INTRO: This is actually part two of my interview with Vivien Sansour. If you have not yet listened to Part one, please pause this, go back and do that. It was Episode #138, because that episode not only was incredibly powerful, but it sets the entire groundwork for this episode that you're about to hear, which is part two of my conversation with Vivien. If you have already listened to Episode #138, then please enjoy the conclusion of my conversation with Vivien Sansour.

Matt Bowles: I also want to ask you about some of your other travels and some of the other places that have made an impact on you. I know you spent a bunch of time in Central America as well, in Guatemala and Honduras. And I was wondering if you can share a little bit about what that experience was like for you.

Vivien Sansour: Well, Central America is such a magical place, particularly when I was in Guatemala because I felt so at home there. It's so bizarre. And I have a very dear friend. Her name is Kiki. She spent a lot of time in Palestine, but she is from Guatemala. And we always laugh that maybe there was some error in our birth. And she was really supposed to be born in Palestine and I was supposed to be born in Guatemala. And so, I find Guatemala to be such a beautiful country, also from north to south. And I got to also spend a lot of time in the forest. And I was so lucky to be taken into the forest and to learn about the magnitude of nature. Like, wow, I had never seen such wilderness. And when you say the forest is magical, this is a magical forest. And I went there a few times, but the most impactful time was when I went with John Sabella again, who I mentioned John a lot because honestly, I would have been nobody, nothing if it weren't for John. I owe him so much of who I am because he really helped me learn to see the world and to appreciate spaces that were sometimes maybe scary. You know, I came from the Mediterranean. This big forest was a bit scary for me. But he helped me learn how to walk in the forest and to become with it and to surrender to it and to learn from it and allow it to shape me. And so, I've had major shifts within my spirit in Guatemala in particular, particularly learning also about the Mayan culture and how the Mayans were not so different than my people in the sense that the world also dismissed them for so long. And yet they carry so much wisdom, so much wisdom in the food, in the foodways and in the ways of being one with nature and not treating nature as something outside of yourself. And so, for me, I guess Guatemala in particular is a major place for that for me. I have many other stories in Guatemala and cooking and meeting people and also working a little bit with coffee farmers at some point, which was quite a learning experience to see what folks there are doing and what they're facing. You know, there are many farmers who are risking their lives to continue to farm in Guatemala as well. Obviously, it's a place that's not unfamiliar with genocide and massacres. And so again, we go back to the same thing where you go to this gorgeous place and you also find all these big wounds that are sadly still festering.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And that was a United States-backed genocide, which actually the Israelis were also involved in. And if people don't know the history of, I mean, U.S. policy in Latin America, that's definitely something that you should really research. I mean, the United States was training death squads on American soil.

Vivien Sansour: Still is.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. At the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, and all sorts of things of this nature. And at various different times, depending on how much pressure was being put on them, they would be forced sometimes to back away. And then they would bring in proxies to do a lot of that work, which included the Israeli military in the case of Guatemala.

Vivien Sansour: Actually, to build on what you just said, the policies of the United States and the tons of money that goes into training folks from Central and South America in Fort Benning, Georgia, to be torturers and then sending them back to their countries to destroy those countries. First of all, those are the same tactics and policies that the United States with Israel have practiced in Palestine. And after the Oslo Accords, they opened a university in Jericho and they call it the Dayton University. It's basically a training camp for where they take Palestinians the way they took people from Central America and train them how to be basically killers and torturers working for the Israeli and the American government. And so, this is a very clear policy that the United States practices. And when you go to South America or to Central America and learn about that history, you're kind of blown away to see it replicated also in your own country, in my case, and to understand how, again, we say this is the same exact apparatus that is oppressing and using and abusing people all over the world. And it's important to bring this up. As in the U.S., people treat people from Central America often so poorly. They are "the help"; they are the people who come, whatever they talk about, as if they also don't exist. But those people. And then there's also this anti-immigration sentiment where people say, "Go back to your country if you don't like this country." Well, I'd gladly go back to my country. I can ask any immigrant, you see: "I'd gladly go back to my country if you didn't destroy it, if your tax dollars didn't destroy my country." And I think this is really important because nobody just wakes up one day and says, oh, I'm going to just leave my family, leave my community, walk miles and days, risk my life so I can come and mow your lawn or I can do whatever. Nobody does that. People do that because this is the last resort and they come from lush, rich cultures and then they are dismissed when they come here. And I'm talking about immigrants mostly from anywhere. But I just like, when you really understand, like we're in Mexico, like Mexico for me is the center of the world. And so, when I see, you know, people, when I was in Tucson one time and there were these guys carrying signs saying Mexicans go home. I mean, first of all, like, do you understand where these people come from? This is like, you should bow to them and try to learn a thing or two.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I think it's really important also just in this context of traveling for people to have a really clear understanding of particularly their own government's foreign policy history. Right. Like we're talking about the Israeli government policy in South America or in Uganda or places like that. But in terms of Americans, for example, we have listeners of the podcast from probably 140 different countries. But for Americans in particular, I think it's incredibly important when we travel to places to understand the context that we are stepping into vis-à-vis the history of our government's foreign policy in that particular place. So, if we go to Colombia, for example, Medellin is a very popular place for all sorts of digital nomads and expats to go now. It's becoming this amazing hub, and it's an extraordinary city on so many levels. And I know you love Colombia as well, but I think as Americans, when we go there, it is very important and incumbent upon us to understand the history and the contemporary foreign policy, as well as the historical foreign policy of the destruction that was wrought there on the people of Colombia by the Colombian regimes that were supported and financed with American tax dollars and supported by the American government, and the amount of atrocities that were committed against indigenous folks, people of color, workers, et cetera, in Colombia that were trying to simply live in dignity and claim their basic rights. So, I want to ask you now, Vivien, about your experience in Mexico, because I love Mexico as well. You and I have both spent time in Chiapas with the Zapatista communities there, as well as other places in Mexico. But I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what you love about Mexico in general, why it is so meaningful and important to you, and what your experiences were like there and in general and specifically also in Chiapas. I'm very curious about.

Vivien Sansour: Yeah, well, again, I think Mexico is the center of the world, and I experienced, again, a lot of inspiration in Mexico and diversity. So, when you enter into a Mexican village, for example, and you're being served food, just looking at the plate alone, the ingredients in your plate should tell you enough about

how diverse and genius this plate is. Just the ingredients on your plate. And then, of course, the generosity and I mean, the beauty of the place and the people. I was particularly inspired in Chiapas, obviously, because I've heard about their struggle for autonomy. But also, I went there not knowing much, and I probably still don't know enough or much. But what I do know is people. And so, when I was there, I was there actually with a coffee company. And the idea was that we were going to meet the folks in these communities who produce coffee on a very small scale. And the first trip we took, we drove up in this rugged truck. Very difficult terrain unpaved roads in Las Nubes. Like you're in the clouds, literally going to these communities and just driving up this really dangerous road. It's dangerous because it's unkept. And you can tell that the government not just fights them and kills them, but abandons them and doesn't take care of the roads to get there. And so, you'd be like, driving in the middle of this mountain, you're at the edge, you could fall and die. But you're like, okay, the road is carrying me. And then suddenly the road has a big hole curve in it that stops being a straight road. And you could easily, if you don't know the roads, just fall and die. Nobody will know you were there. And then the first place we arrived to was this church. And I thought, oh, how sweet. We're just going to go visit this church. And, you know, the church is a humble space made of wood. And we enter and the church is full of names of people who were murdered while they were praying. Their only fault is they are people who refuse to bow their heads and abandon their native language and their way of life. Anyway, for me, that was obviously extremely impactful. And also, to see how they honored the people who passed, how they honored the dead, the people they loved who were lost. But in Chiapas, I actually encountered my main inspiration to what became the Palestine heirloom seed library, I should say. And that was when we arrived to the village. The village had a hard time getting clean water. And the folks I was with were funding, you know, and supporting the community to get clean water and to get water to the village. And while we were there, we were being welcomed. They put out this long table with delicious soup. And there was this elderly man the whole time carrying this bag. It was a little burlap bag, and it clearly had something bulky in it. And I was like, what's in that bag? So, the whole time I'm, like, looking at this guy, like, what's in the bag? But before we were introduced, the elder came up and said, before we introduce ourselves to you, each of you has to give us a clear introductions of yourself. And I was like, yeah, because, you know, my experience in Palestine, foreigners come all the time and they feel a sense of entitlement for me to tell them anything and everything about myself, you know, because they're there and I used to. And I see a lot of people in my community used to and do it still. And this elderly Mayan man was like, no, you came here, so why don't you introduce yourselves? And it was amazing because that community doesn't speak Spanish. So, we had to do the translation from Spanish. You know, some people spoke English to Tzeltal, their native language. And they didn't mind, they took the time. And I'm talking about this is a translation for the whole village. And I was like, yeah, that's dignity right there. That's power right there. Like, you don't get to come to my community and just do whatever you want. Who the heck are you? And so, I was so inspired by him. And then finally after we ate and everybody laughed and everything, he came up to us and he pulled out from this burlap bag that I've been so curious about a big papaya. And he handed it to me and he was like, this is my gift to you. This is the papaya of my ancestors. And I thought, wow, I couldn't be more honored because he didn't give me a placard, he didn't give me a golden star. He gave me his papaya, like a gift for eternity. And I was so honored. And I wasn't by myself. There were other folks from Michigan who were amazing folks. And for me, that was a huge learning experience and definitely an inspiration that I took with me as I moved forward in my own work in Palestine.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. So, I want to also ask you about your choice to return to Palestine.

Vivien Sansour: And I want to drink to that.

Matt Bowles: One because I can remember going to. You and I were in LA at the same time and I can remember going to your going away party as we were sending you off and you had made the choice to return to live in Palestine. And I'm wondering if you can talk about what you went there to do at that time, what that choice was prompted by, and then how your experience was when you got there and returned.

Vivien Sansour: I love your question because I would say it's the best choice I've ever made if it were a choice. Because I know this is not popular to say, but I think, at least in my own experience, in my own life, a lot of things that I do and that have happened to me sometimes feel like they're not necessarily a choice, they're a gift I've been given and I just luckily followed and accepted. So, I was terrified to go back because I wasn't sure what to expect. And I was going back not to Bethlehem, which is where I'm from, but to a new place in the north, which I wasn't familiar with. And I was invited by Nasr Abu Farha, who is an incredible guy who started Canaan Fair Trade Olive Oil Company, which, you know, that's pretty badass himself. But the reason Actually, just to go back, I was in LA to begin with, was my involvement with the South-Central Farmers. And then, you know, my friend Frank there, who connected me with them, you know, took me to this organization that I ended up working with in LA and staying in LA, and that's how I stayed in la. But when I took the job in Los Angeles at that time, I knew deep in my heart that taking that job meant that I was giving up on a big dream I had, which is to go back to Palestine and to start my own farm. And I thought, well, maybe one day that will, you know, be so. But somewhere in me I had just thought, well, I guess that's never going to happen. And then during that time, I met Nasr Abu Farha. And he was like, why don't you come to Palestine and work with the farmers? I said, what do you want me to do? And he's like, do what you do here. Like, you write about people. Just write about the farmers and what they're doing. And I thought, this guy for sure is pulling my leg. God knows what he wants me to do. Because, like, who offers someone such a job? This is my dream job, to be back in Palestine in the villages with people and learn from people and write, which is something that I love to do. And so, I was terrified because I didn't really know Nasser very well. I had heard about his company. His company was still. Still young. But I was like, I don't know this guy, but I thought, I'm going to go. I mean, I just couldn't live with myself knowing that this was a possibility. Had I not taken it, I think I could not have lived with myself. And so, I had to go. I really had to go. And I went. And I remember I was still terrified up until I arrived in Jenin, and Nasser was still so lovely. He was like, welcome home. And I got out of the taxi, and before I went to the bathroom or I went into any building or a house or anything, he took me to the back of the olive oil bottling factory. And we went up in the hill and it had just rained, and he started collecting wild asparagus. And then he just gave it to me. And he's like, welcome home. And we made tea on the fire outside. And I was like, all right, I think I'm home for sure. And so, I've been so blessed and lucky because he was a man. He is a man of his word. And indeed, that is what I did. I spent two years jumping around from one village to the next, meeting Incredible human beings who became my teachers and my spiritual guides and my community. And really, they helped weave me back into my home and root me and ground me into. Into really just remembering who I am, but also learning about how beautiful and how rich my culture is. And that's something that was taken away from me because as a young girl growing up in the Catholic school and learning French and being told that Europe was what was good, in that process, we were all of us severed from really learning about how beautiful also where we come from is. And I guess that's where my journey started of reweaving and sewing myself back into the tapestry of my own community.

Matt Bowles: And can you talk about then how that journey progressed over the years that you were there in terms of your reconnection with the community, in terms of your reconnection with the land and with Palestinian agriculture, and then ultimately as well, your integration of art into all of that and how that came about?

Vivien Sansour: Well, I'm. I'm still learning this every day, actually. In that every day I discover something. You're like, oh, yeah, I learned that then. Oh, I remember that then. Because you don't know what you take in when you're taking it in. And it was a lot. It was a lot. And I'm so happy I'm smiling as I'm telling you this, because in the grief we've been living with, I kind of forgot also those precious moments. So, the progression was natural and again, guided by a force that's not me. I mean, it's really not right to say I did this. I don't know who did this or how this happened. I feel like the way seeds are an instrument for me. I'm an instrument of the seeds and of some divine, I don't know, idea. I don't know what it is yet. And it's always changing and adapting. I just obeyed my heart all the time, and this was the process. So, while I developed, obviously, mental capacities, I always understood that my mind is the servant of my heart, not the other way around. And so, I followed that. And in that process, I ended up meeting people and allowing myself to completely fall in love with what they're doing, what they were about, and then writing about it. And the more I wrote about it, because, you know, when you write, you really get to process what you experienced. And then I met also people who didn't know how to read and write. And for me, they were probably some of the most intelligent people I've met. And I started to also examine my own limitations as a person who does read and write, because you start to understand the world only from this intellectual place rather than this sensorial place. And as I started doing the seed library and other things, I never thought of myself as an artist. But then I kept being invited to different art exhibitions and stuff, and I was like, oh, well, that's. You know, that's what I do. Like, this is. I wasn't trying to create something. I guess I was, but not. It just. That's what I was doing. I was in love and doing these things, and I thought they were so beautiful, and I wanted to capture the beauty. So, like, in my photography, I mean, I was just in love with the things I was seeing. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't trying to create an art exhibition. And the next thing I know is I have a photography exhibition in D. C. or with the stuff I do with stories I wrote and the postcards I made or the installations, there were really things that came out naturally for me. And so, as things progressed, I started to have a better understanding of what I was doing. But I will say that a big influence in refining and learning about art for me was my partner, Aydarafeh, who is an amazing artist and painter. And we started El Beir Arts and Seeds together because he wanted a gallery space and I wanted a space for my seed library. And that kind of partnership created something. So many things, because sort of in our work, we brought together the art world and the agricultural world. And then I came to understand that they're actually not separate at all, because farmers are artists, and they are really the practitioners of true imagination.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about some of the specific art exhibits that you have done? For example, the one at the Chicago Architecture Biennial.

Vivien Sansour: Yes, this one is a very special one for me because I didn't understand when I kept getting an email from the curators, like, why is an architecture biennial writing me, what? Who? What is this? I thought it was spam. And so finally they called me and they're like, why do you not answer our emails? Is there a reason? I'm like, I don't know. I just thought you were saying, spam. What the heck is this? And he's like, no, we actually want to have your work in our Biennial in Chicago. And here we have this budget for you, and you can come to Chicago and we'll build the show for you. And their idea was that they really wanted basically something, a show that would reflect, you know, how we use structures for community, how do we create Projects that actually engage community. And so, I said, I don't want to just parachute in with my project from Palestine. I want to come and spend time in the Midwest. I want to learn about the prairies, because that's really the similarity here. You know, the prairies were transformed the way our merge, which means valley and Palestine, were transformed and changed. So, I ended up coming to Michigan, and also my partner, Aid, came to Michigan, who is an artist, as I told you, but he also works with wood. So, and my dear friend Tim just offered us a tent in his forest. And we ended up spending a summer in Michigan working with wood that had fell and was salvaged during a big storm that happened in Michi-

gan. And so, we ended up building the show that was transported down to Chicago from Michigan. And I spent a little bit of time in the prairies, not enough time at all. And the idea was to basically tell the story of both the prairie and the valley. And so, the show is basically a seed library made from wood and a photo exhibit. But it also has a table in the middle that has postcards and stories and two benches, and people can come and interact and read and learn about all these stories. And so, it's amazing because it ended up being kind of a communal space within the exhibition space. So, you have this fancy exhibition space, but people end up gathering all the time in this corner because that's where people could sit, talk, and exchange. And for me, that was such a great achievement because that is the purpose for me of the seed library. And now it's actually been acquired by the Broad Museum in Lansing in Michigan. And so, it's there now if people want to go and check it out.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. We've been talking a lot about agriculture and seeds and farming and growing and connection to the land and all of that. I also want to ask you about your interest in culinary preparation of this food once it is grown. And I know that your cooking and your interest in culinary history and all of that eventually got you connected with some major chefs. But before we go into those stories, I want to just ask you if you can talk a little bit about the significance of cooking and the actual preparation of food for you.

Vivien Sansour: My relationship to cooking? Well, I mean, for me, honestly, it's really as simple as the kitchen is therapy for me. I'm not an amazing cook or anything. I can make a meal or two or three, but I usually cook from whatever there is. But it's a way for me to disappear from the world. I just love being in the kitchen, it's just the knives transform from these murderous weapons to these utilitarian tools that turn a vegetable into something nourishing and delightful. And I love that chemistry and that process. And I love also the kitchen because it's the place where I connect with my mother, even if she always kicked me out of the kitchen as a girl. Now this is the place where we connect greatly, because I notice that when I follow her instructions, I do much better. But also, I learn every day in the kitchen that observation and what we do as adults is so important, because I learned that the things, I do in the kitchen were not things my mother taught me. They were things I watched her do. And how powerful it is. Just the practice of watching, and you don't know what you're learning. It's not like you open the book and memorize the rest. I just watched her. Like, I remember working with dough once, and as I was kneading the dough, I was thinking, how did I learn how to do this? I mean, I definitely never kneaded dough before. And I was like, oh, I'm imitating my mother. And so, in the kitchen, I also learned about our responsibility as adults and what we do and how what we do impacts other people, the young around us. And so, I love that part about the kitchen.

Matt Bowles: All right, so now I'm going to ask you about your connection with Anthony Bourdain. We have a lot of listeners of this podcast who were very inspired by Anthony Bourdain. A lot of the travelers I know, including a lot of the full-time itinerant digital nomads that are traveling the world now, were inspired to do so by Anthony Bourdain. I think he was one of the most significant, influential, impactful icons of this entire generation in terms of travel. And in one of his episodes, he came to Palestine, and you were involved in that episode. And I'm wondering if you can just share that entire experience from beginning to end, what it was like, particularly in terms of your interaction with Anthony Bourdain and then just the entire experience being with him in Palestine.

Vivien Sansour: Yeah, it was a very powerful experience for many reasons. One is, I am like many of the people you mentioned, one of the people who was very inspired by him and loved his show. And I love food also. And so, when he came and his producers contacted me, I was preparing all these kinds of elaborate food things for us to do. You know, I wanted to take him to places to try things maybe he's never tried before. I wanted to show him, you know, our foraging items, you know, all of this. And to my surprise, he was

not so interested in the food at all as much as he was interested in learning about the politics of where he was. And that really impressed me, actually, because there are lots of people who come through Palestine and want to talk about food. I wanted to give a fluffy story, but they really don't express a true desire to understand. And so, already off the bat, while I was disappointed because I wanted to cook with him, you know, my heart was warmed by the fact that he was also really sensitive. So, I'm not saying this because he's dead. I actually really was at that time blown away, because, of course, as a big fan myself, I was so worried to meet him and then be disappointed. And I think that happens a lot. You know, you're like a big fan of somebody, and then you meet them and they're douchebags or whatever. And with Bourdain, I met him, and he actually turned out to be nicer than, you know, you would think. You know, in the show, often you see him, like, a badass, you know, and I think he is a badass, or he was a badass, or I guess he will always be a badass. But when he arrived, I was really so happy to notice his humility. He was not being pretentious at all. And, in fact, our first encounter was when I received their bus after he visited a settlement. And I was really pissed because the producers insisted that he went to the settlement. And I was like, oh, God, you know, now I'm going to have to kind of give him the 101 of why this settlement is a problem. And he came out of the bus to meet me, and the first thing he said, like, was like, what the heck was that? You know, he was so pissed. And, of course, immediately we bonded. He wanted to have a cigarette. And at that time, I was kind of a social smoker, and I puffed a cigarette with him. And we were just talking about how messed up it is and how he was so appalled by what he saw, and then that was it. But the most powerful moment for me was when we went to Aida refugee camp. And in that camp, it's a camp in Bethlehem, so I'm very familiar with. I took him to meet a young woman whose child has a disability. And so, she was cooking as a way to raise money to support special education for her kid. And when we went there, you know, she didn't know who Anthony Bourdain was or anything. And he signed her book. But while we were, you know, waiting for some of the producers to, you know, prepare stuff, we were outside in the kind of playground, and we were talking about, you know, the kids, and he started talking to the kids. And he actually shared with me about his own struggle because he travels so much, and that means he's often away from his daughter. And I think that pained him a lot. I mean, I don't want to speak for him, and he expressed to me that it was very difficult. But what I felt with him, which I appreciated so much, is how genuine he was. He wasn't trying to put any emotional labor on me as a Palestinian. In fact, he just did what I wish many visitors will do. Instead of lecturing us, he just practiced being a witness. He was just a witness. It's like when somebody dies and you sit next to someone, there's nothing you can say that would bring that person back. The best thing you can do is just be witness and stand sturdy next to someone. And that's exactly how I felt walking in the camp with Bourdain. He was humble. He practiced being witness. He asked questions humbly. He wasn't lecturing anyone. He understood his own privilege, but didn't flaunt it. And he signed that guest book that Islam had. And now, years later, you know, often I wonder, like, what's the point of all the work I do? Sometimes I don't ask that anymore. But, like, I used to often get frustrated. Like, you know, these visitors come in and out, and then what? But a couple of years ago, Islam, the woman we visited in Ida refugee camp, calls me, and she said, you should come to my culinary school. I said, your what? She's like, yeah, now we have a hall, and we have different tables and different cooking stations. And I said, are you kidding me? And so, I went to visit her, and now she's speaking fluent English and hosting people from everywhere. Other women in the camp joined who also have kids with disabilities. And so, she said, it's ever since you brought this guy here, and he signed my book. And somebody came and was like, do you understand who this is? And then everybody wanted to. And then, of course, she showed up in the episode. And so, then everybody now comes to see her. And in the episode, you see, she was very shy. She didn't speak English, and so she wasn't really able to express herself as freely. But now she's like a goddess, and people come to visit her kitchen and learn from her. So, I think those things. This is a long answer to say for me, his visit was so meaningful. And then after his visit, he was given an award by the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, I believe. And the way he received that award just made me love him so much more because he received the award and he said, and I think you can

Google that, it's on there. And he said, it's so pathetic that I would get an award for just making Palestinians look like human beings. It's the most basic thing. I mean, what did I do? It's pathetic that the world we live in has made it that I would get an award for just visiting people and showing them the way, we see everybody as equal human beings. And here's a red cardinal flying across as I said that. So, I just want to honor his spirit. That is a true revolutionary. And I think a person like that who planted so many seeds that he may or may not have known about, lives forever.

Matt Bowles: I remember vividly, as I think a lot of travelers do, exactly where I was, exactly the moment when I heard about his passing and his suicide. I was actually on the island of Corsica and I was there with two other full time world travelers who had also been extremely impacted by Anthony Bourdain's work. But at the moment that I had heard about it, I was by myself and I was in a coffee shop and I was going to be there for a few more hours. And of course, as soon as I heard about it, whatever else I was doing, obviously I couldn't concentrate on that. And I was thinking about trying to create some kind of social media post expressing my feelings about Bourdain's passing and what he meant to me. And I just couldn't think of any words to write. As I was reading, I read as much as I could read about, you know, the situation and stuff. And then I just couldn't think of words to express it. So, then I just started scrolling through my social media feed and then I saw your post that you posted, and it struck me so powerfully and I thought that your words and what you wrote and the fact that it just hit me like the exact right way at that moment. And then I just shared your post on my feed and that was what I had to share about that moment.

Vivien Sansour: I don't know what to say. I mean, I don't remember what I wrote exactly, but I do remember being, of course, myself quite impacted and horrified by the news. So, I actually wrote a little piece after that. And yeah, I mean, I still sit with it sometimes in that it's so funny because it was so natural. Like my encounter with him and I had worked so hard on it, and then when we met, it felt so natural. He was so humble and normal and, well, of course, he's a human being that it really felt like, wow, what a big loss to lose someone who's so real. Really. I think that was his main quality from the little. Obviously, I didn't know him intimately, of course, and I feel so honored, so honored that I got to spend this time with him and I got to hopefully influence a little bit of his own understanding that was translated to hopefully a global understanding, a little window of reality in Palestine.

Matt Bowles: So, building on that, I want to ask you, for all of the listeners, in terms of what folks can do to be better allies of the Palestinian struggle, what we can do to support the Palestinian struggle. And maybe as well, just for folks that don't have a lot of contexts on the Palestinian struggles, we have listeners from all over the world. Maybe if you can just share a little bit about, for example, the BDS campaign and other types of things that folks can plug into around the world. And basically, what you'd like to either ask of people or advice and tips that you can give to people for how they can support and be better allies to the Palestinians.

Vivien Sansour: Well, I like to answer this question actually in a different way, in that, of course, I would love if people would support the Palestinian cause, but I think that cannot be seen in a void in the world. Meaning a lot of people sometimes say, 'Oh, what can I do? What can I do?' The thing is, you can't do something that you're not. So, the most important thing to do, in my opinion, of course people can do whatever they want, is to actually ask yourself the most important question, do I want to live in this world the way it is in this dominant world and accept its mediocrity, or do I want to strive for a different world? And when you start from there, you will have to, at that point, look around and kind of feel your feet and understand where you are. And whether you're in Asheville, North Carolina, or you're in the hills of Jamaica, or you're in Honduras or you're in Palestine, I think the answer is going to be the same, which is, who do I bring to this struggle? Because it's one struggle. And for us to compartmentalize them, I think is

very dangerous. I think it's high time for us to understand, like you and I have been talking all this afternoon about the connections, to understand that who we bring to the struggle is who we are. And so, if you're a mathematician or you're an architect or you're an artist or you're a cook, I think you can practice solidarity and be part of the struggle from within, something that's authentic to who you are already. So not to try to invent something new for yourself, because when we try to do that, it becomes very difficult. Like, not everybody likes to be or can be in the streets, for example, although that is one way to be in solidarity. Everybody can challenge their representatives. Maybe some people are not so keen on that. But I think in what we're doing in our lives, we can be advocates for justice. So, when people say things that are, for example, inaccurate or violent for us not to choose safety over justice, I think that's also very important. You know, people will often say, oh, well, I don't want to challenge my job. And that means that you are choosing the institution over your values. And that, for me, is a mediocre choice. And so, I challenge people to dare to be bold, to dare to bring who they are to the struggle and to, first of all, learn more. You know, I think it's very important to learn more. Like, why should you care about Palestine? Maybe you should learn more about what Palestine is, who the Palestinians are. And of course, we are like any people in the world, all kinds of different folks. It's important also to do a very simple act, like, don't buy Israeli products. Like, that's a very simple act. Or if you go to the store and they sell Israeli products, maybe go challenge the manager, say, you know, I'm not buying here anymore because you're selling Israeli products. You know, you can definitely challenge these distracting efforts and gaslighting that happens when we talk about just by people saying, oh, you just need to be more peaceful. I think the peaceful way to be is the just way to be. So don't put Band aids on things. And also, don't make it the job of Palestinians to both carry the burden of struggling for justice and explaining things all the time to folks. There are lots of resources out there, and people can watch movies. There are many Palestinian indie movies that are amazing. You can talk to people, learn more. Obviously, in my world, I work with seeds, and so I create alliances within the seed movement. We grow seeds, and we take this as an opportunity to talk about Palestine. So obviously, these are just some of the ways. In essence, what I'm trying to say is figure out what you do best and bring that to the struggle.

Matt Bowles: I think that is really awesome advice. Do you have any specific resources? And we'll put them in the show notes so that folks can go to the show notes for people that have heard this episode and they're interested in learning more about Palestine, doing their own research, educating themselves. Are there any particular other websites or books or films that we can put in the show notes that you would personally recommend?

Vivien Sansour: Sure, yeah. There's a lot. Where to begin? Well, there's the Institute for Middle East Understanding, and they put out a lot of information, if you want just hardcore information, can follow them on their Facebook or their Instagram. There is also Just Vision. They have an amazing platform where they've done a lot of films, but they also put out a lot of interviews. There are also people you can follow. Noura Erakat, obviously, is an amazing person who is often on mainstream media and she can be followed. There are people on the ground in Palestine that you can follow, like folks in Sheikh Jarrah, like Ahmad Kurd, Muna el-Kurd, and Mohammed el-Kurd, who, by the way, has been arrested today. Hopefully he'll be released. And there are many films that I love. I love a lot of Elia Suleiman's films that are brilliant. The Time That Remains is an amazing art film, but also a historical film. Hany Abu-Assad has many amazing films. I mean, there are many Palestinian films. Actually, it's kind of cool if you just Google Palestinian films. There's a film that I produced as well called The People and the Olive, and we just made it available for free to the public so people can visit The People and the Olive website and stream the film and watch it. So, this is just off the top of my head. I'm also not good at making lists, so if I forgot someone that you know, there are lots of amazing people out there.

Matt Bowles: So we are going to link all of those resources up in the show notes and I think this is a great place to move in to the final portion of this interview. Vivien, are you ready for *The Lightning Round*?

Vivien Sansour: Let's do it.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right. What is one book that you would most recommend that people check out? Maybe something that has significantly influenced you personally over the years?

Vivien Sansour: I love this question. And the book is, with no uncertain terms, a book I recently read called Thus Spoke the Plant by Monica Gagliano. And she is a brilliant scientist who's talking about the consciousness of plants.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. Who is one person currently alive today that you've never met that you would most love to have dinner with just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation.

Vivien Sansour: Oh, yeah, I do know Chronixx. He's a Jamaican singer.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, Vivien, if you could go back in time, knowing everything that you know now and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Vivien?

Vivien Sansour: It's not true.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, of all of the places that you have traveled, what are your top three favorite destinations that you would most recommend people check out?

Vivien Sansour: Well, Palestine. I think Palestine is a magical place. And as wounded as it is, it is also a healing place in so many different ways that only if you go and be with Palestinian communities that you would not as a tourist that you would really discover. Wow. A whole world of magic. Guatemala, I think definitely Guatemala. Central America is a place that people must go to in order to learn that it's a magical world out there. And Jamaica, particularly the countryside, I think it's a very powerful island and has so much to teach the world.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, last question. What are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you've never been you would most love to go. Highest on your list.

Vivien Sansour: I want to go to Vietnam. It's been a place I've always wanted to go to. Definitely Vietnam. I want to go to South Africa and Mali. I don't know why. I really want to go to Mali. I'm very inspired to go to Mali.

Matt Bowles: Nice. I want to go to Mali too. We should go together.

Vivien Sansour: Well, you arrange it. I'll be right there.

Matt Bowles: I love that.

Vivien Sansour: I don't plan when I travel, so it'll be spontaneous. It'll be nice if someone does the arrangement for me.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I'll hit you up and I'll do the planning and you'll just roll. So, yeah, we could do it like that. I love it. All right, Vivien, I want you to let folks know. I mean, first of all, how folks can find you, follow you, connect with you, learn more about what you're up to, and also how people can support the Palestinian heirloom seed library and all the amazing things that you're involved with. How do you want people to sort of come into your universe?

Vivien Sansour: Sure. Well, thank you for this question. First, people can learn a bit more about my work. They can visit my website, viviensansour.com. From there, you can get snippets of what I've been up to. But it's also where people can connect via email or follow-on Instagram. *Vivien Sansour*, where I basically post things about the different projects, I'm involved in. And the second thing that is urgent right now is that we're creating this public trust to create shade and plant more trees and create a safe haven for many habitats and for people to come and do what we're doing now sitting under the shade of a tree. And this is a big project and it's a big undertaking that we are doing this year and hoping that it will be something we will do for many years to come. And so, I invite people to be part of this history and part of creating history with us. And people can support the seed library and this effort. They can contact me directly on my website through the email. But if people want to make contributions also, they can contribute to the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library through us directly or if they want to contribute through our fiscal sponsor in the United States, which is a tax-deductible contribution. And we work with the Experimental Farm Network, which is an organization based in Philadelphia. So, you could make a contribution to us through there. You just have to really tell them, email them and tell them that this is for the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library, otherwise they won't know. And of course, and most importantly, I would love for people to plant seeds, take care of all the living beings around them and pass on their stories.

Matt Bowles: Amazing, Vivien. This was such a special conversation. You are so amazing and you're doing such incredible stuff. I really appreciate you coming on the show. Thank you.

Vivien Sansour: Now I'm going to have the rest of my wine.

Matt Bowles: Awesome to have you here. Thank you for being a guest on the Maverick Show.

Vivien Sansour: Well, thank you to The Maverick Show and to Matthew Bowles and for this delicious bottle of wine and for the grapes that made it possible. Cheers.

Matt Bowles: All right, cheers to you, and folks, you can find everything that we talked about on this episode, including all of the resources Vivien mentioned and all of the ways to contact her and support her incredible work, in one place. Just go to TheMaverickShow.com and go to the show notes for this episode. And with that, good night, everybody.