

Psychoanalysis and the Arab World Lab

Episode 2 Transcription

Lara Sheehi 00:00

For me, I can't focus on like... oftentimes our, I feel like our energies are put into these like larger structures at the expense of liberating *people* within them. I think this is what – *that* I feel we can, like spaces like this, like what you all are doing through relationality – that there's a liberatory process and a disalienation that can happen in those relationships. I'm not as... I'm not as interested in liberating institutions that replicate that especially on stolen land, right? Like there's an – there's an incommensurability built into that.

[Podcast intro tunes]

Podcast Intro 01:05

You are now listening to EDGES, Engaging Dialogues Generating Emancipatory Sciences. From the University of California, San Francisco's Emancipatory Sciences Lab at the Institute of Health & Aging, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, this podcast aims to foster critical conversations via interrogating power structures, building knowledges of anti-oppression, and encouraging activist-scholar approaches to research, policy, and practice.

In our first season, we are discussing "Emancipating the Academy," and asking questions about our guests' experiences navigating academic careers as well as their visions for liberatory and healing approaches to scholarship and work.

Nicholas DiCarlo 01:59

Okay, so welcome. We're here for the EDGES podcast, Season 1. This is a project from the Emancipatory Sciences Lab at UCSF, which is a dream about coalition building across and outside of the academy. And we're interviewing radical scholars and people that we want to help share this vision within our circles, and hopefully outside of our circles to expand that consciousness, because we're living in a time where it's desperately needed. So, my name is Nicholas, I'm Nicholas DiCarlo. And I am a Co-Director with some of these other individuals here at the Sciences Lab at UCSF, and I also am an adjunct lecturer at Hunter, the social work school at Silberman College, where I get to teach the Practice Lab, which is very much in line with what we're doing here today. And I'm greeting you on Zoom from Northern Manhattan, which is the unceded land of the Northern Manhattan Wecquaesgeek people. And our guest today is Lara Sheehi and two students from GW [George Washington]. So, I was hoping that the three of you could introduce yourselves and just tell us a little bit about who you are and what you'd like to do here today.

Lara Sheehi 03:30

Yeah, thanks, Nicholas. I'm going to hand it over to the students who are the center of this and the heart of this, and so I can come after, but I can hand it over to Razzan or Moataz, whichever one of you want to go because that's the spirit of our lab too, so go for it!

[Pause]

Lara Sheehi 03:57

[laughs] يلا! (Yalla!) They're being polite to each other. This is so Arab! I love it. [laughs] اتفضلوا (Etfadalo!)

Razzan Quran 04:05

Hello. Do you hear me well? Is it okay? My name is Razzan. I use she, they pronouns. I'm a فلاحية (fellaha) from Al-Bireh, Falasteen. I come from a lineage of radical matriarchs, and I'm currently on unceded Anacostan territory. One way that I tried to embody this recognition with action is to mark it in different ways that I've just not seen on a recorded podcast, and especially to speak it at the loudest of my lungs permit in the moment when I'm at bus stops, as this is also the area that's identified as Georgetown and Glover. So, there's a lot of, as whiteness tends to be, pretentious. So that's one way. And I am a sibling, I have three other blood siblings and about five other star siblings. And my intention for today is to just kind of also bask in this very generous offer and invitation. And to try my best not to allow the ways of alienation that the institution requires to show up through my silencing or erasure of what unmediated affect wants to be released in the space. Thank you.

Nicholas DiCarlo 05:47

Thank you so much for being here. And Moataz would you like to introduce yourself?

Moataz Salim 05:55

Yeah. Hi, my name is Moataz. I also go by Taz. I don't mind being called that. My pronouns are he, him. I'm also currently on unceded Anacostan territory. My, on my mother's side, I'm فلاحي (fellahi) as well, of the peasant class, from the south of Lebanon. And on my dad's side, from Gaza, the Gaza Strip. Intention for today – I will likely not put this as eloquently as Razzan can she, she has a way with words that I am nowhere near the level of that mastery of language yet. But I'm like, I'm also very grateful for the offer to come on and talk about the issues that are important to us in the Lab and to me personally, and to really bring light to kind of decolonial theory as it pertains to psychology as it pertains to the places that you know, the Arab world that we're from. And so, I'm very glad to be here.

Lara Sheehi 07:24

All right, thank you, I can't tell you how full my heart is. This is like, you know, so unthinkable in many ways. You know, if we go back 10, 15 years, this would be unthinkable, and you all have invited us into community already, and I think that's the intention I'm setting is it's so important in these spaces that are soul-crushing to have something like this, and I'm so excited that we get to uplift your, your voices too because this doesn't get created in a vacuum. And I imagine there's a lot of labor that went into thinking this up, dreaming this up and we're so excited to be alongside you to sort of bring the world we dream up into being together, and there's nothing more soul sustaining to me than that. I also really appreciate the invitation to speak our names as they were meant to be heard. And I think that's something that racialized subjects in this settler colony often don't get the privilege of doing. So, I'll... My name is Lara Sheehi, and I am beaming in from occupied Pamunkey Confederacy Land. And I think it's so important, I feel like we're in good company and we're in very much in... in solidarity about speaking about land,

and the importance of marking, as Razzan said, whose land we're on. And I think it's especially important when we think about our Lab, about what does it mean to, to sort of work from a decolonial ethos too. It's not just sort of decolonial theory, we're not just trying to like, you know, study theory and then place it somewhere, we're saying, what does it mean to live a decolonial world? What does it mean to live an abolitionist world? What does it mean in our relationships? What does it mean to constantly push up against the disavowals that happen, and so marking what land I'm currently occupying is part of that. And it's especially important when we're talking about the Arab world where the center of that fight is, is Palestine, right? Southern Lebanon was a part of that, Falasteen is the... is the center of that for Arabs, and I think this is part of our lab is absolutely an Arab world lab, and it's also very clear in its centrality of the Arab world cannot be free without a free Palestine. So, we really appreciate you all sort of making space for that, and I'm really excited to just get into it and also have fun because joy is a part of this too, it can't all be soul-crushing.

Nicholas DiCarlo 10:07

Thank you so much for those introductions. And I'm split between wanting to hear your analysis of the soul-crushing academy, and also what the Psychoanalysis and the Arab World Lab is and how it came to be.

Lara Sheehi 10:26

Absolutely. Why don't I just give us a little bit of a history? And then Razzan and Moataz, I want to invite you all to like – what does it become? Because what it was, is different now. Because that's... that with our work together, and even, you know, having just kicked it off and just having a couple of meetings so far there – we have a lot of intentions and the community we've already built is really important. So, for me, I imagined, you know, this is the – part of the soul-crushing of academia is that the navigation of academic spaces and power is such that sometimes, even when your values are nonhierarchical, there's a hierarchy that needs to be done. And my intention is to disrupt that, and also sort of subversively use systems against themselves, like you all have done. What does it mean to speak a space into being, right? And recognize the responsibility that comes with that? So as a... as an Arab, as a... as an anarchist, as an abolitionist, as a queer, light-skinned Arab woman... And for me, particularly as a Lebanese Arab, which has a very specific responsibility in terms of taking responsibility for the violence done in Lebanon's name. What does it mean to say, okay, I'm in a position of power, whatever that might mean, and I have resources at my availability, what can I do to channel that sort of work to redistribute spaces of knowledge production, particularly for the Global South, right? I'm, I'm a product of the Global South, I'm a colonial citizen, myself. And so, a part of that is like, recognizing what that means, because I never had those spaces myself when I was in academia. And then on the other side, saying, I – the distance from those positions that I once was as a graduate student also comes with a particular type of responsibility to pay it forward, and to actively create community that can ask these questions. And so, the lab came about in that way, sort of thinking, you know, what, you're always dreaming of the world you want, and then it's like, well, what else, how else can we make this happen? And so, there are labs everywhere, there isn't an psychoanalysis and Arab world lab anywhere else. There are a ton of people doing amazing work on it, but there's no central space. We also happen to be in GW, in the belly of empire in DC, and all these sorts of things. So it's like, okay, let's have it emanate from here, and that was the contours of it. What came after was really what I had hoped that, you know, I can create a space with my position, but what comes to be is really a community building process, and

as part of a decolonial mission with my students. And I think we've already started that. So that that's the history, I'll pass it along to the present, maybe we can talk about the future in a very non settler time, kind of, kind of way.

Nicholas DiCarlo 13:42

Really quickly. I'm just wondering, in the past, were you a part of any of these spaces? What... where did you get the vision? And were there spaces that were created or that you stumbled upon that gave you a taste of building these... these radical communities within the belly of the beast?

Lara Sheehi 14:07

Yeah, so I, you know, I don't know that it... this is the first formal lab that I've been a part of, because I tend to be allergic to these sorts of things. So maybe it's also saying, let's be expansive about what that might mean, like you all are being, but I have been part of collectives. And I've been part of sub, let's say, subcultures within larger organizations. That's how you and I met Nicholas, right? So, how do you create solidarity even within spaces, so I've always been a part of that. I am... you know, I cut my teeth and organizing, I'm a political activist, and these things have never been separate for me. But so, I have been collectives within that, but I – so I think that's part of where it came to be like, why not make this happen? I don't think it's by chance also that the Arab world and Falasteen specifically have a central role in this because the coordinated sort of efforts to snuff out any conversation around Palestine in academic spaces, the real and not abstract threat that academics who do take stances for Palestine or advocate for boycott, divestment, and sanctions, BDS, these are not abstract, we know. They're there, we get doxxed, we're on lists, we actively get threatened and harassed, we lose jobs about it. And so, part of me is sort of saying, how can we bring these conversations into it? How can we animate them? And how can we do that in a way that's spoken by us? Because very rarely have Arabs had the chance to really speak their narratives, and very rarely, on the scale within academia, and within psychoanalysis, have Palestinians have the chance to speak their narratives. And I think for me that is really important is, how do we decenter? Even the sort of very important work being done in by solidarity movements, how do we decenter, who is oftentimes the people who are speaking? And so that was, what I was hoping too, is how do we come to tell our narratives? And how do we say also, hey, here's how these are connected with liberation struggles across the board. Falasteen is our starting point, always because it centers us because it's a living, breathing example of what settler colonialism does. *And* also, how do we then say, while interested in settler colonialism, we're interested about queer issues, we're interested about trans issues, we're interested about disability rights, we're interested about abolition – these questions, link up with the idea of liberation, and it can't not. And so, it also is a way of saying, you know, don't speak for us in as much as the conversations – or oftentimes what we get lobbed against us when we talk about these things, becomes, oh, these Arab states are repressive, and it's like, let us tell our stories, and let us fight from within our own communities. And that's the way we are fighting and building the worlds we want to live in, across the board, and that's where decoloniality I think, also wraps us in but...

Nicholas DiCarlo 17:28

You just answered every question I had for you today. Amazing.

Lara Sheehi 17:35

[laughs] Let me hand it over to this Razzan and Moataz, and just like how does that align with your own ideas? What have we started when I started to emerge? And just I'd love to hear from you two.

Nicholas DiCarlo 17:45

And if you could please share about your journey into the academy. What – how you found the space and where you'd like to go within it.

Moataz Salim 18:01

All right, I'll go. I... first, I guess I first got interested in the lab because... here's – here's the first thing that I guess I will name is that I'm very new to this to this world. I came in mostly from a person who was of the belief that like, even as – even as a Palestinian person as someone like Falasteeni, and I... you know, going through like undergrad, now I'm in post grad, Canada, DC, whatever it may be. My interest was mainly on psychology. But I saw you know, like Lara I mentioned, things like BDS, and just there was so much tension even on campus day to day that it was it was palpable, really, even within our own department on faculty. Like I remember I went to McGill in my... did my undergrad there, and it happened to be that my first year there that was like the height of the BDS movement at McGill, and so here I am coming from – I used to live in Kuwait before, in the Gulf. And I'm here, you know, first month here on campus and in this like, essentially a new world for me, and immediately I was shown that there is really no like a political psychology or a political academia. And I rejected it initially because I was like, I'm here to study I was, you know, it was – it was rooted in a lot of fear because also like Lara said, being an Arab in an academic space, let alone being a Palestinian in an academic space, it's, it's difficult, and it's very charged. Almost every conversation you have relating to your identity is... has some charge underneath it. Because, you know, like, ideas like, you know, being progressive except for Palestine, it's a very unique issue in that sense. But initially, I rejected the idea that like, you know, the politics are involved in my field, whether I like it or not, and I turned a blind eye to it. I always tell people, like, even in my first three years in... going, going to Canada going to McGill, I wouldn't tell people that I was Palestinian, just as a way of diverting away controversy. But yeah, it wasn't, it wasn't... it lasted three years, then I... then I, you know, finally got hit with the reality that this is something that is, you know, one, it is my identity, it is something that's very important to me, and it's very much the struggles that Palestinians face, the settler colonialism, it's a... it's a thing that expands to many different issues, you know, in the Global South and around the world. So, you know, fast forwarding to where we are now, almost, what, seven years later, it's still not real to me. It is now, but I think what we're trying to do at the Lab here is create a – to create a space and a community for people to speak on these issues to talk, to contribute towards social change, to not be constricted by the negative sides of academia, where, you know, the reliance on funding, which kind of limits your ability to be outspoken. Being able to kind of build a network even or I guess, expand on the network... Lara always tells me about, you know, because I've been very open about my fears of being involved in, you know, what we intend to do here at the Lab. And I'm always grounded by the, by the fact that like, we have a network now of people who are in solidarity, who are willing to speak up and provide a space for us to speak up, like you, very graciously have today. So for me, it's... it's... trying to, you know, obviously, we center Falasteen, Palestine, on it and, you know, that brings me great pride, it's, it's, I can't tell you how surreal that is to me that I'm here in the space, being able to say that even is, like, it was unimaginable to me that I would ever reach... ever have a space like this, honestly. And the idea is to just expand that, you know, expand our networks, expand the topics that we talked about, and keep informing people and hopefully

bring more people into the fold about Palestine in particular, but about other decolonial struggles in the Global South, and around the world. So yeah, that's, that's my take on it.

Nicholas DiCarlo 23:43

I'm so happy that you're talking about the importance of celebrating. That's... there's no mistake that we're both coming together as labs. This is an experiment because the celebration has been so pushed to the margins, and there's so much fear of what's exposed and what's retaliated against. And it's just such a celebration to be here with you today. Thank you for sharing, and Razzan, and I've met you in virtual spaces before, so I'm so eager to learn more about your journey here.

Razzan Quran 24:26

Sure, great. Thank you, Nicholas and Moataz. You know, I don't know if it's the kind of fancy headphones I have on but like, I really hear my heartbeat [laughs]. And as you're speaking Moataz, I like, heard it louder, or felt it and yeah, I'll just like leave that floating. So, it's interesting that even in trying to figure out the words to describe it, I already feel kind of filtration happening or self-surveillance of like, oh, this is gonna be too long-winded. How much of this is necessary? And, and I just wanted to put that out there because like the interjects from the violent "-isms" of this world do exist and like they penetrate in with very sharp edges. And for anyone listening, you know, just know that like that's shared, and it doesn't falsify or deny any of your rights to exist and what is meaningful to you. Academically, I grew up in Falasteen, in Palestine, and I moved to the US. I had a kind of what felt like an earth-shattering experience. I was introduced to my queerness before I even knew I was queer in a kind of knowledge way. I just felt very attracted to and allured to go to an all women's institution on the northeast of Turtle Island, and it was actually my father, who in fear asked me, are you gay? Why do you want to go to an all-women's college? Like, I let you go to coed schools and Falasteen? Many, many young girls wish that, and I was like, I don't know, Baba, stop asking me questions. Like Mount Holyoke was the very first place I landed here, and although it opened these certain dimensions within me, it was really extractive and collapsing of others because I was like, whoa, like, what does it mean to be asked your pronouns and for you to have a say over that? But then if I articulate any inch of being Palestinian, whether it's through my unibrow, or the way I say, my name, my last name, I'm like, projected with such grotesqueness and like elicit this existential threat in another by simply existing. I then move to the south of the US. I have a lot of love and appreciation for Memphis, Tennessee, I really get very vicious about people talking down about the South, some of the most badass radical movements come from the South. The South is not a bunch of these asshole pricks in positions of governance. And that's where I was radicalized in another kind of wave, which is I went to a very public university, University of Memphis, majority of students were what is considered untraditional or non-traditional. I took mostly evening classes. My upper middle class molded parents in Falasteen were very ashamed of why I was going to an institution like this, but that's where I learned how to organize with unions, which was not necessarily looking like doing Palestine work, initially, but increasingly I was oh, right, this is what the cumulative effect of intersection is. And I yeah, I was... found a lot of spaces to be in community.

And then I went back home and I worked, I had studied anthropology, economics, and psychology. So, when I was back home, I was at a counseling center called the Palestine Counseling Center, and it was very heavy. I mean, it's a remarkable team of practitioners there but the burden is really, either through

INGOization, international NGOs give funding programs to psychosocial interventions that like really gives you like these manualized treatment protocols that you're supposed to apply in 12 sessions, go to a refugee camp, go to like a village in Area C, and then that's it, or like the Palestine Counseling Center, which was like doing everything it could to maintain the provision of group and individual psychotherapy, although there was no funding and the PCC that's the acronym in English, had signed onto BDS, and so that meant that the forms of punishment and retaliation from the international community was that they wouldn't give them funding in the same way because they were signed on to a "terrorist" agenda. That never made the organizers and folks of PCC back down from that call, but I do just want to kind of say it's not all romanticized. And so, as a trainee, I was very tired. And I look to the West again, hoping I'd find an answer. There's a very fancy Erasmus Mundus program the language was sexy you know, "the psychology of mobility, diversity, and in inclusion" you know, I was like, wow, cultural psychology and social psychology, wanting to address prejudice, you have your own mobilization process where you will migratorily travel through European countries, and then write policy around the psychological experience and process. So, I was like, oh, yes! Liberation! It was like nightmare – *nightmare*. And not like Nightmare on Elm Street, where you get to at least entertain the horrors, it's just like fascist. And so, I felt really... most of the professors were German, and I do want to say that because there's just a level of pathological narcissism and narcissism like that is really extractive. Most of us students that came from the Global South, are painted as incompetent, unintelligent, and not knowing. I had a lot of – it was the first time I ever failed the class. And when I sought to do my internship period in Lebanon because I was like getting a scholarship, I can use my Palestinian, my American passport, to go to Lebanon and pretend I've never been to Palestine, so I could get into Lebanon. Like I was like, I'm gonna fuck with the system.

I was in refugee camps in Lebanon, and it's very heavy and Lara came to my mind. Really not like a reverie, but as a guardian. And then not in... in like a...symmetrical like, non-symmetrical way. But like in a kind of like, I have a guardian with me in this life I can reach to although we've never had like, necessarily a personal conversation, I just heard her give a talk in Bethlehem University some years ago. And I was like, I don't have a supervisor, and I'm struggling, and the revolution just kicked off in Lebanon, and I don't trust my program, and I don't know what to do. And I was like, I can give you some of the money I have for my scholarship stipend. She was like, "Hell no, what do you need? I'm here." And that's how I learned about GW, was through looking more into, where is Lara, I want to be closer to Lara. And so, I was at GW and – I am at GW, and it's been hard. I am really literate in the language of the oppressor. So, I do my best to tap into intellectualization and rationalization as weapons of mass destruction against these institutions. I use their own writers against them, and I'm saying this because if I said this in one of my classes, I right away be asked for a probationary kind of meeting, a check in: are you having a psychotic level process? What is all of this aggression? So, if you're listening, hello.

And in terms of the lab, you know, like Moataz speaking, that takes so much courage, and it's not just the past tense, courage, it's not just the present tense, like I'm so nourished by you, Moataz. And there are ways that like, cis-masc-presenting individuals, especially from the Global South, get more weaponized and villainized, and I've borne witness to that, and I love you. And in terms of this project, lab, experiment, it is community because settler colonialism's... one of its main tools, or psych-ops is to fragment us. I have never been...I've been to Gaza once on an INGO issue permit. You know, and so the methods of fragmenting us – I got into Lebanon through playing that I speak no Arabic and I've

never been to Palestine even if my passport says born in Jerusalem. That kind of fragmentation is what's been so directly experienced as countered in the Lab. Because Lara, Moataz, myself, we have other member from Turtle Island, like there's— just it's *that*, and it's your space, and us together. So yeah, just it's a becoming. And it's been, feels like both historical and a process, and I don't want us to define it...

Nicholas DiCarlo 34:52

It's a shame that our mics are off and you can't just hear all of the like, loving laughter like celebrating your voice and how strong it is. And you're kind of pinpointing this sexy, seductive, sophisticated academic jargon and framework, and identifying the danger in that and how antithetical it is to embodied passion and anger that has to be present in liberation struggles. I feel like you just you were hitting that nail on the head, and you got it all the way in. Thank you so much.

Lara Sheehi 35:40

That alone, these two wonderful human beings speaking is that is the answer of “Why the lab?” Like my, my heart is bursting.

Nicholas DiCarlo 35:55

I'm wondering if you could speak to some of the ways that you keep yourselves safe and talk about the threats that you receive. Because there's such a power in being visible and having voices to name violence that's coming at you, but there's a lot that happens that's, that's hard to make public because of the threats of retaliation. So, I know that's sort of a loaded question, but I'm hoping you can shed some light on it.

Lara Sheehi 36:26

Yeah, sure. Um, what I'll say is that what grounds us is a cause, and that's something an oppressor and a settler can never understand. Right? Is that there's something bigger than us, and there's something that centers us, and there's something that will *never* be snuffed out. And my Palestinian comrades are the first ones who taught me about this, and that's where the concept of صمود (*sumud*) comes from. That it's an — you can't touch it, it's intangible. And there's that is also why it's so important to eradicate because it *defies* settler logic. It defies oppressive logic, right? So, that's what courses through me and it's not — it's not an... it's not an... “if” it's a, it's a “must.” It's a must. And it connects with my ethical imperative as a clinician as well, that: what's the point otherwise? I can't, you know, Ruth Wilson Gilmore has a beautiful saying: “Where humanity lives, humanity lives.” And if, if we don't or if we aren't aligned with humanity, you're not aligned with *any* part of humanity. And that's for me, where the liberatory struggle is. You don't get to pick and choose what struggle we're a part of, right? Because the second we start to equivocate, you've lost humanity, right? So, that's the larger that's the cause that we're connected to.

And does that come with risks? Absolutely. Every struggle in this world in history has come with risks. And there are ways in which to go back to the romanticization and intellectualization. You can look backwards and romanticize liberatory struggles, and we see this. Everybody loves *Battle of Algiers*. They love that fucking movie, right? And it's like, yes, those women and white feminists are the front of the line to be like: “Yes! Women are the revolution!” Until you look at Falasteen right now, what's

happening. And that's what we're interested in, looking at those contradictions, and it's from those contradictions that the violence really comes, right? And I often talk about this, right, folks want a queer Arab in the space, they definitely want a Lebanese queer Arab space until you bring your politics into the room, and that I think, part of what Razzan was talking about, also a part of what Moataz was talking about. So, the threats come from there. I mean, there are there are very real threats, I've lost jobs. I've ... I've been turned down for opportunities, I receive death threats, I receive emails that are threatening all the time. I, you know, am on websites that are fascistic, and this is real life, right? And, and also, that risk is worth it. I wouldn't – I could not go to sleep at night aligned in my conscience, if it didn't come up, and also from what Moataz is saying is, part of what I think is unhinging people is that we live in a time now where that coerciveness of relying on people for recommendations, for publications, for jobs, for all of that, we have vast networks of folks who are aligned in solidarity struggles. And so that coerciveness doesn't work quite the same anymore. Right? And so that's what I also say to folks is that – you're not, you don't have to rely on those oppressive people to write you those recommendations to do all that sort of thing. And I say that across the board, anybody, any one of you, anybody who's listening, so when you know that there's a space to come to, and like we can divest from those oppressive structures, but that's also what makes them really angry. Just like white – how whiteness works. If you don't come to the feet of whiteness and supplicate yourself, it, it's, it gets incredibly angry when you don't need it anymore, right? And that's been the, the aspect of building community to to sort of position ourselves against that violence.

Nicholas DiCarlo 40:46

And so much of the retaliation lets you know, that you're threatening the dominance, you're destabilizing the power structure, and the fragmentation lets you know, that that's the part of you that's so valuable, that they are afraid they're going to extract and going to be contaminated by or changed by?

Lara Sheehi 41:12

Yeah. Yes, truth is scary.

Moataz Salim 41:15

To expand on the idea of safety, you know, I, I feel like it's, it's important to mention this. I'm, you know, I'm currently, right now, and, you know, in the past couple of weeks or so, implicated in kind of an... issue that went down within our, my cohort within this program, where, like, our lab had a guest speaker come in, who spoke on, you know, global mental health under occupation, and pretty much the idea of how mental health and our field can be used for political means, you know, nefarious political means, you could say, for propaganda. And it's, it was centered on the issue of, on the occupation of Palestine, by Israel, and we had an in one of our classes, you know, there was a retaliation of sorts, where there were, there were some students who have grievances with the... with the talk, and I found my identity was being attacked. And, again, I mentioned earlier that this is...this world of speaking up, and really being outspoken and upfront with my – about my identity, and defending my identity and beliefs, it was... it was put – I was really put on the spot to, you know, almost make a decision of I could just stay silent, or I can, I can speak up against what are, you know, attacks. And even in my speech right now, I notice myself, like, trying to, like filter, filter things out. And that's really, I think, it's, it's pertinent to mention that because I'm currently in the fear right now, like, in this very moment.

And how I feel safe is, for me, like going back to like, the idea of the Lab and what we're building here is really the idea of community and having, you know... knowing that there are people and networks there to support me in being outspoken in, you know, a public forum, in a semi-public forum, against, like, hegemonic dominance. And, like, you were saying, Nicholas, you know, the fact that we like we... the fact that there was even some response or retaliation spoke to the fact that we hit something. And it was, it's... it's frankly, it's terrifying. It's so scary. And I, I don't – there isn't a day that goes by where I don't think about this and get some anxiety or some fear regarding it, but what keeps me going is: one, leading up to you know, the that class where we were there was the response and the talk and the Lab now, I've always thought to myself, this is very important to you beyond just being your identity, it's also just really, really important to you. And if you're not going to stand up for this, what are you going to stand up for? And that's something that really struck me, the more I became confident in my own skin and in my ability to speak on these things, which is very much still a work in progress, believe me, we're at the very beginning. And having Razzan and Lara, I feel honestly, like it was faded. I – there's no other way to describe it, it's, it... You know, it feels like everything has aligned after all those years. And having them, knowing that they have my back, knowing even you know, even after what went down within my own cohort, in the program, I've had a lot of friends in class and stuff come up to me, and show support and knowing that there are people that exist who are there for you, both professionally, academically, whatever, but just on a... on a human – on a being to being level. That's, that's been a... that's been grounding. And, you know, it's just, it's, I think, the fear is always going to be real. And I always, like, I always remember something Lara told me when I when I first expressed to her the fear that this is what going against power is, and it sucks. It's so scary. But it's necessary. And I'm, I wouldn't trade like the fact that I'm outspoken about it now, and you know, learning how to how to be more honest with myself and with others about it, I wouldn't trade that for the world. Truly. And it's been a... it's been a great learning process, despite all the fear.

Nicholas DiCarlo 47:22

Moataz, thank you so much for sharing. And when you were talking about fading, I felt like you were describing the danger of, of not resisting, of epistemicide happening quietly in real time. And what it means to have to actually feel the fear, because that's what the fascist can't do. It's all built on the disavowal. But it absolutely sucks to be the one it's deposited in and carrying it. And in so many ways, you're, you're making me think about the times that I've needed people to carry fear with me, and how lonely it is to feel like, you're the only one feeling the fear. So please let us carry what we can with you...and yeah.

Moataz Salim 48:14

It felt – it feels very isolating in the moment, but it's, it's great to know, after the fact that there are people who can carry it with you. And I appreciate you saying that, really.

Nicholas DiCarlo 48:36

So, I didn't introduce my three collaborators, but I'm hoping to now so that you have a sense of who they are. And I know that they might have questions and thoughts and feelings that are coming up. So I'm wondering, does anyone from the Emancipatory Sciences Lab want to chime in?

Kourtney Nham 48:58

I mean, I can... I can jump in. Sorry, I'm just... I'm very much absorbing everything that's being said right now. And I feel really, really just fortunate to be able to be part and listening to this, this conversation. Um, I'm Kourtney, by the way, I'm a PhD student in the sociology program at UCSF. I'm also Co-Assistant Director with Brittney with the Lab and it's been really cool getting to work with Jarmin and Nicholas and Brittney and also to get to meet you all, but... I guess so... I'm hearing a lot of like, the importance of community and like, what comes to mind is this idea – like this conversation we were just happening having of like safety, being deeply relational, and that that is something that is cultivated with people and can't be had without people. And I guess... we've already kind of talked a little bit about sort of like how you all navigate sort of the risks and suppression that comes with the work that you're doing. But I'm curious, you guys have also spoken about... a little bit sort of the violence, the hegemonic dominance that you're coming up against within the academy, that's inherent to the academy. And I guess the theme for this season is “emancipating the academy” and I guess, from your guys's work, I'm curious if you even think emancipating or liberating the academy is possible or like, if so, like, what does that even look like? And how would you think about that in regard to your work?

Razzan Quran 50:36

Hi, Kourtney. Um, you know, when my when I hear academy there's a pull to situate it in like the Eurocentric world. But the first college wasn't established in the Eurocentric world. So, you know, I was brought up in the Islamic faith. So, I also think about شورة (shura) and الصحابة (sahhabah), and how it was one of the first tenants of like, that's basically what will, I don't know, like, collaboration like you, you can't achieve a decision without there being like a consensus of a circle of folks sitting and talking. But even before that, is that you know, the Islamification of culture and things, there was also like these institutions, and but today is modern day names, like Baghdad in Iraq, and in certain parts of Iran and Afghanistan. And so, I find that like there were these forms, you know... Now, if I'm thinking about this one, I don't, I don't know because one of the things that's been very disheartening is that there is a very intentional agenda of indoctrinating graduate students with scarcity mentality with alienation with disavowed aggression, with like, really insidious competition. There's just a bit neoliberalization of the person and so I really have.... what's been most heart disheartening is that folks of color and marginalized identities that enter these spaces, sometimes will end up fighting for a seat at the white man's table. And not... and it feels so terrifying, as Moataz is talking to face something else. And so, I think that it will depend. It depends on a lot of things. And I think that it doesn't have to be in the binary of can we emancipate? Can we not emancipate? I'm more curious of like, where will emancipation happen? What places? What processes? What kind of like preparation and stamina do we need for that? What kind of rest and repair do we need for that? Did I evade your question? [laughs] Okay.

Lara Sheehi 53:08

I love that. And I think, Kourtney, thank you so much for your labor and bringing this together. I know you're getting emails from you, too. So, it's an abolitionist call for me. And I think this is what I'm hearing in your language Razzan, is that, you know, abolition includes rehearsal. And we're always making, dismantling, making, rehearsing, dismantling, when do we seize the moment? For me, I can't focus on like... oftentimes our, I feel like our energies are put into these like larger structures at the expense of liberating *people* within them. I think this is what – *that* I feel we can, like spaces like this, like what you all are doing through relationality – that there's a liberatory process and a disalienation that can happen

in those relationships. I'm not as... I'm not as interested in liberating institutions that replicate that especially on stolen land, right? Like there's an – there's an incommensurability built into that. And so, you know, when Columbia University does something about decoloniality, I'm like, of course you're defanging... like, how can I take anything seriously when you're doing a “decolonize the university” at Columbia University. So, I think those things are important to speak and then I think it's our work to reclaim the political specificity of those terms. And how that's looked like for me is I am part of institutions you – those of you know me I'm part of institutions, but my – at like any good anarchist, I don't have you know, I stay around until the institution can't sustain the change anymore. And my, my investment is in the relationships, it's not in that institution in the way that it contours those relationships, those relationships can't just exist within that space to me. Right, the university will never be the site of revolution, it will be one of many places, right, in which revolutionary fire emerges. But, and...and, of course, this is part of like, I'm very Fanonian in the way that I think and that is that is a central tenant of it is that what do we mean, when we're talking about decolonization? There's an entire turning upside down of the world and for us to rehearse that and sort of as Razzan was saying, is, like, what, what preparation needs to be done? What to – how do we need, what do we need to nourish? Right? And, and in some ways, also, there's a way in which through that, we're saying what gets left behind? And I think that's, that is our work. Because we're, you know, not about destruction, despite the fact that people will put, pin that on us. Our work is: what is okay to leave behind and how do we do – how do we practice that, too? Some folks will be left behind, some places will be left behind, some institutions will be left behind. And it's also doing the work of like, in the new world that we're building constantly – I'm not thinking about it as like a future thing, I'm thinking about it as every day, right? My partner, Stephen Sheehi talks about this, it's a decolonial now, we're always like thinking about returning to a past or in the future, but what is the decolonial now? That's the constant process, and then also a readying ourselves of like – we're in fascist times, that.... I'm not interested in bringing fascists along. I don't know about you all. But you know, we... our imaginary world can't include that. You know, and I think we have emotional work to do to prepare ourselves for that.

Nicholas DiCarlo 56:50

So, I've got my next question. And it relates to how there's all this discourse about decoloniality, without any sort of, like within academies, without any specificity about land back or abolition. And I was hoping you could speak – because this is something I heard on a podcast that you did, where you were taking trauma studies to task. Where is the academy susceptible to just reifying and glorifying like how sad material reality is, without actually like puncturing the power relations and committing to the return of theft?

Lara Sheehi 57:33

Yeah, I think, you know, I am, I'm glad you brought up material –we are thinking about *material* reality, which includes *historical* material reality. And I think part of the lab and I'll ask, Razzan and Moataz to chime in too, is the act of truth telling the act of sitting together and being like, these are our nonnegotiable truths. This is what it is: there's – there's a land called Palestine, it exists, Palestinians live there, right? And, and Palestinians living in diaspora have done that because of exile, because they are dispossessed, because they are displaced from their homeland, not because we're like out here, you know, living the American dream, right? It's that type of truth telling. And that's, I think, the part that academia kind of gets wonky, there's this way in which it'll go there, but it's about applying theory. And

that's where I'm like, I'm at a place in psychoanalysis and in psychology, where I can sit through talks, and at the end, I'm just like, what's the point of it? What are we producing here? Right? And I can talk all day long with folks about it, and I love it... and we're all theory, you know, we love theory, we're theory fiends. And then in the end, I'm like, what are we – what are we producing here? And, and the better question, what are we displacing? So, when we theorize about decoloniality, what are we displacing in terms of our responsibility to land back? Right? When I, when we talk about – and that's why I make it clear, when I make gun acknowledgments, I'm like, I want to be clear, because not everybody's on the same page here. So, it's also specificity of what we're talking about. Right? When I make land acknowledgement when I talk about the coloniality, I mean, sovereignty, I mean, land sovereignty to indigenous people, the world over from Palestine to Turtle Island, right, from Puerto Rico all the way to back to Palestine. That's what we're talking about. From the Western Sahara, back to Palestine. We're talking about, truly what does that mean? Now we can contend with what that feels like? What does that mean? We're always tasked with answering the questions. Well, what would that look like? I'm like, that's not our responsibility, our responsibility to speak it into being just like you spoke capitalism into being, just like you spoke settler colonialism into being, nobody tasks power with, you know, explaining how capitalism is gonna go. We see the effects of it, right? So, it's also about that. It's also about us saying what does it mean to be a decolonial scholar and truly put your – *live* that life. I think we started there, like what does it mean to live in aligned life as an abolitionist, as decolonial feminist, right? And that's I think it's, it's really not allowing our institutions, or our fields, or our theories to get away with the innocence. You want to claim you do this cash out on it and if you don't cash out, okay, we're here we're watching, this is how we this how we talk about it, then. This is what's needed. You know, I don't know if Razzan or Moataz, you have anything you want to add to that?

Razzan Quran 1:01:02

I just want to name like, they're really great, like also, in addition to our sibling Lara, and you all right, like there's Bassel al-Araj who on the 6th of March 2017, was killed, but he was killed in action. He... sorry... but he fought to the final bullet that he had. And Bassel, in Arabic, we say المثقف المشتبك (*al-mothaqqaf al-moshtabek*). And the like literal translation is the clashing, intellectual. Clashing here, clashes is like our everyday reality in Falasteen, it's like a really watered down word, but it's actually also very empowering because even if we're faced with bullets, and what's the دبابات (*dababat*)?

Lara Sheehi 1:02:00

Tanks.

Razzan Quran 1:02:02

Tanks! And, you know, tanks and like all of that, you know, and the power of the mighty rock. Like, yeah, we are out there. And so – but so, the yeah, he's known as المثقف المشتبك (*al-mothaqqaf al-moshtabek*), maybe another way that will be more like eloquent on the ears for like, English speakers is like the militant intellectual. That you know, Lara's always, she's also my supervisor for clinical cases, and, you know, reminds me of like, what militancy means, looks like, feels, she helps me identify it in my practices. And so, I feel like that's, that's a place. I also am very inspired by, like Mariame Kaba, and I find that there's a lot of power in that she had to be like pleaded with to sit and put this book together, right? That, like, so much of what she emphasizes is the building, the building, the building. And I find that, you know, there's something very intellectual in dreaming, because like, it's, I don't know, like,

what is intellect? You know? And so, why do we also feel like that cannot include if we're talking about imagining, reimagining, burying, like, you know... So, just a lot of thoughts all over the place, maybe it lands.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:03:24

It definitely lands. And I know that we've been talking for about an hour, which is our allotted time. And this is way out of left field. But I find myself increasingly thinking about climate change, and how that gets sort of co-opted as like, this is just the natural like, like, "oh, whoops, like the Army Corps of Engineers, the floodplains here, this communities wiped out." But does it also, I'm wondering if, as part of the left, and with the militant hope for the future, do we see moments of destabilization that provide opportunities for resistance or for consciousness raising? And is that part of what you all are... have been talking about in the Arab world lab?

Lara Sheehi 1:03:55

Do either of you want to go?

Moataz Salim 1:04:21

Could you Could you restate the question?

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:04:58

I guess, it's a very convoluted question and it's not very well thought out. But it's about sort of, as you know, the world faces these big climate catastrophes, and people are in some ways, kind of, it seems like being driven towards allegiance to fascism, but other people are starting to question being like: this is like a death cult, and we're all being sacrificed? Do we have visions from the left, about how to organize around the reality of climate change that advance decoloniality?

Lara Sheehi 1:05:28

I have some immediate thoughts. If you want to collect your thoughts, Moataz.

Moataz Salim 1:05:54

Yeah, go, go for it.

Lara Sheehi 1:06:01

Because I'm seeing... I'm seeing your brain work, and I want to hear what comes of it. But I, you know, Nicholas, I love that question. And I think, yeah, anytime there's, you know, part of our struggle, as militants or revolutionaries is punching at the seams. We all live under the, you know, the crush of power and power clamps down hard. And then also, we've learned from our siblings and Falasteen in the Freedom Tunnel that you dig with a spoon, right? And you defy the laws of physics, and you say, I'm free. And what... if you hear what they said after they were reincarcerated, by the way all – al, incarceration under settler colonialism is illegal. But this one specifically, I'm saying illegal political, they're political prisoners. The idea was like, they were like, "Oh, this is a loss." And they're like, "No, it's not. I saw Falasteen for five days. I defied your reality." And that's what we're, that is why we pick at the seams. And I'm using that example, specifically, because you can look and you can see concrete, and you can see a fortified prison, right? A fortress, which the settler state of Israel likes to call itself. And

then you can say, even that can be defied. And that is what our job is, is when we see these moments of unrest to say, where – where are the seams? People are in pain. They're dying, the pandemic did that, the pandemic radicalized people, right? Radicalization doesn't just go one way, and we need to be okay leaning into that. It radicalized people, because the inequities of the world were so on display in such painful ways, the exploitation of people, the disregard for bodies, the disregard for disabled folks, the outright degradation of life was on full display. But what emerged from that? Mutual aid. And that's our – leftist sometimes get lost in the pessimism, but all I see is a love letter to humanity is like, even in the scenes, we are dedicated to the sustainability of life. And if we can't find it in these spaces, we will dig a tunnel, right? We will find the light. And that's where I would say absolutely. In climate catastrophe, we're saying, let's do this. And also, let's be careful because the language around climate catastrophe can also be imperialist. Let's call in what it really is, so for example, when the Israeli occupation army says "we're the most vegan army in the world." What's the point of your vegan boots when it's on the necks of Palestinian kids? What's the point of your veganism and your commitment to climate when you set up an apartheid wall that destroys entire ecosystems in its wake? So, when we're galvanizing around these messages, we also have to be very careful about the way they become greenwashed and whitewashed and pinkwashed and purplewashed and all the washing that there is, because that's how power works, we can't be surprised by it. So yes, let's lean into climate change and galvanize around that because that is what will kill us. But let's also remember, it's corporations and imperialism and the United States imperial army that creates most of the destruction in this world, not our siblings in Pakistan, a third of whom are underwater, and definitely not people in Jackson, Mississippi, or in Flint, Michigan before that, who don't have water. Right/ And that's, that's our call is to constantly hold that line. That's militancy is to say yes, and. Let's, let's put our feet to the fire where it really needs to be.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:09:41

Our feet are there today. I'm wondering if everyone could just unmute, and we could hear all of the other breathing or shuffling. There's something about muting that just doesn't feel right. I'm gonna turn up my volume, so I can hear all your ambient noise.

Lara Sheehi 1:09:56

Especially with all the laughter, I wanted to hear your laughter!

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:10:01

Yes. Well, I don't have any more questions for today. But if there's anything that anyone wants to add...

Moataz Salim 1:10:21

I mean, it's, it's, it's hard to follow that up. I think Lara said, anything I could say with... with more passion and, and more eloquence still than I could. Yeah, I would just re, you know, reaffirm the, that when we're thinking about something like climate change, for example, we still include, not just...not just – but like in terms of the content matter of, you know, not focusing on just like the West per se, but like the many issues such as in Pakistan, and in the, in the Global South, and, you know, there's a lot of oil shortages, water shortages that are going on. Fr example, like Lebanon is a great example of a... an economy that's been devastated. And I think it's not only important to say those things, in, in alignment with, with, you know, issues that are going on here, but also, when talking about those parts of the

world, centering the voices that are that are from those parts and believing them and understanding that the struggle like decolonial struggles, it's all connected to this, for example, against climate change. So, that's... just want to reaffirm that plus everything Lara said.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:12:00

I could really spend my entire weekend talking with you all.

Razzan Quran 1:12:06

May I, may I Nicholas just put a shout out, Nicholas, to the [Red Nation](#) has a podcast too that's like hosted by Nick Estes, and there's a lot of really badass ways that just for us now on this land to find out how we can show up. You know, and I feel like that's been a solace for me to like know because I'm not as familiar on this continent of the ways that we can in the every day.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:12:35

Thank you, please send us a link and we'll put it on the website as well. And Lara, would you like to plug your book?

Lara Sheehi 1:12:43

Um, yes and no, you know, like, this is, this is the work. These are... I will say, this is the only thing that I will say it is coming out in paperback. Thank you, we pushed them so hard and to move against the criminal pricing of publishing, and so that's coming down the bend and we are very proud and very excited that it was nominated for Palestine Book Award. Yes. So just uplifting, you know, my comrades and colleagues in Palestine who I hold so dear, like, that's, they're the heart of this book, and that's their labor and our fight continues together.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:13:29

Can you tell us just briefly about how the book came about and the process in like the period of writing it?

Lara Sheehi 1:13:36

Um, sure. Or, you know what? I – could we stay with the with the lab? Would that be okay?

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:13:47

That's totally fine. Yeah, absolutely.

Lara Sheehi 1:13:50

I feel like the book has gotten a lot of attention. And I would love for this to, to stay – to stay in the lab if that's okay.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:14:02

And listeners, you just have to Google it. There's gonna be so much written about it. So many podcasts.

Lara Sheehi 1:14:10

[laughs] *Psychoanalysis Under Occupation*.

Nicholas DiCarlo 1:14:14

Well, thank you all for coming. This was really special.

Everybody 1:14:18

Thank you. Thank you so much.

[Podcast outro tunes]

Podcast Outro 1:14:24

Thank you for listening to this episode of our podcast, EDGES. Learn more about our work on our website, emancipatorysciences.ucsf.edu or on twitter, [@EmancipatoryLab](https://twitter.com/EmancipatoryLab).