International Islamic University Malaysia

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Muslim Dynamics in America: Challenges and Opportunities

Dinar Dewi Kania, Ariesa Ulfa, Sari Tri Stianawati, Erpy Reinita, Rere Jessika Purnomo, Agus Saefurohman[1]

Abstract: American Muslims are faced with immense challenges, yet there are also opportunities within these challenges that have resulted in the emergence of various Muslim intellectual organisations in the United States of America. This paper aims to describe and analyse the challenges and opportunities for Muslims in America and the role of American Muslim intellectual organisations in both domestic and global issues. The result shows that Muslims in the United States (US) still need to bear the issue of Islamophobia with its related physical and psychological threats. American Muslims will also need to face the ideological and intellectual challenges to revitalise Islamic teachings so that Islam can be properly understood by the American society. The influence of Islamophobia in US government policy and foreign policy are enormous, especially since it relates to counterterrorism policy. However, opportunities for American Muslims to gain higher education and careers in various fields remain wide open. The contribution of Muslim intellectual organisations to the American society and global society has always been present and cannot be neglected. Concerning the future, intellectual Muslims in the US who currently tend to unite and work together seem to be intensifying their research and education programmes as well as consolidating various Muslim communities in the US.

Keywords: Muslims of America, Islamophobia, Religious Discriminations, Intellectual challenges, Islam.

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[1] All the authors are Postgraduate students in Paramadina School of Diplomacy, Jakarta, Indonesia. The corresponding author, Dinar Dewi Kania, can be reached at dinar.insists@gmail.com.

Introduction

The United States of America (USA) is a large country with people of various ethnicities, races, and religions living side by side. Initially, the United States (US) was formed from the 13 former colonies of Great Britain, which became independent on July 4, 1776. America then carried out a massive expansion of its territory by buying areas such as Louisiana, which was purchased from France, and Alaska from Russia. To this day, the United States is known as a superpower country. For a long time, we recognised Columbus as the discoverer of the American continent. However, today, this detail has been refuted by various parties based on scientific evidence. A prominent Muslim historian al-Masʿūdī (871-957CE), for example, has written in his *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Maʿādin al-Jawhar*, a historical note regarding the discovery of what seems to be the land of America, by a young Muslim man named Khashkhāsh bin Saʿīd bin Aswad from Cordoba, Andalusia, during the time of the caliphate of ʿAbd Allāh bin Muḥammad (888-912 CE). It was written that departing from the coast of Delba (Palos) in 889, Khashkhāsh bin Saʿīd had taken a voyage and reached an unknown land where he met local residents and returned from this trip with an assortment of unique and rare items. Al-Masʿūdī outlined the map of the land in his book, where the mainland is identified to be the modern time land of America (Husin, 2018).

The arrival of Islam in America was due to the arrival of slaves who were brought and employed by European aristocrats. Among the many slaves brought to America were Muslims. A source further strengthens this notion that the first Muslim immigrants to have arrived early to what now is the United States, particularly in 1875 and 1912, departed from Syria. John L. Esposito strengthens this argument by stating that the origin of the arrival of Muslim migrants to the United States occurred when European aristocrats came with slaves from Africa. However, after the African slaves arrived in the United States, some of them could not maintain their faith and eventually converted to Christianity (Khalik, 2015).

Muslims and Islam in the United States are an inseparable part of US history and studies in US pragmatic foreign policy. Freedom is a fundamental component in US politics; it is not bounded by any particular traditional principles, but rather has a utility purpose. The

main goal of the US foreign policy is to maintain the continuity and ideals of the international community and to expand the US economy abroad. For this reason, on matters of religion, there is no specific racial or ethnic group that make up the majority of Muslim adults in the US. Religious freedom is one of the fundamental freedoms applied in the US, therefore, despite Christianity being the major religion in the US, it has to be open to people of all religions, including Muslims.

However, on September 11, 2001 (9/11), the bombing of the World Trade Center in the United States (US) became an incident in history that gained international attention. It not only aroused US anger due to the many fatalities it caused, but also posed a new threat to US domestic interests. This prompted a new US foreign policy that became more aggressive by way of focusing on finding terrorists, punishing those who support them, as well as developing strategies to eradicate those terrorists using methods that include hunting down international terrorist organisations in Muslim countries and the Middle East (The Official Government Featured Commission Publication, 2004).

For this reason, following the 9/11 incident, an anti-Islamic discourse developed and the United States accused al-Qaeda, a Muslim militant group, as being responsible for the incident. Since then, the term "Islamophobia" continues to develop and seems to be a new identity in US politics, a trend that has especially attracted the attention of Muslim-majority countries. Islamophobia itself comes from the words "Islam" and "phobia", which means a fear of Islam or hatred of Muslims. The events following 9/11 also became the base that describes the condition of Muslims in the United States today. Dislike towards Islam is growing and US politicians often use anti-Islamic sentiments, as was initially started through the statement of the then-President, George W. Bush, who announced to the world that the US has been attacked by the terrorist, Osama bin Laden. According to the US government, the war on terrorism is the battle of civilisation. The Bush administration also asked other nations to join forces with the United States to face this battle (The Official Government Featured Commission Publication, 2004).

The United States of America has become a home country to the most diverse Muslim population in the world. This includes people of all ethnicities, countries, and schools of thought. Demographically, the

exact number of Muslims scattered across the United States is difficult to determine because the percentage continues to increase. Among the famous Muslim figures in the United States are the late Muhammad Ali, the late Malcolm X, Mos Def, Fareed Zakaria, Shaquille O'Neal, Lupe Fiasco, Dr. Mehmet Oz, and Rima Fakih. Important Muslim business figures include Farooq Kathwari, who is the CEO of Ethan Allen furniture store with 300 branches throughout the country, Malik M. Hasan, who is a pioneer in the HMO sector with his private health insurance organisation, and Safi Qureshey, who is the leader of a Personal Computer component manufacturing company in the country ("What is the Truth about American Muslims?," n.d.).

The aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy had certainly left a significant negative impact on Islam, especially among the Muslims in America. Various discriminatory policies were created both in the domestic and foreign policies of the United States due to the increasing strong issue of Islamophobia. American Muslims are faced with various challenges, yet there are also opportunities within these challenges that have resulted in the emergence of various Muslim intellectual organisations in America that contribute to its domestic and global issues. This paper aims to describe and analyse: 1) Discriminative policies against American Muslims; 2) challenges and opportunities for American Muslims, and; 3) the role of American Muslim intellectual organisations in both domestic and global issues.

Discriminative Policies against Muslims in the US

Immigration Policy: Muslim Ban Policy

On March 6, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, issued an immigration regulation, which is similar to a previous policy during Bush and Obama era, that drew controversy around the world. Under this rule, Trump administration imposed a temporary freeze of the issuance of visas for six Muslim-majority countries. The following are some controversial issues of Trump administration regarding the immigration of Muslims: 1) Suspending the US Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days; 2) The prohibition was not limited to Syrian refugees; 3) A 90-day suspension to everyone from seven Muslim-majority countries, namely Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan,

and Yemen. Several visa categories, such as diplomatic and UN visas, are not covered by this suspension; 4) Priority was given to religious minorities who faced torture (in an interview, Trump mentioned about Christians in Syria); 5) Approximately 50,000 refugees were admitted to the US in 2017, which was a drastic reduction from the quota set by former President Barack Obama (Syahrin, 2019).

This regulation was claimed to be important and based on the false assumption that the presence of Muslims in the United States has threatened national security and peace of the citizens. According to Syahrin (2019), some of the immigrant groups were suspected of being members of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and intended to infiltrate the United States. This was followed by the rejection of some family members of American Muslims from the Middle East by American society. However, the Muslim ban policy raised pros and cons in United States politics. Most citizens of the United States, especially students, opposed President Trump's policy because it could create tension and domestic problems.

Counter-Terrorism Policy

Terrorism has become a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of the world, especially the United States. This is because it is considered as a crime against humanity. It has also become increasingly recognised in the international arena since the 9/11 incident. The following are some forms of American policy against terrorism:

1. The PATRIOT Act and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

Following the 9/11 attack, many new policies were made in the United States, one of which was the establishment of a new institution named the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The existence of the DHS is a clear response to the problems of security and stability that arose in the country, specifically that of terrorism. Programmes carried out by the DHS are an effort to increase community resilience by providing the following: (1) Education and increased public awareness of terrorism; (2) Public participation in reporting suspicious activity; (3) Public participation in preparedness to face urgent situations; and (4) Increased and more focused communication between the government

and the public on issues related to terrorism. These were the United States government's efforts in fighting terrorism, though it required the involvement of non-state actors, namely the society and community (Timur & Syakirin, 2018).

The events of 9/11 also triggered the re-emergence of the Orientalist analogy of Islam and Muslims, where both are considered as "inassimilable, subversive, violent" (Beydoun, 2016: 115), as well as other characters that describe the inherent nature of tendency towards terrorism. This stigma is deeply embedded in the memory of the US government's institutions and agencies, particularly the DHS and the anti-terror team of the law enforcement, with policies that suppress civil liberties and attach the "presumption of guilt" onto Muslims through supervision, prosecution, and entry denial. Two government policies that can be classified as structurally "Islamophobic" are the PATRIOT Act, including all of its immigration regulations, and the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Policing as efforts to counter radicalisation (Beydoun, 2016).

Although the surveillance of American Muslims existed long before the events of 9/11, special monitoring by electronic surveillance has become a strategic foundation for countering terror in the US since the establishment of the DHS in 2002. The PATRIOT Act, which has become the basis and legal instrument that suppresses the civil liberties of Muslim groups, confirmed evidence of structured Islamophobia in US institutions. The lowering of standards that must be met to monitor, search, and confiscate individuals and their possessions is considered to be anoverly damaging effect of PATRIOT Act on civil liberties, especially in regards to Arab and Muslim groups. In addition to the broadening of powers given to the authorities through the PATRIOT Act, a programme named the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was formed in 2002, which specifically contained immigration rules that severely restricted Muslim immigrants, non-immigrants, and permanentresidence groups. The NSEERS' "special provision" required the identification of fingerprints and of male adolescents from 25 countries that, apart from North Korea, are all Muslim-majority or Arab countries. The sanction, if a rejection to comply with the data collection occurred, was the deportation of the individual to his/her country of origin. Although the NSEERS has since been annulled, both the PATRIOT Act and the NSEERS are

clear examples of the existence of structural Islamophobia within US institutions (Beydoun, 2016).

Recently, the fear of radicalisation in Muslim groups has become an issue and a major part constituting Islamophobia. The development of a counter-radicalisation or de-radicalisation programme has also emerged and become a major part of structural Islamophobia in the US government. As was in previous regulations, CVE policing is also a programme that targets American Muslims, and involves collaboration between DHS, local law enforcers, and informants from communities. The practice of CVE policing itself is considered to be the "most nefarious" part of US structural Islamophobia because it strongly suppresses the freedom of American Muslims from their rights to exercise freedom of religion and speech as well as rights of privacy. By stigmatising Islam as an inherently extremist religion, any Muslim who appears to practice their religion became a highly suspected individual and is monitored as a "presumptive radical." As with various other regulations in the US government agencies and bodies, CVE policing is also built on the assumption that the Muslim identity and its expression are a sign of radicalisation, and is built on the growing structural assumption fallacy that the Muslim identity is closely related to terrorism (Beydoun, 2016).

2. Developing the International Norm of "War on Terror"

In maintaining its security and stability both nationally and internationally, following the 9/11 attacks, the US tried to develop an international norm and perspective regarding the War on Terror by inviting all countries to collaborate with the US in the fight against terrorism. This was certainly laden with the national interests of the US itself since it needed another "enemy" after the Cold War. The "us" versus "them" mentality became a kind of ideology for policymakers in the US. So far, the US has found no rival in many ways, though some view China as a threat. However, China does not meet the criteria that the US wants. To create a global society, a global threat was needed, and Islam, with all its effects, geographic reach, and differences, among others, was deemed to fit the criteria required by the US. Finally, US policymakers made Islam a new actor at the security level, especially after the Cold War (Shipoli, 2018).

There is a general consensus among foreign policy analysts that promoting democracy is the goal of US involvement in world affairs, but there is also consensus that US foreign policy changed after 9/11. The influence of Islamophobia in US government policy and foreign policy is enormous. During the election campaign, the candidates did not try to hide their views on Muslims and even questioned Muslims' loyalty to America, as well as their ability to work normally. When they (the candidates) were elected, even though some did not share these suspicions openly, others dared to do so. This reflects not only in how they deal with Muslims in America, but also with Muslim-majority countries and the extent to which US foreign policymakers can trust Muslims (Shipoli, 2018).

In the perspective of realism, when a country such as the United States strives hard to popularise the idea of a War on Terror as a moral movement in order to protect the safety (human rights) of civilians, in fact, this notion can be understood as an effort to achieve national interests in a security context. The perspective of realism puts the idea of an "international War on Terror movement" as an instrument to achieve the interests of international relations actors. Meanwhile, in the constructivism framework, the development of the War on Terror's norm, with human rights and freedom issue, have been utilised as a basis for the international movement against terrorism. Common ideas related to human values become a strong issue so that a common identity for countries to fight terrorism can be built (Kusuma & Muhammad, 2019).

The direction of United States policy shows somewhat striking changes that resulted from the 9/11 attacks. The Quadrennial Defense Review Report (QDR) issued by the US Department of Defense at the end of September 2001 showed a major change in the orientation of defense policy objectives. There are four policies (defense policy goals) recorded in the report: 1) Assuring allies and friends; 2) Dissuading future military competition; 3) Deterring threats and coercion against United States interests; and 4) If the deterrence fails, decisively defeating any adversary. In the QDR 2001 report, the US also reiterated that the purpose of the armed forces is to protect and enhance national interests, and if the deterrence strategy fails, it must be able to fight against threats to these interests (Department of Defense USA, 2001).

The military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were initiated after 9/11 as the realisation of the war against terrorism, are not only seen as efforts to safeguard US national interests but also as a form of power display to show that the US is still the influential superpower of the world that can maintain international security and order. This behaviour can be related to the end of the Cold War period, where the collapse of the Soviet Union later gave rise to the US as a superpower in the international world. For this reason, the momentum of military operations after 9/11 was strategically used by the US to show its military strength to the international community as well as an effort to reaffirm the view that the US is a superpower that was yet to be matched. In fact, the US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq showed a change in the country's method to hegemonise the world, which was initially soft and political to a "hard" approach (Kusuma & Muhammad, 2019).

Islamophobia: Challenges of the American Muslims

The history of Islamophobic thought began in the era of European colonialism. The form of dislike, hatred, and fear by Western people towards Islam peaked after the 9/11, the attack of the millennia that tore down the World Trade Centre, which was an icon of the United States economy, and killed nearly 3000 people. Bahravesh in Zulian (2019) states that parties that have a direct interest in campaigning the narrative of Islam as a cruel and inhuman religion spread it all over the world. Surrounded by this narrative, European and American citizens in particular slowly started to believe in this narrative and became campaigners themselves in the attempt to spread Islamophobia (Zulian, 2019). Living as a Muslim in America is certainly not easy because the negative view of Islam by Western people has been ingrained and rooted for a long time, and reached its climax after the 9/11.

Islamophobia that was not an extension of the 9/11 terrorist attacks emerged more intensely during and after President Obama's election. A newsreport released in the US entitled "Anti-Muslim Activities in the United States" tracked approximately 757 incidents of violence, threats, and discrimination at the local level across the US (Bazian, 2018). In line with Bazian, according to Kishi (2017), the number of attacks against

Muslims in the United States increased significantly between 2015 and 2016, even surpassing the peak that occurred in 2001 after the 9/11.

The increase in discrimination against Muslims is caused by many factors. According to Gallup (2011), the US government has identified more than 160 Muslim-American terrorist suspects and perpetrators in the decade since the 9/11, and their cases were covered by media and received national attention. Apart from the media, other important factors have led to an increase in discriminatory acts due to Islamophobia in the US. According to Bazian (2018), the emergence of the thesis "Clash of Civilisations" also contributed significantly to the rise of Islamophobia in the state. This thesis allows the state, the right-wing counter-jihadist movement, the neoconservative movement, a sizable segment of the transnational Zionist movement, and various liberal groups that include the pro-war left and the new atheist movement to unleash a barrage of Islamophobic discourse in order to rationalise the new world order and assure their central role in it. Thus, Islamophobia became an ideological policy channel in which international and domestic alliances and coalitions are formed, and where participants use Islam and Muslim subjectivity as an effort to structure their various political, economic, and military interests.

> All the forces mentioned produced materials to saturate political circles, media coverage, and public discourses to the exclusion or marginalisation of the voices that are not committed to this framing. The case of Islamophobia is the same as the way that the anti-communist and Cold War period produced horizontal and vertical domestic and international alliances and forces committed to the policy. The "Clash of Civilisations" thesis is a very narrow, simple, and a one-dimensional view of post-Cold War conflicts in the contemporary world. The world has been far more complex and fluid all along. In effect, Huntington's thesis attempts to define and reduce the sources of conflicts to simply cultural differences between peoples. (Bazian, 2018, p. 7)

Discrimination against American Muslims due to Islamophobia is a major challenge that must be faced. Data from the FBI Hate Crime Statistics released in 2018 described several forms of hate crimes (biased crimes), which contain several data on anti-Muslim crimes within it. It

is noted that in the category of incidents and offenses committed based on religious bias, as recorded by law enforcement, the anti-Muslim sentiment came in second at 14.5%. Similarly, in the category of victim reporting records, Muslim victims ranked second with a percentage of 14.6%. These two categories with similar percentages illustrate that almost one in five victims of crimes related to religious bias affect American Muslims. This is a large percentage, considering that American Muslims are a small minority group compared to other religious groups in America (Criminal Justice Information Services Division, 2018).

Incidents, Offenses, Victims, and Known Offenders by Bias Motivation, 2018

Bias motivation	Incidents	Offenses	Victims	Known offenders
Religion:	1,419	1,550	1,617	917
Anti-Jewish	835	896	920	484
Anti-Catholic	53	59	63	36
Anti-Protestant	34	38	39	22
Anti-Islamic (Muslim)	188	225	236	153
Anti-Other Religion	91	96	109	60
Anti-Multiple Religions, Group	46	50	52	18
Anti-Mormon	9	9	11	8
Anti-Jehovah's Witness	9	9	9	4
Anti-Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Other)	31	32	33	26
Anti-Other Christian	35	42	43	25
Anti-Buddhist	10	10	11	9
Anti-Hindu	12	14	14	10
Anti-Sikh	60	64	69	49
Anti-Atheism/Agnosticism/etc.	6	6	8	13

Figure 1: United States FBI Hate Crime Statistics 2018
Source: Criminal Justice Information Service Division, 2018

The United States public is generally aware that religious discrimination does occur in the country and they admit that a high percentage is affecting Muslim groups. In a survey conducted on the American general public, 82% of respondents stated that Muslims in the US are experiencing discrimination, whereas 57% of them believed that discriminations against Muslims are occurring at a very high level (PEW Research Center, 2017).

In recent years, since the presidential campaign period and later Trump's victory as President of the United States, American Muslims have faced more challenges with growing issues of immigrant restrictions and anti-Muslim sentiments. The results of a survey from the PEW Research Center in 2017 presented a portrait of concerns that reside within the Muslim community under President Trump's

leadership. The results showed that 75% felt high discrimination against the Muslim community, 68% felt concerned regarding Donald Trump as an individual in his role as President, and 62% of Muslims felt that the American society do not view Muslim groups in America as part of the general public. One out of two respondents (50%) also felt that in recent years, the difficulty of being a Muslim in America has increased. One Muslim man who was part of the survey said the following:

> Ultraconservative Trump supporters now have a larger voice that was suppressed just years ago, and now they're really allowed to make heard what they think about Muslims and minorities in general. So it's a lot of tensions have been rising and fears that we're going backward. (PEW Research Center, 2017)

In the same survey, about half of American Muslims also said that they had experienced direct discrimination in recent time to when the survey was conducted, with nearly a third (32%) who felt they have been treated with suspicion because of their religion, one in five (19%) who experienced discrimination by airport security, one in five (18%) who experienced verbal abuse, 10% who experienced discrimination from law enforcement, and 6% who received threats and physical attacks (PEW Research Center, 2017).

The Institute of Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) in 2019 released the results of a poll related to American Muslims entitled "Predicting and Preventing Islamophobia," in which part of the report contains data on Islamophobia in particular. The report shows that, in general, individuals who are connected to or know a Muslim have lower levels of Islamophobia. Of the respondents who were close to a Muslim, 57% of them had a favourable view of Muslims, 10% had a negative view, and 33% stated that they had no particular opinion. Meanwhile, for respondents who were somewhat close to Muslims, 47% of them had a favourable view of Muslims, 20% had a negative view, and 33% stated that they had no particular opinion. As for respondents who did not know Muslims, only 21% had a favourable view of Muslims, 26% have a negative view, and more than half (54%) stated that they had no particular opinion. So, it can be concluded that the more connection and interaction exist between non-Muslims and Muslims in America, the

better the views that the non-Muslims will have towards the American Muslims (Mogahed & Mahmood, 2019).

Amongst the people of faith or religious believers themselves, between White Evangelicals, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and those who claim not to be affiliated with one of the religions mentioned (non-affiliated), White Evangelicals have the highest level of Islamophobia, followed by Protestants, Catholics, non-affiliated, Jews, and Muslims. There are two interesting findings from the ISPU poll. The first is that Jews have the lowest level of Islamophobia, apart from Muslims themselves. This then brings us to the second interesting finding, which is on the existence of Islamophobia amongst Muslims themselves, whose value is not far from the level of Islamophobia from the Jews (Mogahed & Mahmood, 2019).

This phenomenon is often termed as "internalised Islamophobia", which is Islamophobia penetrated the Muslims themselves. This may have developed due to repeated religious-based bullying or stigmatisation of Islam in the media, which led some Muslims to unconsciously accept various negative stereotypes regarding Islam and Muslims. This phenomenon is one of the most important and surprising findings from the ISPU research, as stated by the ISPU Research Director, Dalia Mogahed:

> One of the most important and surprising findings we got in this study was the degree to which Muslims have themselves internalised negative stereotypes about their own community. That does underscore the power of the media and political rhetoric that day in and day out paints a narrative of Muslims in a certain way, that Muslims themselves are not immune to adopting that idea. (Abdelaziz, 2018)

Educational and Employment Opportunities

The United States is often seen as a country that offers promising educational and employment opportunities. Many immigrants come from various countries because they are tempted by these promising opportunities. However, what does the Muslim minority community achieve in America in terms of education and employment? Data from the results of the PEW Research Center survey in 2017, releases from

the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (US EEOC), as well as studies from some research journals are used in this discussion to describe the educational and employment opportunities for the Muslim population in the US.

Data on the level of education of the Muslim population that are contained in the 2017 PEW Research Center report were compared using three variables: the Muslim population born in America, the Muslim population born outside America (foreign-born), and the American general population. The results of this survey, which was conducted in 2016 and 2017, showed that the level of those with an undergraduate education (college degree and graduate degree) from the Muslim population groups (both American-born and foreign-born) is similar to that of the American general population (31%). This indicates that there is a similar level of education between the Muslim population and the American general population. However, when referred specifically to the immigrant Muslim population (foreign-born), the data showed that this group had a higher percentage of undergraduate education level (38%) than American-born Muslims (21%) (PEW Research Center, 2017). This may be due to the skilled migrant policy in which the US gives preference to immigrants with certain skills and levels of education.

Although the percentage value of the education levels between the Muslim population and the American general population is similar, this is not the case with job opportunities. Data from the same PEW Research Survey showed that the Muslim population has a higher percentage of unemployment than the general population. The number of adult Muslims with full-time jobs did not even reach half of the total Muslim population that were being surveyed, with a percentage of only 44%. A total of 28% of the Muslim population were still looking for work, of which 10% were already working part-time and seeking a full-time job, while 18% were jobless and seeking a job. Meanwhile, among the American general population, only 12% were still looking for work, of which 6% were working part-time and seeking a full-time job, while 6% were jobless and seeking a job (PEW Research Center, 2017).

When analysing the social structure of the Muslim population in America, data on the size of income is also important because it has an impact on the experience and social life of individuals. Data released by the PEW Research Center divided the income level into five, with the

lowest level for annual income being below USD30,000 and the highest level for annual income being above USD100,000. For the lowest income level, the percentage of Muslims was higher (40%) than the percentage of the American general population (32%). However, for the next three income levels, Muslims had a lower percentage, amounting to 35%, compared to the American general population, which had a total of 45% at the next three levels. Interestingly, for the highest income level, the Muslim population had a similar percentage to the American general population, namely 24% for the former and 23% for the latter (PEW Research Center, 2017).

This finding regarding the high percentage of American Muslims with the highest income level is indeed very interesting and is in stark contrast with what is often being presented, that is, Muslims being less educated and of the middle social class. It is also important to note that at this highest income level, the percentage of Muslim immigrants (foreign-born) is higher than that of American-born Muslims. This finding parallels the level of education described earlier. What is also interesting is that even though, on average, the percentage of Muslims who are in low-income levels is higher than that of the American general population, the level of satisfaction in financial stability among the Muslim population is on a level that is more or less similar to that of ordinary Americans.

Based on the analyses of education, employment opportunities, and income levels described above, it can be concluded that even though, on average, American Muslims have achieved a level of education that is similar to that of the American general population, both in terms of employment opportunities and income levels, the Muslim population are below the level of the American general population. This could be an indication of the presence of discrimination in terms of equal employment opportunities. The US EEOC released official data regarding the filing of prosecution in cases of discrimination in employment based on Islam as well as the percentage compared to cases based on all religions in general. Figure 2 below contains data per fiscal year from 2001 to 2017 (October 1, 2000, to September 30, 2017).

Religion-Based Charges Filed from 10/01/2000 through 9/30/2011 Showing Percentage Filed on the Basis of Religion-Muslim

Fiscal Year	Total Religion Charges	Muslim Religion	% Religion Muslim
FY2001	2,127	330	15.50%
FY2002	2,572	720	28.00%
FY2003	2,532	598	23.60%
FY2004	2,466	504	20.40%
FY2005	2,340	507	21.70%
FY2006	2,541	593	23.30%
FY2007	2,880	606	21.00%
FY2008	3,273	668	20.40%
FY2009	3,386	804	23.70%
FY2010	3,790	796	21.00%
FY2011	4,151	884	21.30%
FY2012	3,811	780	20.50%
FY 2013	3,721	721	21.60%
FY 2014	3,549	754	21.20%
FY 2015	3,502	708	20.20%
FY 2016	3,825	1,071	28.00%
FY 2017	3,436	802	23.30%

Figure 2: Religion-based Charges Filed on the Basis of Religion: Islam
Source: U.S. Equal Employement Opportunity Commission, n.d.

Some conclusions that can be drawn from the data release are as follows:

1. The lowest number of employment discrimination cases based on Islam occurred in the fiscal year 2001 before the 9/11 attacks. This fiscal year is the only year from the available data where the percentage of discrimination in employment based on Islam is below 20 percent (15.5%).

2. After the 9/11 attacks, from the fiscal years 2002 to 2017, discrimination in employment based on Islam was always above 20%, with the highest percentage occurring in the fiscal year 2002 (fiscal year right after the 9/11 attack) and in the fiscal year 2016, where it reached 28%. For the record, the 2016 fiscal year was a campaign year for the United States presidential election, which resulted in the election of President Donald Trump, who is known to have aggressively campaigned for values that are considered to be of white supremacist and also for his policies that are not pro-Muslim since the beginning of his office.

3. The average percentage value of job discrimination based on Islam was between 20% and 28%, which is considered to be a very large percentage considering that the Muslim population in the United States itself only accounts for around 1.1% of the total population (PEW, 2018).

4. The percentage of discrimination in the range of between 20% and 28% also illustrates that one in five cases of religion-based workplace discrimination in the United States occurred against Muslims.

Several cases reported by the US EEOC also illustrate in more detail the form of workplace discrimination experienced by Muslims in the United States. Two cases of discrimination that occurred in 2012 and 2013 respectively were experienced by Muslim women who were employed at the ABM Security Service and Abercrombie & Fitch, where they are fired from their jobs on the grounds of wearing a headscarf. During the sentencing for the Abercrombie & Fitch case, the judge stated that "dismissal of a job on the basis of wearing a headscarf/*khimar* is illegal". At the time the report was published, Abercrombie & Fitch's company had received three prosecution cases that occurred at different times and at different branches related to discrimination against workers who wore headscarves/*khimar*. Workplace discrimination occurs not only to Muslim women or due to the wearing of the headscarf, but also to Muslim men. Swift Aviation was fined USD50,000 for ignoring the religious and racial discrimination experienced by a Muslim man in the company. The humiliation, discrimination, and bullying that were targeted at the Muslim male employee were continuous and his reports regarding these discrimination acts to the company were also ignored until he became depressed and was forced to quit his job (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013).

Workplace discrimination affects many Muslims in America. One study that conducted a statistical analysis of complaints of religious discrimination filed through the US EEOC stated in its conclusion that "although Muslims make up less than 2 percent of the United States population, they accounted for about one-quarter of the 3,386 religious discrimination charges filed with the EEOC" in 2010 (Goodwin, Chenhall & Bilbrey, 2015, p. 8). The same study also showed that "the number of religious discrimination complaints filed by Muslims has increased at a higher rate than the other religious affiliations listed in this

study" (Goodwin, Chenhall & Bilbrey, 2015, p. 9). In other studies that examined the impact of wearing the headscarf on job opportunities, the researchers concluded that "Hijabis were less likely than non-Hijabis to expect job offers for all occupations, regardless of status or public contact" (Ghumman & Jackson, 2010, p. 17).

The Role of American Muslim Intellectual Organisations

Zaytuna College

In 2009, Zaytuna College was founded in Berkeley, California, with a mission to equip its students with Islamic scientific traditions and cultures, as well as critical ideas that shape the modern society. In March 2015, Zaytuna College obtained an accreditation from the Association of Western Schools and Colleges and became the first accredited Muslim campus in the United States (Zaytuna College, n.d.). The city of California is currently home to many Muslim-based groups (Massoud & Moore, 2015). Before becoming a college, it was an institution that was founded by Hamza Yusuf in 1996. The founders of Zaytuna College are: 1) Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, a white American-born convert; 2) Ricky "Imam Zaid Shakir" Mitchell, an African-American Muslim, and; 3) Prof. Hatem Bazian, an American citizen of Palestinian descent. Hamza Yusuf is one of the most influential Muslim figures in the US and is included in the list of "The Muslim 500", which is an annual list of influential Muslims compiled by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in Amman, Jordan.

Zaytuna College not only expresses the discursive tradition of Islam but also expresses the critical imaginations of the people who use Islamic epistemology to frame and define a multiracial future as a social justice project and practice (Kashani, 2014). Hamza Yusuf tries to familiarise American Muslims with a mode of Islamic practice that emphasises on self-cultivation by strengthening on their compatibility with Islamic traditions through the revitalisation movement. At different levels, three other Muslim American thinkers, namely Yasmin Mogahed, Suhaib Webb, and Yasir Qadhi, have spread similar ideas to the US Muslim population. These figures have offered expressions of Islamic thought and practice that focus on spirituality and efforts to cleanse the heart.

In doing so, they have succeeded in attracting the attention of many American Muslims in the early 21ˢᵗ century (Hannini, 2016). Zaytuna College has successfully published the scientific journal *Renovatio*, an Islamic journal that discusses ideas that have shaped our world in the past and the present.

Zaytuna College often conducts interfaith dialogues to establish mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims regarding the true teachings of Islam. The expertise of Zaytuna figures in regards to the Islamic scientific tradition allows dialogues to be carried out confidently without the feeling of inferiority. Additionally, there are also programmes on environmental issues that are conducted in collaboration with non-Muslims through organisations, such as the Habitat for Humanity, and state forest departments (Challet, 2015). In regards to the issue of terrorism and radicalism, Hamza Yusuf has specifically warned Muslims against the danger of ISIS in his lecture entitled "The Crisis of ISIS". The ISIS group itself has declared Hamza Yusuf an apostate because of his criticism of the attack on the French newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*, in January 2005 (Abedin, 2019; Hassan, 2017).

Zaytuna College intellectual figures have played an active role in global issues such as: 1) Hamza Yusuf was invited by then-President George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq and advised the President not to carry out the attack mission. President Bush refused to cancel the invasion, but the name of his operation has been changed. 2) In 2014, Hamza Yusuf founded a forum to promote peace in the Muslim community. 3) Along with other human rights experts, Hamza Yusuf was appointed to the US Human Rights Panel in 2019 to provide advice on human rights and how it relates to the US foreign policy. 4) Hatem Bazian founded the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at the University of California (UC) Berkeley in 2009 and is also the founder and director of the International Consortium for the Study of Islamophobia.

AlMaghrib Institute

AlMaghrib Institute is an example of how an educational institute established in a Muslim-minority country is able to develop and become an institute that serves and is utilised by Muslims globally, even in the Western world and Muslim-majority countries such as

Malaysia. Founded in the state of Houston, Texas, in 2002, this institute has become one of the largest institutes for Islamic Studies in North America. Through its online teaching system, AlMaghrib also has the flexibility to access teachers from various countries who individually have been recognised for their credibility by the Muslim community from various countries. The offline education centres of AlMaghrib Institute itself can also be found in Canada, England, and Malaysia. AlMaghrib Institute's thematic events and seminars have also been held in more than 40 countries, including Australia, Sweden, and Denmark. AlMaghrib Institute has the vision to become the largest and most useful Islamic learning system, where knowledge taught by the institute can enter various countries around the world and can be accessed anywhere by those who want to understand Islam more deeply.

AlMaghrib Institute is chaired by a Muslim scholar who is well known among Muslim Americans, Dr. Yasir Qadhi. Yasir Qadhi grew up in the US and has an engineering background, but decided to change the course of his education and focus more on Islamic studies. He completed his Islamic studies in Medina and continued his doctoral studies at Yale University, becoming one of the few people who have a combined background of knowledge and learning experiences from both the West and the Islamic world. As a prominent figure, special coverage of him was broadcasted on the PBS TV channel in the programme *Finding Your Roots*. In 2011, *The New York Times Magazine* did a profile of him, calling him "one of the most influential conservative clerics in American Islam" (Elliot, 2011). Similar to Hamza Yusuf, Yasir Qadhi is also one of the Muslim scholars in the United States who received a death threat and was also deemed an apostate by ISIS due to his criticism of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* (Abedin, 2019; Hassan, 2017).

Yasir Qadhi is also a member of the Fiqh Council of North America, a body that issues *fatwa* on various public and social issues, including the *fatwa* statement on fossil fuel divestment that was released by the Fiqh Council of North America as a form of encouragement for the Muslim population to play a more active role in reducing natural damage caused by fossil fuels (Financing The Future, 2019). Although he once leaned towards the Salafi Islamic movement, which tends to be rigid and firm, since leaving it, he argued, "You can't be radical against your own people. You can have differences of opinion, but you will

have to express them in a civilised manner, because this is your society, your culture" (O'Leary, 2009).

Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research

Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research (YIIR) is a non-profit organisation that focuses on the issues of Islamophobia, Islamic belief, and the contribution of Islam. These three main focuses are reflected in the organisation's motto, which is "dismantling doubts (what is not Islam), fostering faith (what is Islam), inspiring contributions (what Islam does)" (Yaqeen Institute, n.d.).

All the materials and content from the Yaqeen Institute can be accessed free of charge through its website, which not only contains Islamic material in written, audio, and video forms, but also contains toolkits for Islamic studies and discussions. Not limiting to only its own website, YIIR is also active on other online platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

In addition to discussing on issues of fundamental beliefs in Islam to fight the rise of atheism and agnosticism in the Muslim community, YIIR also discusses various contemporary issues and accepts contributions in the form of writing from many Muslim researchers on many aspects of Islam, including discussions of contemporary issues. However, articles that can provide answers to questions about Islam - particularly those that raise doubts in the minds of Muslims or issues that are important to maintain the Islamic faith - remains the main focus of YIIR's academic research path.

The key figure of YIIR is Omar Suleiman, a Muslim scholar who is not only active in theological-based activities but also in various humanitarian, anti-racism, and civil rights activities. Apart from being the founder and President of YIIR, he is also the founder of the non-profit organization MUHSEN (Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs), an Islamic organisation that focuses on people with special needs. Omar Suleiman is also an Adjunct Professor at Southern Methodist University, a resident scholar at Valley Ranch Islamic Center, and an advisor to several Muslim financial groups and donation organisations. He is also active in many interfaith works and serves as a Co-Chair Emeritus of Faith Forward Dallas at Thanks-

Giving Square, which is an interfaith coalition for religious leaders for peace and justice. Additionally, he is one of the founders of the East Jefferson Interfaith Clergy Association.

Through his active work in community service, he has received a number of awards, including the Outstanding Civic Achievement from the state government of New Orleans, and an award from The Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University and Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives. Apart from being on the list of the "25 Muslim American Change Makers" released by CNN, he is also included in the list of "The Muslim 500" alongside Hamza Yusuf ("Omar Soleiman," 2020). His writings and interviews have been published in various media, including CNN, Al Jazeera, *USA Today*, *The Guardian*, *HuffPost*, and *The Dallas Morning News*.

Omar Suleiman's humanitarian activities have led him to become involved in many advocacy actions for migrants, demonstrations against immigration policies, and the anti-racism movement "Black Lives Matter" ("Imam Omar Suleiman: He got Arrested on Capitol Hill," 2018). Due to his participation in conducting and voicing on various contemporary issues, in March 2017, ISIS released a video that called for his assassination. Perhaps, Omar Suleiman's belief in the importance of active Muslim involvement as a way to change the condition and narrative of Islamophobia that exists in society is reflected in one of YIIR's statement: "Telling our own story is the only way to counter the narrative that has been forced on our community" ("Imam Omar Suleiman: He got Arrested on Capitol Hill," 2018).

Conclusion

Seeing the dynamics of Muslims in America, especially with the latest socio-political conditions due to COVID-19 as well as the demonstration movements that have occurred throughout America, it appears that Muslims in America still need to bear the issue of Islamophobia with its related physical and psychological threats. They will also need to face the ideological and intellectual challenges to revitalise the Islamic teachings so that Islam can be properly understood by the American society and not be hijacked by radical Islamic groups or anti-Islamic movements. Through international and domestic alliances and coalitions, the issue of Islamophobia has indeed become a tool for ideological-based policies

that fraudulently use Islam and Muslims as reasons to formulate various political, economic, and military interests of the alliance. Additionally, it is also an intellectual challenge that needs to be corrected as necessary, particularly when the issue of Islamophobia and discrimination against American Muslims is included in the framework of racism since Islam is not a race.

The present time is an opportunity for American Muslims to socialise and practice the concept of true Islamic tolerance in American society. Islam has universal values that are compatible with any nation in the world, including the United States. However, it also has distinctive values that should only be applied to its followers and should not be imposed on those outside of Islam. Opportunities for American Muslims to gain higher education and careers in various fields remain wide open because the contribution of Muslim intellectuals and Muslim communities to the American society has always been present and cannot be denied.

Muslim intellectuals and their organisations in America have played significant roles, especially in the field of education and research, and have played an impact on various issues, both domestically and globally. In the future, Muslims intellectuals in the US who currently tend to unite and work together must intensify their research and education programmes as well as consolidate various Muslim communities in the US. Unemployment among Muslim Americans can arise due to discrimination and the low level of education among Muslims, especially African-American Muslims where the majority have a high school level of education or below. Meanwhile, concerning geo-politics, specifically in reference to the "decline" of American influence and the rise of China's new power, various US domestic and foreign policies that respond to it are hoped to impact the Muslim communities positively, since the US may try to re-embrace Islamic countries to support its existence as a superpower nation at the international level.

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