

The West is Collapsing Psychologically | Therapist Benjamin Schoendorff

Clinical psychologist Benjamin Schoendorff explains why the 500 year old (white) empire is now rapidly undoing itself in the face of unsurmountable global resistance to its narcissistic colonial nature. Links: Resistance is Fertile Substack: <https://resistanceisfertilepodcast.substack.com> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Our Shop: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:01:07 Psychology and world violence 00:05:57 Benji background and core theory 00:13:47 Identity and mental suffering 00:20:25 Narcissism and imperial power 00:42:08 Liberation psychology and resistance 00:49:01 Civilizations capital and identity 00:53:28 Treating the West 00:59:04 Follow Benji and closing

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and I'm joined today by Benjamin Schöndorf from the Resistance is Fertile podcast. Benji, welcome.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Thanks very much for having me on your show, Pascal. I think I started listening to you about three or four years ago, and I just love the breadth of your guests and how perceptive your questions are, and also the fact that you have an interest in psychology. And when I saw you invite a few guests to talk about psychology, I thought, oh, I just need to write to Pascal and maybe we can have a conversation. So here we are.

#Pascal

And you wrote a very good email, actually, a very long one. And I thought, well, this is so extensive, we actually need to discuss this. And just as a little bit of background, actually, let me try to show what you've been working on. That's this one here. Here we go—your Resistance is Fertile podcast. And I hope that we can develop the discussion towards what you call the psychology of liberation. And you actually reacted to the podcast that I did with Dr. Neil McLaren, and in the best sense possible, you had kind of objections to what he was saying. And in the best sense possible, what I mean by that is that, of course, in academia, when we criticize each other's work, we don't do that in order to one-up each other.

What we are trying to do is we're trying to get closer to an understanding of how stuff works. And in this spirit, in this dialectical kind of conversation, I'd like to hear maybe your criticism about this

approach of Dr. Neil McLaren, and then how you, as a clinical psychologist, would try to understand what we tried to do in that podcast, which is: how can we make psychological sense out of the nonsense of the international violence that we are seeing, right? Is there a psychological explanation for these goddamn wars that are going on? And I'd like to hear your take on that.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah, it's, you know, I don't actually want to do a critique of the conversation with Neil McLaren so much. My criticisms were more of a general point, like there's always almost a division between, you know, more material analysis, geopolitical analysis, political-economic analysis, and then psychological analysis. I believe to understand the world, we need to really hold both of those dimensions in our hands.

And psychology, which is still a very new science, has missed a good grounding in material reality in terms of what processes we're talking about, what they emerge from, how they emerge, and how they lead to what we call psychological phenomena that go from meaning, language, human consciousness in a way, and also identities, both individual and collective. And the conversation, to me, you know, had a lot of echoes of what I've seen in the past—people trying to kind of, you know, you have old books about the pathology of world leaders, and then you have Hitler, and you have Stalin, and you have Mao, and you have Pol Pot, and you have Richard Nixon, and you have all these people. But it's kind of detached from what is really going on.

What makes it so that at this particular point in time, these kinds of individuals rise to the top? Dr. McLaren was talking about scum rising to the top. What makes it so that at this particular point in time, scum, as he calls it, rises to the top of what I call white empire, which is this 500-year shape-shifting plague that has been, you know, pillaging, raping, extracting, and really destroying life on this planet and destroying human life and human experiences—even the most precious of our experiences, our spiritualities, our connection to the land, to our ancestors—and also destroying, of course, nature itself, to the point that their dream today, as expressed by that vanguard in Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, is to literally get out of humanity because they deeply hate humanity.

So that's the transhumanism—an effort to leave this planet and go and colonize another one. And the word itself is very loaded, you know. And that, I think, when they say it, is to express the essence of what this thing, you know, that we call capitalism—but imperialism also—is, which is to turn every single living thing and human experience into this dead stuff that we call profit. And so, you know, I start from a very materialist analysis, Marxist in many ways, but then I go and look, okay, so how about the psychological dimension? And the two go together. You can't detach one completely from the other. So that was my main general criticism—not, you know, particularly of Dr. McLaren himself—but this kind of bringing psychological concepts wholesale to political analysis, and then they kind of float up in the air.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah, it's quite interesting.

#Pascal

You know, we always have this problem, right? Either we dive very deep into the particular, including its psychology, into the individual psychology of, you know, Mao, Hitler, Trump, and so on, and then try to explain from there. Or we stay on the system level and we try to say, no, no, no, look, the system is what produces these people. And actually, we have that in international relations too, right? We have people like Brian Berletic who are saying, look, it's not Israel that is driving U.S. foreign policy; it is the U.S. empire that is driving the camouflage of Israel driving U.S. foreign policy, because it all builds into the system that has been built. And we are always somewhere in between there. Can you maybe tell us a little bit about your approach to this and mix it maybe a little bit with your biography? I mean, how did you come to clinical psychology, and how do you look at this at the moment?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

So I used to be a student Marxist activist back in my days at Oxford University, where I did my undergrad thesis on Marx. I was recruited to a very small anti-imperialist Trotskyite group I was running there. I won Keir Starmer, who has now become the prime minister, as a testament to my appalling abilities in long-term political education, of course. And then neoliberalism kind of took over, and I became very—I lost hope in change, if you like. Like, I'm literally an anti-imperialist since I was 10 years old, in 9-11, 1973. I had a communist Vietnamese uncle, and he said, "This was the CIA," and I believed him. And lo and behold, it was the CIA. And from that day, I just hated the empire.

And so, you know, it was very hard for me to not see any way to bring this thing down. And I had my own struggle with mental suffering, and eventually I became a clinical psychologist about 20 years ago. I got interested in an approach known as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy that is based on a theory known as Relational Frame Theory, which I've studied for 17 years, and I've started to see as kind of the missing link in providing a material analysis of that very special quality of human mental experience, right? There's this very interesting thing that I believe the world is made of one thing. It's less messy than those dualist notions that there are two things, because then you have to connect them together.

And so everything arises out of this one thing. You can call it spirit, you can call it matter, doesn't really matter to me. But something happens with humans. We learn to relate things with one another, right? This is kind of a basic process, which you see in other animals. Like we see with Pavlov's dogs, when you ring the bell, then the dog will relate the sound of the bell with the food.

And some of what the food makes the dog do, like salivating and moving towards the food, the bell will now carry, right? So it's a very broad process that we can observe. But with humans, we learn to relate things like this when we are very small, when we are babies.

And then one day we do this thing that only some humans can do — the vast majority, but those who can eventually speak — we start what we call deriving relations that are not trained. You can't do this with animals, right? And then suddenly, if you train that this is the same as that, you will derive that that is the same as this. And as you do this, the functions — what it makes you feel, how it activates your body — also change, right? Something that was neutral, like the bell or a sound, or later on a symbol, a concept, will start acquiring some functions, which we call emotions, and will make you move towards it or move away from it, right? It's very basic stuff. But once you have this, then you start doing this activity, this behavior of deriving relations — increasingly complex behavior.

It gives rise to meaning. It gives rise to language. And at one point, it also gives rise to human consciousness because you are trained three relations of distinction: a spatial distinction between here and over there, a temporal distinction between now and then, and a third distinction, which is kind of spatial but also interpersonal — the distinction between you, me, and others, right? And that third distinction is very important. We'll come back to it later because, in a way, when we make this distinction, we have this very, very special experience of recognizing ourselves as being in some way the same as other humans and also different in the sense that I'm here and you're there.

#Pascal

And that one actually takes quite long, right? Children take until about two or three years old before they understand the difference between you and I, because they're always referred to as you. They then start speaking about themselves as you until they understand, oh, no, wait, the I is the I of the other, so I should use the I for myself. But that takes quite a bit of time.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Wow. And this is such a good point to make, Pascal, because what is very special about this approach is that, you know, in contrast with, say, psychoanalysis, which just imagines very complex mental processes in newborns, or cognitive approaches that do a factor analysis and then imagine that the factors you see on questionnaires are actually things in the mind, it starts from the beginning in developmental, experimental, psychological labs where we see that this, you know, deriving relations happens around 13–14 months of age. Multiple relations happen around 23 months of age. There is this explosion of language at one point. It's almost like those networks happen — they're just an ongoing activity. A lot of it is below the conscious threshold, and it's automatic. And yes, those three relations take a very long time to learn.

And the minute they are learned, those three distinctions, basically what happens is something suddenly emerges. And I believe the best way to talk about it is dialectically, because you have a lot

of quantity of relations that are learned and trained, and suddenly this new quality emerges. And the quality is this perspective of being me here now, as distinct from you there then. And this is when this very specific form of consciousness we call human consciousness emerges, and it stays with us until we lose it, or, you know, we're not alive anymore. And that is going to be very important, because inside that model—and I use it in my clinical work—is the root both of mental suffering, but also of liberation psychology and of personal and collective identities, right?

#Pascal

In the "you there then," in that conceptualization of how human consciousness works.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah.

#Pascal

So how does that work? How do you root liberation psychology within that model?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

So I'm going to take the route of clinical psychology because that's my, you know, bread and butter, if you like. And so the people, once you have this me here now emerging, everything that you relate, every experience that you have—oh, this goes with this, this is more than that, this is before this, this is after that, this is me, this is others—is done from the perspective of me here now as distinct from you there then. So what happens is, you know, it's a vast dynamic system. So it's a bit like the weather. You have all these vectors, and eventually attractors emerge that organize the vectors. And then you have this, you know, weather phenomenon like a tornado or something. So that's how dynamic systems work. And you have two vector attractor poles.

One is me and my things, my thoughts, my emotions, my experiences, my memories, my personal history, narrative, and what I do in the world. And the other one is me in relation to you, to others, right? And so those two become the two facets of our identities, if you like. You almost get some equation of this whole thing that goes, okay, so me, given all my thoughts, emotions, personal history, and behaviors, I am this, and also, given all this, I am that in relation to others. Okay? When all goes well, the basic sense of self—and that emerges, by the way, developmentally in kind of three phases. There's the first identity that emerges in very early childhood, soon after this me-here-now consciousness emerges. That's very basic and has to do with basic human worth, right?

And it has to do with, am I a worthy member of this human community that I'm a part of, that trained me into becoming conscious in that way? Or am I not as worthy, or sometimes more worthy, than others, right? So that's a very central point on which the other identities will emerge. And then,

through adolescence, it becomes much more complex. You know, we all know adolescence is the time when we try to answer the question, who am I? And then on top of this thing, imagine my basic dysfunctional identity is I'm worthless, right? I'm worthless. Some very painful childhood experience, emotional experience, drove me to this sense of being worthless. And then adolescence, in a way, will be a way to try and answer how come, or what kind of a person am I, that I am worthless? It will be something like, well, maybe I'm not good enough.

You know, I'm worthless because I'm not good enough. And then that adolescent will try maybe to be good enough and work really hard to be good enough and become good enough. But then you succeed at something, and then you start wondering, yeah, but next time what? And so you start feeling a lot of anxiety. And as you become an adult, a third layer of identity, if you like—it's a bit like an onion—will come on top of it, and you will eventually identify more with these dominant emotions. So in the example I'm giving you, the person as an adult will think of themselves, their identity will be, I'm anxious, right? But underneath, I'm anxious because of how, during adolescence, I interacted with being not good enough. And I was not good enough as the answer to this first sense, very basic, very emotional, of being worthless, right?

#Pascal

And do you think of this as a subconscious process, the subconscious as a concept that you operate with? Because, like, of course, children and adolescents, they might go through these phases, but obviously they're not aware that that's what they're doing, right?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yes. Well, I do not necessarily use the concept of the subconscious, but that doesn't mean everything is conscious, because that process of deriving relations is automatic and very much under awareness. But what it gives rise to the most—a fruitful way to think about it—is as a system of meaning that prescribes our identity, right? And that system of meaning can take all sorts of different forms. Some of them will be very conscious, as we say, like in awareness all the time. Others will be below awareness, which will then map onto what other approaches would call the subconscious.

But to this approach, you just look at how the system is organized in a very individual way, because personal histories, you know, it's like if you look at pebbles on a beach—there are no two pebbles that are the same, right? They're all different, but they've all been shaped by exactly the same forces—you know, the sea, the wind, the salt, hitting one another. But if you look at this one pebble, it's going to be this unique pebble. And in a way, humans are the same. Systems of meaning, of identity, are exactly the same. And so some pebble will be all dark, and if you break them, you'll see incredible things inside, or maybe what you'd call subconscious in my metaphor.

And others you'll see very much on the outside, and if you break them open, there'll be nothing inside. And some, there'll be a lot outside and a lot inside, and some nothing inside. So we don't have a theory that describes in advance how it's going to be, because we have found the basic process that lies at the root of, as I said, meaning, language, human consciousness, and individual and collective identity. So you can then literally study each system of meaning individually, and how it evolved through the different stages of development of each person that you are working with.

#Pascal

So by system of meaning, you mean each individual, right? Each person is a system of meaning. And then, okay, now we're at the individual level. Now, how do you extrapolate from there? And where would you put this discussion about—so is Donald Trump just a scum that rose to the top because the system makes them rise to the top? Can you connect that?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yes, I will, but I need another two steps if that's okay. Okay. So, system of meaning, and I'll give you the example. That system of meaning you would describe as one in which the essence layer of meaning or identity is "I'm worthless," right? What we call the character layer is "I'm not good enough." And what we call the manifest layer, the one present in current adult life, is "I'm anxious." And that's for the me-me facet of it. And on the me-others facet, maybe that system will have something like "I am less important than others," "I matter less than others," right? So that will be the structure of that system of meaning as it relates to others, as this may relate to others. So in clinical practice, people who come to see me are people, almost universally, who are trapped inside a system of meaning that prescribes that they are, at the essence layer, fundamentally less worthy than others.

#Pascal

Those are the people who suffer. They suffer from some things, and they come to see you and try to get relief because their heart, their chest, is in pain.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah, because they are trapped in a system of meaning that prescribes they are less worthy than others. And you have others, of course, who are trapped—because nobody chooses it at the end of the day—inside a system of meaning that prescribes they are more worthy than others. But those, as you can easily imagine, don't come to see me.

#Pascal

So the narcissists don't need that.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Exactly. And this is when you start seeing the narcissist, right? That doesn't mean they're really fully worthy. There may be a big hole, a big nothing at the bottom of it. But suffering won't be internalized; it will be externalized. They will make other people suffer before they reflect on their own.

#Pascal

Which is actually a coping mechanism. Not even a bad one for the individual, but not a good one for society. But go ahead, Keith.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

So we look at individual systems of meaning, right? And also how I relate to others. Well, what happens is, because we have cultures, you know, and the ways and language are very based on the material realities of social reproduction—what it takes to reproduce. For example, you know, in Aboriginal societies, the distinction between me and others is not very individualized, it's very spatialized. So you don't say, "I'm happy and you look sad." You will say, "There is happiness, and I see sadness northwest of me." Right? So it's very spatialized. And you can imagine in those societies, individuality is much less present than in our neoliberal societies where, you know, famously, Thatcher said, "There is no such thing as society."

There are only individuals and their families. And we are trained in systems of meaning, us in the West especially, that really tell us we are like islands, completely detached from everybody else, right? Like the gap between me and others is unbridgeable, right? But that's just one way of having a collective identity. There have been all sorts of collective identities that are different. And even in the West, there have been attempts through social movements—the socialist movement, the communist movement—to build on a more collective identity, right?

And because we learn through social relations, social exchange, we actually, whatever we think in our minds and whatever the Donald Trumps of this world think, we depend on others for our sense of identity. So a collective identity will emerge. And that collective identity, again, is like what we call nations, what we call cultures, what we call forms. And those collective identities will be built in similar fashion. So you will have those that say we are just as human as any other group of humans. And you have those that say we, the white folks, are more worthy than other humans, to the point that they're not really human, right? And so we can do anything to them.

#Pascal

Yeah, and they find many, many, many ways to express that idea in rosy, cushy, flowery words, including, of course, people like Josep Borrell when he talks about the garden and the jungle. You know, it's amazing. And it keeps coming up again and again and again, while also, funnily enough, at the same time, always claiming that you yourself are literally carrying the white man's burden, right? You are suffering in order to help others when what you're doing is enslaving them and bombing them and killing them. It's really thick, but maybe you can unpack it.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yes, and that's exactly it. And so in clinical practice, what we do is we provide our clients with a structured understanding of their system of meaning. We kind of peel the onion back, right, from the manifest layer, the character, adolescence layer, all the way down to the essence layer from childhood, where they get to the point where they suddenly can see and feel that that sense of being less worthy than others—and, you know, if a narcissist came to see me, that sense of being more worthy than others—is just a message they accidentally received from their personal history, but they need not continue to carry it. They can actually choose an identity that says, as a human being, I am just as worthy as any other, but not more. I am just human by virtue of being human. The best way I have to illustrate that is, I don't know if you've ever had the chance to look into the eyes of a newborn.

I actually pulled my son from the womb of his mother, and I looked into his eyes. Like, they kind of did a few things with him, but maybe 30 seconds after birth, right? And in that instant, I recognized another human being in those eyes, right? And most of us, when we look into a baby's eyes, that's what we see if we're not completely trapped in, you know, some crazy racist system of meaning, right? And that's the kind of experience I'm talking about. When we get to that level, I'm the same as you, and I am me. I am the same as you, and you're north of me and I'm south of you, right? And you can actually choose that way—equal worth with others. And when you do that, then you suddenly have a sense of being yourself and not suffering anymore inside those systems that constantly compare you to others.

And actually, what they do, whether they prescribe that you are less worthy or more worthy than others, is they exclude you from common humanity. And when you're on the more worthy side of it, it becomes ever more exclusive. So the whites are more worthy, but then the rich are more worthy, but then the Silicon Valley bros are more worthy, but then the top of the crème, which Dr. McLaren would call the scum, are more worthy than everybody else. And then you find yourself in a group of five and you go, oh, well, actually, humanity is crap and we have to transition out of it, right? Great, great, amazing interview of Peter Thiel, I think it's a year or two ago, where he said, I don't have—you know, the problem I have with trans people is they're not trans enough.

#Pascal

They have to transition out of humanity. Thiel said that. The problem I have with trans people is they're not trans enough.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah. And what they're expressing is exactly this—you know, the endpoint of those systems of meaning that exclude you from humanity in the name of supremacy is...

#Pascal

So this is how you connect supremacy and then mass—like this phenomenon that this supremacist mindset is shared by people who went through similar processes and then are socialized with each other. But even within them, you have these hierarchies, and at the top you would put the transhumanists, who basically look down on everybody else, including themselves, because they're still here.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

I mean, you're a white guy. You were born in Switzerland, I believe, and raised there. I was born in Lyon, not so far from Switzerland, and raised there. And, you know, looking back, I can see that I was born in and died in a whole racist society. Like, you know, I was from a middle-class family, so it wasn't really said openly until the Islamophobia gave them the excuse of this, you know, Islamophobic feminism. But it's everywhere all the time. You are it all the time. It's in everything, even in left-wing circles, right? And it's just baked into us, like it's taken me so long, and it's still a job of work to realize—which is the white hole at the heart of white identity—that brown people are just as human as us. Therefore, they can be just as smart as us.

They can work just as hard. Generally, they work harder because they don't think they're better. And if they have the same information, which they do now with the Internet, they can, in their tunnels in Gaza, in their missile cities in Iran, devise technology just as advanced as that of the white man, which for, you know, 400 years, by some accident or fluke of fate, had a monopoly on this particular technology of death at the end of the day. But this is what is at the heart of white supremacy, and that also explains Trump, and that explains the current course of white empire. The supremacy is so profound that they literally cannot conceive of brown people being as potentially smart as them. They're actually smarter because they work harder. You know what I mean?

#Pascal

They cannot conceive of the other as equally capable. And whenever they do, they actually equate them with equally evil. That's when you see all of this wave in which they say, like, oh, you know, Hamas hiding behind civilians and the like. No, that's exactly what you're doing. That's what you're

doing. And you're interpreting what you're doing as what automatically they must be doing, because that's the only kind of point of reference you have, while at the same time not actually accepting them into the same human family as you are in, even to the point where you exclude them through words like terrorists and scum and rats and so on. And that's where we get into.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah. And you made a very important point there, Pascal. You said you can't see others as equally worthy as you. And it's inside the system also. So even inside the chosen groups, whether they be white or Zionist or whatever, you have the same phenomenon, which is why and how what Dr. McLaren calls "the scum rises to the top," because they don't see even their family or their children. Like the Epstein class is literally sex trafficking their own children, right? You have Donald Trump, who explains that he surrounds himself with losers because it reminds him that he's not one of them. And so that's how narcissism becomes so rewarded in this particular system.

But it's not because scum always rises to the top. It's because, at this particular point in the political economy of this world system known as imperialism, all it has is—it's almost like fungus. I've been bad, and now it's openly genocidal. It actually makes profit, like in the analysis of Ali Kadri, by killing people, by genociding people, by destruction—not because you're going to make profits later by rebuilding, but by literally shortening the lives of people. So that's how, at this particular point in time, this type of psychological system of meaning and identity—an extremely narcissistic identity to the point of being almost clinically psychopathic—will rise to the top. Exactly.

#Pascal

If we just may extend the metaphor in this sense, the scum rises to the top because the goddamn milk is already sour to the point of no return. That's the imperialist milk that's completely, utterly gone, right? Yeah.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

But you see, on the other side, let's take Iran as an example. And I think I've spent the past 15 years trying to depropagandize my mind about China. And now I'm trying to do the same about Iran because I've been walking around in this life. It's very difficult. It's very difficult. But you have a society of philosopher kings, right? Like, you know, they all have PhDs. Larijani had written three books on the philosophy of Kant and Descartes and all the rest of it. And these people are, you know, high intellectuals. They are not a bunch of savage, medieval, obscurantist wife beaters or what have you. And so... in Iranian society, I'm starting to realize, and I apologize that I didn't realize earlier than I did. It's like three or four years. And in Chinese society, it's very clear.

The scum does not rise to the top. The scum is actually taken out. Like, you know, Xi Jinping is not scum. He's a very able person. He's very—and the leaders of Iran are the same. And even the

leaders, you know, Sayyed Nasrallah was an incredible mind. I would also say Yahya Sinwar was a strategic mind, you know. He spent years in prison studying the enemy to the last, as much as he could. And so those people are not scum, and they rise to the top because they are part of a society that is dignified and that operates around what all of humanity has been operating around until that trans-mind virus of white supremacy, you know, infected the minds of Western Europeans who were living horrible lives of deprivation and bad weather and famine and stuff.

And they started spreading all over the world. But humanity has always known that we're all as human as one another. And so they operate on this idea of collective identity that describes an equality of basic worth. I'm not saying an equality of, you know, what you deserve, of ability, of achievements—not at all—just at the level of basic human worth. And on the other side, they're faced by literally barbarian savages who—who?

#Pascal

Barbarians at the West. Yeah, barbarians at the Western gate, yeah.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Exactly, at the Western gate, yeah.

#Pascal

The problem is that these barbarians in the West, they, for whatever reason, that this hierarchical society then arose or... I don't know if that's the term to use, you know, in order to understand this grouping that just works on that premise. Unfortunately, that managed to be so extremely violent that the violence itself then carried the day, because we must not forget what the West is trying to do to Iran, to Russia, and to China. They successfully did it to North America and South America. We lost countless cultures, civilizations in Australia, too. Hundreds of millions. We destroyed them. We killed them. We eradicated them. And we blamed it on them.

And then we even undid their graves, and we undid their memory. And we made sure that nobody would ever even remember them. It's like over and beyond genocide. Because at the end, you get Vienna too, right? Yeah. You get the character of somebody who never actually was the way he was—they were. It's a crime that really yet needs a proper name. But that's what happened, and he successfully did so. And he's trying to do that to the others, right? So the violence itself then becomes a meaningful tool in an, you know, in an evolutionary sense, of one system against another. I don't know if there's a question embedded in this.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

But it's an absolutely great point. And as I was listening to you, you know what was showing up for me is, yes, and yet, look at you and look at me. Here we are, you know, white guys, probably privileged, who got a good education, who, you know, had a door inside the heart of whiteness. And there's something inside our hearts that awakened. I could see it in your passion right now that goes,

#Pascal

We can't live like this.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

We can't live like this. I don't want to be part of this. I'm not going to be part of it. And, you know, this is what the resistance in Gaza called the free people of the world. And inside the heart of each and every one of us, to speak metaphorically, there is a part of us that remembers that not only are we just as human as anyone else and different as everybody else, but we long for that. We long for that common humanity. Like we long to recognize ourselves in the eyes of another and still, you know, notice our differences.

And all those supremacists are, you know, in clinical practice, less worthy systems. It deprives us of this. So it causes internalized mental suffering in those who are less worthy. And you add what Frantz Fanon referred to as the colonized mind. But it also causes external suffering that those who believe they are more worthy cause. But, you know, you look at people like Elon Musk, who is the richest man on earth, and then goes on Twitter to say, guys, I can tell you money doesn't buy you happiness. And you know what? He is actually sincere.

#Pascal

I believe so, too. Yeah. Yeah. Look, at the end of the day, money, of course, in a capitalist system transforms or also has different characteristics depending on how much there is. For you and I, it's the resource we need in order to go and buy stuff and have a life and maybe every once in a while a holiday, right, and so on. For Elon Musk, it is the pure ability to mobilize people—he thinks people are half a nation, right? Because you can command that much labor with it. So it's a completely different thing. But at the core of it, you still have this being that you described, and which actually, when he tweets on Twitter and you read his words directly, just like with Donald Trump, you believe to see—although with Donald Trump, I think he is more of a, his tweets are more the result of a system of the White House. I don't believe that he writes these things himself. This is a concerted effort. Elon Musk, I believe, types this himself.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Yeah. And, you know, I see the time is running, and I want to move to the psychology of liberation because, as a Marxist, one thing that kind of drove me away from active politics was this question, this next question: how do you nurture, create revolutionary consciousness, right? How do you make people see what their—not just material, but, you know, spiritual interests, psychological interests—are in a society that would be more equal, that if it used market mechanisms, it would be in the service of, you know, outcomes that serve the people, like they do in China, rather than in the service of this crazy compulsive accumulation by a few? And I think it's because we didn't have the psychology for it then, but now that we see it, we are actually starting to see it take form in the world.

It's a consciousness that goes on. We are all as human as one another. We are all deserving of that determination. It's, you know, the Chinese stance on the international scene is something like this: we have done things our way. Don't pretend that we know how you should do things, because you live in your country, a place with your own culture, your own history, your own people. We're not going to tell you we have a recipe for you, because the one we have is only for us, and we keep on tinkering with it all the time, and we make mistakes and we make progress. If you want to see what we're doing, we will show it to you, but we will never pretend we know how you should live your life.

That is philosophically so profound because it says to other countries, even those we don't like very much, the way they organize, we recognize your right to live your life and organize your society in the way you want to, because this is what recognizing common humanity is about, right? And so it gives us a new basis instead of saying, we're the best because, I don't know, like we're socialists, Marxists, or whatever, which is another version of the same thing, to say, well, we have common humanity and we can discuss on this basis. And if you look at Iranian diplomacy, they keep on hammering this very message.

Recently, Pezeshkian said, we will never agree to drop the enrichment thing simply because it's legal for everybody, and we are just as human as you. So if you can enrich, we can enrich, and we are not going to live anymore in a system of meaning that says the white man can do whatever they want and their Zionist colony can do whatever they want, but you can't, because we decide you are less human than us. And you see, it's the revolt of common humanity. And this is why, by the way, if you look at the narrative battle—and that's the final irony—because empire, you know, is like, to me, the final battle of Western idealism and the rest of the world, what I call dialectical materialism. Not, you know, not reductionist materialism, but there are things in relation all the time, and you have to take care of them.

Where they went all the way, this guy said, you know, we create our own reality by our thoughts, by our narratives, by our social networks, by all the rest. And on the other side, you have people who say, no, no, we are rooted in our community's reality, in our common humanity. And then when you see now the narrative battle on social media, Iran is literally eating the empire's narrative lunch. Like, you know, they're using AI in a way that nobody could have predicted, turned around, and

every effort by empire to put out propaganda just falls flat on its face. And I think it comes from this. It comes from—they have managed to embody common humanity in a way that is, if I'm honest, it's sort of shocking to me. Like, you know, how is it possible that those people that for 20 years I firmly believed were a bunch of kind of medieval, you know, I don't even have the words to describe the stupid ideas in my mind about the mullah regime.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's encapsulated in the idea of the mullah regime, yeah.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

What? Really? They're so smart. Like, you watch these Lego videos, and I've been interacting with those folks a little bit. They're an old team of psychologists, of scientists, of...

#Pascal

The funny thing is, of the three—China, Russia, and Iran—Iran is actually the best at this game. The Russians are really bad at it. The Chinese don't even try. And the Iranians are just hammering it down because they decoded how this Western propaganda works. And they know that you have to counter-propagandize with your counter-means. And they're actually doing it very skillfully. It's a joy to see. Yes.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

One last point, actually, that I think germane to the conversation is those three poles of resistance, right? And they, you know, we can say all sorts of things about them, especially Russia, but they are rooted in civilizational nations in a way, right? And Iran, as you know, can legitimately claim a history of 6,000 years, and so can China. Russia is a little bit shorter, but there is something there that provides for a collective identity that can sustain this. Because what empire does psychologically is it fracks everything.

I mean, it fracks the earth, but also it fracks, you know, the labor force by exploiting labor, but it also fracks society—our psychological experiences, right? Everything from parenting to eating to exercising to dating, everything is fracked, atomized, and turned into a commodity. And we people in the West and the settler colonies, it's almost chemically pure. We... I have to reinvent everything all the time. Oh, there's an app for this. Why don't you pay \$100 a month and we'll show you how to eat, how to exercise, how to parent, how to take care of your pets, how to...

#Pascal

I have a question on this one because we started the conversation with, you know, how the self forms and the layers of the self, and how that then translates to, well, sickness, psychological sickness or disorders and whatnot. And would you... would you also use those models to describe civilizations? I mean, that we have just mature civilizations like Iran and certainly China, and, you know, the Russians, of course, they root themselves in Orthodox Christianity, which is also 2000 years old. And if you look at the Americans and, you know, especially Europeans, which are also religiously—I mean, they're young. They're a couple of hundred years old at best, at best. And they constantly undo themselves. So would you use that concept also to say, like, look, this Western, highly brutal society is just like a toddler that is still, like, extremely violent? Is that a useful thing, a useful metaphor, or would it take psychology too far?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Well, I would. You know, what I'm working towards—and I'm going to write something when I do less podcasting, but I'm on my way—is an integration of the material living conditions, the conditions of reproduction, with language, the psychology of it. And there is one, you know, because language, consciousness emerges out of matter, but then can act upon matter, right? So there is this thing, but they are linked with one another. So a particular way of reproducing—if we were to study the Aboriginal societies—we would understand how come they don't need a very clearly defined sense of self, and geographical references for talking about oneself and others are good enough for this particular society. We would find what makes it possible.

And the same if you looked at societies with very long histories, you would also find it, because the collective identity emerges from what the community will support, if you like. You know, there's a kind of me-others meaning that will be reinforced, that will be facilitated by a particular form of organizing your society and how you reproduce in the natural environment that you live in, in the institutions that come from this. So yes, there is a correspondence. It's not one-on-one, and one can influence the other. But that explains why, you know, what Ali Khadive calls social nature, when it's deeply rooted, can withstand better the assault of... We think of it—my co-host Indika had this idea that I find absolutely incredible—that capital is the first artificial intelligence.

It's like this unalive algorithm that's unfolding the world to turn everything alive into dead stuff, but itself is not alive. And people like Elon Musk become the slaves of this algorithm. And, you know, people in the Global South become the victims of it. But nobody is free. Nobody is human once you are inside the system. So that's why capital fracks consciousness. That's why it loves settler colonies. Because settler colonies, you know, ideologically, there's a white hole at the middle of it. Their spirituality is kind of a mishmash of small heretic sects and nonsense, and you can very easily turn, you know, Christianity into the cult of Mammon. You can turn Judaism into this genocidal supremacist thing, which, you know, it possibly wasn't... And so that, I think, is a long answer to your question, but I hope I managed to answer it more or less.

#Pascal

In the last six, seven minutes we have, how can we treat the West? How can we psychologically approach this sickness?

#Pascal

Society, and administer, bit by bit, however we can, the medicine that is needed in order to somehow get out of this ultra-violent form of existence?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

It's a great question. And I, again, you know, I think about, I make the analogy with clinical work, like when I work with people who are trapped in narcissistic relationship systems, narcissistic families. And it's very subtle work because you can't just tell them, well, you know, your partner is an abuser and the only way out is for you to leave. If you do that, the person will actually react against you and ally with their abuser. So the only way to treat it is to do my level best to understand how rational it is to stay inside the system for as long as it maintains itself. But there is an inner logic inside narcissistic systems in which they gradually lose their power because it's all about projecting.

You know, it's all about the spectacle and who's the public, and you always need to, you know, you're only ever as good as your last show, as your last gig. So gradually it loses its power. And as a clinician, what you do is you hold space for a different way of being. You hold space for a different way of relating. And when I look at China, you know, sometimes I go, you should do more, you should go and slap the bully in the face. But China, in a way, is doing exactly this. China is holding space. China is saying, it doesn't need to be like this.

It's even saying it to, you know, the UAE or Saudi Arabia or, you know, Aliyev in Azerbaijan or any number of absolutely revolting characters, right? But what it's saying to everybody is there is a different way of interacting as humans. They talk about common prosperity, common future for all, and they mean it. And so that's how you do it. And then when you actually get slapped by the bully, right? As Iran is, or Russia, then you defend yourself. And for sure, as a clinical psychologist, I'd say, yeah, you know, violence is not the answer, exactly like China is saying. But, you know, one has to defend themselves, and I support your right to defend yourself.

#Pascal

Violence is not the answer, but it is a reply.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

It is actually a solution. It's not an answer, but I believe a genocidal, supremacist empire, which I, you know, sometimes call the Fourth Reich, can only be defeated by violence. And the beauty of it is it will itself provoke the very violence that brings an end to it. And I think we're going to see it sooner than we think. And then we're going to have to go and learn at the feet, as I'm talking as white, you know, at the feet of brown people, how to be human again, because collectively we forgot that about 500 years ago.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, I absolutely agree. And I will never argue for violence. But the action-reaction pattern, to ignore that, would just be dumb, right? It would just be irrational. So the fascinating thing is, of course, at the moment, when you look at Iran, they always wait until they're slapped first, right?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

They always wait until they're slapped first.

#Pascal

Even now, as we speak on Wednesday, April 22nd, we all know that the next big kinetic attack is going to come. But they're waiting because they're not going to hit first, because it's part and parcel of the devised strategy and of the way they do things. And also...

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Part and parcel, I have to say, part and parcel of my evolving understanding of Islam. In Islam, if your enemy stops fighting you, you stop. But they do this incredible thing, Iran as well, which is the total opposite of a narcissist. You know, a narcissist never says what they mean and never means what they say. And Iran does exactly the opposite. They tell you. You have Professor Marandi, you know, he speaks at least five hours every day, and he tells the whole world, if the white empire does this, if the Zionists do this, if the U.S. does this, we'll do that. And he's been saying this. If you want to know the future, just listen to Marandi, who gives voice to Iran, because everything he says will happen if they get attacked. Does it happen?

#Pascal

Yeah, and that is not to say that everything in Iran is perfect, et cetera, and so on, right? It's just to say that this is the system within which we currently operate. Very last thing, what do you recommend to people who enjoy this approach? What should they read, and where should they read more from you and listen to your analysis?

#Benjamin Schoendorff

So, of course, I would invite people to subscribe to our free Substack. Actually, people can give money to the Substack if they do. We add 50% to what they give us and send it to small fundraisers in Gaza because people are still fighting, resisting to live in Gaza. In Gaza, literally, existence is resistance. So I've agreed to host five small fundraisers, and I made a commitment to myself. I started speaking out when the structural genocide turned into active Holocaust in Gaza. And I made a commitment to myself that I would never make a penny from this and just, you know, make sure that I gave material support to the people who are just resisting by just existing, which are the families I support in Gaza.

Other than that, people can look into relational frame theory, which is a very serious, solid body of work, especially in its updated version. But the things I'm sharing with you are actually pretty new. I've been studying relational frame theory for 17 years. The updated version is maybe five or six years old. And this integration of it into a kind of dialectical materialist understanding of psychology is, I hope, my contribution to the cathedral, if you like. I'm in the process of writing about this, a book that I hope to publish first in China, just for kicks. I share my thoughts, I write, I have a series of videos about this that I update on my Substack, so people can find me there, and I'm always open to have those conversations. I absolutely love to share this stuff.

#Pascal

And again, the Substack is called Resistance is Fertile. Just type it into Google. You'll find it immediately, and you will find Benji there. That was a fascinating talk. I hope we can continue this. I hope we can continue also trying to root the violence in psychology. It's very much understudied. So thank you for doing that and for building the cathedral. Benjamin Chemdorf, thank you for your time today.

#Benjamin Schoendorff

Thanks very much, Pascal. See you soon.