

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

MASTER THESIS

**ISLAMOPHOBIA IN MUSLIM MAJORITY
COUNTRIES: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH**

RABIUL ISLAM

**THESIS SUPERVISOR
PROF. ERIK IVAR RINGMAR**

ISTANBUL, 2021

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by

RABIUL ISLAM

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Political Science and International Relations**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR
PROF. ERIK IVAR RINGMAR**

ISTANBUL, 2021

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science and International Relations.

Thesis Jury Members

Title - Name Surname

Opinion

Signature

_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____

This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

Date of Submission

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

MÜSLÜMAN ÇOĞUNLUKLU ÜLKELERDE İSLAMOFOBİ:
BANGLADEŞ ÖRNEĞİ

İslam, Rabiul

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Yüksek Lisans Programı

Öğrenci Numarası: 194022006

Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0001-6435-0868

Ulusal Tez Merkezi Referans Numarası: 10408071

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Erik Ivar Ringmar

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Batı ülkelerinde özellikle İslamofobi ve genel olarak 'İslami radikalleşme' üzerine devasa bir literatür var. Özellikle Avrupa, Amerika ve dünyanın diğer bölgelerindeki Müslüman azınlık toplumlarında İslamofobi ile ilgili birçok çalışma ve araştırma yapılmıştır. Ancak bu sadece Batılı ülkelerin sorunu değil, küresel bir olgudur. Müslüman ülkelerdeki 'dini Müslümanlar', Müslümanların Batı ülkelerinde veya Müslüman azınlık toplumlarında karşılaştıkları aynı sorunlar veya ayrımcılıklarla karşı karşıyadırlar. Bu nedenle, bu tür İslamofobik tutumların gerçek nedenlerini anlamak için Müslüman çoğunluklu toplumlardaki İslam karşıtlığı da ayrıntılı olarak incelenmelidir. Bu bakış açısıyla, bu araştırma, Müslüman nüfusu açısından dünyanın dördüncü ülkesi olmasına rağmen Bangladeş'te İslamofobinin gittikçe neden arttığını inceleyecektir.

Bu çalışma beş ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölüm, çalışmanın arka planını açıklayan bir giriş bölümüdür. İkinci bölüm ise literatürü ve teorik perspektifi gözden geçirmektedir. Ardından, bu çalışmanın bir sonraki bölümü, hem kamu hem de özel sektörde İslamofobiyi kanıtlamaya çalışmaktadır. Dördüncü bölüm, Bangladeş'teki İslamofobinin nedenlerini tartışmakta ve incelemektedir. Son olarak, bulguları sonuç bölümünde tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslamofobi, Müslüman çoğunluklu ülkeler, İslam karşıtlığı, savaş suçu söylemleri, laiklik, sekülerizm.

ABSTRACT

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Islam, Rabiul

MA in Political Science and International Relations

Student ID: 194022006

Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0001-6435-0868

National Thesis Center Reference Number: 10408071

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Erik Ivar Ringmar

September 2021, 47 Pages

There is significant literature on Islamophobia particularly, and 'Islamic radicalization' in western countries. Especially a lot of studies and research were conducted regarding Islamophobia in Muslim minority societies like Europe, America, and other parts of the world. However, this is not only a problem in Western countries but a global phenomenon. 'Religious Muslims' in Muslim countries face the same problems or discrimination as Muslims in Western countries or Muslim minority societies. Therefore, to find out the natural causes of these kinds of Islamophobic attitudes, Islamophobia in Muslim majority societies should be examined in detail. From this perspective, this paper will examine why Islamophobia is rising in Bangladesh, although it is the fourth-largest Muslim-populated country.

The study consists of five main parts. The first part is an introduction that explains the background of the study. The second part reviews the literature and theoretical perspective. Then, the next part of this study tries to prove Islamophobia in both the public and private sectors. The fourth part discusses and examines the reasons for Islamophobia in Bangladesh. Finally, it discusses the findings in its conclusion part.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Muslim majority countries, anti-Islam, war criminal discourses, secularism.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BAL	Bangladesh Awami League
BJP	Bangladesh Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh National Party
BJI	Bangladesh Jamat-e Islami
ICT	International Criminal Tribunal
IS	Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh)
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
JMB	Jama'at Mujahideen Bangladesh
Ji	Jamat-e Islami
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although Islamophobia and anti-Islamism had become more popular and challenging topics in the Western world, especially after 9/11, Western Islamophobia has "deep historical roots" (Mastnak, 2010, p. 46). According to Canatan, Islamophobia, as a sociological concept, expresses the state of hatred, humiliation, and fear toward Muslims in the West (Canatan, 2007, p. 11). Western Islamophobia or anti-Islam and anti-Muslim discourses in the western world are not something new. Historically it can be traced back to the Spanish Umayyad Empire, established by Muslims. The year 1492 is another significant point for western Islamophobia, since this year, Christians reconquered Spain. They used anti-Islamic discourses even during the crusades so that they could find more warriors against Muslims (Grosfoguel, 2012, pp. 11-12).

However, Islamophobia has become more popular in the western world after the cold war. During the cold world, communism used to threaten the West, but Islam replaced communism and became the new "threat" to the West and the rest after the cold war (Nonneman 1996, pp.3-24). Huntington's theory of "Clash of Civilizations"s raises more fears, leading to more attention to Islamophobia. In his thesis, Hungtinton (1993) claims:

The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (p. 22).

The West began to perceive Islam as a rival and threat because it could be the most dangerous "civilization" against Christianity. The defeat and thus the disappearance of communism after the cold war has a significant role in anti-Islamic movements in the West and the rest of the world. And the thesis, such as "Clash of Civilizations," has led to this fear and hatred against Islam and Muslims.

On the other hand, the event of 9/11 is another turning point for the anti-Islam movement in the western world. This event and the US "war of terror" that followed it has led to global anti-Islam and Muslim movements. Since then, it has continued to increase, especially in the Western world and countries where Muslims are in the minority. 'Islamic radicalization,' 'Islamic terror,' and Islamophobia is rising in Europe and America. Not only in these countries but also in every Muslim minority society, Muslims are facing problems. They are tortured sometimes. It was even more bloody and violent in some Western countries and some Muslim minority societies. Showing a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in France by a teacher and projecting it onto a government building is a clear example of anti-Islam activities in the West. According to Islam and Muslim beliefs, any depiction of the Prophet is blasphemous (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Moreover, the president of France, Macron, said in one of his statements that he would not prevent publishing these cartoons and described Islam as a religion "in crisis" (Daily Sabah, 2020). This statement by the president of a country is another example of hatred and discrimination against Islam and Muslims. Recently, European Union's top court has ruled that the hijab (headscarf, which is a part of Muslim beliefs) can be banned at work (Al Jazeera, 2021). This decision is nothing but a fear of Islamic symbols and the visibility of Islam in Western societies. Not only these, but nowadays, in Western countries, it can be realized that people are organizing ideological campaigns against Muslims and their religious dignities. Most of the time, Muslims are treated as potential terrorists, and Islam is a religion of terrorism. Thus, Muslims are facing discrimination in Muslim minority societies. Today, also the western media portrays Islam or describes it as a 'militant Islam' or 'fundamental Islam' as a threat to the western civilization, which to a certain extent, those policy-maker or politicians in the West take this as an opportunity to whip up mass hysteria against 'militant Islam' through their media.

Western countries and some Muslim minority societies in Asia, such as India and Myanmar, are witnessing violent anti-Islam and anti-Muslim movements. Rohingya Muslims communities have been facing systematic ethnic cleansing by state forces and Buddhists for a long time. This systematic genocide goes back from 1962 to 1974 (Abdu, 2018) and continues to increase. Thousands of Muslims are tortured, killed,

raped, and flown to Bangladesh in front of the world. On the other hand, India is another center of violent anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim events. Especially with the Modi government, there is a rise in right-wing and violent Hindu nationalism. Muslims are not free to do their religious activities; they are beaten and even killed by Hindu radicals. Indian recent Citizenship Amendment Bill is an anti-Muslim decision taken by the government. This new bill leaves millions of Muslims without citizenship (Chaudhry, 2019). There are violations of human rights every minute in India.

These are only some examples of Islamophobia occurring throughout the world. Even if a Muslim shows a slight reaction to such events, Muslims are considered terrorists, and Islam is the source. Some "radical groups" may abuse Islam, but this should not make Islam a source of radicalism. Perhaps the Islamophobic events mentioned above in western countries or countries where Muslims are a minority may not surprise us because they are faced with such problems since they are in the minority. However, what should we say about such anti-Islamic discourses and events witnessed in Muslim Majority countries? Although Islamophobia is not violent in Muslim majority societies as in Muslim minority countries, it's still surprising to have Islamophobia in a country with more than 90% of Muslims.

Bangladesh is such a country that surprises us. The country has more than 90% of Muslim population, most of whom are Hanafi (it is a primary traditional Sunni school) traditionalists. Many Islamic groups in Bangladesh are against modernism. Thousands of Muslims protested against Indian Prime Minister Modi's Bangladesh visit because of India's anti-Islam movements (Sakib, 2021). The same kind of protest was held against Macron's anti-Islamic statement. It must be surprising to talk about Islamophobia in such a country (Alam, 2020). However, although it is not like western countries, such Islamophobic incidents are increasing in this country. This study will investigate the reasons behind this.

There is a vast literature on Islamophobia particularly, and 'Islamic radicalization' generally in western countries. Mainly, many studies and research were conducted regarding Islamophobia in Muslim minority societies such as Europe, America, and other parts of the world. However, this is not only a problem of Western countries but a global phenomenon. 'Religious Muslims' in Muslim countries face the same

problems or discrimination as Muslims in Western countries or Muslim minority societies. Therefore, to find out the natural causes of these kinds of Islamophobic attitudes, Islamophobia in Muslim majority societies should be examined in detail. From this perspective, this paper will examine why Islamophobia is rising in Bangladesh, although it is the fourth-largest Muslim-populated country.

The study consists of five main parts. The first part is an introduction that explains the background of the study. The second part reviews the literature and theoretical perspective. Then, the next part of this study tries to prove Islamophobia in both the public and private sectors. The fourth part discusses and examines the reasons for Islamophobia in Bangladesh. Finally, it discusses the findings in its conclusion part.

1.1. Importance of the Research

There is significant literature on Islamophobic activities in Western countries or Muslim minority societies. It is a complicated topic besides the 'Islamic radicalization' among researchers in the Western world. Many studies are conducted regarding Islamophobia, Ideological discrimination, and campaigns against Muslims in Muslim minority societies. However, it is not the only case in Muslim minority countries but a global phenomenon. In Muslim countries, Islamophobic activities are gradually rising day by day. However, there is no more than a little research regarding why it is happening in those countries. There is some research regarding Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, and a few more. However, there is no specific study regarding Bangladesh. Islamophobia in Bangladesh has some different reasons. In this sense, this research is significant because it will fill a considerable gap in the literature. This research will also help the government or policy-maker tackle the issue of Islamophobia and Islamophobic activities in both Western and Muslim countries.

Conducting research regarding ideological campaigns against Muslims in Muslim countries and discrimination that 'religious Muslims' face from Muslim people is challenging because it may cause misunderstanding. When someone tries to understand why Islamophobia is rising in a Muslim country like Bangladesh, they cannot understand because there is no detailed research on it. A Muslim person hates

Islam and fears it; this situation must be studied since it is more significant than Islamophobia in Muslim minority societies. Therefore, this study aims to understand the reasons behind this problem.

1.2. Research Methodology

This is a qualitative case study. This research also considers descriptive explanation, verbal notes, recording of interviews and observation, content analysis, and information from the documentation as part of its methodology. Context, textual analysis, and secondary sources were used for the theoretical and conceptual discussion.

How we can measure Islamophobia is a crucial question to be answered. Political scientist Erik Bleich (2011) presents two approaches for measuring Islamophobia:

It can be measured quantitatively through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires, or it can be measured 'by examining unsolicited statements proffered by politicians, civil servants, public figures, religious leaders, journalists, bloggers, and others whose words are recorded for posterity (p. 1590).

Therefore, for data collection, this research used both approaches presented by Erik Bleich. Firstly, some interviews were conducted with open-ended questions among the focus groups, selected from different cities, religious schools, and Madrassas and religious groups. Madrassa students and teachers, imams, Islamic authors, and a member of an Islamic group, a total of 8 persons, were interviewed. These people were selected because they are potential victims of society. These people face most Islamophobic attitudes in Bangladesh societies. They were asked whether they faced such a situation or not, what they were accusing, from whom they were accusing, and for which reasons they were accused for. Interviewing eight people is not enough to measure Islamophobia in the country. Therefore, this study examined and analyzed many politicians, civil servants, public figures, journalists, bloggers, elites' words, and social media content. Additionally, many secondary sources have been used to support the interview results, content, and discourse analyses.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Islamophobia shortly can be understood as a fear of Islam. The concept of "Islamophobia" has different definitions. Islamophobia is often defined as the 'strong unreasonable fear or hatred of Islam' (Iqbal, 2010, p. 22), "the construction of Islam and Muslims as the enemy" (Aslan, 2019, p. 71), 'antiMuslim racism' or "a form of racism" (Bayraklı and Hafez, 2018; Grosfoguel 2012, p.11), "cultural racism" (Iqbal, 2010, p. 22). Elahi and Khan (2017) added more to these and defined Islamophobia as the "exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs" (cited in Aslan, 2019, p. 71). "As a political project, Islamophobia is a racist and colonialist ideology based on the superiority of the West over Islam" (Kaya & Akıncı, 2018, p. 85). From all these descriptions and discussions, some visible variables such as fear, hate, threats, hostility, prejudice, and exclusion of Muslims from society can constitute the definition of Islamophobia (Iqbal, 2010, p. 22). All of these against a particular group/religion is a kind of "disease" (W. Good, 2010) that must be treated. Significantly, the exclusion of Muslims from political and social affairs is a violation of fundamental human rights that Muslims have been facing worldwide, mostly where they are in the minority.

Most of the studies and scholars focus on Islamophobia in the western and nonMuslims world as Iner and Nebhan (2019) stated that "Islamophobia has traditionally centered on Western and nonMuslim acts of discrimination upon the 'Muslim' other" (p. 212). However, these western and nonMuslims-centric descriptions of Islamophobia are not enough to get Islamophobia and other discourses related to this concept. Since Islamophobia is not related only to the western and nonMuslims world, Islamophobia in Muslim majority societies should also be defined. Bazian (2019) defines Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries as:

A political, social, economic, military, cultural, and religious process emerging out and shaped by the Colonial-Eurocentric hegemonic discourses dating to the late eighteenth century, constituted and internalized through an imitative project by postcolonial elites that posited itself or was designated by Western powers as the custodian for the modern, secular, nationalist and progressive Muslim nation-state projects (p. 22).

In his description, Bazian pointed out the one dimension of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries. It is mainly related to postcolonial modernism movements and modernist elites. To be modern and elite "meant to take an anti-Islamic perspective to demonstrate a break with the "regressive" past" (Bazian, 2014). These "elites," who are mostly educated and influenced by the westerns, problematize Islam, Islamic education, and lifestyles. To understand the other dimensions of Islamophobia in Muslim majority societies, Aslan (2019), on the other hand, states that:

To understand Islamophobia in a Muslim majority society, one should look at how it relates to the construction and reproduction of the political community. If Islam and Muslims are made the enemy and systematically kept outside the political community, we can say that Islamophobic policies are already underway (p. 76).

In this description, two words, "construction" and "reproduction," are remarkable. One prominent theory will be considered in approaching and understanding in more depth the issue of both Islamophobia in general and Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries, which is the approach of constructivism. Constructivism is the best approach to be considered because it works as an ontology confined to a set of assumptions about the world and human motivation and agency (Slaughter, 2011). In the perspective of constructivism, all the variables of Islamophobia discussed above, such as fear, hate, threats, hostility, prejudice, and exclusion of Muslims from society, and therefore most of the Islamophobic discourses are "considered to be historically and socially constructed rather than as a result of inevitable consequences of human nature" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016). Socially, historically, and politically constructed Meanings play the most significant role in Islamophobic discourses. Thence, "Islam and Muslims are constructed as alien" (Beka, 2019, p. 49) not only to nonMuslims but also to some Muslim elites and societies. How a constructed word and the meanings given to this word can be changed throughout time and lead to Islamophobia in a Muslim-majority country will be discussed in the following parts of this study.

2.2. Review of the Previous Studies

To begin with a general discussion about Islamophobia, Sheehi (2010), in his book, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims*, examines the ideological campaigns against Muslims and the ideological discrimination they face in North America Abroad. This is good work to understand the ideological discrimination and campaign against Muslims and their religious dignities, such as mosques and hijab, and the possible causes of this discrimination. On the other hand, Garner and Selod (2014) examine the empirical studies of Islamophobia and the racialization of Muslims. They tried to find the connection between racism and Islamophobia. In other words, they tried to define Islamophobia based on racism and said that if Islamophobia is defined as a form of racism, there should be clear definitions of racism, racialization, and Islamophobia first. Since the forms of racism are dynamic and specific to historical, cultural, geographic, and political contexts, these definitions also should be dynamic and related to other necessary contexts mentioned above. According to them, there are a lot of explanatory works dealing with Islamophobia based on official publications, films, various forms of media, etc., but we need such empirical studies on Islamophobia too. Some studies explain different terms related to Islamophobia. Richardson (2013), in this context, noted that there is a diversity of terminology for referring to hostility towards Muslims and then discussed three of the terms that are in current use; 'Islamophobia,' 'anti-Muslim racism,' and 'intolerance against Muslims.' He explained their advantages and disadvantages, then offered his definition, and noted some political and social consequences of anti-Muslim hostility.

There are not as many studies and research on Islamophobia in Muslim countries as in non-Muslim countries. Few but very significant works can trace Islamophobia in Muslim societies, such as the book *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies*, edited by Bayraklı and Hafez. The book points out that Islamophobia is not a problem of the West but a global phenomenon. Islamophobia is also a significant threat or problem in Muslim majority societies. To clarify this issue, they conducted an interdisciplinary study that focuses on socio-political and historical aspects of Islamophobia in Muslim majority societies (Bayraklı & Hafez, 2019). Some studies and articles examine Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries, such as 'Islamophobia in Muslim-majority

Malaysia' by Khidhir (2019), where he tries to explain the reasons and some other aspects of anti-Islam movements in Malaysia.

The reasons behind anti-Islamic discourses in Muslim countries are tried to be some experts in different studies. It has no specific definition of Islamophobia in Muslim countries because each country differs in its geographical, political, historical, and cultural contexts. Therefore, there can not be a specific description and specific reasons for Islamophobia in Muslim majority societies. Studies try to examine the causes of anti-Islam discourses in Muslim societies and thus focus on different contexts. For instance, according to Osman (2019), anti-Islamic discourses and events in Malaysia should be understood "from the lens of racism" and "cultural racism" (pp. 161-162). In addition, Christianity is the gate, and Islam is an obstacle to Europe for Albanian Muslim elites and nonMuslims; therefore, these people take an anti-Islam position (Beka, 2019).

On the other hand, in Turkey, it is "the secularist political forces, which strived to produce a modern political community based on a secular-nationalist identity, always kept Islamophobic politics as an option" (Aslan, 2019, p. 72). The Egyptian case is a little bit different. It is mainly weakening Islamists, mainly mainstream Ikhwan members (Kosba, 2019, p. 115).

Finally, to focus on Bangladesh's situation, there are no specific studies examining Islamophobia or anti-Islam discourses in Bangladesh. However, security-related studies explaining "Islamic extremism" or "radicalized Islamists" can be considered to understand Islamophobia in Bangladesh. Rahman (2016), in such a study, states that Islamic radicalization became a significant concern in Bangladesh since serial terror attacks or bomb blasts were implemented in 2005. He said that during 1999-2010, 'Islamist militants carried out more than 203 attacks killing 164 innocent people and injuring thousands. In his study, he mainly explores the forms and ecologies of Islamist militancy and terrorism based on the content analysis of media reports and interviews with some experts in Bangladesh. He tried to find out the social, religious, and political causes that fostered Islamic radicalization and offered some ways that could be followed to reduce Islamic radicalization in Bangladesh. On the other hand, Bashar (2019) conducted research as a part of a series that explores the threat posed by the

rise of ISIS in Asia. He focuses on active IS agents in Bangladesh, their strategies, recruitment methods, operational capabilities, and financing. He also pointed out the government's efforts regarding that have taken to fight against those agents. According to him, despite the counter-terrorism efforts of Bangladesh, IS is still a fundamental threat to the country's internal security. IS agents currently target security forces such as the police. He said that IS recruits its agents from existing Islamic radical groups and youth with no criminal records. Additionally, a few more studies partly mention some reasons that can be considered as a reason for Islamophobic discourses in the country. Islam and Islam (2018) pointed out Islamophobic discourses at the official level. They said:

The dominant/official political narratives in Bangladesh have been discursively constructed, massively castigated, and brutally reinforced through various state machineries and their ancillaries to generate legitimacy for the current authoritarian secular state and to uproot political opposition (p. 40).

Islam (2011), on the other hand, states about some "secularism projects" of the country.

He says:

They subscribe to their brand of secularism not because Islam lacks political and social resources to run a state but because Islam is the only religion that has the most comprehensive and humanistic political philosophies to run a modern state into an exemplary welfare mode (p. 129).

These kinds of studies may partly mention the anti-Islamic discourses in Bangladesh but are not enough to understand the real cause of it. Thus, this study examines Bangladesh's Islamophobic approach and discourses in more detail.

CHAPTER III

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRIES

Islamophobia is not only an issue in the Western world, or it "does not only define the relationship between majorities and minorities" (Bayraklı & Hafez, 2019, p. 1), but it is also a significant problem in the Muslim world. In the Muslim world, the anti-Islam or anti-Muslim approach can be explained: "as a way of regulating and disciplining Muslim subjects which are perceived as a threat to the dominant groups in power" (Bayraklı & Hafez, 2019, p. 2) or as an obstacle to achieve something such as developments. These parameters are insufficient to examine and calculate anti-Islam movements and discourse witnessed in Muslim majority countries. The following paragraphs will indicate some more valuable variables to understand Islamophobia in the Muslim world.

There are several forms and aspects of Islamophobia in the Muslim world. A famous author, Ramon Grosfoguel, explains multiple faces of Islamophobia, such as Islamophobia as a form of racism, cultural racism, Orientalism, and epistemic racism (Grosfoguel, 2012). Almost all of these forms are applicable for anti-Islam approaches in Muslim majority countries. However, epistemic racism, which is one of the hidden forms of racism according to Grosfoguel, is a common form of Islamophobia witnessed in Muslim majority countries. Grosfoguel defines epistemic racism as a tradition in which

the "West" is considered to be the only legitimate tradition of thought able to produce knowledge and the only one with access to "universality," "rationality," and "truth." Epistemic racism considers "non-Western" knowledge to be inferior to "Western" knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 29).

Muslim elites, mostly educated from the West or in Western-style, are having problems with Islam and Islamic cultures. Most of them perceived Islam as an obstacle to the modern and civilized world. For them, neither Islam nor Islamic education is appropriate for modernization, Islamic sciences, and Islam itself is backdated.

Therefore, almost in every Muslim society, Islamophobia can be seen as a form of "epistemic racism."

There are some other aspects of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries. Hatem Bazian describes two different aspects of approaching Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries. According to him, Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries emerges "out of a nineteenth and early twentieth-century developments that witnessed shifts among Muslim elites away from Islam; and the colonial project that problematized the 'native populations and their relationship to Islam" (Bazian, 2019, p. 22). Muslim countries colonized by the western powers witnessed anti-Islamic events by their upper-class westernized elites. Bayraklı et al. defined them as:

Elites first suffered capitalization of the indigenous economy and Westernization of values through the occupation of their country by a foreign power. Then, they either fought colonial power by reclaiming European Enlightenment values or worked with it to remain at the head of the country (2019, p. 9).

Some Muslim elites did not colonialize by any foreign power but still think Westernization is the only way to be modernized. They are "self-westernized" Muslim elites. Bayraklı et al. define them as:

Domestic elites got engaged in the capitalization of the economy and Westernization of values without being subjected to any foreign colonization in the long run because they believed it to be in the best interest of their countries, and they thought it impossible to resist the advance of Western powers without modernizing and Westernizing their societies (2019, p. 10).

In all cases discussed above, it is seen that Westernization and modernization is the main problem behind the anti-Islam movements in Muslim majority countries. In both societies, colonized or not, upper-class Muslim elites have understood modernization as following western cultures. Elites in the colonized Muslim countries were influenced by colonial power and considered them a door to Modernization. On the other hand, self-westernized Muslim elites consider Westernization as a door to Western power and modernization. In both cases, Islam and Islamic values are the main obstacles to achieving their goals. Thus, they perceived Islam as a threat and tried to eliminate it either by modernizing it or rejecting it.

Colonial effects and Muslim elites may be the primary and common cause that leads to Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries, but not the least. Hatem Bazian mentions three different cases where Islamophobia can be seen as a tool to weaken the opposition parties. Secular power elites problematize political Islam or Islamic parties. Political Islam and Islamic parties are considered a threat to their power. Therefore, they problematize Islam and Islamic parties by using Islamophobic discourses intentionally and utilizing the fear of Islam in society. In addition, those who are uncomfortable with the visibility of Islam and Islamic cultures may problematize Islamic cultures and signs such as the headscarf, beard, minarets, azan, etc. These people have their comfort zone of dresses and cultures; therefore, these Islamic signs and cultures threaten their comfort. To eliminate this fear, they are utilizing Islamophobic discourses in societies. Even if they are Muslims, they may invite the world-known Islamophobe to normalize their acts and show that they are open to everyone (Bazian, 2019, pp. 25-29).

Islamophobia seen in Muslim majority countries can also vary according to geographical, demographic, and historical background. Even though modernism, colonialism, and elitism is the primary and common cause of Islamophobia in Muslim countries, every country has different Islamophobic contexts. For instance, Albania. It is a country focused on Westernization and being part of the EU (European Union). Some Albanians believe Christianity is their only religious and cultural identity, and Islam was an imposition by the Ottomans. "European identity is portrayed as intrinsically connected with Christianity" by most Albanian intellectuals (Beka, 2019, p. 53). Since most Albanians want to be a part of the European Union, they are unhappy to have Islam and Muslims, which is not a part of European culture. Not only non-Muslim Albanians but also some Muslims comprehended Islam and Muslims as an obstacle or as the only obstacle to Europe. Islamic cultures and the visibility of Islam in societies are not suited to European culture. Muslims who perceive Islam and Muslims as a handicap that hinders reaching the goal of becoming an EU member are upper-class pro-western elites, "westernized Muslim elites," or in Bayraklı et al.'s word, "self-Orientalized" elites (2019, p. 8). Naturally, they see this obstacle as a danger and try to take precautions against it. In order to get rid of this handicap, they problematize Islam and Muslims and create fear and hatred against Islam. Rezart Beka describes this situation and states that "Islam and Muslims are constructed as alien to

Europe. They are excluded from the nation-building narrative and are perceived as inhibitors of the reunification of Albania with Europe" (Beka, 2019, p. 49).

Because of Albanian historical and geographical position, Islam and Muslims are being problematized in societies and therefore excluded from mainstream politics. This situation is not the same in some Asian countries with colonial pasts, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, but it is similar. Even though there is no such thing as being a European member in these countries, the wave of modernity left over from the British or colonial power; those who were trying to be like them and keep business with them and still describe themselves as westernized elites see Islam and Islamic values as a danger. Therefore, they have developed and continue to develop hatred and fear against Islam and Islamic values. As was mentioned before, they do not refrain from doing all kinds of activities to weaken Islam, which is their main obstacle to getting westernized and, therefore, their enemy. Pakistan can be discussed in this context. Syed Farrukh Zad Ali Shah explains Islamophobia in Pakistan as:

Pakistan, with a 97 percent Muslim population and a declared Islamic Republic, has a smaller yet formidable section of society that corresponds to Islamophobic currents. These Westernized secular power elites share similar anti-Islam sentiments rooted in traditional Western discourses of secularism and modernity. These secular elites are far more under the influence of colonial legacies of European imperialism, which developed clear differentiation between imperial and native organizational patterns, societal institutions, and value systems to its own advantage (Ali Shah, 2019, p. 66).

Islamophobia, on the other hand, can result from the clash of different cultures in some Muslim countries. A Muslim country like Malaysia, where many nonMuslims live, can have some problems with nonMuslims. Sometimes, even Muslims can think that Islam, conservative Muslims discriminate against nonMuslims in society, and thus they begin to hate Islam and Islamic cultures. Throughout time, it can trigger more Islamophobic discourses in the country. According to Osman (2019), Islamophobia in the Malaysian context must be explained from the perspective of racism or cultural racism. Previous cultural and racial prejudices against the Malay-Muslim majority population in Malaysia are now seen through the lens of religion. He also stated, "A strong sense has also triggered Islamophobia in Malaysia that political Islam has encroached on the lives of many non-Muslims in the country" (Ibid., p. 161).

Egypt is another Muslim country that can be discussed in terms of Islamophobia. In addition to modernism, colonial past, and Westernization, one significant point must be explained in the Egyptian context of Islamophobia. If Political Islam or Islamic parties are potential opposition to a dominant power, Islamophobia can be the best tool to "fight" with them, especially if the dominant powers are seculars. Problematizing political Islam and Islam might be the best way to deal with opposition. Islamist parties threaten these regimes; therefore, an accusation of terrorism and extremism gives opportunities to deal with Islamist parties. Showing Islam as the source of these illegal acts also makes ordinary people avoid Islamist parties and political Islam. The instance of Egyptian Islamophobia seems to be more like destroying the opposition. Islamophobia has been used and continues to marginalize and problematize Muslims, although it is not as prominent or sharp as the other western countries. Egypt is a Muslim country witnessing anti-Islamic cases in the name of the 'war on terror.' According to Kosba, "Egypt's contemporary war on terror is a continuation of a longstanding anti-Islamist legacy by previous repressive regimes prior to el-Sisi, bringing together elements of Western Orientalist thought and contemporary right-wing anti-Muslim ideology" (2019, p. 116).

Turkey, otherwise, experienced modernization waves after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Islamophobia in terms of Turkish experiences is not similar to 'westernized elites' who want to follow the western cultures in other Muslim countries such as Pakistan. Secular political elites wanted to create a modern Turkey with "a secular-nationalist identity" and therefore "always kept Islamophobic politics as an option" (Aslan, 2019, p. 72). According to Ali Aslan, the basic tenet of Islamophobia in Turkey is "the rejection of the political existence of the Islamic civilization and Muslims in order to integrate with the modern Western civilization" (Ibid., p. 74). Problematizing Islam and Islamic values were the easiest way to reject the existence of Islam in mainstream politics and societies.

All these countries explain Islamophobia from different perspectives. However, these are not only related to these countries. Some Muslim countries can experience some of these, while some countries can experience all of them simultaneously. Anti-Islamic discourses or Anti-Muslims cases can be varied according to a country's demographic, geographical, historical, and cultural background.

CHAPTER IV

TRACING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN BANGLADESH (DOES ISLAMOPHOBIA EXIST IN BANGLADESH?)

Different reasons that trigger Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries have been explained yet. Most of these can also be applied to Bangladesh's anti-Islamic approach. However, some significant causes can be considered different from them, which will be examined in the next part of this study. Before discussing the incidents or factors leading to Islamophobia in Bangladesh, it would be better to discuss and prove anti-Islamic discourses or Islamophobia in the country. Data collected through interviews and content and discourse analysis will be used to prove Islamophobia in different sectors of the country.

Historically, Islamophobia in Bangladesh historically goes back to the Bengal Renaissance Movement, a social, cultural, and intellectual movement in the Bengal region of British India. The movement was primarily active from the late 18th century to the early 20th century. The founding fathers of this movement were mostly Hindus, such as Ram Mohan Roy (Rahman, 2017). These are Bengali intellectuals and pro-western elites who were the initiators of modernization in the region. Bangladesh, established in 1971, was a part of the region. Even though the movement was mainly accepted and propagated by Bengali Hindus, some Muslim figures, such as the national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, had a significant influence on the movement (De, 1995).

This movement triggered many other groups and movements trying to get development and modernization in the country. There were then many Muslims who followed these movements. One such group was the Muslim Sahitto Somaj, known as Shikha Gosthi, an intellectual movement that emerged in Dhaka in the late 1920s. They aimed to show the Muslims of Bengal the way to enlightenment from the darkness of superstition and religious dogmatism (Islam, 2013, as cited in Rahman, 2017). "Kazi

Abdul Wadud, Kazi Motaher Hossen, Professor Abul Hossen, Dr. Mohammad Sahidullah, and Professor Anwarul Qadir were the key persons leading the movement" (Rahman, 2017, p. 5). These westernized elites, influenced mainly by colonial British, problematized Islam and Islamic norms in the name of modernization and enlightenment. For instance, Kazi Nazrul Islam, one of the vanguards of the Muslim renaissance in Bangladesh, teases and problematizes religious leaders in Mosques in his poem "manush." He says, "O God, the people have been ostracized from the Mosques and Temples, Mullahs and Puruts [religious leaders in temples] have locked up all the doors" (Hossain, 2013, as cited in Rahman, 2017, p. 5). In a country where most people are traditionalists, susceptible to their religion and religious norms, this kind of modernist and secularist vision leads to Islamophobia to some extent. The movement started in the British Bengal region and dramatically impacted Bangladesh's anti-Islamic movements. The movement may no longer be active in the societies, but its successors are still actively working throughout the country. Like many other upper-class modernized elites, "the secularist school of contemporary Bangladesh somehow carries the genealogy of the movement" (Rahman, 2017, p. 5).

In 1947, when India gained independence from the British, a kind of religious nationalism emerged among some Muslims who were the founding fathers of Pakistan. Bangladesh was the Eastern part of Pakistan. According to Nazrul and Saidul Islam, "soon after the independence of Pakistan, religious nationalism took the back seat and instead Bengali ethnic nationalism began to grow in East Pakistan" (Islam & Islam, 2018, p. 2). This new ideology mainly emerged due to the exploitative policies of the West Pakistani military elites (Jahan, 1972). Even in the beginning, this ethnic nationalism had no conflicts with Islamic nationalism; they later had some problems with Islamic ideology in East Pakistan (Islam & Islam, 2018, p. 4). In 1971, East Pakistan became an independent state, namely Bangladesh. Bengalis nationalist movement and Bengali ethnic nationalists were the leading figures of the war of liberation (as was stated above, some West Pakistani military elites had exploitive agenda on East Pakistanis that led to a war of liberation in 1971). The ruling regime after the independence had a secular agenda that Islamophobia can also explain in Bangladesh. The constitution of 1972 determined secularism as one of the leading state principles of Bangladesh. This secularism was not the rejection of religions but a kind of religious neutrality. However, some practices have shown that this was more a

rejection of Islam than the neutrality of religions. Nazrul and Saidul Islam have cited some of these practices and stated that:

Some scholars who had participated in this study argue that secularization efforts under Mujib regime, such as the elimination of the Qur'anic inscription *Iqra bismi rabbi-kallazi khalaq* (Read! In the name of your Lord Who created everything; Qur'an 96:1) from the Dhaka University monogram in 1972 (Miah 2009), the deletion of the word "Muslim" from the name of a Dhaka University students' hall (Salimullah Muslim Hall) in 1972 (SM Hall Alumni Association DU 2012), the abolishment of the Islamic Academy in 1972 (Islamic Foundation n.d.), the cancellation of recitation from religious texts in the inaugural session of state-owned radio and television, the reduction of financial allotment in *madrassa* education, the removal of Islamic stories in the primary and secondary school textbooks, and most importantly the banning of Islamic politics made the people suspicious of Mujib's commitment to religion/Islam (Islam & Islam, 2018, p. 6).

So far, Bangladesh has experienced different regimes, including military coups. Some of them had no conflicts with Islam, but they promoted Islamization in the country. However, the successors of the founder regime, who are still the dominant regime or ruling elites of the country, have some conflict with Islam and Islamic parties. The ruling party of the country (Bangladesh Awami League, BAL) has a similar ethnic-nationalist ideology that conflicts with Islam and Islamic value. Saidul Islam summarized the regime's mission regarding Islam and said the ruling regime wants to displace Islam and Islamic symbols from the country's mainstream politics (Islam, 2011). He also stated that, after 9/11

Massive propaganda was launched by some ministers and some media portals at home and abroad to brand Bangladesh as a "Jongi State," perhaps to woo the Superpowers who are hostile to Islam and thereby earn unequivocal support for the regime's action against Islamic political forces (Islam, 2011, p. 128).

This short discussion indicated that the routes of Islamophobia are not new in Bangladesh. Islamophobia in the Bangladesh context should be discussed with their historical routes. Bangladesh has been witnessing anti-Islamic actions since it was the region of British India. Nowadays, especially under the founder regime's ruling regime, which has been successors since 2008, both private and public sectors are harshly witnessing anti-Islamic practices, which continue to increase.

4.1. Islamophobia in the Private Sphere

Bangladesh is one of the world's largest Muslim populations countries, and Islam is the country's state religion. Most scholars, academics, and researchers think that Islamophobia does not exist in this country. However, as was explained above, Islamophobia has a historical route in Bangladesh and Bengal Muslims that goes back to British India. Anti-Islamic incidents may not that much harsh and violent as in Muslim minority countries, "but the anti-Islamic sentiment is increasing very fast over the country which is the agenda of secularist and leftist communities" (Islam, 2019). Especially under the Awami League regime, which has been the ruling regime since 2008, anti-Islamic incidents and discourses have increased in both private and public sectors. All of our interviewees from religious backgrounds have confirmed that anti-Islamic sentiments have increased in society. The ordinary public may not be aware of the term "Islamophobia" itself, but they are aware of what is happening in society against Islamic sentiments. One of the interviewees, Abdul Hasib, who is a preacher in a mosque, an Islamic teacher in a Madrassa (religious school), and an author of some Islamic books, says:

Not everyone in Bangladesh is aware of the notion (of Islamophobia). There are diverse understandings of the terminology among Bangladeshi academics. It may differ from person to person. For instance, women who do not like hijab or veil may be against Islam. Upper-class elites, who think Islamic law will not allow them to do whatever they want, such as corruption, also may be against Islam.

Maulana Bahauddin Zakariya, one of the senior teachers in a religious school and an imam in a mosque, on the other hand, says:

This term is primarily used in the Western world. However, some atheists/leftists/elites take shelter in the term to dismantle Islam in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the ordinary public is unfamiliar with this term and very sensitive to Islam.

The regular public in Bangladesh might not be aware of the term "Islamophobia," and they might be susceptible to their religion, but it does not mean anti-Islamic sentiments are not growing in the country. As Abdul Hasib and Bahauddin Zakariya said, some people who are primarily elites are spreading hatred against Islam and Islamic value. "The ultra-secularists in Bangladesh are often seen to maintain an extreme rebuff and a total antagonism towards a particular religion, which in this case is Islam" (Islam, 2011, p. 127). Islam and Islamic norms such as prayer, veil, hijab, bread, even carrying

Islamic books, and many others are gradually becoming a problem for some people in schools, colleges, and universities. Abdullah Mahmud, a MA student in Islamic Studies who also has madrassa educational experience in both Bangladesh and India, shares his experience regarding Islamophobia and says:

Even though it is not that much, we have Islamophobia in our country. Some institutions or universities may not do it directly, but they somehow try to apply it. I know one person studying at the University of Rajshahi who was forced to open her veil/hijab during exam time.

IUBAT, a famous private university in Gazipur, Bangladesh, tried to ban Islamic dress codes for students in 2015. Students wearing burkha (kind of a dress for a female that covers the whole body), hijab, veil, students with beards, and Islamic dress codes were lynched by others openly. The university administration wanted a new dress code banning Islamic dresses on campus (Sobuj, 2015). Many students from the university and from outside of the university protested this rule. Shabrina Rahman, a 27 years old teacher in a female Madrassa, shared the bad and shameful experiences she had faced due to her dress and books in the university. She says:

After wearing Islamic dresses, I heard many hateful words from the neighborhood. Moreover, in 2016, I had to experience many insults for using the burqa and niqab (veil) at my university. When I went to the university hall to pray, they called me a militant, Shibir (the student organization of Bangladesh Jamaat-e Islami, which is an influential Islamic group and coalition partner of the main opposition party). At that time, no Islamic books could be kept in the bag. They were very threatening. They were also saying that they would hand me over to the police. I was mistreated at that time. I think their behavior is ignorance about Islam and a lack of proper knowledge of Islam.

In Bangladesh, with more than 90% Muslim population, Muslim girls had to appeal to the court to ensure their right to wear Islamic dresses. As a result of their petition, Bangladesh high court has decided on the freedom to wear burkhas in schools. Sheikh Omar Sharif, petitioner's lawyer, in his statement to Dhaka Tribune (a newspaper), said that:

Students have been harassed over wearing the burkha. We previously sent a legal notice to the education secretary, home secretary, and director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education to take necessary measures against this. As there was no response to the notice, we filed a writ with the High Court (Dhaka Tribune, 2021).

Having no responses from government officials regarding such a severe issue is thinkable for a democratic Muslim country.

Islamic dresses and Islamic education are in danger in the country. There are thousands of madrassas throughout the country. Students and teachers of these madrassas have been experiencing hatred and inhumane treatment from some people. Hasan Mohammad Ibrahim, a 25 years old student, said in the interview, "*I was asked inappropriate questions and experienced inhumane treatment when I was a madrasa student.*" Another interviewee, Hafeez Kamrul Islam, a teacher in a Hifz Madrasa (where children memorize the Qur'an), did express his regrets regarding this harassment by saying:

I eyewitnessed some harassing events pinpointed as some Islamic scholars being outfitted with their religious garments and lifestyle. Some young dishonored them in a particularly disgusting manner. Others can conduct such things with Islamic scholars because of ulama (religious scholars) disunity. Thankfully I have not experienced such ill-mannered humiliating rages ever. Nonetheless, my teacher was subjugated to some notorious behaviors. The institution he was working in had propelled him into stepping out of a job. Apparently, some of his ideas did not go according to those in the administration.

There were serial bomb blasts in 2005 in Bangladesh conducted by one of the terrorist groups known as JMB (Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh). Shaikh Abdur Rahman, known as Bangla Bhai, was the leader of this terrorist organization. Many of these terrorists, including him, were hanged in 2007. After those attacks, religious Muslims, especially madrasa teachers and students, experienced a lot of hatred and inhumane behaviors. These incidents have accelerated the anti-Islamic sentiments in the country. Still, many people who have problems with Islam are misusing it to problematize Islam and madrasa teachers and students. Maulana Bahauddin Zakariya mentions this issue in the interview by saying:

These unprecedented incidents were triggered by some Middle-east-influenced persons, such as Sheikh Abdurrahman, Bangla Bhai, and others. They were the main culprits behind the birth of these anti-Islamic practices because they spread the idea of far-right Islamic practices all over the country. Thus Islam and its practitioners were misrepresented in the media. As a result, people started to treat those with the ideas mentioned personalities and their outfits as terrorists.

On the other hand, Harry Blair criticized the growing number of Madrasa in Bangladesh. He says most of these madrassas are funded by the Persian Gulf, particularly from Saudi Arabia. He also claimed that these are bankrolling terrorist organizations such as JMB and Bangla Bhai (Blair, 2010, p. 106). A lot of charity trust from the Gulf countries fund many madrasahs in Bangladesh under government supervision, but it does not mean that these are for terrorist organizations. Secular

elites have a similar approach as Blair, which is nothing but hatred of Islam and Islamic education.

In addition, many anti-Islamic incidents occur in different parts of society. For example, some columnists express their hatred of Islam and Islamic values in their writings. Khan Asad, in one of his writings, stated that:

I don't see any 'Islamophobia' and 'anti-Islam' in Bangladesh. What I see is the opposite. Love of Islam instead of hatred against it. Islam is a special kind of love among people which can be seen all around. Everyone wears a hijab, Islamic scholars are preaching, and everyone uses Arabic words in their sentences, such as Allah Hafez and Alhamdulillah. Parents named their children in Arabic (Asad, 2020).

However, A. M. M. Bahauddin, on the other hand, complains about the growing anti-Islamic sentiments in the country. He says:

Hundreds of problems and crises we have in our country. Poverty, corruption, lack of justice, administrative oppression, murder, rape, disappearance, and political and social crisis do not issue. In their view, there is only one problem in this country: Islam and Muslims. Frustration, unemployment, lack of good governance, lack of trade and commerce, crisis, or economic backwardness are not problems for the country's people. The problem in their eyes is the way of life of religious people (Bahauddin, 2015).

Many private institutions and companies try to apply the Islamophobic agenda. Employees and others are forced to give up their religious values. These companies have problems with the visibility of Islam in their places, and therefore, they are trying to 'fight' against it by imposing anti-Islamic sentiments on their employees. Imran Hossain, a student, alleged that Arong's (one of the largest companies in the country) interview board refused him because of his beard (Dhaka Tribune, 2021). Abdullah Mahmud, who had a long madrasa experience, says:

Some private institutions force their employees to open hijabs or to open their faces. They are forcing people to shave their beards which is not valid according to some Islamic scholars. Even we have some intellectuals or elites who problematize Islam by saying that Islam is a religion of terrorists or that Islam triggers terrorism. These elites are also somehow Islamophobes, I think.

Moreover, the new trend of the 21st century, media, and social media platforms are critical places where anti-Islamic discourses are gradually increasing. Pages on Facebook, anti-Islamic bloggers on their blog posts, and Islamophobes on their Ids are full of Islamophobic discourses. People of a Muslim majority country easily express

their hatred against Islam and Muslims through these platforms. Our interviewees have seen many Islamophobic posts, programs, and writings on social media. One of the interviewees, Abdul Hasib, says:

There are many anti-Islamic sentimental posts in newspapers, social media, and newspaper articles. Most of the writers and "elites" criticize and problematize Islam. I have read a post on Facebook, not recently, that was criticizing our Prophet (saw) because of his married life and wives.

Kamrul Islam, another interviewee, says:

I have seen some anti-Islamic posts. For instance, some Facebook posts defamed our Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). Some broadcasts do also desecrate Muslim pilgrimage, offerings, and worship. If someone from Islamic scholars raises their voice against it, all will label him as "rajakar," a radical, far-right activist, etc.

4.2. Islamophobia in the Public Sphere

The current government of Bangladesh is the successor of the founder regime. Therefore, the ruling party, Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), works to restore the secularist ideology that was one of the leading state principles in the 1972 constitution. However, their secularism is different from western secularism. Saidul Islam defined this as ultra-secularism" and sometimes "neo-fascism" (Islam, 2011, p. 1297). By the ideology of secularism, the current regime has been trying to apply their mission of "de-Islamize Bangladesh" (Islam & Islam, 2018, p. 3). The government has problems with Islamic groups and parties in the country, and thus they problematize Islam to legalize their action against them. One of our interviewee, Maulana Bahauddin Zakariya says:

The government is sending Islamic scholars and pro-Islamic supporters behind bars arbitrarily. The regime is taking such steps under the pretext of preventing any provocation by these people. The state is also allocating its preferred personnel to the top executive administrations to have any kind of future control guaranteed.

Twenty-six-year-old Madrasa teacher, Sabrina Rahman, has a critical viewpoint about the ruling regime as other religious people do. This government sometimes seems like pro-Islamists, but they are not real. She says:

This regime is anti-Islamic or Islamophobic. Because some of them used to pretend to be friends of Islam, the current situation has exposed their black masks. They are now declaring open war against Islam and Muslims. Fascinated by money and power, they are betraying the soil and people of this country in various ways. Besides, they make fun of the girls who wear hijabs and burqa.

A ruling regime with such kind of "ultra-secularism" ideology undoubtedly triggers Islamophobia in every governmental office. Ministers and parliament members are having same anti-Islamic sentiments. The student wing of the regime is also spreading hatred against Islam in every area, including university campuses. "Recently Abrar Fahad, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) has been killed brutally by the student wing of Awami League because Abrar used to perform prayer and call everyone for prayer as its confessed by the perpetrators in court" (Islam, 2019).

Because of its ideology, the government has conflicts with Islamic groups and parties, including madrasa students and Islamic scholars. These people are against almost every anti-Islamic decision taken by the BAL government. For instance, in late 2020 and earlier this year, thousands of Islamists, including Hefazat-e-Islam, one of Bangladesh's most prominent Islamic groups, did protest the decision to install a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder father of the country (Mahmud, 2020). Islamists asked Sheikh Hasina, the country's prime minister, and Rahman's elder daughter, not to install the statue because it is not permitted in Islam. However, the government tried to suppress the protest violently, and many madrasa students and teachers were injured. In such a situation, the government becomes harsh and acts violently, so officials and police forces conduct many anti-Islamic acts and human rights violations. This situation was explained by one of our interviewees, Abdul Hasib, who says:

According to this government, people are terrorists when they ask for their rights and protest for something. In the presence of revolt and demonstrations, you might face such treatment. You might encounter actions such as searching your backpack, distressing you for wearing Islamic outfits, being labeled a terrorist, etc. Some students of mine were arrested and harassed sometimes. They stayed days and nights in jail sometimes.

He also criticizes the double-standard of the prime minister and says:

The Prime minister of Bangladesh is promoting a double standard while dealing with Islam as she advocates Islam by condemning the Gaza attacks in the parliament. However, the same person or her government is torturing Muslims in Baitul Mukarram National Mosque located in Dhaka.

Islamic education and madrasa students are other problems for this government. Many officials, including ministers, are talking loudly against madrasa education. In 2009, the minister of the law said that "Qawmi madrassas (traditional Islamic schools

mostly based on Hanafism) have now become breeding grounds for militants. Militancy has spread in Bangladesh centered on Qawmi Madrassa" (Islam, 2019). On the other hand, recently, a speech by the minister of education, Dr. Dipu Moni, went viral on social media and news platforms. In her speech, she criticized madrassas, students, and teachers by saying that "they are inclined to educate students the jihad or militancy" (Rupchan Miah, 2021). She had accused students and teachers of many inappropriate allegations. Because of her speech, she was protested and criticized by many Muslims, including Islamic groups, madrassa students, and teachers on social media. When we asked one of our interviewees, Kamrul Islam, who is a Madrassa teacher and a member of the most prominent Islamic group, regarding the government's position against Madrasah and Islamic education, he said:

The government takes on these madrassas because they promote Islam's principles. The regime has also confiscated some Islamic institutions from being executed, accusing them of manufacturing terrorist minds. The fact is that the current system does not want an overwhelmed Islamic sentiment around it.

The situation explained and examined above has clearly shown how anti-Islamic sentiments are gradually growing in every sector of the country and how the current government of BAL is taking the lead in it.

CHAPTER V

WHY IS ISLAMOPHOBIA GRADUALLY INCREASING IN BANGLADESH?

As mentioned above, Islamophobia or anti-Islamic sentiments can be conducted for different reasons in Muslim societies. Although there are some common triggers of Islamophobia, every Muslim country has its special causes that lead to Islamophobia in the country. Most of the causes discussed so far that leads to Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries are also applicable in the Bangladesh case. However, two significant triggers that lead to anti-Islamic discourses and incidents in the country are to be examined. These two are thought of as different, which explains Islamophobia in Bangladesh. Indian influence, 'war criminal discourses,' and the secularism project of the current government (BAL), which could also be related to the historical process with India, will be examined in this part of the study.

5.1. India - BAL Relationship and Indian Influence

The Indian role in the Bangladesh Liberation War must be discussed first to understand the Indian influence on Bangladesh and how it does generate Islamophobia in the country. India did play a significant role in the war of independence that Bangladesh had to fight due to the exploitive and tyrannous policies of West Pakistani power elites. Awami League, headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is Bangladesh's founder regime. "Indira Gandhi's government provided full political and diplomatic support during the entire nine-month long period of Bangladesh Liberation War" (Quader, 2019). They had opened their border and established refugee camps near border areas for Bangladeshi people. The Indian government also provided training and military equipment to freedom fighters known as Mukti Bahini. The Indian strategy at this point "was to establish an Awami League government in Dhaka (the Capital of East Bengal) through international pressure and to secure the withdrawal of the Pakistan army" (Hamza Alavi, 1971, as cited in Haider, 2009, p. 5413). Some scholars explained this

strategy as India would establish "a weak and subservient government in Bangladesh" and finally, "Bangladesh, together with Nepal and Bhutan, would go under the security system of India, and it would thus realize the Nehruvian vision of the greater Indian Union with a common defense system" (Haider, 2009, p. 547).

The current Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) government is the successor of the founder regime of Bangladesh. Because of this historical background, "India had secured Bangladesh's independence with its military intervention" (Blair, 2010, p. 102); this government has had a great relationship with India. In 2014, BJP-led (Bharatiya Janata Party) Narendra Modi came to power in India. With the Modi government, a violent Hindu Nationalism that can be explained as a new kind of religious radicalism has been gradually growing in India. Today, BJP and Modi are advancing based on the RSS structure and Hindutva (a general form of Hindu nationalism) ideology to make India a Hindu state. This is not only for India, but the Modi government is also concerned about all the Hindus living within the border of Bangladesh (Bayram, 2019). On the other side, BAL-led Sheikh Hasina, the elder daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been leading Bangladesh with its leftist secularist partners since 2008. It was thought that, although the BAL government has a historical relationship with India, this time, their relationship will not reach a good point due to Modi's ideology. However, "India-Bangladesh relation has gained a new pace and reached a new height during Modi's tenure as the prime minister of India" (Quader, 2019).

Modi government has a significant influence on the BAL government's policies. Modi government is also imposing its Hindutva ideology on Bangladeshi people, leading to anti-Islamic sentiments among government officials and some people, according to Islamic scholars, including our interviewees. *"Government is trying to make this country a state of India. Then Bangladesh will be secularised,"* Hasan Muhammad Ibrahim, a senior madrassa student, says. On the other hand, Abdul Hasib, the author of Islamic books and a teacher of a madrassa, says:

The Awami League government has a historical bond with India and the Modi government. This government also has a Hindutva agenda, whether people believe it. They also have a secularism project. However, to get conservative Muslims' votes and power, they use Islamic sentiment. On the other hand, they are killing Alims (religious scholars) and vanishing Islamic education. They are doing everything to problematize Islam. How can a Hindu help Muslims

without any interest? Some Indians are more powerful in Bangladesh. They are so active in society. The Bangladesh government is a pro-Indian government. RAW (Indian intelligence) is widespread in Bangladeshi internal and external affairs.

BAL government openly supports anti-Islamic sentiment in the country. Some incidents, such as violent treatment against Madrassa students, teachers, and some Islamist groups who protested Modi's visit to Bangladesh hanging and imprisonment of many Islamic scholars, have shown how India influences this government. Moreover, recruiting Hindus in the most critical offices is also a clear indication of this. Maulana Bahauddin, one of the senior Arabic teachers, indicates this issue and says:

It's clear that India is controlling everything. India has an immense influence on Bangladesh's socio-religious policies. There has been an argument in the parliament regarding including beef in the culinary. Some preferred the menu while others opposed it as its regarded as divine among Hindus.

Hafez Kamrul Hasan, on the other hand, says:

India is ruling Bangladesh in every aspect. India interferes with Bangladesh's internal policies to have a share of its natural resources. Furthermore, India wants a more Hindu-ruled neighbor that has been outnumbered since its independence.

Some Hindu missionary organizations are trying to spread Hinduism worldwide, especially in the neighboring countries of India. These groups have gradually increased in Bangladesh thanks to the BAL government and Indian support. One of these organizations is ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a worldwide movement based on Bhakti Yoga practices and philosophy. The main purpose of ISKCON is to teach the science of God's consciousness (Krisna Consciousness) and serve humanity, adhering to the ancient Vedic texts of India (Iskcon, n. d.). This movement "includes five hundred major centers, temples, and rural communities, nearly one hundred affiliated vegetarian restaurants, thousands of namahattas or local meeting groups, a wide variety of community projects, and millions of congregational members worldwide" (Iskcon, n. d.).

Among others, this movement is actively working in Bangladesh. They have built many temples in different places in the country. At first, they targeted the small Hindu people, but later they succeeded in recruiting high-ranking Hindu bureaucrats. In their offer letter, they offered unlimited support to their members and said, "Iskcon will do

everything necessary for your promotions. In return, you will serve the Iskcon, the mother" (Rupchan Miah, 2021). They are inviting people to join them. They also support Hindus and problematize Islam and Muslims with the support of some high-ranking bureaucrats. They are very active and influential than any other organization in the country. Therefore, it is thought that without government support, none of the foreign movements can be vital in a country. One of our interviewees, Abdul Hasib, criticized this group by saying that *Iskcon, a student group with Hindutva agenda is more powerful than Bangladeshi student groups. They are so active in society.*

Many incidents took place in some cities of Bangladesh that show how Iskcon leads to problematize Islam and Muslims and how much this group is powerful in some places. In Sylhet, a megacity in Bangladesh, there was a clash between Muslims and Iskcon members in 2016. In a Juma prayer (A weekly holy day for Muslims), Iskcon members played music loudly to disturb the prayer. Although many requested, they did not stop their music, so Muslims in the mosque went to stop the music in the temple. As a result, both groups had a clash where many Muslims were injured and arrested. Rokan Uddin, one of the eyewitnesses, claimed to Dhaka Tribune that:

Muslim devotees went to the temple before the Jumma prayers and requested the temple authorities to stop the devotional songs while the prayers were held. However, when the songs were not stopped, the devotees went there again and locked in an altercation (Islam, 2016).

Elias Hossain, one of the Bangladeshi journalists who make an investigative program (15 minutes), has devoted one of his series to explaining Iskcon and their activities. In the program, Hossain (2019) claimed that in the Sylhet incident, many Muslims were injured, and hundreds of them were arrested by police. However, none of the Iskcon members was even taken for questioning. Most newspapers published this news like it was an attack by Muslims on the Hindu minority (Islam, 2016; bdnews24.com, 2016; The Hindu, 2016; & India.com, 2016). However, few of them wrote why Muslims were angry with Iskcon members. This is enough to prove ISKCON's influence on some government offices, including the police force and media. Without government support, they cannot be active and influential on Bangladesh soil.

Like other groups who work for India and Hindu nationalism ideas, Iskcon is also supported and funded by the Indian Modi government. "The Indian government is

'supportive' to the activities of ISKCON in Bangladesh and also funding development projects of its two centers in the country," High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla says one of the Iskcon programs in Sylhet (bdnews24.com, 2018).

BAL government, with its historical relationship with India, especially with the Modi government, problematizes Islam and Muslims in Bangladesh. They have conflicts with Islamic groups, madrassa education, and Islamic scholars, which has been clearly explained in the above discussion. This historical relationship triggers anti-Islamic discourses and incidents, which are constructed mainly by the government elites and minority groups backed by India, such as Iskcon.

5.2. Government's Secularism Project

The ruling party of Bangladesh, BAL, wants to secure secularism as a primary principle of Bangladesh. As it was mentioned above, their secularism is different from western secularism. It is not the separation of religion and politics but instead eliminating Islam from mainstream politics and society. This project is neither a new agenda nor detached from the historical relationship between India and the ruling party of Bangladesh. Therefore, this secularism project should not be examined independently of Indian influence.

Undoubtedly, Bangladesh gained its independence thanks to Indian logistic and diplomatic support. Indian support to Bangladesh, especially Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's led Awami Ligue, was not only for humanitarian causes. India had a considerable strategy to crate its influence over the region. Zaglul Haider explained the Indian strategy to be supportive of the Bangladesh Liberation War by following points:

With the emergence of a secular Bangladesh, the futility of religious nationalism and nationhood would be established, and secularism would be regarded as a dominant ideology for the developing countries; Indian desire to become an Asian superpower would be translated into reality; by exerting her hegemonic influence, India would establish a weak and subservient government in Bangladesh; and India would easily use Bangladesh as an extension of its own market (Haider, 2009, p. 547).

Furthermore, finally, India will achieve her Nehruvian vision of the greater Indian Union with a standard defense system by creating her influence on neighborhoods, especially in Bangladesh (Haider, 2009, p. 547).

It was also claimed that India installed Mujib's regime after the liberation war. According to Christopher H. Bateman, the newly installed regime's ideology reflected Indian ideology. He says:

The post-war period saw a grateful India tilting significantly in the direction of Moscow. Not surprisingly, the regime installed in Bangladesh by India was essentially a reflection of that in New Delhi: democratic, ostensibly secular, and committed to economic development (Bateman, 2021, p. 783).

The new regime established a new parliament, "which drew up a new constitution creating a Westminster-type parliamentary system and a polity based on the four pillars of Mujibbad (Mujibism): nationalism, socialism, secularism, and democracy" (Blair, 2010, p. 99). Secularism was their main principle by which they claimed to secure freedom of religion. However, soon after, Bangladeshi Muslims had to experience totally anti-Islamic policies taken by the new regime in the name of secularism. "Islam was not granted political status as the state religion. It was separated from state affairs, and no individual or political party was to use religion for political ends; religious persecution was prohibited (Article 12)" (Hussain, 1984, pp. 142-43).

Secularism was one of the leading state principles guaranteed by the 1972 constitution of the Mujib regime. After 1975, there was a military coup that ended the rule of the new regime. From 1975 to 1981, a military regime ruled the country (Islam, 2015). Then, things happened to change in the country. Regimes came after Mujib was pro-Islamists. Finally, by the constitution's eighth amendment, Islam was introduced as the state religion of Bangladesh (Alam, 1991). Since then, Islam has been the state religion for a country with more than 90% Muslim population.

The current government of Bangladesh is the successor of the founder party that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman headed. This party has been ruling the country since 2008. They had before ruled the country too. However, they could not make their intention clear they had the intention to restore secularism in the country. It was not that easy in such a Muslim majority country full of Muslims who are very sensitive to their

religion. However, this regime returned to power and secured everything to restore the secularism project that vanished with the 1988 constitution. As they did in 1971, India supports this government in implementing the project that will be a significant problem for Islam and Muslims in the country. Bateman stated that the "Hindu economic elite that still dominates India and, if given access to the Bangladesh economy, would threaten the Moslem position in Bangladesh-particularly if secularism was ever adopted wholeheartedly as a principle of government" (1979, p. 785). This situation is still applicable to Bangladesh. Indian Hindu elites, thanks to the current regime, have full access not only to the Bangladesh economy but also to the socio-political sphere. Shabrina Rahman, one of the interviewees, summarizes this situation and says:

I think India has the lion's share of influence in Bangladesh. Because the land of Bangladesh is getting narrower for Islam and Muslims as the days go by today, barbaric Hindutva, in the guise of secularism, is gathering strength on the soil of this country by leaning on the shoulders of the Awami League government. The control of a large part of the administration has passed into the hands of the Indian polytheists.

BAL government puts their secularism project into words. They do not hesitate to show their real intention by secularism, which is against Islam and Islamic parties. In 2008, a few weeks before the general election, Sajeeb Wazed, an advisor to the prime minister Sheikh Hasina and the grandson of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, with Carl Ciovacco, wrote an article for Harvard International Review where Sajeeb Wazed said:

With the rise of Islamic extremism encouraged by the last two years of military rule and five years of BNP governance, the Awami League will undoubtedly be fighting an uphill battle before and after the elections to stem this movement. The ascendancy of Islamists (moulobadi in Bangali) in national politics was partly due to how Zia and the BNP structured their 2001 campaign to include the Islamic party Jamat-e-Islami (JI). When the BNP formed a coalition government with JI, it opened the door to increased Islamic influence on the governing party. Before JI became part of the ruling coalition, it had minimal influence on the government. The number of seats that JI had ever garnered in any election prior to 2001 was three. After the BNP allied with JI, its legitimacy grew within the governing construct (Wazed & Ciovacco, 2008).

He also added:

The Awami League must, however, implement certain changes to proactively check this Islamism if it hopes to secure long-lasting secularism and democracy. If successful, an Awami League-led Bangladesh could be the global example of secular governance in a Muslim country (Wazed & Ciovacco, 2008).

In this statement, he took his position against Islam and Islamic parties, especially Bangladesh Jamat-e Islami, one of the most prominent Islamic parties in the country. Sunita Paul tried to examine Wazed's words "it hopes to secure long-lasting secularism and democracy" and said, "the present rulers in Dhaka will make all possible arrangements in keeping power as long as possible since they proclaim to be the lone vanguards of secularism." BAL government is now known as an authoritarian regime that is a threat to democracy. Moreover, it is thought that Bangladesh is becoming a one-party regime with political acts of violence, fraud in elections, violations of human rights and law, and many others. In 2021, the government is still emphasizing its intention to restore secularism and says that Bangladesh will not give up on its founding principle of secularism (Star Online Report, 2020).

To secure their power, the BAL government even problematizes the potential opposition, including the main opposition party, BNP (Bangladesh National Party), and its main coalition party, Bangladesh Jamat-e Islami. It also problematizes all Islamic groups, especially those active in mainstream politics. To weaken these Islamic groups and Islamist parties, the BAL government problematizes Islam and constructs anti-Islamic discourses. Thousands of Islamic scholars were imprisoned, many of them hanged, and the BAL government adopted many anti-Islamic policies since it came to power in 2008 to weaken political opposition.

BAL government secularism project, on the other hand, is very similar to the Turkish secularism project that was implemented by the secular founder elites of modern Turkey. Turkish secularism, mainly in the name of modernism, "was carried out by the state elites in an authoritarian way, Islam and Muslims were made the enemy" (Aslan, 2019, p. 72). The current government of Bangladesh is following the same path as Turkish secular elites did to implement their secularism plan in an authoritarian way.

The current government of Bangladesh has a secularization project on its agenda. Naturally, a government with such an agenda sees religious institutions and religious groups as threats. The government and other people who support it accept it as such. All these should be evaluated separately from the effort to weaken the opponents, mostly the Islamists. Because, of course, it targets Islamic parties that can rival it, to

come to power and stay in power, but on the other, it targets not only groups that can rival it but also Islam and all the values related to Islam. BAL government problematizes Islam and Islamic values, including Islamic dress, lifestyles, and Islamic education. Madrassa students, teachers, Islamic scholars, and imams are sometimes treated like fundamentalists and terrorists. Even Wazed said in his article to Harvard International Review that to renew the secular plan, our government.

Must modernize the curriculum of the madrassas. Second, it must build proper, secular elementary schools and hospitals. Third, it should increase the recruitment of secular-minded students into the military from secular cadet academies. Fourth, it must attempt to rehabilitate known extremist clerics. Lastly, and perhaps the most abstract solution, it must push to vanquish Bangladeshi poverty and illiteracy, that consistently ranks among the worst in the world (Wazed & Ciovacco, 2008).

5.3. War Criminal Discourses

War criminal discourses are another source that is used as a tool to problematize Islam and Muslims in Bangladesh. The word '*Razakar*' is frequently used to express hatred against Islam and Islamic value such as Islamic education and madrassas. People with religious sentiments, madrassa teachers, students, imams, and people with Islamic dress codes such as bread, burkha, veil, etc., are the primary victims of this word. According to the Practical Bengali Dictionary of the Bangla Academy, the word '*Razakar*' means those who, in the 1971 Bangladesh independence struggle, volunteered to support the occupying forces of Pakistan and to oppose and harm the freedom struggle (Prothom Alo, 2021). Pakistani military elites created this group to help them in the war. Many other groups were created for the same purpose by Pakistani military forces, such as *Al Bador* and *Al Shams*. Bengali locals joined these groups and helped Pakistani military forces find out Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) members and also committed many crimes, including murder and rape (Mollah, 2020, p. 653). Not only locals but many Urdu-speaking people living in East Pakistan at that time were operating under these groups. Even more than one group was helping the Pakistani people during the war (Hossain, 2019). The word '*Razakar*' has become the popular discourse to express people's hatred towards war criminals.

It is believed that some Islamic scholars and people with religious sentiments supported a united Pakistan rather than two separate countries. Some others also

thought India would control Bangladesh after independence, so living under Pakistani Muslims is better than living under Hindu nationalists. This kind of idea also made people support the ideology of a united Pakistan. Bangladesh Jamat-e Islami, mainly its senior leaders and scholars, supported this ideology of a united Pakistan at that time. One of our interviewees, Sabrina Rahman, says regarding the word '*Razakar*':

Razakar is now a hateful word in Bangladesh. The then military government of Pakistan formed this force in 1971 to suppress the freedom fighters. They later became involved in crimes against humanity, including murder and rape. Some razakars say, 'we knew India was the force behind the liberation war. Eventually, India will make this country a part of it. We chose Muslims between Hindu and Muslim exploiters.'

Interestingly, the word '*Moulobad*' (fundamentalism in English) has become used alongside the word '*razakar*.' Because it is thought that people with Islamic sentiments and some Islamic scholars were against the separation of Bangladesh, some secular elites kept it the same with religious fundamentalism and even more terrorism. '*Razakar*' was a pro-Pakistani group that helped Pakistani forces during the war. It is clear that they also committed many war crimes in 1971. It is also clear that many Islamic scholars, including some Jamat-e Islami leaders, did support the ideology of a united Pakistan. However, there is no proof that all of them were members of the '*razakar*' group and committed war crimes. This word is now not only used to indicate that specific group who committed war crimes in 1971; rather, it is used to indicate Islamic scholars, madrassas students, teachers, and conservative religious people. This word has become a general expression against Islam as they are identified first with a particular Islamic group and later with Islam itself throughout the time. Now, the war criminal discourse, especially the word '*razakar*,' are used to problematize Islam and Islamic values. An author of many Islamic books, Abdul Hasib, explained this as:

Muslim scholars always wanted a united Muslim country based on both Pakistanis. However, nowadays, people with Islamic getups are being branded as Razakar because of the primitive actions of the people with the same identity who opposed the separation.

Generalization of the meaning of '*razakar*' and war criminal discourses are politically and socially constructed, especially by some political elites as a political weapon. BAL government has been using this weapon to secure its 'long-lasting secularism' (Wazed & Ciovacco, 2008) by weakening the main opposition and Islamic groups. Many Islamic scholars and opposition leaders are imprisoned and hanged by the BAL

government in the name of war crimes. Most of the Jamat-e Islami senior leaders were imprisoned and hanged due to war crimes trials. Interestingly, most of the 'criminals' are either from Jamat-e Islami or the main opposition party, BNP (Jamat-e Islami Bangladesh is the leading coalition partner of BNP). There is no problem in judging war criminals through International tribunals founded by the BAL government, but the problem is using these war criminal discourses and tribunals for political purposes and targeting the opposition.

There are many criticisms regarding Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). Many international scholars, experts, and organizations have criticized this Tribunal's process and the 'political motives' (Mollah, 2020, p. 6621). Mollah (2019) compared some other International Crimes Tribunals with the ICT of Bangladesh and criticized it by saying that "multi-states judges and prosecutors led all the other trials, but ICT of Bangladesh is run solely by domestic (Bangladeshi) judges and prosecutors" (p. 661). According to Sir Desmond de Silva QC, former Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, "the government of Bangladesh is not attempting to use the Tribunal to deliver justice for victims, as was their election pledge, but to target its political opposition that it repeatedly labels as anti-liberation (Silva QC, n.d.). Moreover, Human Rights Watch has said that "the conviction of Golam Azam, the head of the Jamaat in 1971, was based on "flawed proceedings,"; and The International Centre for Transitional Justice has evaluated the judicial process as "fundamental unfairness" (Bergman, 2014).

As mentioned above, the BAL government and its leftist coalition partner weaponize historical crimes to tackle the opposition and secure their "long-lasting secularism" (ibid) and power. Any potential threats to their power and secularism project are labeled with either anti-liberation or religious fundamentalism (Moulobad in Bengali). For instance, Sajeeb Wazed, one of the advisors to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her son, has connected Jamat-e Islami and the BNP with a terrorist organization such as JMP. He said they "had direct and indirect involvement with Islamic fundamentalist groups that masterminded 500 coordinated bombings across Bangladesh in 2005" (Wazed & Ciovacco, 2008). It is necessary to connect them with terrorists and thus declare them as terrorists to justify fighting them. It should not be the right way to generalize the sin of a particular group that committed this crime in 71, attribute it to

all the main opposition and Islamic parties, and even go further and use it in an anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim position.

Not only are the power elites, but also many people in the societies using these discourses to problematize Islam in Muslim society. These people are influenced by power elites, modernization, and anti-Islamic sentiments. The word 'razakar' has been generalized by meaning by what Islam and religious Muslims are targeting. This word is not used only for a particular group and specific crimes that have been committed in 1971 anymore but to problematize Islam and Islamic values, especially Islamic education. According to some people in the societies, most of the madrassas students, teachers, imams, and people with religious dress codes are 'razakar'. Hafeez Kamrul Islam, one of the madrassa teachers, says:

It is a shame that Islamic scholars are being labeled with that word. At the same time, they are not prone to bring harm anyone deliberately. Not all are being subjected to the terms; shamefully, it only applies to those with Islamic outfits.

Hafeez Mamunur Rashid, another Madrassa teacher and an imam of a mosque, shares his experience and says:

One of the powerful men in the society said last time, why do we donate to Madrassas? Terrorists and 'razakars' are raised in these places.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As a result, it can be concluded that Islamophobia does exist in Bangladesh and has been gradually increasing in both private and public sectors. Even though this country is one of the world's largest Muslim countries with many Muslim groups and Islamist parties with traditional Islamic beliefs, anti-Islamic sentiments are seen in every part of the country. As discussed above, Bangladesh is not a Muslim country like Turkey. It is different ideologically, and Muslims here are mostly traditionalist Hanafis. Most Islamist groups and parties are susceptible to Islam and Islamic values. They strictly oppose any kind of violation of Islamic values. Not within the country but also in the other parts of the world, wherever anti-Islamic incidents occur, Bangladeshi Islamist groups, including the masses, are protesting it and showing their support to the Muslims. Having anti-Islamic sentiments in such a country can be surprising sometimes for scholars and researchers. Many causes examined above lead to anti-Islamic discourses and incidents in the country.

Almost everything that triggers Islamophobia in other Muslim majority countries and societies is naturally seen in Bangladesh. However, the most effective ones are the ones we mentioned above as the reason. Unlike other countries and other studies in the literature, Indian influence and war criminal discourses are much more critical here like all other causes, such as modernism and colonialism, a historical incident, just as war crimes committed by a specific group during the War of Liberation, can lead to Islamophobia in a Muslim-majority country. Although it was not the fault of all religious people, an incident can be introduced as an event that misleads society. Furthermore, it causes hatred against a group or a religion.

Society constructs something and gives it meaning, or it constructs meaning for an existing incident. They may generalize the meaning and misuse it to problematize others. Exactly, this has been happening in Bangladesh. Many discourses were

politically or socially constructed regarding war criminals against Islam and religious Muslims in Bangladesh. Of course, such discourses have permanently weakened a group while they have benefitted others. As can be seen in this study, some people, the BAL government, and its coalition partners in the Bangladesh case have constantly vilified Islam by using these discourses, and they have quickly introduced their plans and secularism projects into the nation. To secure their power, they have been utilizing these discourses to weaken political opponents and Islamist groups and denigrate them in society's eyes. Not only Islamist groups and Islamic parties even went further and vilified Islam by utilizing war criminal discourses that "have been constructed largely to support and legitimize the current authoritarian regime" (Islam & Islam, 2018). They have managed to create a small number of Islamophobes masses in a Muslim majority countries such as Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the historical relationship between the BAL government and the secularism project of the government hugely affects Islamophobia in Bangladesh. The historical relationship of India with the BAL government makes India a very powerful country in Bangladesh. To maintain this relationship and the secularism project that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman adopted in 1971, the current government sometimes ignores Indian activities within the borders of Bangladesh. Many Indian-supported groups with Hindutva agenda, such as Iskon, can therefore work and recruits people from the high-level bureaucrats openly. Some anti-Islamic incidents, such as Clashing with Muslims in Sylhet, can occur because of these groups. Such events are not many. Although the state has made some apparent attempts, it has generally received backlash and given up thanks to the Islamic masses. Therefore, it has also condoned things that come primarily from small groups such as Iskon.

Additionally, the BAL government is slowly injecting its secularism project into society. India is again the biggest supporter of the government in implanting this project. India has assisted in securing the BAL government's 'long-lasting' secularism project. A government with such a project perceives everything that can be an obstacle as a threat to him. In this case, Islam and Islamic values are the main obstacles for the BAL government. Thus, it has done everything possible to problematize Islam and Islamic values to implement the project quickly. Madrassas are the primary victims of these Islamophobic incidents. Islamic parties and other oppositions are also suffering

from this. These groups, including the BAL government, who want to problematize Islam, also use the sensitive issue of independence war to problematize Islam and Muslims in the eyes of the masses. By making the opposition and Islamic parties a target, the government has already revealed its intentions more or less. Besides elites, leftists, and other intellectuals, Indian influence, secularism projects, and war criminal discourses are much more critical in the Bangladesh case.

As can be understood from the statements made, Islamophobic incidents have been seen more and more, especially in recent years. Such events are not very common in ordinary people and villages because normal people are very attached to their religion. However, the BAL government and some private institutions under the influence of India are leading such events. In particular, we witness such events more and more as the influence of some groups such as Iskcon increases. If it continues, Bangladesh will be a place of violent Islamophobic incidents like the western world. There can be a civil clash between seculars and religious masses because a country like Bangladesh, with traditionalist Muslims who support their religion and religious values at any cost, will not tolerate any kind of anti-Islamic sentiments in the country. It is clear that since 2008, the BAL government has taken over power, and Islamist groups and religious masses have protested against every decision taken by the government that hurts Islamic values. Some terrorist groups may misuse this situation to emerge again on the soil of Bangladesh.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information:

Name - Surname: Rabiul Islam

Address: Yesilbas Bayırı, Sultantepe, Uskudar, Istanbul

Phone: +905532653804

Education:

2014-2019 BA in Islamic Studies, Istanbul Şehir University, Türkiye

2016-2021 BA in Political Science and International Relations (Double Major),
Marmara University, Türkiye

2019-2022 MA in Political Science and International Relations, Ibn haldun
University, Türkiye

Experience:

02/2021-Current, Research Associate, İLKE Foundation for Science Culture and
Education/Research Center for Islamic Economics (IKAM), Türkiye

02/2021-Current, Publication Secretary, Turkish Journal of Islamic Economics
(TUJISE), Türkiye

10/2019-09/2021, Teaching Fellow, Ibn Haldun University, Türkiye

Publications:

Islam, R., (2020). Hindu nationalism: A rise of new religious radicalism in India,
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