

# **ANTI AMERICAN SENTIMENT; The Case of Muslim Student Activists in Makassar**

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this paper is to identify how the anti-American sentiment emerges among the Muslim student activists at university. This paper tries to figure out the reason why America perceived negatively how the actions of the activists which are considered as the attempt against America. It verifies that the spirit of anti America occurs among the Muslim students. However, this study reveals that the tendency of anti-America is not related to a religious motive but related to other motives such as American close relationship with Israel, American foreign policy, cultural westoxification and America as a symbol of global capitalism. The respondents for this study were taken from the Islamic activists' organizations such as Muslim Student Association (HMI), Indonesian Muslim Student Action Union (KAMMI), Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII), and The Student Movement of Liberation (Gema Pembebasan) which located in Makassar.

## **The Anti-American; From Europe to a Muslim Land**

In 1492, when Columbus accidentally landed in American continent and thought that it was Asian, no one predicted the land would be a home where the super power country located. After the collapse of Soviet Union which represented the East Block at the end of Cold War in 1991,

America stood alone as the super power country and the leading power of Western Block.

However, being the representative of West sometimes puts America into a problem. Not everyone in this world like Western ideology or western civilization. In fact, West is often portrayed as an enemy. The western domination all over the world leads to a resistance of marginalized group including some Muslims group. With no surprise, the hatred against the west is also addressed to the US as the symbol of West.

Although today's anti-American has always been associated with Muslim countries, anti-American attitudes is not limited in Muslims land. In fact, Anti American originated from Europe. O'Connor (2004) states that the first term of Anti-Americanism is related to the Europeans views against American attitudes and manners which are considered rude. When America became a Super Power country, the issues more focus on politic and economy. In the end, the term has been spread and each country and group has its own story of anti-Americanism. O'Connor historically divided the Anti-Americanism into four phases. The first phase of the anti-America was when the American became a new home for the European until the end of World War II. In this phase, the anti-American attitude more oriented to a criticism toward the American culture where the European were look superior while the American cultural are inferior. The second phase of the war between 1945 and 1989. At that time, the anti-American attitude is more politically and ideologically oriented. It's actually voiced by the "left" and Soviet Union.

The third phase was, from 1989 to the end of the cold war. In this time, the Anti-American attitude put more emphasis as an opposition to the American capitalism, Americanization and continued to the issue of anti-globalization. The final phase was marked by September 11 in 2001, when the anti-Americanism terrorists attack of the World Trade Center in USA (2004: 77-78). From O'Connor statements, we can conclude that, Anti-American history is as old as the history of the "discovery" of America itself.

However, it is not easy to define what Anti-Americanism itself is because each person has their view about what Anti Americanism is. Ivan Krastev (2005) the Researchers at Central European University in Budapest, Bulgaria, who stated that we are entering the "Anti-American Century," said that the definition of anti-American will always be elusive to be understood. For him, opposing the policies of the U.S. government cannot be translated directly as Anti Americanism. But opposing any policy simply just because it is endorsed by U.S governance is counted as anti-Americanism. (2005:7).

I myself tend to identify that Anti-American stance is an attitude that puts America as "enemies" or "threat" that should be opposed. The reason why America considers as the enemy could be varying both in terms of political, economic or cultural. The underlying reasons for the rise of anti-American attitudes in Latin America could have a different reason with emergence of anti-American in Europe or even in the Muslim world. As matter of fact, from one Muslim

country to another Muslim country may have a different reasons regarding the emergence of anti-American attitudes. One group can be very strong against U.S. in terms of culture but on the other hand has positive view towards American democracy. On the other hand, someone may strongly oppose America's monopoly in economy and politics but rather like American culture, or enjoy fashion and technology made by America. So, from my point of view, there is no such thing as "Fully Anti-Americanism." Or a complete hatred of America.

In the Muslim world, the sentiment of Anti American is always understood as the result of the cultural difference embraced by American as representative of the West. However, Reuvan Paz (2003), a person who supported the Clash of Civilization theory by Huntington, mentioned that a hatred of America by Muslim community is naturally caused by cultural factors rather than military or political factors. Paz also said that, Sayyid Qutb is the one who introduces to American hatred in the Muslim world.

But that point of view is not completely true. There are some researches which showing that the anti-American attitude in the Muslim world is not merely about cultural problem. In the Arabic world for example, the Anti-Americanism is built by three factors. *First*, The American supports for Israel either politically, economically, and militarily. *Second*, the American attacks and sanctions to some Arab countries. *Third*, the U.S government support to a tyrannical regime in Arab, the establishment of military bases

and also the view that America support the campaign against Islam (Abdallah; 62).

In Pakistan, one of the big Muslim countries, the hatred towards America is also based on three factors. *First*, the Americans policy toward Pakistan understood is recognized as the American effort for the sake of their own good. *Second*, the America's global policy that supports Israel and against the Iranian Government *Third*, American intervention in related to issue of Afghanistan and the declining values of Pakistan currency. Interestingly, most of the Pakistani people rejected the notion that hatred of America is based on a religious factor, ethnicity, and cultural differences (Kizilbash; 1988).

The same thing happened in Indonesia where the Anti American sentiment is not purely based on religious and cultural differences. The sentiment of Anti American emerged due to the issue of Israel or any other issues such as America tendency against Indonesia for their own political and economic interest. America is the group which should responsible for the independence of Timor Leste, and economic crisis which happened in 1997 (Bowen: 2007).

All those facts above prove that hatred toward America among Muslims themselves also vary depending on the relevant issues in that country. However it is clear that the Anti America in the Muslim countries is not only caused by cultural differences. Instead, the U.S. foreign policy is very much influential in creating hatred against America itself.

## **The Negative Image of America from Muslim Activist Perspective**

At least, there are three general pictures of how Americans perceived by the activist students; Americas as a colonizer, Americas as an imperialist, and America as a country which is identical with liberalism, materialism and hedonism. Those three perceptions show how the American is still perceived as a negative in the Muslim community.

The opinion which portrait America as a colonizer is established based on the understanding that American military invasion to Afghanistan and Iraq is not a form of resistance against terrorism or an effort to discover mass weapons, but it is understood as an American attempt to colonize those two countries. Through the understanding of those activists, the colonization also occurs in the form of "Soft colonization," and that's what actually happened in Indonesia. The "soft colonization" shaped in the form of economic colonialism, foreign investment, control of the mines and the natural resources of Indonesia.

The activists' understanding about America as an imperialist country on the other hand has a meaning as recognition of the superiority of America as a "super power." America is regarded as a strong nation, a great military, education and technology. Unfortunately, the America has a desire to be the center of the world. America tries to strengthen its influence to the world by spreading their idea. The American imperialism embedded in the form of economic imperialism by spreading neoliberal economic

system and creating capitalist societies. The political imperialism is created by making the leaders of Muslim countries as an "American puppet." The American military imperialism was built by constructing military bases in Muslim countries, and cultural imperialism by spreading American cultures into Muslim community.

The American negativity also reflected from the assumption that America is identically with liberalism, materialism, and hedonism. These three concepts are considered incompatible with the teachings of Islam. According to the activists, the notion of freedom, which embraces, by Americans is contrary to a religious teaching because it eliminates religious values. Free sex becomes so common in society. Later, this action also spread to the Islamic world. The rise of sex videos

### **Why America Perceived as a Muslim Haters**

There is actually an assumption from the Muslim activists that America has a tendency to hate Islam. There are three common reasons why that view appears. First, the presumption arises due to the labeling of the "Islam as a terrorist." This labeling is considered as a form of American hatred against Islam. Second, there is a double standard attitude of America over the issue of human rights. U.S. is considered inconsistent in addressing the problems of Human Rights (HAM) in Muslim society such as in Iraq, Afghanistan or in Rohingya. Third, there's a belief that U.S trying to destroy Muslim belief through thought and lifestyles which

were transformed through the media. All of those are the reason why American perceived as Muslim haters. On the positive side, even though America seems to be an enemy of Muslim but these activist groups did not hate American society. When the mentioned America, it is referred to the American government, not include the American society. Government and society are two different things.

What is so interesting is, there is such belief that U.S. sentiment toward Muslim set by the Zionist group. In their point of view, the Zionist controls the U.S government. U.S is not more than a puppet show. They even belief that Barack Obama is actually Jews. This kind of argument is actually not new. There is another argument who believe that Zionist is actually full of hate toward Muslim.

### **The Various Argument of Anti American Sentiment**

There are at least four factors that led to the emergence of anti-American attitudes among Muslim activists. Those are; the closeness relation between U.S and Israel, American foreign policy factors, westoxification, and U.S as a symbol of global capitalism.

#### **1. The Close Relationship between U.S and Israel**

As I mentioned before, this Muslim activist believe that American is actually under control of Israel or the Zionist group who have control over American economy and government. This statements is supported by the fact that, when the Israel military invasion was attacking Gaza, the

Americans tend to be silent and allow it while many other countries criticize it. In the other hand, as a country that supports the issue of Human Rights, U.S government seems neglectful toward the Palestinian case.

Not surprisingly, when they staged a demonstration against the Israeli violence against Palestinians, at the same time they also held demonstrations against America. The burning of the American flags is also common happened in demonstration against Israel.

## **2. U.S Foreign Policy Factors**

There are views from the activists who believe that there are many American foreign policies that harm the Islamic society and the Islamic country. The case of Iraq and Afghanistan are two cases that are often raised to show how American foreign policy discredited the Muslims world. Using the motive of destroying terrorist or looking for mass destruction, America destroys a Muslim country. There are so many people who has become a victim and died. And those victims were Muslim. The American arbitrariness in Muslim country even is even considered as American action that replace the position of God.

## **3. Westoxification Factor**

The Muslim activist students acknowledge that Western culture is contrary to the Eastern cultures or even Islamic culture. American Lifestyle include how to dress and free sex are very contrast with the teachings of Islam. However, it is

not the cultural difference why that hatred arise, but the threat of "westoxification" that is regarded as a trigger. Cultural differences are not an issue if the culture remains at the place where the culture was born. However, if the culture is taken out from its place and is transformed into a place with a different culture, it will create the problem. In this situation, America is suspected to spread their way of life and way of thinking to a Muslim community. It and was consider as a threat to Islamic culture.

#### **4. America as a Symbol of Capitalism**

Hatred against the Americans was not always based on religious and cultural motives, but also can be formed by other reasons. One of them is anti-American sentiment which is built based on the belief that America as a symbol of global capitalism. This view gives a great overview that Anti-American attitude of a Muslim does not have to always be associated with the issue of religion and culture. Another issue which is considered much more serious is about the politics and economy of America.

The activist groups who have a tendency to embrace the anti-American sentiment based on the premise that Americas as a symbol of global capitalism believe that the capitalist system which is adopted by Western countries are too dominating the world. Capitalism is then regarded as a sistem that cause a social injustice and economic injustice. This system makes the developed countries with its strength capital can easily exploit the third world countries.

An understanding of America as a symbol of global capitalism is precisely what underlies why then a demonstration against America is often directed to fast food outlets like McD, KFC or Pizza Hut. These places are considered as a real symbol of American capitalist which embedded in Indonesia. The Demonstration against fast food outlets can be significantly mean as the opposition to the U.S. and also the opposition to global capitalism.

The sentiment of America which is based on the anti-capitalist issue might open our eyes that the hatred of American among the Muslim activist students are no longer just about religion or culture, but also through the other lens such as socialism, Marxism or anarchism.

### **The Praxis of Anti American Sentiment**

Organization is a place where the sentiment of Anti-Americans to be strengthened or reinforced. Through the organization this sentiment becomes more ideological. The activist acknowledged that America is not mentioned explicitly as an enemy in their organization, but America always portrayed as a negative example. America is mentioned as the example of the capitalist country, America became one of the example of a democratic country who oppose Islamic government, America is a country that holds the western cultures which tries to impose their cultures into Muslim countries. All those example put America is the negative example.

The forms of resistance against the American then divided into three models of resistance: Resistance of ideology, Boycotting, and demonstrating

### **1. Ideological Resistance**

Almost all activist students believe that it is important to take the fight against the Western ideology. Some even consider it as a necessity, especially when this Western ideology has begun to poison the Islamic community. To prevent the spread of Western Ideology, the Muslim activist students try to raise awareness of people about the dangers of Western understanding. This “awareness’ processes done through various ways such as public discussion, countering Western discourse, using a social media or writing an opinion in the media, as well as in the form of propaganda. This kind of ideological resistance is regarded as what Prophet Muhammad has shown in his life. This form of resistance also considered as a sort of intellectual resistance.

### **2. Boycotting the American Product**

Boycotting American product is actually not a massive movement, which mean that there are not mat many people are holding this idea. The students who are involved and participated in this movement have a different opinion why they are doing this boycott. Some people believe that boycotting American product is much better rather than doing a demonstration, especially a harmful demonstration. While some other students are involved in this movement due

to ideological reason where boycotting American product is a part of boycotting American capitalism. There for we should rather deny it.

However, it became so interesting when this boycotting product is promoted in social media issues such as facebook. In fact, those of people who are campaigning to boycott American product still use a facebook even though facebook is actually considered as the American product itself. They actually have a base foundation for this. They still use facebook because facebook can be a backfire for U.S. They can use this social media to attack back the U.S. Through facebook they can do massive campaign against U.S. They also use facebook as a tool to spread the discourse of anti America all over the world in the simple way without costing much money. On this basis, facebook is still used.

### **3. Demonstration; From Peaceful Demonstration to *Occupy McD***

Demonstration against American is the real action which is often done by the activist. However, this demonstration does not occur spontaneously and without a trigger. There is always a trigger before the demonstration happened. This trigger commonly comes from America itself or from western side such as; the case of the Innocence of Muslim film, U.S military attack on Iraq, U.S. support for Israel, the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip or in Jylend Posten cartoons. These activists acknowledge that demonstration is the reaction from those triggers. The demonstration is also

conducted as a form of critic against the United States. Some of the demonstration are also based on their disappointment to the Americans.

The majority of the Muslim activist students highly recommend a peaceful demonstration. Some activists are actually against a violent demonstration because they believe that prophet has taught us how to behave non-anarchically. However, they did not consider the burning of the American flag or the Israel flag as part of the non-violent demonstrations. Burning the American flag is seen as symbolic action against the Americans. It is not considering as damaging public facilities.

These activists have a different opinion in looking demonstration which leads to occupation of McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut or any American franchise. Those who reject the occupation mentioned that even though KFC, McDonald's and other brands are the symbol of America but it must be remembered that there are many Muslim brothers who work in that place. They also condemn if the occupation was followed by destruction. In their view, creating destruction is not a apart of Islamic teaching. For them, it is important to show the world that Islam is a non violence religion.

While other activist, who support the occupation of the American symbols, have a different opinion. In their view, a demonstration against U.S should be done exactly at the place where the American symbol exists. And in Makassar, that American symbol can only be found in the American

franchise. They also refuse to be called doing destructive action because if what they did consider a destruction, what America did to a Muslim country was much more danger and created much more destruction.

The attacking of this American franchise is not merely due to American symbol issue. The other reason why these American franchises are always became a target of demonstration because those places are also portrayed as a symbol of capitalism. No wonder, even the issue of fuel price, this place will became a target of demonstrators. There is big message that demonstrators try to deliver by attacking those place. The demonstnan are deliberately done in order to create disabilities. The big message for the U.S. is, Makassar is not a suitable place to invest. So, get out from here.

## **Epilog**

This paper succeeds to answer the original question about the existence of anti-American sentiment among Muslim activist students. This study found that the tendency did exist but was guided by different reasons. The U.S can be portrayed as a common threat, but with a different concept. In this case, the background of the organization may give influence in creating the rationale behind the anti-American attitude.

There are two interesting things that can be counted as consideration. First, the anti American sentiment is not built upon the differences of civilization or as Huntington called “the clash of civilization.” I am not pointing that Huntington

is wrong, but his theory may not applicable in the context of Muslim activist student in Makassar. Both Islam and West are two different civilizations and the activists do understand about this. They still respect west as a culture as long as their culture stays at the West. The western cultures became a problem if those cultures are tried to be infiltrated into Muslim culture. In short, cultural difference is not a threat. Bringing one culture into a place where one culture already exists is a problem.

Second, Anti-American is not a religious sentiment. The hatred of America is not mainly built based on religious differences. In fact, there is also other issue which is used to legitimate those Anti American attitudes. For example, an issue where America is put as a symbol of capitalism. This is a not an Islamic issues because this issue is also carried by non-Muslim people who have an Anti American sentiment. So, there is such as merger between what so called cultural issue, religious issue and also global issue.

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