**June 25, 2024 / It’s not Islamophobic, it’s anti-Palestinian**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

NOEL: The temperature in Euless <YOO-less> Texas hit 91 degrees in mid-May, so a mom took her two kids to the community pool.

NOEL: Poolside, a woman asked where they were from, grabbed at the six-year-old boy and when he got away, pushed the little girl’s head under the water.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.instagram.com/cair_national/reel/C8kphiWpUpb/)*> Camilla Bernal, CNN: “The mother told police that her three year old child was calling for help, [and] was coughing up water. But she was able to pull out her out of the water FADE HERE*

NOEL: The kids are Palestinian-American. The attacker is white and was charged with attempted murder. The Council on Islamic American Relations says it’s a hate crime, calling it Islamophobic, anti-Arab AND anti-Palestinian.

Suggesting those terms DON’T all mean the same thing.

NOEL: Coming up on Today, Explained: since October 7th, incidents of Islamophobia in the U.S. have spiked. But what’s Islamophobic? What’s anti-Palestinian? And an argument that drawing a distinction between the two really matters.

SCORING OUT

**[THEME]**

MOUSTAFA: My name is Moustafa Bayoumi. I am a journalist, a writer and a professor. I write for the Guardian and I teach at the City University of New York.

NOEL: Moustafa was born in Egypt, but moved to Canada as a child and has been in the US most of his adult life. 15 years ago he wrote a book that I loved - *How Does it Feel to be a Problem,* in which documented the lives of seven young Arab-Americans in Brooklyn, after 9/11. The difficulties they faced included Islamophobia.

MOUSTAFA: I would define Islamophobia as a kind of anti-Muslim racism and anti-Muslim bigotry. You know, I think definitionally it would be something about fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims. But it's not really about doctrine, right? It's not about whether somebody is a believing Muslim or a non-believing Muslim. It's about Muslims as an identity, not as a, as a belief system. And I think that's an important part to underscore.

NOEL: Many Americans would only really have become aware of the term Islamophobia after 9/11. I assume it existed before then. What did it—what has it looked like in the U.S., historically?

MOUSTAFA: Well, I think you're actually quite correct about that, that Islamophobia as a social phenomenon really took off after 9/11. If you look at the history of anti-Arab and Anti-Palestinian sentiment in the United States, you'll see that it goes back at least to the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the US really…its policies really turn much more towards supporting Israel.

*<CLIP> NBC NIGHTLY NEWS, 1973: Reports on the air and ground battles received here are sketchy, about the only thing Pentagon officials are confident of is that the ultimate victor will be Israel. And it’s still believed here that Israel has better trained men and better command control. One Pentagon official said the Arabs have just never quite put it all together.*

MOUSTAFA: And this is also the same time, of course, in the mid 1960s, you also have a couple of other things happening. You have the civil rights struggle going on. And at the same time, you also have a change in U.S. immigration policy in 1965. So you have a lot more people who are coming from different parts of the world.

*<CLIP> FORMER PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON: From this day forward, those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationships to those already here.*

MOUSTAFA: So you did have more people coming from the Arab region and more students and people who are immigrating here. And many of them had very specific ideas that Palestinians had been dealt a bad, you know, hand and that they really deserve to have their rights for self-determination respected.

<SCORING IN> Intelligent ticking pondering APM

MOUSTAFA: What happened was the government started spying on them.

SCORING BUMP

MOUSTAFA: It wasn't until one of the very well known lawyers, a man by the name of Abdeen Jabara, read a newspaper report or magazine report that said that the government was involved, the NSA back then was involved in, in spying on dissidents that he thought hmm, maybe I should look into this myself…

*<CLIP> ABDEEN JABARA: I was certain that some of those were clients of mine or who had called me for one reason or another.*

MOUSTAFA: And he found out that the U.S. government had been spying on him for years.

*<CLIP> ABDEEN JABARA: A lot of it was surveillance of speeches that I gave at different events and so forth, but it also included asking the NSA for any communications I had outside the United States.*

MOUSTAFA: And in fact, not only that, but they had also shared information about him with several different foreign governments at the same time. Black Muslim groups were also surveilled by the government, groups such as the Nation of Islam or the Moorish Science Temple.

*<CLIP> ELIJAH MOHAMMAD, LEADER OF THE NATION OF ISLAM (1967): The caucasian world, the enemies of righteous. They’re murderers of prophets. They’re haters of truth and lovers of other-than-truth.*

MOUSTAFA: These are sort of early precursors of, African-American Muslim communities. In fact, the Nation of Islam and Moorish Science Temple still exist today, but in much smaller numbers than they they once had.

*<CLIP> WSVN: RICHARD WHITCOMB REPORTS (1969):*

*RICHARD WHITCOMB: You are seeing local Muslims entering the Miami Mosque, located at northwest Seventh Avenue and 53rd Street.*

*RICHARD WHITCOMB: Authorities warn that the Muslims are the largest black extremist organization in the United States.*

MOUSTAFA: These groups were also being watched by the government, primarily because they were seen as not being patriotic enough, especially during the World War Two effort. And so they were seen as being seditious and maybe even having connections with the Japanese. But the government's attention that was focused on black Muslim groups was generally part of a larger wave of repression that was focused on all kinds of liberation struggles organized by African-Americans across the country. So COINTELPRO you know, the counterintelligence program by the government that was eventually exposed, had certain specific groups that they were targeting.

*<CLIP> EURONEWS:*

*MARTIN LUTHER KING JUNIOR: There may be some…*

*ROBERT HACKWILL, REPORTER: Among the treasure trove of CIA and FBI files released by America's National Archive last week, were documents relating to the assassinated civil rights leader Martin Luther King. The FBI's director at the time, Edgar Hoover, detested King and suspected him of being a Communist.*

MOUSTAFA: Of course, there were, it's well known that African-American organizations were part of Cointelpro, as were actually Arab-American groups, which is less known. So I think it's absolutely necessary to see the ways in which African-American history, Arab-American history, Muslim American history are connected, but also to see them for their differences at the same time.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: How does Islamophobia shift in the U.S. after 9/11? How does it manifest?

MOUSTAFA: Right after 9/11, there was an immediate outburst of vigilante violence that we saw around the country.

*<CLIP> DEMOCRACY NOW:*

*RAIS BHUIYAN, HATE CRIME SURVIVOR: It was, September 21st, 2001. It was Friday. I was working in a gas station. A customer came inside wearing bandana, sunglasses, baseball cap, and pointing a gun directly at my face.*

MOUSTAFA: And then there was a push by the government to enact certain kinds of programs, and, such as special registration which required that Muslim males over the age of 16 register their whereabouts with the authorities. That was a very targeted and very discriminatory policy.

*<CLIP> CSPAN:*

*Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell: One has to appreciate that the United States has an obligation to secure our borders and the purpose of these procedures is not to target anyone or to intimidate anyone, it's to get a better understanding of who is in our country.*

MOUSTAFA: And then it really shifted to fear of, Muslims being fifth columnists and infiltrators within the society became a kind of more cultural problem. We had TV shows, like there was this one show called Sleeper Cell, that Showtime had put out.

*<CLIP> SLEEPER CELL (SHOWTIME):*

*SPEAKER 1: What about our great leader? What are you going to do while we toil away for jihad?*

*SPEAKER 2: What I do is I tell you what to do. This isn't a democracy. We're trying to put an end to that, remember?*

MOUSTAFA: And then by the time we get to Barack Obama, we find that there already have been significant levels of Islamophobia that were invading American culture and really making it difficult for Muslim Americans here. But then it got even worse– you know, under Donald Trump– with his notion of the Muslim ban, and we're going to stop people from coming here until we know what's going on as he said.

*<CLIP> SKY NEWS:*

*President Donald J. Trump: Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what the hell is going on! <<cheering>>*

MOUSTAFA: That actually rose vigilante violence all over again. So during the rise of Trump on the national stage, we saw expressions of violence against Muslim communities, that had even surpassed the levels that we saw post 9/11.

*<CLIP> ABC NEWS:*

*It’s being called the biggest spike in anti-Islamic incidents since 9/11 and it’s not just rhetoric. In Philadelphia, surveillance video of a pig’s head thrown at a mosque, the FBI now investigating…this Palm Beach, Florida mosque vandalized, windows smashed, all of this triggering fear.*

MOUSTAFA: So it's been a really difficult 20 plus years so far, and it hasn't really shown much sign of abating.

NOEL: And so where does that lead us? I mean, we have these, we have conversations in America about our various racisms and phobias, with the attempt, I think, genuinely, of making things better. What do you think makes this better?

MOUSTAFA: I think some of the things that could make things better, would be even just knowing each other a little better, some of the polling data indicates that a large majority, over 60% of Americans, say that they don't even know someone who's Muslim.

<SCORING IN> Haze APM

MOUSTAFA: Yet I'm pretty sure that almost 100% of Americans have an opinion about Muslims. But it's not just a question of knowledge, I think. It's really a political question. There are ways in which conflicts exacerbate and exploit our differences. And so what we really need to resolve those conflicts in order that we can live a more peaceful and fruitful life together.

<SCORING OUT> Haze APM

NOEL: Journalist Moustafa Bayoumi.

Coming up next: since October 7th, we’ve heard from the Council on American Islamic Relations and others that incidents of anti-Muslim bias - Islamophobia - have hit new heights. You’ll recall us doing a similar story about antisemitism in America. But should we be more PRECISE when we talk about who is being targeted?

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: It’s Today, Explained. I’m Noel King. Vox reporter Abdallah Fayyad will be familiar to you / if you’ve heard any of our Florida Man episodes. Abdallah covers policy and a lot of Donald Trump. That’s his beat. But his heritage is Palestinian.

ABDALLAH: I was born in the US, but I grew up in Jerusalem. My parents are Palestinian, and they moved back there when I was about two and a half years old. So I grew up there, spent my entire childhood there and and all the way from high school. You know, I lived a life of, of relative privilege compared to many other Palestinians. But the reality is, is that we still loved, lived under occupation.

NOEL: That meant, for his family, as for other Palestinian families, their movement was limited.

ABDALLAH: You know, we still had to go through checkpoints, especially when we were kids, during the second intifada, that were set up throughout the city we lived in. You know, incidents with with military and soldiers, you know, in our neighborhoods and in places we grew up.

NOEL: After writing many pieces about American politics, Abdallah recently wrote something more personal for Vox. The title: “It’s NOT Islamophobia. It’s anti-Palestinian racism.” I asked Abdallah why he thinks making that distinction is necessary.

ABDALLAH: Well, I thought that one thing was really missing in the conversations we were having, here in the United States, about antisemitism and Islamophobia in the wake of October 7th,You know, we've seen task forces rise up in universities across the country on antisemitism,task forces about Islamophobia. You know, we've seen also, any time there has been an attack on Palestinians, you know, politicians and institutions, you know, try to, you know, label it as Islamophobia. One example is, you know, the six year old Palestinian-American boy who was murdered in his apartment, allegedly by his landlord.

*<CLIP> WGN NEWS:*

*JENNA BARNES, REPORTER: Mourners gathered in Bridgeview Monday night to offer their condolences to the father of six year old Wadea Al-Fayoume. Hours after he was laid to rest, his white casket draped in the Palestinian flag during the funeral service.*

ABDALLAH: His landlord was upset in the aftermath of October 7th. You know, the alleged landlord, for example, you know, was afraid, according to his wife, who spoke to law enforcement, he was afraid that ~~t~~he mother of the boy was going to invite her Palestinian friends, and and potentially harm him. Beyond those incidents, we've also seen a lot of anti-Palestinian discrimination at the institutional level.

<SCORING IN> Circular 5ths Drone

ABDALLAH: A lot of people, for example, saw what happened on college campuses and were befuddled by why there was such an overwhelming police response to, you know, overwhelmingly nonviolent campus protests.

SCORING BUMP

ABDALLAH: So it started at Columbia University, where the president of the university, Ni’mat Shafique quickly after the encampment in April, within days contacted the NYPD and said that there was a clear and present danger being posed by the protesters.

*<CLIP> NYPD COMMISSIONER MICHAEL GERBER: As a general matter, Columbia University and this goes back many years, does not want NYPD present on campus. That is their decision. Last week, on Thursday, they informed us that they had students who were trespassing. They asked us to come on the campus to take action, and we did.*

ABDALLAH: I reached out to Columbia to ask for further explanation, when I was writing about this, they refused to elaborate on what that danger was in the early days.Now, when we've seen encampments against fossil fuel industries, we've seen them eventually get cleared out. But never were they labeled as something that was imposing a clear and present danger on the university within, you know, a day of of being erected.

<SCORING OUT> Phases of motion APM

ABDALLAH: Given that the university didn't want to really explain the president's rationale behind calling in the police, the one thing that we can look at is the history of universities, suppressing Palestinian activism on campus.

*<CLIP> CBS CHICAGO:*

*SABRINA FRANZA: Dr. Anne D’Aquino, surrounded by students but not allowed back in her former classroom.*

*ANNE D’AQUINO: My case is a reminder that if faculty and staff are not protected from the swift and severe reprimand of this university, students most certainly are not either.*

*SABRINA FRANZA: Two days after issuing an optional assignment which asked students to focus on the biological effects of the war in Gaza, she was fired .*

ABDALLAH: One thing that is true about Anti-Palestinian racism is that it does not impact just Palestinians. It also impacts their allies who speak up for their rights.professors on college campuses, a lot of students face retaliation for speaking up against the Israeli occupation. And that is not Islamophobia. That's anti-Palestinian racism.

NOEL: I wonder if there is a counter-argument that when you complexify the language and you say, when we're talking about this specific,smaller group of people, you kick other people out of the allyship. So for example, racism against Vietnamese in America, racism against Chinese in America. One might say that's all anti-Asian racism, we should keep it simple so that people feel as though they are, the racism against them kind of bonds them together and allows them to act as one community. Do you think by drawing attention to anti-Palestinian racism, it kind of draws divisions at all?

ABDALLAH: I don't necessarily think so, though, though I do get the point. And if we were to use the anti-Asian racism as an example, I think, there there is there's a considerable amount of criticism about the kind of umbrella term of anti-Asian racism kind of, defining all forms of anti-Asian discrimination because what it does is it flattens the reality for many Asian-Americans. We see, for example, a lot of inequality when you break down the Asian-American category, by national origin. So there is value in breaking down categories to better understand how forms of racism do manifest and where they're institutionalized. When you only categorize the racism that Palestinians face in America as Islamophobia, what that actually does–it removes, and makes invisible, you know, the existence of Christian-Palestinians who might be victims of Islamophobia, for example, because their culture is so deeply associated with Islam, but they are not Muslim themselves. And there are plenty of Palestinians who are also secular, non-practicing, atheist, and, and many in the diaspora, many Christian Palestinians as well, who are deeply embedded and deeply rooted in the Palestinian cause.

NOEL: Can you talk a bit more about what you see, if we erase Palestinians from the conversation and we lump it all in as Islamophobia, what does that actually mean for how the U.S. behaves in the region?

ABDALLAH: I’ll give you one example of the insidious ways anti-Palestinian racism is so deeply embedded in American foreign policy. You know, there are all these ideas of what a Palestinian state might look like. When you drill into what that looks like, what American plans look like for a Palestinian state, it's not a state at all. At least it's not really that independent.

*<CLIP> MSNBC:*

*US SECRETARY OF STATE ANTONY BLINKEN: The only way to really get durable peace durable security for Israel as well as for everyone else, has to include the realization of Palestinian political rights*

ABDALLAH: There's this idea that granting Palestinians full independence is a direct threat on not just Israelis, but Jews around the world.

*<CLIP> Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: What's happening in America's college campuses is horrific. Antisemitic mobs have taken over leading universities," Netanyahu claimed. "They call for the annihilation of Israel. They attack Jewish students. They attack Jewish faculty. This is reminiscent of what happened in German universities in the 1930s.*

ABDALLAH Now, it's not to say, of course, that Palestinians are incapable of violence. Of course, Palestinians, like any society, are capable of violence, discrimination and hate. But the idea that Palestinian society writ large is incapable of living with Jewish residents that's, you know, anti-Palestinian racism in and of itself.

NOEL: Since October 7, the terms attached to this war, right – so we’re talking Islamophobia, we're talking anti-Palestinian racism or bigotry, we're talking antisemitism – they get similar complaints. One side of the debate will say, “you're weaponizing that term to shut down legitimate critiques of states or of leaders.” How do you distinguish between what is a political critique of Hamas, for example, and what is bigotry against Palestinians?

ABDALLAH: Obviously, when you attack Hamas as a political entity that is an attack on a political entity.

<SCORING IN> Onward APM

People have, you know, the right to be as critical of, of Palestinian, you know, political parties, Palestinian governance as much as they want. When it comes to, you know, how, you know, these labels shut down debate,People have been very free to condemn Hamas, very free even before October 7th, to condemn all forms of Palestinian resistance, including boycotts including peaceful, nonviolent resistance. You know, we've seen states, for example, legislate against the boycott, divest sanction movement. I don't thinkthere is a mirror image there where we’ve seen the same kind of shutting down of debate happen.

NOEL: Vox’s Abdallah Fayyad. Haleema Shah and Victoria Chamberlin produced today’s episode, Miranda Kennedy edited. It was fact checked by Victoria Chamberlin, all-star, and engineered by Patrick Boyd and Andrea Kristinsdottir.

The rest of our team includes Avishay Artsy, Peter Balonon-Rosen, Miles Bryan, Rob Byers, Laura Bullard, Denise Guerra, Amanda Lewellyn, Hady Mawajdeh, and Sean Rameswaram.

Our supervising editors are Amina Al-Sadi and Matt Collette. Our Executive Producer is Miranda Kennedy.

We use music by Breakmaster Cylinder.

I’m Noel King.

<< For podcast:>> *Today, Explained* is distributed by WNYC. This show is a part of Vox. Support our journalism by joining our membership program today. Go to vox.com/members to sign up.

>>

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**