TRANSCRIPT

"BOOK LAUNCH—AMERICAN ISLAMOPHOBIA: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS AND RISE OF FEAR"

A conversation with Khaled A. Beydoun

Interviewer: Alvin Starks

Recorded Oct. 24, 2018

ALVIN STARKS:

Good evening, everyone.
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

ALVIN STARKS:

Good evening, everyone. All right, (LAUGH) there you are. So-- I must admit I'm extremely excited-- to be in conversation with Khaled-- Beydoun, who's someone I've actually known for several years. And-- before we started this conversation-- I promised him that this would be the most engaging and enlightening conversation he's had thus far on this very prolific book-- I think. I met Khaled, I wanna say, maybe a decade or so ago when you were an emerging scholar at UCLA Law School-- I think a scholar in residence-- as part of the critical race theory program. And so it's been interesting to sort of watch-- the growth of his work, and to kind of see the DNA emerge.

And it's very apparent in this book-- that I'm dying to talk to you about. What's also very interesting about-- the career that you're holding at this moment is, as Tom mentioned, it's both-- being a public intellectual and a thought leader, but you also have a very vibrant social media presence, which oftentimes isn't something one sees-- with distinguished writers, and the ability for the audience and the community to-- to engage.

This conversation probably couldn't be more timely than ever before. And so I wanna sorta just jump right in. Because-- as we think about, you know, both this book and its content, it lives in a space both of-- where race, Muslim identity, democracy, and current affairs sorta merge. And so my first question's a very simple one and a very basic one. Where do we find this book? Where is it listed in the bookstore, under what section? Because the-- the breadth of it is so, dare I say, intersectional-- on purpose, and so it's hard to kind of say it is that book or this book. So I wanna start there. What-- what are you trying to do with *American Islamophobia*?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

So first of all, thank you so much to Open Society Foundation for hosting and giving me an opportunity to speak to you about-- this book, and salaam alaikum. Hope you guys are all doin'-- well this evening. So-- where can you find this book? I think that really is-- hinges on which bookstore you walk into.

The fact that you find it in different places in different bookstores I think is a testament to-- the-- the intersectional work, the kind of broad-based work I seek to do with this book. In some bookstores it's in the-- the American history section, and a heavy component of the book examines American-- legal-- racial and immigration history.

Some books have it in the-- race and ethnicity section, because as a critical race theorist-- the importance of race and racism to my analysis-- of Islamophobia is extremely important and salient. Some people have it in, ironically enough (and this is problematic) in the Islamic studies or the religion section, because there's a routine sort of-- dare I say, orientalist conflation of anything dealing with Muslim identity as being religious-- and specifically Islamic.

So it's probably harder to find in that section. I-- I-- I l-- if I can segue a bit, last night I did a talk at 92 and Y, and the vast majority of the questions I was getting were-- were addressing-- Islamic law. So having me kind of probe sharia law questions, which again, you know, go to the idea that-- just because you're addressing Muslim identity or Islam does not mean you're concerned (NOISE) with examining-- theological questions. But you can find it in a range of places-- which I think can be good, but citing the latter example, can be a bad thing as well.

ALVIN STARKS:

But-- Khaled, in all honesty, I'm-- I wanna go-- to another direction. I'm curious to know why this book, right? Like-- the-- the question of Islamophobia-- as you brilliantly illustrate, has actually been with us-- for, dare I say, centuries. But it's actually now moved to a new terrain, right? The kind of watching it be politicized and publicized-- in a way that we probably haven't seen in at least the last 30 or 40 years. So why produce something that already exist, but it felt like you were tryin' to do a bit of a refresh?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah. So two reasons. I think there was-- there was an immediate kind of political-- concern to write this book at this time because of the-- the uptick, the intensification of Islamophobia that was ushered in by-- by-- by Trump, now President Trump, when he was a candidate vying for the Republican nomination. It was obviously a very pressing issue that-- you know, media pundits, scholars, activists, advocates were all rushing toward-- in-- in-- in-- in a very urgent fashion.

So that political obj-- you know, aspiration to kind of, you know-- address what was happening in real-time in the country-- in a very trenchant way wa-- was of critical concern to me. The second-- objective, which-- I think was more potent in inspiring me to write this book-- was the idea that there was, I think, a lot of flattening of what Islamophobia meant in terms of the way it was being discussed-- in discursive spaces, bl-- specifically the media-- but also among scholars. I-- you know, th-- it was refreshing for me-- as somebody examining this topic, and also as a critical race theorist, to see that the term Islamophobia had been championed by a broad-- cross-section of people. But it was-- it-- it was not being defined in a way that was doing justice to what-- what I was-- what was actually happening. So for instance, when activists were saying, "Islamophobia," or somebody like Anderson Cooper were say-- was saying, "Islamophobia," they were specifically focused in-- with what these private actors were doing, right? So like hatemongers, bigots-- that are viewed to be deviant or aberrational, right?

Individuals that were not-- acting on behalf-- of what the state was doing, and second, were not acting on behalf of what broader society-- was sort of encouraging with regard to animus to Muslims. And I wanted to-- to kind of broaden it to-- to kind of examine the idea that you can't talk about Islamophobia unless we talk about the War on Terror, and the various-- apparatuses and laws that the state has been enacting since-- the aftermath of 9/11-- the 9/11 terror attacks.

And second, there was this kind of-- broad sort of leviathan kind of hovering in the atmosphere called orientalism, that no one was connecting modern Islamophobia to this longstanding tradition-- and epistemology of orientalism that actually existed in the American imagination before this country was a sovereign nation.

So it was doing all those things, first the political sort of-- immediate political-- objective, and second, the broader intellectual piece-- that drives from my academic scholarship that I wanted to deconstruct in a way that c-- that could be accessible to a broader audience.

ALVIN STARKS:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). And-- and that intellectual piece, right-- so this goes back to actually how I first met you-- from critical race theory, right, pioneered oftentimes-- coined by Derrick Bell and many others. But usually in the critical race space you didn't see a focus on Islam or even Muslim populations. So-- at-- at some level, you know, you're actually

engineering something that feels relatively new. And so I'm just curious, like, so how does one come to this space of merging-- and we should also define what critical race theory is-- merging critical race theory and Islam?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Great question. So-- (LAUGH) it's a hard one-- to respond to, 'cause it forces me to go back in my own kinda, like, personal history. But I'll do some-- autobiographical contextualization that might give you guys some idea as to why I decided to become an academic, and specifically a critical race theorist.

So the 9/11 terror attacks happened two weeks after I was a law student in law school. I specifically chose to go to the UCLA School of Law because it's a school that boasts the only-- concentration in critical race theory. So UCLA hosts luminaries like Cheryl Harris, who wrote *Whiteness as Property*, people like Devon Carbado, who's done really important work on the fourth amendment-- and identity performance theory, and Kimberle Crenshaw, my mentor and-- a good friend of Alvin's who coined this term, intersectionality.

Her work has obviously been very foundational to the advancement of critical race theory as-- a intellectual discipline. So I was in law school at this time, examining critical race theory in a range of questions that were grappling with the experience of African-Americans, Latinx-- populations, Native Americans, the struggle of-- LGBTQ communities, the importance of-- gender in how it-- interacts with the law.

And I was finding that there was a dearth, if not-- a complete nonexistence of literature examining what was was happening-- with Muslim-Americans in real-time. So at that point, I'll be frank with you guys, I didn't think that it was possible for me to be-- a law scholar because I wasn't somebody who comes from a conventional kind of-- circumstance where I thought that was possible, right?

I had f-- I'm somebody who flunked freshman year of high school, I transferred to university from-- a city college. I was a better boxer than I was a writer (LAUGH) growin' up-- as a young man. But it-- it was s-- it was inspirational for me to see scholars of color, like Professor Crenshaw and Professor Harris, examine the law in a very incisive way from a racial standpoint.

And that sort of moved me-- to wanna v-- to wanna make that contribution. So-- back to what you said, Alvin, I was very much I think, maybe one of the first, if not the first, Muslim-American critical race theorists-- that, you know, really tried to merge the canon of critical race theory with what was happening with Muslim-Americans-- and how Islam was also being demonized as a religion-- in real-time during the War on Terror, but also-- well before the War on Terror moment. I told Alvin he can cut me off 'cause, you know, law professors, we have a penchant for being long-winded. I ta-- (LAUGH)

ALVIN STARKS:

No, no, no. You-- you-- you're perfect. Don't-- don't-- do not worry. But I wanna pick up something else that the book does that I think is incredibly eloquent and important. You really provide a very rich historical literacy, right? So there are moments when we believe that the experiences that we're having in the real-time do not, or feel-- they're new to us, but they have historical relevance.

And there is a piece in the book that I wanted to read because I think it kind of does a great job of kinda giving us a snapshot, right? And-- the woman here, her name is Nora, and I just wanna kind of read a few-- sentences that I thought was just breathtaking. This is Nora's voice: "'I don't know what to do,' she revealed to a circle of family and friends. Being Muslim in America has always been wrought with scrutiny and suspicion. But the entrance of Trump spelled emboldened Islamophobia, and for conspicuous Muslims like Nora, a far higher likelihood of harm."

Quote-unquote, "'Acting Muslim', today in the United States invites suspicion from the state and maximizes the prospect of backlash from hatemongers. For Muslim-Americans who confirm their religious identity by wearing head-- s-- headscarves or Islamic dress, fasting on Ramadan, and regularly attending the mosque, merely practicing their first amendment rights is perilous. Muslim-Americans like Nora, driven by fear to conform, cover, or conceal their Muslim identity may diminish the prospect of suspicion from the state or backlash from bigots, but in doing so they are complacent in supporting the very mission Islamophobia aims to advance: eroding and eliminating every manifestation of Islam until it is gone from America altogether."

When I read that part-- I mean, it's breath s-- breathtaking for a whole host of reasons. But this-- public conversation and desire for erasure. I wanna hear more about when you were doing the research for this, how prevalent was this notion of erasure and this idea or this contention (if it exists)-- between, "Can I be free to worship and dress as I like, and also be safe and American simultaneously?"

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Well, you know, for me when I was-- when I was writing the book-- and Nora is-- a young woman I've known from the Detroit community for-- for some time. She-- was a family friend-- who, you know, evolved into a community activist, somebody who was extremely religiously pious and really struggled with-- you know, expressing her Muslim identity publicly after the-- the ascendance-- of Trump. So I had moved back to Detroit where I'm from-- during the-- the campaign moment. And many of you guys might know, Detroit is home to one of the most concentrated and actually diverse Muslim communities in the country-- along racial, ethnic, and even sectarian lines-- and also socioeconomic lines. Detroit is home to-- a very sizable poor and working class-- Muslim community. But-- when-- when I was writing that and when I was engaging with Nora I was thinking about the

concerted effort to bring about the erasure-- of Islam from two vantage points, right? There's the historical vantage point, and to me the history is critical.

And-- and to me the history is if not entirely neglected, supremely diminished from the way we discuss Islamophobia in the public sphere today. So-- being somebody who was really-- researching legal history-- I quickly thought about this naturalization period. You-- the naturalization era is this-- period from 1790 to 1952. There was a law in place called the Naturalization Act of 1790, which had mandated whiteness as a prerequisite for citizenship. So when we talk about white supremacy today typically speaking, people are concerned with the most brazen kind of manifestations of white supremacy.

However, it's important to know that white supremacy was actually an entire, full-fledged system enshrined into every facet of American law. And one of the facets of American law is the immigration legal system. So whiteness-- and it's critical to understand that whiteness is more than just phenotype, it's more than just geographic origin; it's also religion, right?

And Islam as a religion was-- was racialized, but it was also deemed and oriented as a rival civilization, if you will, a rival sort of-- population-- to Christianity. And Christianity we know, initially Protestantinism (SP), was the touchstone of whiteness really early-- early on, evolved into being-- more robustly Christianity. But you see the erasure of Islam and Muslim identity from this period from 1790 to 1944 effectively deployed and made made possible through American citizenship and immigration law, right?

And to me the travel ban, which was proposed by Trump on December 7, 2015-- but remember on that day-- and ironically enough-- or maybe not ironically enough, that day is when his campaign became-- you know-- a real-- like, real thing. Was-- he became a viable candidate on that day. He announces that-- we have to consider the-- the banning of Trump-- of Muslims until we know what's goin' on.

And then we see that he enacts it seven days after he's inaugurated into the White House, tries two more times because of the pending litigation circulating through the federal courts, and ultimately on June 28 the Supreme Court upholds the Muslim ban, saying that the president had the plenary power to impose such a policy on national security grounds.

So what-- what happened today is not surprising. And-- when pundits and journalists were saying that the travel ban would never be embraced because it conflicts with American values, that isn't the case. When they say things that the travel ban is unprecedented, that isn't the case. There was a Muslim ban in place from 1790 to 1944 that was upheld by Supreme Court justices and civil court judges.

When they say things like, "This is completely contrary to, you know, American-- mores and the spirit of the constitution," that is not true. So for me it was really critical to highlight the idea that what is happening today is anything but surprising; it's actually foreseeable if we fully put our heads around what happened-- during not only, you know, this dark chapter of American immigration legal history, but a chapter that lasted for roughly 70% of America's existence as a sovereign nation.

ALVIN STARKS:

So-- that-- that's excellent. But what I wanna also go into a little bit more is the history. Because when I-- when I read this book I was really impressed by the level of research, right? Like, so you un-- unpack a lot of mythologies that people hold, right? Like, so for many of us we believe Muslims sort of appear kinda post-9/11. But you cite the great work of Sylviane Diouf, who reminds folks that the first Muslims in North America were African slaves, right? And so I wanna hear a little bit more about, like, how did you come across this notion of actually diversifying what we understand as the Muslim population?

Even from the cover of the book, it doesn't fit, you know, the kind of lexicon that most people identify-- as being of Muslim identity. And that seems like it's a very purposeful strategy, but at the same time was there-- pushback from actually exploring the rich diversity of what does it mean to-- to practice.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah, I'm glad you brought up Sylviane Diouf's book-- *Servants of Allah*, a book I highly recommend people read. I remember reading that book for the first time as a-- undergraduate, I think, at the-- tail end of my time at the University of Michigan. And that bl-- that book blew my mind. I had no clue that 15% to 30% of the enslaved Africans in the antebellum South-- were not only originally Muslims, but continued to practice-- their Muslim identity against the letter of slave code that was imposed in-- in southern states-- and against the violence of-- unleashed by slave masters.

So for me, reading that book and seeing how-- Islam was actually wielded as a liberation tool by these enslaved Africans-- throughout the colonies and even in the North-- was both surprising, but also deeply-- deeply inspiring to me, I think. And for me-- it's-- it was critical after reading that book to root the grand narrative of Muslim-Americans in blackness, right?

And I-- and many of the-- many of the books that I had read-- examining the-- the history of Muslims in America-- had not done that. And you-- you found some scholars do that, but typically tie it to the-- the neo-- religious movements that arise in the 20th century: the Science Temple-- the Moor Science Temple, which is-- one might all it an offshoot of Islam that starts in Philadelphia, the Nation of Islam, for instance. But-- but few scholars until Diouf comes around were tying it to-- the slavery moment. And it was-- it's important to do that, because in addition to think about is-- think about Islamophobia as the progeny of orientalism, right-- orientalism being this master discourse that-- theorist-- Palestinian-American theorist, Edward Said, talks about-- it's also critical to tie Islamophobia to anti-black racism and white supremacy.

And we see how Islamophobia is, you know, initially deployed against enslaved Africans through the construction of blackness, right? The work that Cheryl Harris does in *Whiteness as Property* is really critical to this as well, to say that blackness was constructed, right--

the-- the idea-- the classification of blackness was constructed to be synonymous with property or chattel, right?

It inscribed the idea of property, stripping citizensh-- citizenship from individuals who were deemed black. And as a consequence of that racialization and that racial classification, enslaved Muslims could not be seen as bona fide Muslims, right, on two grounds: because they were black and deemed property-- and part-- part of the way we strip individuals of the u-- their humanity is to deny them the ability to practice a religion, right?

If you were to allow an enslaved individual to practice their religion you'd effectively extend them the rights of the free exercise clause of the first amendment. So the way you maintain that enterprise of slavery is to, I think-- you know, most potently deny them the right to practice their faith.

But secondly, it's also important to overlay that legal sorta foundation with the idea that Islam was racialized. We understand Muslim identity as a consequence of orientalism, as something that is narrowly viewed in the caricature of Arab, Middle Eastern, and at that juncture, Ottoman identity. So given that enslaved Africans didn't fit within the racial caricature of what we thought Muslims looked like, and second because they were deemed to be property by slave code and racial classifications created by-- the new American racial taxonomy, we could not view them as legitimate Muslims. So they were brought-- so that engineered-- that double sort of racialization engineered their erasure-- from-- American legal history, but also Muslim-American history.

ALVIN STARKS:

You-- you're raising something else that I wanna kind of also connect, right? Like, so we-- we're having a conversation about actually how Islamophobia becomes enshrined in law. But there's another part of this where Islamophobia gets kind of enshrined in public attitudes, right?

Like, which I think is even more powerful than the legal component because at some level you have to communicate-- to the larger (THUMP) audience that this is an issue of threat, right? And so the, quote-unquote, "public narratives" that get created-- that are incredibly toxic towards even having folks see-- Islam as a peaceful space, right-- or Muslim people as a peaceful-- people. And so we don't have public narratives or even caricatures in such places in pop culture.

And what's interesting to me is that a lot of your correct work also really investigates this space of pop culture, and religion, and ethnicity, right? In particular the space of sports arena, right, where I've always seen, like, the sports space to be one where we're having a unconscious, conscious conversation about race in politics. So I wanted to hear more from you about how do you bridge the gap between addressing Islamophobia and sports?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah. So my-- my next book-- I'm kind of afraid to talk about my next book because promotin' a book is a beast, right? Writin' a book is one thing, but promotin' the thing is a lot harder. (LAUGH) And I-- I just turned 40, so running around the country isn't as easy as it used to be. But-- yeah, but my next book is going to examine-- the-- the sort of, like, convergence of race, racism politics-- in sports.

I'm-- I'm a former athlete-- I l-- I'm a big sports fan, and I'm really interested to see how not only Muslims are portrayed in-- sport, but also how race and racism is sort of-- informing and driving-- different athletic arenas. So-- I'll sh-- maybe I'll share two examples that sort of, you know, highlight the-- the salience of Islamophobia-- in sport, and second, maybe more broadly, the importance of-- I guess race and racism within the broader sporting-- context.

First I think-- for those who watch soccer, I'm a big soccer fan-- or football, for those who aren't American. Don't hit me-- hit me on top of the head for callin' it soccer. There-- and I'm Egyptian also. So-- last year you saw the ascent of a-- kind of-- a wunderkind soccer player-- from Egypt named Mohamed Salah, who plays for Liverpool and then the Egyptian national team, kinda come outta left field.

And he plays for a team in the English Premiership-- the-- the kinda the-- the signature-- br-- English league-- Liverpool, which is generally comprised of a fanbase that is white and working class. And Mohamed Salah is a deeply pious, traditional, humble Muslim-- who drops to his knees and prays every time he scores a goal. Last year he scored 45 goals so he was doin' a lotta prayin'. (LAUGHTER) So he was doin' a lotta prayin' last year. But the-- the-- so th-- you know, kinda the Islamophobe scholar in me was kinda concerned for this guy at first because I knew the-- the context in which he was performing in. And second, if you watch soccer you know that br-- English soccer fans are also called hooligans, right? They're not the most-- tolerant of distinct cultures, they can be violent, and they can be nativist.

But something really brilliant happened-- with the rise of Mohamed Salah. You saw these white working class-- fans of his totally embracing him and embracing his Muslim identity in-- in-- in a range of really interesting ways. They had songs singing like-- (SINGING) "Salah, la, la, la, la. If he scores another few then I'll be Muslim too," right? (LAUGHTER) So it-- it was amazing, and for me what it did, it made me-- and I always kinda look for, like, rays of optimism because doin' this work can walk you down some really dark-- (LAUGH) dark alleys at times-- and I'm from Detroit, so I'm used to dark alleys, and so it doesn't necessarily scare me. But-- but it was-- it was beautiful to see how this young soccer player had captured the imagination of these non-Muslims, but also individuals who might be Islamophobic.

And maybe his performance on the field was actually diminishing and retrenching the views they had before. Now, it's kinda tied to this other sort of idea-- and this is the reason why I wanna write the book. We all know individ-- people who study race and examine race really

closely, that it always takes an exception-- exceptional person of color to transcend and be humanized by individuals that otherwise might not like us, right?

So with the good comes the bad. But you gotta be exceptional, you gotta be Michael Jordan, you gotta be Oprah, you gotta be J-Lo, right, in order for a broader white mainstream audience to embrace you, right? And we-- you see that same phenomenon happening with Mohamed Salah. A second thing that happened in ex-- you know-- yeah, lemme pivot to-- I-- I used to box, right? I was-- I boxed for a long time, so I'm a big combat sports fan.

Coupla weeks ago you had this Muslim-- MMA fighter, Khabib Nurm-- I can't say his last name so I'm not gonna try. We'll-- we'll stick with Khabib-- fighting McGregor. And Conor McGregor-- basically capitalized on this strategy of bigotry-- to promote the fight, but also to get in the head of Khabib, who's Muslim, who's from-- Dagestan, which is-- a majority Muslim province-- in the country of Russia.

And you saw how the UFC, this MMA, you know, league and Dana White, its-- president was fully capitalizing and essentially abetting McGregor to say things like-- calling his assistant a terrorist, to saying that, "You're-- you're-- you're backwards because you don't drink," and offering him alcohol, knowing that he's Muslim at the-- at-- at global press conferences-- and essentially defaming this man's country, his family, and his religion. So-- to me it's really interesting to see how islamophobia, race-- and racism all converge within allegedly the nonpolitical or apolitical context like sport, even though we know that's a myth because sport is inherently political.

ALVIN STARKS:

So you're raising something else that I wanna talk a little bit about 'cause I think this is very interesting when it comes to questions of race and ethnicity. The public's cognitive dissonance, right, the idea that people can hold-- competing ideas together, right? Like, so on one poll that I found it said, "The majority of Americans support Muslim civil rights."

Okay, so let's hold that. And at the same time we're having a conversation where assault on Muslim communities surpassed the attacks from 2001, right? So my question to you is, connect those realities for us. How can both things be true if we're seeing a spike in hate crimes and violent acts, but yet the public imagination believes itself to be supportive.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Th-- tho-- those statistics are not unlike-- and I-- you know, I d-- I'm not doin' this to dodge, but hopefully the way I answer this provides broader context for why those-- you have dissonant figures-- in that respect. So for instance, we see-- and I wanna tie this to the idea that-- you know, one of the great myths in America is the idea that we become more racially tolerant-- and accepting as time passes, the fact that racism actually declines-- as we move forward.

So even though this country, at least from an outward standpoint, becomes more-- multiculturally accepting, becomes more-- tolerant in the way it-- I frames its language around ethnicity and race-- even though we see the-- the expansion of diversity as sort of being a mandate that's embraced by colleges, universities-- private and public actors across the country-- we see the retrenchment of-- race-conscious programming across the board-- in colleges and universities.

You see the number of black and brown students declining at colleges-- especially elite ones, across the country. You see the carceral state expanding, more black and brown bodies in prisons across the country. So it's important to know that there's an outward performance of racial acceptance and religious tolerance-- that in my opinion kind of guises what is happening-- behind closed doors.

And you could tie this to-- 'member that study, the Bradley Effect, I think it was from the '70s? I wanna say that people will say they feel one way about certain things when they're-- surveyed publicly because they wanna appear-- they want to appear to be accepting and tolerant-- and so forth, and so on. But-- but once they get within those private confines-- right, when they go to vote, right, when they're at the-- when they're alone and making actual decisions around-- you know, high-stakes-- mandates they go the other way, because nobody can see them, right?

That's why, for instance, even though you see-- so-- I'm really strugglin' right now with what's going on in the country, and we-- we're gonna talk more about this over dinner; I'm not gonna tell you guys too much right now 'cause I don't wanna get in trouble.
But to me I'm really concerned when I see this-- th-- this surge in-- radical leftist-- social justice movements-- especially among liberal whites. But I see figures like 54% of white women voting for Trump. And then when you bro-- when you break down the numbers from a study d-- done by the Quinnipiac study around the Kavanaugh hearings, right, there's a huge performance of largely white women showing resistance and disapproval of the Supreme Court nominating and potentially appointing somebody like Kavanaugh.

But their study showed that 58% of white women approve his confirmation. So how do we reconcile these figures with the fact that what's happening statistically is the exact opposite? I think there's a surge in-- the performance of political correctness happening with a sizable segment of this country that is actually not being coupled with-- decision-making in action. And that-- and that to me is a manifestation of a more concerning form of white supremacy that sort of embraces-- you know, sort of the veneer of tolerance, but is actually committed to maintaining the status quo.

ALVIN STARKS:

Well-- something that comes up in the book for me-- is even the demand for Muslim populations to even take a stronger, more stark approach towards extremism, right? And-- part of that is, of course, to be publicly protected, but there's also this kind of demand to say that you are not X, Y, Zed. So I'm curious to have a conversation with you a little bit more

about, like-- so what makes those demands so important, and where do they find themselves?

Because you know, Muslim populations in and of themselves, like any population, are dynamic and diverse, right? Like, so this demand to denounce extremism and to perform in an Americanized way that sort of eases the burden for non-Muslim populations. So does that make sense? Like, I'm just (UNINTEL) curious to hear more about, like-- so how did you wrestle with that tension inside, you know, this book while challenging notions of Islamophobia?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

So-- so when I was a first-year law student I read this case, Korematsu versus the United States. Do-- are you guys familiar with this case? Many of you are. Korematsu effectively is the Supreme Court decision which-- enabled the president at that time to intern Japan-Americans, right? And there's dicta from that majority opinion that effectively said that-- it's just an unfair reality of democracy that specific segments of the population have to bear the burden of national security for the rest of us, right?

And you see that same thing happening today with Muslim-Americans, that was happening with Japanese-Americans roughly 70 years ago, right? That even though you have-- you know, constitutional guarantees like free exercise of religion-- one of the touchstones of Islamophobia is that the more you maximize expression of Muslim identity, the more suspicious you are to the state.

So that guarantee of free exercise is actually not extended to Muslim-Americans: the exact opposite is. The more I exercise my Muslim identity, the higher-- the presumption is that-- that I'm actually engaged in terrorism or radicalization. Now, I-- I wanna reconcile that with, again, our-- our discussion of race and-- and white supremacy.

Now, the great-- the greatest privilege attached to whiteness is the ability to be an individual, right? So when-- when Dylann Roof walks into that church in South Carolina and kills nine black people-- all southern-- Christian teens in the South aren't blamed or asked to apologize or condemn.

When Nikolas Cruz walks into Parkland High School in Florida and kills 55 of his classmates, young white teens in Florida aren't asked to apologize or condemn. When Stephen Paddock shoots 60 people at that country concert in Las Vegas, middle-aged white men living in the state of Nevada or the broader West Coast don't have to apologize and condemn. That's the greatest privilege, I think, of whiteness.

That's the hallmark, if you will, that makes whiteness such a coveted and prized possession. Now, that is not extended to Muslims. That is not extended to black folk, that is not extended to brown people. There's this idea of collective guilt that's associated with the way you look and the way you believe. So when something happens in Paris, right, the Charlie Hebdo attack-- lemme tell you a story.

So Charlie Hebdo happens, I'm at home watchin' the Detroit Pistons lose another game, right, in Detroit somewhere. I get a call from the BBC, from-- Fox, "Professor Beydoun, how do you feel about this? Do you wanna condemn the act?" I'm like, "Nah, I'm eatin' Doritos at home, gaining weight that I don't need to be putting on myself, watchin' my team lose another game. Just because I'm Muslim does not mean I have to speak on behalf and condemn-- an-- an actor of somebody who's a hemisphere away from me."

But again, that is one of the curses-- this idea of collective and collateral guilt that is always assigned to Muslims on grounds of religious identity, that is never assigned-- to whiteness as a consequence of not-- not white supremacy s-- but white-- but white privilege, the greatest privilege of whiteness. I got-- I got turned up answerin' that question. I don't know what's goin' on. (LAUGH)

ALVIN STARKS:

Yeah, I-- I knew that would happen. I knew that would happen. So I-- I wanna end with-- one last question from myself before we turn it over to the audience. And if you have not-- purchased or read this book I highly suggest-- you do so. And I would be remiss if I didn't ask this very basic question for those folks who haven't bought the book as of yet. Can you define Islamophobia?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah. So this is, like, a really nerdy, like, legal academic-- definition. But before-- (OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

But-- bef-- before I wrote this book I wrote an article for the *Columbia Law Review* where I define Islamophobia for the fir-- for the first time. And I define it as-- Islamophobia is the presumption that Islam is inassimilable, foreign, and violent, tied to the idea that expressions of Muslim identity raise the presumption-- of terrorism. And then I divide Islamophobia into three forms. First you have private Islamophobia, the form that is-- extended or unleashed by private actors, structural Islamophobia, extended by the state, and finally Islamophobia is-- as a dialectic. Meaning that what the state does-- both endorses and sometimes emboldens the private Islamophobia taking place on the ground. It's a complex definition, but I think it's an important-- framework for understanding how complex the form of animus can be.

ALVIN STARKS:

So I-- I have to ask this question, I'm so sorry folks. What kinda trouble have you gotten into for this book? (LAUGH)

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Trouble? You know, I--

ALVIN STARKS:

John Lewis would call it good trouble. But I'm just curious (UNINTEL PHRASE)--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah, yeah. No there's-- there's been-- there's been great trouble and there's been-- you know, not the best trouble. So-- a quick story. So I had the chance to-- to present this book-- on a Sunday service in-- a largely poor to working class white church outside of Lexing-- Ken-- Lexington, Kentucky. I was afraid when I walked in, people were sizin' me up, probably thought I was, like, Latino or somebody that didn't look like he belonged there. But-- what happened after I presented-- and I didn't present the book. I talked about myself. Like, something registered in my head where they were like, "Don't talk about the book but talk about who you are a little bit."

Something beautiful happened-- where I think a third of the room hated me, and they hated me before I got there so I didn't change their minds. A third of the room were kinda, like, lukewarm about me. But a third of the room-- and there was, like, 500 people-- had can-- you know, come up to me-- were givin' me hugs-- "You're the first Muslim I ever met. I can't wait to read your book."

And-- it was-- it was g-- one of the more transformative moments of my book tour because it demonstrated how just kinda the most-- what I thought to be a trivial kind of introduction of who I was could significantly change the minds of people that I thought were staunchly Islamophobic before I walked in. So that's an example of good trouble that I got into. And two of those women-- email me all the time. One of 'em just sent me cookies last week, (LAUGHTER) like this soccer mom lady. So I made some good friends and gained some calories that I don't need to eat as a consequence. (LAUGH)

ALVIN STARKS:

Let-- let-- let's make some good friends this evening, then. So what I wanna do is there is a microphone-- towards the front of-- room. We're gonna ask people to speak into the microphone, just so that we can all appreciate and hear-- the question and/or comment. We would love to get as many questions and comments in as possible, so if we can practice sharing the mike-- that would be absolutely lovely. So-- we'll start with you. And if you could introduce yourselves as well.

FEMALE VOICE:

Th-- thank you very much. Thank you also to Open Society for this event and all-- all of the events that Open Society makes. C-- couple things. I also wanted to ask about the trouble, because your-- your-- your service is for American society and for people to understand. So I-- I-- I doubt that you're really making trouble; you're-- you're part of the-- (LAUGH) anyway. A couple things.

I know that Thomas Jefferson when he was-- working with the French to-- on the (FOREIGN LANGUAGE)-- on the s-- human rights, that he read some of the Qur'an. He sent away for the Qur'an, he read-- great texts-- Chinese texts. And-- and so-- this was important to him and important to the development of-- of-- of our country.

And so I'm wondering-- 1) if it's in the book, and if you see other examples of-- American politicians who are looking beyond this Protestant or Christian way-- in order to-- to build what we have going forward? Secondly, I used to live in France. I lived in Paris about a year after 9/11 and-- I actually wrote my thesis on prejudice toward people from the Maghreb in France-- because I was mortified by how my friends-- my, (MAKES NOISE) you know, academic friends from Tunisia or-- or, you know, wherever-- North Africa-- h-- you know, I was mortified-- about how they were being treated.

But at the same time there's a better cultural blend and-- in-- in-- in most top French films there's a scene where the French people are-- are enjoying themselves-- dancing to-- a Raï song or-- or something. There's-- there's more appreciation, albeit with the prejudice. And so-- in your future works I'm wondering if you could compare and contrast, because I think it's valuable for-- for us to see.

Also, the Muslim ban-- I have friends from Chad-- I speak fluent French, and-- and-- and I know that that ban ended for them but there was not, like, a big to-do about it. This Muslim ban came in, there were all these different-- judges-- you know, the judge in Hawaii who-- who were saying, "No, this is not okay." But there wasn't, like, "Okay, this is the end of this." It just kind of, like, fizzled out because every day we have a new issue. And then if-- if it comes--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

That's three questions. I-- I can answer those-- (LAUGH) (BACKGROUND VOICE)

FEMALE VOICE:

Okay, great. Thank you very much.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

So-- the first question, yeah, there's-- there's a great book by Denise Spellberg r-- that's actually called *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an*-- that documents-- the importance of the Qur'an-- and the role it had in sort of shaping and affecting Thomas Jefferson's-- championing of the free exercise of religion.

That was really central to-- who he was as a visionary. So you have, you know-- the-- and I'm critical of the book because it lauds Thomas Jefferson as being a champion of-- free exercise, and in some respects he was. So even though he had a Qur'an and that he sees Islam to be one of the world's great religions, at the same time he unseen the-- the enslaved Muslims living-- within his-- within his context, right?

So there's an important juxtaposition that Spellberg does not engage in that book so-- and that I think highlights the antiblackness the also drove not only Thomas Jefferson-- but some of the other founders. Another book by Robert Allison-- that also addresses the importance of-- orientalism on the framers called *The Crescent Obscured*-- grapples with some of Thomas Jefferson's contemporaries, and how they effectively castigated Islam and Muslims as being an antithesis and-- and the orientalist tradition of how they saw the-- h-- and how they sh-- wanted to see the development and cultivation of the United States as a effectively Christian democracy.

I'm not sure if that's an oxymoron or not, but-- that's what-- that was actually steering-- the way they saw the-- the making of the country. And third-- Islamophobia in France and the way it compares to the United States is really, really interesting and compelling. There's some-- important distinctions, one of them-- are legal.

In the United States we theoretically have the free exercise of religion; France does not, right? The French state does not enshrine free exercise as one of its-- you know, constitutional guarantees. It has this principle called (FOREIGN LANGUAGE), which effectively enshrines secularism, right? The state is actually committed to mainstreaming-- a secular state, and as a consequence of-- of that, secularism becomes an engine that enables Islamophobia, in-- in my opinion, in ways that can be more ferocious and omni-- and ominous than we see Islamophobia being extended here in the States. But inshallah-- you know, God willing, I'd love to do comparative work between the United States-- and France. Yep.

FEMALE VOICE:

H-- hello. You-- titled this *American Islamophobia*. I think the whole world has Islamophobia. Even in Egypt where you s-- I was a history teacher. Because if you look at the Sisi group and-- the Brotherhood group, I-- I would say a Sisi (UNINTEL), meaning his followers, are afraid that the Muslim Brotherhood's gonna show up and do them in. And if you look at the number of terrorist attacks in this world you have to understand why people have Islamophobia. And when 58% of American Muslims say they prefer the sharia law to

the Constitution, we read that in *The Wall Street Journal*, I mean, what do you expect from us?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Well, lemme-- lemme-- lemme answer the last question. So one-- (LAUGH) one of the most-- destructive myths is that sharia law is a bad thing. So it's been co-- it's been co-opted-- it's been co-opted by the right-- lemme finish. Lemme finish. It's been co-opted by the right to mean something that it isn't.

Sharia law does not mean these scare tactics people like Ted Cruz-- Tea Party candidates-- and Trump mean it to mean. It doesn't mean that the Muslims are here attempting to-- replace and supplant American principles with Islamic law. That's the way they've weaponized and distorted the meaning of sharia law, which effectively just means a broad, theological law tied to the Qur'an.

Now, Christians believe in-- Christian law, Jews beli-- believe in Judaic law. Muslims should also believe in Islamic law. It's been co-opted and manipulated to mean something that it-- that-- that it does not mean, and effectively used as a political tool by the right-- to scare folks. So there's nothing wrong with Muslims believing in sharia law, just as long as they're p-- practicing sharia law in line with the free exercise clause. And guess what? If you know anything about the first amendment you know that you can't enact sharia law, because the establishment clause preempts it. You cannot comingle American state law with religious principles; we have the separation of church and state.

So next time somebody tells you, "You should be afraid of sharia law," tell 'em, "All you gotta do is read the first amendment to know that you cannot implement j-- sharia law, Judaic law, or Christian law, because it's prevented by the first amendment. (APPLAUSE)

MALE VOICE:

Thank you for your very important work. My question-- 9/11, the false flag-- was of course pointing at the-- 19-- attackers-- alleged fliers of the planes. However, many people feel that the planners of the event were the Mossad, the ISI-- the Pakistani ISI, the Israeli Mossad, and Cheney and company set it up to point the finger at these bad Muslims. What are your thoughts?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Well, I mean, I-- I don't think that's the case, and I-- I'm somebody who doesn't pay a lot of attention to what I think are conspiracy theories. I think that the culprits of the-- the attacks were-- I think generally Saudi culprits that-- were tied to Al Qaeda and other actors-- which-- which-- which highlights another important point, the idea that it's important to think about-- you know, terrorism not-- not along religious lines, but all-- but-- but more along,

you know, precise identity lines. These were 19 individuals from Saudi Arabia y-- however, you know, Saudi Arabia still remains one of the staunchest allies of the United States.

FEMALE VOICE:

And Egypt. Five from Egypt.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

I don't think it was five from Egypt. I think one would from Morocco.

FEMALE VOICE:

Well, five were considered from Egypt, and the rest were from Saudi--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Okay. So there were 19 individuals that committed-- committed an attack. So are we gonna indict one p-- are we gonna indict 1.7 billion believers on a faith on-- on account of 17 (SIC) individuals? That doesn't seem like-- I mean, I wasn't the best math student, but that's (UNINTEL PHRASE)--

MALE VOICE:

No, right, right. But I think that's what the media (LAUGH) was suggesting we do. Final thought, that-- jet fuel-- the fires created by jet fuel are not nearly hot enough to me-- melt steel structures. You gotta start thinking about 9/11 from that point of view.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Okay. I didn't do well in physics either so I'm gonna leave that one alone. (LAUGHTER) (OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

ALVIN STARKS:

I-- I want us to also be a little bit more mindful about the subject matter-- around how we also challenge within ourselves-- Islamophobic beliefs, right? Because what oftentimes happens when we bring in the-- the questions of race and ethnicity, we oftentimes use narratives that diminish individuals. So I wanna make sure that, you know, as we have questions that they are as vibrant and as-- important as this text encourages us to be. So thank you. (BACKGROUND VOICE) (APPLAUSE)

FEMALE VOICE:

Thank you so much. I'm from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and we have a very large-- community of Muslims of different-- country backgrounds. And-- I'm finding this has happened since 9/11, but more predominantly since Trump is in. So I have to on a daily basis-- (NOISE) and I'm not looking for any kind of props or accolades when I say this. I have to find myself on a daily basis sticking up for people of Muslim background, and-- people wearing hijabs that are almost being attacked in-- in the streets. And I do point out about all of the natural-born American terrorists and the mass murders that they have perpetrated, that they're not Muslim people.

And also we have someone that's running for state senator that seems to be promoting Islamophobic ideas. But on a few occasions when in the course of sticking up for people I have been asked to leave McDonald's. And I'm not, like, on a soapbox orating. But however, having a conversation and then maybe some people are offended, and then they go into-- like, go into the management and saying that I'm saying things.

So this means, like, I'm tryin' to, you know, do the right thing and stick up for people 'cause I have a lotta friends that are Muslim, and it's becomin', like-- a counterpoint balance against me. People assume because I'm, like, a 58-year-old female-- white female that I'm a Trump supporter. So I'm very vehemently against him, what he's doing. But I mean to say-- also but people throw in my face, though-- they say the Qur'an says to kill the dif-- the infidels. And I'm not familiar that I have not read, you know, the complete Qur'an. But I mean-- and that's the only thing that I cannot have a recourse about, because I really have not read it. Okay, thank you so much--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

No, no. Thank you. Keep-- keep doin' what you're doin'. It's important to have-- you know, allies--

FEMALE VOICE:

And may--

ALVIN STARKS:

'Cause you do-- you do talk about allies in the book. And just wonder, could you say a little bit more about what does it mean to be in allyship?

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah, so I think there's-- there's-- there's two important forms of-- of allyship going on with what you-- what you presented. First it's important for people to stand up for their neighbors

and individuals who are targeted. But second it's important to ally with the spirit of the Constitution. You know, the letter of the law says that individuals should have the right to freely exercise their faith-- so even though you might disagree with Islam as a religion, that you should uphold the-- the tenets and principles of the Constitution to every individual-- regardless of what religion they-- they-- they-- espouse.

MALE VOICE:

(CLEARS THROAT) I am a writer, a psychologist, and a theologian. So my life revolves around this as my worldview revolves around this. Prof., I think it will be proper to differentiate Islamophobia and racism, for us to make a proper conclusion. You talked about-- some slaves bein' prohibited to practice-- Islam durin' the slave trade.

The people you mentioned came from the northwest of Africa. By the time they came here Islam was already in West Africa. But African culture and religion was completely forbidden on the pain of law-- on the law-- in fact, pain of death. That is why African culture and religion was completely lost in the new world.

So that is a very great point. But Islam was-- in fact-- they were given at least limited authority to practice. That is part of it. But my question is-- is there any way Muslims contribute to this Islamophobia around the world, especially in this country? Because-- I am a Nigerian and my writings-- I write on Africa, and Nigeria in particular.

I been writing for many years. In Nigeria now the president wants the-- is already causing confusion. The whole world knows about Boko Haram. Boko Haram dre-- terrorism did not start in Nigeria. African culture is pro-life. For you to kill-- if you commit murder you banish yourself, you go into exile. Boko Haram brought terrorism into Nigeria. Nigeria now becomes the global headquarters of terrorism. Even Al Qaeda denounced Boko Haram.

We are talkin' of Boko Haram, we have another threat now that even Amnesty International-- just made some months ago-- said that they commit more murders than Boko Haram. That is Fulani herdsmen. The president is a tribe of Fulani. Fulani has two sects: sedentary Fulani, and nomadic Fulani. The president belongs to the sedentary, which is far away; they're not really related. We just associate them. So the-- these nomadic Fulanis, they're cattle rearers. For many-- for some time now they've been killin' people. They have tacit permission from the president--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Can you-- can you get to the question? I'm sorry, 'cause-- what-- what's the specific question you have?

MALE VOICE:

The question I am t-- (UNINTEL) that is (UNINTEL PHRASE) Islamophobia. Is there any way Muslims contribute? I like your comparison ab-- about-- Salah. I-- I'm a-- soccer referee myself (UNINTEL PHRASE). So if everybody behaves like-- Mohamed Salah, do you think people will hate Muslims or have (UNINTEL) Islamophobia.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Well, lemme-- lemme (UNINTEL)--

MALE VOICE:

Before-- excuse me. Before Mohamed Salah the first African in Europe to be given that-- high recognition was Rashidi Yekini. He was the first African to win African footballer of the year twice. He's (UNINTEL) Nigerian. So--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah, lemme-- lemme-- lemme answer that, if you don't mind. So-- number one, it's impossible for edy (PH)-- every Muslim to-- to behave like Mohamed Salah. If that was the case I'd be playing soccer and making millions of dollars. It's impossible for anybody-- any person of color, any member of any rel-- any religious tradition to sort of-- you know, reach the levels of somebody who is a lum-- luminary within that community.

Second, lemme answer the specific question you had, "Are there Muslims that partake in-- the entire project of Islamophobia?" Yes, and that's an important question. We see that in the War on Terror project really-- s-- specifically in a range of ways, right? So one way is that the state capitalizes on using Muslims as informants-- Muslims as interlocuters, Muslims to endorse the War on Terror project to effectively legitimize it.

I'll speak specifically to one policy in-- in question, that I consider to be the most nefarious form of structural Islamophobia: counter-radicalization policing. Those of you in New York might remember a program in place called N.Y.P.-- P.D. spying on Muslims, right? Which in my opinion is one of the most destructive forms of-- structural Islamophobia. It was only able to work because the N.Y.P.D. actually recruited and enlisted Muslims in the community to function as watchdogs and data gatherers-- in individuals within their mosques, individuals within their student organizations, community centers, and so on, and so forth.

And this program that was u-- that was adopted by the N.Y.P.D. is now actually a federal program-- established by the Obama administration in 2011, which highlights-- I think, another point that I wanna make before we leave, is that it's-- it's critical to know that Islamophobia does not only rise from the right.

It's a caricature to think about Islamophobes as specifically Repub-- Republican and conservative. But if we see a program like counter-radicalization policing being established by the Obama administration, we see how liberals-- right, progressives act-- actually also partake in this project of Islamophobia as well.

ALVIN STARKS:

Thank you. As we democratize our questionings-- I want us to think about, as you-- 'cause I think we have, like, four people in line-- one, two three.

MALE VOICE:

Six.

ALVIN STARKS:

Oh.

MALE VOICE:

There's people sitting too.

ALVIN STARKS:

Oh, there's-- there's folks sitting. So unfortunately we won't have a chance to get to every question. But I'm gonna take the folks who are standing (and we can talk afterwards if you like). But I'm gonna really ask that you--

FEMALE VOICE:

Be succinct.

ALVIN STARKS:

--ask questions less than 15 seconds--

FEMALE VOICE:

Okay.

ALVIN STARKS:

--just in order for us to really, again, enjoy the richness of the questions. So I know you will exemplify that. Thank you--

FEMALE VOICE:

I-- I will strive to. (LAUGH) I--

ALVIN STARKS:

And I'm-- I'm watching the clock.

FEMALE VOICE:

Okay. I-- I'm a big believer in the maxim that prejudice rarely survives exposure. And so your story of Salah-- exemplifies that. And-- I'm gonna digress and come back. The-- luckily-- Christians are not defined by Ku Klux Klan, or by the evangelicals who bombed abortion clinics. Similarly, I'm a believer that Islam-- religion of a billion plus people should not be defined by its extremists. Now, returning to my actual question, when you're traveling around pro-- promoting your book, Michigan has a strong pan-Arab, pan-Muslim culture-- so there's a lot of exposure there. New York is very diverse-- which creates acceptance, and sometimes argument. Have you found differences in the regions-- of the United States wh-- when you've promoted your book?

ALVIN STARKS:

So we're gonna take several questions. So hold that-- and we'll have the second question, and we'll just do them in a cluster.

MALE VOICE:

So my question's a little bit about the cognitive dissonance you were talkin' about earlier, and specifically the people we presume to be very Islamophobic. You said it's from the right and the left, but nowadays it's a little bit more from the right. Those are the people who right now with the Saudi Arabia Turkish murder incident are, sort of at the behest of Trump, defending Saudi Arabia and sort of coming to its defense, and saying that, you know, "Saudi Arabia didn't do what everyone said it did." And at each step of the way sort of believing their narrative. So how do you reconcile the people who we would expect to be so Islamophobic, you know, when it comes to power plays, political, global, relations all of a sudden be so pro-Saudi Arabia?

ALVIN STARKS:

Thank you.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Thanks.

MALE VOICE:

Hi. My question is about the book cover, and if you could share some of the responses that you've had from different people about having an African-American young woman being on the book cover.

FEMALE VOICE:

So I-- I work for an organization that works with a lot of-- law students around the country. And they are really excited about your book-- and that's actually how I learned about it. So a couple of the things that had kind of come up when they were talking-- is first of all, that-- there's a large diversity of perspectives that are highlighted in the book. And so-- a lot of the students that we work with, you know, they inhabit multiple identities-- you know, they are-- they are queer, they are immigrant, they're working class. And you know, some have experience being incarcerated, or family members.

And so I think what I'm so excited about the book and what they conveyed is that there are so many, like, of those perspectives that are shared that we don't-- that, like, despite, (LAUGH) like, rampant Islamophobia, they're excited to read something that doesn't play into respectability politics, that you have to be perfect in order to have-- your spec-- your perspective be valued, and that there's a lotta focus on-- Muslim-led-- organizing and-- and building of, like, power and sharing of stories. So my-- my question is-- how did you choose to highlight the individuals and organizations and communities that-- that you did? And-- I'm sure some you may have had relationships with already, but how did you cultivate that-- for the book?

ALVIN STARKS:

Thank you.

FEMALE VOICE:

Hi. Thank you so much. I-- in terms of your speaking about state sponsored Islamophobia, I was wondering if you could speak to sort of how different countries get treated very differently in, like, our state either, like, (UNINTEL) program, or the Muslim ban, or

whatever other sort of bans are-- or restrictions on Muslims are in place? Like, how you account for the differences between how, like, a Saudi Arabia, or Palestine, or Indonesia is treated in-- in Islamophobia, and-- like, what accounts for that. And thank you again for your time.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Thank you.

ALVIN STARKS:

Really quickly, 'cause I like you. (LAUGHTER)

FEMALE VOICE:

Hi. I too believe that-- exposure reduces xenophobia-- not just Islamophobia, but any xenophobia. And your book is about Islamophobia in America, so I don't quite expect you to be world expert. But since you've given it a thought I'm sure you'll give-- and you brought up the Salah case-- do you find differences not only in portions of the country, but in different countries-- that have Muslims in different relationships within or with the country?

ALVIN STARKS:

So I am going to channel my inner Oprah and-- (LAUGHTER) summarize the-- the rich questions. So this-- this question around proximity and exposure as you travel-- the current cognitive dissonance in our current political moment-- remind us around the responses to the book cover. The question around the diversity of representation that's actually in the book and how it resonates with young folks. How do you account for this international Islamophobia and where you've seen-- that work? And then the latter question around the differences around various countries.

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

So I'll try my best to get to-- to all of that. But-- the-- the-- the first thing I wanna say is that it's important to understand that Islamophobia is not irrational. It can be v-- very rational when it's being-- ex-- when it's being engaged in by the state. And what I mean by that is that the state actors and power is willing to set aside its Islamophobic views when they're advancing their-- specific interests, right?

And we see that specifically with Saudi Arabia, that Saudi Arabia is-- for the mere fact a state that enshrines Wahhabism, which is the most-- in my opinion the most-- problematic interpretation of is-- of Islam, that inspires terrorism. We-- we set aside those views when engaging with Saudi Arabia because that facilitates our country's access to infinite supplies

of crude oil. So when it's economically feasible for the United States and politically expedient, we're willing to set aside-- our Islamophobic views-- we see that in that regard.

Second, I-- I-- I don't buy the idea that the more we expose Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism-- the more that we can entrench it. It's important to understand Islamophobia in the way we understand racism, in that-- it vacillates, it rises and falls in line with prevailing economic and political aspirations. So for instance, we see the exposure-- of racism-- in un-- in unprecedented ways with the rise of Trump. But in conjunction with that, we see the rise of racism and white supremacy in ways that are-- unprecedented in modern America. The third question-- r--

FEMALE VOICE:

What do you attribute it to? That's the (UNINTEL)--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Well-- a range of things. I mean, p-- part of it is political opportunism. Pa-- part of it is candidates like Trump understanding that if you engage in explicit Islamophobia, racism, and xenophobia that that's gonna get butts to the voting booth. That's gonna move people. So it's politically expedient to engage in demagoguery, and that isn't unique to Trump.

It's something that is well-entrenched in the American political-- history. Third question-- the book cover. So again, as I mentioned earlier-- I-- I was really keen in making the strategic move to tie-- not only Islamophobia, but a new Muslim-American sort of-- narrative to blackness, because of the historical roots, and second because the book is extremely focused on being intersectional, to highlight the specific experiences.

And I think the young lady asked a question about-- the various communities that were being impacted. I really wanted to push subaltern stories of Muslim-Americans to the center because we-- we typically have-- the priorit-- the prioritization of Muslim stories that are tied to immigrants, Arabs, or Middle Easterners, and part of that is because of the orientalist conflation of Muslim identity with Arab identity.

That I didn't-- I-- what I wanted to do was be very intentional about uplifting stories that were being marginalized by this grand narrative, and that I thought by focusing on-- by-- by putting a black woman who is Somali front and center, I was able to feature a range of identities that were being marginalized.

And she was-- a family friend of mine, her name is Asma. I knew her from the community. So it gave it kind of a human-- dimension too, for me to put her on the cover. And the fourth thing-- you know, again, I'm-- I'm-- I'm a scholar, but I'm also-- I'm-- I'm Muslim-American. And there's-- there's a beautiful quote by Edward Said, who's-- who's a hero of mine, the individual who theorized orientalism, who writes in his autobiography called *Out of Place*-- a book that really, you know, kinda changed me.

He wrote that, "I am an oriental writing back at the orientalists who for so long have thrived upon our silence." This book is not only an academic project to me. This is not only a subject of intellectual interest or intellectual inquiry. I'm Muslim-American. I grew up in a working class, single-parent, Muslim household in Detroit.

These are people, these are stories, these are communities that I know very well, that are family members of mine-- sisters, brother, cousins, neighbors, and so on, and so forth. So in ad-- in addition to the intellectual project I wanted to humanize the project and sort of retrench this tradition of non-Muslims telling our stories by offering one chapter of what I hope, inshallah, God willing-- encourages other Muslim-Americans to tell their stories as well.

ALVIN STARKS:

So Khaled, on behalf of Open Society Foundations and this audience that assembled here this evening-- we wanna graciously thank you--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Thank you--

ALVIN STARKS:

--for this very important book and this very rich conversation. So can we acknowledge that? (APPLAUSE) And-- and the book is available on all (UNINTEL PHRASE)--

KHALED A. BEYDOUN:

Yeah, it's available on Amazon, all that, Barnes and Noble. I got two copies I can sell tonight. That's it, unfortunately. (LAUGHTER)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *