

race-and-religion-in-south-asia-well-not-the-us

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SPEAKERS

Simpsons, Krusty the Clown, Megan Goodwin, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Eddie Izzard



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping It 101: a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. This season, our work is made possible in part through a generous grant from the New England Humanities Consortium and with additional support from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We are grateful to live, teach, and record on the ancestral and unseeded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki and Aucocisco peoples.



Megan Goodwin 00:41

What's up nerds? Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race and gender. I am also the program director at Sacred Writes (W R I T E S), which is a Henry LUCE-funded project hosted, at my institutional home, Northeastern University.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:58

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a scholar of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and history. I help run the UVM's Humanities Center, write books, and parent in my downtime.



Megan Goodwin 01:11

LOL, downtime.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:14

That was a joke.



Megan Goodwin 01:15

I know... you're doing great! Hi nerds! We'd ask "How are you?" but pandemic etiquette suggests that that is fraught. Anyway, we hope you're hanging in, surviving, maybe even finding places to thrive. Let's jump in. Okay, last time I talked your ears off about race and religion in the United States. This time, we are still talking religion and race, but we're going to focus on examples beyond the United States because guess what? (You can tell Ilyse wrote this part) Race and religion exist outside the United States, sometimes in different ways. Shocking, I know, fellow self-centered Americans (Steve Buscemi.GIF).



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:02

Well, good news! While some of my research has touched upon the United States, the overwhelming majority does not. It's almost like we planned a division of labor.



Megan Goodwin 02:13

Yay!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:13

So today, we're going to think about race, religion, and Islam in particular internationally. I am well aware that Islam is not the only religion that is racialized, and that it is racialized differently in different places that are not the US. But, it is both my own area of expertise, and the way in which we can focus an episode that's supposedly about the whole world and racial definitions and religion. We gotta have some kind of things to hold on to. Okay, so the thesis today: race and religion isn't just a United States phenomena. Euro-American definitions of race fundamentally shaped (AND shape) the world's understanding of race, even if local varieties are homegrown. And for our case study: Muslims are racialized in meaningful, semi-consistent ways globally.



Megan Goodwin 03:10

I'm ready. Don't slip out the back, Jack. We've got a new LESSON PLAN, Stan. I love this so much.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:21

Today's lesson plan is to first trek back a little and talk about imperialism. I know, I know you're over my rants on all things pre-21st century but the thing is-



Megan Goodwin 03:31

Never, never! I'm never over those rants.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:34

Okay, good, because the thing is that European imperialism helped popularize, spread, formalize, invent, not just modern categories of religion (like we've told you about before) but also scientific race theories. And straight up, for most European imperial powers, the global slave trade, rooted in notions of white, Christian, religious, and racial superiority, is the economic driving force behind enforcing these systems violently.



Megan Goodwin 04:06

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:06

So after I do this, after I make sure that y'all know the big broad picture, I'm going to walk us through a few examples of how this imperial, colonial, post-colonial soup of ideas about religion and race manifest for Muslims. And I'm cautious to keep saying: this is broad strokes because, like, I'm drawing on so many scholars and archives and regions, but I- I will, I will get over my need for 400 footnotes per paragraph.



Megan Goodwin 04:31

You will not get over that at all, at all. But we love you, we embrace and love your weird brain. Obviously, I, myself am never gonna be mad about wanting too many citations, but, I think footnotes are kind of a visual thing- and the podcast is an audio medium. I really

like the plan of big picture then examples. Even if they are from a bird's eye view, even if they are not footnoted to infinity and beyond. So that is also why we have shownotes and we give homework.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:06

Okay, I- I reluctantly-



Megan Goodwin 05:08

You can do it!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:08

accept those terms... Okay, so just to give us another place to bite in, the thesis again is: religion and race absolutely have local nuances, the whole world over. But, religions are racialized beyond the United States. And second, Islam is racialized in ways that are locally inflected, but also part of global ideologies, histories, patterns.



Megan Goodwin 05:35

Okay, so if I'm understanding you correctly, A) race and racialized religion happens not just in the United States, no matter what I think.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:44

Check.



Megan Goodwin 05:46

And- despite the fact that like, mm, Islam and Muslims, look, acts, are different, in different places all over the world, we see Islam being racialized all over the world. And there are some major patterns in the way that Islam gets racialized globally.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:10

You got it.



Megan Goodwin 06:12

Excellent. Good job me. Keeping it 101: ON TODAY. The segment where we do some professor-work. IRMF! Help us with big picture stuff. Why do we need to talk about imperialism again? Why, why, why are you like this!? Why!? I love you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:33

I love you too. And a good- a good throttling every so often won't do me any harm.



Megan Goodwin 06:39

Oh no!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:40

But here's why. Okay, so you know how in the last episode, when we were talking about race and religion in the United States, you said that several hundred years ago, a bunch of Christian European dudes who are mostly British, French, Spanish, and Dutch showed up in the so-called "New World" and, you know, for funsies, did genocide and enslavement in the name of economic expansion, white Christian supremacy, and global conquest?



Megan Goodwin 07:02

Yeah, I did. I did say that.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:04

Well, I know you- I know that- I know that you didn't know this, but those British, French, Spanish, and Dutch dudes are acting on behalf of and in concert with their imperial regimes.



Megan Goodwin 07:16

I like, mi-might have known it a little, I have met you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:20

I'm just being a dick.



Megan Goodwin 07:22

No, I like it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:24

So, like, imperialism- imperialism was part of your story. And I'm- I'm picking on Megan, but it was part of the story we already told you last episode, dear nerds. And we just like, often forget to mention it when we talk about the United States because the United States is a weird case of colonialism. Right? The OG white colonizers eventually revolted and won. And because they were white, and because they had all sorts of goods that could be easily traded for (because they were white and Christian) this new nation state, this new empire of the United States, emerged from its colonization as a fully recognized country and ally to Europe, for the most part. As opposed to emerging after a revolution, in say, beleaguered, indebted, punished-and-shunned manners, which is what happened in places, uh, like Haiti.



Megan Goodwin 08:22

Yeah, we fucked Haiti up good. We're still fucking up Haiti good.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:25

Oh, yeah. So like the mean way of saying why the United States is really good at ignoring colonialism, or part of being part of imperial systems is that the American Revolution was about children gaining independence from their parents in order to run the family business and maybe like, live in the family beach house. Supes adult.



Megan Goodwin 08:48

This is like when Will and Carlton, go live in the pool house, right?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:51

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 08:53

Sorry, I'm in the middle of a Fresh Prince [of Bel Air] rewatch, so.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:57

Which is to say that the United States, despite most American protests to the contrary (and our alarming ability to meddle in other countries' shit) is- is actually part of the international and European imperialism, and later euro-American imperialism, is simply the cauldron from which modern race theory and modern religions emerge at the same time. In tandem. From the poolhouse.



Megan Goodwin 09:26

Horrible, horrible poolhouse.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:32

We've done some work on this before Megan, right? So like in episodes 103 and 104, when we talked about imperialism as the framework through which "world religions" and "major religions" were developed and codified. Can you remind our nerds what- what that was, so that- so that I could take a sip of water?



Megan Goodwin 09:48

I can, and I will. Stay hydrated. Okay. So, way long ago in the before time that was season one (when we could still hug our friends), I definitely remember talking about how world religions- our world in relationship to (you're going to be shocked to hear this) Christians, and especially Protestants. So a bunch of white, European and European-descended white Christians got together and decided which religions were "actual" religions and worth paying attention to. Because, they were the people who made up the system as part of imperial expansion. Like, this is where you talked about Edward Said and his sense that imperialism had two sets of dudes to do the enforcing the new regimes. First dude (dude with guns), military showed up and controlled the population and enforced laws physically. But the second dude, the scarier, arguably more damaging long term, dude, was the dude with a pen, scholars, registrar's demographers, people responsible for classifying and categorizing and codifying, and telling non-white non-Christians why they weren't as good as everyone else and so should honestly be grateful that white European Christians showed up to, like, civilize them.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:09

Yeah, yeah, that's exactly right. And those dudes made facts, facts. And when they

showed up in, say, South Asia, and they said that Hindus were fundamentally different- not just religiously, mind you, but temperamentally different than Muslims- they didn't just say it, they proved it. They cited the Qur'an. They cited hadith (or, um, sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad). They noted how Muslims had ruled South Asia since 1226, implying that they ruled through might over Hindus who were therefore weak.



Megan Goodwin 11:45

Okay, so, sorry just checking in because you know I don't like to do things before 1980 (or like beyond the tristate area). So, the Brits show up in India in the mid-19th century, and go: "Okay, what are your religions? You're Hindu, you're Muslim, we're gonna call those religions now." And looked at a bunch of sacred texts, or things they decided were sacred texts, and were like: "Alright, well, Muslims, are clearly warlike, because they have been ruling since 1226 (a date I just learned) and Hindus must be weak because they allowed themselves to be ruled for the last 600 years."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:24

Yeah, more or less. Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 12:26

Gross, okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:27

I mean, like, in broad strokes, you got it.



Megan Goodwin 12:29

That's, I- that's all I can do because of being an Americanist who doesn't like to talk about things before 1980. That's what you get.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:36

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 12:37

That's the one slide version.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:39

Totally, one slide. I want to expand that slide a little bit, because...



Megan Goodwin 12:42

Of course you do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:43

It's not- it's not just South Asia. So you're totally right. They show up, um (well they show up a lot earlier than the mid-19th century in South Asia), but they start really stranglehold power around then. But, this- this set of documents they made, this facts about "why are Hindus different than Muslims?" "Why- what are Muslims inherently," "What are Hindus essentially." These aren't just like, internal documents for the local registrars to use in the municipality of Calcutta, or like, uh, like an annual evalu- evaluation they send home to Parliament. Now, the Brits ruled other places in the world at the same time they ruled South Asia and facts are facts, right?



Megan Goodwin 13:34

Facts are fact, subcontinent.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:37

Exactly. So- so this "evidence," and- and I want you to hear that in both scare quotes and not in scare quotes, right? Cuz like, we know that this is baloney. But we also know that it is taken as fact. So this evidence that the British are using about Muslims being inherently violent, about Muslims being unable to submit to anything but Muslim rulers and therefore they are ineligible for citizenship, or proper subjecthood, Muslims as inherently rebellious... These "facts" became facts, not just in South Asia, where the facts were gathered, but everywhere British folk ruled. And this was a lot of places, Megan, I can't list them all both because, like, country names have changed and because we don't have all day. But here's a smattering of where Muslim populations would have been affected, and for our benefit, I'm going to use contemporary country names.



Megan Goodwin 14:31

Thank you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:32

Nigeria, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Zanzibar in particular, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen, Jordan, Singapore, parts of Malaysia, South Africa... I'm definitely leaving a lot out.



Megan Goodwin 14:49

So like half the damn world, basically. They looked at India and went: "Muslims are like this" and then, took over half the damn world and went: "Muslims are like this everywhere."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:01

I'm gonna say yes.



Megan Goodwin 15:03

Gross.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:08

So I want you to- I want you to like actually play with that with me. So I want you to imagine this one regime, one overarching set of legal, cultural, political, linguistic ideas deciding that a given population was inherently violent, incompatible with its statecraft, unruly, different.



Megan Goodwin 15:32

Yikes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:32

That's what happened.



Megan Goodwin 15:34

Yikes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:36

And this is, dear nerds, in part how Muslims become racialized. The British, deploying their dudes with pens, proved that Muslims were this one thing, and that their Muslim-ness, not their Indian-ness, or their Nigerian-ness, or their Iraqi-ness, was the most important thing to know about them. Never mind that these wide, wide swaths of humanity speak different languages, have different cultural norms, or different ethnicities even within one region, and are represented across a wide range of skin tone, physical appearances etc. All of that's irrelevant. Their 'Islam' defined them.



Megan Goodwin 16:27

[blows raspberry]



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:27

I know, fart sounds galore. I want to be clear here though, because I'm harping on the Brits because that is my wheelhouse. But the crucial thing about this period of time is that European empires fundamentally agree on race theory. They disagree on who should win global domination; they are all fighting each other (sometimes in the countries they colonized) for top-dog global ruler status, but, they straight up, flat out agree across the whole damned continent that white Christians are better than, and ought to rule, non-white, non-Christians the world over- at home and abroad. So while there are differences in how this worked in, say, French colonial spaces than British colonial spaces, the premise remained. Muslims=bad. So, I've got receipts for days nerds, but Megan said I'm not allowed to cite them all at you and I have, in fact, been filibustering.



Megan Goodwin 17:31


Okay, I love your brain, A). And B), we cannot have 24 hour long episodes. But-





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:37


People would love it, it would- it would be like 24, but like, less Islamophobic.

 Megan Goodwin 17:43
Oh!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:44
Okay fine, we won't do it, we won't do it.

 Megan Goodwin 17:45
I mean low bar but okay. You can have your show notes...

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:49
But I want to.

 Megan Goodwin 17:49
I know, I know. Well, and even as you're saying this, my brain is doing, like, a really pro sem thing where we're reading David Hume, where he is helping create this idea of religion, but also explaining why white Christians are better than everybody else and everyone else actually just really wants to be dominated, they don't know it yet. So that's gross. I hate it, yes to all of this. Uh, and also a reminder to my fellow self-centered Americans / Americanists: that this isn't exclusive to "not-us," like we're not, not part of this process. This kind of religio-racial language and thinking lingers to this very day in state and federal documents and it's a big part of how agencies like the FBI get their start. So I recommended on the last episode, Sylvester Johnson, Lerone Martin has done a bunch of this work too to show that the FBI had, let's call it a preferential option for white Protestantism, and the black Muslims in the United States have always been a target for state surveillance and violence because America as a state imagines itself as white and Christian. Or, even for folks that don't, uh, think of themselves as Christian or for institutions that don't think of themselves as Christian, you have to be not, not Christian. You can claim to be not religious, but you can't act in ways that we can prove are not Christian, and therefore not American. Plus, you can definitely see this Muslims=danger rhetoric expressed in American foreign policy (whaddup Beth Hurd) and adopted by other states as with China's insistence that they have to put Uighurs (ethnically Turkish-descended Muslim population in the northwest of China)- putting Uighurs into concentration camps because they're Muslim and that means that they're threats to state security.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:30

Yeah. All of this, um, as I- as I have argued in the majority of my writing, is related to this expansion of race theory, imperialism and definitions of religion that we could trace- now, granted, they have different iterations and different pathways to where we are today- but that this is all related in- to the source code of that, like, venn diagram of race theory and religion. So, uh, I want to say this again and louder for the back. Just so you don't think this is all history, this is, as Megan points out, ongoing. When Muslim-majority states became decolonized, um, and exist in spaces of self-rule, it isn't like they got a clean slate. We still see the language of the untrustworthy British Muslim in- in debates about Brexit, for example. In France contemporarily, we see inordinate anti-Muslim laws, policies and etc. around burqa bans. And, um- and as we talked about before, that in COVID, you're mandat- mandated in France to wear a face mask, but also not mandated; you're not allowed to wear a face mask if it's religious. So it's not the mask, it's the person. And in Russia, which was- which was the one time center of the USSR, which controlled much of (if not all of) Central Asia, the anti-Muslim violence and rate of crime against Muslim and Muslim-affiliated people is, like, frankly, intense. And we're still-



Megan Goodwin 21:06

I mean, we're seeing it in-. Oh, sorry. Go ahead. I was just gonna say, um, not to like get in your territory. But we're seeing this in India too, right? Where like, [Indan Prime Minister Narendra] Modi's regime is using very specific anti-Muslim language suggesting that they're inherently- that they can't be true Indians. And that's why they have to be treated differently by the state- or should I not talk about that because that's going to get us in trouble?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:08

No, go ahead. Well, like, we will get the trolls, the trolls love that. But you should talk about it. That is absolutely on there. I just- I just didn't want to use India as an example again.




Megan Goodwin 21:38


I know, but like, I knew a thing! I knew a thing!





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:40

I know, I'm so proud of you!


 Megan Goodwin 21:42
Thank you.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:45
All of which is to say, that we're still grappling with the ways that race theory made Muslims a racialized "Other-" the way that, um, white folks using race theory made Muslims a racialized "Other-" even if those iterations look different in different places, and over time. Regardless, Muslims have been racialized, and even the idea that shows up in a lot of people's common rhetoric, um- the idea of the "Muslim world," as if it's another place... like a separate globe, just for Muslims.

 Megan Goodwin 22:18
The Muslim World: a whole new world, if you will.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:21
Exactly! Yeah. The Muslim World's capital is definitely Agrabah.

 Megan Goodwin 22:28
Sorry. Sorry, you were saying?

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:36
As I was gonna say, um, one of my favorite historians and just all around rad human Cemil Aydin has argued, um (and he's- spoiler alert- he's going to be our storytime later), but Cemil Aydin has argued that the "Muslim World" reflects the racialization of Muslims in our daily speech patterns. Because why would we assume that Nigerians and Indonesians and Bangladeshis and black Americans and Turks and Arabs and Kurds, and and and and... are all part of the same so-called "world" that is definitely not "ours"?

 Megan Goodwin 23:10

Oh, wait, I know! I know! It's race and racialization, isn't it?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:14

It is, you got it.



Megan Goodwin 23:17

I learned a thing. Good for me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:19

In the spirit of good scholarship, though, I also want to point out that racialization of Muslims as a particular group has interesting side effects and frankly, isn't all bad. Muslims, too, use the "Muslim world" as Aydin shows us, to really try to figure all this stuff out: How can we resist colonial power? How can we get a seat at the table? How can we opt out of this shit altogether? How can we address some of the- albeit racist- critiques levied at us? What internal resources do we have to do this? Are we united? Can we be? So this idea of the "Muslim world" as an evidenced space of racialization becomes really important to Muslims. It becomes part of how Muslims, especially intellectuals (if we're following Aydin's work here) in the 19th and 20th centuries, start to talk about themselves and each other. So in a weird way, the racialization modality so, like, assuming all of your empire's were basically- all of your empire's Muslims were basically the same, created a scenario in which Muslims themselves started to use that logic, often for the work of both anti-colonial activism and within-the-system gambits for representation, usually across national, ethnic, linguistic lines. It's where we start to see movements that you may have heard of before, like pan-Arabism, or pan-Islamism, which really, really briefly, are movements meant to put regional, linguistic, and theological differences aside in order to work for a common good where Arabs or Muslims are at the center. And for the record, I'm not saying that all of these movements did great work or even work I like, but I want us to hear how racialization became a space of creative and innovative thinking for Muslims, even while they experienced imperial violence in differing and vast empires.



Megan Goodwin 25:08

Okay, so I want to pause and make sure that I am following. Here- here is what I hear you saying: Number one, European empires did their gross stuff across the globe, and since they ruled or came to influence nearly the whole globe, Muslims experienced that rule in specific ways. So like, European empires showed up in a place, went "Muslims are like this

in this one place," and then went, "Oh, all Muslims must be like that."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:37

Yeah, you got it.



Megan Goodwin 25:38

Yeah? Okay. That, "all Muslims must inherently be like this" is racialization. They get understood as one group unified by religious affiliation, despite the fact that they're all over the world speaking a bunch of languages, look nothing like one another, have specific characteristics specific to their locations.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:59

Check. Got it.



Megan Goodwin 26:00

Okay. Cool, cool, cool. But also, because people have agency and use that agency to find creative ways to flourish in the world, some Muslims found innovative spaces within that racialization and redefined and rethought (and are still redefining and rethinking ideas) about global, Islamic belonging. About something inherent to Islam that, like, unites Muslims, regardless of language or location.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:34

Yeah, check.



Megan Goodwin 26:35

Cool. What did I miss?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:40

Not much. But I think- I think maybe I just want to also add that, um, because we're living in a moment of heightened Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence, that I want to be clear that anti-Muslim, um, vehemence is longstanding, and it's tied up with different

things in different places. So, the reasons people give (if we allow them those reasons) for being anti-Muslim, for being Islamophobic, for seeing Muslims as one group, those really vary. And I would be remiss not to mention, say, for example, the genocide of Bosnian Muslims, which is both about ethnic identities that are local and longstanding, as well as broader tensions around race, Muslim compatibilities within states, and nationalism.



Megan Goodwin 27:36

We see it in Myanmar as well with the Rohingya. Right, where it is- it gets framed in international media coverage as just a "Buddhists v. Muslims" issue, but it's also about ethnicity, and understandings of how they relate to the state. Right?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:52

That's exactly right.



Megan Goodwin 27:53

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:54

And you already talked about both China and in India, where we're seeing renewed and local iterations of anti-Muslim oppression, with concentration camps in China, and out-loud, super violent pogroms in India. And so while all this stuff looks differently, they share a similar understanding of their Muslim-minority populations as being incompatible with the government and its regime. And, also, I want to underline something you said before, which is we see American foreign policy-



Megan Goodwin 28:22

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:22

if not outwardly cosigning this kind of anti-Muslim treatment, then, like, tacitly supporting it. And we do both, America.



Megan Goodwin 28:31

We sure do. And we do it out loud, like when the current president of the United States tells China and Xi Jinping to go ahead and build those camps. And also, when we see American corporations being like, "Gosh, China, I wish you wouldn't put people in concentration camps, but I guess we'll go ahead and just ignore that and keep manufacturing in your factories cuz it's cheaper."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:53

Right.



Megan Goodwin 28:54

Gross. Sorry.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:55

And I would- I would just- I would frankly, close this out by saying that both of these- China and India's- contemporary regimes are bolstered by a global devaluation of Muslim experience, religion, and life, this many years, of course, into the so-called American-led "War on Terror." But also this many years after white Christian empires set about racializing brown and black Muslim folks as part of the project of dominating them.



Megan Goodwin 29:21

So many years. Okay, so to close out our professor work here, racialization of religion is obviously not exclusive to Muslims, as Ilyse has been saying all along. But, we're focusing on Muslims, one, because that's where Ilyse's expertise lies, and, because it's a big fucking problem and has been for literal centuries. But again, when we're talking about race and racialization, we're never just talking about state violence or cultural oppression. Muslims and other racialized religious groups have also responded to racialization in ways that rethink and reshape the world in new, important, radically creative ways that reimaged community and belonging and meaning.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:02

You've heard from us. Now let's hear about us. It's PRIMARY SOURCES.



Megan Goodwin 30:07

[singing] Primary sources! It's never not funny to me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:14

I just- I like that the song and the giggle is just the soundbite. Like it's not just one or the other.



Megan Goodwin 30:19

Thank you, so silly! Alright, so I'm cheating a little bit / spoiler-ing storytime except Ilyse already spoiled it so I don't feel bad. My primary source for today is my ongoing frustration with the phrase, the "Muslim world."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:34

Ooh, tell us more.



Megan Goodwin 30:35

I shall. I was a Mellon postdoc at Bates from 2014 to 2016, and another postdoc invited me to guest lecture on Islam and gender in her history class. So Bates, if you don't know, is a small liberal arts college. It was founded by abolitionists, it talks a pretty good social justice game, and a lot of the students and faculty and staff are on the team. But it is also an elite small liberal arts college in New England, so, it means another big chunk of the student body are wealthy white kids who just want to skii, I am not kidding. So, I'm leading the discussion that anyone who does anything on Islam and gender fucking hates to do the, "UGH. Fine, I will explain AGAIN, why your 'but the women!' bullshit critique of Islam is, and always has been, bullshit." Did I mention that it was bullshit? And one of the students whomst- (such bullshit, and, like, I do this lecture because I know...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:28

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 31:28

...Islamists straight up have to do it all the time. And like it's my- my way of trying to share

the load.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:35

Aww, well I appreciate that, that's so nice.



Megan Goodwin 31:37

It's so stupid. I try) Alright, and so one of these students, whomst I believed to have been a polisci major (pregnant pause...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:46

We hear that pregnant pause.



Megan Goodwin 31:47

Mmm), kept using the phrase the "Muslim world." And I flagged it a couple of times, but he kept using the "Muslim world" to signify this specific region where Muslims were, and what they did there, aside from, uh, hate us, and presumably our freedoms, they were also oppressing their women. So I did the thing that I do and kind of did for y'all, which is: the Muslims are everywhere in the damn world, Muslims have been in the US since before there was a US, people everywhere oppress women- this isn't just a religious problem, it is a people problem. And specific to the readings that he was supposed to have done for the day, mm, attempts to liberate Muslim women both harm Muslim women, and distract us from attending to all the other ways America harms women and other vulnerable people. And this kid was not having it to this like: "Well, I disagree." It was like- and- and then I, who had also had it, said: "That's fine. You're wrong. Let's move on." One of those moments where like...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:56

Yep. No, sometimes they're just wrong. And teaching means telling them that they're wrong.



Megan Goodwin 33:00

Right, right. Right. And it was that moment of like, you are wrong, you did not do the

readings, and you are no longer having conversation. You are- you are interested in my time, but not my perspective. So, dear nerds, he was wrong. Muslims live everywhere. Muslims are of every race, every gender, every sexuality, and even if they are too polite to say so- they are tired of your bullshit. So knock it off. P.S., this kid definitely followed me out of the class and tried to give me notes on my pedagogy. I vividly remember it, I was standing next to this beautiful tree on Bates campus and it smelled wonderful and he launched into this: "So I think you're really great teacher, but a thing that you need to keep in mind is..." Like out of my mouth (as is my wont) comes: "Are you trying to give me notes on my pedagogy?" And he's like: "Well, you could be really great at this if you..." and I was like: "Yeah, no." And he's like: "Well, you weren't respectful of me." And I said: "Do you think you were respectful of me?" And he said: "GROW UP MEGAN" and stormed off. So, as I learned to say in North Carolina, bless his heart. Uh, American imperialism dies hard, y'all. The end.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:10

I mean, also if you're gonna, like, yell at someone, you should- it's- it's- it's Dr. Goodwin, like, get it together.



Megan Goodwin 34:19

Well, that's- I think what I tweeted after it happened was like, my one regret in the exchange was that I did not follow up with "That's Dr. Goodwin to you."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:27

Like, seriously. Get outta here,



Megan Goodwin 34:28

Too late.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:28

If you're gonna be a dick then you need to be like- right? It's like when you talk to the ref and you only say sir, like- just, do it better. Anyway.



Megan Goodwin 34:37

I would have settled for ma'am.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:37

That was a primary source and a half.



Megan Goodwin 34:39

Yep, yep.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:42

Oh that was a lot. Alright. Well, I'm gonna keep this stupid short, but I obviously teach a lot about race and Islam.



Megan Goodwin 34:49

Oh, do you?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:49

And, uh, I locate myself as a white person. And I think that one of the most, um, challenging sets of teaching experiences I've had at UVM has been that quite a lot of Burlington- quite a lot of the Muslims in Vermont- have historically been, um, Bosnian refugees. It was the first Muslim community- not the first Muslim community in Vermont- but one of the first, like, really established, deep-roots, long time here, kinds of communities. Um, and the way that refugee relocation works mean- is that, like, once that community was well established, then the government was happy to, like, distribute more Muslims here. So-



Megan Goodwin 35:33

Yeah we have the same thing in- oh, sorry. I was just gonna say we have the same thing in Maine where we had Somali Muslim, um, asylum seekers in Lewiston and that, yeah, that community now has a really vibrant and also vexed relationship with the town of Lewiston.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:50

Yeah, so what's interesting about the Muslim community in Vermont (and this might be further afield than anyone wants to be) is that it's like actually, really both pluralistic- like, it is a hodgepodge of people from the world over with different ethnicities and languages and backgrounds- but also that creates tensions internally, right? Anyway, one of the things that's vexing at UVM is that quite a lot of the Muslim students are white.



Megan Goodwin 36:17

Hmm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:18

Right, because Bosnians are European. And many of this second-generation of like the children of, um, asylum- new Americans and asylum seekers, is just now, and like, for the last couple years, being college-aged, and, like, a little bit older, but like fully second gen, not 1.5 gen.



Megan Goodwin 36:21

Yeah, yup. Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:40

And so in a lot of classes, we will have very tense exchanges about what Muslims "really are." And what my (predominantly white) students want to say is brown, Muslims are brown, which is, again, problematic, if not altogether incorrect. But when you talk about it, and then watch students fundamentally not believe that Muslims that are not converts could also be both European and white. It's the moment where I'm like, Uh huh. Uh huh. The thing that we were gonna do in this class was talk about art. But the thing that we are doing is now talking about the racialization of Islam, because that thing that you just said, dear racist student, needs to be, like, nipped in the bud.



Megan Goodwin 37:29

Yup, yup.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:30

And we need to- we need to unpack your assumptions, here. And like, that's how we know Islam is racialized, because it can't be this thing that it is.



Megan Goodwin 37:41

Yeah, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:43

Yeah. Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 37:44

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:44

Yeah. And I could talk for days...



Megan Goodwin 37:45

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:45

...about how, um- the violence of that. It is the thing I talk about every single semester with my Bosniak students, because imagine having your family, um- definitionally, you are here because your people experienced genocide,



Megan Goodwin 38:02

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:03

and to be so erased from a common knowledge that not only does no one know about

that trauma, they fundamentally cease to believe that you exist.



Megan Goodwin 38:17

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:17

It is such a violent space that we talk about, often in ways that, you know, when I taught in North Carolina, that simply wasn't the demography of who is in our classrooms. And so it's a different challenge. But for me, the primary sources, I watched this play out in really fascinating ways, just given the wealth of- of humans that come through my class at UVM.



Megan Goodwin 38:37

Yeah, that's hard. I- I am reminded of having a conversation shortly after the 2016 election with a Turkish colleague, who was baffled that he was stopped at the airport, flying back from Turkey. Um, and I said: "Well... yes, that is what happens to- to folks who are racialized as Muslim, uh, at the airport." and he said: "But I'm Turkish, I'm white." And I said, "Not at the airport you're not." And...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:10

Have we got books for you.



Megan Goodwin 39:12

We have so many books for y'all.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:14

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 39:15

Anyway, uh, religions are racialized, the "Muslim world" is, and is not, and is, and is not, a thing. And, uh, if you're gonna be a dick, you have to call me Professor Goodwin. The end.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:29

That was primary sources.



Megan Goodwin 39:30

[singing] primary sources! Don't believe us check the book. It is STORY TIME.



Krusty the Clown 39:38

Hey, kids it's story time.



Megan Goodwin 39:42

Ilyse what do you got for us?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:43

Okay, so we've been talking about Cemil Aydin's book, both directly and surreptitiously, and so I want to read a little bit from it. It's Cemil Aydin's 2017 book "The Idea of the Muslim World: a Global Intellectual History", and I am drawing here from pages five and six. It's a really great pull quote that I will put most of on the show notes but that I'm not going to read the whole thing because reading you a page and a half of stuff is boring, I will read you the relevant bits. Ready?



Megan Goodwin 40:15

As Tim Good would say, edit.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:18

Exactly. Aydin writes, "The idea of the Muslim world is inseparable from the claim that Muslims constitute a race... The rendering of Muslims as racially distinct- a process that called on both "Semitic" ethnicity and religious difference- and inferior aimed to disable and deny their demands for rights within European empires" [pg. 5] (And then I'm going to skip down a little bit and say) "Racial assumptions also ensured that later subaltern and nationalist claims for rights would be framed in the idioms of Muslim solidarity and an enduring clash between Islam and the West, giving rise to the Islamism and Islamophobia of the 1980s and beyond" [pg. 6]. What do you make of that, Megan? And then I'll- and

then I'll do my thing.



Megan Goodwin 41:17

Yeah, yeah, do it. Um, well, I mean, let's just start with like, Cemil is so fucking smart. Like, we both write about- you and I- both write about racialization and Muslims a lot, but Cemil just like nails it and having his work to cite makes our work both, like, possible, and- and so much smarter. So like this is another moment of just being grateful for smart folks sharing their smartness with us. Um, this passage, I think, highlights the points we've been making since last season: religion and empire aren't separate, and race especially can't just be a day on your syllabus if you're teaching religion. Race and religion are, as we have been saying, coconstitutive. You are not understanding religion if you're not thinking about race, and how race and racialization created and continue to create religion, and vice versa. Plus, the cranky Americanist in me wants to pay particular attention to the way that we instrumentalized racialized religion. Racialization of religious groups as a way of insisting that "those" people are fundamentally different from "us" (who were taught to think that we were American, and many of whom were taught to think that we were white). So "those" people are different than "us," and thus somehow less important, their lives less valuable, their resources not truly their own. Racialization is often a strategy of dehumanization. So, like, reminder, when we're talking about religion and race and gender and sex and all of those other things that make up a human. We are always, always, always talking about power.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:40

Yeah, yeah. And we should say out loud that we know- we know Cemil Aydin, which is why we're using his first name after just pitching a fit about not being called Dr. Goodwin.



Megan Goodwin 42:51

Dr. Aydin,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:52

Dr. Aydin.



Megan Goodwin 42:54

My bad!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:55

He is a friend of the pod.



Megan Goodwin 42:57

He is a friend of a pod.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:58

Um, yeah, this book is really, really important and, um, teaches beautifully for those of you nerds who need a book to teach in a class on modernity or empire or race. But, I think for me, all of this stuff about racialization and power is really, really important. And I- I also want to point out that what Aydin does so well is that he is really clear about how the racialization of Muslims starts as an imperial project, but then imperial subjects rally in some ways around this phraseology. So you have people writing their own histories that go back in time, above and beyond, what- what the "Muslim world" as a phrase had ever done in real life, and remake their worlds around it. And I think that- I think that what I'm so- what I like about this passage, what I like about this book so much, is that it is so clear that the process of racialization is cataclysmic, it changes everything. And yet, it changes things, like, in ways that are innovative, and creative and interesting, and that aren't just violent and oppressive and horrific. Which isn't to say that we should be excited about and, like, "Oh, yeah, that- that created this thing and that's good." No, no, no, no, dear nerds. But I think that why I value Aydin and why I picked this selection is that he makes no bones about the legacies of- of racialization where you get Islam-versus-everyone, like get out of here, but also that it becomes this unifying factor. And one of the major drives of anti-colonial movements was this idea of like, well, if we're all the same, then, like, we should have a meeting! Like what if, we had this meeting and we, like, wrote letters and we thought with each other because this- this fucking regime shit sucks! Like, what if- what if we united against that? And- and- and you know I love a union, so...



Megan Goodwin 45:16

There is power in a union.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:17

But yeah, this idea that race and religion are not separable is crucial for any of us who talk about Islam and so if you are doing that, stop it.



Megan Goodwin 45:35

Don't pack up your stuff yet, nerds! You've got HOMEWORK.



Simpsons 45:37

Homework? What homework?



Megan Goodwin 45:39

Nerds, you know by now that talking too fast is kind of our thing. So if you missed anything, don't forget about show notes where we stash our links, our citations, things you might have missed, things Ilyse tries to smuggle past me, and we do our best to make sure that there's no paywalls. Or if there is, because accurate citation, that we find you other, not-paywall things. Plus, transcripts. IRMF, you are up, what do you want to assign for today?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:03

So much, I guess. And all this stuff I mentioned above I'll put in the show notes. But let me start with some real homework assignments. So Daryl Li's "The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity" is a super smart book.



Megan Goodwin 46:22

I wanna read that one. I haven't read it yet.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:23

I think you should grab and, um, I will put up- for all of these books, y'all, I'm gonna put up some interviews with the author. So, like, those will not be paywalled, but the book is a book, so I don't have that.



Megan Goodwin 46:39

But maybe your library does.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:41

But your library might. Nazia Kazim's book "Islamophobia, Race, and Global Politics" centers the US in a lot of ways but it's definitely worth it. Uh, Nadine El-Enany's really new book (like, I think it came out two months ago) is called "(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race, and Empire" and it's super smart, and I wonder if our listeners in the UK wouldn't mind a rec about their contemporary spaces?



Megan Goodwin 47:07
Oh!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:09

And then, um, Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana have an edited volume that is chock-a-block with awesome essays about Muslims, racism, and empire. It is called "With Stones in Our Hands: Muslims, Racism, and Empire." Uh, and if this British example about racialization and Muslims titillates in any way... that's- that's the entirety of my book, and I feel silly continuing to plug it, but that is like literally the entirety of my book. So I will link to maybe some podcast interviews that I've given about it.



Megan Goodwin 47:44
Love it!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:44

And you can- you can check those out. I'll stop there.



Megan Goodwin 47:48

I'm kind of impressed that we made it through an entire episode about Muslims and Brits and racialization. And you didn't mention the East India Company or rifles. So-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:57

I'm, you know, I know what you can't handle anymore. And it's not-



Megan Goodwin 48:01

The fucking rifles. I read all of Ilyse's book and so should you. Obviously, also Dr. Aydin's "The Idea of the Muslim World" so good, so smart, read all of that. Uh, friend of the pod Simran Jeet Singh did a piece last year for Religion News Service called "A pat-down at the airport passes the shame of racial profiling to my 3-year-old", where he talks about... being racially profiled at the airport in front of his three year old and it is devastating but also shows the way that racialization of Islam is slippery and doesn't just harm Muslims. Yeah, so I have a thing in the journal the American Academy of Religion, uh, which I don't think I have recommended yet, um, that looks at the racialization of Muslim women in Atlanta specifically, and how a Georgia lawmaker tried to make covering a reason that they were a threat to Good Order and national security and that [they] shouldn't be allowed to drive among other things, so that's trippy, it's in the JAR, which means it's paywalled but like maybe get in touch and I could probably hook you up. We have recommended both of these before but they're too good to come back to: so both the Islamophobia is racism syllabus, and the black Islam syllabus specifically have really good, really smart sources on the rac- racialization of Islam. And to veer slightly away from Islam for a moment I want to shout out the work of folks like Tia Noelle Pratt and Shannen Dee Williams, who are working to recover voices of black Catholics in the US, as American Catholicism has frequently been racialized as white. So Tia has a black Catholic syllabus that she is continually building and compiling. Shannen's forthcoming "Subversive Habits" looks at black nuns in the US (super excited about that). But she also has a great piece in "America" last year, so I will make sure that you get a link for that. Also, friend of the pod Matthew J Cressler just had a piece come out in The Journal of Religion and American Culture called "Real Good and Sincere Catholics" that looks at the resistance to desegregation of congregations in Chicago. And last one, Richard Newton (also friend of the pod) had a recent piece come out on the way that religio-racializing the US as a white Christian space, justifies or gets used to justify violence against black folks. It also has among my favorite academic titles ever, it is called "Scared Sheetless"



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 50:32

Oof.



Megan Goodwin 50:33

Yeah. Uh, it is- that's a- a [Klu Klux] Klan joke that- and, just in case you missed it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 50:41

Jokes are funny when you explain them.



Megan Goodwin 50:44

Jokes are always funnier when they have to be explained. And that is available in the Journal of Religion and Violence. So, I will see if I can get you some public-facing, um, auxiliary work to give you a sense of what both Cressler and Richard are working on. They're good. They're smart. You should read them. Uh, well, gang, that's it for us today. Thank you for listening. Thank you to our transcription Captain Katherine Brennan whose work helps make this podcast accessible. As usual, come yell at us or with us on Twitter.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:17

You can find Megan on twitter @mpgphd and Ilyse, that's me, @profirmf or the show @keepingit_101 find the website at keepingit101.com, that's where we stash all the goodies. And with that, peace out nerds.



Megan Goodwin 51:38

Do your homework, it's on the syllabus.



Eddie Izzard 51:57

And we built up empires, we stole countries that's what you- that's how you build an empire. We stole countries with the cunning use of flags, yeah. Just sail around the world and stick a flag in. "I claim India for Britain." "You can't claim us, we live here! 500 million of us!" "Do you have a flag?" "We don't need a bloody flag- this is our country you bastard." "No flag, no country, you can't have one. That's the rules that I've just made up. And I'm backing us up with this gun that was lent from the National Rifle Association."