Ear to Asia podcast

Title: The legacy of the War on Terror for Muslims in the West

Description: Although the rising popularity of the political far-right in Western liberal democracies has shifted Australia's security gaze away from Islamic terrorism, two decades of terrorism countermeasures has left scars on Muslim communities down under and elsewhere. So how has living under the yoke of the War on Terror influenced how Muslims see themselves and their place in Western societies? What impact has this environment of suspicion and fear had on the generation of young Muslims who came of age during this period? Researchers of Muslim societies in the West Professor Michael Humphrey and Dr Jan Ali examine the ongoing impacts of the War on Terror with presenter Peter Clarke. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

Voiceover:

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Peter Clarke:

Hello, I'm Peter Clarke. This is Ear to Asia.

Michael Humphrey:

So in Australia, it appears that things have quietened down in terms of the dynamic of politics and how Muslims are no longer a major focus. But in terms of the war on terror, unfortunately that link between external events and how people will be regarded will be a constant theme, I think, in the contingency of where one sits and how one's regarded and the question of inclusion within Australian society.

Jan Ali:

I think the way forward would be to move away from othering Muslims to de-othering Muslims, which means that we have to start thinking about people in this country as all belonging to the nation state, and that when we begin to isolate individual communities and start to authorise them, we are not solving anyone's problem.

Peter Clarke:

In this episode, the legacy of the war on terror for Muslims in the West.

Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.

With the rising popularity of far-right political parties and figures in Western liberal democracies, Australia's security focus is shifting away from Islamic terrorism, the primary concern after the 9/11 and subsequent extremist attacks on Western targets towards white supremacists and the far-right. This change comes around two decades after the Australian government enacted some of the strictest counter-terrorism measures in the Western world in response to 9/11 and in support of George W. Bush's war on terror. These measures as well as Australia's involvement in the invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq took a heavy toll on Muslim communities who bore the brunt of these policy shifts. In Australia and elsewhere, constant surveillance of domestic

Muslim communities bred fear, anxiety, and self-censorship, while mainstream media outlets were free to amplify stereotypes with little accountability.

So how has living under the shadow of the war on terror influenced how Muslims see themselves and their place in Western societies? What impact has this environment of suspicion and fear had on the generation of young Muslims who came of age during this period? And what steps can and should be taken to repair the damage of the past two decades? With me to discuss the legacy of the war on terror on the lives of Muslims in Australia and other Western nations are researchers of Muslim societies in the West, Professor Michael Humphrey from the University of Sydney and Dr. Jan Ali from Western Sydney University. Michael and Jan, welcome to Ear to Asia.

Michael Humphrey:

Thank you.

Jan Ali:

Thank you.

Peter Clarke:

As an opening gambit, Michael, and I'll come to you in a moment, Jan, what is your general overview of how Muslims were perceived by Australian citizens and how they perceive themselves in the Australian society before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA and after? What were the key shifts in those perceptions, Michael?

Michael Humphrey:

Well, I think the key shifts are in the context of immigrant societies in which Muslim communities from different countries saw themselves as members of diverse multicultural societies in which they were coming with the expectations of migration of better life opportunities for children. And then in the context of ethnic politics was rapidly overturned with the 9/11 event because it was experienced as a global event. And suddenly, Muslims as a kind of collective identity were transformed from immigrant communities to a homogenised other and potential threat. So it was a radical shakeup.

Peter Clarke:

Jan, your overview and just bearing in mind listening to Michael then, there were many tributaries feeding into that relabeling, if you like, including as I alluded to a moment ago, George W. Bush's war on terror. How do you see those key shifts?

Jan Ali:

I think I concur with Michael. The original immigrants to Western societies, for instance, to Australia where Muslims migrated, they basically arrived in these Western countries, including Australia, for a better life. And so they were actually participating, if you like, in this multicultural society which was presented to them as a paradisaical country, if you like, or place. And that was totally changed with the events of September 11 where they became targets of political leaders and media journalists and policymakers. Whilst Muslims generally have been migrating into Western countries as ethnic groups and therefore separate entities were suddenly lumped into a single collectivity as one homogenous group, which actually was problematic because Muslims are generally from different ethnic and parochial backgrounds, including different sectarian and ideological backgrounds as well. And so lumping them together was going against reality, so to speak, and that was hugely problematic. And I think that continues to happen even today.

Peter Clarke:

Jan, keeping that before and after lens on, how fertile were the fields within our society for the sowing of those seeds of the labelling or relabeling, do you think?

Jan Ali:

I think Muslims have always been the other from a Western perspective. We can go all the way to crusades. But I think the Afghanistan invasion and the invasion of Iraq subsequently made Muslims more of a target now than before, and the landscape has changed for them dramatically in recent years.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, your take on that. And I'm just thinking as I'm listening to Jan, the increasing foregrounding Christianity, even amongst our leaders like Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott, et cetera. What other elements do you see being part of those tributaries moving into, flowing into the shifting of perceptions?

Michael Humphrey:

I started work as an academic researcher in the late '70s on Muslim communities arriving in Australia. And the perspective then was very different. And it really was very different in different parts of the world. In Europe, of course there was a colonial relationship, especially Britain and France. But in Australia, that relationship didn't exist. And the largest communities at that point were people from Turkey, not only Turks but also Kurds arriving as essentially an extension of migrant labour programmes, and Lebanese coming from the civil war.

And so the questions at that point were much more the integration of migrants in the context of a acceptance, a greater acceptance of diversity. So 9/11, the impact of 9/11 brought a Middle East politics and external events into the community in a way that dramatically revealed the contingency of the process of settlement in a country like Australia. In other words, they were no longer really in control of the major factors that would determine how they were going to be seen and the terms under which they were going to be accepted in the society.

Peter Clarke:

Was Australia at that time, before 9/11, essentially perceived by most citizens as a secular society, or was that really an illusion and it really was primarily a Christian society or a Christian-based society?

Michael Humphrey:

I think this religious emphasis is a much more of a post-9/11 kind of perspective. Because multiculturalism, in a sense was a pushback against the priority of white Anglo-Saxon Christian culture, and to accept the reality of the diversity of the population that was arriving in Australia and increasingly growing and becoming extremely diverse. And in Australia, while certain political leaders may have emphasised their Christianity, it hasn't been the major theme of politics, not like in the United States. So here, it was perceived as a secular society in a sense, an open society, and that was in a sense the opportunity of multiculturalism was to allow that diversity.

Peter Clarke:

And Jan, I've been putting the emphasis just as an opening, contextualising on religion, but of course it's intertwined, isn't it? Obviously with cultural practises and differing cultural expressions of Islam in Australia and around the world, of course. So how important is that intertwining of culture in terms of even obvious things like hijab and full facial coverings, et cetera, from differing cultural groups? How important were those cultural contributions within the religion?

Jan Ali:

I think they were important during early migration, and we are talking about 30, 40 years ago. But that definitely is changing, both in Western countries as well as in Muslim majority countries where what we might call cultural Islam is being countered by what we might call scriptural Islam under the guise of revivalism or religious revivalism. And what we see now is a dichotomy between cultural Islam and scriptural Islam or revived Islam. And the revived Islam is very much a product of young Muslims who are now more educated and actually have access to religious texts and materials, and of course with the benefit of education, are able to move away from cultural Islam to more scriptural-based Islam. And you'll find that especially the young Muslims, both men and women are moving towards that.

And you mentioned about hijab. That is one manifestation of that, if you like, scriptural Islam or revived Islam. And I think that trajectory is forever more intensifying in contemporary period. More and more men and women are moving towards that kind of religious practise than what we might call cultural Islam. So certain things that were considered to be alien to Islam but entered into Islam as Islamic practise have been now countered particularly by educated class, if you like.

Peter Clarke:

Let's together now examine that Australian related to the response after 9/11 that I alluded to in my opening. Within months of 9/11, the Australian government enacted a raft of counter-terrorism measures which some analysts describe as the most rigid, the most stringent in a Western democracy. So Michael, just summarise for us what are the hallmark characteristics of those countermeasures, both then and as they've evolved?

Michael Humphrey:

Well, counter-terrorism as a kind of way of framing a crime or potential crime or prevention of crime shifts the focus of prosecutions of criminal acts, things that have been done, to things that may happen or people have the intention of committing. So the focus of these laws becomes how to find out people who might be planning or might have the intention to commit these crimes. And what happened with the legislation was it extended notions of traditional criminal responsibility, granted intrusive powers to police and intelligence agencies, limited media reporting in the public interest, and allowed for secretive trials. And between 2001 and 2021, there's some 92 counter-terrorism laws that have been enacted. So it is certainly a huge amount of legislation to address these. These laws are not just an Australian initiative. The homogenization of Muslims, it's also reflected in the harmonisation of counter-terrorism laws. And many Australian laws reflected particularly UK law in the process of internationally coordinating the policing, the intelligence. All these things become part of a new development of the national security state and harmonisation of judicial processes.

Peter Clarke:

So it's fair to say the hallmarks were largely pre-crime or having an intention to commit a terrorist crime. They were some of the key characteristics of the legislation as it came forward.

Michael Humphrey:

That's right. And in fact, if you look at the prosecutions that occurred in the first decade and second decade, overwhelmingly in the first decade, there were prosecutions for the intention to foil, to prevent. And there was only, I think, two people convicted of terrorist crimes, which was the Parramatta incident where a police accountant Chang was murdered by a young Muslim. And so overwhelmingly, yeah, these laws have been about intention and planning and prevention.

Peter Clarke:

So Jan, as you look back now and today as well, look at the landscape of that evolving counter-terrorist legislation in Australia, what are the main things that stand out for you?

Jan Ali:

Well, I do acknowledge that the policymakers and the lawmakers had the intention of, I suppose, curbing terrorism happening in Australia and therefore enacting laws. But I think given the context, although the lawmakers, policymakers, politicians would have us believe that it was not necessarily targeting a particular group such as Muslims, but in fact it originated or emanated from the 9/11 context. So we cannot deny that. And therefore, the obvious characteristic of these countermeasures were to target or were targeting Muslims and their faith in an attempt to securitize Muslims. And some of my colleagues and I actually argue that the acts that took place under the guise of the terror would quite easily pass for criminal acts and should have been prosecuted under that or under those acts. But again, there was a political interest in doing so, and also Western countries aligning with each other and most importantly aligning with the superpower hegemony like America. And that was only obvious on the part of Australia to do so.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, I guess we can garner some of the rhetoric that we heard from politicians at that time as the legislation was being forged and put into place. We get clues as to what they were thinking. But what's your analysis of what were the key triggers and what were they responding to, essentially?

Michael Humphrey:

Well, John Howard expressed it pretty well at the time. The fact that he was in Washington DC during the attacks in the World Trade Centre and in Washington made him identify very closely with the US and US response to that. But the actual construction of it, of terrorism, has had real consequences in terms of the way laws have been written, counter-terrorism laws have been written. And the idea that these are not just criminal acts, but acts committed by people who are ideologically motivated, meaning they're likely to be recidivists. And so the aim of this prosecution, especially in the United States, has been directed at incapacitating, in other words prevention, incapacitating, people convicted of terrorism offences by long jail sentences rather than a focus on rehabilitation. And that really is a very clear contrast between normal criminal convictions and current convictions for terrorist defences.

So the harshness or the severity that Jan was pointing to relates to how individuals have been constructed or what their behaviour represents as acts committed under these laws, against these laws. Of course, the other dimension, and one is the rhetoric of President Bush, you know, good and bad Muslims, you're either with us or against us. All this consolidated a Western perception of them being under attack.

And that's precisely what John Howard said. They're against us too. We're all targets. And for John Howard, of course, that was only emphasised in the Bali attacks in 2002 by a JI which was at the time seen as an Al-Qaeda franchise in Southeast Asia. So that really brought home to Australians the idea that we are under attack, and therefore this homogenization of a group as representing evil within that rhetoric of counter-terrorism was entirely politically, I suppose, powerful being tough on terrorism. And so in that context of anxiety and insecurity, politicians made use of it for their own political interests.

Jan Ali:

Can I add one point? Michael mentioned this earlier is that in pre-9/11 era, intention wasn't a major focus. If you intended to do a criminal act wasn't a major focus. However, in post-9/11 era, particularly when it came to Muslims, intention became a very important point of prosecution and

criminalization. So intention became criminalised. And for Muslims, what happened is that a Muslim suddenly became guilty by the virtue of the fact that he or she's a Muslim and subscribed to Islam and he or she then have to prove he's or her innocent. It totally made a 360 degree then, which I think is hugely problematic in terms of laws and regulations.

Peter Clarke:

And as I heard Michael allude again to the good Muslim, bad Muslim binary that Bush put forward, that's obviously just on prima facie very problematic, isn't it? Because what we saw happening then was the requirement that Australian Muslims enter into the renunciations, justify themselves. So you have to prove almost daily that you are a good Muslim in various ways. Would you agree with that?

Jan Ali:

Yeah, absolutely. You're good Muslim if you rub shoulders with Westerners and participate in their values and rituals and practises. But if you are kind of excluding yourself and being part of your own enclave to communities and also practising your religion, then obviously you are the other and the enemy. So yes, that's usually problematic because a lot of Muslims who do practise their religion obviously by the virtue of the fact that the religion teaches many great values and moral and ethical practises and virtues, then it's totally rejected because you are no longer part of us but on your own or part of a different enemy group.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, surveillance, and that continues to this day, quite stringent surveillance. What has been the impact you believe on the Muslim societies around Australia by this intense surveillance?

Michael Humphrey:

Well, surveillance has been a central part of counter-terrorism, and one we've talked about the laws. But of course that also involved active involvement and the experience of people with the laws and the potential for detention, secret detention for seven days or not being able to communicate anything associated with any investigation or interrogations made everything very anxiety-producing. If you look at things like parliamentary joint committee reports on various aspects of these laws, say in 2005 ASIO questioning and detention powers, the communities expressed concerns about the way they were undermining civil liberties and their democratic rights denied their right to silence. In fact, it was criminal if you withheld information, discriminatory laws seen as targeting one community, excessive secrecy. So the nature of surveillance was also the uncertainty and just simply not knowing what it meant to come under scrutiny and what consequences it might have.

At the community level also relating to what we were talking about before, counter-terrorism and stereotyping and this idea of good and bad or moderate or extremist was the attempt by police and intelligence to work with the community to keep it safe, but that also had the effect of cleavage between those who were with us and those who were against us. So was it an expression of support and loyalty? Again, the idea that you constantly had to prove that you were on their side and whether or not their perceptions or concerns were valid or how they were reading or misreading or how they were essentializing certain aspects of Islam or attributing certain meaning to symbols, which is hijab. In places like France, and the hijab became a symbol of radicalism as a consequence of the civil war in Algeria and GIA and their action in France. So those symbols become very broadly appropriated and used as political weapons.

Peter Clarke:

Jan, your take on that.

Jan Ali:

I think surveillance or security measures, counter-terror measures, I think were taken under the pretext of a risk minimization, and that was to basically manage Muslims in such a way that any act of terror would not happen. And so the political authorities and policymakers went on to doing certain things with the community, Muslim communities, and also in terms of other activities. So working with the community, encouraging this whole idea of moderating Islam in the community and encouraging sheikhs and imams to preach moderate Islam. This idea of de-radicalization of Muslim youths, even this idea of secularisation of Islam, were all part of this risk minimization, and government spent a lot of money in this kind of measures of initiatives with de-radicalization programmes, providing community with funding to engage in de-radicalization.

I teach Islamic studies at Western Sydney University, which is very much a product of that in the sense that with the 2007 Cronulla riots when John Howard was prime minister, he funded the centre to actually bring in Islamic studies in certain universities, Melbourne, Griffith, and Western Sydney. And that was very much part and parcel of this whole idea of moderating Islam in Australia and encouraging particularly the preachers and teachers of Islam to practise moderate Islam, whatever that may mean. And so yeah, basically all this what I've said was part and parcel of risk minimization.

Peter Clarke:

Now, Jan, one could assume that with that severe threat from outside of the community, the Muslim community, that there'd be increased solidarity. And I'm sure that's what evolved and that's what happened in many ways. But within the communities, were there also fissures created? You've just been alluding to moderate versus extreme and all that sort of thing, and the variability across the community and fed by various cultures as well within the multicultural community. So were there fissures within the communities as well that arouse suspicion of other members of that community?

Jan Ali:

I haven't seen evidence, empirical evidence, to suggest that the parochialized or ethnicized Muslim communities came together when such legislations were enacted. I don't think that there was any attempt by community heads to bring Muslim communities together. What did happen, I would say, is that a lot of community organisation heads started engaging with the state in variety of ways to participate in these initiatives. But as far as identifying culprits, I don't think that really, really took off.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, your comments on that. I'm just listening to Jan there, thinking of the corollary that human psychology where within a group under great stress and under stringent conditions including legislation, there might be a tendency within that group to say, "Well, prove you're one of us or are you one of them?" The corollary of the good Muslim, bad Muslim thing.

Michael Humphrey:

There would be that dynamic, but I think one point to emphasise is that Islamic institutions and community organisations were evolving over that period. And the response of many states after 9/11 was to try to cultivate a national Islam, so an Australian Islam, a French Islam, a British Islam. And so the processes of involvement and community, how to keep the community safe and liaison, was part of a domestication of those institutions. Historically, mosques in Australia had to evolve from very small communities who gathered around each other in various locations in the major cities and built their own institutions. And the diversity of those institutions actually brought about an attempt to consolidate and integrate. And, if you like, authorise, for example, the accreditation of imams as a

process of bringing those institutions together into a more structured and both bureaucratic organisation.

So sure, within that process there would be a tension between whose side you were on and whether you were loyal or whether what was Islamic or not Islamic. That is part of the extremely controversial moment where radical groups, Islamist groups keep on wanting to appropriate the legitimacy of their particular interpretation. So yeah, that dynamic is going to be there in terms of the politicisation of religion.

Peter Clarke:

You are listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. And just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institute's online publication on Asia and its societies, politics, and cultures, it's called the Melbourne Asia Review. It's free to read and it's open access at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. You'll find articles by some of our regular Ear to Asia guests and by many others. Plus you can catch recent episodes of Ear to Asia at the Melbourne Asia Review website, which again you can find at melbourneasiareview.edu.au.

I'm Peter Clarke and I'm joined by researchers of Muslim societies, Dr. Jan Ali and Professor Michael Humphrey.

The dimension we've barely touched on so far, it's the whole concept of and practise of Australian citizenship and that oath of citizenship one takes when one is naturalised in Australia. If you're not born here, you are naturalised. So citizenship, it's very character, its dimensions, that's all part of this, isn't it? Michael?

Michael Humphrey:

Well, yes, but what is more poignant is the whole issue of the Australian government establishing laws and being able to strip Australian citizenship of those with dual nationality. That was the ultimate statement about the contingency of your integration and membership within the society, even if you were born here.

Peter Clarke:

Jan, citizenship. Take that a bit further.

Jan Ali:

Sure. Stripping of Muslim citizenship was and has been, I suppose, part and parcel of this risk minimization in the context of terrorism. So yes, citizenship has become a political football when it comes to Muslim citizenship, and stripping Muslims of their citizenship is a way of keeping the threat away, not eradicating it but away from Australia. So let's say for instance a particular individual has been convicted of terror attacks or intending to commit an act of terror and is a dual citizen, you would like to then strip off his or her citizenship and retain them to the original place of birth. So that's shifting away the terror or the threat of terror away from your own country and moving it to another place. So citizenship has become a very malleable, if you like, when it comes to Muslims.

Peter Clarke:

So notions that we've heard like grateful or not, deserving or not, and being worthy or not. And who actually makes those judgements and those appraisals? Michael?

Michael Humphrey:

Look, this idea of the contingency of citizenship and recognition and inclusion has to be put in the context of what's happened over 20 years since 9/11. There are two dimensions to counter-terrorism

policy which Australia got involved in. One was what we've been talking about, domestic policy, both laws and approaches to incorporation of community as a strategy. The other is that wars overseas, defeat terrorism where it's produced. And of course Afghanistan was one, and then the trick to transfer to Iraq.

Now, the consequence of that has been rather than prevent more Islamist movements and even more radical forms of Islamic terrorism and action in the West has failed. And so when we talk about the stripping of the dual citizenship and the stripping of Australian citizenship, this really happened in the context of ISIS and the recruitment of people from Western countries or young Muslims from Western countries to go and join the great millenarian movement of transformation of some particular region under the fold into some kind of ideal Islamic society. So the contingency of these situations has been caught up in the dynamic between the policy of trying to defeat terrorism overseas in Afghanistan and all the counter-terrorism operations that are still going on in parts of Africa and the Middle East, and the impact of the policies on communities here who have a relationship, either direct or indirect, to those events.

Peter Clarke:

That seems a good moment then as you described that to very briefly compare what happened here in Australia a long, long way away from New York and Washington DC with how the United States itself enacted counter-terrorism legislation. What were the key features of what they did in terms of legislation and the execution of it? How were those measures similar to what happened in Australia and how did they fundamentally differ within that federal republic and then within that US democracy? Michael?

Michael Humphrey:

Of course, the key legislation was the Patriot Act focused on what was called terrorism enhancement and material support laws. The constriction of Muslims and particularly the attackers in 9/11, because it was a huge shock in the United States. The attack on particularly the World Trade Centre was to see them as enemy of freedom, involved in the murder of innocents, and really demonise them as an expression of evil. Now, the approach to criminalization was to really enhance punishment, prosecution and punishment, as a measure of basically taking potential terrorists or people involved in acts of terrorism off the street, put them in prison for a very, very, very long time. So the intention to commit an act of terrorism was treated as if you'd actually committed the crime and you'd end up with 35 years to life for a crime that might otherwise as a normal criminal act only attract five years in term of imprisonment. So it was a very harsh response to anybody convicted under those laws.

And again, this idea we made the point before about the approach to these people convicted on terrorism laws as recidivists, and it was more important to incapacitate them than to think you could rehabilitate them. And even in Australia, we've had that happen. People who've served sentences for terrorism have been kept in jail beyond the term. Now, the other dramatic events that have happened is the London bombings in 2005 and the increasing consciousness that it wasn't about keeping people out of the country, potential terrorists, but also the problem of what they call homegrown terrorism, the threat of terrorism within communities, arising from within communities and people being attracted to or radicalised online.

Peter Clarke:

And I just can't help but recall because Michael mentioned the London bombings, the Bali bombings in our nearest neighbour or one of our nearest neighbours, Indonesia, a very large neighbour and Muslim majority. Jan, how did the Bali bombings play into these scenarios?

Jan Ali:

I think it played a very important role because apart from anything else or what happened at Bali is that a lot of Australians were killed. And so that made Bali bombing an Australian problem, if you like, or a problem for Australia, and needed to be addressed I suppose in the way that Australia saw fit. And I think that the parallel is, again, between Australia and US, is that George W. Bush says that, "We will deal with these criminals in our way." And I think that attitude was also replicated here in Australia, that we will bring these people to justice. And I think there was huge political pressure on Indonesia to prosecute the Bali bombers, and some of them definitely got the death penalty.

Peter Clarke:

So these programmes which have been instituted both in Australia and in the United States, CVE, countering violent extremism"", what are the similarities and differences in those programmes and how have Muslim communities received and interacted with those programmes in the two countries?

Jan Ali:

I think they're very similar, and I think some of the initiatives perhaps are replicated or borrowed, particularly from England where IRA has been quite active in terror attack for some time. And so they had that experience before Americans had and before we had, say for example, in terms of Bali bombing. There's a correlation between the initiatives taken here in Australia as well as in US and UK. So I was involved in a number of counter-terrorism programmes and we had experts coming from FBI and CI here in Australia as well as New Zealand and UK working together on this. And so there were programmes, de-radicalization programmes, counter-terrorism initiatives, and it seemed to be fairly similar from one country to another.

And so I think because of the collaboration happening between a number of countries that the initiatives practically was same counter-terror measures, the initiatives, de-radicalization or what kind of programmes should state initiate. For example, New South Wales was involved in a counter-terrorism programme which basically was to identify where possible terror Muslims lived and how could they be identified and I suppose prosecuted. And so the programme basically was designed to, and you mentioned this earlier, to see how Muslim communities can be persuaded to help the state, in this case New South Wales police, to identify the culprits and bring them to justice, if you like.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, we've been looking at the United States briefly, examining the Australian history. Let's detour just again very briefly to another very different country, France, an intensely colonial country, as we're still seeing playing out in Niger in Africa. Of course they had colonies in Africa and in the Pacific as well. And with a much higher Muslim population, just describe for us very briefly what's been happening in France, including things like the fact that they banned Muslim face coverings in 2011, bearing in mind of course that high profile terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris in 2015 and other related terrorist attacks in France. Just use France now as another point of comparison for us in terms of the war on terror and the life of Muslims.

Michael Humphrey:

Well, as you say, it's a complicated history in terms of its colonial past and the Algerian War of Independence and the history of immigrant migration from North Africa into France. First of all, terrorism in France has a long history, and Middle East terrorism is only really the most recent. There's been separatist kind of terrorism. There's been right-wing terrorism. And in fact in the 1990s, the Algerian Civil War brought the armed Islamic group, the GIA, into terrorist attacks in France. And

in fact, the French developed a much better understanding of what was happening internationally through those attacks where they identified that people were going to Afghanistan and getting trained by Al-Qaeda. And apparently one of the people involved in the 9/11 attacks was identified with this kind of flight simulation training. And when they approached the French, they warned them about these dynamics and they didn't take them seriously unfortunately, and they didn't intervene and grab his computer and see who he was in contact with.

Anyway, so the French have their own historical experience with terrorism, which is quite independent of 9/11. The question about French culture, it is a particular perspective on creation of the French citizen. In France, in the education system, people have lessons that are synchronised. You're taught particular topics and programmes and lessons in unison across the country. There's a sense in which everybody is supposedly being integrated and formed as a French person within the overview and the support of the state.

Peter Clarke:

A Napoleonic legacy.

Michael Humphrey:

Definitely. So it's not surprising that colonial attitudes about how to make people, French, involved taking away their cultural attachments. And so the hijab was a focus of the liberation of women in colonial Algeria. This is not a new thing. And the difficulty is for Muslims in France is that the more radical attacks were targeting the French on French soil, the more the symbols of Islam became either radicalised or stigmatised. And so the question of the hijab became a symbol of extremism or a risk, or was this an expression of cultural autonomy? So these symbols just become extremely politicized and difficult for people to conduct their ordinary lives.

Peter Clarke:

And Jan, speaking of symbology, I guess we in Australia find it somewhat bewildering to see French police on beaches getting people to uncover rather than cover up coming from a slip, slap, slop sort of environment here in Australia with the intense sun. We'd find that very hard to be told to take our rashes off and risk skin cancer. But of course that is what's happening in France to this day, I believe. So just looking at France and again, starting to come back to Australia and compare how we're dealing with these friction points and how they're dealing with them.

Jan Ali:

In terms of the two nations treating Muslims any differently, I find it very interesting that France being a place where liberal democracy, this idea of French Revolution with the birth of human freedom took place is suddenly making a U-turn and stripping people of their freedom and things like that. And I don't think Australia has caught up to that yet. We still allow our citizens a proper level of freedom, I suppose, and we haven't banned hijab or niqab or anything like that. But France has done that. So I suppose there are some similarities but also some differences. And as Michael was saying earlier, that France has had a more long-term experience with terror was we don't have that here in Australia. And so this is one way of managing that, I suppose, in the French context.

Peter Clarke:

Jan, inherent in a robust and healthy democracy which we still have in Australia to a fairly large degree, though it's being buffeted like democracies around the world, is that contest over values and the expression of values, values like free speech, open free speech, the role of women, homosexuality, et cetera, et cetera. Those values frameworks are in constant contest within our

Australian democracy. Do you see that as a positive thing in terms of the othering and de-othering of our Muslim citizens?

Jan Ali:

I think generally speaking, Islamic values and Australian values don't differ or Islamic values or Western values don't differ. There's no religion in my view that actually promotes violence, promotes disharmony. And so these are the values that all religions value and preach, and modern democracies do the same. So I think it is an artificial demarcation that actually pits a religion, in this case, Islam, against West in terms of values. I find that to be implausible articulation about this idea that there is a difference in values and therefore we cannot work together. That's not really true. And I think we need to start appreciating the fact that these religious traditions actually harbour the same values that we in modern democracies do, and we should therefore work with each other, not against each other, in saying that our values different and therefore we are different. And even if we are different, different doesn't mean that we cannot work together. We can. And so as a civilised society, we can find ways of working together and I think this is what needs to be done.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, how do you perceive these evident friction points around values, et cetera?

Michael Humphrey:

Jan's comment reminds me of a conversation I had with an imam a long time ago who said to me, "Look, Muslim values or Islamic values and Australian values and care about for provision of welfare and hospitals and education," he said, "They're very similar. In fact, Australia's almost an Islamic country", which would've surprised a lot of Australians. But I understood his point. But on the other side, you were mentioning questions about values in regard to homosexuality and more liberal views about the individual rights and behaviour. Islam is conservative in those matters, but so are many religions, and some, very punitively. So well, that will be a point of conflict. But in the US, we see how these get politicised so that that whole idea of individual rights and behaviour now becomes stigmatised as woke and identified with a political party. So the danger with these questions about cultural values is the way they become politicised. And hopefully it doesn't develop in our politics, which is really quite worrying what you see what's happening in some Western countries.

Peter Clarke:

So to finish our conversation about Muslims growing up since 9/11, it's been 20 years. And Michael, as we look at our Australian political fabric here, things have shifted. The last federal election saw over 30% of Australian citizens voting for a non-major political party. We had the rise of the community independence, and I don't think they're going away. So we're seeing a shift in the way people are seeing politics, and we're seeing, I think, the splintering to some degree of the conservative side of politics as given expression by the Liberal party. We're seeing a lot of tensions and fissures there. So in that 20 years, things have changed politically and culturally within Australia. So taking a snapshot of today and trying to project forward into the future, what needs to be done and can be done to repair the damage done by the othering of Muslims within Australian society since 9/11.

Michael Humphrey:

Look, I think the legacy will be what the future of the war on terror is in the sense that Muslims in Australia found out that it wasn't just the domestic environments that would determine how they were going to be treated and how they were going to be viewed, but events overseas. It's certainly since the defeat of IS and the demolition of the caliphate, the issue of Islam and radicalization has

really receded. And I think the terror alert of New South Wales police is actually very low now. And the other point is it hasn't been recently the focus of political campaigns and the stigmatisation process that you see very prominently in Europe with this kind of major focus on immigration and refugees and the right wing parties stigmatising Muslim communities and looking at them as a threat within, much in the way that Trump introduced his Muslim ban when he characterised the Syrian refugees as a Trojan horse of IS fighters coming into take over Europe. So the domestic environments are very different.

So in Australia, it appears that things have quietened down in terms of the dynamic of politics and how Muslims are no longer a major focus. But in terms of the war on terror, unfortunately it appears to be something that will be ongoing as a globalised form of politics. And the whole emergence of new forms of technological warfare, particularly drone warfare, which is active across Africa, West Africa, Somalia, those are fairly distant from many of the communities in Australia. But that link between external events and how people would be regarded will be a constant theme, I think, in the context of Australia and the contingency of where one sits and how one's regarded and the question of inclusion within Australian society.

Peter Clarke:

Jan, it has been 20 years since 9/11, so inevitably there are generational forces at work in terms of younger people having grown up during that 20 years here in Australia. So the same question to you. What else needs to be done to repair the damage already done by the othering of Muslims within our society here in Australia? How do you view that? How optimistic are you?

Jan Ali:

I'm cautiously optimistic, and I think the way forward would be to move away from othering Muslims to de-othering Muslims, which means that we have to start thinking about people in this country as all belonging to the nation state, and that when we begin to isolate individual communities and start to otherize them, we are not solving anyone's problem. And in fact, we are creating a problem. And so we need to learn a lesson from this Muslim experience and move away from otherization. And if we are to engage in community building, society building, then we have to treat our citizens equally and equitably and make sure that they're all included in the decision-making process.

And this is a positive for both the Muslims as well as the larger Australian society. And if we can do this, if we can take a more holistic approach and a more holistic attitude towards nation-building and move our way from playing politics or politicking, we will be able to make this country better. And I think Muslims will be more than willing to actually engage in that. This is something of a long-term process, and I think both of the policymakers and politicians need to actually revisit their position so that there can be some modification in their attitude and their approaches.

Peter Clarke:

Michael, Jan, thank you for your time and for your insights today here on Ear to Asia.

Michael Humphrey:

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Jan Ali:

Thank you very much, Peter.

Peter Clarke:

Our guests have been Professor Michael Humphrey from the University of Sydney and Dr. Jan Ali from the University of Western Sydney.

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