

THE IMPACT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA ON SOCIETY, ATTITUDES, POLICIES AND THE YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

Is Islamophobia a new marvel?. Are Islam and the Judeo-Christian West still hateful of and hostile toward each other? What has fueled the sudden rhetoric of Islamophobia in the United States of America and Europe?. After the attack of Twin Towers 9/11, Islam was being viewed as a conservative, barbaric and intolerant perspective of life. Muslim was posited as blood thirsty savages under the banner of a monolithic religion. The study aims to examine the impact of Islamophobia on society, attitudes, policies and the youths. Descriptive method with qualitative approach was used in the study. The 2016 Presidential elections of America were one of the most acrimonious and confrontational campaigns in the history of America. Extraordinary political rhetoric, outbursts in distasteful discriminatory tones, and anti-Muslim invectives blemished the campaign of United States (US) Presidential Elections of 2016. To endorse his political agenda, Donald J. Trump specifically focused upon Muslims as a grave issue, and likely toyed with the public pulses, which resulted in an unpredictable election result. Mirroring the perceived reality, media as an invention of information shapes public opinion. Media reports after 9/11 specifically underrepresented Muslim views and negatively portrayed Islamic culture. Islam was painted as a religion of discrimination, radicalization and regression by the Western media. With the advent of digital media, providing a carte blanche deserted the situation further. The rhetoric of Islamophobia dispersed hatred speech and acts of defamation on social media websites backed by the freedom of speech narrative.

KEYWORDS *Islamophobia; Political gain; Media; Defamation; Discrimination; hate*



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INTRODUCTION

The spread of Islamophobia, both in terms of the phenomenon's momentum and outreach, is particularly alarming these days, for it has emerged as a new form of racism characterized by xenophobia, negative profiling and stereotyping of Muslims. The rise in hate crimes against Muslims both offline and online, as well as discriminations in education, employment, housing and healthcare sector, among others are well documented. The gendered aspect of Islamophobia is also gaining prominence, with girls and women being targeted due to mode of their dress and the general notion that Muslim women are oppressed and thus must be liberated. What indeed is worrisome is that Islamophobia continues to find strong resonance in political spheres, ultimately leading to the institutionalization of Islamophobia through new legislation and policies. Studies in Europe and elsewhere have also revealed that Islamophobia is most visible in the media and in the discourse of right-wing political parties and groups who tend to exploit and build on the general fear of Islam for electoral gains. anti-refugee rhetoric has taken an anti-Muslim overtone and have often become the central in many countries, particularly in the West (Europe and the US included), anti- immigration and theme of campaigns by far-right parties. It is also noted with grave concern that a number of Western media outlets continue to propagate fear and negative stereotypes against the Islamic faith and its followers, notably by acting as a platform for widespread dissemination of anti-Muslim rhetoric. It is however, pertinent to note that Islamophobia is also on the rise in some non-western countries where the Muslim communities and minorities face discrimination, hatred and violence, including in Kashmir. The world has also witnessed large-scale cross-border forced displacement of religious minorities e.g. Rohingya Muslims. In the context of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, there has been a perceivable rise of negative narratives and hate speech in some countries holding the Muslim minorities responsible for spreading the COVID- 19, pursuant to disinformation campaign and “fake news”, mainly in the social media. The study aims to examine the impact of Islamophobia on society, attitudes, policies and the youths.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used qualitative research method. Moreover, descriptive method with qualitative approach: this method involves the collection of in-depth and detailed data on the phenomena of political economy of peace and conflict. Researchers can use in-depth interview techniques, participatory observation, and document analysis to understand the factors that influence conflict and peace in the context of political economy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Eliciting Definition

Literally, Islamophobia is a fear, or more precisely: an excessive fear, against Islam, against Muslims, as well as against anything associated to the religion, such as Mosques, Islamic Centers, Holy Qur'an, Hijab, etc. It also constitutes racism and discriminations in daily life, on Media, at workplace, in political sphere, etc. It rests in the mind and it reflects in attitudes, and could be manifested through violent actions, such as burning mosques, vandalizing properties, abusing women wearing scarf, or insulting Prophet or sacred symbols of Islam. That is more or less, how Islamophobia identifiable, how it manifests, which can be seen not only from incidents, but also through xenophobic

perspectives, statements, behavior, and even gestures. Therefore, Islamophobia is not always noticeable, since it could hide in the mind and heart of the people (Semple, 2015). General Trend of Islamophobia during the period under review in the aftermath of the shocking massacre against Muslim worshippers in Christ church city in New Zealand in March 2019 up until end of 2020, the major trend driving Islamophobia has kept on the rise, not only in Western countries, but also quite elsewhere around the world. A number of factors have been identified as the main contributors to such a worrisome trend: mounting far-right ideologies, refugee crises, immigration, negative perceptions amid adherents of different faiths, and provocative rhetoric by some media. Nevertheless, it was quite relieving to note that following the New Zealand incident, significant measures and efforts have been deployed around the globe towards ensuring better protection of Muslims and other minorities (*US Media Coverage on Muslims More Negative than Any Other Minority Group, Study Finds, 2019*). The U.S. and Europe still stand as the major hot spots of Islamophobia, where the trend of Islamophobia has been most disturbing as evidenced by the number of incidents such as mosque burning, provocative statements in social media, mail threats, Holy Quran burning and desecration, insults of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), physical assaults, and verbal abuses. Both in the U.S. and Europe, the Islamophobic trend has been mostly marked by the growing popularity of right-wing parties and movements, evolving into a global wave of anti-Establishment, ultra-nationalism, and the mushrooming of extreme right-wing parties. For instance, a growing number of European countries today see the dominant influence of far-right parties, i.e. Hungary (Fidesz), Poland (Law and Justice), the Netherlands (Freedom Party-PVV), the Czech Republic (ANO), France (National Rally), Italy (Five-Star Movement and Northern League), Germany (Alternative for Germany-AfD), Austria (Freedom Party-FPO), and so on. Beyond America and Europe, India and Sri Lanka are two notable cases to watch closely.⁴ In certain countries like China and Myanmar, the issue of Islamophobia is closely intertwined with other issues i.e. politics, human rights, minorities, culture, identity, humanitarian, separatism, terrorism, extremism, etc. At the time the COVID-19 pandemic yields devastating repercussions worldwide, anti-Muslim groups in some countries have tapped the crisis to fuel hatred towards Muslims. Social media is inundated with claims of Muslims breaching the lockdown by continuing to attend mosques to pray, as a result of which many Muslims have been attacked. Some Islamophobic leaders have also used the Corona virus crisis as a tool to further their agenda against Muslims. In India, for example, Islamophobic elements emerged starkly when cases of COVID-19 were reported at a Tablighi Jamaat event because of which Hashtags Corona Jihad and Bio Jihad were trending on Twitter. As a consequence, fake stories blaming Muslims for spreading the virus in the country started circulating on social media, casting Muslims as a threat to the nation. Elsewhere, since the outbreak of the pandemic, incidents of violent attacks against Muslims have reportedly redoubled in many countries. Meanwhile, a changing pattern of Islamophobia was seen on a Burqa-related issue. During the few months since February 2020, phobia against Hijab and Burqa declined very significantly, probably due to the world-wide campaign to wear face masks as part of the personal protective gear against Corona virus. Despite the Ban on Burqa being still in force in at least 14 (fourteen) countries i.e. France, Belgium, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, Bulgaria, Latvia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the policy's enforcement has softened, if not vanished completely. There are even indications that some might review the policy in the foreseeable future (*Residential Inequality Exists for Muslims, 2019*).

Major events

Some events have brought about a significant impact on the trend and prospects of Islamophobia since last year, particularly the terrorist attacks against Muslims in New

Zealand in March 2019; the terrorist attack in Sri Lanka in April 2019; the European Union Parliamentary Election in March 2019, the case against Myanmar for the Genocide against Rohingya at the International Court of Justice in November 2019, the introduction of controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by India in August 2019; and most recently the havoc in France following the republication of derogatory cartoons of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) by Charlie Hebdo Magazine in September 2020.³ Terrorist attack against Muslims on 15 March 2019 in New Zealand left 51 people dead and 49 wounded. The attack highlights the global reach and connection of far-right extremists and white supremacists with terroristic and 6 violent agendas (Segelbaum & Ruland, 2019). The international community, including world leaders and politicians, supported the people and government of New Zealand and condemned the attacks. At the United Nations, the attacks were condemned by all Member States through various relevant resolutions. Similarly, the matter was widely reflected in the statements delivered at the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly by world leaders, including Heads of State, In August 2020, the perpetrator of the assault was sentenced to life without the possibility ‘Easter Bombing’ terrorist attack in Sri Lanka in April 2019 took place just over a month after the Christchurch massacre, targeting churches and hotels in Colombo, claiming the life of 259 innocent people. Although the linkage between the two incidents was highly questionable, the Colombo attackers claimed they were taking revenge for the mosque attacks in New Zealand. Not long after the incident, backlashes against Muslim population rampaged across the country, doubling the level of Islamophobia in Sri Lanka as well as in some other Buddhist-majority communities nearby (ABC13 News, n.d.). European Union Parliamentary Election of March 2019 altered the political scene across countries in Western Europe. Along with anti-immigration rhetoric, the ultra-nationalist agenda is now being used by far-right political parties in election campaigns to whip up anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia in garnering popular support. These nationalist sentiments no doubt impacted the European Parliamentary elections on 23-26 May 2019 during which issues of migration and anti-Muslim propaganda took center stage in the public debate in the May 2019 European Parliament contest. The run-up to the 2019 European parliamentary election was thus dominated by the expectation of an inevitable rise of populism across the continent. However, while a populist takeover of the European Parliament did not ultimately happen, far right-wing and nationalist parties did gain a sizeable number of seats, obtaining around 10% of the seats in the 751-member EP, almost double if compared with the previous membership. Yet, the destructive influence of ultra-nationalist and populist parties was relatively unseen during the months of 2020, probably due to the prioritization of many other issues in Europe amidst the Corona outbreak. International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Myanmar for Genocide against Rohingya took place in November 2019. The Republic of the Gambia, acting officially instituted proceedings against Myanmar Government before the ICJ for violations of the Genocide Convention through “acts adopted, taken and condoned by the Government of Myanmar against members of the Rohingya group”. The Gambia argued that the Myanmar military had committed “the genocide acts” during the “clearance operations” against the Rohingya group since October 2016 and particularly from August 2017, with the intention “to destroy the Rohingya as a group, in whole or in part”. The ICJ stated on 23 January 2020 that Myanmar must take provisional measures aimed at preventing the commission of genocide acts pending its final decision and preserving evidence of genocide acts. Myanmar was also compelled to report back on all measures taken in that regard within a four-month period (ABC7 News, n.d.). The introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by the Indian Government controversially granted citizenship to all undocumented migrants within the country except for Muslims. Amidst the rising popularity of rightwing Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an umbrella organization which strongly advocates the extreme-right 'Hindutva' ideology across India, the CAA was taken more or less in parallel with the rising tension following the government's decision to remove Jammu and Kashmir's special autonomy, and turning the states into a federal territory (Daily Sabah News, n.d.). These decisions mixed with fake stories circulating in social media denigrating Muslims who, in the eyes of government and the majority population, immediately became the main culprits responsible for the spread of the Corona virus in India. The life of Indian minorities, especially the Muslim population, has been negatively affected (ABC13 News, n.d.). Attempt to insult and ridicule Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) again happened on 2 September 2020 when French magazine Charlie Hebdo republished the same offensive cartoons which, in the past, triggered condemnation and eventual killings in Paris in January 2015. The republication of the defamatory cartoons coincides with the trial of persons accused as accomplices in the 2015 attacks that killed 11 staffs of the Magazine. The reckless provocation drew renewed condemnation in France and beyond. Despite efforts made by French Muslim leaders to avoid violent reactions, some groups instead added insults to injury, by supporting the republication of the cartoons, viewing the provocative action through the lens of "freedom of expression and freedom of press." The situation took a tragic turn after 2 (two) terrorist incidents that happened in the aftermath of the cartoons republication: first was on 25 September 2020; and the second was on 16 October 2020; both indicated to have close connection with the cartoon issue. The French government launched afterwards a series of policies to suppress what the France chose to call 'separatism'. Terms directly associating Islam with terror were widely used by policy-makers in parallel with the justifications to insult venerated figures in Islam; Again in the name of freedom of expression. The situation is becoming tense as right wing politicians tried to capitalize on the on-going crisis to pursue their anti-immigrant and anti-refugee agenda.

The culminating point of intolerance against Muslim communities, among others, was the Rohingya crisis that unfolded

In the summer 2017, almost one million Rohingyas were forced to flee their country because of the persecutions they were facing from the Burmese authorities. As to the hardships and atrocities endured by the Rohingyas, they have triggered the outrage of the international community. The previous UN High Commissioner for Human Rights spoke about 5 "a text book example of ethnic cleansing".

The Gambia argued that the Myanmar military committed "the genocidal acts" during "clearance operations" against the Rohingya group since October 2016 and particularly from August 2017, with the intention "to destroy the Rohingya as a group, in whole or in part". These genocidal acts included "the use of mass murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the systematic destruction by fire of their villages, often with inhabitants locked inside burning houses". The Gambia identified two elements of Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya as "particularly indicative of genocidal intent" including its systematic denial of legal rights to members of the group and its support for, and participation in, pervasive hate campaigns designed to achieve the collective demonization and dehumanization of the Rohingya as a group (*Population Structure of the OIC Member Countries*, n.d.). The ICJ issued, on 23 January 2020, an order on Provisional Measures, urging Myanmar not to commit any genocidal acts pending its final decision and preserving evidence of genocidal acts. Myanmar is also compelled to report back on all measures taken in that regard, within four months. Moreover, the decision taken by the ICJ refers to the Rohingyas as "a group that self-identifies as the Rohingya and that claims a longstanding connection to Rakhine State, which forms part of the Union of Myanmar". This mention is a clear dismissal of the denial of the Myanmar authorities of the Burmese

citizenship to the Rohingyas under the pretext that they do not have roots in that country. The ICJ declared in this historic order that there was prima facie evidence of breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention, the court warned that the Rohingyas remaining in Myanmar were “extremely vulnerable” to military misdeeds. The decision of the ICJ was certainly a big success for the OIC and its Member States, as it demonstrated the determination in leading international efforts aimed at holding Myanmar accountable for its persecutions against the Rohingyas. It is an unprecedented endeavor to bring justice and accountability to the Rohingyas people. The case submitted by The Gambia at the ICJ, on behalf of OIC, regarding the Rohingyas is of the highest gravity for it refers to blatant violation of the Convention on Genocide, but it has a symbolic value as it shows that OIC and its Member States are ready to use all the means at their disposal, when it comes to defending and protecting Muslim minorities in the world. in Des Moines, Iowa, where he defended not providing exceptions for rape and incest in abortion bans by arguing many people had histories of rape or incest in their family histories (Stone, 1991).

Discrimination, and Hatred Based on Religion Main Events Bringing Noteworthy Impacts on Islamophobia, Intolerance

Following the shocking massacre of Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, Islamophobia keeps growing in many corners of the world, along with campaigns spreading negative images about Islam, and reflected through incidents targeting Muslim individuals, mosques, Islamic attires, Islam revered figures and sacred symbols, etc. There had been a growing mistrust toward Islam and Muslims, which often mixed-up with other issues like politics, minority, identity, terrorism, extremism, secessionism, human rights, humanitarian, etc., where the majority population feels suspicious over religious activities conducted Muslims in their homes, mosques, and Islamic centers, while many remained having tendency to associate Islam with the extremism and terrorism (Kuruvilla, 2019).

The introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by the Indian Government

On 12 December 2019, India adopted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) granting fast-tracked citizenship to undocumented Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Christian migrants who had allegedly fled persecutions in their countries of origin, except for Muslims. The cutoff for citizenship eligibility was 31 December 2014, so that anyone who was deemed eligible under the law but entered the country after that date was subject to deportation. The Indian government justified this omission by claiming that, since Muslims were majority populations in the three neighboring countries, they were simply trying to assist non-Muslims who face “religious persecution” in those countries by allowing them to remain in the Indian territory. In reality, the CAA was an anti-Muslim legislation because it introduced religious grounds to grant citizenship to immigrants from India’s three Muslim-majority neighbors, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The hunt for migrants happened for instance in Assam, a state near the borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh. Many of the people whose citizenship was now being questioned were born in India and have enjoyed all the rights of citizens, such as voting in elections. State authorities were rapidly expanding foreigner tribunals and planning to build huge new detention camps. Hundreds of people had been arrested on suspicion of being a foreign migrant. The governing party forced people to prove they were citizens to other parts of India, part of a far-reaching Hindu nationalist agenda, fueled by Modi’s sweeping reelection victory in May 2019. Modi unilaterally wiped out the statehood of India’s only Muslim majority state, Jammu and Kashmir, removing its special autonomy and turning it into a federal territory without any consultation with local leaders — many of whom have since been arrested (Kossaify, 2020). All of the 33 million residents of Assam have had to prove, with documentary evidence, that they or their ancestors were Indian citizens before early 1971

when Bangladesh was established after breaking away from Pakistan. By the beginning of 2020, more than 4 million people in India, mostly Muslims, were at risk of being declared foreign migrants as the government pushed a hardline Hindu nationalist agenda that challenged the country's pluralist tradition (Segelbaum & Ruland, 2019).

Terrorist attack against Muslims on 15 March 2019 in New Zealand

During a Friday prayer on 15 March 2019, two terrorist attacks took place at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand leaving 51 people dead and 49 wounded. The massacre which was live-streamed by the attacker named Brenton Harrison Tarrant, began at Al Noor Mosque and continued at Linwood Islamic Centre. The attacks highlighted the global reach and connection of the far-right extremists and white supremacists with terroristic and violent agendas. The national politics no doubt had ample reflection in the European Parliamentary elections on 23-26 May 2019. Notably, issues of "migration" and anti-Muslim propaganda remained central in the public debate the May 2019 European Parliament contest. The run-up to the 2019 European parliamentary election was thus dominated by the expectation of an inevitable rise of populism across the continent. Interestingly, the outcome of the election, though, didn't live up to this hype. However, while a populist takeover of the European Parliament did not ultimately happen, far right-wing and nationalist parties did gain a sizeable number of seats, obtaining around 10% seats in the 751-member EP, almost doubling the number from before. In Italy, France, Poland and Hungary they were even in the majority (Palma, 2020). This result reflected the strength of Matteo Salvini's Northern League in Italy and Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France as well as the radicalization of some traditionally center-right parties such as Fidesz in Hungary. In the UK, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) was replaced by Nigel Farage's new Brexit Party, which took a significant share of the vote from both the Labor Party and the Conservative Party. Italy's then Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, initiated the European Alliance of Peoples and Nations (EAPN) to establish a broad nationalist front in the EP. It includes nine parties that so far, include the German AfD, the French Rassemblement National, the Flemish political party Vlaams Belang of Belgium, the Austrian Freedom Party FPÖ as well as the Finns Party and Greek and Hungarian nationalists. These far-right wing parties, visibly anti-migrant, anti-Islam and xenophobic, united in the "Identity and Democracy" party, die-hard anti-EU coalition bring together 73 MEPs. This core far-right group could also ally with MEPs from Eurosceptic parties on the right, particularly those in Scandinavia and central Europe including Poland's PiS, the Sweden Democrats, and the Danish People's Party. Hungary's far-right ruling Fidesz party won considerable seats at the European Parliament despite the party being suspended from the EPP (European People's Party) the largest group in the European Parliament. So far, although very much similar in political mindset, Fidesz has not officially committed itself to the EAPN alliance, possibly due to personal differences between Victor Orban and Marine Le Pen. Notably, however, some left-wing populists have fared significantly worse in the 2019 election than they did in that of 2014 e.g. Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, which seemingly is a reflection of a decline in their domestic political position. Furthermore, the PVV of Greet Wilders of the Netherlands although had done well in national elections in 2017, however did not secure any seat in the new European Parliament. It is relevant to note that Greet Wilders who has been notorious in his anti-Muslim position, had on 28 December 2019, announced on a tweet that he would re-launch satirical cartoon contest competition on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on the premises of the Dutch Parliament in The Hague, more than a year after he had cancelled such motive in 2018. A few hours later, he however, announced cancellation of the competition, citing that "mission accomplished" as his announcement had made headlines around the world. Mission accomplished. It once again proved that he only craved for "cheap publicity". The

Christian democrat, European People’s Party (EPP) still holds the majority, followed respectively by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE renamed Renew) and the Greens Party fourth. The resurgence of green parties across the continent during the European election is noteworthy as it reflects the importance given by segments of the electorate to climate change issues (O’Neill, 2019).

The main elements that have brought together the far-right alliance in the new European Parliament obviously remain migration, more generally anti-Islam as well as ultra-nationalism. The question remains how influential these rightwing groups will be in Parliament. This yet remains to be seen. However, political analysts are of the view that given 13 the disparate priorities of various groups in the European Parliament, “its present five-year term may not be characterized by dominance of the far-right, but rather by a fragmented political landscape in which new alliances will be necessary to keep the EU’s traditional agenda moving forward” (Timmons, 2019). This will involve a more balancing act, at least in the short term. One thing to reckon with is Brexit finally happening. Many MEPs from the UK who have been supportive of the Muslims and overall cause of Islam would be departing the European Parliament. On the UK’s domestic level, the sweeping victory of the Conservative Party in the December 2019 elections is also something to reckon with. It is worthwhile to mention that in a poll surveyed shortly before the election, a staggering 62 percent of conservative voters agreed with the statement that Islam threatens the British way of life, while 37 percent admitted to viewing Muslims in a negative light. These findings are deeply worrisome but not surprising. Reports on the prevalence of anti-Muslim bigotry in the Conservative Party have abounded for many years now. It is recalled that Mr. Boris Johnson in an article that he once wrote mentioned “Islamophobia—fear of Islam—seems a natural reaction” and insisted “Islam is the problem.” To conclude, the electoral advances of the far-right parties in many European countries are quite alarming and definitely set a new balance of power within the European Union¹⁶. Yet on a positive note in 2019, the notion that populist parties, is the future of European politics seeming far less certain? The snap elections both in Austria and in Italy in 2019 had seen the untimely collapse of ruling coalition with the far right, Freedom Party of Austria and Italy’s League respectively. In both countries, these parties have been replaced in the new governing coalition, respectively. The Terrorist Attack of 9/11 provided an impetus to the rise of Islamophobia. After the attack of Twin Towers Islam was being viewed as a conservative, barbaric and intolerant perspective of life. Muslim was posited as blood thirsty savages under the banner of a monolithic religion. The West holding the power to Information Technology spread the acrimony, condemning Muslims to racial discrimination and ridiculed Muslim community as perpetrators of violence and unrest in society. With the rise of Islamophobia across the board, the far-right political parties of liberal western communities gained momentum in exploiting the subjected minorities of Muslims to confer political gains. Islamophobia became a subterfuge to add defamation to Islam by public commentators and political actors. The 2016 Presidential elections of America were one of the most acrimonious and confrontational campaigns in the history of America. Trial on the Issue of Myanmar’s Genocide against Rohingya at the International Court of Justice (Becker, 2020).

Repeated attempt to insult and ridicule Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)

On 2 September 2020, the French magazine Charlie Hebdo launched ‘another’ reckless provocation by republishing cartoons about the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). The same cartoon had in the past triggered condemnation, and eventual attack and killings in Paris in January 2015. The publication apparently coincides with the trial of persons accused as accomplices in the 2015 attacks that killed 11 staff of the Magazine. The

republishing of the offensive cartoons drew renewed condemnation in France and beyond. Fearing violent protests, the French Council of the Muslim Faith, the main organization representing French Muslims, had urged that attention should not be paid to the republished cartoons. It also cautioned that “terrorism that is committed in the name of Islam is the enemy of the religion”. On the other hand, there were other groups who support the republication of the cartoons viewing these through the lens of “freedom of expression and freedom of press”. Reportedly, President Macron had stated that “A president of France should never judge the editorial choice of a journalist or editorial staff because there is freedom of the press which is rightly cherished”. Similarly, French Prime Minister Jean Castex wrote in a Twitter post: “Always Charlie”. On 25 September 2020, a knife attack was carried out in Paris, near the former office of Charlie Hebdo magazine, wounded two people. On 2 October 2020, President Macron announced his plan of action against all forms of ‘separatism’, especially the ‘radical Islamism’. Although the President was supposed to “tackle all forms of separatisms” in his speech, it ended up being only about ‘Islamism’. By 22 October 2020, the political scene in France has become tense, especially with the far-right parties, seeking to gain political mileage out of it. Marine Le Pen of National Rally party found it an apt opportunity to spotlight her hardline views against Muslims and immigration. In a press conference on 19 October 2020, she accused the incumbent government for its “soft line” policy, while underlining that France now required “wartime legislation” to combat organized force of radicalized Islamists. Wary of appearing “inactive”, President Macron had already termed the killing an “Islamist terrorist attack” and described France as being in an “existential” fight against terror. On 16 October 2020, another incident happened – an 18-year-old French citizen of Chechen descent beheaded a secondary school teacher in the suburb in Northwest of Paris, provoking strong condemnation in France and beyond. The killing is believed to be linked to showing of cartoons of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) by the deceased teacher, Samuel Paty, to students apparently as part of a free speech class. Reportedly, photo of the teacher and a message confessing to his murder was found on the mobile phone of his killer, Abdullakh Anzorov, who was later shot dead by police. The crime was described by French President Emmanuel Macron as an “Islamist terror attack” and urged the nation to unite against. The President reassured that the government will “go further with measures against structures, associations or people close to radicalized circles”, and among the announced measures were: **i)** make secularism in public service compulsory, **ii)** school will be obligatory at 3 years old and home-schooling would be strictly limited to health imperatives, **(iii)** associations requesting state funding will have to sign a “secular charter to respect the Republic’s values”. Furthermore, the President also intends to “free Islam and Muslims in France from the influence of foreign countries” (by training of Imams in France, as well as reinforcing the control of the financing). A budget of 10 million € will be provided for the Foundation pour l’Islam de France (Foundation for Islam of France) and the creation of a “scientific institute of Islamology”. The French Council of Muslim Faith would be requested to draw a charter within six months, non-respect could lead to the revocation of Imams. In this regard, a draft bill is planned to be presented on 9 December 2020, of which analysts believe that this might be used to further stigmatize and target French Muslim communities in the country. Since 25 October 2020, there had been protests and mounting calls in the Islamic world to boycott French products. The French Foreign Ministry meanwhile, called on authorities in countries in which there are angry reactions against France to ensure the security of French citizens. The Ministry described the calls for protests as “heinous”, lamenting manipulations “by a radical minority” and dubbing nascent boycotts of French goods as “groundless”. On 29 October 2020, a knife attack happened, killed 3 persons inside the Notre-Dame Basilica in Nice, France, complicating

the already tense situation obtaining in France and beyond since the killing of Samuel Paty which was already been described as “terror attack by Islamist”. Marine Le Pen was quick in her response calling for a hardening of the combat against Islamist radicalism. She said: “the dramatic acceleration of Islamist acts of war against our citizens and our country impose on our leaders a comprehensive response aimed at eradicating Islamism from our soil”. At the time when this report is written, some corrective measures were taken by President Emmanuel Macron to deescalate the on-going tension between France and the Muslim world; amidst the continuous crackdown on Islamic organizations and NGOs i.e. Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), BarakaCity, and Cheik Yassine Collective (Steiner, 2019).

Islamophobia in the U.S. and Canada

Islamophobia — in the form of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims — had been on the rise in the U.S. since 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. It continued until today and had even been worsening over the years due to some factors such as the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media, the spread of anti-Islam rhetoric, as well as lack of understanding of the religion itself. As a result, living as Muslim in the American society today would be much different with the same life of twenty years before, at the period before 9/11 tragedy happened. It was now very common to see that the safety tips, concise and chilling, were passed from friend to Muslim friend on social media, by imams to their congregations, by Islamic groups to their members, by parents to their children heading off to school: When in the subway, “Stood away from the platform edge, preferably with your back against a wall”, “Walk in groups after dark,” “Stay alert at all times”, etc. Muslims in American big cities and elsewhere had guarded against discrimination and hates, changing their routines and trying to manage their fear. Still, the violence had come (ABC13 News, n.d.). A survey of different faiths' and ethnicities' outlooks on Islam was released by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, according to which the White Evangelicals were the most likely hold Islamophobic views. The poll, placed in the field since January 2019, asked questions of American Jews, Muslims, Protestants and Catholics, as well as the non-affiliated. Thirteen percent (13%) of American Jews said they had a negative view of Muslims and 44 percent of white Evangelicals said they had a negative view of Muslims, double the number that said they viewed them favorably (20 percent). By race, Hispanic Americans were found to be five times more likely to hold favorable opinions of Muslims than negative ones. Fifty-one percent (51%) said they had a positive feeling towards Muslims versus 10% feeling negatively. Black Americans were seven times as likely to have a positive opinion of Muslims as opposed to a negative one. White Americans were almost equally likely to have a negative or positive opinion of Muslims if they had an opinion at all. However, 40 percent of white Americans polled said they had no opinion on the Muslim community (ABC7 News, n.d.). There was also a strong indication that Media has played a significant role to the fast growing Islamophobia in the U.S. A study revealed that news coverage about Muslims in the U.S. media was far more negative when compared to other minorities' representation. The study, which was conducted by researchers from the Media Portrayals of Minorities Project Lab at Middlebury College, looked into news covering minorities, namely African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Jews and Muslims from four national newspapers in the country for the year of 2018. A total of 26,626 articles published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today were selected for the study; where articles were then scored according to the positive and negative tones they carried. The research further revealed that only 2% of the articles about Muslims covered Islamophobia or anti-Muslim sentiment with 3% explicitly noting anti-Muslim hate crimes, while some 17% of articles about the Jewish community mentioned anti-Semitism.

News coverage on the Jewish minority community was also described as having a neutral tone on average by the researchers, unlike any other news covering minorities.⁹ A report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) says that Islamophobia in the U.S. was ‘systematic’, directly or indirectly supported by a vast source of funding. It says American charities steered \$125 million to groups that spread anti-Muslim hate and propaganda during the three-year period ending in 2016. These charities included at least 30 foundations in New Jersey and a dozen in Westchester County, New York. More than 800 entities ranging from major national foundations like Fidelity Charitable and Schwab Charitable to small, little-known family foundations gave grants to organizations that push anti-Muslim rhetoric and legislation. In some cases, foundations might donate to organizations while unaware of their role in anti-Islam activity. CAIR identified 39 organizations in its so-called “Islamophobia network” that operated as media watchdogs, experts on security or the Middle East, or centers for ‘freedom’ among other benevolent-sounding missions. Some were foundations whose families had helped educational, cultural and health institutions for generations. Among them was the Sarna Family Foundation in Englewood, which gave \$500 to the Clarion Project, which produced and distributed films promoting anti-Muslim conspiracy theories.

Meanwhile, a study titled “Muslim-Non-Muslim Locational Attainment in Philadelphia: A New Fault Line in Residential Inequality?” published in the peer-reviewed journal *Demography* in August 2019, used data gathered from household surveys in the Philadelphia metropolitan area that deal with people’s religious affiliations, race, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. The study says: “Our analyses find significant Muslim-non-Muslim disparities in neighborhood characteristics...Black and non-black Muslims live in neighborhoods with fewer white residents than non-Muslims, even after making equal their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics — for example income, education and family status. Among blacks, Muslims are 30 percent less likely than non-Muslims to live in suburban neighborhoods” (Campbell, 2019).

Islamophobic Discourses and Campaigns in the U.S. and Canada

Islamophobia was reflected through multiple forms, including through discourses and campaigns done by individuals or media, and institutions, being intended to mock, insult, or bring harm to Islam, Muslims, or anything associated with the religion. For instance, during the reviewed period, the Observatory monitored some incidents reflecting such derogatory discourses and campaigns in the U.S.; cited as following:

“Ramadan Special Pulled Pork Sandwiches \$2.99 Muslims Eat Free”

The York Daily Record/Sunday News analyzed the Facebook pages of more than 500 police officers from all 20 police departments in York County in response to the Plain View Project, a database that flagged posts and comments that researchers believed could undermine public trust and confidence in law enforcement. The initiative received national attention and sparked outrage across the United States. The York City Police Department was one of eight police departments examined in the national project. More than 99% of police officers in the York Daily Record's analysis did not post anything of note. They shared pictures of their family, offered commentary about sports and posted tributes to fallen first-responders. Nevertheless, the investigation also uncovered four police officers who publicly posted racist, Islamophobic and sexually aggressive comments and pictures. One post made a joke about breathalyzers and oralsex. Another post encouraged people to share a picture of a pig named Mohammud. In addition, there was the post that made light of shooting criminals. In a post from April 2019, West Manchester Township Police Sgt. Patrick Hinds shared a meme of the cartoon character Lisa Simpson standing on stage in front of an audience. There was a screen behind her with the words: “Evidence suggests dead pedophiles do not reoffend.” Later, in May, Hinds posted a picture of a sign outside a

BBQ restaurant called “Little Pigs.” The sign outside of the restaurant was circled and read, “Ramadan Special Pulled Pork Sandwiches \$2.99 Muslims Eat Free.” Several other posts on Hinds’ page contained messages with similar Islamophobic themes (Padilla, 2019).

“Muslims Go back to your country.”

Tim Hortons coffee chain said a Michigan employee had been fired after a Muslim couple were told to “Go back to your country.” The incident occurred on 28 June 2019 at a Tim Hortons in Ypsilanti. Alaa Kouider and her husband, both were U.S. citizens, said they were harassed when they went inside to fix a coffee order that was made in the drive through lane. The exchange was recorded on video. Tim Hortons told media that it “does not tolerate any type of harassment.”

“No Muslims! Go away to Hell.”

Maria Disney behind bars after admitting to spray painting anti-Muslim graffiti on the walls of a Muslim-owned business in Concord. “No Muslims! Go away to Hell” was one of the messages sprayed on the side of International Market and Grill in the city. The store specialized in Middle Eastern and South Asian groceries and its restaurant served Afghan food. Concord Police Department described that she had an argument with a Muslim the week before, and that’s why she did. Disney was being charged with vandalism and property damage (Daily Sabah News, 2020).

“Some cancers must be treated with radiation. Islam is one of them”

Raritan Deputy of the New Jersey, Louis Reiner resigned after he reportedly posted a series of threatening Islamophobic messages on his personal Facebook page. One post depicted a mushroom cloud and declared, “Some cancers must be treated with radiation. Islam is one of them.” In October 2019, the Raritan Township Committee passed a resolution condemning the posts and calling for Reiner to resign from the Deputy Mayor position.

“Muslims should not be allowed to seek asylum or immigration to the U.S.”

A civil rights group was calling on Roman Catholic Church leaders to reject a sermon in which a Minnesota priest described Islam as a threat to the U.S. and Christianity. The Rev. Nick VanDenBroeke was pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in the small town of Lonsdale. He said during a sermon on 5 January that large numbers of Muslims should not be allowed to seek asylum or immigration to the U.S. The Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations then called on church leaders to repudiate the sermon. St. Paul-Minneapolis Archbishop Bernard Hebda said all who believe in God must work together to banish every form of discrimination and intolerance.

“Islam is threatening the U.S.”

A Baptist church in Michigan had canceled a blatantly anti-Islam lecture series after heated backlash from politicians and religious leaders. Bloomfield Hills Baptist Church’s two-day event promised to provide two vital briefings about how Islam was supposedly threatening the U.S., according to a flyer for the event. The church’s pastor, Donald McKay, had proudly embraced the label “Islamophobe,” telling Fox 2 Detroit the week before that he believed committed Muslims were seeking to overthrow the U.S. and dominated the world. Local and state politicians had denounced the church’s. Intent to host the anti-Muslim lecture series. Reps. Debbie Dingell and Andy Levin, both Michigan Democrats, condemned the event in a joint statement, urging the church to cancel it and instead “recognize America’s rich cultural and religious diversity.” Jordan Denari Duffner, a Catholic author who had written extensively about Muslim-Christian relations, told Media that the talking points Hadian’s project used had been echoed by other Islamophobic groups — and were used in the past to scapegoat other religious groups, as well. She said: “Hadian’s organization claims to speak the truth with love, but instead they seem intent on

sowing mistrust and misunderstanding of Muslims, not to mention support for discriminatory policies that would marginalize Muslim communities (Gaby Del Valle, 2019).

“I’m pushing to put (Islam) on trial”

Rick Phillips, a Republican candidate for the state’s 2nd Congressional District primary on June 2, stated on his campaign website that “Islam should be recognized as a hostile ideology antithetical to the United States Constitution” and that “It should have its religious status revoked.” He also falsely claims that a “mosque is nothing more than a military outpost where the seeds of hatred are sown against our country.” The Republican Party’s rebuked of him came in response to an email by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) urging its local leaders to repudiate the candidate’s comments.

“Far-Rights and populism in the U.S.”

A Columnist had argued that the 2010s was the decade where populism surged around the world and predominantly far-right parties permeated the political mainstream, and the 2020s is the decade their people see the consequences of those policies. He wrote: “The decade brought us the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the Brexit vote in Britain. It witnessed the rise of the Alternative for Germany—the first far-right party to enter the country’s national parliament in decades—as well as the ascent of populist parties in countries such as Austria, Brazil, Italy, India, Indonesia, and Poland. By 2018, as many as 20 populist leaders held executive office around the world.” He continued: “If the 2010s were the years in which predominantly far-right, populist parties permeated the political mainstream, then the 2020s will be when voters ‘are going to see the consequences of that.’” In response to that argument, a professor of comparative politics at the University of Reading, in England, said: “In some ways, they already have. In Britain, the 2016 vote to leave the European Union—and the political fallout it caused—is likely to be fulfilled at the end of January, following Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s resounding victory in last month’s general election. Elsewhere, populist parties have already made their impact—if not through passing legislation at the head of government, then by applying pressure in opposition” (Campbell, 2019). Quite recently, the U.S. President again stirred strong reaction as his comments on Muslim congresswoman Ilham Omar culminated in a chilling moment of 17 July 2019 at his “Make America Great Again” re-election rally in North Carolina. When Trump claimed Omar had a history of “launching vicious anti-Semitic attacks,” thousands in the crowd responded by chanting “Send her back! Send her back!” The chant was reminiscent of the “Lock her up” refrain rallygoers used to shout about Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign. Yale philosophy professor who was also the author of ‘How Fascism Works’ Jason Stanley tweeted after the rally: “We are facing an emergency” (Patriquin, 2019). Trump briefly tried to distance himself from the chant on July 18, saying he was not happy” with it, and had tried to start speaking very quickly to drown it out” The rally chants came just days after Trump tweeted a series of racist attacks on Omar and her Congressional colleagues Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley, all women of color. In one tweet, Trump suggested the four women go back to where they came from. All but Omar were born in the US. Omar immigrated to the US as a child and became a US citizen at 17. The attacks were being criticized at home, and in Europe and the United Kingdom. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called Trump’s remarks “completely unacceptable” on July 19. German chancellor Angela Merkel, asked about the comments at a press conference, said she stood in solidarity with the four Congresswomen, and that Trump’s remark “thwarts America’s strength.”

The United States was strong, she said, because “people of very different nationalities have contributed to the strength of this people” (Padilla, 2019). Immediately,

some white supremacists and right-wing media figures quickly jumped to his defense. Trump tweeted about “progressive” Democratic congresswomen, writing that they “originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere,” and saying that they should “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how it is done. You can’t leave fast enough.” It was widely inferred that Trump was addressing Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), and Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA). Trump went on to berate the lawmakers for “viciously telling the people of the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run.” The tweets were also factually inaccurate -- Ocasio-Cortez’s family is from Puerto Rico, which is part of the U.S., and she was born in the Bronx; Pressley is an African-American who was born in Cincinnati to parents who were also from Ohio; Tlaib was born to immigrant Palestinian parents in Detroit; and while Omar was born in Somalia, she became a U.S. citizen as a teenager. Many Americans pointed out that being told to “go back” to some distant country, regardless of birthplace, is a familiar, ugly, racist trope. Unsurprisingly, some white nationalists and right-wing media figures defended Trump’s comments. A few praised the comments, and others resorted to gas lighting, insisting that media and Democrats were misquoting Trump (*Daily Sabah News*, 2020).

Islamophobia in Europe

Anti-Islam sentiments had bolstered almost everywhere across the European continent, where significant reordering of the political landscape had been taking place since the last few years. This situation was quite predictable, as countries in this region had been struggling with high level of unemployment since the economic crisis hit in 2008. Such a circumstance in turn led to domestic debates about hot issues such as immigrants, non-European foreigners, assimilation and integration, national identity etc., which worsened by the surge of refugees fleeing the civil war in some Muslim countries, as well as ‘periodic’ terrorist attacks hitting the continent. These ingredients, altogether, were creating the necessary environment for right-wing parties and figures to prosper, in parallel with the European Union’s policies of integration. As the consequences, anti-EU, anti-immigration and anti-Muslim platforms then gained a fertile ground, soaring Islamophobia highly across Europe, at least as being indicated by polling and reports on some countries in Europe. According to a poll by anti-racist group ‘Hope Not Hate’, Islamophobia had gone mainstream in the U.K., with liberal, middle class voters also expressing anti-Muslim views. People continued to see Muslims overwhelmingly more negatively than any other religious group according to research with 31% of the population believing that Islam posed a threat to the British way of life. Some 18% of people had an extremely negative view of Muslims. On perceptions of Muslims, conservative voters were among those with the highest proportion who saw Muslims very negatively (26%). A huge 44% of Conservative voters saw Islam as a threat, with only half that amount (22%) saying it was compatible. A total of 6,118 adults were polled by YouGov between 26th April - 1st May 2019.

Islamophobia in the Rest of the World:

Myanmar

Since 2012, there has been a continued spread of anti-Muslim sentiments, mainly in Rakhine state and further escalated towards tension between the Rakhines and the Rohingyas elsewhere in Myanmar. There were at least two justifying reasons: First, the release of radical Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu and the then formation of the 969 movement under his leadership that provided an organized platform for the promotion of Islamophobia. The movement, which was launched in 2012, propagates fear of Muslims (who make up 4% of the total population according to the 1983 census in Myanmar) on the

false claim that eventually Muslims would become the ‘majority element’ and the largest group within Myanmar. Members of the 969 movement often act as prime instigators of the anti-Muslim movement all over the country. Second, the absence of media censorship since 2011 had the side effect of allowing hate speech to flourish unchecked. Uncensored media has opened the avenues to the use and abuse of social media, propagating anti Rohingya, as well as anti-Muslim speeches and messages. The 2014 riot in Mandalay highlights the misuse of the media. For instance, a fabricated story in social media of molestation of a Buddhist girl by her Muslim employer triggered a massive violence, hence Muslims in Rakhine State identified as Rohingya have then been vilified. In parallel, ultranationalists have framed Muslims as posing a threat to Buddhists in Myanmar. They made claims about high Muslim birthrates, increasing Muslim economic influence, and Muslim plans to take over Myanmar. They argued that Muslims were increasing in numbers, in part by marrying Buddhist women and forcing them to convert. In addition, ultranationalists often reacted strongly against Muslims in Myanmar wearing hijab and other forms of Islamic dresses. They interpreted such dress code as a sign of Muslims’ greater allegiance to their faith than to the Burmese nation. Meanwhile, they also employed gruesome images of ISIS brutality and selective photos from episodes of communal violence in Myanmar to suggest all Muslims were potential terrorists. Some ultranationalists also used dehumanizing language to characterize Muslims, a hallmark of dangerous speeches. Social media was in particular playing the significant role behind the calamity suffered by Rohingyas. Reuters and the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley School of Law found more than 1,000 examples of posts, comments, images and videos attacking Myanmar’s Muslims – including some material that had been on the site for more than six years. Facebook announced that it removed a total of 135 Facebook accounts, 425 pages and 17 groups, as well as a further 15 Instagram accounts. The accounts had a wide reach, with around 2.5 million people following at least one. Meanwhile, 6,400 people belonged to at least one of the Facebook groups, while around 1,300 followed at least one of the Instagram accounts. According to Facebook, a number of its accounts were operated by the Myanmar military as part of a coordinated hate campaign against the Rohingya people. This is just one indication of the scale of the hate speech problem in Myanmar. Far more resources must be dedicated to tackle this onerous scourge. The international community keeps condemning Myanmar on this issue. Following a mission to investigate claims against the military of Myanmar of human rights abuses, the UN released a report that stated top officials in the armed forces must be investigated for genocide and crimes against humanity. The report states that the military tactics were “grossly disproportionate to actual security threats.” Six senior military figures were also named in the report with the conclusion that they should go on trial for their involvement. These names included Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and his deputy. Finally, based on the findings of the FFM, the ICJ made, on 23 January 2020, a unanimous order on provisional measures urging Myanmar to prevent the commission of genocidal acts pending its final decision and to preserve evidence of genocidal acts... [to protect the Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority in the Buddhist majority country that has suffered “mass killing, mass displacement, mass fear[and]overwhelming...brutality”]. Myanmar was also compelled to report back on all measures taken in that regard, within four months. Moreover, the decision taken by the ICJ makes reference to the Rohingyas as “a group that self-identifies as the Rohingya and that claims a longstanding connection to Rakhine State, which forms part of the Union of Myanmar”. This mention is a clear dismissal of the denial of the Myanmar authorities of the Burmese citizenship to the Rohingyas under the pretext that they do not have roots in that country (Bartlett, 2019).

China

There were around 25 million Muslims living in China, which is minority in a country of 1.4 billion populations. Among them, the Hui and the Uighurs made up the largest ethnic groups. Uyghurs primarily live in Xinjiang, (Earnshaw, 2019) but the Hui scattered around the country. Up to the first quarter of 2020, the world's attention had focused so much on the situation in Xinjiang Province, with diversion recently by the Corona virus outbreak in Wuhan. Since 2018, reports from some international bodies claimed that hundreds of thousands of ethnic Uyghur were detained against their will in mass re-education camps under the pretext of preventing extremism. Media reports also suggested that China was participating in the practice of forced conversion of Muslims, alleging that thousands were being held for months at a time, and subjected to political indoctrination sessions. It is claimed that many had been detained for praying, wearing 'Islamic' clothing, or having foreign connections, such as travel abroad in the past, or visiting relatives living in another country. Some reports even mentioned the deaths of detainees in the centers, and other human rights abuses occurring in the centers secured by guard towers, barbed wire, and high walls.⁶⁵ On Xinjiang issue, a fresh accusation came from the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) that claimed that Chinese authorities were reportedly to have used app, technology and surveillance system for controlling the Uyghurs (Hussain, 2019). One document noted that authorities in Xinjiang had identified 40,557 people by monitoring their activity on Zappya, a popular free Chinese app used to share audio and video files. It encouraged users to download the Quran and share religious teachings. The app, also known as Kuai Ya, was developed by DewMobile Inc. The app was popular beyond China, in countries including Myanmar, India, and Pakistan. Still according to the ICIJ, Zappya allows smartphones to connect to one another without being connected to the web, making it popular in areas with poor internet connection. According to the document, authorities found that more than 1.8 million Uighurs in Xinjiang had downloaded the software between July 2016 and June 2017, and that 40,557 of them were what it called 'harmful' people, that included fugitives, criminal detainees, and unauthorized imams (Bloom, 2019). Human Rights Watch reported in 2019 that official's in Xinjiang also used a special app to log residents' personal information, which included political views, use of birth control, and use of electricity at home. Some reports maintained that party officials policing the region also stick QR codes in front of people's front doors to log personal information about the household and track their whereabouts (Mohan, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Observing events, media news, discourses, public feelings, and incidents on Islamophobia occurring during the latest 20-months period, the Islamophobia Observatory draws some conclusions as pointed below:

In the aftermath of the shocking massacre against Muslim worshippers in Christchurch city in New Zealand in March 2019 up until end of 2020, the trend of Islamophobia has kept on the rise, not only in Western countries, but also quite elsewhere around the world.

A number of factors have been identified as the main contributors to such a worrisome trend: mounting far-right ideologies, refugee crises, immigration, and negative perceptions amid adherents of different faiths, and provocative rhetoric and action by certain media. The U.S. and Europe still stand as the major hot spots of Islamophobia, where the trend of Islamophobia has been most disturbing as evidenced by the number of incidents such as mosque burning, provocative statements in social media, mail threats, Holy Quran burning and desecration, insults of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), physical assaults, and

verbal abuses. Both in the U.S. and Europe, the Islamophobic trend has been mostly marked by the growing popularity of right-wing parties and movements, evolving into a global wave of anti-Establishment, ultra-nationalism, and the mushrooming of extreme right-wing parties.

Some events have brought about a significant impact on the trend and prospects of Islamophobia since last year, particularly the terrorist attacks against Muslims in New Zealand in March 2019; the terrorist attack in Sri Lanka in April 2019; the European Union Parliamentary Election in March 2019, the case against Myanmar for the Genocide against Rohingya at the International Court of Justice in November 2019, the introduction of controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by India in August 2019; and most recently the havoc in France following the republication of derogatory cartoons of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) by Charlie Hebdo Magazine in September 2020.

The Muslim World is now becoming more active in their efforts against Islamophobia, while the commitment from Member States for addressing the issue of Islamophobia is much relieving; in parallel with significant measures around the globe to combat Islamophobia and to provide better protections on Muslims and other minorities, in the aftermath of the terrorist incident in New Zealand.²⁷

Islamophobia against Veil, Hijab, Burkini, and Burqa continued to be a serious contagion spreading across the globe. The policy has attracted more and more governments in different regions, and had become one of the most potent flash points in the countries' tense relations with their Muslim population. So far, at least 14 (fourteen) countries have fully banned veil, headscarf, hijab, niqab, and burqa i.e. France, Belgium, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, Bulgaria, Latvia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. However, since February 2020, phobia against Hijab and Burqa declined significantly, probably due to the world-wide campaign to wear face masks as part of the personal protective gear against Corona virus.

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