

- Arjun: [00:14](#) Welcome to the second episode of Anthropological Airwaves. My name is Arjun Shankar, postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, and I am incredibly excited to introduce this episode which is on the one hand about Islamophobia in the post-Trump moment in the United States, but which is at the same time about its historical antecedents in anti-black racism, native genocide and racialization of various immigrant communities including Latin American communities, Asian communities, and now culminating in the racialization of Muslim communities in the United States.
- Arjun: [00:52](#) You're going to hear from two scholars, Nazia Kazi of Stockton University and Mariam Durrani, soon to be assistant professor at Hamilton College, both of whom take seriously the relationship between Islamophobia and its historical antecedents in order to engage in really unique public dialogues. And I think for us in this podcast the last point is really the most important. How do we as anthropologists use our uniquely anthropological tools in order to engage with a broader public. The episode was produced by Nooshin Samimi of the University of Pennsylvania, and I look forward to hearing all of your feedback as we move forward and continue to improve.
- Fatima: [01:49](#) My name is Fatima Tassadiq. I'm a third year anthropology student at the University of Pennsylvania. I work on the politics of infrastructure in Pakistan and how they inform conceptions of democracy, citizenship, and political subjectivities. We are in conversation with Dr. Nazia Kazi, who is an anthropologist working on issues of race and difference in the United States. Dr Kazi has conducted ethnographic research and Muslim American advocacy groups and she examines what it means for instance to ask for legitimacy or the right to belong in the heart of empire. Thank you so much for coming over.
- Nazia: [02:26](#) Hi Fatima, great to be here.
- Fatima: [02:27](#) Um, to start off, could you tell us a little bit more about your research and the projects that you have worked on and are currently engaging with?
- Nazia: [02:35](#) I'm really focused on is the act of representation itself. And I find in my work that it's somewhat fraught for Muslim Americans post-9/11 especially. And it seems increasingly post-Trump to be attempting to represent themselves as Muslim Americans. And I think, you know, one of the things I really come up against in work is this category of Muslim American itself and what it signifies and then what it shrouds and I think

when we kind of fall back on this category of Muslim American, we really risk overlooking some of these really critical differences.

- Fatima: [03:15](#) So can you talk a little bit more about how you see these issues changing?
- Nazia: [03:18](#) It's both a sense of urgency and also a sense of crisis. Because I think for many of us who work on race in the US for the longest time we were thinking about critiques of Liberal Forms of racism, you know, focusing on, you know, colorblindness and post racialism now it's like, well the klan is back, you know, and we have a whole other fish to fry really. And I think that a lot of us are sort of struggling to find our footing in this moment. That has really been shocking because of the types of critique, a dialogue we've been making around race for over a decade now.
- Fatima: [03:50](#) There is a certain kind of immediately right, right. The tendency to restrict what is happening, reduce what is happening to the figure of Donald Trump, or these recent events and it's dangerous in the sense because it raises all these histories of racism and different types of discrimination, which sort of congeals in this figure, the conversation keeps going back to the person, rather than looking at these histories.
- Nazia: [04:15](#) I think that it's real. What you're saying is really critical is that we need to understand Donald Trump, not as a break from some type of racial past in America, but the culmination of it, um, and even the way people are talking about the seven countries in the travel ban, as somehow about Donald Trump, somehow about his investment portfolio. When really, you know, these were, this was a list that preexisted his administration.
- Fatima: [04:40](#) To go back to what you said a little earlier about how we have been focused so much on neoliberal forms of anti-racism and the issues that that springs up and, but you also see some of that and the advocacy work right now, some of the mainstream rhetoric, which people have talked about how that is very problematic. For instance, I personally have a lot of problem with the idea that we're a nation of immigrants. It erases the histories of genocide and slavery... so can you talk a little bit more about the problems that you see with this kind of rhetoric now?
- Nazia: [05:12](#) We've seen this intensified protest culture since the inauguration, and I actually went to the inauguration. I was part

of an anti-war pro-Palestine protests. We called it a disruption that happened during the inauguration. I chose not to go to the Women's March the day after for precisely, I think the reasons that you are suggesting, which is in this moment when we're faced with the figure of Trump who, as I said, is sort of a culmination of America. You know, if we're going to issue a serious challenge to this, we have to be very clear about what it is we want to see instead. And, for me, that is not anything that's aligned with the Clinton campaign or a type of, you know, imperialist that is all too often ever present at a lot of these protest movements. So on January 29th, here in Philly, a lot of us were at the airport for the travel ban protest.

Nazia: [06:08](#) I mean, there were thousands of, I think it was probably about 5,000 people there. And what a lot of folks don't know is that there were two separate protests that took place. There was the one that happened primarily outside the airport, behind the police barricades, and it seemed to be very collegial with law enforcement. And then there was a black and brown sit-in that happened inside the terminal. And this was an event where the microphone was really only given to black and brown people to share their experiences of institutional and systemic racism, their own refugee or migration stories. And white attendees were invited to sit in, in solidarity with us and this was a sit-in that had just a remarkably different tone than what was happening outside, where people were thanking the police for being there and cooperating with them.

Nazia: [07:05](#) And inside we were very clear about the fact that the Fraternal Order of Police endorsed Donald Trump. I think the Customs and Border Patrol Union was the first union to endorse Donald Trump. So we have to be very clear about how we relate to these authoritative sort of structures in this moment. Or else we kind of risk falling back on a very liberal type of engagement, which is I think what got us into this mess to begin with.

Fatima: [07:32](#) A hashtag that went viral and is still being pushed around is the "no ban, no wall" or "no wall, no ban"

Nazia: [07:42](#) Yeah. I think they're using both.

Fatima: [07:44](#) Yeah it's a little confusing, that sounds right. Would you talk a little bit more about how that hashtag brings together different but overlapping histories of racism and bigotry against these two social groups, of Mexicans and Muslims, and how there are significant continuing these kind of xenophobia that both of these social groups have to face?

- Nazia: [08:03](#) Absolutely, and I kind of feel that there's what I call like an economy of scale of US racism and we see this very clearly, post 9/11, is the sort of convergence of anti-Mexican and anti-Muslim sentiment. The very concept of homeland security is itself anti-Muslim and Anti-Mexican and so you know, in 2010 in Arizona we saw one of the most draconian, I mean up until now, anti immigrant measures the SB 1070 law which basically legalized now racial profiling by local law enforcement. I don't know, the SB 1070 could have been passed without the presence of Islamophobia. You had to have people on a mass scale sort of invested in the idea of a homeland that needs to be secured to begin with. And I think of course the post nine slash 11 moment allowed for the introduction of that type of thought into the American public consciousness and that then gave license to so much anti-Mexican, Anti-Latino racism in the US.
- Fatima: [09:02](#) So can you talk a little bit more about your public engagement project, in making your work accessible to a broader audience?
- Nazia: [09:08](#) I think this is what all of us have to be thinking about right now. I once taught an Undergrad intro to anthropology class where I was teaching "In Search of Respect." One of the chapters in that book is called violating Apartheid. And I asked my students, "Why do you think he chose to call this chapter violating apartheid? What's apartheid?" And I got blank stares and I was like, well, do people know who Nelson Mandela is? A room full of thirty-five, 19 and 20 year olds? Not one of them knew. I mean, I teach in New Jersey at Stockton University. Not far at all from Philadelphia here and none of my students have ever heard of the MOVE bombing and I think actually many Philadelphians have never heard of the MOVE bombing now that historically should have made the history books, because think about local law enforcement dropping bombs on a residential neighborhood and the police commissioner saying let it burn, and people losing their lives. And that to me, I mean just the fact that that is omitted from the history books is not just a telling. I think it's actually a teachable moment and I think one of the things we can do as educators is kind of surprise people with these, um, you know, blind spots in our, in their political education and use that as the starting point to sort of start to think about race, about empire, about critical multiculturalism.
- Fatima: [10:29](#) Thank you so much, Nazia, this has been lovely.
- Nazia: [10:31](#) Yeah!

- Michelle: [10:56](#) My name is Michelle Munyikwa and my work is about refugee resettlement and asylum advocacy and the institutions that do it in Philadelphia. And I'm here with Dr. Mariam Durrani, who is an anthropologist, a teacher, a writer, a media maker, and a committed activist for social justice, her research bridges the anthropology of Muslim youth, feminist approaches to transnationalism and migration studies, studies of gender and critical visibility in classrooms and in the media. So thank you so much for joining me, Mariam.
- Mariam: [11:28](#) Thanks for having me.
- Michelle: [11:29](#) Can you just tell me a little bit more about your ethnographic research among Pakistani-origin Muslim college students?
- Mariam: [11:35](#) So I did a transnational ethnography both in Lahore and New York City, and I was interested in students who migrated for higher education.
- Michelle: [11:45](#) One of the things that's come up a lot is dissecting this category of Muslim right? Complicating it. Not to suggest that it's not important to make clear that there are a lot of things that go into being and enacting one's Muslim identity, practicing Islam. And of course given the current political climate, right, there's this idea that like being Muslim means something in particular. I'm curious about what your thoughts are on the way that the category of Muslim has been mobilized in this political climate.
- Mariam: [12:17](#) There's a couple of different ways I think people have talked about it, which I find useful. Anne Norton who's a political scientist here at Penn has written a book called "On the Muslim Question" and in this book she basically does this work of thinking about how the Muslim figure is seen as somewhat analogously to the way the Jewish figure was positioned within like Enlightenment discourses. How do we create a more liberal democracy in taking into account this minority population. But the problem with that is, that it really doesn't take into account and give a full understanding of the Muslim in the US, right? Because the first Muslims that came to the US were not immigrants, but actually slaves. And so the story of the African American Muslim is completely left out when this particular question around like the Muslim immigrant, and what do you do with the Muslim immigrant, and how are they assimilated into this western liberal democracy or whatever.
- Mariam: [13:24](#) So that's another part of it I think that people are writing about and talking about which is what's happening within the Muslim community with regards to, you know, the Arab immigrants, the

South Asian immigrant, and then the African American Muslim, right. And I think the way that this category is gendered is also a really important component of this, where, you know, the Muslim woman for example, has been presented oftentimes as someone who needs to be saved, it needs to be rescued. And Abu Lughod's awesome essay about "Do Muslim women really need saving," you know, does a lot of the work on, I think unpacking that gendered aspect to the category. But there's a lot of people who are also writing about masculinity, like Muslim masculinities, and how the masculinized Muslim subject is seen as a terrorist and, and as dangerous and threatening. And so there's a lot of really important overlaps with how that gendered figure is actually drawing from a much.

Mariam: [14:28](#)

And the racism around that is drawing from a much longer history of like anti black racism in the United States. Right? And seeing like the racialized figure of black men and black women in relationship to this Muslim man, who is threatening, scary, wants to, you know, and all of us or what have you type of thing. So, I think really important to think about all these different ways that even the critique of the category are emerging in relationship to each other, because that allows us to see just what kind of damage first of all this language has done already and then we can go about, you know, critiquing that and kind of offering up other ways of producing that discourse and what have you. And so the last thing I'll say is that most recently there's been a little bit of um, there's been a little bit of language around the idea of Muslims as like the new model. American citizen, you know, Van Jones went on CNN, I think...

Van Jones: [15:31](#)

Honestly, if a Muslim family moved next door to you, you will be the happiest person in the world. First of all, the chances of your kids getting in trouble just went way down, way down. Because the Muslim community has the lowest crime rate, the highest entrepreneurship, the highest educational attainment for women in the country. They are the model American community.

Mariam: [15:51](#)

The way that that, now the Muslim as like the model American, or model minority or whatever, is being taken up, is doing a similar kind of violence against other, you know, racial minorities and is reproducing that, even if it's in some sense I think trying to reduce the kind of violence and hatred that's directed right now towards Muslims. It might deflect that. But it's, you know, obviously focusing on another group of people.

- Michelle: [16:20](#) Can you speak to me a little bit more about sort of public outreach, sort of the role that various forms of media and multimodality play in how you conceptualize your role as a public scholar.
- Mariam: [16:30](#) Absolutely. I think when you were working with populations that are experiencing marginalization, discrimination and have such real consequences in people's lives and in the lives of participants, but also more generally in the lives of people that you know, it's really important to figure out how to do that and how to do that well, but I think that's the challenge is like how to actually engage in public scholarship such that you feel that the time that you spend on it is meaningful and has some kind of value.
- Mariam: [17:02](#) One of the things that I first started to do two years ago is writing for this news web magazine called religion dispatches and writing short editorial pieces for them in response to particular news that was going on at that time, news events of that in that moment. And so I think that's interesting. That's interesting place to engage in public scholarship because it has. It's very timely. It's very time sensitive. So if you are, you know, if something happens and you don't write about it within a week, it's basically over, which is the total opposite of how we as anthropologists go about speaking on an issue... and having thought about it for many years before you actually feel like you can really, you know, definitively say something about it. However, I think there's ways of using our analytics that are still useful in the moment when even it is a time sensitive piece.
- Mariam: [17:56](#) So for example, I wrote something around when the San Bernardino shooting happened, the New York Times had a front page that had an image of the home of the shooters and it was a really nondescript image because there was, I think there was a table with, you know, table cloth and some things on the table. And there was a hanging that had the 99 names of Allah, which is something you'll find in a lot of Muslim homes. And that this is kind of all colluding together to give an image of violence and association with Islam. And that there's something clearly problematic about that because that living room, I've been in rooms that look exactly like that my entire life and I don't know anybody who's a shooter or you know, so what is this doing? What is this doing, first of all, for young people who see this and see that their homes are being presented in some way of like, you know, the home base for some kind of criminal and also for people who necessarily who don't have any familiarity with those.

Mariam:

[19:14](#)

And yet now associate, you know, every time they see Arabic script they immediately think that it has something to do with terrorism. And this kind of one-to-one understanding is perpetuated through this kind of discourse, through this kind of visual discourse. But it's not that easy to spend that much time writing, you know, 800 or 1200 words op-eds when you have to teach and you have to write your own articles and you have a life obviously. So, but it's really important I think because there's certainly just a dearth in terms of I think people having sensitivity around some of these issues and for those of us who specifically work on race or gender or other ways that populations are organized and thus marginalized and oppressed, it's incumbent upon us to say more.

Arjun:

[20:33](#)

Thank you again for listening to the second episode of Anthropological Airwaves. I really hope you join us for the third episode, which is ostensibly about social imaginaries, but really so much more. Our producer of that episode, Diego Arispe-Bazan will be interviewing Damien Stankiewicz, of Temple University to think through how a critique of the social imaginary might open up space for a different kind of public engagement. Should be a really interesting discussion and I hope you join us.