

Michael Eure Show Transcript

The Rise of Islamophobia

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EURE: Hello this is Michael Eure, and I'd like to invite you to The Michael Eure Show featuring student hosts and very special guests talking about a variety of interesting topics. You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube Channel.

EURE: Good morning and welcome to the final episode of this semester of the Michael Eure Show. Our special guest today is Dr. Amin Asfari. And he's got a really outstanding presentation for you and I want you from the beginning to know this is interactive. Feel free to type your questions or comments and we will reply. So, Dr. Amin Asfari, tell us a little bit about yourself, and what is Islamophobia, and why did you get involved in that?

ASFARI: Sure, so my dissertation, my doctoral dissertation was on Islamophobia. And, I wanted to really understand how prejudice overall manifests itself. And specifically as it relates to the newest form of prejudice that's come on the scene both globally and in the United States. We may have heard of the term but most people don't know where the term or when the term originates. The term Islamophobia suggests it's a hatred or animus towards Muslims in general, but the emphasis seems to be on Arabs. And I'll talk a little bit about that, why and how I tried to reframe that term as a new form of antisemitism.

EURE: Okay.

ASFARI: So Islamophobia comes on the scene in a report in 1997 in the UK, called the Runnymede Trust Report, and the first time the term was coined. And it just had it's 10 year anniversary and there was another publication in 2017. A compilation of papers that talked about what the new state of Islamophobia is in the UK, certainly because this is where the report originates but of course, globally as well. So this is what peaked my interest, right? Being a Muslim, of course, and being related to the murder victim of the Chapel Hill shootings. I'm sure you've heard about that. Deah Barakat was my cousin. He was murdered execution style by his neighbor, so was his wife and her sister in their apartment. So that really was the impetus for my research on this topic. And since then, I've been really just enthralled with the idea of how prejudice manifests itself psychologically, and the literature on this is really fascinating. And when you see and you interact with people, and they know that you are Muslim or composed of some other minority group, you can see the literature come to life sometimes and their behavior and the things that they say, etc, this notion of affective racism. So that's the history behind my interest there.

EURE: Okay, well another interesting fact about you, besides the fact that we worked on Wake Tech Online together, because you teach in the criminal justice department here, as well as some other institutions. What is the current state

discussion about, because you reminded me of profiling, because that's also part of that situation. So as a criminal justice professional, what is the current kind of feel across the system of policing in terms of addressing Islamophobia, racism etc, in profiling?

ASFARI: That's a really interesting question and it needs some nuance before I answer it.

EURE: Okay.

ASFARI: The way that racism, you see, okay, so we say that Islamophobia is a new manifestation of an old racism.

EURE: Okay.

ASFARI: An old prejudice, really, is the more apt term for it. Nobody wants to be called a racist anymore. But clearly, if you look at the current political environment, you recognize that there's a lot of prejudice. Maybe prejudice towards skin color, towards ethnicity, towards gender, towards sexual orientation, and so on and so forth, right? So the way that racism has manifested itself in the United States, or prejudice more aptly, it's gone in cycles. In terms of African Americans and profiling, in terms of law enforcement and profiling, there were structural systems that were developed that allowed if not turn a blind eye to what was going on. There was a very famous theory in criminal justice, called broken windows theory. This theory basically suggests that a neighborhood that's dilapidated, a neighborhood that's run down, is more likely to bring in a certain element. That it's predisposed to having sort of a rundown neighborhood, not cared for, grass is unkempt, the windows of the houses are broken, hence the name. The person that came up with this theory was later chastised by the criminology folks because there was some implicit racism there. He was suggesting, of course, that element that's more attracted to those kind of neighborhoods would be low-income whites, Hispanics, and African Americans. And so based on this theoretical framework, you have the development and deployment of police practices such as stop-and-frisk. Which if you look at the NYPD in a single year, I believe it was 2012, the NYPD stopped roughly 45,000 individuals using the stop-and-frisk practice. Of those 45,000 individuals only 5,000 were they able to substantiate the reason for the stop. That is to say they had some sort of weapon or something. That suggests that 40,000 of those individuals that were stopped, predominantly African Americans and Hispanics and low-income whites, had nothing. Another practice in California, after the Rodney King incident in California, the Federal Government stepped in and said, we want every police officer that stops an individual to write down on a card what was the ethnicity, what was the race, what was the reason for the stop, did you secure permission to search, etc. And what they found, the researchers collected 800,000 of these cards, so that any number that you get from this, any result is a statistically significant finding. What they found that the highest rate of stops was for African Americans, Hispanics, and whites, respectively. Those who gave the permission the most tended to be African

American and Hispanics followed by whites. Consent, that is to be searched. And interestingly, what they found is those, what they called the miss rates, when they search something and they don't find anything, the highest percentage was for African Americans, and then Hispanics, and then Whites. That suggests that you are more likely to find some paraphernalia or drug or something on a white individual than you were African Americans. Now, fast forward to the notion of Islamophobia. Racial profiling has been a problem to some degree at the airports, right? You look at the no fly list, you look at the TSA stops, and so on and so forth. Some of the policies that were developed and later challenged by institutions like CARE, Council for American-Islamic Relations, include, but are not limited to, policies of the TSA that said hey, if you see someone with a beard, or recently shaven, that they're not tanned here where their beard would otherwise be, perhaps you need to stop them. Maybe they shaved their beard so they can get through the security checkpoint and do something dangerous. And, of course, you can see how that might manifest itself and what group might be the subject of more Searches, or inquiry, than others. So that's institutional, and institutional is very difficult to find out about because it requires research.

EURE: Okay.

ASFARI: See there's a difference between individual, racism or prejudice, and institutional. Individual is very easy to spot, you say something racist, you say something, Uncivilized to say the least, and I can know that you're a racist, or you're a prejudiced person, and that's fine. But if it's a structure that's set up, where laws and policies and procedures manifest the results of those laws and policies, are the exclusion of a certain group. That's more difficult, and more nuanced, and requires time to figure out.

EURE: Okay. Now you're making me go into the international [LAUGH] world, because I'm thinking about the Rohingya, and this situation. And it involves the police, and military, and what do you think about that? Is that a cultural thing, or is the cultural and institutional the same thing?

ASFARI: The Rohingya story is really interesting one, and it has a historical context that I'm not a subject matter expert on. What I do know is that these are the most, according to recent reports, the most widely discriminated against group from the Muslim community there. That seems to be more of a cultural problem. One of the things that I've talked about, I gave a presentation here a couple of weeks ago. Is that societies, generally heterogenous societies, like ours in the United States that are multicultural and diverse, you will always find something called inter-group conflict. And there's a whole theoretical framework developed based on this notion, intergroup conflict theories and so on. Where one group, those who wield more power, tend to exclude others, and they do that through multiple ways. One of the ways that they do that is through the use of the criminal justice system, the use of the military apparatus, etc. Before I came here today, I was reading on my news feed

that Justin Trudeau of Canada just offered an apology for what the Canadian government has done to the LGBT community in Canada.

EURE: Okay.

ASFARI: There were policies in place to infiltrate that community, to out members of that community, and to suppress them in such a way as to make them lose their families, break up the homes. So they would approach members within the military, the law enforcement, and so on, get them to essentially admit that they were gay.

EURE: Mm-hm.

ASFARI: Or belong to this group, and they would lose their job, there were consequences, right?

EURE: Mm.

ASFARI: So the Rohingya issue is one that moved from a subtle prejudice and a subtle form of malignment, if you would, they maligned this group, to now an overt, basically, genocide. And I would advise your viewers, if they are interested in this topic, to read the work of Hannah Arendt. Hannah Arendt talks about this notion of the banality of evil. And she also has this wonderful book called, what was it, *The Rise of Totalitarianism*.

EURE: Mm.

ASFARI: Are we seeing the precursors of this in the United States? I suspect no, because the United States, thankfully, is an institution-based country, it's not one that can be run by one individual. But that doesn't mean that we need to be complacent, right, so.

Q&A: We have a question from Floriana Thompson, she wants to know, do you see this moving into housing, and jobs, profiling? Is Islamophobia affecting these aspects of life here in the United States?

ASFARI: Sure there are incidents of that. Now the interesting thing about the United States is, of course, Muslims compose less than 1% of the Muslim population. Whereas of course in the U.K., and in general, and in Europe, there's a geographical tie between the Muslim world and the Christian world. That makes it more likely to manifest itself through policies of exclusion, in terms of housing or the lack thereof, of and so on. One very interesting correlation that I can draw here, between what your viewer's suggesting in terms of policies and discrimination against housing and employment, and so on, and that of African Americans. I'm not sure if she's read another book that I'd highly recommend by Michelle Alexander, it's called *The New Jim Crow*. And what she's arguing there, and this can be very easily applied to Islamophobia and other minority groups, is essentially this. That Jim Crow ended,

some folks in the US weren't very happy about that, how can we control this group, African Americans? Well we can do it in a legal way, you see in Jim Crow we say, we can legally discriminate against you in housing and employment, you can't sit in on jury, you can't vote, etc. What we call civil death in the criminal justice system. Well if we take and we punish the possession, the sale, or the consumption of crack cocaine. Which is pharmacologically no different in its effect on the body than powdered cocaine, that of the white middle class, then we can start this war on drugs. And of course these communities, African Americans, Hispanics, and low-income whites, we can kill them off civilly. Once you have that felony, we can say that, guess what? I'm sorry, it's not because you're African American, Hispanic, or low income, or whatever. We can say that we can discriminate against you in housing and employment, you can't sit in on a jury, etc., because you have a felony. It's essentially the same thing that happened to the Catholics during the time of the prohibition, and another book of interest is Gusfield's *The Symbolic Crusade*. Where he said that, we were told in public schools the prohibition was a bunch of women that got together and got really upset their husbands coming home, and beating the mess out of them. Well of course, women didn't have the right to vote so they couldn't formulate national policy, let alone an amendment to the constitution. What he argues is this was a Protestant led movement against this new group that was coming over. What is it that you can criminalize about this group? Well guess what, if you were Catholic, the underlying thing that you did was you drank. And if you criminalize that, then you criminalize the group.

EURE: Well what about the Irish and other groups of immigrants? Because they've all been discriminated against. But of course, now they have assimilated as white.

ASFARI: Right.

EURE: Was that all part of the same type of process?

ASFARI: It was in fact the same type of process. The problem with assimilation, if you're African-American is, you're identified by the color of your skin.

EURE: Yes.

ASFARI: So it becomes more difficult to assimilate or to integrate, and those two terms need not be conflated. There's a distinction to be made between assimilation and integration. What you see with the Muslim community, it's really interesting. That you see, with an African American, you're prejudiced towards them because of the color of their skin. With an Irish person, they were Irish, generally they're of European descent. So even if you were prejudiced towards Catholics, they were generally of European descent. With Muslims however, there's an Islamic center here not too far in Raley, it boasts about 70 different nationalities. So now how does the prejudice now manifest itself? Towards these people. Because there are blonde haired, blue-eyed folks that are born and bred from the time of Columbus that are Muslims. Islam is a faith that boasts what, nearly 2 billion people? So you have the

Chinese Muslim, the Muslim from Zimbabwe, the Muslim from North America, from Canada, etc. Is the focus of the prejudice now the religion or the nationality? And you see the Jews, in order to justify what Hitler did, what had to happen, the 19th century intellectuals of the time had to take Judaism from a religion and turn it into a race. You see, if you were Jewish and that was your religion, you could convert to Christianity and be one of us, a European Christian. We couldn't do anything. But if we reconceptualize the identity, you can never escape your Jewishness. That's a race now. So I say you're from Zimbabwe, I'm from Syria, and he's Jewish, you understand? It's been turned into a race such that now you can never escape it, and Hitler can do what he did.

Q&A: We have one more question from Jaquana Watkins. And she wants to know does being a Muslim make it more difficult for let's say children in the school system? Is it difficult in public schools with being a Muslim and exhibiting your faith and avoiding being prejudiced? How early does this start do you think?

ASFARI: Yes, to some degree we're seeing some of this now. There are incidents around the country where little Muslim girls, who tend to be more identifiable, if they choose to wear their headscarves, than their male counterparts. Where teachers are taking off their headscarves and so on. So we've seen some incidents of this here in the US, and elsewhere in the UK, and so on. So that presents a challenge. But what that does it also presents a challenge internally to that Muslim community because the Muslim community now has to come out its shell. And that process of integration must begin, and that's something that Muslims have had a difficult time with. Let me elaborate. Muslims are not new to the United States. Muslims have by all accounts, one-third of the slaves that were brought here from Africa were Muslims. There's evidence of Arabic being spoken. Spain was Muslim for 800 years, so some of the people that came on with Columbus, although they had Spanish names, were actually Muslims. So there's evidence of this. And the work of one Harvard professor whose name escapes me now, demonstrates that Muslims have been here for a long time. But barring that, the latest influx of Muslims comes in the 1960s. And Americans are first, Islam is brought to the attention of Americans visa vis Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam and so on and so forth. Naturally, of course, they're gonna associate it with these black people, a group that's already been marginalized and maligned. Well, fast forward, and then you have the influx of these immigrant groups coming in. What these people failed to recognize and do is they never integrated well. So what they would do is they would open up their Islamic centers or their mosques, if you would, right? And those mosques would house their schools and so on. And they would never really come out of these places to integrate and to begin the process of integration. That process of integration says I have rights in this country, but I also have responsibilities. And those correlating responsibilities are to work for social justice with other groups, to work with allies, and so on and so forth, yes?

EURE: Compare that with the Jewish population because somewhat they didn't isolate. But they built their own communities and there is power in that, right?

ASFARI: Right.

EURE: So I'm thinking that the Jewish people, I'm talking about the Middle East people, they're cousins to me. They look alike, they just have a different religion. Is that the nature of that conflict?

ASFARI: I'm not sure I understand.

EURE: Are the people in Israel and the people in the other Middle Eastern countries aren't they similar, of the same ethnicity?

ASFARI: They're actually genetically similar even.

EURE: Okay, right, that's what I'm asking. It's like cousins are fighting.

ASFARI: [LAUGH] That's right.

EURE: And it's religion that's driving it.

ASFARI: There's the Haaretz paper in Jerusalem that published, they called them blood brothers. I mean, the Israelis were really dumbfounded to find out, my god these Palestinians are actually genetically similar to us.

EURE: [LAUGH] Right.

ASFARI: So that's another can of worms that's both, that has temporal considerations, time. Yeah and certainly geopolitics is at play. So what's happening now in the Middle East, not to digress too much, is really a lot of politics masquerading as religion. These groups, ISIS and others, are being funded by nations around the world for particular interests. There's a proxy war going on. The Middle East has a resource you may have heard of called oil. And there are two competing interests generally. You have China and Russia on one side, United States on the other. And they're funneling money into that place and arming different groups and so on. But of course, to the outsider it's religion. But really what it is is a lot of politics and geopolitics.

EURE: Right and I don't wanna mess up these. I was just listening to a show and I think it's Iran. Is it Iran and Syria or Iran and Saudi Arabia that are-

ASFARI: Competing interests?

EURE: Yeah, okay, all right.

ASFARI: Yes, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

EURE: Okay, all right, so now we're gonna talk about extremism because a lot of people mix up Islamic folks with ISIS, which is just a extreme, I think, version. And I think of them in the same way I think of the Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan who started off as Christian masquerading. They were masquerading as Christians, [LAUGH] but they were terrorists.

ASFARI: True.

EURE: And I feel like that might be the same with ISIS.

ASFARI: Sure.

EURE: What do you think about that?

ASFARI: That's a very good question. ISIS is to Islam as the KKK is to Christianity.

EURE: Okay, then that's good to know, right?

ASFARI: Right.

EURE: So that we don't need to think of all Islamic people that way, but I know a lot of people do.

ASFARI: Indeed.

EURE: And that's where the Islamophobia might be-

ASFARI: Manifesting itself.

EURE: Yes.

ASFARI: Indeed, now you've gotten into another topic, terrorism studies. My dissertation was written under the tutelage of a guy who was a professor in California and who's written five books thus far. His latest one is called *The United States and Terrorism, An Ironic Perspective*. His name is Ron Hirschbein. And [COUGH] what he argues in that book is first of all whenever you talk about this notion of terrorism, you have to have some nuance. You have to define the term. Is terrorism to kill a lot of innocent people? If that's the definition that we go by, then you have Hiroshima and Nagasaki, right? Do we talk about state terrorism? Do we talk about individual terrorism? Do we talk about non-state actors or do we talk about state actors? In the context of ISIS and so on, you have to understand that the reason that these people join these groups is the same reason largely that you have people that join gangs. When you ask yourself, why does someone become a gang member? They want a family, right? They want a sense of family. They typically marginalize groups, right? Kids, youth that have no fathers, no mothers, whatever the case may be. They're low socioeconomic, low education. And someone picks

them up and gives them something to believe in. This is the main cause, the underlying cause, beyond the theological problems and the philosophical, and in fact the political problems that manifest themselves. Why would a sane, rational individual join a group like this? Whether it's the KKK or others. You see that they have the same common denominator. Both ISIS and white supremacists are both regressive. Remember that the guy that took over the land was in Oregon recently, Ted something or other. Exactly, those folks and ISIS share a lot of similarities. They're both very regressive, they all look back, they harken back to a time when our founding fathers were this and it was this utopian era. Conversely, you have the progressive movement in the United States which looks forward to a time when we have no prejudice when everybody is treated equally, etc. So how does terrorism and extremism manifest itself? Largely by utilizing and preying upon individuals who are marginalized and maligned within their societies. And of course, it preys upon the social factors that are going on and the political factors and influences.

EURE: I think, Doctor Roddenberry, is there another question? It seemed a little confusing to me. But you can state it properly.

Q&A: There is, there's actually a question from Lefleuer Alec, who wants to know about the, how do these different cultures live so close and side by side? How do you differentiate yourself when I'm a person walking through downtown Jerusalem, or wherever I go? Are there ways in which these groups break themselves that are cousins, step brothers?

ASFARI: Right, thank you for that question. Actually, a testament to the, when people think of the Middle East, they think of people that are very divisive. The Christians and the Muslims don't like each other and the Jews and so on and so forth. One anecdotal piece of evidence to suggest that that's all political and news media nonsense is to look at some of the oldest Christian communities in that region. I had a military guy that I was speaking to. He said, I went to Baghdad, and I was stunned. When a church was blown up, all these Muslims came and had a vigil for them and helped to rebuild it. I said, the fact that you were stunned suggests that you've bought into this narrative that these people are, they can't play nice, but the fact that a church is there 1400 years after the sort of the impetus of this religion should tell you something. If indeed they were all monsters and didn't like each other and couldn't get along, they wouldn't exist. Some of the old Christian and Jewish communities work and live side by side for a long time.

EURE: All right, and we know that a lot of the holy sites are right there together and so all of those people have to get along. Really quickly, because I think we're running out, we've got about a minute and a half, can you tell us some organizations or ways that people wanna get involved with maybe bridging these gaps? In this local region.

ASFARI: Absolutely, I'm-

EURE: Or online. Go ahead.

ASFARI: Absolutely. So the biggest organization, sort of our NAACP if you would, would be the CAIR, Council for American Islamic Relations. Locally there's many different groups. There's something called the Lighthouse in downtown Raleigh, that was opened after the shooting death of Deah Barakat. And it basically is like a community house for everybody to do social justice activities or whatever, feed the homeless and so on together, collectively. And then, let me give a pitch here to my own organization that I helped to start called Communities at Peace, Uniting Through Service which I started with a lady, Katie Miller, who is from the Episcopalian Church in downtown Raleigh. And the idea is to help other existing nonprofits, no matter the cause, if it's a social justice cause, we do it together, or with Christians, Jews, Atheists, whoever.

EURE: And I know we briefly talked about that and I look forwards to working with you and meeting her and maybe having her come and be on the show.

ASFARI: Absolutely.

EURE: So thank you for the audience, and we'll look for you next year.

ASFARI: Thank you so much.

EURE: Another question?

Q&A: Wants to ask you a question, her child asked me, what is jihad in the Muslim religion?

ASFARI That's a very interesting question. That's one that was coopted by the right, that term. Jihad literally means, and this is through a consensus of scholarship for that it is an internal struggle. That the greatest form of jihad is the idea that I had a jihad with myself this morning waking up and getting here on time and so on and so forth. That's really what it means and the prophet himself reiterated this on many occasions. Of course this was coopted by these extremists to mean a physical war of aggression. Thus there is some connotation that a jihad is also to be understood as a war of defense, but not a war as these people are suggesting. These people have coopted it, the right wing has coopted it and used that term to malign Muslims as well.

EURE: Well, we had an extended program that was worthwhile that also reminds me the success coaches are having our final end of the semester celebration at the Northern Wake campus building E, room 414 from 11 until 2 today, so if you're an online student with a success coach, please come by. Thank you. And thank you so much.

ASFARI: Thank you very much. My pleasure.