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Anthropologist Dr. Nazia Kazi recently wrote [What We Forget](#) , a piece commemorating the global aftermath of 9/11 illustrated by Anuj Shrestha; Sam Goldman interviews Dr. Kazi about the US empire and related root causes of the fascist stew that is politics today. Follow Dr. Kazi on Twitter at

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Nazia Kazi 00:00

It's interesting that even the US government itself acknowledges that the War on Terror is a never-ending forever war... We've got to remember the geopolitics that led to 9/11 to begin with... 37 million people displaced by the US led war on terror... US-created a network of

secret prisons, so-called black sites around the world... The notion of empire, the notion of imperialism is so absent from American discourse... To think about American Empire allows us to begin to understand not just the War on Terror, but the global economic system.

Sam Goldman 00:53

Welcome to Episode 76 of the Refuse Fascism podcast. This podcast is brought to you by volunteers with Refuse Fascism. I'm Sam Goldman, one of those volunteers and host of the show. Refuse Fascism exposes analyzes and stands against the very real danger and threat of fascism coming to power in this country. Today, we're talking about what we need to remember when we mark the 20 years since 9/11, and the launch of the Global War on Terror. We are sharing an interview with Nazia Kazi, anthropology professor at Stockton University recorded on 9/11/21. First, I want to step back a moment. Fascism is a qualitative change in the form of rule. Once in power, fascism's defining feature is the essential elimination of the rule of law and democratic and civil rights. Fascism foments and relies on xenophobic nationalism, racism, misogyny, and the aggressive reinstitution of oppressive, "traditional" values. Truth is obliterated, and fascist mobs and threats of violence are unleashed to build their movement and consolidate power. This definition can be found in our [mission statement at RefuseFascism.org](#). This consolidation of fascism is something that we came horrifically close to in the last few years. But it didn't come out of nowhere.

If we are to confront the fascist threat looming large today, it's imperative to deepen our understanding of how Bush's crusader doctrine of endless wars on the world with torture and assassination out in the open, along with the creation of Department of Homeland Security, an exponential ramping up of the militarization of the police, of surveillance, unleashing a tsunami of American chauvinism, coupled with anti-Arab, anti-Muslim and anti-Asian hate helped us get here. It's important to come to grips with the reality that Obama with Joe Biden as Vice President, not only refused to prosecute those crimes against humanity, not only normalized them, but expanded many key tenants of that doctrine, and in key ways, open the door for the fascists to walk right on through. It's also worth looking at the connections between the aftermath of 9/11 with the growth of a more energized vocal and organized mass base for fascism and Trump's galvanizing role. In that light, I want to share some insights from two previous guests on the show Ruth ben-Ghiat and Jason Stanley. According to Dr. Ruth ben-Ghiat, fascism scholar at New York University, Trump fused elements of the new security state like a tough Department of Homeland Security and torture of terror suspects into his own brand. "It's hard to draw a direct line from the reaction to 9/11 to Trump, but he weaponized the liberal policies and attitudes that flourished in those years. He takes all those seeds disseminated in those years, and he puts them in a package of authoritarian style politics."

Jason Stanley has a new piece in the Scientific American titled [How 9/11 Ushered in a New Era of Conspiracy Theories](#). In it he writes, “The Bush administration attempted to deceive American citizens by distorting any evidence and insinuating falsehoods, intending to deceive one treats one’s audience as reasoners, who one must persuade in contrast Trump and the party he controls simply made up whole cloth a fictional reality for its own loyal audience. Trump’s ‘big lie’ was never intended to be digested by anyone other than unwavering supporters of the leader. A big lie isn’t part of an argument. A big lie is a rallying cry.” He went on to say, in reference to fascism that it “thrives when a population is taught to fear a supposed enemy that is both foreign and yet insidiously domestic, be they Muslims, Jews, as a Nazi Germany, or another minority group. Social media and online influence operations provided platforms and fuel for conspiratorial thinking to proliferate. But it was the post 9/11 era with its nativist, anti-Muslim appeals, betrayal of public trust and failures of democratic institutions that enabled a politics based on rallying cries and faith rather than mutual deliberation over policy. It laid the groundwork for the future success of politicians who prey on our fears and encouraged conspiracy theories, if not manufacture them outright.”

Yesterday Biden, Harris, and Bush all spoke of unity; yearning for the patriotic union displayed in the wake of 9/11. But what was that unity for? It was to wage imperialist war and unite around mass terror against all those deemed “other.” Vice President Kamala Harris said, “unity is imperative in America, it is essential to our shared prosperity to our national security, and to our standing in the world.” So what exactly are they telling you to unite with now? And for what? Despite being branded by Republi-fascists as enemies and traitors, the Democrats are once again telling you to get behind unity with fascists, as we have said, and will continue to say and illustrate on the show, there can be no reconciliation with fascism, except on the terms of the fascists. Fascism must be resolutely opposed.

Now my interview with Nazia Kazi. Today is the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Khalid Beydoun, a recent guest on our pod tweeted today, “never forget the lives lost on 9/11, but sadly, we tend to forget or not even care about the millions of Iraqis, hundreds of thousands of Afghans and countless numbers of Muslims slain in the name of “countering terrorism”. That’s really important because today, as we mark 20 years of the so-called war on terror, we need to put special emphasis on putting humanity first, not America first. We need to cut through the American chauvinism amnesia that permeates society that so insidiously without question or apology, leaves absent from our collective memory the screams of the millions killed or made refugees as whole villages were erased, the orphaned children, crushed lives of widows, the terror that reigned across over seven countries over the course of 20 years of the “War on Terror”, and the domestic terror felt by Muslims or those that “looked” Muslim. To help us get into what we should never forget why it matters and how it relates to fascism, I’m glad to be joined by Nazia Kazi. Nazia is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Stockton University.

She's the author of [Islamophobia, Race and Global Politics](#), and co-authored a provocative and powerful [piece "What we Forget"](#) published, by The Nib earlier this week. Thanks for joining me today, Nazia.

Nazia Kazi 08:26

Thanks so much for having me.

Sam Goldman 08:29

You've been looking at what younger generations know or don't know, more accurately, about 9/11. And I was hoping that you could fill us in on what you've learned about this generations impression of the War on Terror, and 9/11, and why you think that's the case.

Nazia Kazi 08:46

One of the things that really struck me in both in my work in the classroom with students and in my own research, was that those too young to remember the attacks of September 11th, and perhaps born after them, they had some very vivid understandings of certain things. For instance, the number of people who died in the Twin Towers that day; that number seems to have been, you know, sort of embedded in their memories. They definitely know that the first responders suffered respiratory ailments due to the air quality at Ground Zero. But that vivid kind of memory is paired with a very hazy memory of the realities of the War on Terror. For instance, a lot of these very same young Americans cannot name a reason that the US provided for invading Iraq in 2003. A lot of them don't know who was behind the attacks of September 11th; mistakenly assuming Iraq, or Saddam Hussein had something to do with it. They certainly haven't been taught about the systemic sexual torture that took place at Abu Ghraib. A lot of them don't know about the creation of a sort of Muslims-only torture camp at Guantanamo Bay, or why there's a US naval base there to begin with. So for me, it was really interesting to put these realities side by side, the vividness with which they remember American suffering, and the haziness, with which they understand U.S. empire-building.

Sam Goldman 10:09

Where do you think this haziness comes from? Is it just from the media narrative? Is it from the lies their parents tell them? Where is this coming from?

Nazia Kazi 10:19

That's a great question. I'm really interested in the classroom lessons, and how it is that young learners are taught about America's recent history. And there have been some studies done that look at school textbooks and how sparse and inconsistent the curricula are around 9/11. So a lot of young Americans will graduate high school without knowing the cozy relationship that the US had to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. The forces that would later come to be labeled terrorists by the US were actually not just key allies of the US, but were created, funded, supported in crucial ways by the US. So I think the school room lessons are especially important. But I also think young Americans get their information from all kinds of media, including entertainment media. If we look at the kinds of film and television that have been produced since 9/11, we see entertainment media that really reinforces American imperialism. The number of movies that are funded, vetted, or created by the Department of Defense or the CIA is striking. Of course, there are the obvious ones like Zero Dark 30, or American Sniper, movies that are just overtly racist, and glorify America's crimes against humanity. But then there's some really banal ones where you're like, why was that episode of Cupcake Wars vetted and sponsored by the CIA? So when you ask this question: "where do Americans get their information from?" It is such a broad and sweeping set of answers there, because I think American Empire pops up in places we might not expect it to. You could visit one of the countless 9/11 memorials, not just across the country, but around the world, and not going to history lesson at all, not really get a sense of who the attackers were the relationship between Cold War geopolitics and 9/11. Those are things that there's not a lot of room to talk about what's missing from that bigger picture.

Sam Goldman 12:19

Yes. You started with talking about the classroom and what's in, or more accurately, not in the textbooks, but when looking at what's there, there's been this recent talk about patriotic education, as opposed to anti-racist education, let's say. I think that there's a reflection there in what did transpire over the past 20 years as people did receive a very heavy-handed patriotic lesson and what it is to be a vengeful American.

Nazia Kazi 12:49

I think this question of where patriotism surfaces in educational environments is really interesting. It became clear right after September 11 that this was going to be the case. There were localities across the country that passed laws, mandating schools to hang God Bless America banners in their school hallways. It was right after September 11th that public school teachers were vocal in their criticism of say, the US invasion of Afghanistan or later of Iraq, or the Patriot Act, or the various really repressive responses to 9/11, teachers who are critical of those, faced all kinds of disciplinary action. So did students. Students who wore t-shirts to school in protest of US foreign policy faced all kinds of disciplinary action, and that was especially concentrated when the students happen to be Arab or Muslim or specifically Palestinian. We know about a Palestinian student who said the word "tourist" to a classmate was misheard saying "terrorist" and that was put on his disciplinary record. He had to bring a legal case against the school to have it removed. So the classroom and educational environments are especially charged in these ways that you talk about.

Sam Goldman 13:59

Your piece in The Nib is beautiful. One of the pieces' little boxes that stood out to me the most was: "Yet sadly to 'never forget' 9/11 has meant to forget the unfolding devastation of the war on terror. To forget the racism, labeling entire regions of the world deserving of U.S. retribution. To forget the twisted dynamics that inspired the attacks of 9/11 to begin with." What do you think is most central that people are forgetting, or not remembering, in this ultimate, "never forget" culture? And why is it so essential that we not lose sight of that?

Nazia Kazi 14:43

I think both what followed the attacks of 9/11 and what came before it are erased. All we remember are these images of devastation; the crumbling buildings from that day. What we really need to underscore if we want a more nuanced and more appropriate history is to remember what came after September 11th. One of the things I talk to my students about is I ask them to guess how many people were displaced, forced from their homes because of the US led war on terror. They will throw some big numbers out there: 200,000, half a million. Actually, the number is so much larger than that: 37 million people displaced by the US led War

on Terror. This is a number that is so hard to wrap our heads around. It's also responsible for the wave of refugee crises we've seen since the launching of the War on Terror. I think we forget that the US- created a network of sort of secret prisons, so-called black sites, around the world since September 11th. Not just Guantanamo Bay, which is not a secret one — but clearly, many secret and really covert actions took place there. But around the world, there's sort of this archipelago of carceral sites that are off the record. Where what the US military or US intelligence apparatus does, is unknown, and unrecorded. These are the things we really ought to remember. I think, more interestingly, we ought to remember the geopolitics that led to 9/11. To begin with, there is such a vast misunderstanding of what the Cold War was in the US. People don't understand why it was that the US was involved in Afghanistan to begin with, as early as the 1970s, when Jimmy Carter himself and his national security adviser Brzezinski wanted to provoke the Soviet Union into a military conflict in Afghanistan that they would lose — they wanted them to suffer a crushing military defeat, similar to the one that the US had suffered in Vietnam — the lives and dignity of the Afghan people was irrelevant in those geopolitical decisions. I think people forget, for instance, that the CIA had something called Operation Cyclone, which was a series of funding ultra-right wing forces in Afghanistan that would "fight the Soviet threat." This is a history without which we can't make appropriate sense of the attacks of September 11th.

Sam Goldman 17:04

I think that's really important. There's a lot of illusions that these are just different narratives, different stories. I want to challenge listeners to not think of what Nazia is saying as another story, an alternative story, one that you don't like to hear, but is somebody else's perspective, and to really think about it being the full story, the true story. There was a host of lies that Americans were fed to justify and support 20 years of war on terror, really dangerous lies like this was being done for democracy, or the liberation of women, and lies about culpability or involvement in the attack. But there was also, I think, even more profoundly, people not looking at the full set of facts and the full damage that was being done largely in their name. That's the true story that needs to be told and amplified, two decades has meant for people in Asia, in Africa. It's not just that people can't find Afghanistan on the map, but it wasn't only Afghanistan that was impacted by the US involvement in that region for 20 years. I want to caution people away from this view of narratives in terms of remembering. I wanted to pivot a little bit to how you see this legacy continuing 20 years later. I think it's worthwhile thinking about some of the things that happened in this country post 9/11: the lynching of Muslims, the attack on Muslim storefronts, the bombing mosques, the orchestrated terror, if you will. Then just a few years ago, there being a Muslim Ban. And now now, where are we? So I hope you could talk a little bit about how you see it as someone who's really looked at Islamophobia, anti-Muslim. How have you seen this evolve?

Nazia Kazi 18:57

Yeah, it's interesting that even the US government itself acknowledges that the war on terror is a never-ending forever war. And these domestic aspects of it that you raise are really crucial. On the one hand, 9/11 and the war on terror shifted the racial landscape in the US, but it also just kind of clarified it. It became very clear that race was a key component of how American politics played out. It's very easy to talk about the very obvious and terrifying Islamophobia that surfaced after September 11th; Islamophobia that was unsparing. I mean, you did not have to be a Muslim necessarily to be victimized by Islamophobia. The first hate crime murder after 9/11 was a Sikh person. And there have been Hindu Americans who have been mistaken for Muslims. There have been Arab Christians. But I think more interestingly, if we think about, for instance, the militarization of the US – Mexico border, which has deeper roots that stretch well before September 11th, quite often militarizing the border is justified by saying, you know, it's a terrorism prevention tool. I mean, there were these false narratives that were surfacing about ISIS having cells in Mexico, they might sneak across the US – Mexico border if we don't secure it. What's happened is this Department of Homeland Security and Border Patrol and ICE really brutalizing Latin American migrants. In a way, there's this kind of spillover in which fear of Muslim terrorists, this kind of Islamophobia, actually has impacts that are beyond Muslim and those thought to be Muslim communities and are impacting the lives of Latin American migrants. We can think about how the forces that were used against indigenous people at Standing Rock in 2016 were counterterrorism forces. These were counterterrorism firms that were ostensibly created to protect Americans from Muslim terrorists, and they were deployed against indigenous water protectors. So then we get a sense of yes, Islamophobia as a particular kind of racism, but also a kind of racism that clarifies the shape of white supremacy in the US.

Sam Goldman 20:55

Where do you think that we're at with that right now? How do you see the white supremacist threat? Some people think that we're in a better place now. What are your thoughts on that?

Nazia Kazi 21:06

I think people's understanding of white supremacy is like a hooded Klansmen. I cannot help but think that what happened to the water supply in Flint, Michigan was an act of white supremacy. When we fail to see the systemic realities of American racism, then we risk really

understanding that white supremacy is this freakish anomaly that happens when there's tiki torch marches in Charlottesville. We forget that white supremacy is endemic. It's really baked into America's legal system, most obviously. I think the uprising we saw last summer after the murder of George Floyd showed us that white supremacy and its most tragic manifestations is quite often state-sanctioned. We sort of collectively suffer or run the risk of suffering right now from this Trump syndrome, where we want to heap all of America's problems on the singular figure of Donald Trump. Now that he's out of office, people assume there's adults running the show and things are improved, or there's a "lesser evil" is the framing you often hear. It's more useful to think of what we see now as sort of a more effective evil. The fact that the George Floyd Act that American legislators can debate and pass would actually increase funding to police. That should be something that is really striking and perhaps troubling to people who are critical of white supremacy. So I think our definition of white supremacy needs to be revised to incorporate sort of the mundane, banal, systemic manifestations of white supremacy.

Sam Goldman 22:39

Yeah, I think there's looking at the history of this country, and it being founded through genocide and slavery, and that that is enshrined in the legal system, and the effects of it ripple through all society, and what that means for people who don't want to live in that world to dig deeper. I want to kind of wrap up our conversation with going forward. Whether you're thinking about young people, or whether you're thinking about people who are educators and work with young people, what do you think is needed to right the course for people who want to have a society that fully recognizes and remembers the implications of this country's response to 9/11?

Nazia Kazi 23:27

I think the answer to that question is so different, depending on what educational setting you're in. In the summers, I'll often teach a K – 12 teacher training workshop. It is always so thoroughly depressing to meet with teachers who have such a profound consciousness about some of these matters, but don't have the room to engage with it in an elementary school, middle school or high school classroom, where curricula are so determined by the state, and often in ways that really don't leave room for this kind of critical conversation. By the time I get a college student in my Islamophobia class, they've had a decade and a half of learning the state-sanctioned narratives of American history. Maybe at that point, it's too late to change the course of that conversation. But one thing I find really useful is when we do have a chance to work with young learners to expect that they will respond well to learning about American Empire. By that, I mean, let's take the conversation on immigration in the US. The conservative

or right wing obvious xenophobia is often put in opposition to the liberal assertion that America is a land of immigrants and immigrants enrich our country and make it more beautiful. Of course, what neither side is talking about is what are the political and economic reasons for migration to begin with? Because once you start having that conversation, well, then we really have to start questioning, for instance, US policy in El Salvador in the early '80's. How many of our young Americans know about the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, where Latin American military leaders were instructed in the office and science of torture and protest repression; all these kinds of tactics were unleashed in Central and South America. This is the question of migration. It's what Juan Gonzalez has called sort of the harvest of empire that the very countries the US has economically and militarily destabilized and dominated are the countries from which migrants come. Neither the liberal nor conservative mainstream poles of that conversation, have room to talk about that. For me, at least, pedagogically, the one thing I've noticed is when you bring in that side of the conversation into a classroom space, young American learners are really curious to think and talk about it in ways that I think are really effective.

Sam Goldman 25:39

That is refreshing and good to hear. That's an important conversation to have with students. I'm wondering, for those listeners who aren't involved, don't have young people in their lives, what role do we all play in remembering?

Nazia Kazi 25:55

That's a million dollar question, because I think it's very easy. I imagine folks who are listening to Refuse Fascism podcast, we're probably quite often on the same page here. When it comes to this question of "never forget," we really have to be very vocal about America's role as an imperialist power. Sometimes we misrepresent our political commitments as being anti-war. That is drastically different in a lot of ways than being anti-imperialist. If we can start having a conversation about American Empire, we can begin to understand something that tries very hard to hide itself in plain sight. The notion of empire, the notion of imperialism is so absent from American discourse, and we need to make it sort of mainstream. We need to talk about: what does it mean that the US military is the biggest polluter in the history of humanity? What are the relationships between mass incarceration in the US and — this what we talked about earlier — with the carceral facilities around the world, many of them built by private companies like Halliburton, which was Dick Cheney's former company? To think about American Empire allows us to begin to understand not just the war on terror, but the global economic system; why we have regional inequality, under-development, etc, in ways that are far more nuanced

than just thinking about war and militarism, as sort of not connected to Empire.

Sam Goldman 27:23

I really appreciate you coming and talking with us and sharing your perspective and expertise as part of marking 20 years of the Global War on Terror, and what that's meant for people all around the world. So thank you, Nadia. If people are interested in reading more from you, is there a place that they should be going to?

Nazia Kazi 27:46

My book Islamophobia: Race in Global Politics was just published this week in a second edition that has a few new chapters in it. Those chapters deal with the beginnings of the Biden Harris administration, a reflection on Trump's term, and also looking at this legacy of the two decades of the War on Terror. That book is very introductory. I really wrote it with high school seniors, perhaps some college freshmen in mind. This is a book meant for someone who has perhaps not had a ton of time to think about not just American racism, but American foreign policy and the War on Terror. I find it to have been a pretty useful text. It's been used in a lot of undergrad classes across the country and around the world. It's helpful because it is not academic; it is meant to be very accessible, so anyone can pick it up and read that. It is available wherever you buy books, but my suggestion for everyone is to get your local library to get a copy of it.

Sam Goldman 28:38

Awesome. Well, thanks again. You can find a link to Nazia's book in the show notes. In speaking with Professor Kazi about what students learn nowadays in American history classes, I remember what those same classes were teaching back when I was in high school, before and right after 9/11 happened. In those days, it seemed that at least in my classes, the curriculum suddenly ended right before the Vietnam War. It struck me at the time that they might have trouble selling us on anything past that. It almost seems as though the patriotic version of 9/11 taught in these classrooms, the way Nazia describes, has become a saving grace to the mainstream narrative of the American story. This is something I think must be challenged. It was a pleasure to talk with Nazia and to share her insights with you.

But I must say I do disagree in one key place with Professor Kazi. For me, confronting the true heart, what the American Empire has been, from its inception down to today does not negate the fact that there is a vast and powerful fascist movement in this country. Millions and millions at this moment still united around Trump in particular, that is hell bent on doing away with even the notion of the rule of law or the veneer of democratic rights. The consequences of their agenda succeeding is nothing short of genocidal. This recognition informs my understanding of both how all of this works, and what must be done to decisively stop fascism and to uproot the system that it is one expression of. In the show notes, be sure to check out Nazia's piece that's up on The Nib and follow her on Twitter [@NaziaKaziTweets](https://twitter.com/NaziaKaziTweets). Thank you for listening to Refuse Fascism.