The Long History of Islam as a Collective "Other" of the West and the Rise of Islamophobia in the U.S. after Trump

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ABSTRACT *In the last two decades, Islamophobia in the West has become mainstream. Covertly, Islamophobia is the last link in the chain of a long tradition of Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and racism. This article analyzes the recent rise of Islamophobic policies and practices in the United States. In particular, the false fear of Islam, which carried Trump into power, seems to have turned into a 'reason' for all kinds of violence and oppression against Muslims both domestically and abroad.*

Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a phobia is "an exaggerated, usually inexplicable and illogical fear of a particular object, class of objects, or situation." As implied in this description, the source of the horror is mostly meaningless and illogical, but it influences the flow of life in many respects. Over the last few decades, a particular kind of phobia has gripped Western societies: *Islamophobia*.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) defines Islamophobia as a "closed-minded hatred, fear or prejudice toward Islam and Muslims that result in discrimination, marginalization, and oppression."[1] Ali and colleagues define Islamophobia as "an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life."[2] Runnymede Trust's Commission defines Islamophobia as "an unfounded hostility towards Islam, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." This report found that the term was used firstly by an American newspaper reporter in 1991.[3]

Islamophobia refers to stereotypical and negative attitudes held primar-

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ily by mostly non-Muslims (though ironically sometimes by some Muslims) and directed toward Islam, Muslims, and parts of Islamic culture. Sourcing from these wrong images "It creates a distorted understanding of Islam and Muslims and transforms diversity in name, language, culture, ethnicity, and race into a set of stereotyped characteristics." For this reason "Islamophobia is a system of both religious and racial animosity."[4]

As a phenomenon, Islamophobia is a harsh and thoughtless attitude toward differences and diversity in the society. When Islam is defined as an enemy from an Islamophobic perspective, people become less open to discover its real appearance. Since Islamophobia is fed by a long history of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and racism in the West, it is difficult to overcome it.[5]

Ironically, Islamophobia not only affects the lives of religious Muslims; people who have some characteristics such as language, clothing or skin color that are generally associated with Muslims are also affected by Islamophobia. As a result, some non-Muslims such as Sikhs, Africans, Arab Christians, and Hindu Indians have been targeted by Islamophobic actions. At the same time, not only Muslims living in the U.S., but people all over the world can suffer from the consequences of Islamophobia. An Islamophobic U.S. will be a problem for international politics too.

Islam as a Collective "Other" of the West

When a group is an "other," it is easier to suppress them and exclude them from the public sphere. For this reason, the otherization of Muslims in the U.S. is an important aspect of the prejudices against Islam. The long history of Islam as a collective other of the West provides enough material for justifying the suppression and exclusion of Muslims.

The relation between Islam and the West has a long history full of conflicts. As Edward Said puts it, "the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest, richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other."[6] Islam always represents the closest other and the most active enemy for the West. Otherizing it is not only a cultural, but also a strategical matter. Controlling and shaping perceptions of Islam is essential for the continuation of the world domination of the West.

Islam has been the major rival of Christianity since it emerged in the early 600s CE. It bereaved Christian-

ity of its position as the last Abrahamic religion and thereby has constantly been defined as a false religion by the Church. As Henri Pirenne states, the Church substantially benefitted from Islam as an other during 8-9th centuries during its efforts to establish political unity in the feudal world.[7] This is because while there was a disorderly political structure under feudalism in the West, Islam unified the Eastern world under its roof and shook the World power balance. In this period, Islam started being recognized as an enemy of Christianity. The partial unity attained under the Carolingian Empire in Europe was united through anti-Islamic feelings; the spread of Christianity throughout the central lands of the West, and the Christianization of the pagan people who had destroyed the Roman Empire created an urge to respond to the Islamic East. Therefore, the Crusades were launched under the uniting power of the time, the Papacy. Although the ultimate purpose of these expeditions was never realized, Europe became open to the strong cultural influence of Islam during this period. Thus, many novelties transferred to the West and the previously self-enclosed Europe became more a part of the world.

In contrast to the pervasive vitality of almost every area in the Muslim world, Europe was characterized with steadiness in the medieval period. As Richard Southern remarks, the strong influence of Islam established through Andalusia substantially shaped the perception of the East in the West.[8] Similarly, Montgomery Watt discusses the effect of Islam on the culture of Europe and the Islamic influences in European culture in his book *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe*, and shows that Islam is one of the major factors shaping European culture in almost every aspect.[9] In Erdmute Heller's *Arabesques and Talismans*, Islamic influence on European languages and cultures are displayed in detail.[10] John Hobson investigates this subject thoroughly and suggests that the roots of Western civilization should be sought in the East.[11]

This disproportioned superiority of Muslim civilization was inevitably reflected in the Western imagination of Islam and Muslims. This reflection has two dimensions: on one hand, special otherizing aimed to resist the threads of Islam; on the other hand, great admiration. With the deliberate propaganda of the Church to preserve the unity of European society, Muslims were constructed in the European imagination as inhumane creatures, monsters, and cannibals –at best pagans worshipping an idol called Muhammed. One of the most important manifestations of this portrayal is the depiction of Muslims in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. That Islam is a religion promoting unhampered sexual relations and that it is a distorted version of Christianity were prevailing beliefs in the West. On the other hand, there is another image of the Muslim world represented by *Arabian Nights,* in which it is a place of flamboyance, welfare, and desire. These two images, sparking both fear and desire, laid the foundations of the

(L to R) U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly deliver remarks on visa travel after Trump signed a revised ban on travelers from six Muslim-majority states.

AFP PHOTO / MANDEL NGAN

prevailing view of Islam in Europe thereafter.

As in the establishment of political unity in the feudal world, Islam played an important role as an other in the development of modernity as well. With the collapse of the monopoly of the Church over knowledge and the beginning of the age of Expedition, information sources proliferated. As the Church opposed the emerging modern order, Muslim societies started being regarded as alternative models by the first moderns. Paul Hazard states that due to the political environment of the time many prejudices toward Islam were eliminated.[12] Islam was used as a logistic support in the battle with the Church. It was seen as a worldly religion and praised by European thinkers who sought to transcend the pressure of the Church. However, with the formation of the model of modern society and the reduction of the threat from the Church, this situation ended and the old negative otherizing view prevailed again. This transformation was brought about by Scottish moral thinkers around the 1750s. David Hume, a leading figure of the Enlightenment, created a progressive understanding of history and a mechanical concept of society based on the mechanical concept of the universe and pragmatic, functional morality. Thus, with the foundation of the idea of modern society, there was no more need for non-Western models to defend and legitimize the new order. Therefore, denigration of Islam and Muslims restarted in the name of the glorification of modernity in the second half of the 18th century.[13]

On this basis, the 19th century saw the spread of Western domination

throughout the world and over Muslims as well. In this period, although Western expansion faced considerable resistance in Muslim societies, political, economic, military, scientific, intellectual and cultural influence spread all over the world and the encounter between Islam and the West went beyond the geographical sense. The Western vision, founded and reinforced by Orientalism, considers Islam as a suppressed enemy who might make a comeback. Accordingly, it was Muslims who resisted Western hegemony the most and for the longest time. Moreover, Muslims were the ones who were most willing to re-establish their identity and civilization in the post-colonial era. Therefore, as Salman Sayyid notes, Islam became a source of "fundamental fear" for the West.[14]

The reasons for the pervasiveness of Islamophobia in the West should be sought in the depths of this fundamental fear. Sayyid uses Derrida's 'ghost' metaphor to show how Islam has been transformed into a ghost for the West. It is worth reviewing Sayyid's argument in detail here, as it sheds much helpful light on the otherization of Muslims in the West. Ghosts are the remainder of the dead, scary, can pass through walls and cannot be contained within boundaries. Although they do not really exist, they can be useful. Muslims, who should have stayed in the past like ghosts according to the West, actually stay with us by visiting today's world. The reason the West sees Muslims as ghosts is the once widely-held belief that Islam can be gotten rid of per-

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manently. Therefore, as an outmoded social system, the re-emergence of Islam with its political and social demands could not belong to a real and valid body, but only to the ghost of a dead one. However, in the face of Islam's effective revival, Eurocentrism has been eroded and its claim of validity can be expressed only tacitly.

At this point, the usefulness of the ghost becomes clear. Considering that most ghost stories correspond to a function in real life, such as frightening naughty children or distracting people, it is necessary to examine the usefulness of the transformation of Islam into a ghost. To which fear does Islam, as a perfect other of the West, correspond? As an enemy who could not be defeated until the nineteenth century, does it claim domination again? In such an instance, the fear of Islam becomes a call for action and European politicians and intellectu-

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als have an obligation to denigrate, invalidate and overcome Islam.

None of the many ghosts visiting Western civilization from time to time is as elusive, complicated, confusing and irreplaceable as Islam and its modern revival. That Islamic societies gained their independence one by one, became economically self-sufficient and even became a threat to the West at some points (consider the oil embargo of 1970s and today's developing Muslim countries), and that they started to put effort into regaining their identity and do not consent to stand idly aside when it comes to world politics help to feed the West's fear. Islam has long loomed over the West like a nightmare. The unexpected return of the ghost after decolonization, the eruption of the formerly suppressed shocked the West, went beyond its expectations and makes the West feel deeply that Islam may overturn the prevailing world order. This situation refashioned the old Orientalist techniques; Islamophobia is the common name of the new techniques that have emerged in the West to contend with this fundamental fear.

On the other hand, the apparent, concrete and strong resistance of Islamic societies during the struggle for independence and their concrete requests for and insistence on cultural and intellectual freedom gave the impression that Islam is not only a ghost visiting occasionally, but a revenant looking for a new body for itself. In fact, the return of Islam to modern politics surprised the world system. Just as a *cliché* portrait of the Muslim world depicting it as despotic, lazy, mystical, emotional and irrational is shown profound respect in the spectacular archives of Western Oriental studies and is carved into the minds of Westerners, today a portrait of Islam as more alive, aggressive, having no limits, and incorrigible is being drawn, and Muslims are shown as an imminent threat to be fought. In fact, as Sayyid states, this conceptual transformation clearly shows the decline of the West and Eurocentrism.[15]

Trends of Islamophobia in the U.S.

Many people accept the 9/11 attacks as the beginning of the rise of Islamophobia in the West. However, as Esposito states "it did not suddenly come into being" after this date. "Like anti-Semitism and xenophobia, it has deep historical roots" that were discussed in depth above. Esposito finds a close tie between rising racism and Islamophobia in the West.[16]

It is now clear that Islamophobia is a rising trend today. An increasing use of political, economic and social context is emerging to position Islam *vis-*

à-vis the West, and Islam is regaining its position of being a collective other for Western culture and civilization.

The Runnymede Trust defined eight main principles of Islamophobia in a 1997 report: (1) Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc. It is defined as a static and unchanging culture; (2) Islam is seen as a collective other. It is defined as totally different from and opposite to Western culture. The long cultural interchange between and common roots of the two cultures are ignored in this manner; (3) Depending on the perspective of the superiority of the West over any other culture, Islam is seen as inferior, barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist; (4) Related to the current political agenda in the U.S., Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, and supportive of terrorism. It is blamed for starting a clash of civilizations; (5) Islam is labeled as a political ideology. According to Islamophobic theories, Islam as such engages in political or military plotting against the West; (6) The critiques of Muslim people toward the politics and interventions of the West are rejected totally. Islamic voices are not welcomed; (7) The positioning of Islam as a hostile culture functions to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and the exclusion of Muslims from society and politics; (8) Islamophobia and hostility against Muslims are seen as natural; these attitudes help shape the main strategic elements of Western governments in world politics.

Some years later, *The Huffington Post*[17] tracked Islamophobia in the U.S. and found 6 main rules of Islamophobia in America: (1) Many Islamophobic groups and lobbies think and propagate the notion that *Muslims living in the U.S. are not really American* and that they do not deserve to stay in the country; (2) There is widespread and intense propaganda circulating that the recent terror attacks have an Islamic character and that terror is an integral part of Islam. Serious investments have been made in spreading the idea that *Islam is not a religion; it is a violent ideology*. Spreading this perspective, the justification for of military intervention in Muslim countries has been created. It is especially important for Islamophobic groups to identify Islam as an ideology because the pervasive anti-ideological ideas spread in the West during the Cold War make intolerance for ideologies more acceptable to the mainstream population. Islamophobic groups present Islam as an ideology in order to detract from Islam's cultural and religious identity and to deny Muslims access to the protections and freedoms granted to persons of religious belief; (3) The golden rule of Islamophobia is *linking Islam with terrorism*. There is no evidence to suggest that mainstream Muslim groups support terrorist organizations; in fact, the opposite is true. Many mainstream Muslim groups publicly oppose terrorism. However, this fact does not make any sense for Islamophobic people, groups, and lobbies; (4) Since many Europeans and Americans see Islam as the specific religion of the Arab people they think that *all brown people are potentially Muslim* and *vice versa*. For this reason, many

> **In the U.S., Republicans are much more prejudiced against Muslims than Democrats. This actually shows that political discourses and activities are very important in affecting the ideas of individuals**

brown skinned non-Muslim people suffer from Islamophobic attitudes directed towards them; (5) *There is a secret Muslim plot to take over and/or destroy the United States and/or Western civilization from within*. This root fear is the main source of much conspiratorial thought. The narrative of "the enemy within" is often used as the basis for oppression and intimidation against a certain group. As it is remembered, this feeling was the basis of the oppressions against the Jews in Europe. Historically, many Muslims in the U.S. have been able to find positions in many institutions and some of these are very critical positions. Awarding positions on the

basis of merit regardless of religious belief or skin color is one of the original principles of the American system. But today, such inclusiveness and non-discrimination are seen as a threat, especially given the pervasive, public argument that the country is under a violent and intense threat, and the idea that such immigrants as Muslims, Indians, and Chinese are "not really American"; (6) *Pork is to Muslims as a crucifix or garlic is to vampires*. Today many politically extreme groups are working hard to demonize Islam. In this process, they always make reference to the pig ban in Islam, and make fun of Muslims' aversion to pork.

CAIR's report on "Confronting Fear: Islamophobia and its Impact in the U.S. 2013-2015" finds the same trends at work in the increase of Islamophobia in the United States.[18] As a result of this trend, the number of documented bias incidents is steadily increasing, as it is seen in Figure 1. This trend will be examined in detail.

The results of a research project run by *Gallup* show that there is a great

Figure 1: Total documented bias incidents by year.[19]

2014	**2015**	**2016**
3,559	**3,786**	**4,282**
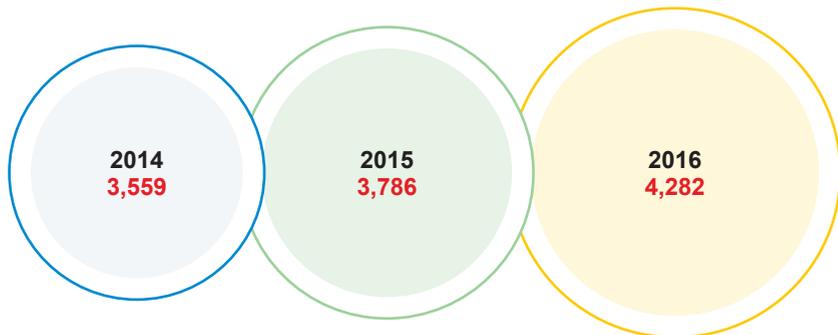
prejudice against Muslims among Americans, British and Canadians. Likewise, a prejudice against Western politics and people is rising in the Muslim world. Several *Gallup* reports examine the prejudices against Muslims and Islam in many countries and regions around the world. According to this, globally, Muslims think that they are not respected in the West; many Western people believe this also. As it is seen in the graph below, 52 percent of Americans and 48 percent of Canadians say the West does not respect Muslim societies. And the research shows that the percentage of people holding this idea is increasing. "Muslims globally see the West as mistreating Muslims in their countries. This belief adds to the perception of Muslims being excluded from social, political, and civic life in Western societies."[20]

In researches conducted in 2007 and 2009, *Gallup* observed that prejudices about Islam are not actual results of lack of knowledge about Islam. It is striking that those who have the lowest levels of prejudices about Islam are actually those who know the least about it. A considerable number of the people who state that they do not have a personal prejudice against Muslims in fact hold negative ideas about Islam (36 percent). When the relationship between having prejudices against Muslims and having negative ideas about Islam (90 percent) is taken into consideration, we can see that we face the development of Islamophobia as an actual threat. However, the polls have also observed that personal contact with a Muslim

is one of the factors reducing the level of prejudice against Muslims.

According to the research conducted in line with *Gallup*'s Religion Tolerance Index, which measures the tolerance of individuals towards people of other faiths, people may be divided into three categories according to their attitudes towards other faiths: isolated, tolerant and integrated. In this research, it is seen that compared to communities from other religions, Muslim Americans have the second highest rates of tolerating the faith differences of others in and out of their own society; which means that they are integrated. From this respect among the religious groups in the U.S., together with Mormons (46 percent), Muslim Americans (44 percent) are more integrated than Jewish Americans (36 percent), Protestants (35 percent) and Catholics (34 percent). In addition, *Gallup* research shows that compared to tolerated and integrated groups of people, isolated individuals in Germany, France and England live in a more homogenous environment with respect to religion and ethnicity. Integrated (70 percent) and tolerant (65 percent) people live in more diverse areas. Therefore, the level of tolerance increases in proportion to the encounters with different peoples in everyday life.

In the U.S., Republicans are much more prejudiced against Muslims than Democrats. This actually shows that political discourses and activities are very important in affecting the ideas of individuals. In particular, the Republican politicians who very ea-

gerly conducted the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11 influence their voters to a significant extent. And this situation is reflected in the voting habits of American Muslims. Public opinion research shows that American Muslims mostly vote for Democrats.

The idea of disloyalty is one of the most important arguments feeding the Islamophobia discourse. The feeling that Muslim Americans are not loyal to the U.S. is regarded as one of the core components of Islamophobia. *Gallup* has also examined thoughts regarding the loyalty of Muslim Americans to the U.S. Those who believe that Muslims are not loyal also think that Muslims are to be feared, that they are not trustworthy, and that therefore they should not be treated equally. Women are more inclined to think that Muslim Americans are not loyal to the U.S. Those who believe

Muslim Americans are loyal to the U.S. are younger than those who do not believe so. Most of those who say that they would have no objection to having a neighbor who has a different faith (87 percent) do not believe that Muslim Americans are disloyal to the U.S. This is an important point. It shows us that Islamophobia actually arises from a specific emotional and intellectual agenda. In addition, as trust in institutions increases, so does trust in the loyalty of Muslims. Those who say that Muslim Americans are loyal to the country also believe the trustworthiness of the elections (73 percent), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (73 percent) and local police (82 percent). The exception here is the trust in the army. Among those who trust the army, the level of those who believe Muslim Americans are not loyal to the U.S. is slightly higher. Therefore, there is actually a close re-

lationship between the level of trust and the attitude towards Muslims in the country. If an American believes that the institutions in the country function well, his/her level of trust increases and in this case, Islamophobia as an ideology which feeds on fears such as betrayal and terror decreases.[21]

At the same time, one-third of Americans believe that Muslim countries have very negative views about the U.S. The idea that "they do not like us" or "they are our enemies" is a belief which shapes American attitudes toward Muslims to a significant extent. Those who believe Muslim Americans are not loyal to the U.S. also believe that Muslim Americans are loyal to their "own countries." Much research shows that this belief extends not only towards Muslims but also includes many other groups in the U.S. such as Chinese, Indians, and Africans. Therefore it can be seen that among Americans, there is an increasing level of prejudice and doubt about people coming from different origins. This also proves that xenophobia and Islamophobia are two thought-systems nourishing one another.

One of the prominent figures of American policy, Samuel P. Huntington, published an essay entitled, "Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite" in the journal of *The National Interest* in March 2004 under the shadow of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.[22] In this essay, Huntington portrays the American elite as *dead souls* and claims that this elite has become denationalized and that the U.S. should be reestablished with

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a new nationalism shaped around religion, specifically Christianity:

> Significant elements of American elites are favorably disposed to America becoming a cosmopolitan society. Other elites wish it to assume an imperial role. The overwhelming bulk of the American people is committed to a national alternative and to preserving and strengthening the American identity of centuries.[23]

Two-thirds of Americans participating in *Gallup* research state that religion is an important part of their daily life. Participants who believe that Muslim Americans are not loyal to the U.S. also think that religion has a more active role in shaping daily lives of Muslims. In other words, they believe that Muslims' loyalty to their religion is a factor hampering their loyalty to the U.S.

In another report prepared in 2016, CAIR recorded a 57 percent increase in anti-Muslim bias incidents over 2015. This was accompanied by a 44 percent increase in anti-Muslim hate

crimes in the same period. "From 2014 to 2016, anti-Muslim bias incidents jumped 65 percent. In that two-year period, CAIR finds that hate crimes targeting Muslims surged 584 percent."[24] As seen in Figure 2, the number of anti-Muslim bias incidents and hate crimes has increased simultaneously and radically in the last three years. In Figure 3, the changes in the types of anti-Muslim bias incidents may be seen in a detailed manner.

In a substantial portion of Western societies, there is a considerable negative perception, prejudice, and discrimination against Muslims. Believing that Muslims are disloyal, uttering prejudice against Muslims and avoiding being neighbors with Muslims are some of the symptoms of Islamophobia in the West. Moreover, due to the provocation and orientation of numerous politicians and media outlets, Islamophobia is continuing to rise at an alarming rate.

Islamophobia Networks

Fear of different cultures can have a place in the normal feelings of ordinary people. It is often revealed that ordinary Americans are unconcerned about the world and ignorant of different cultures. But Islamophobia seems to be far from being just a notion associated with people's personal feelings. It is a political instrument. Today, Western politicians

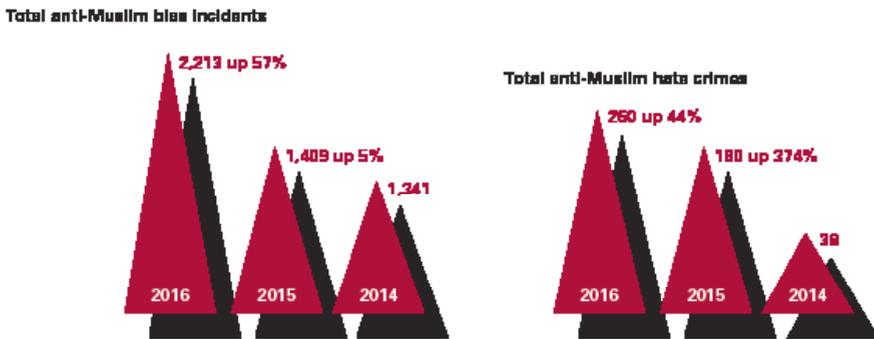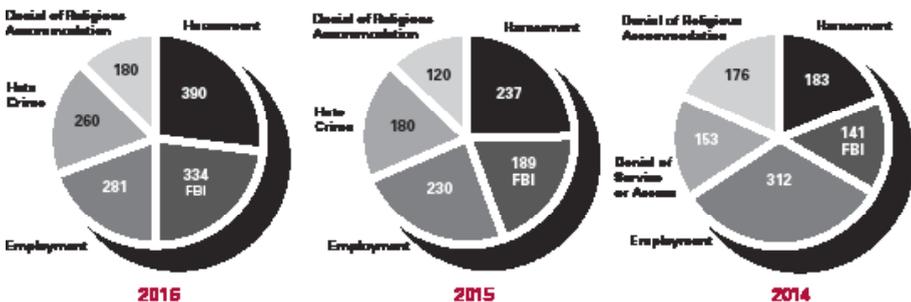**Figure 2:** Number of anti-Muslim incidents and crimes.[25]

Figure 3: Top five types of anti-Muslim bias incidents.[26]

see Islam as a global counter-culture; they turn anti-Islamism into a tool of control both inside and outside the borders of their countries by uniting their constituents with 'common threat' sentiments.[27]

Islamophobic thoughts and policies did not emerge spontaneously. The main sources of contemporary Islamophobia are the media, political rhetoric, violent extremists, American foreign policy, and Islamophobia Networks.

According to "Fear, Inc." a report by the *Center for American Progress* in 2011, "a network of misinformation experts actively promotes Islamophobia in America."[28] The report found that seven charitable foundations spent around $42.6 million between 2001 and 2009 to support Islamophobic rhetoric. The efforts of this group of funders and experts were echoed by the religious right, conservative media, and politicians trying to orchestrate a negative public opinion against American Muslims. As a result of this promotion of Islamophobic prejudice, discrimination among the general population against Muslim people has risen sharply. As discussed above, prejudice is the key element in the existence and proliferation of Islamophobia. A second follow-up report entitled, "Fear, Inc. 2.0: The Islamophobia Network's Efforts to Manufacture Hate in America," found that "a well-funded, well-organized fringe movement can push discriminatory policies against a segment of American society by intentionally spreading lies while taking advantage

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of moments of public anxiety and fear."[29] According to this report, after two decades of Islamophobia, certain forms of "civilization jihad" narrative had been firmly rooted. In the general climate of fear and anger toward American Muslims, saving Western liberal values from Muslim interference is the common spirit of the Islamophobic actions.[30]

According to CAIR, from 2013 to 2015, the number of U.S.-based networks promoting Islamophobia increased from 69 to 74. Among these networks, nearly half of them (33 groups) very actively "promote prejudice against, or hatred of, Islam and Muslims." The funding for these organizations comes from the public, and their total revenue is also increasing (at least $205,838,077). The primary purpose of the other 41 groups "does not appear to include promoting prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims," but they do regularly demonstrate or support Islamophobic themes.[31]

It is worth noting that there are some special groups that support and fund

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Islamophobic politics. These networks invest in specific discourses and ideas, and in the end, their efforts appear to be paying off, as some of their opinions are spreading through the American public. In the United States (and of course in Europe), anti-Islamic opposition emerges as a rhetoric that some groups have established and continue to propagate in order to form and maintain their own political positions. So looking at Islamophobia also means looking at groups that benefit from its spread.

Islamophobia after Trump

Donald Trump came to power with an Islamophobic campaign, and now his views are becoming the official policy of the United States. As Beydoun states, "from start to finish, the 2016 presidential election vividly revealed that Islamophobia is alive and potent and politically resonant as ever. Scapegoating Islam and vilifying Muslims was far more than merely campaign messaging; for Donald Trump, it was a winning strategy."[32]

Trump's sailing with the wind of Islamophobia has long been in harmony with the emotional world of voters who have been prepared for a long time by Islamophobic networks and campaigns. Trump realized that with this rhetoric, a significant portion of the voters could be mobilized. This mobilization helped to carry Ohio, Florida, North Carolina and other battleground states. According to a number of public opinion surveys, Trump was successful in deploying Islamophobia as a primary campaign strategy. In an *NBC* study in December 2015, 25 percent of Americans supported Trump's Muslim ban. According to a March 2016 survey, Trump's Muslim ban had gained more than 51 percent support. This increase comes as a result of Trump's rising Islamophobic publicity and shows that he used the chance to use this wave to reach the climax in his political journey. As Beydoun notes, "he delivered what the market demanded, and doubled down on his anti-Muslim rhetoric. He fed the Islamophobia his loud and angry base demanded, and as indicated by election results, a sizable portion of the silent, white majority."[33] Along with Trump's resultant campaign and narration, anti-Islamism and Islamophobia became natural elements of American policy.

Most worryingly, the government initiated (momentarily) a political movement against American Muslims. "Trump supporters attacked, harassed, or plotted to kill Muslims during the election cycle, proving a potential link between Trump's rhet-

oric and the actions of supporters."[34] At present, the U.S. president seems to be the most prominent architect and orchestrator of Islamophobia.

Being an American Muslim: Hated and Excluded

"Our Unknown Country" was the title of the commentary written by Nobel Prize winner economist Paul Krugman on election night for the web version of *The New York Times*. Krugman complains not to notice the deep social waves in the country: "There turn out to be a huge number of people –white people, living mainly in rural areas– who don't share at all our idea of what America is about. For them, it is about blood and soil, about traditional patriarchy and racial hierarchy." Krugman was surprised about the election results and pessimistic about the future: "I don't know how we go forward from here. Is America a failed state and society? It looks truly possible."[35]

Many liberal academics are in the same line with Krugman. After all, since its foundation, the U.S. was championed to be a land of liberation for all people. However, things are changing quickly for the worse in the 21st century. Changes in foreign policy, security perspectives, and the legal system have affected the lives of many different groups. Along with the rise of Islamophobia in America, religious rhetoric has become more undisguisedly full of anti-Islamic sentiment. Fundamentalist Christians, who constitute a major part

of the electorate of the Republican Party, attach Islamophobic discourse to mainstream conservative policy and address their remarks to religious rightist voters. With a discourse on the clash of civilizations and even realization of messianic prophecy, right wing leaders find it politically useful to stigmatize Muslims. Therefore they turn the religious right into the major supporter of Islamophobic policies.

In this regard, these groups often claim that Muslims abuse their religious rights in America and take advantage of religious tolerance and America's secular tradition. In this way, they seek a chance to start and sustain a witch hunt against Muslims without conflicting with prevalent American values.

This disturbing crusade based on misinformation and demonization resembles the darkest ages of Western history. Daring and ignorant misinformation and over-generalization of Muslims is redolent of anti-Semitism in Europe and discrimination against black people in the U.S. Similarly, in today's world, millions of Muslims face discrimination, illegal surveillance, and profiling every day, solely because of their religious beliefs.[36]

In the U.S., networks of Islamophobia that are financed and organized by certain factions constantly create new opportunities to take advantage of fear and uncertainty to advance their hateful agenda. The recent terrorist attacks by ISIS in various Western cities supplied anti-Muslim

organizations with an immeasurable amount of material for their propaganda. These groups attribute the actions of a few extremist individuals to all Muslims and use the attacks as an excuse to discriminate against 2.6 million American Muslims and keep them under surveillance. Islamophobic ideologists and their backers impress the idea that all Muslims are terrorists and that therefore the U.S. should wage war with 1.6 billion Muslims. This attitude seems to be becoming the official policy of the U.S.; consequently, the U.S. increasingly has an unappealing image for Muslims communities, creating a self-feeding cycle of violence, ignorance, and destruction. ■

Endnotes

1. "Islamophobia Fact Sheet," *The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)*, (June 28, 2017), retrieved from http://www.islamophobia.org/images/pdf/6.15.17---Islamophobia-Fact-Sheet.pdf.

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