# ISLAMOPHOBIA

## A Multidisciplinary Study

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**A Multidisciplinary Study**

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# From the Editor

Dear Readers,

The book you are holding is the product of an effort to shed light on Islamophobia, one of the most pressing and complex issues of our time, through the lenses of various academic disciplines. This work not only examines the impacts of Islamophobia on individuals and societies but also delves deeply into its sociological, psychological, educational, exegetical, historical, and philosophical dimensions.

The sociology of religion explores the societal manifestations of Islamophobia, while the psychology of religion helps us understand emotions such as fear, prejudice, and hatred. Religious education questions the role of education in addressing and resolving this phenomenon, and the discipline of tafsir examines how Islamophobic perceptions are sometimes rooted in misinterpretations of religious texts. Islamic history provides insights into the historical origins of this phenomenon, while philosophy interrogates its ideological underpinnings and its impact on human thought.

By integrating these diverse perspectives, this book aims to provide readers with a holistic understanding of Islamophobia and to propose pathways for addressing it. Enriched by contributions from experts in these fields, our interdisciplinary approach underscores the complexity of Islamophobia while offering valuable insights for both academic inquiry and societal transformation.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors and everyone who supported the preparation of this volume. I hope this work inspires readers to engage in new discussions and develop solutions to the challenges posed by Islamophobia.

Sincerely,

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yılmaz ARI
Editor
Eskişehir / TÜRKİYE, 2024

CHAPTER 1

# ISLAMOPHOBIA AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON: SOCIOLOGICAL DEPTH AND CONTEMPORARY REALITY

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yılmaz ARI**[1]

## 1. Introduction

Islamophobia, as one of the global issues of our time, can be defined not only as an individual bias or fear but also as a phenomenon that profoundly affects social structures (Saparca, 2019). Although the term "Islamophobia" gained popularity in academic circles in the West during the 1990s (Bangstad, 2015), the roots of this phenomenon stretch much deeper. Islamophobia primarily refers to fear, prejudice, hatred, and discrimination directed at Islam and its followers (Ergül, 2015). However, this simple definition does not fully reflect the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the phenomenon.

Islamophobia has become interwoven with social structures and cultural norms in many Western societies, leading to significant long-term social polarization (Duman, 2020). This phenomenon is not limited to individual prejudices; it is a complex issue reinforced by societal structures and ideological tools (Saparca, 2019). From the perspective of the sociology of religion, Islamophobia functions not only as an individual attitude but also as

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an exclusionary mechanism used by societies in constructing their identities (Genel, 2014).

Social integration and exclusion mechanisms, representations of religion in relation to capitalism, and the functions of ideological tools help us understand that Islamophobia is not merely an individual prejudice but a phenomenon that strengthens social structures and reinforces the interests of dominant groups (Balcı & Karadeniz, 2021). These approaches explain how Islamophobia functions in maintaining the continuity of social order and preserving power relations. From the Crusades of the Middle Ages to the colonial period and modern times, fear and hostility towards Islam have been systematically nurtured in the Western world (Buehler, 2014). After the September 11 attacks, the media and politics increased societal fear by associating Islam with terrorism, turning Islamophobia into a global phenomenon (Aktaş, 2017).

The media is one of the most effective tools in spreading Islamophobia. Platforms such as television, cinema, and social media have reinforced societal fear by presenting Muslims as a dangerous "other" through false and negative representations (Göknel, 2015). Particularly, populist policies and anti-immigrant rhetoric have made Islamophobia a politically legitimized tool (Bayar & Güdül, 2022). As seen in the examples of France, the UK, and the US, discriminatory rhetoric by political leaders towards Muslims has increased social polarization and strengthened this prejudice (Gölcü & Çuhadar, 2017).

Islamophobia is not limited to the West; it has become a global phenomenon (Buehler, 2014). The portrayal of political tensions in the Middle East in the media has contributed to depicting Islam as a threat, creating a social issue affecting Muslims worldwide (Saparca, 2019). Particularly in Europe and America, the rise of anti-immigrant and nationalist movements (Özarslan, 2023) has turned Islamophobia into a societal issue, reinforced through both politics and social norms (Tosun, 2024).

Fighting Islamophobia is a comprehensive responsibility that goes beyond overcoming individual prejudices and must be addressed at both societal and institutional levels. In this process, education, media literacy, legal regulations, and active participation of civil society emerge as key tools. Providing more accurate and balanced representations in the media, implementing cultural change programs, and developing effective anti-discrimination policies by states can create a strong resistance to Islamophobia. At the same time, efforts to raise social awareness, develop empathy, and access accurate information will play a critical role in overcoming this prejudice in the long term.

This article will examine the historical development of Islamophobia from its origins to the present from the perspective of the sociology of religion, discussing the impact of elements such as the media, politics, and social structures in the formation and spread of this phenomenon. It will also focus on the importance of education, media literacy, the role of civil society, and legal regulations in combating Islamophobia. Addressing Islamophobia is a multidimensional struggle that requires the collective effort of individuals and institutions.

## 2. The Historical Background of Islamophobia

The origins of Islamophobia are not limited to the socio-cultural structures of modern Western societies; rather, they trace back to much deeper historical roots. The historical trajectory of this phenomenon extends from the Middle Ages to the present and has been primarily shaped by the conflicts, misunderstandings, and cultural differences between the West and the Islamic world (Çakaş, 2019). Islamophobia first became evident during the Middle Ages, with Europe's growing hostility towards the East, particularly towards the Islamic world. This hostility was further systematized during the colonial period and evolved into a global phenomenon in the 20th century (Bozan, 2018; Ergin, 2021). Today, negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims have become a form of prejudice for many individuals, both religiously and culturally, and the origins of these perceptions date back further in history.

From the 7th century onwards, the interaction of Islam with other cultures and belief systems reveals that the early relationships between Christianity and Islam were largely based on religious competition. In the early periods of Islam, the political aspect of the religion was prominent, gradually acquiring a religious identity and developing into a distinct belief system, especially through its elements that differed from Christianity and Judaism (Aydın, 2011). Islam's claim to be the "final religion" and its criticism of earlier religious traditions were perceived as a threat to Christianity and Judaism. In response, arguments were made that Islam did not perform prophetic miracles and that the Quran was an inconsistent and complex text. Moreover, the idea that Islam spread through the sword reinforced the perception in the West that "Islam spread by the sword" (Hoyland, 1997).

At the beginning of the 7th century, as Muslims advanced as far as Spain, the Christian world's perspective on Islam and Muslims began to change. The period of Al-Andalus under the Umayyad caliphate initiated the rapid spread of Islam into Western Europe, laying the foundations of the fear of Islam in Europe. This fear and prejudice were further reinforced through the

Crusades during the Middle Ages, and Islam began to be seen as a threat to the Western world. The anti-Islamic attitudes that developed in the West during the Crusades deepened with the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and the conquest of Istanbul in 1453. The Ottoman Empire's conquests in Western Europe, its territorial expansion, and control over maritime routes strengthened the fear of Islam in the Western world (Şeker, 2023).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Europe's colonial expansion led to the definition of Islam and Muslim communities as "backward" and a threat. Orientalist viewpoints and the political discourses of the time contributed to the formation of negative stereotypes about Islam (Metin, 2013). After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of communism, Western countries targeted Islam to define a new "Other" (Kirman, 2010).

The date of September 11, 2001, marked a turning point in the global spread of Islamophobia. Following this event, an atmosphere of distrust towards Islam and Muslims began to spread in the West, creating a fear-based new power structure. In modern societies, these fears and prejudices led to increased social exclusion, discrimination, and hate crimes (Kirman, 2010). After the September 11 attacks, Western media began using more negative language about Islam and Muslims, labeling them as "terrorists" and deepening negative perceptions of Islam (Erdin, 2014).

The negative mentality towards the Islamic world, developed by the West, was reproduced and spread to the masses through the media in the post-September 11 period (Yüksel, 2014). During this time, the actions of terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab led to the association of Islam with "violence"; in 2006, Pope Francis's statement about Islam spreading through the sword further reinforced this perception in the West. Today, Islamophobia is not just an individual prejudice but a structural problem that leads to the exclusion of Muslims in social, economic, and public spheres (Kalın & Esposito, 2024). This situation reinforces the stereotypical judgments that demean Muslims in the West, alienate them, and define Islam as a violent ideology.

## 2.1. The Middle Ages and the Crusades: The First Traces

In the Middle Ages, the rise of Islam was not merely a religious event for the Western world, but also symbolized a deep cultural and ideological chasm between the West and the East (Erdin, 2014). From the 7th century onward, Christian Europe viewed the rapidly spreading Islam not only as a religious threat but also as a cultural, social, and political rival (Gür, 2023). The Crusades, which began in 1095, became one of the most prominent

events that systematized the fear and hostility that the West felt toward the Islamic world. During this period, Western historians and writers labeled Muslims as "barbarians," "reactionary," and "culturally backward" (Kalın, 2020; Göknel, 2015). For the European leaders and elites, the perception of Islam went beyond just seeing it as a religious threat. Islam was defined as a "heretical" and "primitive" culture, with exaggerations of the differences between Christianity and Islam, leading to the development of a discourse focused on hostility and otherness. In the West, Islam was associated with negative adjectives such as "irrational," "oppressive," "barbaric," "ruthless," "aggressive," "violent," "terrorist," and "inferior," which were used to legitimize open Islamophobia and animosity against it (Ayık, 2013). These approaches provided an ideological foundation for policies of discrimination and exclusion towards Muslims.

These negative images of Islam laid the foundations for centuries of prejudice in the West. In the centuries following the Crusades, Western thinkers and writers continued to depict Islam as a religion "associated with violence" (Alıcı, 2019). This process led the West to perceive Islam both as a religious competitor and a cultural threat. These Islamophobic images in Western literature gradually permeated literary works and popular culture, gaining wide societal acceptance.

## 2.2. The Colonial Era: The Image of Islam as a "Backward" Religion

Another critical period in the historical consolidation of Islamophobia is the colonial era. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Europe's expanding colonial empires reshaped the West's relationship with the Islamic world. As England, France, and other European powers seized large territories in Asia and Africa, they began to view Islam not only as a religious obstacle but also as a cultural and political threat (Ayık, 2013). During this period, Western colonial powers often described Islamic societies as "backward" and "despotic," trying to justify their claims of superiority (Alıcı, 2019).

In the 19th century, English and French intellectuals, particularly, presented Islam as a "reactionary" and "anti-modern" religion (Güllüpınar, 2020). As Edward Said argued in *Orientalism* (1998), the West's view of the "East" was not merely a geographical difference but evolved into an ideological structure aimed at constructing the East as the opposite of the West. This "Orientalist" perspective led the West to define its own culture and values as "enlightened" and "civilized," while labeling other societies as "backward" and "barbaric" (Akdağ, 2023). This viewpoint particularly portrayed Islam

and Islamic societies as "primitive" and "backward," reinforcing the West's own superiority while deepening the roots of Islamophobia.

Colonial powers sought to impose an understanding that constantly belittled, criticized, and even insulted Islamic traditions. In this way, while Westerners viewed themselves as superior in every domain, they defined Muslim societies as historically "reactionary" and in need of correction, aiming to implant these ideas into the Muslim mind (Bozkurt, 2022). Colonial powers not only applied cultural exclusion but also maintained their economic dominance in the Islamic world through economic pressures (Aslan, 2021). During this period, the negative images produced by the West towards Islam and Muslims spread widely, even reaching the colonized populations. Colonialism used Islamophobia as an ideological tool to justify the West's claims of superiority, not only in military and economic terms but also on a cultural level.

## 2.3. The Global Dimension of Islamophobia: The 20th Century and Post-9/11

The 20th century, particularly during and after the World War II and the Cold War, marked a period in which Islamophobia became more entrenched on a global scale. During this period, the Western view of Islam deepened, especially in the context of ideological and geopolitical conflicts. During the Cold War, Muslim communities were often defined as the "other" and associated with the opposing bloc in the struggle between the West and the Soviet Union (Erişkin, 2023). In this context, political tensions in the Middle East and the rise of religious movements set the stage for the West to perceive Muslims as a threat.

However, it was the 9/11 terrorist attacks that truly marked the global prominence of Islamophobia (Poynting & Mason, 2006). After this tragic event, Western media, particularly American media, played a significant role in associating Islam and Muslims with terrorism (Salem et al., 2021). During this period, the media continuously linked Islam with violence, using the actions of groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda to depict all Muslims as potential threats. The media perpetuated the notion that Islam was a religion prone to radicalism and that all Muslims were violent, which led to the spread of Islamophobic perspectives. These discourses not only reinforced individual prejudices in Western societies but also influenced state policies, such as the travel bans against Muslims imposed by the United States (Küçükcan, 2022).

### 2.4. Political Tensions in the Middle East and Islamophobia in the West

Islamophobia does not only manifest in Western societies; it also appears in different forms in regions like the Middle East and North Africa. Following the Arab Spring, the increasing hostility towards the West and the internal conflicts in the region gave a new dimension to the narratives surrounding Islamophobia. During the Arab Spring, Western interventions were often viewed by the local populations as a conflict between Islam and the West (Nebati, 2019). This led to some regional leaders adopting rhetoric that strengthened both Western Islamophobic discourses and global hegemonic policies. Furthermore, the effects of foreign interventions on the socio-political balance in the region contributed to the deepening of these discourses.

Understanding the relationship between Islamophobia in the West and political tensions in the Middle East is crucial. Western military interventions in the region and the growing anti-Western sentiments that followed have played a significant role in fueling Islamophobia (Aktaş, 2017). For example, the Iraq War and the invasion of Afghanistan are pivotal events that increased fears and prejudices against Muslims in the West. Meanwhile, the events in the Middle East led to accusations of the West engaging in a "religious war" (Eğribel, 2022). These mutual perceptions created a cyclical relationship that perpetuated Islamophobia on both sides.

Islamophobia has evolved as a deeply rooted phenomenon throughout history, adapting to different socio-political conditions and cultural contexts from the Middle Ages to the present. Islam has been perceived by the West not only as a religious rival but also as a cultural and ideological threat, and this perception has been reinforced over time (Aktaş, 2017). The colonial era shaped the Western view of the Islamic world, while the wars and global tensions of the 20th century made Islamophobia a global phenomenon (Kutlu, 2020). This historical process plays a key role in understanding the current Islamophobic perspectives.

## 3. Sociology of Religion Perspective on Islamophobia

The sociology of religion is a discipline that seeks to understand the impact of religion on societal structures, how individual belief and value systems are shaped by social norms, and the divisive or unifying roles these beliefs play within society (Günay, 2011). When viewed from a sociology of religion

perspective, Islamophobia is not only a result of individual prejudices and fears but also a complex phenomenon shaped by the interaction of societal structures, media, education, politics, and cultural factors. To understand how it is related to processes such as constructing the "other" (Göknel, 2015), social exclusion (Çınar, 2021), and identity formation (Ar, 2023), it is essential to refer to the fundamental concepts and theories within the sociology of religion.

### 3.1. Emile Durkheim and Social Integration: Islamophobia and Exclusion

Emile Durkheim offers an important framework for understanding the social function of religion. According to Durkheim, religion is a fundamental tool for the integration of societies; it helps in the adoption of social values and norms, making individuals align with the collective order. However, Durkheim also notes that religion can play an exclusionary role (Durkheim, 2011). While religion helps societies define themselves, it also emphasizes differences from other societies and belief systems, thus reinforcing social exclusion.

In this context, Islamophobia functions as an exclusionary tool used by Western societies to define themselves (Bayraklı & Yerlikaya, 2017). Historically, Western societies have positioned themselves as the center of civilization and progress, often labeling Islam and Muslims as "backward," "dangerous," and "barbaric." Such representations strengthen the Western self-image as "modern," "enlightened," and "civilized," while simultaneously marginalizing Islam and Muslims as the "other." Durkheim's theory helps us understand how Islamophobia serves as a tool for constructing this exclusionary identity.

Durkheim's concept of social integration reveals that Islamophobia is not merely a religious prejudice but plays a significant role in the construction of social identities. Islamophobia allows Western societies to create an "other" figure, reinforcing their own cultural identities (Tekin, 2017). This process of exclusion strengthens the division between "us" and "them," contributing to the formation of social cohesion.

### 3.2. Max Weber and Religion, Economy, and Islamophobia

Max Weber examined the impact of religion on social structures, particularly through the lens of religion's relationship with capitalism. In his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued

that religious beliefs have a transformative power on economic and social structures (Weber, 1999). Islamophobia, particularly in the Western world, is fueled by the perception of Islam as a threat to the economic, cultural, and social order.

Certain Western political groups argue that Islam is incompatible with the capitalist economic system and opposes liberal values and individual rights (Gafuroğulları, 2019). These perceptions have led to Islam being seen as a threat. Weber's analysis of the relationship between capitalism and religion offers a key tool for understanding Islamophobia. By the late 20th century, some interpretations of Islam were seen in the West as an alternative to the capitalist economic order and Western value systems. Islam's values of "social justice" and "redistribution" (Akyuz, 2021) were sometimes perceived as conflicting with the individualistic capitalist approach prevalent in the West. This perception reinforced fear of Islam and fueled Islamophobia. Therefore, Weber's views on the transformative power of religion in social structures help explain the economic and cultural threat perceptions that underpin Islamophobia.

### 3.3. Karl Marx and Islamophobia: Religion and the Ruling Classes

Karl Marx emphasized how religion reproduces social structures and reinforces the interests of the ruling classes. According to Marx, religion serves as a tool to maintain the ideological dominance of the ruling classes (Marx, 1968). Religion functions as an opiate for the masses, convincing them to accept the existing social order (Marx, 2002); the ruling classes use religious values and ideologies to establish control over the populace.

In line with Marx's views, Islamophobia allows Western ruling classes to define Islam and Muslims as "backward" and "culturally inferior," thus presenting themselves as the bearers of a superior culture. One of the reasons for global opposition to Islam lies in the religious views of Western colonizers or elite marginal groups. These groups perceive religion as a regressive phenomenon that leads to false consciousness and alienation from oneself. A core reference point for this worldview is Marx's famous phrase, "religion is the opium of the people." This quote reflects the basic perception of those who hold this view: religion is seen as a false consciousness that alienates people from their true selves, serving the function of reinforcing the economic and social position of the ruling classes (Akkır, 2018).

Western powers have portrayed Islam and Muslims as a threat to capitalism, liberalism, and democratic values, thereby reinforcing their ideological

superiority (Ar, 2017). This strategy became especially prominent toward the end of the 20th century. The Western self-definition as "progressive" and "modern" has been coupled with labeling Islam as "backward" and "dangerous," serving as a tool to reinforce the existing social structure and power relations. According to Marx, such ideological discourses help sustain the power of the ruling classes (Marx, 2002).

Islamophobia provides a clear example of how dominant cultural norms and values in the West can be used as ideological tools for excluding Islam and Muslims. In this context, we can better understand the relationship between Marx's concept of religion as a tool and the Western ruling classes' claims of cultural superiority.

### 3.4. Islamophobia and Social Identity Construction

The sociology of religion is a crucial discipline for understanding the construction of social identities. Islamophobia is closely tied to the processes of identity formation in Western societies, particularly in their tendency to exclude Islam. The theories of thinkers such as Durkheim, Weber, and Marx contribute to our understanding of the "function of religion in shaping social identities" (Cavlı, 2020), while also shedding light on how Islamophobia reinforces processes of social exclusion and othering. Western societies define their own culture and values as "universal" and "natural" (Gür, 2023), positioning Islam as the antithesis of these cultures and thus excluding religious and cultural differences, constructing the "other."

Islamophobia enables social forces aiming to create a sense of homogeneity and unity to carry out this process in an exclusionary manner, ignoring and marginalizing differences (Aydın, 2019). In this sense, the relationship between religion and social identity helps us understand how religion functions not only in facilitating social integration but also in the construction of identity and the creation of the "other."

The sociology of religion views Islamophobia not merely as an individual fear and prejudice but as a phenomenon "linked to social structures and identity construction processes" (Eken, 2020). The theories of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx regarding the impact of social structures play an important role in understanding the social function of Islamophobia. Islamophobia is part of the process through which Western societies reinforce their cultural identities and exclude the "other." Religion, as both a tool for social integration and a structure that can play an exclusionary role (Arı, 2021; 2024), deepens this process.

## 4. Islamophobia and Social Structures

Islamophobia is not merely a prejudice or fear at the individual level, but also a phenomenon that is produced, shaped, and propagated by social structures. How this phenomenon is reinforced and spread at the societal level is influenced by many institutions and systems within society. The media, educational systems, state policies, and other social institutions all function as tools that legitimize and deepen Islamophobia within social structures. This section will explore in detail how Islamophobia interacts with social structures and spreads through these systems.

### 4.1. The Role of the Media: Islamophobia and Stereotypical Representations

The media is one of the most powerful tools in shaping social perceptions and plays a central role in the spread of Islamophobia. Especially in the Western media, Islam is often associated with terrorism, violence, and backwardness, creating a deep sense of fear and hostility toward Muslims in the public. Islamophobic discourse has not been limited to news bulletins, but has also appeared in popular cultural products.

Television series, movies, and news programs frequently depict Muslims as "dangerous," "violent," and "reactionary" (Temel, 2019). For instance, in Hollywood films, Muslim characters are often portrayed as terrorists. In the television series *24*, Muslims are shown as terrorists, constantly depicted as America's enemies, and these themes are repeated in many films (Sputnik Türkiye, 2024). These media representations not only reinforce individual prejudices but also pave the way for the development of collective fear and a sense of alienation in society.

The media's Islamophobic representations have spread the image of Islam as linked to terrorist groups and heightened fears of Muslims within society (Arslan, 2019). In this process, the media's portrayal of the "other," i.e., Muslims, as perpetually "dangerous," has created an effect that reinforces hostility toward Islam and Muslims. The media has thus become a platform that legitimizes Islamophobia not only by spreading individual prejudices but also by shaping it as a structural social influence.

### 4.2. The Education System: Misinformation and Intolerance

Education is a vital tool for individuals to understand the world, learn societal norms, and interact with different cultures. However, the teaching of

misinformation and prejudice toward Islam in the education system has led younger generations to develop intolerant attitudes. In schools, especially in subjects like history, religious studies, or world history, incomplete or incorrect representations of Islam have caused students to develop negative attitudes toward religious diversity.

In particular, in some Western schools, Islam and Muslims have been associated with terrorism, violence, and backwardness. Students have been taught that Islam is a "backward," "despotic," and "obstructive" religion to the development of societies, which has prepared the ground for them to consciously or unconsciously develop Islamophobic attitudes (Bozan, 2018). In European and American schools, the media-driven representations linking Islam to terrorism have created a deep sense of fear among young people, presenting Islam only as a threat (Yavuzer & Açıkgöz, 2018).

These educational approaches have a reinforcing effect within the social structure, strengthening and deepening Islamophobia. Younger generations continue to harbor negative feelings toward Muslims by combining the misinformation and prejudices they acquire both in school and through the media. The failure of the education system to correct these faulty representations emerges as a crucial factor in perpetuating the transmission of Islamophobia to future generations.

### 4.3. State Policies and Islamophobia

State policies also play a significant role in reinforcing Islamophobia. In Europe, particularly in recent years, anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies have become structural factors that deepen Islamophobia (Kedikli & Akça, 2017). With the onset of the refugee crisis, countries like France, the UK, Germany, and other European nations have faced a substantial increase in Muslim populations. This situation has often formed the basis for state policies and public concerns regarding Muslims.

In France, especially after the 2015 Paris attacks, the rhetoric from the government and right-wing groups towards Muslims has grown increasingly harsh. The French government, with measures such as the ban on headscarves in public spaces, has implied that Islam and Muslims pose a "threat" to society (Alper & Turan, 2023). Similarly, in the UK and Germany, in response to the rising migrant populations, governments have frequently criticized Islam and portrayed Muslims as a security risk. Such policies have contributed to the strengthening and more systematic establishment of Islamophobic perceptions and prejudices in society.

The shaping of state policies in this manner has not only fueled public prejudices but also normalized the fears directed at Islam. These government actions deeply affect societal structures, helping the official discourse of the state spread and become widespread among the public. In this context, it can be argued that state policies function both to legitimize and reinforce Islamophobia.

### 4.4. The Impact of Islamophobia on Social Structures

Islamophobia is a phenomenon that is both produced and reinforced by social structures. The media, education system, and state policies play a role in legitimizing this phenomenon and allowing it to spread at the societal level. The media, by often depicting Muslims as "dangerous" and "violent," creates deep fear and alienation within society. The education system, through misinformation and incomplete representations, leads younger generations to develop intolerant attitudes. State policies, by turning Islamophobia into a structural issue, deepen the societal divide. The interplay of these processes prepares the ground for Islamophobia to transform from an individual prejudice into a societal norm.

## 5. The Role of the Media in Islamophobia

The media is one of the most powerful tools in shaping social perceptions and forming individuals' worldviews. Especially visual and print media affect the process by which the public acquires information, while also shaping societal norms, values, and behaviors. The media's role in reinforcing prejudices and fears toward specific groups plays a central function in the spread of Islamophobia. Particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Western media outlets began producing news and analyses that linked Islam and Muslims with terrorism, violence, and backwardness, leading to the widespread propagation of negative perceptions of Islam in society.

By focusing on negative stereotypes and associating Muslims with terrorism, the media has played a key role in amplifying societal fears of Islam and Muslims. This portrayal has not only affected public opinion but also contributed to the institutionalization of Islamophobic attitudes in social and political discourse, deepening divisions between Muslims and the broader society.

## 5.1. Post-9/11 Media and Islamophobic Representations

The 9/11 attacks dramatically transformed perceptions of Islam in the Western world. These attacks, particularly in the United States and Europe, triggered fears towards Muslims, with the media serving as a primary tool for reinforcing these fears. Since then, Western media has created an image of Islam closely tied to terrorism and violence (Salem et al., 2021). The portrayal of Islam as a radical and backward religion has fostered a collective sense of fear and alienation in Western societies.

In countries like the UK, Germany, Australia, and the United States, television, cinema, and media outlets have often depicted Muslim characters as "terrorists," "criminals," or "radicals." On these platforms, the dangers of radicalism based on Islam are continuously emphasized, with Muslims often portrayed as individuals posing a security threat (Gardner et al., 2008; Saeed, 2007). These media representations have positioned Muslims as a "dangerous" group, shaping societal perceptions and reinforcing negative views of Islam. The constant repetition of these negative portrayals has deepened misconceptions about Islam and created profound distrust toward Muslims.

The narratives shaped by the media in the West not only focus on terrorism but also promote the idea that Muslims are incompatible with modern society. Muslims have often been depicted as "backward," "violent," and "reactionary" (Lebourg, 2018). For example, the French media, while covering the actions of terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, has sent the message that Islam is closely associated with the ideologies of these groups. Such representations have framed not only these groups but all Muslim societies as a threat.

## 5.2. The Role of Digital and Social Media in Spreading Islamophobia

Digital media, particularly social media platforms, have become powerful tools for rapidly spreading Islamophobia. The anonymity provided by the internet has made it easier for individuals to produce hate speech and disseminate it to a wide audience. In the 2010s, social media platforms hosted a large amount of misinformation, hate speech, and Islamophobic propaganda (Arslan, 2019). These platforms have played a key role in spreading Islamophobic discourse and deepening societal polarization.

Concrete examples of social media's role in spreading Islamophobia can be seen in events like the 2016 Brexit referendum and the U.S. presidential

election. In these instances, populist leaders and groups used social media to generate anti-Muslim rhetoric and spread these messages rapidly to large audiences (Purtaş, 2016). Social media also facilitated the interactive spread of these messages. On platforms like Twitter and Facebook, fake news and misinformation spread quickly, reinforcing the public perception of a "Muslim threat" (Küçükyılmaz & Ayan, 2019). This situation heightened societal polarization and allowed Islamophobic views to gain more legitimacy in the broader population.

The rise of populist politics has further amplified this phenomenon, with social media serving as a key platform for these leaders to gain support. During Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, Islamophobic rhetoric was frequently expressed through the media. Trump's statements, such as the "Muslim ban," and the support messages quickly shared on social media, fueled growing hostility and fear towards Islam (Karakuş, 2019). Similarly, during the Brexit campaign in the UK, rhetoric framing the influx of migrants as an "Islamic threat" spread rapidly on social media, leading to greater societal division.

The ability of social media to quickly spread and reinforce Islamophobic ideologies has thus created a new avenue for the dissemination of negative stereotypes and fears about Muslims, contributing to a more deeply polarized society.

### 5.3. Media's Influence: Institutionalization of Islamophobia

The role of the media in institutionalizing Islamophobia, both in individual perceptions and societal structures, is significant. Islamophobia is not only a matter of public fear or prejudice but also evolves into an ideological structure. The media plays a pivotal role in shaping a specific image of Islam, and this image impacts various domains, ranging from state policies to the education system. Islamophobic representations in Western media influence not only daily interactions with Muslims but also shape the political and social dimensions of these relationships.

The constant portrayal of Islam as a "threat" by the media has made such representations appear natural and acceptable. This is a societal norm shaped by the media, where individuals, based on the narratives they consume, may develop negative attitudes towards Muslims. This situation leads to systematic exclusion and discrimination, laying the groundwork for the spread of Islamophobic policies. As a result, media representations of Islam

as a threat contribute to the normalization of Islamophobia at both individual and institutional levels.

### 5.4. Structural Impact of the Media on Islamophobia

The media is an immensely powerful tool in spreading Islamophobia and reinforcing societal structures. After the 9/11 attacks, Western media constantly linked Islam and Muslims with terrorism, violence, and backwardness, creating a widespread sense of fear and alienation. Digital and social media have accelerated this process, with populist rhetoric and hate content spreading rapidly across social media platforms. By shaping not only individual prejudices but also societal structures and ideologies, the media has significantly contributed to the institutionalization of Islamophobia (Küçükcan, 2022). In this context, the media's role in fostering Islamophobia is not just a temporary influence, but rather a structural impact that leads to long-term societal changes.

## 6. Politics and Islamophobia

Politics is one of the most critical domains that regulates and guides societal relationships. It also plays an important role in the spread of specific ideological discourses and policies. Islamophobia is not only a cultural prejudice but also a social phenomenon shaped by politics and populist movements. In recent years, populist policies and anti-immigrant rhetoric have become among the most powerful tools for encouraging and spreading Islamophobia (Aktaş, 2017). In Europe and the U.S., particularly right-wing and far-right political leaders have portrayed Muslims as a societal threat, turning Islamophobia into a social and political strategy.

### 6.1. Populist Policies and Islamophobic Discourses

Populist movements often use the fears and anxieties of the public to gain political power. In recent years, many populist leaders in Europe have made immigration, especially Muslim immigration, a central issue in their political discourse. These leaders have depicted Islam as a threat, arguing that it undermines the cultural fabric of societies and disrupts social harmony.

In France, Marine Le Pen's National Rally Party has gained attention for its strong criticisms of Muslim immigrants. Le Pen has argued that French culture is being "undermined by Islam" and that French identity is under threat, using Islamophobia as a powerful political tool (Üste & Mantoğlu, 2023). Le Pen's rhetoric has reinforced fears about cultural changes in French

society, leading to deep exclusion of Muslim immigrants (Emiroğlu, 2021). Such discourses have not only increased the party's electoral support but have also paved the way for a wider surge of Islamophobia in French society.

Similarly, far-right leaders like Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and Matteo Salvini in Italy have used similar rhetoric to portray Islam as a "backward" and "dangerous" religion, positioning Muslims as elements threatening societal peace (Hekimler, 2021). These leaders argue that Islam is incompatible with Western values and that this incompatibility leads to societal problems. In many parts of Europe, such rhetoric has embedded itself in the public's subconscious, turning Islamophobia into a larger political strategy.

### 6.2. Islamophobia and Populist Leadership in the United States

In the United States, Donald Trump's presidential campaign stands as one of the most prominent examples of Islamophobic rhetoric. Particularly during the 2016 presidential election, Trump made harsh criticisms of Islam, labeling Muslims as "terrorists" and a "security threat." During his campaign, he advocated for a "Muslim ban," which proposed banning Muslim immigrants from entering the U.S., a stance that garnered significant support and lent legitimacy to Islamophobia (Karakuş, 2019). Trump's "security threat" rhetoric aligned with Western media's portrayal of Islam as linked to terrorism and violence, fostering fear and prejudice against Muslims, while contributing to the spread of racist and xenophobic discourse.

Trump's policies targeted not only Muslims but also immigrants in general, presenting the cultural influence of immigrants as a threat to American identity. These discourses, especially when combined with populist rhetoric during Trump's campaign, resonated with a broad segment of the public. Trump's hate speech spread through social media and decisions such as the "Muslim ban" helped institutionalize Islamophobia in American society, providing a form of "legal legitimacy" for such sentiments. This, in turn, has contributed to increasing social pressures and discrimination against Muslims in certain states and cities across the U.S.

### 6.3. Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric and Islamophobia

Anti-immigrant rhetoric has also played a significant role in spreading Islamophobia in both Europe and the United States. Immigration, especially from Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East and North Africa, is often framed as a "societal threat" (Akıncı Çötok & Taşdelen, 2013). Muslim

immigrants are frequently depicted as economic, cultural, and societal threats. Narratives suggesting that immigrants "exploit" the labor market, "corrupt" cultural values, and "threaten social order" are widely adopted by populist right-wing political movements.

For example, Angela Merkel's refugee acceptance policy in Germany in 2015 was strongly criticized by right-wing and far-right groups, and Islamophobic rhetoric was closely tied to this critique (Tauscher & Bezci, 2016). Following the refugee crisis, in countries such as Germany, France, and Hungary, the claim that "Muslim immigrants" were damaging national identity became prominent, leading to increased societal polarization (Kedikli & Akça, 2017). Populist politicians used these discourses as part of their election strategies, further strengthening the political and societal framework for Islamophobia.

## 6.4. The Contribution of Politics to Islamophobia: Structural and Ideological Effects

Politics not only reinforces individual prejudices but also shapes societal structures and ideological alignments. The Islamophobic rhetoric of populist leaders has deepened broader societal polarization. This polarization shapes not only social relationships but also the understanding of religion, culture, and identity by the state, society, and individuals. Political discourses often define Islam as an "other," helping to position Western societies as more "civilized" and "advanced."

In this context, it can be said that politics plays a structural and ideological role in spreading Islamophobia. Populist policies capitalize on the public's fear of religious and cultural diversity, turning these fears into societal strategies that are amplified. Political leaders, with the media's influence, legitimize public prejudice against Muslim immigrants, security threat perceptions, and cultural anxieties, turning Islamophobic discourses into societal norms.

## 6.5. Using Islamophobia as a Political Tool

Politics does not merely spread Islamophobia as a sentiment or ideological stance within society, but also uses it as a political tool. The anti-immigrant rhetoric used by populist leaders and policies that define cultural and religious diversity as a threat have been crucial elements in legitimizing and reinforcing Islamophobia. Such discourses lead to deeper societal divisions and lay the groundwork for the social, cultural, and political exclusion of Muslims. By shaping societal norms and ideological beliefs related to

Islamophobia, politics ensures the institutionalization of this phenomenon at the political level.

Through these mechanisms, Islamophobia is not only a byproduct of societal fears but also an instrument that populist leaders use to gain support and enact policies that perpetuate division, exclusion, and discrimination.

## 7. Islamophobia and Methods of Combatting It

Fighting Islamophobia is not only an individual effort but a collective responsibility that spans across societal and institutional levels. It requires a multifaceted approach, including strategies such as education, media literacy, legal regulations, and raising public awareness. These combined methods offer an effective roadmap to prevent the spread of Islamophobia. Each step taken in the fight against Islamophobia not only helps eradicate prejudice but also contributes to building social peace and tolerance.

### 7.1. Education and Cultural Exchange Programs

Education is one of the most powerful tools in shaping societal change. In the fight against Islamophobia, encouraging religious tolerance and cultural diversity in schools and universities stands out as an important strategy. Ensuring that younger generations have access to accurate information plays a critical role in eliminating prejudices (Erişti, 2014). In this regard, cultural exchange programs and organizations encourage students to interact with individuals of different religious identities and better understand cultural differences. These programs allow students to get to know each other more closely, fostering mutual understanding and contributing to strengthening social cohesion.

Such educational programs provide students with the knowledge that Islam and Muslims are not merely linked to terrorism and violence but also represent a peaceful, humanitarian, and culturally diverse belief system. For instance, in some schools in Germany, projects have been organized for students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, encouraging them to gain accurate information about Islamic culture and develop empathy (Genç, 2004). These kinds of programs are among the most effective ways to break down prejudices and strengthen social bonds.

Moreover, cultural exchange programs help students not only understand the dynamics of their own society but also explore other belief systems more deeply. Acceptance and respect for differences between religions and

cultures lay the foundation for the creation of more peaceful and tolerant societies in the long term.

## 7.2. Media Literacy and the Role of Media

Media has a significant influence on shaping societal perceptions. Media texts are shaped by specific choices and have the power and purpose to influence viewers. In these texts, certain opinions, events, or practices are repeatedly emphasized, while opposing views and events are marginalized or ignored (Devran & Tanır, 2019). In the battle against Islamophobia, developing media literacy is of utmost importance. Media literacy education enables individuals to question the misleading and false content they encounter in the media, thereby preventing the spread of negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. When people begin to recognize the falsity of the Islamophobic content they encounter in the media, they can adopt a more critical stance toward such material.

Media literacy is crucial not only at the individual level but also at the societal level. Civil society organizations and media platforms can decode Islamophobic discourses in society and raise public awareness to combat these discourses. Especially in the age of rapidly spreading misinformation and hate speech on social media, awareness campaigns on platforms like social media will play a key role in enhancing societal resilience against Islamophobia. For example, global campaigns such as "Stop Islamophobia" can be organized, urging people worldwide to be more sensitive to Islamophobic content.

The media's role in combating Islamophobia goes beyond preventing the spread of harmful content. The media must also present accurate, balanced, and positive representations of Islam. Television series, movies, and documentaries can shape society's perception of Islam, and content highlighting its peaceful aspects can be an effective tool in breaking down Islamophobia.

## 7.3. Legal Regulations and State Policies

The fight against Islamophobia should not be limited to the efforts of civil society and individuals. States must also play an active role in addressing this issue. Governments need to enact legal regulations to combat Islamophobia and pass laws that prevent discrimination, thereby fulfilling their responsibility to protect social equality. On December 1, 2015, the European Commission appointed David Friggieri as coordinator for combating anti-Muslim hatred. This step marked a significant milestone in

the European Union's efforts to fight Islamophobia. These efforts encompass areas such as education, integration, social inclusion policies, and supporting civil society organizations, while ensuring that NGOs combating racism and anti-Muslim hatred play a central role. The coordinator's office contributes to strategies against hate crimes, intolerance, discrimination, radicalization, and extremism, and fosters communication between Muslim communities and NGOs.

The coordinator's office has taken various important steps to raise awareness of anti-Muslim hatred, facilitate information flow, and strengthen communication. These steps include meetings on the Islamic Law in Austria, participation in global panels on religious intolerance, and conferences aimed at fighting discrimination across the EU. Additionally, meetings with Muslim communities in countries such as Germany, Austria, and Malta, as well as collaborations with international organizations like ODIHR, FRA, and ENAR, form part of this process. In January 2021, a workshop was held with the participation of representatives from over 50 NGOs and equality bodies, where concrete strategies to be implemented at the national level were developed.

Through such initiatives, state policies can play a pivotal role in addressing Islamophobia, protecting the rights of Muslim communities, and fostering a more inclusive society.

The Coordinator, in collaboration with NGOs, has organized roundtable meetings to combat anti-Muslim hate and discrimination. These meetings have addressed issues such as daily discrimination faced by Muslims in the EU, ethnic-based police interventions, and hate crimes, and have developed solutions to tackle these problems. On December 19, 2019, a seminar was held to create a definition for anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia, aiming to contribute to the development of policies for combating Islamophobia. Furthermore, a similar seminar was organized on January 13, 2020, to define Islamophobia at the EU level and secure a permanent place for it in legislation, with the goal of creating positive changes in national legislation across member states (Ergin, 2021).

Additionally, in the United Kingdom, the government's efforts to prevent Islamophobia are particularly evident through measures aimed at securing Muslim institutions. According to statements from the Home Office, a budget of £29.4 million has been allocated for the security of Muslim institutions, with an additional £4.9 million allocated after October 7, 2023. These investments include technological solutions to enhance physical security and symbolize the government's long-term commitment to combatting

Islamophobia. The security measures provided for the Muslim community can be seen as part of a comprehensive approach to address Islamophobia. Primarily, the goal has been to install security technologies, such as cameras, alarm systems, and fences, to secure mosques and other Muslim places of worship. These measures are a response to hate crimes that threaten social peace. Additionally, under the Home Office's "Protective Security Program for Mosques," mosques and other Muslim institutions must register in order to benefit from the allocated funds (Çetinkaya, 2024). This not only increases security but also sends a message of support and belonging to the Muslim community.

The UK government's actions towards Muslims go beyond just security measures. A significant portion of the funds provided to combat hate crimes and discrimination has been directed to civil society organizations that support democratic processes and fight extremism. This indicates that the government is developing long-term strategies not only for physical security but also for social cohesion and peace. Ultimately, the UK government's efforts to prevent Islamophobia include more than just security policies. The steps taken to prevent attacks, harassment, and other hate crimes against Muslims significantly contribute to reducing intolerance in society. The government's funds and security measures allow Muslims to feel more secure and affirm their equal rights within the society.

With such measures being taken by states, it is essential for governments to define Islamophobia and recognize it as a crime through legal regulations. This would be an important step in preventing discrimination and violence in society, as well as helping to prevent the social legitimacy of Islamophobic discourses. Moreover, campaigns aimed at raising awareness, alongside legal regulations, provide an effective solution in preventing Islamophobia.

## 7.4. Civil Society Organizations and Cultural Awareness

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in driving social change and raising awareness. These organizations are at the forefront of the fight against Islamophobia, undertaking critical functions such as creating public awareness, lobbying for legal changes, and educating the public. Through various campaigns, CSOs can increase public sensitivity towards Islamophobia and combat concrete issues like violence and discrimination. Additionally, these organizations focus on highlighting the challenges faced by Muslim communities and work to ensure that these communities are part of a more equal and just society. International CSOs like SETA,

Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch publish global reports on Islamophobia, urging governments and societies to take action on this issue.

### 7.5. Collaboration and Continuity for Social Transformation

Fighting Islamophobia requires not only the implementation of specific policies and educational reforms but also a deep transformation within all social structures. Efforts in education, media literacy, legal reforms, and civil society's involvement are critical steps in this fight, but the process can only be sustainable through societal cooperation. Every individual, institution, and state must bear responsibility in the fight against Islamophobia and commit to continuous efforts to address it.

## 8. Conclusion: Islamophobia and Social Transformation

Islamophobia is not just a religious prejudice or individual hate; it is a phenomenon reinforced by societal structures and supported by cultural and political powers. The struggle against Islamophobia requires more than just immediate solutions; it demands a profound, multifaceted social transformation. Understanding Islamophobia involves examining its historical roots, the effects of social structures from the perspective of religious sociology, and how tools like media and politics perpetuate these prejudices.

The historical process from the Middle Ages to the present demonstrates how Islamophobia is deeply intertwined with Western social structures. Colonialism and cultural imperialism have systematically shaped negative perceptions of Islam, portraying it as a threat to the modern world. The construction of the "other" in the West, through discourse that depicts Muslims as a danger, has been reinforced by political rhetoric. One of the most powerful modern manifestations of Islamophobia is the continuous reproduction of these prejudices through media and politics, particularly through misrepresentations related to terrorism.

From the perspective of religious sociology, Islamophobia is not just a matter of individual and group prejudices; it is also a phenomenon reproduced and supported by social structures and ideological tools. Sociologists like Durkheim, Weber, and Marx have highlighted the role of religious social structures in shaping societies. Durkheim's emphasis on the exclusionary function helps us understand how societies construct identities

by excluding the "other," while Weber and Marx's theories on capitalism and the functioning of dominant classes provide insights into Islamophobia as a tool of social control and ideological power.

One of the most influential tools reinforcing Islamophobia in social structures is the media. Particularly after September 11, media representation of Muslims in relation to terrorism has contributed to creating fear and prejudice in society. These representations have led to negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims across large segments of society. Digital and social media have further accelerated the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and increased social polarization. Media literacy is critical in identifying and questioning these false narratives. Additionally, media platforms bear responsibility for creating accurate and fair representations, highlighting Islam's peaceful aspects, and curbing Islamophobic discourse.

In the political realm, Islamophobia is reinforced through populist rhetoric and anti-immigrant policies. In Europe, certain political leaders have used discriminatory language against Muslim immigrants, turning Islamophobia into a societal strategy. In the United States, statements like Donald Trump's "Muslim ban" during the 2016 presidential campaign have allowed the normalization of Islamophobic language. Such rhetoric has not only affected language but has also influenced social and legal practices, contributing to the establishment of a structural foundation that strengthens Islamophobia.

Fighting Islamophobia requires both top-down (state-driven) and bottom-up (grassroots) approaches. Education, media literacy, legal reforms, and active participation from civil society are essential tools in this struggle. Educational systems should teach tolerance and religious diversity, and cultural exchange programs should promote the recognition of differences. Media literacy education ensures individuals become more sensitive to misinformation, while awareness campaigns on social media can strengthen societal responses against Islamophobic rhetoric.

States can play a critical role by implementing legal reforms to combat discrimination and promoting social peace. The Council of Europe's guidelines emphasize the need for effective legal measures against hate crimes. Alongside legal protections, efforts by civil society organizations to raise cultural awareness are vital. Civil society serves as an important tool for raising public consciousness about Islamophobia and promoting accurate media representations.

In conclusion, the fight against Islamophobia should not be limited to achieving harmony among religious beliefs but should also serve to create

more tolerant, egalitarian, and peaceful social structures. Since Islamophobia is a phenomenon produced and reinforced by societal structures, its combat requires not only individual efforts but also a broad societal movement. Interactions between education, media, politics, and laws offer the most effective pathways in this struggle. Raising awareness, accessing accurate information, and developing empathy towards one another will lay the foundation for a transformation that transcends Islamophobia in the long term.

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