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**America's Perception of Muslims after 9/11**

*Bakalářská práce*

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- 5) Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to make the reader familiar with the basic pillars of the religion of Islam and to provide him with the insight into the life of American Muslims living in the United States of America, especially in the period after the fatal events that happened on September 11, 2001. The main idea of the thesis is to trace whether and in what way the attitudes towards Muslims in America changed and to what extent it is necessary to accept the issue of Islamophobia in the West.

List of recommended literature:

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## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, Islam and Muslims are a big topic. However, it is not for the faith itself but rather for the violent minority of people who claim they act in the name of Islam and who receive the media attention. The same was true for weeks after 9/11 when the TV news kept replaying the Twin Towers falling, informed every day about the suspects in connection with Islam, and broadcast negative comments about the faith by some political and religious leaders.

The current largest issue which has been mentioned in the news in connection with extremist groups is undoubtedly a radical Islamist group called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Regrettably, the media report the actions of the militant minority without pointing out that the moderate majority of Muslims throughout the world disapproves all of the violent operations of any Islamist radical group. The media is thus responsible for the distorted picture and demonization of Islam in the eyes of non-Muslims. What I have learned personally is that most people I know would not talk about Islam's main principles or about the way it could be related to Christianity and Judaism. Rather, they start talking about the negatives and stereotypes based on the picture created by the media. Islam is the enemy of West and Western values; women have no rights and are forced to cover their hair; Muslims are violent and approve bombing and hijacking, Qur'an is a violent document. These are just some of the stereotypes. However, are they truthful or are they based on the insufficient knowledge of the Islamic faith and its followers?

The main aim of this thesis is to explain how 9/11 affected the status of Muslims in America in the days and months following the attacks, and to determine to what extent the aftermaths of that tragedy affect the lives of American Muslims today.

This work consists of five main sections. First of all, it starts with a general description of the faith and mentions the countries with the highest percentage of world Muslim population. This is followed by the inter-faith as well as intra-faith tensions and their roots and description of the common features shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the crucial differences between the two latter religions. The second part focuses on the first Muslims in America and their difficulties and touches also upon the first American converts to Islam. Before proceeding to the core of the thesis – the status of Muslims in America after 9/11 – I will briefly describe

the critical moments of Tuesday, September 11, 2001 and attempt to trace why the terrorists claim their actions are done in the name of Islam. The final part deals with a short survey, which I created for this thesis, and which includes questions concerning Americans' relation to Islam and its believers. Questionnaires were handed out to 46 American citizens and the personal opinions of some of them will be quoted in the last part as well.

## 2. The Religion of Islam

This first part of this section describes the main principles of Islam. The second part explains the difference between its two largest sects, the next one outlines the main reasons for religious intolerance between Muslims and Christians, and the last part sheds some light on the view of Muslims on the West and vice versa.

### 2.1 Basic Information about Islam

As far as the number of believers is concerned, Islam is the **world's second-largest religion** with 1.6 billion believers. The countries with the highest percentage of world Muslim population are Indonesia (13%), India (11%), Pakistan (11%), and Bangladesh (8%). However, currently, there are increasing numbers of Muslims throughout the world including Europe, which is home to 3% of the world Muslim population and America, which is home to less than 1% of the world Muslim population ("Muslims").

Islam is, just like the world's largest religion Christianity with 2.2 billion followers ("Global Christianity"), a monotheistic religion. However, Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the son of God. Rather, they believe Jesus is one of the prophets sent by God, together with Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. The significance of the Prophet Muhammad lies in the fact that he is seen as the prophet receiving "the final and complete revelation from God through the angel Gabriel to correct human error that had made its way into the scriptures and belief systems of Judaism and Christianity" (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 5).

The fact that Muhammad revealed God's message to ordinary people makes him the founder of the religion of Islam and his birthplace Mecca the place of its origin. God's revelation received by Muhammad is described in Muslim Scripture called **Qur'an**, meaning *to read* or *to recite* in Arabic. Qur'an consists of 114 chapters known as *suras* and these are further split into verses called *ayat* in Arabic. What is interesting is the fact that the order of chapters does not follow the order of revelation. Rather, they are organized according to their length starting with the longest chapter. Concerning the stories included in Qur'an, it accepts revelations



received by Moses and Jesus as Muhammad recognized them as true prophets. Generally, it can be said that the significance of Qur'an for Muslims lies in its guidance (Elias 20-22).

A significant source of guidance is also represented by *Sunna* which can be described as the words the Prophet said and the actions he did during his lifetime. The early Islamic community considered the *Sunna* of Muhammad to be as significant as Qur'an. It was an obligation of early believers and scholars to collect the traditions of the Prophet in order to provide an ideal model to be followed. These records of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions became known as *hadith*. There was soon a boom of new traditions said to be done by the Prophet and those people who provided reports about Muhammad's life were called transmitters. Not all of the reports were truthful, though. There were such transmitters who transformed the traditions of Prophet according to their own ideals and beliefs. A great number of hadiths therefore cannot be perceived as reliable. Moreover, already in the eighth century some scholars developed a system that should have discovered forgeries. This meant that the hadith was considered to be accurate only if its chain of transmitters (or *isnad*) consisted of trustworthy respected transmitters (Elias 26-27).

## 2.2 Shari 'a and *Fiqh*

Shepard explains that neither Shari 'a nor *fiqh* should be understood as the equivalent to what is known as law in the West, pointing out that “[t]he body of *fiqh* law is often called Shari 'a although ... this is not correct, since Shari 'a is what **God ordains** and *fiqh* is what **humans understand**” (130). “Shari 'a [therefore] refers to God's will, laws, principles, and values, found in the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 163), whereas *fiqh* “involves discovering the law, not creating it and is done by **scholars**, not by rulers or governments” (Shepard 142). The crucial difference between the Western law and the Islamic law lies in the fact that Western law regulates one's relationship to the state and to other people, while Islamic law in addition governs one's relationship with God. What is more, Nigosian explains that whereas Western law is open to changes under the influence of present-day society, this is not the case of Islamic

law, which is believed to be the final and unchangeable divine will (85). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Islamic law is not simply the revelation of God. It is the outcome of the interpretation of early scholars bound to Islamic societies and was developed at certain time in the past. In democratic secular societies like the United States Muslims can rely on Shari ‘a as long as it is in accordance with civil law (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 163-166).

### **2.3 The Five Pillars of Islam**

The “Pillars of Islam” consist of rules, which every devout Muslim is required to follow. As stated by Esposito, “[t]hese “Pillars of Islam” represent the core and common denominator that unites all Muslims and distinguishes Islam from other religions” (*What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 18).

The first Pillar is called the declaration of faith (or *shahada*). To become a Muslim, one must declare: “There is no god but God [Allah] and Muhammad is the Messenger of God”. To believe that there is more than one God is considered a sin. According to the second Pillar it is an obligation of every Muslim to pray five times a day. Prayer (or *salat*) is the second most important religious duty after the profession of faith. The prayers are based on the recitations from the Qur’an and “have to be performed in Arabic, regardless of the native tongue of the worshipper” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 25). The third Pillar—almsgiving (or *zakat*) supports the needy. Muslims believe that those who were given the money and possessions from God must donate some of it in order to help within the community. “The Qur’an particularly identifies the poor, widows, and orphans as needing attention” (Smith 13). “The Fast of Ramadan” or the fourth Pillar of Islam means that during Ramadan – the ninth month of the Islamic calendar – it is an obligation of every Muslim to fast if his or her health allows them to do so. Fasting (or *sawm*) lasts from dawn to sunset and in addition to food and drink every Muslim must also give up any sexual activity. The fifth and last Pillar stands for the duty of every adult Muslim to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia (known as *hajj*) at least once in his or her lifetime if their physical and financial condition allows them to do so (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 18-25).

In 2013, there were 2 million pilgrims from around the world and 14,000 of them were Americans (*American Muslims* 63).

## 2.4 Religious Intolerance

Religious intolerance is not a new phenomenon. For centuries people have suffered from inter-faith intolerance, intra-faith intolerance (e.g. Shiite – Sunni conflict) or intolerance between the religious groups on one side and secular groups on the other one. Nevertheless, however surprisingly it might sound, the religious tolerance in the past was greater as far as Islamic religion is concerned. Unlike in countries with Christian rulers, where the rebels were executed or expelled, non-Muslims in Muslim countries could practice their faith provided they paid a special tax being “relegated to second-class status in the new social and political order under Muslim rule” (Abdo 171). Nevertheless, as Esposito argues, “[h]owever progressive this policy was in past, it would amount to second-class citizenship for non-Muslims [even] today” (*What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 74).

In fact, if we consider Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, there are many similarities. First of all, Muslims and Christians as well as Jews believe in only one God. They all put emphasis on peace and accept prophets, angels, Satan and God’s revelation: “for Judaism through Moses, Christianity through Jesus, and Islam through Muhammad” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 76). However, Muslims believe it was the Prophet Muhammad who received the final revelation, and believe that the previous revelations received by Moses and Jesus were significantly distorted by humans.

Looking at the core of the problem, the deterioration of relations between Muslims and Christians went hand in hand with the Crusades and European colonialism whose legacy is the belief that “the indigenous Christians were favored by and benefited from colonial rule or that they are the product of the European missionaries and their schools that converted local Muslims, and somehow retain a connection to a Christian West” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 79). Considering the Christian point of view, the expansion of Islam and the capture of Christian areas was not their only concern. Christians were especially offended by the fact that Muslims refused to accept the divinity of Jesus Christ

(because they understood it as a form of polytheism) and what is more Muslims also denied Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Ron Geaves, a professor of religion at Liverpool Hope University in England, believes that “the modern era builds upon historic conflicts between religions and empires” pointing out that “many Muslims in the twenty-first century still react to the West with memories of colonial and post-colonial domination and with fears of global capitalism and secularization, whilst the West has created new stereotypes consisting of oppressed women and ‘suicide-terrorists’” (127-128).

Historically, as well as currently, all religions mentioned above have been used for good purposes, as well as for bad purposes, causing misfortunes. Nowadays, the main supporters of religious intolerance are seen as radical religious extremists and terrorists. Concerning Islam, the term that is often abused and misinterpreted is the word *jihad* meaning exertion or struggle and is sometimes called the Sixth Pillar of Islam. Qur’an teaches that *jihad* is primary **the struggle to be a good Muslim** avoiding evil and following the moral principles. Besides fulfilling the Islamic doctrine, *jihad* can be also seen as the effort to **spread** or, if necessary, **defend** the faith. Unfortunately, the latter means that the term *jihad* is sometimes interpreted as *holy war* and used as a justification for violence and terror in the name of “true” Islam. This war, legitimated by misrepresenting the scripture, is led against anyone who does not accept the religious extremists’ view including Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 133-134). Religious extremists deliberately declare *jihad* to justify their vicious actions. As a consequence, non-Muslims associate Islam with violence and interpret it as a religion of fanatics.

Among the contemporary manifestations of violence and terrorism there are suicide attacks which are committed by extremists even though according to the Islamic religion it is only God, who has the right to take life. What is more, the practice of violence is restricted and terrorist behavior forbidden by Qur’an and Islamic law. Nevertheless, in recent decades “Shii and Sunni alike came to equate suicide bombing with martyrdom, relinquishing one’s life for the faith” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 143).

## 2.5 The Difference between Sunni and Shiite Muslims

Although Sunnis and Shiites present the two most significant divisions within the Islamic religion, Sunni Muslims obviously prevail. While Sunnis represent approximately 85 % of Muslims, Shiites make up only about 15 %. Among the countries with the largest Sunni-majority populations there are Egypt (99%), Indonesia (99%), Bangladesh (99%) and Pakistan (87%). These countries are in stark contrast to Iran (93%), Azerbaijan (70%), Bahrain (70%) and Iraq (67%) where Shiite Muslims clearly prevail (“Sunni and Shia Muslims”). The difference between the two groups is the outcome of the historical events dating back to the early seventh century. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E. there was a disagreement about the future leader of Muslims because Muhammad died without appointing a definite successor. “[Whereas] Sunni Muslims adopted the belief that leadership should pass to the most qualified person, not through hereditary succession” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 49) and chose Muhammad’s friend and one of the first converts to Islam Abu Bakr, Shiite Muslims were of the opposite opinion. They believed it is the Muhammad’s daughter’s husband Ali, who was also his cousin, who should become the leader. As for the authority of both Sunni and Shiite leaders, while Sunni Muslims have a political leader (**caliph**) only serving as “the protector of the faith” (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 43), Shiite leader has political as well as religious power and is known as **imam**. Shiites believe that “[t]he imam possesses superhuman qualities, more particularly a “divine light” (i.e., superhuman knowledge), which is transferred to him from Adam through Muhammad and Ali” (Nigosian 49).

Therefore, there have been tensions not only between Islam and other religions, but also among Muslims themselves. The most complicated relations between Shiite and Sunni Muslims are in states where Sunni and Shiite Muslims live side-by-side including Lebanon, where the amount of Shiite Muslims is approximately the same as the amount of Sunni Muslims; in Iran, Iraq and Azerbaijan with Shiite-majority populations and finally Afghanistan where Sunnis prevail (“Many Sunnis and Shias”).

## 2.6 Islam and the West

The main obstacle to understanding the relationship between Islam and the West is ignoring their interaction. According to Geaves, it is important to realize the influence of Islam on the Western civilization in three different ways:

... (a) the historic contribution of Islamic civilization to European cultures, (b) the colonization of European territory by the Ottomans and Moors which has resulted in large territories in Eastern Europe maintaining large Muslim populations to the present day, and (c) the influx of significant Muslim populations into Western Europe and North America through the movements of people from Muslim-majority nations as a consequence of economic migration or fleeing wars, disasters or political regimes. (127)

However, it is not the mutual contributions, proving the compatibility of the West with Muslim countries, which is being highlighted. Nowadays, the West accuses Muslim societies of being medieval and static (among the reasons there are for example patriarchal system, underdevelopment, veiling and degradation of women, hostility) and Muslim societies accuse the West of being too secular. But what does the concept secularization mean?

According to Shepard:

Secularization means in particular to shift interest from the spiritual world or the future life to this secular world, to draw one's values and beliefs primarily from human rather than divine sources, and to limit the influence of religious institutions on society, often by separating them from other institutions, but not necessarily seeking to destroy them. (209)

Secularists believe that separation of the religion from the state is the only way how to achieve power and independence of their nations in modern society. Even though we do find secularists even in Muslim states, unlike in the West, in Muslim states it "rarely involves separation of religion and state, because the state almost always controls or tries to control the religious institutions and use them for its purposes" (Shepard 217). Secularists in Muslim countries do not put emphasis on Shari'a and, if they are pious, see Islam as an important but not "a total way of life" (Shepard 216). A great example of a Muslim state well known for its secular reforms

is Turkey. In the Ottoman Empire, there was a conflict between “the progressives” and the conservatives dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since 18<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Empire had to face the European military power and “the progressives” believed it is necessary to meet Western values and technology in order to save the Empire. However, this was not the case of conservatives who were afraid of the upcoming changes as well as of losing their power. The reforms eventually did not save the Ottoman Empire but they prepared the state to undergo secular reforms. Therefore, as far as Turkey is concerned, “Turkish secularism does not mean separation of “mosque” and state but state domination of “mosque” (Shepard 227, 237).

The current rejection of secularism by Muslims is a reaction to the past because they have equaled colonialism and the efforts to introduce Western modernism to the efforts to introduce Western secularism and Muslims fear that secular liberalism would undermine their religion and society. Esposito points out that only “[f]ew [Muslims] have understood that American secularism separated religion and the state to avoid privileging any one religion and to guarantee freedom of belief or unbelief to all” (*What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 187). One of them is a Muslim immigrant to America and the former head of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York Imam Shamsi Ali. “In America, secularism simply means that government doesn’t have any right to decide any religion for any person, but America protects the right of everyone to practice their religion, private or public” (*American Muslims* 68) argues Ali, and believes that Muslim immigrants are integrating to the mainstream American society very well.

### **3. A Brief History of Islam in the USA**

#### **3.1 The First Muslims in North America**

Among scholars there are those who believe there was an arrival of Muslims from Spain and Africa already almost two centuries before Columbus pointing out the “linguistic and cultural evidence of pre-Columbian contact between Americas and the established Muslim world, but [in general] modern experts remain deeply divided on this question” (Abdo, 65).

Some Muslim Americans, primarily those of Hispanic origin, put emphasis on the fifteenth century. It is because of the uneasy time of Muslim believers on the Iberian Peninsula during the reign of Fernando of Aragon and Isabella of Seville whose main goal was to make Spain exclusively Christian. Those who believed in Islam had to convert to Christianity; otherwise they were either forced to leave the country or were killed. Some of those, who left, managed to reach the United States. Currently, some Latino Muslims living in America see the historic connection between them and the Spanish Muslim culture because “[t]hey have found much in Islamic culture that is akin to their own cultural heritage, especially the importance of the family structure and specifically defined roles for men and women” (Smith 67). According to Abdo, “[t]he Latino experience thus bears some similarities to Islam’s attraction among African Americans, who also feel connected to the faith’s long history in Africa” (172) and are therefore proud to be Muslims. African Americans were not fleeing from a hostile country like the Muslims from Spain. They were brought from Africa to America “against their will, finding [it] a land not of promise but of bondage” (Smith 76). The link between the current African American Muslims and the past of slave-trade lies in the fact that some of those slaves brought to the New World were actually Muslims. The number of African Muslims who were brought to North America as slaves during 1619-1800s is estimated to be 30 percent out of an estimated 10 million African slaves (Cincotta et al. 56). However, only a small percentage of them managed to practice and maintain their faith. The reason was not only their Christian owners, who mostly prohibited them to do so, but also the harsh working conditions and the lack of time they could dedicate to praying (Smith 77).

Nevertheless, the first well-documented arrival of Muslims to the American continent is considered to be the nineteenth century. These Muslims, especially from the Middle East, did not intend to settle down in America. Rather, they planned to earn some money and return back to their homelands. Their plans were not easy to realize, however. “The lack of language skills, poverty, loneliness, and the absence of coreligionists all contributed to a sense of isolation and unhappiness” (Smith 54).

The first wave of immigrants from Middle East was between 1875 and 1912. They were coming from Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon and most of them were Christians. As Abdo states, “[m]embers of this early wave often had little or no education” (70). The cause of the second wave at the end of World War I was the



end of the Ottoman Empire, and this wave consisted mainly of relatives of those already living in the United States of America. During 1921 and 1924, the amount of Muslim immigrants was significantly reduced due to quota systems applied to specific nations. The next wave during 1930s consisted only of the relatives of immigrants already living in America, and this did not change until the fourth wave lasting from 1947 to 1960. “Unlike their earlier counterparts, many of these immigrants were urban in background and well educated” (Smith 52). The crucial year for the increase of Muslim immigrants to the United States was 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson repealed the restrictive immigration quotas from 1920s. “As a result, millions of nonwhite people, including Muslims from Asia and Africa, immigrated to the United States over the next several decades” (Curtis 73).

Concerning the life of Muslim immigrants in America, the difficulties did not let them return overseas and they had no choice but to stay in their new land and get used to their new life. The adaptation meant to sever their ties with their homeland. They tried to preserve their customs, and Arab cuisine became well-known among other Americans. Nonetheless, the fact that they differed in habits and appearance was hard and affected especially the young generation. The young generation of Muslims realized they differed greatly from mainstream Americans and wished to fit in. As Smith states, “[t]heir refusal to even learn the mother language was doubly painful for their families, as Arabic was not only their cultural but their liturgical language” (55). Yet, some immigrant Muslims managed to maintain their traditions because they created Muslim communities, where they preserved their culture and identity. These were, as Smith states, created in the Midwest, New York, Chicago, California, and also in Dearborn, Michigan and Quincy, Massachusetts (Smith 55-60). It happened despite the fact that “[t]he immigrants had no experience of being a minority, of living in diaspora, or of creating institutions or organizing religious communities. They had no imams or religious leaders to provide instruction in the foundations of the faith” (Haddad 26). Newcomers also became a challenge for African American Muslims, because “[u]nlike black Islam, which had sought first and foremost to defend its members from persecution by whites, the immigrant faith hinged on the traditional concerns of Muslims in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent” (Abdo 82).

### 3.2 The American Converts to Islam

The first American convert to Islam is believed to be a former Protestant Alexander Russell Webb. He was born in 1846 to a middle-class white family in New York. After the Civil War he moved to Chicago where he set up a jewelry business. In 1874 he became a journalist in Missouri, where he started to live. Although Webb abandoned Christianity already in Chicago and considered himself an atheist, he eventually turned his thoughts toward alternative forms of religion. As Curtis states, [f]or Webb, all religions were one in spirit even if their ritual and outer elements differed” (26). His particular interest in the mystic East and Islam led to his correspondence with a Muslim reformer in India Ghulam Ahmad “[who claimed] to have received divine revelations or signs legitimating his role as an Islamic leader” (Smith 74). What is more, Webb decided he is obliged to travel overseas to understand Islamic teachings fully. His intellectual study of Islam began in the Filipino capital city of Manila and here Webb also converted to Islam. During his travels, Webb met a lot of Muslims who appreciated his intention to spread Islam in America. Although Webb achieved to catch attention, it was only temporary, and the number of Americans who converted to Islam was not significant. The reason was not only the lack of money but also the fact that Webb targeted exclusively “respectable,” white, well-educated, and “thinking” middle-class Americans” (Curtis 28).

Other Muslims who prompted some Americans to convert were the Indian religious leaders Inayat Khan linked with Sufi Muslims and Mufti Muhammad Sadiq. Sadiq was related to a group called the Ahmadiyah. “Ahmadi Muslims, like Inayat Khan’s Sufi Muslims, advocated a peaceful, open-minded, and spiritual interpretation of Islam, but also emphasized the teaching of their founder, Ghulam Ahmad” (Curtis 31). Sadiq, however, was more successful in spreading the faith in America than the previous missionaries. It was because of the fact, that he realized African Americans are far more accessible than whites. A great number of African Americans came to the industrial northern states in the first half of the twentieth century as they “sought the promise of better jobs and a better life in the North” (Abdo 72). Here they either joined the churches that already existed or created new organizations. African Americans desired social equality, and this was exactly the thing Sadiq emphasized Islam offers.

**The Moorish Science Temple (MST)** was one of the first movements led by African American Muslims. This movement was founded by Timothy Drew known as Noble Drew Ali in Chicago in 1925. Ali pointed out “that Americans of African descent were by their heritage Asiatic, or Moorish” (Smith 78) and “Moors were by nature Muslims” (Curtis 34). He considered himself to be a prophet of Allah; his organization should have brought African Americans back to the Islamic religion. Ali also published a book called *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America* in 1927. However, it differed completely from the Holy Qur’an of Islam and Abdo describes it as “an amalgam of scattered teachings from Islam, Christianity, Freemasonry, and other belief systems” (73). According to Smith, “Ali’s message was appealing to little-educated blacks who were suffering from economic deprivation, bitter about their lot in America, and desperate to find an identity that separated them from white oppression” (79). After Ali’s death, none of the following leaders earned such a reputation as he did.

Another independent African American Muslim movement was **the Nation of Islam** founded by Wallace D. Fard known as Farad Muhammad in 1930. Like his predecessors, he also claimed Islam to be the original religion of African Americans. One of the leading members of Nation of Islam Eliah Poole known as Eliah Muhammad declared Farad Muhammad to be divine, and he also declared himself to be God’s Messenger which would be considered a sin by majority of Muslims because the statements contradict the Islamic scripture, which clearly states that there is only one God whose last Prophet is Muhammad. Eliah Muhammad also claimed that the white race is doomed and that only black people who confess Allah will survive when the Day of Judgments comes. This is, however, also in contradiction with true Islam which is based on the belief of equality of all people before God. In 1934, after the mysterious disappearance of Farad, Eliah Muhammad became the leader and stressed the importance of separation of the white and black race. Eliah also put emphasis on education and black-owned business (Curtis 37).

Another important figure of the Nation of Islam was Malcolm Little. Known as Malcolm X, he advocated the Nation of Islam publicly. Although Malcolm X was devoted to Eliah Muhammad and his teachings for years, later he was influenced by Eliah’s son Warith Deen Mohammed and he “began to question more seriously some of the doctrines and beliefs of the Nation” (Smith 88). His position within the Nation of Islam was strongly weakened. What is more, he eventually found out the genuine

Islam after making the pilgrimage to Mecca and realized that the Nation of Islam is not in accordance with the worldwide Islamic doctrine. This resulted in leaving the organization. Malcolm also managed to create a new organization but was assassinated by an unknown assailant (Smith 88).

After the death of Eliah Muhammad, his son and a friend of Malcolm, Wallace known as Warith Deen Mohammed, became the leader of the Nation of Islam. This was surprising for some members of the Nation because Warith previously questioned his father's beliefs about Islam. In fact, Warith's election became a crucial moment causing the turn toward orthodox Islam. Warith himself studied Quran and Arabic and intended to refute Nation's rooted doctrine about the superiority of black people and the corruption of whites. Nevertheless, the current doctrine after the leadership of Louis Farakhan, who rejected Warith's views, consists in the same ideology which was propagated by Eliah Muhammad and therefore differs significantly from the orthodox Islam. However, African American Islam should not be seen as The Nation of Islam only. Apart from the followers of Nation, there are many African American Muslims who follow the orthodox Islamic doctrine refusing the incarnation of Allah and insisting on the final prophecy of Muhammad and on the equality of all humans (Smith 90-97).

### **3.3 Shiite Islam in America**

The documented arrival of Shiites dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest Shiite newcomers were from Lebanon and India; later also from Iraq and Iran. Whereas American Shiites are considered to be rather well-educated, this was not true of the early Shiites from Lebanon. Smith argues that "Shi'ites have always been among the less advantaged, both economically and educationally" (61). According to Takim, the first Shiites settled in Dearborn, Michigan and in Michigan City, Indiana (*Shiism in America* 12). Other Shiites headed to Detroit, Michigan due to the presence of the Ford Motor Company and its generous daily wages (Takim, *Shiism in America* 14). Unlike the first Shiites, who were predominantly from Lebanon, the present American Shiites are ethnically diverse. Their roots are in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the Indian subcontinent, the Gulf States, East Africa, and parts of North Africa (Takim, *Shiism in America* 24). Considering their part in the United

States, it is estimated that today there is approximately 11% of Muslim population that is Shiite (*Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism* 23) and Shiites in America can be thus described as minority within minority, which focuses on the preservation rather than extension of its boundaries. Moreover, Takim points out that Shiite organizations responsible for proselytization activities in America do not have sufficient funds and adds that “[m]ost of those who convert to Shi’ism do so as a result of their own study of Shi’ism rather than of extensive da’wa [missionary] activities by the Shi’i community” (“Foreign Influences” 459).

Shiites themselves can be divided into three main branches, the Twelver Shiites, Isma‘ili (Sevener) Shiites, and Zaydis. All three sects agree “that the only legitimate leader of the Muslim community is a descendant of Ali and his wife Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet” (Elias 40). The division was caused again due to the disagreement over the leader, the fifth imam to be more precise.

As for the Shiite-Sunni relations in America, they have been influenced by the events in the Middle East. Saudi-Iranian political battles have caused the enmity between Shiites and Sunnis in various spheres in America including the Muslim Student Associations, mosques, prisons, and the Internet. The relationship between the two sects has been further influenced by the conservative immigrants who **stress the differences between the two groups** (Takim, “Foreign Influences” 459). Therefore, Muslims in America including both Sunnis and Shiites must face not only the tensions between them and non-Muslims but also the tensions within their own Muslim community.

## **4. The Attacks of September 11**

### **4.1 9/11**

September 11, 2001 became one of the most tragic days in U.S. history. On that day nineteen al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners flying to Los Angeles and San Francisco from Boston, Newark, and Washington, D.C. The tragedy began at 8:46 a.m. when the hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Only seventeen minutes later, at 9:03 a.m. the south tower of the World Trade center was hit by the hijacked United

Airlines Flight 175, making people realize that this was not an accident but a deliberate terrorist attack. The next target, the west wall of the Pentagon military headquarters in Arlington, Virginia was hit by American Airlines Flight 77 at 9:37 a.m. The fourth hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 was destined to hit either the Capitol or the White House; thanks to the courageous passengers who fought for their lives and their country, Flight 93 failed to reach those destinations and it eventually crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03 a.m. (Kean and Hamilton 1-14).

After burning for 56 minutes, the South Tower collapsed at 9:59 a.m., only a moment before the crash of the United Airlines Flight 93. The North Tower collapsed after burning for 102 minutes at 10:28 a.m. (Kean and Hamilton 285). Both collapses caused a massive cloud of dust and smoke and a large loss of life. Because of the attacks of 9/11 nearly 3000 people were killed and the lives of their families and friends and all Americans were forever changed.

#### **4.2 Terror in the Name of Islam**

There is no wonder that Islam is often associated with terrorism as terrorists themselves refer their violent actions to Islam. The last words of one of the hijackers of the United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed into a rural field in Shanksville, were: “Allah is the greatest! Allah is the greatest!” (qtd. in Kean and Hamilton 14). However, it is important to note that Islam does not support illegitimate violent behavior of terrorists and advocates neither hijacking nor hostage taking. The great majority of Muslims in America and elsewhere condemns any such behavior. The question therefore is how it is possible that religious extremists and terrorists dare to claim their deeds are right and in the name of Islam? Why are there people who believe them and follow them?

Esposito argues that:

Bin Laden and other terrorists exploit the authority of the past (Muhammad, the Quran, and Islamic history) for the religious rationale, precedents, and radical interpreters to justify and inspire their call for a jihad against Muslim governments and the West; they

legitimate warfare and terrorism, and they equate their suicide bombings with martyrdom. (*Unholy War* xii)

To understand their claims, one must consider the historical facts. Why is *jihad* understood, besides other things, as the *holy war*? If we think carefully about the time of the life of Prophet Muhammad, we see that the Arab world, in which Islam spread in the seventh century, was a place of constant warfare. Muhammad's Mecca was the center of war among tribal leaders and its inhabitants were witnesses of perpetual conflicts between the Byzantine and the Persian empires. What is more, Muhammad had to face not only the well-established **polytheistic** elite, but also the corrupted society in order to spread God's message. Therefore, it is not surprising that the beginnings were difficult. Due to rejection and persecution, Muhammad had to leave Mecca, and he and his followers moved to Medina in 622 C.E. This move is called *hijra* and means emigration from a hostile un-Islamic environment. Medina became the place where Muhammad founded the first Islamic community and the year 622 C.E. is celebrated as the beginning of the Islamic calendar, which is the official calendar in many countries to this day. "Both mainstream and extremist movements and "holy warriors" like Osama Bin Laden, who emigrated from Saudi Arabia to establish his movement and community with its training bases in Afghanistan, have selectively used the patterns of *hijra* and *jihad* for their own purposes" (*Unholy War* 32), argues Esposito. Unfortunately, religious extremists and terrorists use the history and distorted interpretation of Islamic scripture as a means to justify their violent actions. Anyone who does not accept their beliefs becomes an enemy with whom they have no mercy.

Additionally, Esposito stresses that:

Many Muslims today believe that the conditions of their world require a *jihad* ... Western governments are perceived as propping up oppressive regimes and exploiting the region's human and natural resources, robbing Muslims of their culture and their options to be governed according to their own choice and to live in a more just society. (*Unholy War* 27)

Islamic fundamentalists compare Meccan corrupted and materialistic society, which Muhammad was trying to reform, to present-day Western society. They reinterpreted the term *jahiliyyah* (literally "ignorance"), which was initially used to describe the pre-Islamic society, to describe the West. To change this "ignorance", a

radicalized minority calls for a militant jihad as they believe this is the only way to spread the Islamic religion, create Islamically oriented societies and restore the Muslim power and glory.

## **5. The Life of Muslims in the USA after 9/11**

### **5.1 Who Are the Muslims of America?**

According to the Pew Research Center Report, it is estimated that there are approximately 2.75 million Muslims living in the United States (*Muslim Americans* 20). Nevertheless, various sources range widely, **from 2 million to 7 million**, because the U.S. Census does not track religious affiliation. “The 10 states with the largest Muslim populations are California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, Ohio, and Maryland” (Cincotta et al. 50). The Muslim population in the United States consists of **63%** of Muslim Americans who belong to the first-generation immigrants (who have come from at least 77 different countries), further **15%** belong to the second-generation with at least one immigrant parent and the remaining **22%** are the third-generation immigrants (*Muslim Americans* 8). Smith argues that, “[w]hile the great majority of Muslims in America are either African American or part of the immigrant population, a growing but significant number of other Americans are choosing to adapt Islam as their religion and way of life” (65). Those who claim to be **converts** to Islam represent **20%** and the majority of them were born in the United States (*Muslim Americans* 24). Marriages between non-Muslim women and Muslim men are among the reasons why Americans convert to Islam. Although it is not their obligation, women usually choose to convert to the religion of their Muslim men. For other people the reason to convert is the chance to be a part of an organization or the clarity and simplicity of the proclamation of the faith. Lately Latinos are among those Americans who choose to adapt Islam. Currently, Latinos make up **6%** of the total number of American Muslim population (*Muslim Americans* 16). Abdo states that “the largest Latino Muslim Communities are in those cities with large Hispanic populations: San Antonio, Chicago, New York, and Miami” (170). Most of them are former Christians who did not recognize Jesus as the son of God, who “didn’t believe in the infallibility of the pope and [appreciate] Islam’s tradition of individual interpretation of the holy texts” (Abdo



170). Also, as it was mentioned earlier, they see their Islamic roots in medieval Spain and in this way they justify their decision. Muslim communities thus become an important place for them as well as for African Americans because both groups often feel being disadvantaged in America due to their race. Moreover, a significant number of all converts including Hispanics and African Americans do not perceive the process as conversion but rather as “reversion” because they say they realized that their faith has always been Islam and claim only to go back to it. An even stronger belief in “reversion” exists among African American Muslims who see Islam as the faith of their ancestors (Smith 163). Takim also argues that a growing number of African Americans are now converting to Shiism although they initially converted to Sunni Islam or were members of the Nation of Islam (*Shiism in America* 24). Conversion brings both positives and negatives, though. While this step in one’s life can bring a feeling of satisfaction, it can also lead to family estrangement and loss of friends.

Concerning the family life, “having children is a matter of great importance to Muslims living in America” (Smith 119). Parents spent as much time as possible with their children, and just like their mothers, children attend prayers at the mosque. It depends on parents whether their children attend Muslim schools and socialize only with other Muslim American families, or whether they allow their children to attend American public schools. Muslim parents worry especially about their daughters as they may become pregnant outside of marriage and make every effort to protect them “against the ills of America” (Smith 121).

As far as marriages are concerned, Western understandings of marriage is certainly different from that of immigrant Muslims. Considering the priorities on both sides, it is clear that Muslims focus on reputation within their community rather than love. What is more, they prefer “arranged marriages inside the same ethnic group ...” (McCloud 84). It is estimated that **83%** of married Muslim Americans share a living with a spouse who is also a believer of Islam (*Muslim Americans* 9). This is not surprising taking into account the Sunni Islamic law stating that a Muslim man can either marry a Muslim woman or a woman who is a believer of another monotheistic religion. The situation of women is even stricter. They are only allowed to marry a Muslim man to arrange suitable surroundings for their children. Following the patriarchal system of Muslims, it is assumed that the children will be raised as believers of the faith of their father (Elias 72).

The 2011 Pew survey found that Muslim Americans are more or less comparable to the U.S. public in education and income levels (*Muslim Americans* 17). “This is likely due to the strong concentration of Muslims in professional, managerial, and technical fields, especially in information technology, education, medicine, law, and the corporate world” (Cincotta et al. 51). Muslim Americans contribute to the cultural mix by being successful businessmen, artists, filmmakers, writers, educators, scientists, soldiers, sportsmen, lawyers, activists, journalists etc. Simply put, Muslims in America are an extremely diverse community. Yet, in comparison to the life of mainstream American, there seem to be a lot of similarities.

According to the Pew Research Center Report:

When it comes to many other aspects of American life, Muslim Americans look similar to the rest of the public. Comparable percentages say they watch entertainment television, follow professional or college sports, recycle household materials, and play video games. (*Muslim Americans* 7)

If Muslim Americans significantly contribute to the “melting pot” and the reports show their life does not differ much from that of other Americans, why are they so “visible”? Except for their traditions and daily prayers, it is also their looks. Even if they do not look Middle Eastern, they might be marked as Muslims because of their clothing habits. A lot of people think that Muslim women are forced to wear their *hijab* by their Muslim husbands, families and community. However, American Muslim women declare it is their own decision to cover their hair. As for the figures, approximately a third of Muslim American women (36%) always wears *hijab* when out in public, somewhat more (40%) report they never wear *hijab* and the remaining percentage wears the head cover most or some of the time (*Muslim Americans* 31). Some American Muslim women even admitted that they started to wear the *hijab* after 9/11 in order to strengthen the community.

### **5.1.1 Islam in America’s Prisons**

The main reasons why some American citizens have an inclination to convert to Islam were clarified. Nonetheless, there is a place significant for conversions to Islam that has not been mentioned yet. It is an American prison. Nowadays, more and more prisoners tend to adapt non-Judeo-Christian religions, for instance

Buddhism, Hinduism, Native American religions, Hispanic religions, and of course Islam. Considering Islam, besides the official al-Islam, Sunni, Shiite and Sufi versions of the faith, one can also find American unorthodox versions of Islam such as Moorish Temple Science and Nation of Islam in U.S. prisons (Hamm 667). It is estimated that more than three hundred thousand inmates are converts to Islam, with a yearly conversion rate around thirty thousand. The majority of the prisoners who choose to convert are African Americans who further continue to practice their faith outside of the prison. What is more, the American Muslim community “is developing initiatives to continue their education in Islam and to help integrate them into the community” (Smith 165).

Well known African American Muslim leaders Noble Drew Ali, Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey, Wallace Fard and Elijah Muhammad, as well as Elijah’s son Warith Deen Muhammad and Warith’s friend Malcolm X also spent some time in prison. These imprisoned leaders were seen as heroes by many Black Americans who were suspicious of the “white-dominated” legal system and “saw little moral evil in breaking the laws of a society they perceived to be unjust and manipulated for white advantage” (Feddes 506).

Islam in prisons is sometimes also mentioned in connection with radicalism. Baykan is among those alarmists warning against a growing tendency of conversions to Islam in European as well as in U.S. prisons and states that Islamic extremists deliberately focus on the inmates and lead them to conversions to their distorted version of Islam in order to train them and use them for terrorism purposes. He gives France, Spain and Britain as examples of states in Western Europe with a high risk of recruitment for radical purposes. Baykan believes that the United States are no exception (Baykan 49). The Federal Bureau of Investigation admits that “some of [the] inmates may be vulnerable to terrorist recruitment” (Hamm 667). An example of a man, who managed to convert inmates and later used them successfully in his terrorist campaign in Iraq, is a well known terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq (Hamm 668).

To find out the reasons for and the time of the expansion of Islam in American penitentiaries, one should take into account the social changes of 1960s. As it was mentioned earlier, the mid-1960s meant the shift in the ethnic makeup of the American society, and this included also the prison environment and caused therefore the outnumbering of whites by blacks and Hispanics in prisons (Dannin

170). As far as the expansion of Sunni Islam in American prisons is concerned, it is said to be rooted in New York State in 1960s (Baykan 49). With the help of an outside Sunni organization called *Dar ul-Islam*, there was a creation of a mosque in Green Haven Correctional Facility in 1968, where the Muslim inmates could hold their religious services separately. Unlike a prison chapel, which was accessible to all religious groups, Green Haven's mosque, named *Masjid Sankore* by Green Haven's Sunni Muslims, was open to Muslims exclusively "and correctional officer oversight was greatly reduced" (Baykan 49). Arabic language served as a tool for secret communication. What is more, Muslim inmates enforced their own law, Shari'a, used not only among Sunnis, but also in a relationship to those, who did not believe in Islam. The Sunni power at Green Haven lasted until the conflict between the Sunnis and the correctional officers in 1982. The incident was caused after preventing one of the officers from entering the mosque. As a result, Muslims lost all of their privileges and their leaders were exported to other correctional facilities (Dannin 184). These leaders were replaced by chaplains who were state employees. Dannin asserts that "the administration sought to destroy continuity in leadership succession and to dispel what they regarded as the myth of Sunni predominance at Green Haven" (186-187).

Although Baykan mentions the reduction of Sunni power after 1982, he also argues that it does not mean Muslims in prison do not pose a threat. He believes that the Sunni inmates have been continuously influenced by outside groups, who deliberately send books and videos targeted against Christianity, Judaism and "white" America. The main source of funding seems to be Saudis promoting Wahhabi Islam, "a narrow, strict, puritanical form of Sunni Islam upon which the ideology of al-Qaeda is based" (Hamm 671). As a consequence, some inmates are manipulated and make statements against their own country in the name of Islam. Additionally, the Wahhabis also strongly influence the relations between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in correctional facilities and elsewhere. It is due to the fact that they "had pronounced Shi'ism to be a heretical sect" (Takim, *Shiism in America* 200) and many African American Sunnis accepted their ideology. Baykan stresses the importance of monitoring of the incoming radical Islamic sources and highlights that the authorities must not underestimate the influence of these groups both in Europe and America (Baykan 49-51).

However, although it is estimated that 80 % of those, who seek faith while imprisoned in U.S. prisons, do turn to Islam, the studies show that “the typical convert to Islam is a poor, black American, upset about racism, not Middle East politics—someone who became a Muslim to cope with imprisonment, not to fulfill a religious obligation to Osama bin Laden” (Hamm 671). Hamm explains that “[a]lthough some inmates may be encouraged by foreign terrorist groups like al-Qaeda . . . , these groups are not directly involved in the conversion process” (673).

Therefore, there seem to be two views regarding the possible Islamic threat in American prisons. The first one is held by those, who claim that the authorities should be more cautious about the Islamic issue in correctional facilities. The other one is somewhat more moderate admitting a great number of inmates converting to Islam but seeing Islam as a way to cope with the life in prison rather than a possible danger.

## **5.2 Being a Muslim in America after 9/11**

### **5.2.1 The Immediate Aftermath of 9/11 on Muslims’ Life**

The immediate response of Muslim Americans was the same as that of most other Americans. Muslim Americans were in shock after discovering what happened that day in lower Manhattan and later also at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Disbelief and anger were other common responses. However, the worst was yet to come.

Some people were blaming Muslims and Arabs immediately after the attacks. There were also American Muslims, who admitted their worries that this was done by a Muslims group. The names of the perpetrators were released by the FBI three days after the attacks confirming that all the men were Arab Muslims which then caused “the most severe wave of anti-Islamic backlash in recent experience” (Peek 113). Sumbul Ali-Karamali, an American Muslim woman and an author of the book called *The Muslim Next Door*, described the situation in the following words:

[We] were doubly harmed: like everyone else, we grieved for the victims, struggled with the images of their nightmare, and lost friends and relatives in the senseless destruction of the twin towers. But unlike everyone else, we braced ourselves for the backlash of hate

mail and attacks on our persons and property, not from terrorists, but from our very own fellow citizens. (211)

Although being a Muslim means to believe in the religion of Islam regardless of nationality, “[i]n the aftermath of 9/11, the media and public officials often used the terms “Muslim” and “Arab” interchangeably” (Peek 11). In fact, the Middle East-North Africa region represents less than 20% of the total Muslim population (“Mapping the Global Muslim Population”) and the majority of Arab Americans are Christian being the descents of the first wave of immigrants from Middle East, who practiced Christianity (*Arab Americans* 28). Arabs who believe in Islam (23%) are therefore “a minority within the Arab-American community [...]” and “Arab-Americans are also a minority (25 percent) within the Muslim-American community, which includes an estimated **33 percent South Asians** and **30 percent African-Americans**” (Haddad 3). The figures show that Muslims in America are not homogeneous, but on the contrary **ethnically diverse people**. The early Arabs, both Muslims and Christians, were mostly refugees or uneducated people seeking work. Among those reasons that caused significant immigration of Arabs from Palestine to the United States was undoubtedly the creation of Israel in 1948, which is still a very delicate subject for Muslims, and further the Immigration Act of 1965 (McCloud 82). Besides being labeled as Arabs, Muslims are “currently labeled as either “good” or “bad”, radical or extremist (sometimes both), moderate, fundamentalist or militant, and sometimes all of the above” (McCloud 2). It is important to note that ethnic or racial prejudices against Islam and its followers existed already before 9/11. Americans were aware of the conflicts in the Middle East and informed by media about the bombings, hijackings and violent behavior of extremists. Therefore, the events of 9/11 only intensified the prejudices against Islam as many Americans associated it with radicalism and violence long before 9/11. Yvonne Haddad, a distinguished scholar of Islam and the Arab world, explains that Islamophobia, or in other words hatred of Islam and Muslims, was on the rise in post-9/11 America and according to her, “... government security measures [that] targeted Arabs and Muslims through profiling, censoring of Islamic texts, monitoring of mosques, freezing of assets of Muslim NGOs, search and seizure, arrest, deportation, and rendition of suspects” were the matter of course (38). In the aftermath of 9/11, it was a challenge to be a Muslim, particularly for those who could have been easily identified as Muslims because of their looks and the religious clothes they were

wearing. Based on the words of Muslims, Peek stresses that **“Muslims were verbally harassed; stared at; threatened; profiled on the basis of their religion and ethnicities; and denied equal access to employment, housing, and educational opportunities following 9/11”** (63). As for the verbal harassment, Muslims interviewed by Peek said that before and especially after 9/11 they or their acquaintances were labeled as “terrorist[s],” “dirty Muslim[s],” “camel jockey[s],” “rag head[s],” “towel head[s],” “sand roach[es],” and “n-gger[s]” (64). The main subject of hate stares were women wearing the *hijab* as it was obvious that they believed in Islam. Whereas before 9/11 the stares could be described as rather curious, after the attacks they were clearly hostile. Peek explains that “[t]he Muslims who were subjected to hate stares felt as if they were being personally blamed for destroying the Twin Towers and ending the lives of thousands of people on 9/11” (72). Nevertheless, Muslims were not only the subject of hate stares in the days and months following the attacks. Those who were interviewed also admitted that some people were looking at them with anxiety perhaps believing Muslims might hurt them. Not only the looks but also a name suggesting Arabic descent or names sounding Muslim turned out to play the role based on the nonprofit Discrimination Research Center study conducted in 2004. The study showed that those applicants whose name sounded Arab or Muslim were least likely to be invited for an interview even though all applicants were similarly qualified. Moreover, those Muslims who had a job post-9/11 were in a difficult situation too, being the visible minority and unfortunately sometimes also the object of hateful comments from their own colleagues. Discrimination could be especially bound to places known for South Asian American and Middle Eastern American employees including gas stations, convenience stores, ethnic restaurants, and taxi service. Likewise, school environment was no exception to discrimination, because just like some Muslim employees were harassed by their colleagues and employers, so were the Muslim students by their peers and teachers. Some Muslim students also reported that their faith, and especially the term *jihad*, was misrepresented by some professors. Furthermore, it was also mentioned that Muslims encountered housing discrimination. This was the case of some of those who were not born in America as well as of those who were. Nevertheless, those who were the U.S. citizens were more likely aware of the fact that it was their right to report such discrimination. On the other hand, the FBI advised the property owners to “keep their eyes open”. Some of

the women in Peek's study also mentioned that they were asked by their landlords to stop covering their hair (Peek 76-88).

Considering the role of the federal government, it became a perfect model for those mainstream Americans who blamed all Muslims. Why is that? It is clear that not only the extremists but regrettably also the innocent people were the target of a number of antiterrorism policies and programs "for no other reason than sharing the terrorists' ethnic origins (Arab) and religious affiliation (Muslim); they were scapegoats" (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 156). The difference between the individuals' role in hate crimes against Muslims and the actions done by the government is, however, obvious. One of the post-9/11 government initiatives were the detentions of Arab and Muslim immigrants. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr argue that "[n]obody knew where detainees were kept, why they were charged, or how long they would be kept, and even their names were not made public" (157). The reasons for detention turned out to be incorrect INS records, the fact that Middle Easterners and Muslims broke the visa but unfortunately also the false accusations and tips like: "This individual, I've seen him carrying guns into his house. He's out all hours of the night. Different people come in and out of the house at two, three, four o'clock in the morning" (qtd. in Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 158). As a result, those who were detained or deported were missed by their families because many wives were dependent on their Muslim husbands and some of them did not even speak English (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 161). Besides FBI interviews, detentions and deportations, many of those who were perceived to be Middle Eastern or Muslim also became a subject to special security checks. These included lengthy security checks at the airports as well as in other public settings. Respondents also admitted they were worried to talk about some issues via telephone as they were convinced they were monitored by government. This spying was later confirmed. One of the women in Peek's survey shared her feelings and said: "I think the most negative thing that came out of 9/11 was the laws being passed. It's not only about people, about singling you out—it's about the government actually passing laws to single you out. It's very scary" (Peek 94).

If not being the victims of the post-9/11 laws, many Muslims in Peek's survey admitted their other concern—concern about violent confrontations. They heard about various incidents from their friends or learned about them through the media. Muslims were afraid of physical assaults and other anti-Islamic crimes like



the property damage including mosques, schools, business; “[o]thers had personal property that was ruined, although many attempted to avert this form of backlash by removing Islamic or Arabic symbols from their homes and cars” (Peek 98). Some of them reported they personally experienced a physical assault but most of them never reported it (Peek 95-98).

Nevertheless, it is worthy to note that some of the Christian and Jewish communities were aware of the initial shock and helplessness of American Muslims in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and tried to help them. “[Muslims] were grateful to the rabbis and ministers who volunteered to stand guard at mosques, schools, bookstores, and other Islamic institutions to keep avengers away” (Haddad 88). They were also positively surprised by the fact that some Americans expressed their interest in Islam and tried to learn about its main principles.

### **5.2.2 American Muslims Today**

Considering a statistical portrait of Muslims in America based on the 2011 Pew Research Center survey, **52%** of American Muslims believe “that government anti-terrorism policies single out Muslims in the U.S. for increased surveillance and monitoring” (*Muslim Americans 2*) and **more than a half of American Muslims (55%) say that their life “has become more difficult since 9/11”** (*Muslim Americans 2*). 28% of American Muslims report being looked at with suspicion, 22% being called offensive names, 21% being singled out by airport security and 13% report they have been singled out by other law enforcement (*Muslim Americans 2*). The figures unfortunately confirm what was mentioned above as a consequence of 9/11 and even though it has been more than a decade since the terrorist attacks, there is still a significant prejudice against Muslims. Bias against Muslims still exists in spite of the fact that there have been efforts to make non-Muslims familiar with Islamic faith and its basic principles by engaging Muslims in diverse civic and political activities (Cincotta et al. 25). The reality simply suggests there is too much ignorance and unwillingness to learn about the other faiths. According to Peek, it is the lack of knowledge of Islamic religion that influences the Americans’ view on Muslims. She mentions that “[a]pproximately **six in ten** Americans acknowledge that they **do not have even a basic understanding of Islam**” (14) and there are also those who believe they are familiar with Islam but their knowledge is significantly

**distorted.** This is not surprising, because many Muslims live in exclusively Muslim communities and moreover non-Muslim Americans do not have much of a chance to develop a close relationship with Muslims. At the same time, this cannot be seen as an excuse for “not knowing” in the century of modern technology and World Wide Web, when it is so easy to find information about anything. The tolerance should be mutual. Just like the ignorance is no excuse, so is the fact that newcomers from Muslim-majority countries are not accustomed to a plural society. The data shows that whereas **56%** of American Muslims express their desire to conform to the American values, a much lower number, only **33%** of mainstream Americans believe that American Muslims actually do want to assimilate. Simultaneously, **49%** of American Muslims think of themselves first as a Muslim, not as an American (*Muslim Americans* 6-7). One of Muslim Americans called Assia, whose parents are from Algeria but she herself was raised together with her sister near Chicago, Illinois, explained: “In America, we would say we’re Muslim first, because that’s what makes us different ... But in another country, like in a Muslim country, we would say we’re American” (Cincotta et al. 8).

According to the 2011 Pew survey, most Muslims (65%) identify themselves with Sunni Islam, only approximately 11% with the Shiite tradition and 15% have no specific affiliation (*Muslim Americans* 2).

The 2011 Pew survey also confirmed that there is no growth in alienation or support for extremism among Muslim Americans. When asked about illegitimate forms of violence, **81%** of American Muslims “say that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilians are never justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies” (*Muslim Americans* 65). Nevertheless, **24%** of the public think that “Muslim support for extremism is increasing” (*Muslim Americans* 1).

### **5.3 The Role of Media**

American media have played a significant role in stereotyping Muslims and Arabs. Considering the present-day portrayal of Islam in Western media, it is not positive. Islam and Muslims are almost exclusively mentioned in connection with misogyny, terrorism, violence, hijacking and killing innocent people. Hasan points out that if a Muslim does something wrong, the reporters always stress his faith. She adds, nevertheless, that this is not the case of Jews and Christians “even if their

religion motivated the act” (87). “[W]hy are Christians or Jews or Hindus or Buddhists all over the world not required to condemn all the crimes that their co-religionists commit ...?” (220), asks Ali-Karamali and stresses that Muslims do condemn the actions done by terrorists but adds that their “condemnations can only be heard if the media publishes them” (220).

According to Esposito, “[c]onservative columnist, hard-line Christian Zionist religious leaders, some of them prominent neoconservative radio and television talk show hosts with large audiences, have regularly used hate speech and dangerous invective aimed not at extremists but at Islam and Muslims in general” (*What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* 227) and contributed thus to religious discrimination. The negative perception has been supported also visually because “[a]rticles on terrorists claiming to act in the name of Islam tend to be illustrated with photographs depicting men bowing in prayer at a mosque” (Poole and Richardson 118). To pray, the picture in such article clearly suggests, is to be a terrorist.

**The media’s coverage of Islam is regarded as problematic by most American Muslims today. The 2011 Pew survey showed that more than a half of the American Muslims (55%) think that the media coverage of Islam and Muslims is biased against them. Only 30% believe that the media coverage is fair and the remaining part is not sure or does not know (*Muslim Americans* 51). Geaves observed that “[t]he main concern of Muslims with the Western media is that they tend to portray Muslims as either terrorists or misogynists” (131). Hasan explains that whereas the Islamic faith is mentioned in connection with negative acts, it is rarely so if Muslims do something beneficial or productive (87).**

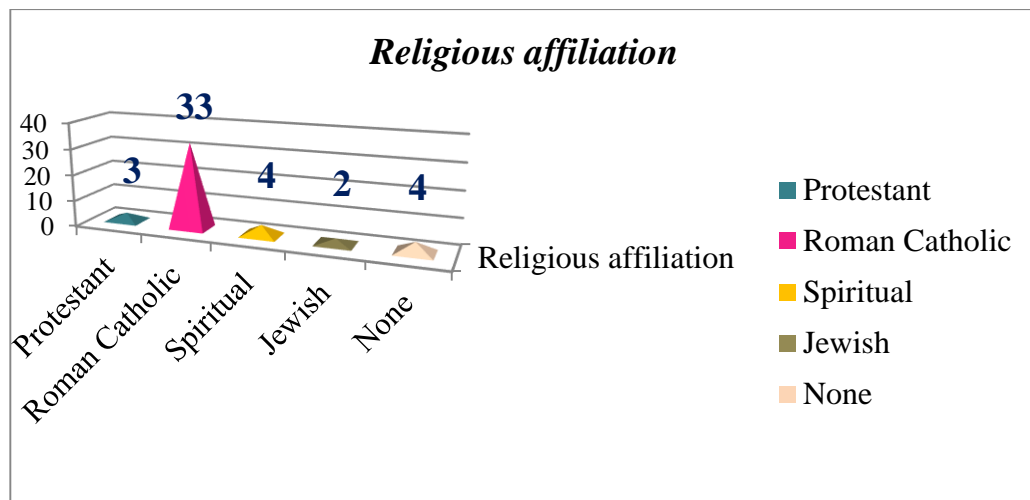
Canadian scholar Karim Karim argues that “the overall idea about Muslims is that they are the Other against whom the collective Self should be on guard” and adds that “even those [Muslims] with deep roots in the USA – are excluded from the collective Self (Poole and Richardson 117). Therefore, as long as the various types of media focus on sensation, ethnic/religious differences, and the voice of the radical minority rather than on what Islam is really about, Muslims will have to face misunderstanding, discrimination and suspicion. Unfortunately, this cannot be changed without Americans being educated regarding the Muslim religion and the Middle East, and Muslims in America must explain more about the Muslim extremists and their beliefs. Only then will Americans listen to their Muslim fellow

citizens and understand the true nature of Islam instead of responding with fear, anger and misunderstanding.

## 6. Questionnaire

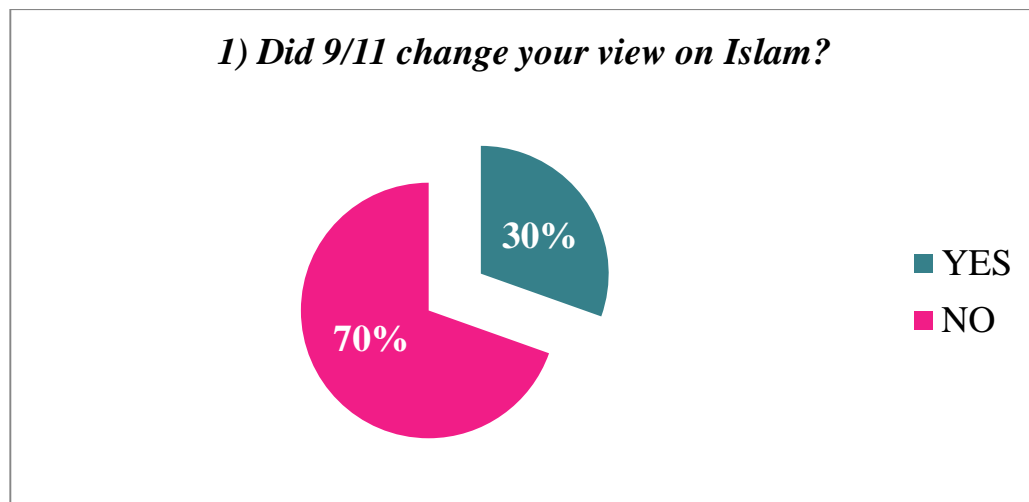
This questionnaire was sent to **46 American citizens** (none of them is an American Muslim), who are my friends and acquaintances. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out their opinion on Islam and Muslims living in America. All of the respondents live in New Jersey. The youngest interviewee was 20 years old, the oldest one was 65. The average age of the interviewees is **39.9**.

*Graph 1*



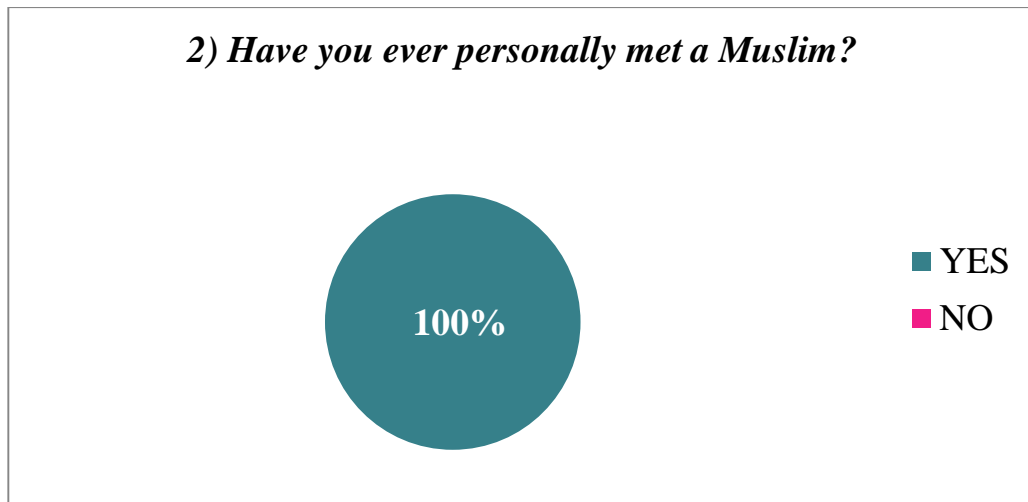
According to the Graph 1, the vast majority (33) of the interviewees are Roman Catholics, 4 of the respondents said they are spiritual, 3 of the respondents said their religion is Protestantism and other 2 said they are Jews. Only 4 people out of 46 respondents said they have no religious affiliation. The graph suggests the high religiosity among the interviewed Americans.

Graph 2



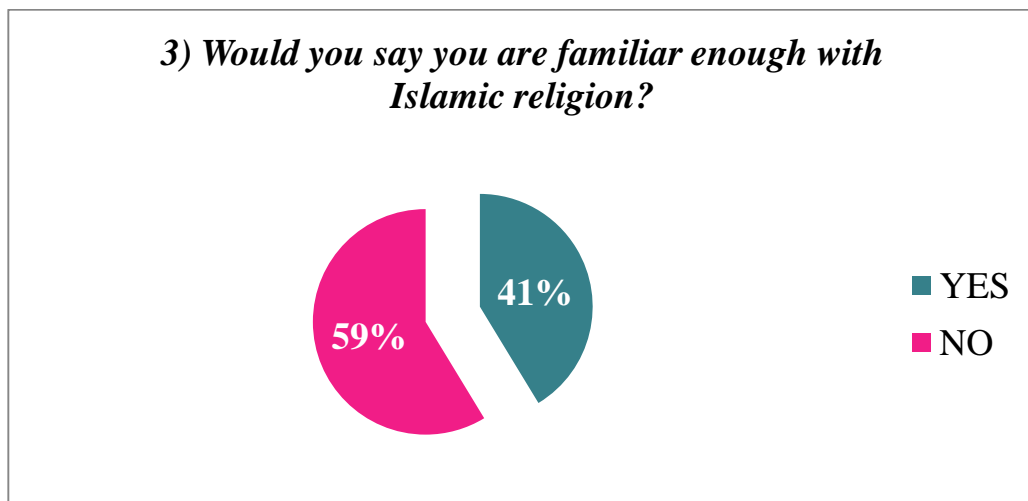
When asked about their attitude towards Islam after 9/11, approximately two thirds of the respondents (70%) said the events of the day did not change their attitude towards Islam. Nevertheless, the remaining third claims their attitude toward Islam changed. Sean (41), who works as an environmental scientist, said: “Yes, 9/11 did change my view on Islam. Killing innocent people in the name of a god is barbaric.” Darin (40), who works in finance, also believes his view on Islam became worse. Darin claims that there are “too many radicals created in the name of Islam” and states that “the good Muslims do little to stop terrorists amongst them” and “in most cases they even seem to support their actions.” This contrasts with Neil’s view. Neil (54), who works in International Logistics Sales, said that “the actions of a percentage of radical Muslims do not indicate the belief of all.” Ania (34) working in Information technology admitted her attitude to Islam became worse after 9/11 and states she does not support the religion after “learning [about it] online and on television via news.”

Graph 3



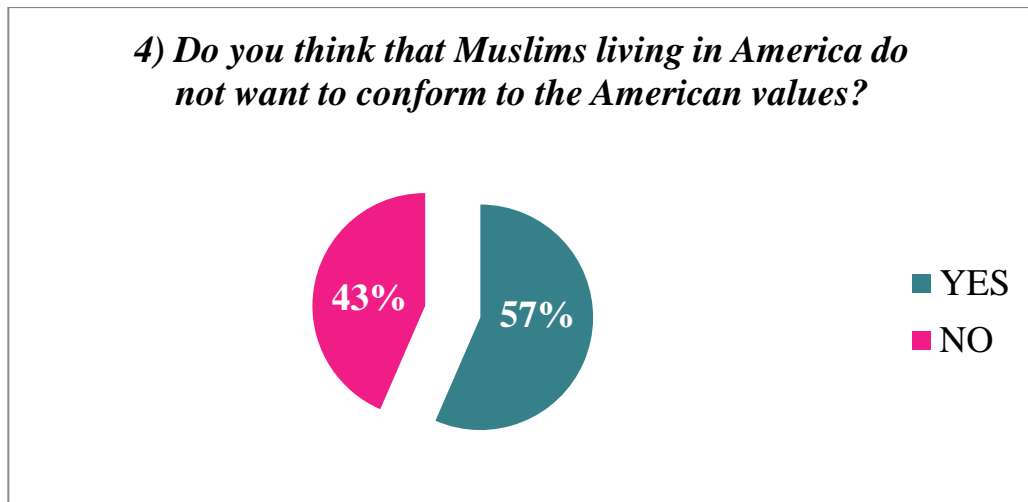
Considering Graph 3, all of the interviewees said they have already met a Muslim and majority of them said it was mostly in a professional capacity. None of them mentioned negative experience. Charles (49), who works as a Brand Marketer, even said: “Yes. I dated one in a college. Very nice and peaceful person.”

Graph 4



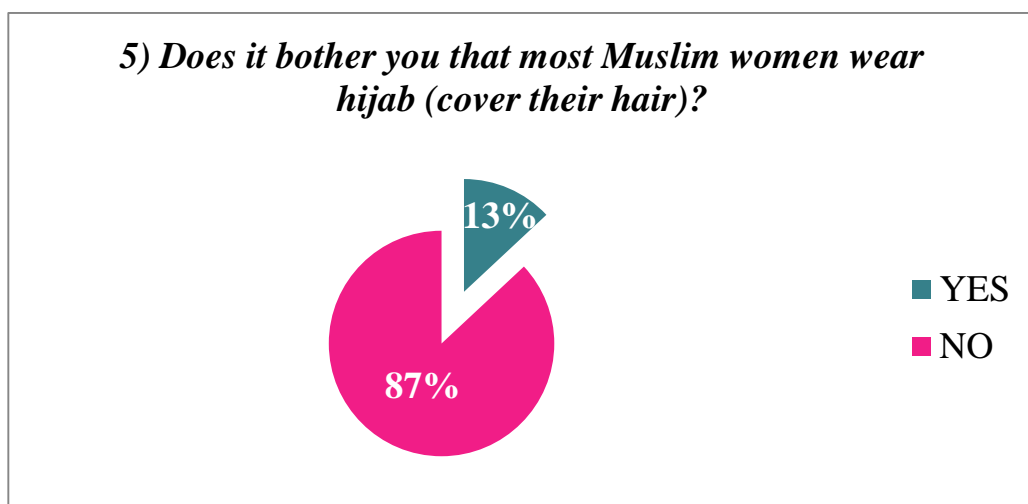
When asked about their knowledge of Islam, less than half of the respondents (41%) claimed to be familiar enough with the faith. 59% of the respondents admitted they have no or a very slight knowledge of the religion and its followers.

Graph 5



The percentage in Graph 5 resembles that of Graph 4. Here, more than a half of the respondents (57%) believe American Muslims **do not want to conform to American values**. Sean (41) argues that “[Muslims] don’t care for their property as Americans do. My neighbors’ house looks like a shack, no respect for their property.” Darin (40) said: “It’s a selfish thing to reap the benefits of a country while rooting against it.” On the other hand, Marc (40), who works in Sales, thinks Muslims want to conform to the American values and believes that they, as immigrants, “probably value the “American Dream” more than [those] born there.”

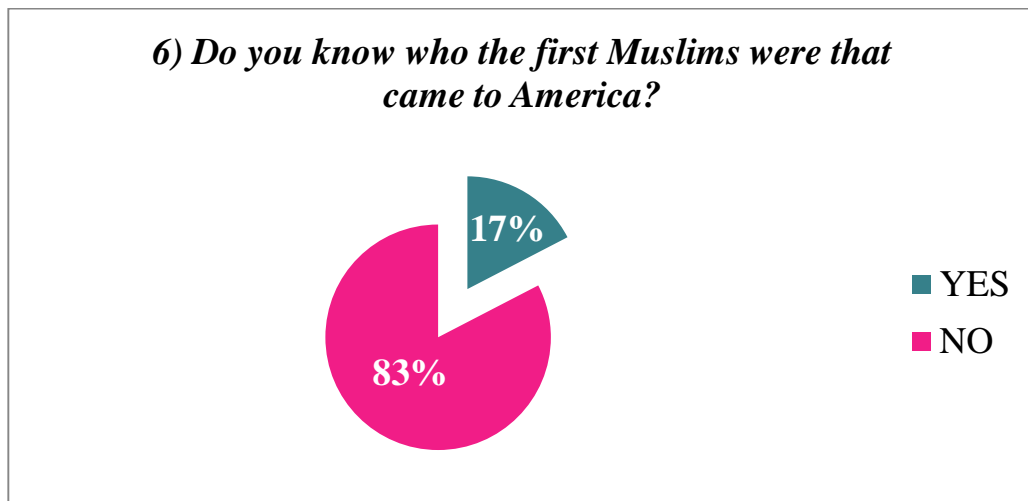
Graph 6



As far as Graph 6 is concerned, the vast majority of the interviewed Americans do not care whether Muslim women do or do not cover their hair.

Nonetheless, Ruth (54), who works as a legal assistant, is among those who are bothered by women who wear *hijab*. Ruth does not agree with the fact that Muslim women wear *hijab* because she thinks “it makes them seem inferior to men.” Ania (34) does not approve wearing *hijab* either and argues that “[Muslims], wherever they end up, should respect the countries culture, style of living including clothing.” In contrast, Mike (35), working as a Manager, does not care if Muslim women cover their hair but adds that “in 2015, to be so devout to ideals that are so archaic seems a little strange.” Leon (39), who is a lawyer, accepts wearing *hijab* by Muslim women but adds that “covering the face with *burqa* is sign of extremism to [him].”

Graph 7



Graph 7 shows that only 17% of the respondents are aware of the story of the first Muslims to America.



## 7. Conclusion

The situation in the Middle East has become a source for news dealing with terrorism, wars, and fear. Most people associate Middle East with Muslims. The most visible present-day terrorist organization controlling or influencing a significant territory in Iraq and Syria bears the name “Islamic” State. There is no wonder that people with insufficient knowledge of Islam equal this faith to evil taking into account they rely precisely on news. The survey conducted for this thesis confirmed Peek’s words that most Americans do not have a basic understanding of Islam. Moreover, only a minimum of the interviewees knew who the first Muslims were that came to America. The survey also corresponds to the Pew Research Center survey because in both cases the majority of the interviewees do not believe Muslims living in America want to conform to the American values or in other words to assimilate.

The main aim of this thesis was to find out the influence of 9/11 on the status of Muslim community in America and to trace whether any aftermaths prevail. Muslims can be our neighbors, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and the Pew Research Survey showed that the vast majority of them disagree with any form of illegitimate violence including bombing and hijacking. The overwhelming majority of them were hurt and shocked by the terrorist attacks directed at America. Nevertheless, they suffered twice as much because they had to face a bias based on their looks and religious affiliation. With contribution of media, the immediate aftermaths were stereotyping and general misunderstanding of Islam and the fact that people associated anyone who looked like a Muslim with evil and terror.

This thesis attempted to portray a real picture of an American Muslim. This would be impossible without giving the reader an insight into the religion of Islam. It was explained that just like Christianity or Judaism, Islam also preaches peace and does not support any illegitimate violence. It was also explained that the primary function of an often misrepresented term *jihad* is not to wage war but rather to struggle to be a good Muslim and to behave morally. The section “Unholy War” clarifies why terrorists refer their actions to Islamic faith and why their claims might sound convincing to other people.

The survey for this thesis showed that all of the interviewees have already met a Muslim in their life and none of them had a bad experience; it has been also

mentioned that there are a growing number of Americans who convert to Islam. Although still a minority in America, the numbers of the followers of Islam undoubtedly increase. Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress that Muslims are not Arabs only. Instead, the thesis provided arguments showing that Muslims in America are a very diverse community.

Surprisingly, two thirds of the Americans who were asked for this thesis said their attitude toward Islam did not change after 9/11. Nevertheless, it must have changed toward Muslims as both Peek's survey as well as Pew Research Center survey showed it did. The thesis provided not only the insight into the harmful effects of September 11 on Muslims in days and months following the tragic event but it also demonstrated the figures proving Muslims still face a bias. It is a bias against Muslims, who might differ ethnically or pray five times a day, but who want to live their "American Dream" like everyone else in America. To avoid this bias, we must let ourselves make our own picture of Muslims and of other minorities by interacting with the minorities, listening to them and trying to understand their culture and habits, rather than relying on media. It is upon us.

## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumala vliv útoků z 11. září na statut muslimské komunity v Americe. Jejím cílem bylo také zjistit, do jaké míry jsou předsudky o islámu a muslimech pravdivé. První část práce se proto zabývá právě islámem, jeho základními principy. Tato část je pak následována zmínkou o napětí mezi muslimy a křesťany a o napětí v rámci muslimské komunity samotné, konkrétně poukazuje na vztahy mezi šíity a sunnity. Nejsou opomenuty ani společné znaky a naopak hlavní rozdíly mezi islámem a křesťanstvím.

Ačkoliv jsou islám a jeho následovníci diskutovaným tématem zejména v posledních letech, muslimové v Americe nejsou novým fenoménem. Nicméně ačkoliv jsou na americkém kontinentě již několik staletí, dotazník pro tuto práci potvrdil slova Peekové, podle níž nemá většina amerických občanů dostatečnou znalost o islámu a stejně tak, že jen minimum z nich má představu o prvních muslimských imigrantech v Americe. Tato práce nahlíží zejména na první muslimské imigranty ze Středního východu, kteří přicházejí v 19. století za lepšími pracovními podmínkami nebo kvůli nepříznivým podmínkám ve vlasti. Prostor byl také věnován těm Američanům, kteří se do víry nenarodili, ale jako první k ní konvertovali a stejně tak organizacím, které inspirovaly Afroameričany ke konvertování.

Před řešením samotného statutu muslimských občanů ve Spojených státech po útocích z 11. září se krátce věnuji také průběhu samotných útoků a v části „Unholy War“ se pokouším vysvětlit, proč extremisti odůvodňují své činy právě islámskou vírou. Tato práce poukazuje na to, že takovéto odůvodnění, ačkoli může zapůsobit na menšinu věřících, je v rozporu s islámem, který stejně jako křesťanství a židovství hlásá mír a odsuzuje jakékoliv neoprávněné násilí. Je také vysvětlen primární význam v médiích a jinde často zmiňovaného a překrucovaného termínu *džihád*.

Poslední část této bakalářské práce pak zodpovídá otázku o statutu amerických muslimů, který se ukázal být v důsledku útoků na Světové obchodní centrum a Pentagon značně otřesen. Z poměrně málo diskutované menšiny se ze dne na den stala komunita diskutovaná a zkreslovaná médii, vůči níž stáli nejen jednotlivci, ale i samotná vláda. V neposlední řadě práce ukazuje amerického muslima jako člena velmi rozmanité skupiny, jehož život je mnohdy i více než dekádu po tragédii z 11. září jejími následky stále ovlivněn.

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*The List of Graphs*

Graph 1: Religious affiliation

Graph 2: Did 9/11 change your view on Islam?

Graph 3: Have you ever personally met a Muslim?

Graph 4: Would you say you are familiar enough with Islamic religion?

Graph 5: Do you think that Muslims living in America do not want to conform to the American values?

Graph 6: Does it bother you that most Muslim women wear hijab (cover their hair)?

Graph 7: Do you know who the first Muslims were that came to America?

*The List of Abbreviations*

Non-governmental organizations NGOs

Immigration and Naturalization Service INS



## **Anotace**

Příjmení a jméno: Hepová Kristina

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Studijní obor: anglická filologie

Název: Pohled Američanů na muslimy po 11. září

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Matthew Sweney, Ph.D.

Počet stran: 49 (89 482 znaků)

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl seznámit čtenáře se základními principy islámského náboženství, poskytnout mu stručný přehled o počátcích islámu na americkém kontinentě a především přiblížit mu život amerických muslimů a to, jak jsou vnímáni americkou společností. Tato práce se zaměřuje především na okamžité dopady 11. září na muslimskou společnost v Americe a dále pak zmiňuje do jaké míry osudné události 11. září ovlivňují život muslimů v Americe dnes.

Klíčová slova: islám, američtí muslimové, konverze, džihád, 11. září, 2001

## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to make the reader familiar with the basic principles of Islam, to provide him a concise overview of the beginnings of Islam on the American continent, and especially to give him the insight into the life of American Muslims and how they are perceived by the American society. This work focuses mainly on the immediate aftermaths of September 11 on Muslim society in America and to what extent the fatal events of September 11 affect the lives of Muslims in America today.

Keywords: Islam, American Muslims, conversion, jihad, September 11, 2001