

ALI 518: Countering Islamophobia

Shaykh Azhar Nasser

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Countering Islamophobia

- Though the word “Islamophobia” only entered public lexicon in recent years, its origins date back to the turn of the 20th century, where it was understood as a form of prejudice.
- Prejudice towards and discrimination against Muslims is a persistent problem that often goes unnoticed and unchallenged in Western societies. That’s why a term to describe it was needed.

Countering Islamophobia

- The stigmatization of, for example, Jews and African-Americans existed long before we had words to describe it, but the formulation of these words (anti-Semitism and racism) and their usage by prominent figures, was a critical step in communicating to the public the serious prejudice and discrimination these groups faced.

Countering Islamophobia

- Islamophobia is a type of bigotry and is actually a threat to all Americans, Canadians, Europeans etc.
- It is a threat towards anyone who is passionate about social justice

Countering Islamophobia

- How is Islamophobia a threat to every citizen ?
- Islamophobia opens the door to other forms of bigotry
- This is not a just theory but rather an empirical fact supported by overwhelming evidence

Countering Islamophobia

- Example: Anti-Sharia legislation
- The same lawmakers who propose anti-Sharia legislation are 80 percent more likely to go after the voting rights of African Americans and Latinos. They go after labor rights, women's rights, immigrant rights etc
- Islamophobia opens the doors, emboldens and empowers the bigotry against other groups

Countering Islamophobia

- Islamophobia is not an isolated phenomenon
- It is a threat to people of color, women and other historically marginalized communities.
- Islamophobia is empirically linked to anti-Semitism
- An increase in Islamophobia is linked to an increase in anti-Semitism

Countering Islamophobia

- What if you're not a person of color, a woman, a Jew, or an immigrant. Does this mean that Islamophobia is not a concern to you?
- Islamophobia makes everyone less safe.
- How?

Countering Islamophobia

- **1. It strengthens terrorist rhetoric.**
- If you examine the narrative of terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, you will find that it sees the West as being inherently hostile towards Islam and Muslims
- They create this narrative to rally people to their cause
- Islamophobia plays right into their hands

Countering Islamophobia

- **2. Islamophobia makes all citizens less safe because it alienates people from their own country**
- Increased alienation is the single strongest factor in the process of radicalization, not religiosity
- So Islamophobia strengthens terrorist rhetoric and also works on their audience increasing alienation

Countering Islamophobia

- **3. Islamophobia makes us all less safe because it distracts us from bigger threats**
- The vast majority of terrorist acts carried out in the United States are carried out by white supremacists or anti-government separatists
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Countering Islamophobia

- **4. Islamophobia radicalizes white supremacists against Muslims**
- It incites violence against Muslims or anyone who “looks” Muslim
- It gives people permission to act on their hatred

Countering Islamophobia

- Islamophobia also makes us less free
- Thomas Jefferson famously said: “The foundation of democracy is a well-informed citizenry.”
- If people are not well-informed citizens capable of critical thinking, they will be swayed by whoever can buy the most campaign ads.

Countering Islamophobia

- 80 percent of media coverage of Islam and Muslims is negative
- Other faiths are portrayed mostly in a neutral manner
- Other faiths are portrayed through their religious leaders
- Islam is mostly portrayed by armed militants

Countering Islamophobia

- North Korea is designated as a terrorist state. They have actually made threats against the United States
- 72 percent of the time, media portrays North Korea negatively

Countering Islamophobia

- How the New York Times portrays Islam and Muslims
- Islam is more negatively portrayed by the New York Times than was cancer and cocaine
- Think about the impact of this negative media
- It instills fear in people

Countering Islamophobia

- How does fear impact human beings?
- From a neurological perspective, fear does three things to us
 1. Makes us more accepting of authoritarianism
 2. Conformity
 3. Prejudice

Countering Islamophobia

- These are the most corrosive elements to a free society
- Anti-Muslim sentiments actually do not spike after terrorist attacks.
- Anti-Muslim sentiment did not increase after 9/11 nor did it spike after the Boston bombing
- It spiked in the run up towards the Iraq war and in the 2008 and 2012 election cycle

Countering Islamophobia

- Anti-Muslim sentiment is not an organic natural phenomenon, its manufactured
- It is a tool of political manipulation
- If Islamophobia is a threat to our safety and freedom, what should we do?

Countering Islamophobia

- 1. Recognize bigotry and call it out in media and in politics
- Sometimes Islamophobia is blatant but often times its subtle
- Collective guilt is a form of bigotry that all minority groups face. When a member of their group does something bad, the entire group is held accountable

Countering Islamophobia

- When a member of the majority does something bad, that person is considered a lone wolf and no one is required to respond
- We need to start calling out this double standard

Countering Islamophobia

- Another form of subtle Islamophobia is fundamental attribution error
- Fundamental Attribution Error- attributing evil acts to a person's inherent character and in the case of Muslims to a person's faith
- When a Muslim commits an act of violence, it is automatically assumed that his faith was the motivation.
- This double standard has to be called out

Countering Islamophobia

- Inconsistent definitions of terrorism
- Actual headline from the Washington Times
- **“Majority of Failed Attacks on U.S Soil Carried Out by White Supremacists, Not Terrorists”**

Countering Islamophobia

- Inconsistent level of coverage on terrorism
- Have you heard of Glendon Scott Crawford?

Countering Islamophobia

- a Navy veteran and a member of the Ku Klux Klan, was found guilty in August 2015 and sentenced to 99 years in federal prison for conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction and kill Muslims and President Obama.
- If he was a Muslim, you would have heard about it. Call out the double standard

Countering Islamophobia

- 2. Build meaningful coalitions
- The Holy Prophet did this with the Christian King of Abyssinia
- One of the aims of bigotry is to isolate you and make you feel small.
- Fight this by asserting your strength through the formation of alliances

Countering Islamophobia

- Build coalitions around common goals and shared problems
- Racism, xenophobia, sexism and Islamophobia are just different sides of the same coin

Countering Islamophobia

- 3. Gain inspiration from success stories
- The Coalition for Humanity- an organization that planned to hold protests at local mosques across 20 different cities
- This protest never happened because there was a massive mobilization of interfaith allies who stood in solidarity with the Muslim community

Countering Islamophobia

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ

“Say: "O People of the Book! come to a common word between us and you..." Quran 3:64

Countering Islamophobia

وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَّوَدَّةَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ
مِنْهُمْ قَسِيصِينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

“and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.” Quran 5:82

Countering Islamophobia

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُن مِّنَ
السَّاجِدِينَ وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

“We do indeed know how your heart is distressed at what they say. So exalt [God] with praise of your Lord and be of those who prostrate [to Him]. And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty (death).”

Quran 15:97-99

Countering Islamophobia

- One of the ways to alleviate the emotional and psychological distress brought about by Islamophobia is to open a channel of communication with God
- When the world seems to hate you, remember that God loves you.
- When the world has cut its ties with you, know that God will never abandon you

Countering Islamophobia

- As the animosity you face increases, you must deepen your relationship with God
- It will bring peace to your heart and the courage to remain steadfast
- Worship until death. If you don't witness victory in this life, at death you will discover that you were indeed triumphant