**Gene Callahan**: So, first of all, let me say congratulations on writing such an excellent book.

**Musa al-Gharbi**: Oh, thank you!

**Callahan**: There were a couple of things that perhaps I disagree with you on. But the wealth of material you assembled in defense of your thesis is really impressive. I think there's, what? forty-five pages of footnotes or something like that.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah.

**Callahan**: How long did you work on this?

Longer than I had planned to. But that’s because I actually ended up writing two books. So when I initially pitched it to Princeton, I thought it was going to take six months.

That was crazy in retrospect because I didn’t appreciate how different writing a book is, that it’s not like writing 10 papers or something. It’s completely different because it was largely systematizing a lot of other research I already had done. I thought I could turn around in six months. I sold it in May 2021. I just went and got published in October of this year. So, close to three years working on it. And then, you know, some time in the queue. But yeah, so basically, what I wanted to do in the initial pitch to Princeton was to spend about half the book looking at symbolic capitalists and the social order that we preside over and the ways we legitimize our power grabs and all.

And then in the second half, I was going to turn the analytic lens from the winners in the knowledge economy towards those who perceive themselves to be the losers. And I was going to look at people who are sociologically distant from us, people who are living in small towns or more suburban areas, or people who live in more rural areas, people who do jobs where they’re providing physical goods and services to people, and so on and so forth.

And the basic argument of the second half of the book was going to be that a lot of political things that we think of as kind of separate stories -- the diploma divide, the urban and rural divide, and gender divide -- these are all just proxies for this more fundamental divide in American society, which, in my analysis, is between symbolic capitalists and people who feel alienated from the social order that we preside over.

And then, likewise, I was going to argue about things like the rise of Populist leaders, like Trump, or the crisis of expertise or tensions around identity, politics, and so on. These are similarly different fronts in the same struggle, which is the real struggle between symbolic capitalists and people who feel alienated from their world. And so that’s just going to be a second book. Now, it’s probably going to be called *Those People*.

**Callahan**: Well, I’ll let you know that you’re far from the champion of missing a deadline. Do you know about Eric Voegelin’s *History of Political Thought* textbook?

**al-Gharbi**: No, I haven’t read that.

**Callahan**: Well, you can’t read it, because it never came out as a textbook. He contracted to do a 200 page book that would be delivered in a year and 14 years later, he’s corresponding with his publisher, saying he had written 4,500 pages so far. I also heard about someone submitting a book 50 years late to one of my publishers.

**al-Gharbi**: In my case, initially, they were like, send us 90,000 words, three or five target around that length, and I was like, I can’t write 90,000 words about anything. So I negotiated down to 70,000. And then I gave them a manuscript that was 210,000. So I wrote both books. They’re already done. We just cut it in half, basically more or less. and then kind of, you know, adjusted things so that each stands as its own as a freestanding work. But yeah, so the second book is basically done. I’m going to be shopping it out. Actually, now that we have started to get some sales, some preliminary sales data on how the first book did we can.

**Callahan**: So we should see that fairly soon, I hope.

**al-Gharbi**: I hope so.

**Callahan**: Now, this interview will appear in a journal where we don’t expect everyone to have read your book, unfortunately. Perhaps it would be good to do a little intro to what a symbolic capitalist is, and what you see as the cultural contradictions of this new elite.

**al-Gharbi**: Yes. So symbolic capitalists have been known by other names and by other scholars. So they’ve also been called the Professional Managerial Class, the Creative Class, the New Class: there are a whole bunch of them that involve class. For reasons I explain on my sub stack, I actually don’t think class is right. I don’t think they actually combine into being a class in the traditional way that class was understood. And so that’s one of the reasons I didn’t stick with one of the existing terms. But basically symbolic capitalists are people who make a living by manipulating symbols and data, rhetoric, images and things like this. These are people who don’t provide physical goods and services to people. And so if you want, like, a nutshell way to think of who symbolic capitalists are then think about people who work in fields like science and technology, education, finance and consulting law, human resources, and so on and so forth. So the book is trying to basically highlight a handful of contradictions: The cultural contradictions of the new elite.

The core one, probably the one that kind of anchors the rest of the questions the books are trying to analyze is the beginning of these professions; when they started to form into professions as we understand them today. So this was in the interwar period between World War one and World War 2. So, starting then and accelerating after the 1960’s and the move away from the centrality of industry, we saw the rise of symbolic capitalists, who started gaining a lot more affluence and influence over society. The global economic order shifted in favor of what you might call the symbolic professions and away from traditional industry. And one of the things that’s interesting about that move is that we symbolic capitalists, from the beginning of our professions we’ve defined ourselves in terms of altruism and serving the common good.

Let me look at my own professions: Journalists are supposed to follow, you know, be a voice for the voiceless, and speak truth to power, and academics are supposed to follow the truth wherever it leads, and, to tell the truth, without regards to economic and political considerations, and so on, and so forth. And if you look at who in America is most likely to self-identify as an anti-racist, as a feminist, as an environmentalist, as an ally to LGBTQ people, it’s most likely to ber symbolic capitalists. So engaging in the modes of discourse and self-presentation and interaction that people call woke is symbolic capitalists. And so what you might expect, given our strong social justice orientation that has been present, you know. since the beginning of our professions, is, as people like us have more power and influence over society we would expect to see along a lot of social problems being ameliorated, we would expect to see growing trust in institutions, and as a result of all the great work that we’re doing, and so on and so forth. Instead, we see the opposite. In many respects a lot of persistents, a lot of social problems have persisted or even grown worse.

We see increasing institutional dysfunction, increasing distrust in institutions, increasing social mistrust, growing affective polarization, and so on. And so the core question, really, that the book is trying to wrestle with is like, well, what’s going on here? Why do we see what we see, instead of what we promised and expected, and maybe hoped would happen, as we got more power over society, and there are a number of subordinate puzzles, then, that the book is wrestling with, but I would say, that’s the cool one.

**Callahan**: Excellent. So I have two follow-up questions to that answer. The first is why do the symbolic capitalists not form a class? In that way they fail. So maybe class is an ideal type in the Weberian sense, right? So all that actual phenomena conforms more or less to an ideal type. But, you’re saying that this is less so than maybe the industrialists right? Or the proletariat? Why is that?

**al-Gharbi**: For a few reasons. So one of the things that makes us classy is that we do tend to have convergent issues and convergent interests on a number of issues like intellectual property rights, or, you know, investments in infrastructure and we tend to cluster in some of these similar communities. We live and take part in this set of interrelated institutions like nonprofits, higher. Ed, and you know, the media, and so on. But yeah, there are a few reasons why we don’t cohere well into being a class per se, though, despite the classy bits of us. One of them is that there’s this basic application within the symbolic professions where you have basically one track of people who have a lot of prestige, a lot of autonomy. And you have, like really high pay, and you have other people who make, you know, a lot less. They have a lot less autonomy. In fact, they’re mostly executing other people’s visions. They have a lot less prestige. They still have more than Normie workers. And actually, this is one way in which we consistently misunderstand our own class position. A lot of symbolic capitalists who are like adjunct instructors, and so on, who are kind of the lower end of this bifurcation tend to think of themselves as kind of poor, and you know something like that. And the only reason they can even think of themselves that way is because they just really have no understanding of how most of the rest of America lives. It looked like what Normie jobs look like. The kinds of income that most Americans make, and so on. But set that to the side. Another thing that’s really about class. As my advisor Seamus Kahn said, he argues that one of the most defining things about us is that we tend to think of ourselves as like excellent individuals, we define ourselves in terms of our merit and our individualistic striving, and so on. And, in fact, a lot of our institutions select for people who have these kinds of individualistic understandings of themselves and these individual individualistic narratives. They tell us we're especially weird; to use a term from Joe Henrik. And so yeah, despite convergent interests, we don’t really operate and coordinate as a class in a meaningful way. We don’t really think of ourselves as a class in a meaningful way, and so on, and so forth. And there is this kind of deep schism within that that prevents it. So at best, we’re kind of a class in formation, but we’ve not been able to really cohere that way because of this deep division that lies within the symbolic provisions.

**Callahan**: What I would think that one of the problems the Marxists always had was actually getting the proletariat to conceive of themselves as a class. So this is not new.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah, yeah.

**Callahan**: Alright, but the second follow up question is, at the end of the book you spend some time defending the sincerity of the commitment to social justice, and so forth, of the symbolic capitalists. I’ve actually written a book review as well, because preparing for the interview, I really realized I had enough notes that I might as well publish a book review, and what I wrote there was;

If I continue to tell you that I’m really committed to sobriety, but every night you find me in a bar. after a while, does it mean maybe I’m suffering from false consciousness of some sort. Right? I’m deceiving myself about my sincerity. So, I know that symbolic capitalists will assert that they’re very tied to these values. But after a certain point. are we entitled to say, well, you’re not putting your money where your mouth is, are you? You seem to defend them against that charge, and I wonder if that defense is fully justified.

**al-Gharbi**: Well, I think what I’m really trying to do is push back against two things. One, there’s this thing in the culture wars; this tight focus on hypocrisy. I think hypocrisy is actually analytically uninteresting, and, in part because pretty much everyone is a hypocrite. If you believe in something, you’re basically a hypocrite. And there’s a lot of reasons for that. I highlight that briefly in the book and then more in my subset. So I don’t think this kind of conversation about hypocrisy or different sides are pointing at each other. You’re a hypocrite. No, you’re a hypocrite. Like, I just think that’s not a useful way of understanding.

**Callahan**: So, like everyone except me.

**al-Gharbi**: And well, then I think two things are true about symbolic capitalism. One, just because you believe something sincerely doesn’t mean something is important to you, right? So you can have a sincere belief. But it’s just not a thing. So you can think like, oh, it’s great if the homeless people are all off the street. I don’t think that most Americans want homeless people in their neighborhood, or so on and so forth, or I don’t think they want to see people struggling to survive and things like that. But solving that problem doesn't mean that you’re feeling that way. That doesn’t mean that’s a really big priority for you in your life to fix it. And then, you know, a related issue is that while it’s absolutely true, I think that symbolic capitalists are sincere in their commitments to social justice, that's not their only sincere commitment. They’re also sincerely committed to being an elite, which is to say, they think that we think that our perspective should count more than the person checking us out at the grocery store, we think we should have a higher standard of living than Walmart workers, and we want our children to reproduce our own class position. And this sincere set of beliefs and desires is in deep tension with the other set of social justice, oriented beliefs and desires. It’s hard to be an elite, an egalitarian social climber, right? And so often when these two sincere beliefs come into conflict, as they often do, it’s the desire to be an elite that ends up, winning out and supervening how we pursue social justice, leading us to pursue social justice in largely symbolic ways, or to pursue social justice by trying to expropriate, you know, take things from others, and expropriate blame onto others, without making any meaningful sacrifices or risks, or whatever to how we live our own lives and what our own aspirations are. And so I think that’s what’s actually happening there. It’s not that they’re not sincere. It’s that this isn’t their only sincere commitment, and it’s not their top sincere commitment.

**al-Gharbi**: And then the last thing I’ll say about this point is, I read Orwell’s The road to Wigan Pier. He has actually a great quote that I include in the substack post. He highlights in this bit of text that he was looking at what makes Socialism unappealing to a lot of Normies. And he said, one of the things that’s really unappealing about Socialism to a lot of Normies is this intense focus on things like automation and things like this. According to like Socialist understandings of like, there’s this Utopian vision of today. They call it fully automated luxury communism, where you know, no one has to work anymore. And things like this. They think that’s a paradise. Orwell says that would be hell. It would be miserable because actually, one of the ways that people find community meaning and purpose in life is through work. Work isn’t just the way that we pay the bills. There’s this deep human need to be productive to do things that are valuable and to produce things, and so on.

**al-Gharbi**: And a lot of the Socialists say. Well, you know. Under fully automated luxury, social communism, there’s nothing that would stop you from working. If you want to work, you know you could go ahead. You could do that. But the truth is, Orwell argued, even if that was technically a possibility, no one’s going to do it in practice. What they would do, what they would end up doing, is spend that time trying to fill that hole with drugs, alcohol, and entertaining themselves to death, and things like this. And the fact that most people would do that doesn’t mean that this is what they want. They want to just get drunk and high and entertain themselves to death.

**al-Gharbi**: But that’s what they would end up doing, because there’s, you know, social defaults are strong and other things like this. And anyway, I think this quote from Orwell is a powerful point about how like, people can do things and embrace states of affairs that they detest, or they can fail to live up to the things that they say they value, or are important, and that doesn’t necessarily mean that they don’t actually believe those things. It’s just again, there’s all sorts of things that frustrate our desires to see a certain type of society, or to live a certain way.

***Callahan***: Your remarks about that tension remind me of when I was a visiting Phd. Student at NYU, and I attended two colloquiums. One was Mario Rizzo’s Free Market Oriented Colloquium, which met in a small cramped room with kind of crappy tables, with a view of another building and no amenities. And then Thomas Nagel and Ronald Dwarkins, very egalitarian seminar colloquium, which met in a very luxurious room with leather back chairs and a view out over Washington Square Park. And I thought, it’s kind of funny that the egalitarians have so much nicer accommodations than the free market people.

***Callahan***: Okay, now, there, I started to feel that in the beginning of the book, does anyone actually believe in anything, or are they just acting in their self interest? So was it in your best interest to write this book, for instance. So what? How do we sort that out?

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah, I mean it definitely was, I mean, part of the reason, for instance, I wrote it. I mean, I have this set of questions that I’m interested in and whatever but, like also part of the reason I wrote and published it with Princeton University Press is because I’m on the tenure track, and you know, and in fact, one of the things that’s you know, interesting about the book is that in some ways it’s actually a physical embodiment of some of the very things that I like. It’s a literal, direct, physical embodiment of a lot of the things that I criticize. So, for instance, one of the things that the book highlights is the use of educational credentials, and especially credentials from elite schools to sort out who deserves to be worth hearing and taking seriously which perspectives are valuable and so on.

**al-Gharbi**: Okay, but you know, this is a book that I targeted at prestigious University Presses, and the reason why this book was picked up was in no small part because I am myself affiliated with Columbia University. If I was a Phd. student at University of Arizona or Stony Brook, even if I sent in the exact same manuscript, changing absolutely nothing, It’s likely that the book probably wouldn’t have gotten picked up by anyone, let alone Princeton. There probably wouldn’t have been a competitive auction for the rights, and so on in the same way that before I was at University well, when I was at University of Arizona, I would pitch to places like the New York Times and stuff, and I wouldn’t even get a no, I was below rejection. And then, when I moved to Columbia, I had editors from the New York Times and the Washington Post reaching out to me cold, hey? Would you like to write something for the Washington Post? And it wasn’t because I became a much better writer between the time it took to move from Sierra Vista to Manhattan it’s purely network effects, institutional effects. And so on.

**al-Gharbi**: And the same is actually true with respect to race and ethnicity. So one of the things that the book highlights is the ways that symbolic capitalists leverage their association with marginalized and disadvantaged groups to advance their own interests. But a reality is that part of the reason that this book was published; it was published in the form it was, and so on is because I’m black. Like, it’s not the case that everyone who’s black gets a Princeton book, but if I wasn’t black, if I was a white, if I had written the exact same book as a white person, especially if I had any hint of conservatism or Evangelical Christianity, or something like that about me, chances are this book wouldn’t have been published even if I was just a white Liberal. Chances are this book wouldn’t have been published by this press, certainly not in its current form. It would have had a bunch of scrutiny, and so on, and so forth, and so part of why I was able to publish this book in the form it was and part of why this book was so attractive to a lot of publishers, and so on is because I’m black. And so the book is itself in many respects like a literal, direct embodiment of a lot of the things I criticize in the pages, and rather than just pretending like that's not true, I think it’s important to just lean into that and wrestle with that contradiction. Apply it to myself reflexively.

***Callahan***: Well, it’s nice of you to provide a good example of what you’re talking about for us.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah.

***Callahan***: So writing the book not only brought forward the thesis, it exemplified the thesis at the same time so well done. Very Meta.

**al-Gharbi**: I’m a sociologist of knowledge, so I can’t help, like, get super mad at all times.

***Callahan***: All right. The book talks about racialized inequalities at a number of places and I was wondering about that. Are you familiar with Gregory Clark’s The Sun also Rises? came out a decade or so ago.

**al-Gharbi**: The name is familiar, I wouldn’t be able to speak confidently on it off the top of my head.

***Callahan***: Interesting book, and his main thesis, which I think surprised him. I think.

**al-Gharbi**: Thank you.

***Callahan***:I reviewed this, but it was a decade ago, but as I recall, he actually discovered this while researching it, and was rather surprised. He was trying to show the different degrees of social mobility in different societies, and wound up discovering that the social mobility was kind of constant across societies, and that elite status tended to persist for many generations. So you know, he went back into the Doomsday Book and found that some of the same names are still prominent at Cambridge and Oxford. Right? It is very well researched. And so when we look at the racial characteristics of the elite in the U.S., how much of this could be explained simply by the fact that 200 years ago, essentially, if you were elite in the U.S. you were white? Right, and that this elite status persists. And what we see is simply this persistence. Now we could try. We could try to pull this apart from race itself. For instance, by seeing how likely are the descendants of a poor white family and a poor black family, how likely are they to have attained elite status?

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah.

***Callahan***: Right? So what do you think about how much of this is any current racial issue? Aside from just the fact that all the elites were white, you know, a few generations ago, and so naturally today more of them are.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah, I wrote about this a little bit. So, for instance, for the Heterodox Academy, I had an essay looking at the composition of the professoriate along the lines of race and gender, and so on. And this is one of the things that I argued is that one of the big obstacles to diversifying the professoriate is that these are lifetime appointments, and society changes a lot faster than there’s turnover in terms of the lifespan of people who work in these professions. And so, even in the absence of formal discrimination, you can see this pattern where the professoriate will be unrepresentative, and actually in some respects increasingly unrepresentative of society as a whole, even in the absence of formal discrimination, and so on. And, in fact, there is a great paper that was published in the National Bureau of Economic Research recently. I forget her name. But what she showed was that even in a world where there was no Jim Crow, where there was no segregation, where there was none of that actually, you would expect to see significant black and white income gaps for some of these same reasons. Okay, so there is. So an element of these disparities is as a result of this kind of path, dependency, elite reproduction, and so on. But one of the things that’s interesting is that, if you look at the symbolic professions, and if you look at some of these macro social trends, like part of what’s happening is actually, there’s this, as Richard Reeves called it, opportunity hoarding by people who are elites to protect and preserve their elite status, to create glass floors for their children, to make sure their children reproduce their status in ways that undermine things like social mobility, and so on and so forth. So in a world where, in the absence of this kind of rigging of a lot of markets, you see this kind of cartel-like behavior.

**al-Gharbi**: One of the things I show in the book is that if the knowledge economy followed traditional supply and demand, one thing that you would expect to see is a demand for a lot of service jobs. It’s hard to even find enough people to work those jobs. And for a lot of knowledge economy jobs, there’s this huge overproduction. So take Higher. Ed, for instance, professors, there’s this huge glut of people who want to be professors, and there’s not nearly enough jobs. And so traditional supply and demand laws worked. Then what you would expect to see is that the pay for professors would be going down, the pay of service workers would be going up radically, and especially relative to one another. Instead, what you see is that actually the gap between professors and service workers is growing bigger. Professors are actually doing better and better relative to service workers whose wages are relatively stagnant, at least compared to the knowledge economy workers. And so this isn’t just the market and path dependency. And this kind of stuff just works its normal way, and like normal reproduction. This is actually caused in some respects by a lot of cartel-like behaviors and opportunity hoarding and other things like this that actually prevent the kind of churn among the leads that would actually be necessary to allow some of these problems to mitigate themselves over time.

**al-Gharbi**:So instead of them getting better over time, they actually persist in some cases grow worse because of active choices that we make today, not carryovers from Jim Crow, not carryovers from slavery, not carryovers from racial redlining, but because of decisions that we make today that exacerbate various forms of inequality, and, in fact, a lot of the professions that are like hyper woke, and so on. They tend to be some of the places where these disparities are most pronounced. So in terms of race and ethnicity, the symbolic professions are some of the most parochial workplaces, as I show in some data tables in the whole country, and even in terms of things like gender. Although a lot of these professions have been feminizing at a pretty rapid rate, gender disparities between men and women are actually more broader in the symbolic professions than they are in society at large despite the fact. And so, yeah, so I think part of it is the story of just kind of, you know, path dependency. You have the elites that looked one way, and then, you know, even in a situation where things were genuinely open and and procedurally fair, you would expect a degree of the initial distribution to persist for a while. So part of it is that. But part of it is also definitely not that it’s choices that we’re making today that exacerbate and perpetuate some of these unfortunate dynamics.

***Callahan***: Well, a certain amount of that path dependency is going to arise precisely from the fact that elites have power to make sure their own kids attain a lead status. Right?

**al-Gharbi**: And so this is my point is, yeah, it’s not a situation where it’s where you’re talking about, like some kind of genuinely open, procedurally fair thing where it’s just I mean, so even in a case where some people have advantages, they go to better schools, they have healthier diets. They live in better neighborhoods and things like that. Those are examples of like, well, okay, that’s kind of an elite path dependency. A whole bunch of other people don’t have those advantages, and so you would expect to see certain forms of inequalities reproduce themselves even in the absence of formal discrimination or cartel behavior, or anything like that. But a lot of these disparities that I point in the book are not just that. They’re actually clearly the result of cartel-like behavior, active exclusion, and active decisions that people are making today. So, for instance, in some cities racial segregation is worse today than it was in the 1980’s. You can’t explain why things are worse today than they were in the 1980’s because of racial redlining, or Jim Crow, or anything like that, right? That can only be explained by choices that we made today. That took a trajectory that was going one way and turned it another way. So a lot of these problems are actually the result of active decisions we’re making here and now, not just leftovers of the past.

***Callahan***: Yeah, I recall, and there was a proposal to merge one of the school districts in Brooklyn Heights that would make it incorporate the housing projects on the other side of Tillery. The residents of Brooklyn Heights exploded.

**al-Gharbi**: Yes, they did.

***Callahan***: Furious about this. So the racial aspect is interesting, you know. If this had been a bunch of poor rural whites, they probably would have been just as upset. So it, you know, if the neighborhood had a bunch of wealthy black doctors, I think they wouldn’t have minded at all.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah, absolutely well. And so this is so. Class is an important and in fact, some of the social justice, one of the cultural contradictions that the book highlights is that a lot of times we mobilize social justice discourse in ways that actually help us justify inequalities in ways that help us explain why people who are losing and suffering under our prevailing order deserve their suffering, deserve to be marginalized. So, for example, a lot of the narratives we tell about white privilege. For one, we tell this kind of goofy story, where every white person has the same racial privilege. So someone who is a checkout counter who lives in Appalachia at Circle K has the same white privilege as a professional that lives in San Francisco, and as I show in the book, it’s just not the case that everyone benefits in the same way from their race; even if they share the same race. That’s just actually false. But, setting that aside, the reality is when you look at what teaching people about white privilege does, what effect does it actually have on people? It turns out there’s a lot of empirical research on this, that teaching people about white privilege doesn’t cause them to think about non-whites any differently. It doesn’t cause them to behave any differently than they did towards non-whites. The main effect is that it causes them to look at poor whites and think that those people really must suck, they must really deserve their plight. They were born on third base. They were born white. They had all this privilege and look at them. They’re still poor. Okay?

**al-Gharbi**: And so this is a very convenient kind of narrative for elites to hold, because a plurality of poor people in the United States are white. And so, if you tell a story that allows you to write off the suffering of the lion’s share of poor people in America, to say, not only do we not have to worry about allocating anything to them because they would just waste it, they’d squander it. They were born with all this privilege, and what do they do with it? Right, but then also allows us to actually look at their suffering and think. Actually, in fact, maybe they have more than they actually deserve. Maybe they should have less than they have. We want to take from the whites right? So we tell these kinds of narratives that allow us to point at the people who are suffering and losing and falling behind in the prevailing order, and to justify why they deserve their suffering, why they deserve their marginalization, why we don’t have to take that concern seriously and throw social justice on its face. These narratives about white privilege seem egalitarian, seem social justice oriented. But in practice, when you look at how they’re actually mobilized by elites, at their social life, it seems like more than anything what they end up doing in reality is helping us justify inequalities.

***Callahan***: They have to take from them until they learn to stop voting for Trump.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah. Well, they’re gonna have to start taking from the blacks and hispanics, too. In fact, that’s been a big story over the last decade. Not just the last election.

***Callahan***: So I imagine we should wrap things up soon. I know you’re having a busy day, and we’ve been at it for a while. This may be purely an artifact of your publishers requirements. But when John Gray and I were talking, we brought up how so much of the social justice activity results in what’s an empty gesture and rather than actually fixing a problem. And I said, You know, it actually covers up for the fact that the problem is not being fixed.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah.

***Callahan***: And does nothing. And John said, No, I think it’s worse than doing nothing. It takes the energy that could go into fixing the problems and instead rename something. So the homeless people are now unhoused. Yeah. So don’t you feel better in that cardboard box now that you’re unhoused instead of homeless? But throughout the book black is spelled with a capital B.

**al-Gharbi**: Yes.

***Callahan***: I just wonder is this the kind of gesture we should be resisting? Because I don’t see that that’s actually improved. A lot of people are suffering in a terrible housing project. Hey? You’re still in the terrible projects. But we now spell their race with a capital B.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah, absolutely. So that was the thing that the publisher did in my initial manuscript. I didn’t capitalize the B.

***Callahan***: I guess.

**al-Gharbi**: That’s their standard. That’s their standard practice. But also, you know, I didn’t fight about it precisely for the reason that there’s actually nothing at stake here, so if they want to capitalize it, and I don’t want to capitalize. I didn’t capitalize it. They want to capitalize it fine. I don’t care. There’s nothing at stake either way. If I insisted on keeping it lowercase, what would that accomplish? Nothing. So I was perfectly fine to let them do their own thing. I was more worried about, you know, more important, substantive things.

***Callahan***: Yeah, it is a minor point, But.

**al-Gharbi**: Yeah, no. That makes sense.

***Callahan***: To that extent where, if you go along, if I say you know, someone says to me, don’t call them homeless. They’re unhoused, and I go along with it. Am I pretending that there’s a substantive change here?

**al-Gharbi**: And in the case of unhoused and homeless, actually, there is an actual problem. So I would actually push back about that in part, because there’s a lot of research that shows euphemisms actually make people more comfortable with adverse states of affairs. Actually, if you call them unhoused instead of homeless, what you’re doing in some ways, is obscuring the brutality of the conditions that they’re living under. It makes it easier for people to tolerate that kind of thing. So, if they wanted to replace a bunch of stuff in the book with euphemisms, I would have probably pushed back against that. That would actually cut against the point of the book. But something like a stylist, if you capitalize lowercase or something, that’s the kind of thing that I don’t care about, you know.

***Callahan***: Yeah. Like I said, there’s a very minor point that just struck me. Okay, well, I’ve taken up a good bit of your time, and I’m sure you’re having a very busy day, so I do appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

**al-Gharbi**: It was a lot of fun. Actually, I’d be happy to, you know, talk to you about your review as well. But yeah, feel free to reach out to talk more downstream. But okay.

***Callahan***: Thank you. Bro.

**al-Gharbi**: Alright. Thank you.

***Callahan***: Take care!

**al-Gharb**i: Alright! Go ahead!