

# SHIFTING PARADIGMS: ISLAMIC JUST SUSTAINABILITIES AND AMERICAN MUSLIMS IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

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*Abstract:* This paper explores how Trump-era American Muslim activists and organizations have contributed to the development of what we call an “Islamic Just Sustainability”. We explore how this emerging paradigm has restructured Muslim identity in the American context, while reinforcing a foundational shift in religious and sociocultural understanding of the environment and its corresponding intersectional identities. The paper will discuss how the Trumpian context has buttressed American Muslim activist networks that first arose in the post-9/11 environment then explore the development of Islamic Just Sustainability as a theological precept in the American Muslim community. Finally, we will explore the way American Muslim scholars and activists have promoted and implemented the Islamic Just Sustainability paradigm through the pulpit and in their communities.

*Keywords:* Islamic Just Sustainability, Trump, islamophobia, Islam, American muslim.

## INTRODUCTION

The victory of President Trump in the 2016 presidential elections has dramatically questioned the place of American-Muslims in the political and social landscape. His divisive rhetoric and Islamophobic policy initiatives have galvanized the American public, creating a space where bigotry and Islamophobic violence that

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was formerly only common amongst fringe racists, to become the norm (Beydoun 2017). However, in spite of the normalization of the divisive rhetoric, American Muslims have become active participants in the American political and social landscape (Krajeski 2017). They have been in the forefront of not only campaigning against the numerous policies that are adversely affecting the larger Muslim community, but also pivotal in constructing emerging organizations, ideological formations, and alliances with other just sustainability movements (Al-Damkhi 2008).

The shift in American Muslim activism reflects the larger question of what it means to be a Muslim in the Trump era, and more importantly, *how* to be an American Muslim. Such questions have shaped the framework for establishing principles for Muslim scholars and activists, as they face the policies emerging from the Trumpian political apparatus (Calfano, Lajevardi, Michelson 2017). As second and third generation American Muslims begin controlling Islamic religious institutions, a paradigmatic shift in the perception of what constitutes their “home” has taken place (Naşr 1996). In other words, what was considered a foreign land by immigrant parents – who originally came from Muslim-majority countries in North Africa, Middle East, and Asia – now transformed into an intimate abode for the children of immigrants residing in the United States. This has allowed Muslim activists to re-conceptualize what it means to be a Muslim, and expand their notion of inclusivity and identity, by absorbing the struggles of those who were historically viewed as outside of their socio-political interests, and therefore not a priority in community development (Haniff 2003).

The reasons for this transformation are due to multiple factors. From a sociological perspective, the change in priorities can be seen as an organic process; the ostracization of the Muslim community has led to an alignment with other minority groups who also face discrimination, albeit in different ways (Taras 2013). Another contributing factor can be seen from the lens of assimilation. Second-generation and third-generation American Muslims

tend to be more invested in the social, political, and economic realities of their “home” country (Byng 2017). Consequently, the central goal for Muslim activists is to promote a sense of cohesiveness that seeks to redefine the American Muslim narrative, while promoting a shift in their religio-sociocultural understanding of the environment and their corresponding identities (Nagel, Staeheli 2005).

By constructing inclusive narratives that bridge the divide with other minority communities, American Muslims have expanded their frames and are redefining what constitutes “Muslim issues” in the community (Nagel, Staeheli 2005). This reconstruction seeks to work from within the framework of the Islamic tradition to pursue just and sustainable political and social change in American society. Therefore, pursuing theological positions that maintains that justice (*adl*) and equity (*ihsan*) in relation to the environment, minorities, and politics are not only just causes, but also ones that are embedded in Islamic history and legal tradition (Shute 2018). Thus, for American Muslims, the practice of Islam is interconnected to other struggles within the environment and fighting for a just sustainability is of the greatest struggle, or *Jihad*.

In this spirit, the following paper utilizes qualitative content analysis of news articles, websites, and American Islamic scholarship to explore how American Muslim community activists and organizations have sought to define and address the overarching importance of what we call an “Islamic Just Sustainability” in the Trump era. The paper will first discuss the Trumpian context that gave rise to the growth of American Muslim activist networks by looking at global discourses in just sustainability. Then, we will lay the conceptual undertones of the Islamic Just Sustainability approach by developing a definition and exploring its theological precepts. Finally, we will explore the way American Muslim scholars and activists alike have sought to implement Islamic Just Sustainability on the pulpit and within the urban environment, with an emphasis on the approaches of three prominent American



Muslim scholars, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Imam Suhaib Webb, and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf.

## TRUMP, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The election of President Trump during the 2016 campaign was primarily characterized with xenophobic rhetoric and regressive policy frameworks that sought to reverse and transform the accomplishments of a number of environmental, social, and economic justice efforts (Dillon et al. 2017). From pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord, to the Muslim Ban, Trump is actively reversing the legislative accomplishments of the Obama administration while also pursuing Islamophobic policies that have challenged the presence of the American Muslim community (Tesler 2018; Ouassini, Amini 2018). These policies have not only hurt the American Muslim community, but also other vulnerable communities in the United States and around the globe (Tesler 2018).

The Trump effect on American Muslims has forced the community to reevaluate their social and political positions in the United States vis-à-vis other vulnerable and targeted communities. The combination of this reevaluation and alignment of grievances and goals with the wider community of minorities has strengthened the Muslim activist network within the United States (Peucker, Ceylan 2017). However, in spite of the sociopolitical strain directed by Trump and his administration towards the American Muslim community, scholars have rightly observed the first significant catalyst for the maturation of Muslim activist networks took place in the post-9/11 environment (Cainkar 2002). The policies instituted by the Bush administration resulted in social and legal repercussions that can be felt even today (Maira 2016: 11; Slessarev-Jamir 2011; McGinty, Sziarto, Seymour-Jorn 2013). The main difference, however lies in the public rhetoric. Putting aside actual intent, the presidential discourse post-9/11 by



George W. Bush, was drastically different than Trump's presidency – the former stressing inclusion of the American Muslim community, with the latter using open hostility and demonization (Barry Jr. 2017; Ouassini, Amini 2018). The idiosyncrasies of the Trump presidency could potentially be the reason for a second iteration of the maturation of Muslim activist networks, motivated by the development of an Islamic Just Sustainability. It should also be noted that, although the current research will focus on recent developments, the cultivation of American Muslim activist networks reached its peak (and perhaps, initiated) during the civil rights era, with the efforts of notable American Muslims like Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X (Jackson 2005). The effort laid by both the immigrant and Black Muslim communities during this era is the foundation by which all subsequent American Muslim activist efforts rely upon.

Additionally, while president Trump's policies and individual actions have further divided America, social cohesion of minority groups has taken place: his election has produced new forms of protest and social movement activity that has allowed for the re-framing of the traditional grievances of the Muslim community. In lumping the Muslim, Mexicans, liberals, environmentalist, LGBTQ, Haitian, working poor, and hundreds of other identities into one large group, a symbiosis of the downtrodden as taken place. He has forced American Muslims to reevaluate organizational structures, ideologies, and tactics in resisting the Trump administration's Islamophobic policies (Jamal 2017).

A consequence of this reevaluation is that the traditional structures of mobilization that were primarily based in the mosque setting, have shifted as later-generation American Muslims centralize their activism within the urban communities they are actively engaged with (Selod 2015). The shift towards grassroots organizational efforts has reflected the overall generational shift in Muslim leadership from first generation immigrants to their more invested children and grandchildren (Voas, Fleischmann 2012). The first generation were primarily concerned with



questions surrounding integration and assimilation into the larger American fabric, while only partially dedicated to their new American context; much of their focus was still on their former homes overseas (Voas, Fleischmann 2012). An example of this was in the 2000 presidential elections, where the first-generation American Muslim community overwhelmingly voted for George W. Bush and the Republican Party, ignoring long-standing African American Muslim political, social, economic interests in the communities that they occupy (Ayers 2007). Their reasoning was driven more by foreign policy and questions on Palestine, rather than socio-economic and political issues that affected their lives in the US (Love 2009).

This shift in both their focus and the construction of their own narrative for many second-generation American Muslim activists has been guided by the urgent need for relevancy. It is in the interests of the American Muslim community to move beyond their traditional institutional structures in order to be relevant in the context of vulgar Islamophobia and Trump (Ajrouch 2017). Aside from relevancy, the second reason for this focus is the increasing legal integration between the American context and the traditional Islamic legal framework. American Muslim scholarship and religious legal opinions have begun to approach American Muslim lives from a holistic perspective, primarily from within the American socio-political and economic context (Ahmed 2018). The centrality of the Islamic legal tradition cannot be overstated – American Muslim activist stances on equality, oppression, environmental consciousness, and justice are all informed by baseline Islamic law. The result of this symbiosis is an Islamic Just Sustainability, which is based upon the Islamic paradigm that God provides human beings with the responsibility to be vicegerents on this earth, to promote what is good and to work against negative elements of our society (Nasr 1993). These negative elements are conceptualized as anything that contradicts and/ or denies justice (*adl*) and equity (*ihsan*) for *all* living beings upon the earth, humans or otherwise (Fadl 2014). From this perspective, an Islamic

Just Sustainability manifests with two dimensions: a legalistic perspective that guides human action upon earth that is both just and sustainable, and a theological dimension that stresses intention and a form of sustainability that extends beyond the bounds of the current life.

### THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC LAW

The foundations of Islamic law stems from two sources: the Qur'an and a supplementary textual tradition referred to as "*Hadith*" in Arabic, which contain the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammed (Hallaq 2016). These laws, and the scholarly dialogue therein, form the guide by which faithful Muslims navigate their life and, in extension, their perspectives towards equity and justice. Although a technical discussion of Islamic Law is beyond the scope of this paper, it will suffice to point out its evolving structures and characteristics *viz-a-viz* the diverse cultural contexts it encounters.

As Islam entered into new, diverse cultural environments, scholars and faithful believers participate in an integrative exercise that seeks compatibility between the basic tenets of Islamic law and the rich cultural and societal practices of a given region. Specific methodologies are utilized by jurists and legal scholars, which allow for a nuanced reconciliation between culture, religious practice, and legal development (see '*Urf*' and '*Adab*') (Ahmed 2018). It is precisely these tools that are operationalized when interpreting the stance of Islamic values towards justice and environmental consciousness in the US context. The main goal motivating the reconciliation between environmental, social, and cultural factors, with Islamic legal tenets lies in the ideas behind relevancy and efficacy. Without room for flexibility and constrained evolution, the legal edicts that guide faithful Muslims become fairly archaic and passé, thus posing a lack of usefulness for both practitioners and fellow citizens (Auda 2008).

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The scholarship and ideological perspectives that have emerged from within this legal reconciliation process has produced new hermeneutical paradigms that seek to make Islam relevant to the American Muslim community. The general pattern consists of leading Islamic thinkers and public figures appropriating neutral societal issues, mobilizing Muslim interest by injecting an Islamically-grounded responsibility with the issue, and gathering buy-in from the greater Muslim community (Fadl 2014). These scholars and movements leaders, thus, sought to strategically align the Muslim community with the larger non-Muslim community through causes and issues that have been conceptualized as Islamic in orientation (Yukleyen 2009).

Reading the Islamic tradition around the premise of just sustainability has allowed American Muslims to organize and create networks and alliances with a number of movements, some of which would not be historically aligned otherwise. While American Muslims are not a unified, homogenous entity, the vast majority of the Islamic organizations and structures that represent the American Muslim community have embodied this framework: the internalization of traditionally non-Islamic issues as their own (David 2007). This shift is one that American Muslim communities view as not only beneficial to the communities they serve, but also a responsibility per their standing within American society. This active participation in civil society to put “Islam into practice” while furthering American Muslim interests, and standing in society, is tied to what we call “Islamic Just Sustainability” (Djupe, Calfano 2012).

## AN “ISLAMIC JUST” SUSTAINABILITY

The pivotal publication of “Our Common Future” from the Brundtland Report of 1987, lays out the foundation, both conceptual and practical, of a just sustainability movement. The document highlights the potential role of religion in facilitating sus-





tainability by, “[...] helping provide direction and motivation in forming new values that would stress individual and joint responsibility towards the environment and towards nurturing harmony between humanity and environment” (Brundtland et al. 1987). The definition of just sustainability has also expanded, as a growing body of literature has sought to contribute towards the concept and bring nuance to the conversation. These discussions involve using just sustainability to address social and environmental justice transnationally (Agyeman, Bullard, Evans 2002), and an emphasis on the variable of “equity” when discussing the intersection of the environment, society, and economy (Agyeman 2005). It is precisely this message – the responsibility of a solitary believer, or her community, towards their society – that grounds the Islamic discourse in just sustainabilities.

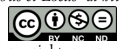
The concept of an Islamic Just Sustainability builds upon the notion of needing to work in consideration of localized, ecological constraints while developing a quality of life that is both environmentally and socially viable (Agyeman, Bullard, Evans 2002; Agyeman, Evans 2003; Campbell 1996). The critical question of equity forms the foundation of many of the questions that an Islamic Just Sustainability attempts to engage. The basis of an Islamic Just Sustainability paradigm is the Islamic principle that God provides human beings with the responsibility to be vicegerents on this earth, to promote what is good and to work against the negative elements of a society (Nasr 1993). These negative elements are conceptualized as anything that contradicts and/or denies justice (referred to in Arabic as “*adl*”) and equity (referred to in Arabic as “*ihسان*”) for the people (Fadl 2014).

Classical and modern Muslim scholarship has consistently interpreted the Islamic tradition as being concerned with the welfare of the environment. The Qur’an indicates that the degradation of the environment has deep theological implications: “Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps



they will return [to righteousness]” (Qur’an 30:41 Saheeh International). Both early and contemporary commentators of the Qur’an have interpreted this specific verse to refer to the appearance of droughts, reduction of harvest, and the general negative ecological impact, due to wrongdoings committed by human beings (Abdul-Matin 2010). More restrictive interpretations of the verse have used the term “corruption” as synonymous with environmental pollution (Abdul-Matin 2010). Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a contemporary Islamic philosopher, states regarding Islam and the natural order of the world: “the perennial wisdom of Islam concerning the natural order, is its religious significance and intimate relation to every phase of man’s life in this world” (Nasr 1993: 143). The current environmental, social, and political crises that currently manifest, “may in fact be said to have been caused by man’s refusal to see God as the real environment which surrounds man and nourishes life” (Nasr 1993: 131). In this perspective, Islamic Just Sustainability puts forth the idea that the earth belongs to all of humankind and it’s a religious obligation or responsibility (referred to in Arabic as “*masoliya*”) to not only take care of the environment, but ensure that justice prevails as, “nothing is more dangerous for the natural environment than the practice of the power of vicegerency by a humanity which no-longer accepts to be God’s servants, obedient to His commands and laws” (Nasr 1992: 92).

The theologically-motivated approach to addressing the critical issues shaping contemporary society brings about a sense of religious depth to the just sustainability discourse. From the perspective of actual output, the religious undertone of an emerging Islamic Just Sustainability movement has facilitated collaboration between networks and activists. A consequence of this has been the sharing of critical resources that “ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems” (Agyeman, Bullard, Evans 2003: 5). The connection between proponents of a just sustainability, coupled with the exchange of re-



sources, facilitates a strong sense of communal sustainability and environmental justice. This, in turn, addresses the societal need that emphasizes the interests of the community and urban environment; economic progress that focuses on the development of localized economic actors; and addressing political issues that are producing equitable relations between and among communities (Mohai, Pellow, Roberts 2009). Moreover, as an emerging movement, its success can only happen if the leadership and activists' networks are able to understand that sustainable development is interlinked with environmental, political, social, and economic justice (Taylor 2000). These are precisely the frames by which an Islamic Just Sustainability manifests itself. While Muslim scholars and activists do not label their movement actions under the just sustainability label explicitly, the religio-ideological frameworks that they have constructed reflects many of the just sustainability precepts (Agyeman, Evans 2003).

Leaders in the Muslim community alongside community activists have been able to reorient and restructure what they believe to be critical environmental and sustainable issues that are afflicting all communities, Muslim and non-Muslim. What used to be considered issues that were outside of the realm of "Islamic" concern, have now been integrated and are at the forefront of American Muslim issues (Beydoun 2017). The Islamic Just Sustainability approach has, thus, flipped the American Muslim narrative regarding the important and defining features of traditional Islamic activism which historically only focused on the immigrant Muslim community. Islamic Just Sustainability's social justice framework forces Muslims to conceptualize all forms of inequality and exploitation as Islamically *haram* or impermissible (Safi 2003). Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon the community to engage with the issue even if it is not one that is traditionally legitimated by orthodox Muslim positions. Some of these issues include opinions towards gender equality, social activism, social justice, and state-sanctioned roles and responsibilities towards fellow citizens (Yukich 2018). An example can be seen with how Muslim organi-

zations nationally stood with the LGBT community in supporting the legalization of gay marriage, in spite of the orthodox Islamic perspective that oppose the practice of homosexuality (Buncombe 2017; Miere 2018). This paradigmatic shift and evolution in religious law and culture reflects the principles of an Islamic Just Sustainability, which seeks sustainable growth, equality and justice for all communities. This is all done in the attempt to provide what is interpreted as individual and communal Muslim harmony within the natural and social environment (Ahmed, Amer, Killawi 2017). This necessitates that humankind take care of our ecosystem including plants, animals, the poor, and the persecuted as each individual Muslim would be responsible to God in the day of judgment (Ahmed et al. 2017).

The Islamic prophetic tradition outlines a specific, hierarchical methodology by which a Muslim believer should go about facilitating internal and external change; this is at the core of the emerging Islamic Just Sustainability movement (Naşr 1996). First, one must try to stop an injustice with their hands through direct mobilization in society. If one cannot encourage change through movement mobilization, then they must voice their concern orally, through dialogue, discussion, and protest. Finally, should the two aforementioned mediums of change not be possible, a Muslim should express empathy by embodying the pain of those who are being oppressed (including plants, animals, and human beings) – however, this is considered the weakest form of faith (Naşr 1996).

Standing with the Islamic legal concepts of *adl* and *ihsan* in society is not just about volunteerism, but it is seen as part of one's *ibaadah*, or worship, of God (Dutton 2013). The goal of creating sustainable communities while pursuing environmental justice has allowed American Muslims in the Trump era to mobilize their religious traditions and their accompanying identities to become relevant to the communities they serve (Safi 2003). This not only challenges the structures of Islamophobia but also establishes new social movement networks that are able to work together to bring about positive social change (Halafoff 2011).

## AMERICAN ISLAMIC SCHOLARS AND “ISLAMIC JUST SUSTAINABILITY”

Another critical element to understanding the contours of the emerging Islamic Just Sustainabilities movement is analyzing key actors and institutions. Understanding the role of prominent Islamic scholarship and American Muslim activism will give us further insight into the development and current standing of Islamic Just Sustainability and its presence within American society. Two prominent American Muslim scholars that can be seen as progenitors of an Islamic Just Sustainability are Imams Hamza Yusuf Hanson and Suhaib Webb (Tourage 2013; Yusuf 2002). Both being American converts to the Islamic faith, their lectures to the masses of American Muslims – youth, professionals, and converts alike – overwhelmingly stress the responsibility the Islamic faith gives in regard to environmental justice, sustainable development, social inclusion, and equitable policies (Goodstein 2017). Yusuf and Webb’s lectures attempt to integrate the deep spirituality of the Islamic tradition with modern issues and contemporary afflictions, underscoring Islam’s obligation towards animal rights, racial equality, global warming, and opposing vulgar stratification (Hancock 2017). These scholars emphasize environmental issues and the responsibility of faithful believers to tackle these questions directly as a matter of theological significance. Whereas traditional notions of religiosity are contained to ritual and personal worship, the contemporary belief that welfare of the environment and community is also integral to the faith tradition, injects Islamic belief with a high degree of social consciousness and inclusion (Goodstein 2017).

Hamza Yusuf occupies a unique place within Islamic scholarship in the United States – besides being recognized as one of the top influential Muslims in the world, his global popularity also transcends Muslim circles: he’s a notable figure in interreligious, environmental, tech, and academic circles (Al-Jadda, Chaudary 2014). As the co-founder of Zaytuna College, Yusuf actively en-



gages with contemporary ideas that are at the forefront of academic and policy questions relating to the American Muslim community. His speeches are often filled with impassioned calls for unification against greed, unjust war, and economic injustices (Birt 2017). He often points to the Islamic theological component of justice, where all humans – regardless of religion, ethnicity, or origin – are required to have a baseline quality of life (Yusuf 2007). His pronounced support for sustainable initiatives within the Muslim community, he argues, are not foreign to the Islamic tradition. In fact, he maintains that the Prophet Muhammed was the first environmentalist, based on the vast traditions that explicitly highlights his just sustainable objectives (George, Yusuf 2014).

In particular, there are three areas of interest in analyzing the development of an Islamic Just Sustainability: just sustainability as it relates to consumption of food, human rights, and the environment. Yusuf's critique of the food industry is primarily framed within the sustainability paradigm, in that he argues that Muslims, as a point of ethical concern, abstain from the consumption of food products on the supermarket shelves responsible for many of the ailments in contemporary society (Mayton 2010). His argument being grounded in both nutritional and economic responsibility. He maintains throughout his lectures and speeches that the Prophet Muhammed never filled his stomach, always ensured that the food he ate had pure, legitimate sources, and would seldomly eat meat. Yusuf also argues that the consumption of meat is directly affecting the environment in negative ways and, thus, Islamically the conscious Muslim should not participate in those economic ventures neither as a producer nor a consumer. Going into more detail, he stresses that the unsustainable consumption of fish caught by state and private fisheries is leading to mass depletion and leading to unforetold global consequences. Thus, Yusuf maintains it is the duty of Muslims to cease eating fish in order to support sustainable growth (Mayton 2010).

The second component shaping Islamic Just Sustainability is the question and status of human rights, as it stems within the Is-



lamic tradition and how it manifests in contemporary society. He calls on the Muslim community to be in the forefront of the human rights efforts, arguing that human dignity in relation to the environment is sacred and thus must be safeguarded for all (Yusuf 2012). He often quotes the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed that state that the sanctity and dignity of one person is more sacred than the *Kaaba* itself, referring to the cubical structure in the middle of the holiest mosque in Islam, *Masjid al-Haram* (Yusuf 2017).

Finally, the third component is an emphasis on the environment. For Yusuf, protecting the environment is an Islamic duty and a core element of fulfilling basic tenets of the Islamic tradition. So much so, that he maintains that in the Islamic tradition, cutting down a tree without any necessity is *haram*, or unlawful (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Stonebanks 2010). The importance of protecting the environment as an Islamic duty has introduced the Muslim community to new ideas and movement framework in which many Muslims were not aware. His religious discourse has allowed the Islamic tradition to be aligned with movements that were previously seen as outside of the fold of the Islamic purview. An Islamic Just Sustainability stems from these basic ideas of environmental justice; just as it is important to respect and maintain the physical self, American Muslims are instructed to uphold the rights of the environment around and outside the self (Kincheloe et al. 2010).

Imam Suhaib Webb serves a pivotal role in the American Muslim community, acting as a bridge between older and newer generation of Muslims. Webb's unique background and charisma allows him to connect to the younger Muslim generation, and address specific issues unique to them. Webb's messages of proactive justice, environmental awareness, and the linking of Islamic principles within contemporary social justice issues lies at the heart of the development of Islamic Just Sustainability (Jibril 2018).

Webb has continually stressed the need for relevance within the realm of social justice, speaking in support of various movements including Black Lives Matter and other mainstream environmental efforts (Varagur 2016). Webb's support goes so far that, as a symbolic gesture, he wore a black hoodie in support of Trayvon Martin while giving a Friday Sermon in Boston (AltMuslimah 2012). Webb's emphasis on reorienting American Islam towards supporting efforts in justice, sustainability, and social inclusion, has also sought to act as an iconoclast to the traditional leadership structure in Islam. His discussions and religious edicts are pervasive throughout social media, to such an extent that Webb has been referred to as the "snapchat Imam", highlighting his attempts at reaching youth with a more "relevant" message of Islam (Burke, Stix 2018). The focus of Webb's work often references equity and lack of ethical concern in resource allocation as a critical problem that is only compounding as inequality continues to rise (Tourage 2013). As result of his work, the question of fairness and justice within the context of resources allocation is garnering greater attention from mainstream American Islamic scholars as they focus on developing inner city programs, addressing gentrification, and helping to re-build wrought institutions within cities like Detroit and Chicago (Couch 2015).

A core element to the development of an Islamic Just Sustainability has been the idea of perfecting one's embodiment of religious obligations (*fard*). Vital to this notion of perfection is the alignment of both the internal, spiritual state, with outwards forms of action. This is best captured in actions taken in consideration of social obligations and the upholding of justice for, "the common good of the universe and its interconnectedness" (Kamla, Gallhofer, Haslam 2006: 1). Suhaib Webb has been a vocal proponent in the effort to bring more attention to *ihسان* – from his advocating of Muslim participation in the BLM movement to his active theological resistance to Trumpian policy and dictates. More specifically, Webb's opposition to Trump's rhetoric and policies targeting women, religious minorities, racial minorities,



and scientific progress have all been presented with the underlying message of Islamic theology: it is the direct commandment and requirement of God that all of His believers should prevent any form of discrimination and hate (Donahue 2017; Kamla et al. 2006). His emphasis on redefining American social justice issues as an Islamic responsibility has allowed American Muslims to have a legitimate authority figure that has “Islamicized” the causes of most activists (Staff 2018).

As proponents of social justice and active environmentalism, both Hamza Yusuf and Suhaib Webb embody the movement of scholars supporting ideas of living within our ecological limits to enhance greater sustainability of the environment, therefore creating an Islamic Just Sustainability (Gonzales 2016). These prominent Muslim scholars serve as models within the American Muslim community in reflecting the fusion between components of just sustainability and theological aspects of Islam, including the concept of *ihسان*. They attempt to integrate the deep spirituality of the Islamic tradition with modern issues and contemporary afflictions, underscoring Islam’s structural obligation towards all issues linked to the environment (Vasi 2010). These key figures within the American Muslim experience are also reflections of the larger emerging American Muslim movement networks and activists that have played a crucial role in the development of an Islamic Just Sustainability.

#### “ISLAMIC JUST SUSTAINABILITY”, WOMEN’S RIGHTS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

American Muslim activists, organizations, and institutions have increased their participation in the struggle for economic equality and social justice. This involvement has only amplified since the election of President Trump, where what has been described as a “shaking” or awakening has taken place, and a justice-oriented emphasis has been rendered on Islamic theology

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(Krajeski 2017). Scholars, institutions, and other forms of Muslim social movements have used Islamic scripture to transform discourse with a heavy emphasis on the environment and in creating a sustainable future, for humans and animals alike (Abdulrachman 2011). The development of an Islamic Just Sustainability in the American context has helped develop a connection between local efforts in the United States, with broader, more global efforts by fellow Muslims in other countries, including the Middle East and Northern Africa. The impact of Trump’s policy on the development of an increasingly *global* Islamic Just Sustainability and the impact it has had on the development of American Muslim social networks, can be seen in two examples: women’s rights and climate change.

The first example of the grassroots development of Islamic Just Sustainabilities can be seen with the 2017 Women’s March that took place the day after President Trump’s inauguration. The Women’s March marks a pivotal change in the American Muslim activist framework, as the global event highlighted the strong emphasis on equality and women’s rights which, although was present before the presidential transition, took a magnified form in the tenure of President Trump. The March conveyed a strong intersectional feminist presence, and helped form a “coalition of issues”, that also injected the concern for women’s rights and religious freedom into the theological discourse for American Muslims (Fisher, Dow, Ray 2017; McLaren 2017). One prominent Muslim figure and key organizer of the event was Linda Sarsour, a prominent Muslim activist from New York (Sarsour 2011). Sarsour represents a significant change – taking place in the American Muslim context – her relentless commitment to equity, environmental consciousness, and social justice is constantly stated as stemming from Islamic sources and fundamental to the Islamic religion (Sarsour 2011). A pivotal event like the Women’s March having a main organizer that is central to the Muslim activist scene marks a key development in the emerging Islamic Just Sustainabil-



ity movement, providing a shift in the way American Muslims view their role in American society.

The notion of addressing climate change, as a theological and religious obligation upon Muslims certainly existed prior to the ascent of the Trump presidency; however, the post-Trump context brought on a firm resolve where the notion of environmental protection became fully embedded within the Islamic ethos (Goldstein, Greenberg 2018; Jotzo, Depledge, Winkler 2018; Roth 2018). For example, in August 2015, eighty global Muslim leaders from twenty countries released the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, seeking to eventually transition to renewable energy in an effort to address climate change (Firman 2017). During this period, environment-specific Muslim organizations, like the Global Muslim Climate Network, sought to encourage Muslim communities at the grassroots level to adopt “green” measures, including solar energy within local Mosques, to offset climate change and provide a positive impact on the environment (Firman 2017). The goal of the Network is to form bonds transnationally amongst Muslim leaders, with the hope of establishing a unifying environmental stance on climate change, in alignment with the Islamic tradition. The Co-Chair of the Global Muslim Climate Network, Nana Firman, states: “Islam teaches us that ‘man is simply a steward holding whatever is on earth in trust’ (Islamic Relief 2015). In describing the goal of the Climate Network, she goes on to state that, “The Declaration calls upon all nations and their leaders to drastically reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and support vulnerable communities, both in addressing the impacts of climate change and in harnessing renewable energy” (Islamic Relief 2015). Firman’s statements place a strong emphasis upon the environmental aspects of Islam’s theological outlook, thus highlighting the fusion between Islamic beliefs and environmental justice and sustainability. In the post-Trump era, key events including the People’s Climate March, a popular event taking place in response to Trump’s climate change skepticism and denial, saw the explicit fusion of Islamic principles

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and the tenets of just sustainability (Fisher 2018). The transnational event was also a robust example of the global nature of the Islamic Just Sustainability paradigm, where localized issues have the ability to create discourse that impacts theological and legal questions within the Islamic tradition. Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad were being utilized to not only justify, but to bind Muslims to the key issues in climate change and overall environmental accountability (Haghamed 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The basis of the Islamic Just Sustainability paradigm is the Islamic principle that God provides human beings with the responsibility to be vicegerents on this earth, to promote what is good and to work against the negative elements of society. These negative elements are conceptualized as anything that contradicts and/or denies justice (referred to in Arabic as “*adl*”) and equity (referred to in Arabic as “*ihسان*”) for the people.

The development of the Islamic Just Sustainabilities perspective reflects the growth of the American Muslim community. While environmental consciousness has always been a part of the Islamic tradition (Abdul-Matin 2010), the emergence of the Islamic Just Sustainabilities approach has been the modern product of both scholarly and activist engagement with pressing questions in the post-Trump context. This paper showed how the frameworks of Islamic Just Sustainabilities have developed and presented a conceptual overview of its key ideas and how they ought to be considered in the general just sustainabilities discussion. We discussed the Trumpian context that gave rise to the growth of American Muslim activist networks. We then discussed the conceptual undertones of the Islamic Just Sustainability approach and its theological principles. Finally, we explored the way American Muslims scholars and activists alike have implemented Islamic Just Sustainability on the pulpit and within the urban environment.



As a result of the rise of an Islamic Just Sustainability in the American Muslim community, we find American Muslims activists and scholars alike in the forefront of a number of critical issues in the post-Trump era. The growth and internationalization of the Islamic Just Sustainabilities approach is also beginning to shape the way Islamic thought is constructed and implemented across the globe. As Islamic leaders like Hamza Yusuf and Imam Suhaib Webb increase their international Muslim audience and link local issues with global sentiments, the concept of an Islamic Just Sustainability might be able to contribute to the core just sustainabilities discussion. Further research should be conducted to extract how the conceptual undertones of Islamic Just Sustainability materializes into action. A detailed study of the evolution of American Muslim activism would help parse the advent of Islamic Just Sustainabilities and provide a better look into its ramifications on the Muslim community. An in-depth discussion on Islamic Just Sustainability in the global context would also bring great nuance to the growing body of literature. More specifically, looking at how Muslim-majority countries – including Morocco, Malaysia, and Turkey – and their various manifestations of just sustainabilities would add a deeper dimension to the discussion.

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