Religion & Islamophobia Show Notes & Major Questions

How do you define Islamophobia?

Kayla: it is both the interpersonal and structural othering of Muslims and people who are perceived to be Muslims. The other leads to their safety, livelihoods and sometimes their citizenship being in a constant state of flux.

Zareena: we want to reframe the term islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism. For a couple of reasons, it can be too individualized, the other term can help show the structural impacts.

Talha: I struggle with defining islamophobia because when you define something you are placing limits on it. I would define it as an experience when you perpetrate islamophobia you are conjuring oppression. I agree with and like calling it anti-Muslim racism because it encompasses various aspects.

What does Islamophobia look like in people's everyday lives?
How do you think it effects/impacts Muslims?

Talha: It is like a shadow, sometimes it is right in front of us and blatant and sometimes it is hidden, not as easy to see but still there. If people are experiencing these things in the classroom, it can make it harder to learn and advocate for yourself. Some people go inward and for others resistance becomes the legacy that they want to leave behind.

Kayla: Race can also impact how people experience. Black Americans experience these things from both non-Muslims and from Muslims. People tend to think that African American Muslims are "not real Muslims." There is also a thing I am seeing leading up to the election of people making African American Muslims choose an identity and not understanding how these identities are intertwined.

Zareena: Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism is not experienced equally by all members of a community. If you live in an ethnic enclave post 9/11 those were the communities that were most heavily surveilled and received the most state violence. Racism is never stable; it is not always one thing.

How are Muslims coping with this, Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism?

Kayla: I see a lot of people turning inward, building communities, fighting back and not being comfortable with the status quo. What is surprising is how little support I have seen for younger Muslims.
This moment feels a lot different than when 9/11 happened.
People were much more "American" they were doing more to express their citizenship after 9/11, American hijabs, proving they are American so they can be safe. Now people are not as scared, they see and realize that there was never any safety. It has led to people really trying to stand up, leading to arrests, losing jobs, etc.

Talha: Many people and students are turning inward, relying on communities. Some people also do not, or we go through phases. From a lived experience, it can feel like a life sentence to be Muslim in this country. You cannot turn it off so we lean into what we can control. Many of us younger Muslims do not feel like there is an answer to what will make us feel safe and secure.

The American-Islamic relations in its 2024 report stated that there was a 56% jump in Islamophobic reported incidents to them in the USA during the year 2023, the highest recorded in its 30-year history, half of the reported complaints in 2023 to them were reported in the final 3 months of 2023. Could you expand on what you think has led to this surge of Islamophobic incidents in the USA?

Zareena: as someone who looks at qualitative and quantitative data when it comes to racism, we do not really have a strong picture. We need to, when thinking and looking at this data, think about what we are getting and what we might be missing. Islamophobia did not begin with this war, it did not begin with 9/11, these are moments when the volume gets turned up. These roots have a long, deep history. Many campuses are graveling with how to be even handed when you have students from different racial and religious communities who feel targeted, vulnerable and are experiencing pain and discrimination. One of the ways I have been thinking about this is institutional voice.

There is a gap in understanding the differences between types of people, we see Palestinians getting grouped as all Muslim when that is not the case.

How might Islamophobia present itself in higher education institutions? Do you have any examples of this that you are comfortable sharing? How can higher education institutions counter Islamophobia in their teaching and learning environments?

Talha: Intimidation, financial intimidation, we see it in the class content is built. It is very systemic, and harmful for many more groups and people.

Kayla: Surveillance, we see these overt ways that people are silenced and pushed people underground because you do not know who is watching and listening to you.

Zareena: One of the surprises for me is the role of chaplain offices. Muslim racism is not taken as seriously or worried about in the same way. What is being done to rectify that?

What do you believe is the main contributor to the rise of contemporary islamophobia? What is driving the surge today?

Zareena: The war.

Talha: Decades of what is pushed into the culture. When we dictate what people can have access to, like book bans, certain media, painting Muslims a certain way. We have access to certain things that make it so we can learn, stay informed, and make our own decisions on topics. We have access to talk to people from around the world and not just rely on what the big media companies are telling us.

From Audience: As a historian of religion in the US, I hope that Islamophobia could be lessened by a stress on the common religious elements between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. As a trans person, I like to point out that Abraham pleaded with God not to destroy Sodom for half of Genesis 18 and often deferred to his wives. Can teaching religious history bring peace?

Kayla: I teach in a theology department and am part of the interfaith studies concentration. I hate interreligious dialog, I think it is Christians patting themselves on the back, the goals are to find common ground but many times it

is through a Christian lens. I do not know if it humanizes people. When you only pay attention to the commonalities you are not looking at the structural problems.

From Audience: Dr Grewal shared how campuses are ignoring Islamophobia incidents, what are the causes of that? beyond just being ignorant.
Zareena: I do not think the incidents are getting neglected wholesale but there are many places and times that they are not getting looked at as much as they should. I do not think it is based on just ignorance.

Questions From Audience (Not Answered)
1. What do you believe is the main contributor to the rise in contemporary Islamophobia? As you have said this is obviously this is not a new phenomenon but what drives it today?

2. Can we discuss the implications of Islamophobia and the upcoming election? For the first time we have two Muslim anti-imperialist candidates as VPs for third parties. What does this mean for the future of the Muslim voter and the utility of Islamophobia in garnering votes for democrats and republicans?

3. How can you academically explore the links between increased islamophobia and the financial network of Zionism that impacts many universities funding sources or in the case of Columbia's militarized police force prompted by Zionist CEO's and billionaires, (per the text chain to NY Mayor)?