

## ISLAMOPHOBIA IN WORK ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY EXAMPLE

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### Abstract

In this study, Islamophobia among Turks, a Muslim community, was investigated. As in other areas, Islamophobia is becoming more evident in working environments. The first signals of this situation started to be given in social media environments. With the spread of the internet and interactive media, people have become sharing everything on social media. Those who are exposed to Islamophobic behaviors in the working environment also make various posts on social networks. However, similarly, anti-Islamic posts are quite common even in Muslim societies. In this study, the Islamophobia that employees are exposed to was evaluated within the framework of both the work environment and social media. Virtual ethnography was used as a method in the research. Interviews were held on Twitter which is a social media medium. Within the scope of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 3 recruiters and 10 employees for three months. According to the results of the study, Islamophobia is very common in the work environment and it is only a small example reflected on social media. Also, the posts revealing Islamophobia on social media do not prevent the existing problem. Because the shares on social media are instantaneous, the effect is also instantaneous.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Workplace, Social media, Twitter, Employer

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## ÇALIŞMA ORTAMI VE SOSYAL MEDYADA İSLAMOFOBİ: BİR SANAL ETNOGRAFİ ÖRNEĞİ

### Özet

Bu çalışmada Müslüman bir toplum olan Türkler arasındaki İslamofobi araştırılmıştır. İslamofobi diğer alanlarda olduğu gibi çalışma ortamlarında da gün geçtikçe daha belirgin hale gelmektedir. Bu durumun ilk sinyalleri sosyal medya ortamlarında verilmeye başlamıştır. Kişiler internet ve etkileşimli medyanın yaygınlaşmasıyla bütün her şeyi sosyal medyada paylaşır hale gelmiştir. Dolayısıyla çalışma ortamında İslamofobik davranışlara maruz kalanlar da sosyal ağlarda çeşitli paylaşımlar yapmaktadır. Buna karşılık, benzer şekilde İslam karşıtı paylaşımlar da Müslüman toplumlarda bile oldukça yaygındır. Dolayısıyla bu araştırmada çalışanların maruz kaldığı İslamofobi hem çalışma ortamı hem de sosyal medya çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmada yöntem olarak sanal etnografi kullanılmıştır. Görüşmeler sosyal medya ortamı olan Twitter’da yapılmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında 3 işe alım uzmanı ve 10 çalışanla üç ay boyunca derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucuna göre, çalışma ortamında İslamofobi çok yaygındır ve sosyal medyaya yansıyan sadece küçük bir örnektir. Ayrıca sosyal medyada İslamofobiyi açığa çıkaran paylaşımlar var olan sorunu engellememektedir. Çünkü sosyal medyada paylaşımlar anlık olduğu için etki de anlıktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslamofobi, İş yeri, Sosyal medya, Twitter, Çalışan

### Introduction

Since the word Islamophobia means "anti-Islam", it is an important question whether it is possible to talk about the hidden existence of Islamophobia in a predominantly Muslim society like Turkey. Islamophobia as a term has been discussed in detail from the perspective of Western societies throughout the 20th century and still continues to be discussed. The concept was first used with the expression "Islamophobic delirium" (accès de délire islamophobe) in the work about the Prophet Muhammad written by Etienne Dinet and Sliman Ben in 1925. However, the concept was not used in the work of Dinet and İbrahim as it is used in contemporary thought (Etienne Dinet ve Sliman Ben İbrahim, 1925). On the other hand, Chris Allen (2010) speculates that the concept may have been coined by a Muslim researcher at the Institute for Policy Studies (PSI) in the late 1980s (p. 6) (Allen, 2010). Also, the concept of Islamophobia and the expression of fear and hatred towards the Muslim population in the UK is associated with "Islamophobia: A Challenge for All of Us" (1997), first published by the RunnyMede

Trust (Trust, 1997). In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Islam was associated with terrorism and Islamophobia became a global phenomenon.

Considering its basic meaning, Islamophobia is expressed as "fear of Islam". However, in the Oxford dictionary, the concept is expressed as "fear or hatred of Islam or Muslims, especially in terms of being a political power", which actually reveals the point of view because "phobia" is a concept in clinical psychology that is mostly not based on a rational basis and is used to describe a disproportionate or excessive anxiety and fear between the feared thing and the person. The point to be noted here is that such a fear is based on some psychological reasons unique to the person and the thing feared is often innocent. For example, "excessive fear" of insects, heights and dogs occurs not because they are scary, but because of the psychological state of the individual. On the other hand, Islamophobia actually refers to "Islam hostility" beyond the psychological fears just mentioned. While it is accepted that the person who is afraid is basically innocent and that there is a psychological disorder in other fears, in Islamophobia, the fact that Muslims or Islam are innocent and not something to be feared is always ignored. Similarly, the tag "phobia" used for fears such as xenophobia for foreigners, Judeophobia for Jews, ephebiphobia for young people or Islamophobia for Islam describes the feeling of hatred towards certain groups socially rather than a clinical disease. In its simplest form, Islamophobia means an unreasonable and irrational fear of Islam, but its main purpose is to hate everything about Islam (Saeed, 2019, p. 2).

Islam has long been perceived as a threat to secularism, democracy, and Western civilization in general. Migration flows from Muslim countries to the European Union (EU) have further inflamed the debate on Islamophobia in the last two decades. Particularly, as a result of the problems in the Middle East, the dispersal of the people living there to both Europe and other Muslim countries made it necessary to re-discuss and evaluate Islamophobia. Because although Islamophobia is accepted as a global phenomenon that needs to be addressed, we observe that the functioning of this phenomenon is largely ignored in Muslim countries, especially in Turkey. In this article, we will use the term Islamophobia as a critical tool to address the different approaches and radical attitudes towards religion of the modern elite in Turkey. While the view of the countries of the world towards Muslims is constantly criticized, it is ignored that Muslim countries have to cope with the modern elites within themselves. For example,

sociologist Yasin Aktay (2007) previously pointed out the local presence of Islamophobia by criticizing the actions supporting the headscarf ban in Turkey (Aktay, 2007). Aktay openly expressed his condemnation by stating that the so-called 'secular sensibility' against the basic slogans of the republic actually stemmed from Islamophobic impulses. By contributing to Aktay's discussion, our aim is to detail the local operations of Islamophobia with an academic effort and to reveal the necessity of evaluating the issue in a much broader perspective beyond the headscarf. Critically questioning the secularist impulses of the Kemalist modernization project in Turkey, Mutlu and Koçer (2012) revealed the censorship of religion in Turkish cinema between the 1960s and the early 1970s, but discussed the issue without detailing it from the perspective of Islamophobia (Koçer, 2012). Although there are many studies on Islamophobia in the literature, studies on Islamophobic behaviors shown by Muslims to each other, especially in Muslim countries, are quite insufficient. On the other hand, serious Islamophobic activities continue in Muslim countries and are increasing day by day. Today, in Turkey, which is positioned as a place where headscarves are not prohibited and where everyone can freely worship, there are actually many invisible prohibitions. Although Islamophobia studies have been carried out by giving various examples, we believe that the studies on Islamophobia, which is experienced in working life and has many examples, are generally insufficient and this issue should be pointed out.

Islamophobia, which is developing day by day all over the world, is triggered by media tools. In addition to traditional media, the internet and social media give more support to the development and deepening of Islamophobia because unlike traditional media, people can share on social media without revealing themselves. This situation increases hate and Islamophobic posts. Therefore, Islamophobia experienced in the working environment is transferred to social media tools and becomes apparent. In contrast to this situation, people exposed to Islamophobia in the places where they work, thanks to social media tools, try to make their voices heard and find supporters. Therefore, it is possible to say that social media supports Islamophobia both negatively and positively. In this context, in this study, it is aimed to investigate how social media affects the Islamophobia of employees. It is considered important that this research is carried out in Turkey, which is a Muslim country. It is thought that understanding the reflections of

Islamophobia, which Muslims apply to each other, on social media will make a different contribution to the literature.

Therefore, in this article, Islamophobia in Turkey, a Muslim country, is examined in terms of working environments. Therefore, the employees and recruiters interviewed on social media are Turkish. These people were asked both about Islamophobic posts on social media and to evaluate their work environment in terms of Islamophobia. In this context, it is aimed to evaluate Islamophobia in an ethnographic framework by conducting interviews with employees and recruitment specialists in various companies in Turkey using the virtual ethnography method in the social media environment. Apart from in-depth interviews, the evaluation of Islamophobic posts shared on social media was made together with the interviewees. As a result of the interviews, it was aimed to understand the extent of the reflections of Islamophobia in the working environments in Turkey on social media. On the other hand, with this article, it is aimed to draw a new framework to the concept by drawing attention to the Islamophobia of Muslims against each other in Muslim countries. While evaluating the interviews, efforts were made to enrich the study by making use of both the Islamophobia literature and many examples.

### **1. The Secret Prohibition of Living as a Muslim in Muslim Countries**

As a general opinion, Islamophobia is perceived only as the hostility of the West to the Muslim world. However, this situation is not as it seems because in Muslim countries, it is seen that people who say "I am a Muslim" behave towards each other within the scope of Islamophobia. In fact, this is an issue that deserves much more attention and scrutiny. Many people find the term islamophobia offensive because it has the word "phobia" in it. Instead, even a person who exhibits islamophobia behaviors states that it is not so and there are only differences of opinion. However, perhaps even the term islamophobia may be insufficient for the behaviors revealed beyond the term. Sometimes the situation turns into a hatred beyond a phobia. Hate is far more dangerous than fear because the hatred felt can push the individual to react.

Islamophobia is a broader issue for Turkey, which is considered to have a different perspective than other Muslim countries. Along with the emphasis on secularism that took shape in the historical process, radical modernization projects from the top have caused insurmountable traumas in the Turkish society, a significant part of which is related to

the Muslim identity. The impositions in question and the divisions that emerged over time show itself in every field in the form of an Islamophobia in flesh and bone. In fact, for a clearer perception of the situation, it is necessary to look at the radical modernization process underlying the Ottoman-Turkish modernization. While the Ottoman Empire, which was thought to have lagged behind in many areas, entered the modernization process, it began to bring not only modernization in science and technique, but also modernization in life, culture and religion to the society. Then, with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, much more serious decisions and changes emerged. As a result of these changes, many people have fallen into the position of the other in their own society. Frantz Fanon, who is one of those who best expresses the situation of the "Other", stated that the trauma caused by the modernization efforts in Algeria is not just about the "white man" because there are always "indigenous supporters" of the "white man". Every opinion that finds support from inside definitely infiltrates the main veins, if not the whole society. When we look at the basis of these modernization efforts, we encounter the "Westernism" movement. The movement started in the Ottoman period and changed in size after the proclamation of the Republic. The westernist movement basically points to the final level to be reached. Moreover, the understanding that advocates radical change supports the mentality that commitment to traditional values can be an obstacle to progress. On the basis of the emergence of this idea, as we mentioned above, the idea that the Ottoman Empire was left behind by the Western innovations is shown. Western modernization, the foundation of which was laid in the Ottoman period, led to an increase in discussions on the basis of religion/tradition especially after the establishment of the Republic. Novels were written, meetings were held, opinion leaders were formed among the people and many other efforts were made to spread and adopt this understanding in Turkish society. It is quite remarkable that the understanding of Westernism is advanced beyond science and technique on the lifestyle, traditions, religious and cultural structure of the society. In fact, there are many examples on the subject. One of the most striking examples is the character of Doctor Haldun in the famous novelist Mithat Cemal Kuntay's novel Üç İstanbul (Three İstanbul): "Molla! You slept for 14 centuries, enough is enough; wake up". Although there are many more examples like this, the understanding of Westernism was basically evaluated in an ideological sense and tried to be adopted in this way. Today, on the basis of nationalism and enlightenment, many segments of society

have a similar perspective on tradition and Islam. When religion is in question, "reactionism" emerges. This situation not only remained as a point of view, but also led to serious divisions in the society. As the society was divided politically, divisions and marginalization began to emerge within the society. In the course of time, hatred has begun to arise among the people who see each other as the other. Although this situation is not Islamophobia as many groups, but prevention of reaction, basically it is Islam that is attacked and the rules brought by Islam. For example, people's wearing headscarves, performing prayers, fasting within the scope of their religious obligations are described as backwardness and lagging behind and are used as insulting material.

In addition, In Turkey, as recently as May 2021, the 1st International Symposium on Media and Islamophobia was held in cooperation with the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Erciyes University, TRT, the Political, Economic and Social Research Foundation (SETA). In this symposium, President of Religious Affairs Prof. Dr. Ali Erbaş emphasized that Islamophobia has turned into hate for Islam, in other words, anti-Islam or against to Islam ("İslamofobi, İslam düşmanlığına evrilmiştir", 2021). Although Islamophobia abroad is mentioned here, the main theme is important. Because, in general, Islamophobia, which comes to the fore under the name of Islamophobia in Muslim countries and in the West, is the hostility to Islam or a stance against Islam. Therefore, it is possible to say that a general social judgment has been formed.

A general Islamophobic point of view that has been formed in the society can also be considered within the framework of specific fields because people are exposed to movements involving Islamophobia in various places, times and places from many people who claim to be Muslims like themselves. Although there are many areas where Islamophobia is seen in Muslim societies, in this study, we have discussed the field of study that has been overlooked in the literature. In this context, in the next section, we tried to express how Islamophobia emerges in the working environment and how it is reflected in the light of the interviews we have made with employees and recruiters within the scope of the ethnographic study.

## **2. Islamophobia and Social Media**

One of the most effective and even the only tools for Islamophobia to take its final meaning today is the media. This situation is similar all over the world. However, an important part of the studies conducted in the field of Islamophobia and the media in general focused on the negative behaviors of Europe and America towards Muslims. Therefore, in Muslim countries, Islamophobia, which is displayed by Muslims against each other and reflected in the media, is mostly ignored.

The emergence of Islamophobia in the world, especially in the United States, is a result of political problems and the triggering of the media. Despite the fact that it took place in the USA, after the September 11 attacks, which affected the whole world, a negative image of Islam and Muslims became widespread all over the world with the influence of the media, and this situation had a significant and severe effect on the perception of Islamophobia (Özcan, 2007). With the support of media tools, an anti-Islamic terrorist typology with the appearance of Osama Bin Laden was created. Thus, Muslims living in Europe and America have been reduced to the position of "the enemy within us" and the world has been dominated by the perception of an insecure place as it has never been in the past. In this context, it is quite appropriate to say that Islamophobia is a perception and reaction that identifies Muslims with the potential danger of terrorist attacks (Furlanetto and Mehring, 2020, p. 2)

Islamophobia first emerged in Europe and America with the support of traditional media. While addressing this Islamophobia created by the media, it is necessary to draw attention to two main points. The first of these is the "fear" that is being pumped, the second is the "manipulated interpretations". "Media" comes into play in processing fear, manipulating perception, and then pumping these perceptions into people's minds (Shaker, 2010).

On the other hand, in today's world, where physical wars have lost their importance and turned into wars of words, the media, with all its grandeur, has the power to persuade people about whatever it wants by making any kind of manipulation it wants (Yel, 2018, p. 6). Therefore, both traditional and new media are very powerful in persuasion and manipulation. When it comes to a subject like Islamophobia, the power of the media and its results are much more important and worth investigating.

Media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio or television, which are included in the concept of traditional media, are generally places where there is a one-sided communication. On the other hand, the development of new media technologies has transformed the social functions of the media and brought a completely different dimension, especially within the scope of freedom of expression (Ar, 2019). With the emergence of social media tools, which have developed and become widespread in the last two decades, and the increase in internet use by large segments of the society, the possibilities of accessing alternative information, especially for the young population using the internet, have increased significantly. Compared to the past, this situation has resulted in information reaching people quickly and from alternative sources, apart from the propaganda made by the media, especially among young internet users. Although social media alleviates the propaganda effect of traditional media tools, it is said that it completely eliminates it since with new technology tools and artificial intelligence applications, a perception paradigm beyond the traditional square can be applied without making the society feel it. This may even be more dangerous than traditional media propaganda. Namely, even individuals who are distrustful of traditional media can be under the influence of new media without realizing it. Although social media seems to pave the way for access to information, it actually highlights and presents news and information that direct the society. Although the power center changes, the power is still in the hands of some routers. For example, applications such as Facebook sometimes use the authority to remove posts, they do not deem appropriate. In the period of various social movements, Twitter can turn into a serious steering tool. Examples of this are common lately. For example, the posts calling for participation in the protests of the protesters who demanded the closure of their workplaces in the country due to the Corona virus epidemic were blocked by Facebook. In other words, the masses are directed again, but this time different media platforms are used, not traditional media tools. On the other hand, the fact that the information circulating on the internet can be easily shared and there is no control mechanism has brought along many new problems and problems in terms of the authenticity and security of the information circulating on the internet. Images that want to manipulate society can be easily accessed using social media tools. Groups or individuals who want to direct the society can impose the events they want to propagate on the society as they wish, through social media.

Islamophobia includes more than harsh speech against Islam and Muslims in general. Because Islamophobia generally serves those who want to maintain the dominant power structures (Abadi, 2018, p. 5). This situation does not only refer to strong or weak countries. Within the scope of our study, it is possible to say that those who are similarly strong in social media easily continue their anti-Islamic activities. In contrast, there is a similar power imbalance between employees and employers.

Although there are many anti-Islamic posts on social media, many people talk about Islamophobia in their workplaces in the same place. There are many posts that can be an example of this situation. For example, one of them; "I heard that I was hired by a law firm today on the condition that I don't pray. How we love to separate people." In another example, there is a woman who was not hired because she was wearing a headscarf. In another post on Twitter; "It was noticed by my manager that I was praying today and I am under threat of losing my job". These examples are an indication that working environments are shared on social media. Behaviors containing Islamophobia are more exposed after social media. This situation reveals the two-way situation of social media in terms of Islamophobia.

### **3. Method and Findings**

The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between the Islamophobia that employees are exposed to and the social media environment. Considering that almost everything is shared on social media, especially in today's world where technological developments are rapidly taking effect, the impact of this situation on life is very important. In this context, this study aims to understand the impact of social media on employees' posts about their workplace and Islamophobia. In addition, understanding the relationship between the reflection of working life on social media and Islamophobia is among the objectives. On the other hand, in the study, it is aimed to understand the case studies related to Islamophobia that both employees and recruiters face in their working environments. As a result, although the study was carried out in the social media environment, it aimed to understand what happened in both virtual and real environments.

The data of the research were collected by using virtual ethnography method with both recruiters and employees in the social media environment. Due to the nature of

ethnographic research, interviews were conducted with randomly selected people, regardless of age, gender, etc.

Christine Hine, a prominent academic when it comes to virtual ethnography, defined virtual ethnography as follows in the Sage Online Research Methods Handbook; "Virtual ethnography is embedded in academic culture as a viable way to explore how people understand the possibilities the Internet has to offer" (Hine, 2008)

In addition, Hine mentions that virtual ethnography has a very important place even in "critical cyber culture studies", which are made more suitable for the social, political and economic context of the internet (Hine, 2008) because, in fact, virtual ethnography is an imitation of ethnographic work, according to a significant number of researchers. However, virtual ethnography does not have population and sample concerns as in ethnographic studies.

Therefore, the number of people interviewed and demographic data are not important in all ethnographic studies. The important thing is to detail the data on the basis of the ethnography obtained. However, if we look at the difference between both virtual and real ethnographic studies, ethnography is based on obvious evidence of "real" culture, whereas virtual ethnography refers to a cultural construct that has already been created. In this context, the practice of ethnography, which means approaching and understanding another culture, is not directly translated into online cultural studies in virtual ethnographies. Because what is sought and wondered in virtual ethnography is not exactly the same as in ethnographic fieldwork. In conclusion, it is possible to say that the main distinction between virtual ethnography and real ethnography is related to reality and virtuality (Kozinets, 2010).

In this study, within the scope of virtual ethnography method, 10 employees and 3 recruiters were made friends on Twitter and in-depth interviews were conducted with them for three months.

### **3. 1. General Framework**

Although a significant part of the Turkish society is Muslim, those who want to live by fulfilling the requirements of Islam are seriously exposed to the Islamophobic behavior of people who claim to be Muslim. Various examples of Islamophobia have been shared in the news so far, in the public sphere, on the street, in the field of education, and in

political life. On the other hand, working environments where individuals spend more than half of their days are ignored. Considering various examples, it is clear that people are exposed to Islamophobia openly and/or covertly in the places they work. Even in some companies, the Islamophobic point of view emerges even during recruitment. In this context, we wanted to shed light on this issue with the help of various examples with this research. However, the reflection of these examples in the working environment on social media makes this research different.

Within the scope of the study, virtual ethnography was carried out in the social media environment on the basis of Islamophobia with 10 people working in different businesses and 3 people working as recruiters in different places. In order to avoid biased views, individuals were randomly selected within the scope of ethnography. Apart from the interviewees, 15 people who were offered to be interviewed refused to be interviewed. The reason for this situation was related to the anxiety of losing their job. In fact, this situation is accepted as an indication that Islamophobia is much more serious than it seems. Although we have stated to these people that we will never use your or your institution's names in our work, one of them shared his feelings as "If somehow it turns out that I am working here and giving you information, I will lose my job, I cannot trust, this issue is very sensitive."

### **3. 2. Visual Ethnography Interviews with Recruiters on Twitter**

One of the recruiters who agreed to be interviewed said, "I have very serious problems at the company I work for. Qualified people are not hired here just because they want to live their faith. When it is revealed that the employee is worshipping after being hired, they are either exposed to mobbing or sometimes they are fired. So, I agreed to meet with you because I want everyone to know about them. Maybe this way more people will be aware of this issue". In response to these statements, do you have a problem with this recruiter? When we asked him, "Even though I claim to be a Muslim, I am not actually a religious person. However, the injustice done to people both upsets and disturbs me. I am comfortable, I have no problem, but my other friends are treated unfairly. They cannot worship freely. Sometimes they are exposed to jokes and insults. I think everyone, religious or not, needs to show their reaction to these behaviors."

The other recruiter stated that she received a directive from her manager to choose people who look more secular and do not fulfill their religious duties for important positions such as senior managers in the institution she works for. She shared her experiences on the subject using the following expressions; "For example, if we are looking for a marketing manager, my manager always says, this is an important position, please let's choose people who are both graduates of reputable universities and are secular, open-minded and presentable. Because, according to him, senior employees are the face of the company and that face should not be a devout or religious person". Then, we asked this recruiter the question, "What if a devout graduate from reputable universities is among your candidates, what would you do or what would your manager recommend, even if he is your best candidate?" In response, "the recruiter recommends that in such situations, our manager always seeks both reputable university graduates and secular people, we have never chosen a candidate who prays or wears a headscarf just because he graduated from a good university".

We asked all three recruiters if their company had a masjid for employees. All three of them stated that there is a mosque, but it is a very small room, for example, considering the current pandemic, it is a place for only 3 people. Considering that all three companies have an average of one thousand employees, this mosque seems to be only for show. When we asked why such a small mosque was built and why they didn't remove it, two recruiters said they had no knowledge, while the other said, "I think they want to show that they respect religion. But actually, they don't. Maybe that's why there is a mosque. For example, when someone from outside comes and asks if there is a mosque. "Yes, they want to say yes. They probably want to seem close to a certain group of people. Thus, no one can take into account that they will display Islamophobic behavior. This masjid seems to be a camouflage tool for their real behavior and thoughts. "

One of the recruitment specialists stated that Muslims experience the fasting month of Ramadan as follows; "Before each month of Ramadan, we are all asked whether we should fast or not. When one of us says he's thinking of keeping it, they are trying to prevent us from fasting with statements such as, "I think you are already tired, you are working, you cannot stand hunger/thirst. Besides, is it fasting in this century. You will neglect your work and it will not be good for you".

Another recruiter interviewed shared an interesting incident related to her experience. “I needed to get a manager in the finance department. In general, we, as HR experts, make the first eliminations depending on the requests of the units, and leave the last ones to the choice of the managers of the relevant units. Normally, we all recruiters know the HR department's general approach to recruitment. As a general company policy, we need to select candidates who are secular, presentable and graduated from reputable universities. However, this time, I noticed that one of the candidates wearing a headscarf was much more qualified than the others. If I had eliminated her because of the headscarf because the HR department wanted her, my conscience would not have left me alone. Since I knew that the finance manager had a more moderate and positive attitude towards Islam, I brought that female candidate forward and presented it to the manager of the finance unit. The manager asked us to hire him because he is also qualified. However, after this incident, my unit manager called me and asked me to eliminate those who were "extreme" with their appearance and lifestyle, without bringing them before the managers. Even tell me you know basic HR procedures; how can you do such a thing. He implicitly threatened me, saying it wouldn't be good for you if it went on like this”. Upon this sharing, we asked this expert, "But the Finance manager has agreed, why is there a problem?" When we asked him, he gave us the following answer. I guess they don't want to show their direct opinions. They are secretly trying not to hire people who actually practice Islam. Because many times during the conversation, my manager said, we are also Muslims, but what is the point of living "extremely" like this. This country is a secular country. I don't want him to get corrupt, I heard his saying”. As can be seen, even for those who say they are Muslims, those who practice Islam are actually "extremists" and "corrupt the society”. Most people do not directly say that they are Islamophobic, but in different terms they reflect their Islamophobic views. Such people constitute an important part of Turkish society. When they talk, they say "I am a Muslim too" and display Islamophobic behavior in their behavior and actions. Therefore, it is not easy to distinguish these people. Maybe that's why so many Islamophobic incidents and situations are covered up.

In addition to this incident, another recruiter shared a clearer example of Islamophobia she experienced. “We have a manager in the unit where I work. Officially, he makes negative and insulting speeches about religion whenever he gets a chance. We

hear that she speaks much more especially during religious days, holly nights and Ramadan. For example, she once said on the day of the night of Qadir, "What nonsense and unnecessary times, it's all completely made up." One day, she said to an employee who was fasting, "Your fasting bothers me, what a backward mentality, what's the point of fasting in this period?" These are just a few examples. Actually, this colleague likes to speak out against religion at every opportunity. One day we jokingly asked her why do you hate religion so much. As an answer; Turkey has been left behind because of this reactionary mentality. Is religion left in this century? The most important thing is science. I don't want this country to go backwards anymore. When I see someone wearing a headscarf, I get nauseous and angry. Fortunately, there are no people praying or bearded in front of our eyes here, thank God". These statements are clearly indicators that there is Islamophobia in the institution in question. For example, people who work in that company and want to practice their religion are constantly exposed to these pressures. But no one outside knows about them and does not talk about it. In a way, those who want to practice their religion as Muslims continue to be constantly exposed to Islamophobic acts, since such examples are not directly reflected in the society and no official measures are taken on the subject.

One of the recruiters mentioned another important issue. In general, in the company I work for, it is not desired that the devotees come to senior and important positions. However, since the company I work for has various business lines, for example, when we look for cashiers and department staff in stores, our manager never says things like, for example, don't choose someone who wears a headscarf or pray. One day, one of our friends told our manager that he was wondering why this was the case. They serve the public. Besides, that's the service area, it doesn't matter how they are or who they are. People don't even look at them. It is enough that they give good service. But think about a manager who wears a headscarf? Contemporary, rational and rationalist people can be managers. They look like peasants in headscarves." As can be seen, these expressions clearly contain insults and insults. People are judged by their positions. For example, if a person works in the service sector, it does not matter how she/he is or whether she/he is a devotee. However, they never want to see a devout person in an important position. In this case, it is not important who or how those working in professions such as tea maker,

cashier, cleaner, department officer is compared to Islamophobic people. In this case, both these professions are humiliated and people are seen as worthless and unimportant.

### **3. 3. Visual Ethnography Interviews with Employees on Twitter**

It was important for us to evaluate the situation in terms of employees after the statements of the recruiters. Before the meetings, it should be stated that there is unfortunately no regulation in the Labor Law No. 4857 regarding praying during working hours in Turkey, a country where Muslims constitute a significant part. When many employees demand to pray during working hours, they naturally fall into an unfair position because it is not even stated in the law. According to employers, first of all, the employee should be aware of the purpose of the workplace. According to the labor law, a worker who is at the workplace to work should not engage in any activity without the approval of his/her employer under normal conditions. Because an activity that will be done without the employer's approval may disrupt the entire balance of the production or work plan. This puts the employer in harm's way. For this reason, the employer is usually concerned with the "soundness of the business". To give an example, an employee works at a machine in the production area and wants to pray when it's time for prayer. What will this person do? He cannot turn off the machine, because his main job is to keep that machine working properly. Well, the machine obviously cannot leave the area where the employee is in an uncontrolled manner, this time he is held responsible for the material damages that may occur and he has serious problems with his work. In some cases, employers allow the transfer of work to another employer, even for a short time, during prayer hours. Or the employees agree with their colleagues. However, these are exceptional cases. Mostly, it is not desirable for employees to pray during working hours. Employees are faced with the fear of losing their jobs because the labor law does not protect the employee in this regard.

Finally, we asked recruiters how they evaluated the posts about Islamophobia on social media. One of them replied as follows; "I think social media is a very powerful medium. When people who have problems at work post in this environment, everyone cares about it. But I think there are too many Islamophobic people out there. Therefore, some support these posts and some are uncomfortable". The other recruiter answered the question with the following statements; "An employee of ours shared the prayer problem

at work on social media. He was fired for posting under his own name. I wish he hadn't posted this post. This post didn't work. I think it's going to happen. These posts are just instant messages. They don't work. There is no enforcement power. Companies he doesn't care." This answer is very important. Sharing on social media can also have such power. Because it is an open environment for everyone, it is seen that the shares are shared. This situation may cause the person not to regain the right to pray, but sometimes to lose his/her position in the example.

One of the employees we interviewed is an office worker, whose name is known and worked in one of the big companies in Turkey for 5 years, and he openly stated that it is forbidden to pray in the institution where he works. This person expressed his experiences as follows; "It was forbidden to pray in the institution where I worked. So that no one would understand, I used to make ablution by washing my hands and face in the sink and my feet in the toilet. I was very afraid that someone would see and complain. Because this company clearly told me this at the time of hiring, and I had to lie because I needed a job. I thought I could bear it, but the years I actually worked there were torture. There was no mosque anywhere. There was a small warehouse-like place in the back and out of sight. When I was going to pray, I would go there and pray on a clean cardboard. Because I was afraid to pray, I did not understand anything about my worship. Those were really tough times". I even came across it in the media. After me, an employee shared this incident on social media. The company also shared an article as follows in order not to tarnish its own name. *"As a ..... company, due to the inability to interrupt the current production flow, the obligation of our machines to work 24 hours a day, and the fact that the employees do not have the opportunity to leave the machines and their duties, there is no prayer room area in the factory under our current conditions. Our employees can fulfill their religious obligations before and after working hours."* From this, it is clearly understood that there is no mosque in the company and worship is not allowed.

Another employee working in a different company also mentioned a similar incident. "Our daily prayers are never allowed in our workplace. We are also not allowed to go out on Friday, in case anyone goes to Friday for Friday prayers. We live in a Muslim country and I am an office worker. I can continue my work when I pray and return. Those who want to smoke often go to the smoking section and smoke their cigarettes. My only 2 daily prayers coincide with work hours. On average, it takes no more than 15-20

minutes. However, this is not allowed. I think this is clearly the opposite stance. It is trying to prevent worship. I think it's just a camouflage. Smokers spend almost 2 hours a day, but no one thinks they're disruptive. We expect our worship to be respected in our Muslim country". As can be seen, it is noticed that there is a very clear stance here. Because while smoking does not hinder work, praying hinders work. This is another form of expression of Islamophobia. Maybe there is no insult, but there is restriction and inhibition.

Another employee working in the service sector in a different business shared the problems she experienced in the institution she worked in with the following sentences. "At the place where I work, waiters working like me were suddenly banned from praying. The reason was that a staff member was warned by their chief while he was spending time on the phone in the masjid. One of my colleagues, whom I met at the mosque last weekend, said, 'Brother, we can pray illegally, no one hears our voices'. I'm a poor waitress, so what happens when you take away my freedom of worship? What if he spent time on the phone? This is a maximum of 10 minutes. Anyway, no one can stay in the mosque any longer, it's not possible. Our working hours and breaks are clear and immediately understandable. I think this is just an excuse. The purpose is to prevent our religious worship. They don't want it; they don't like it". Here again, an excuse and camouflage draw attention. Although it seems that there is clearly no Islamophobia, there is still a restriction and obstruction.

Another employee we interviewed shared interesting information on the subject. "It is expressly forbidden to worship in the workplace where we work. This situation is also shared during recruitment. In fact, it was stated to me as follows at the time of hiring. 'You don't pray or something, do you? Unfortunately, such "activities" are not allowed here in order not to disrupt the work and to be efficient. I hope this situation is suitable for you. Because we are a modern and secular workplace. Is there any prayer left in this period? Let it be retired or old people. After all, they have nothing to do.' However, one of our colleagues still found an invisible place in the back and started to pray without showing anyone. I don't pray, but I have respect. That's why I knew this friend was praying. But unfortunately, another colleague, who said he was "disturbed" in this situation, complained to the manager. Upon this situation, our friend who prayed was dismissed from work on the grounds of "abusing his duty and disrupting his work". We

did not expect such a serious attitude. Then the friend sued the company. However, since he could not prove it, the case continued for many years and resulted in non-prosecution. We continued to meet to this friend. Now he works in a different place, but even I could not digest the injustice and hostility towards him. What is the need for such hostility in a Muslim country? However, he was a very hardworking friend. But I guess what is expected is not someone who does his job in the best way and is hardworking". This case is not much different from the others. Again, an Islamophobic stance is clearly shown.

When the employees were asked about their thoughts on the social media environment and Islamophobia; One of the employees said, "I don't post about these issues on social media. I don't want to lose my job. Everyone watches this environment and it's open to everyone. But a friend of mine couldn't go to Friday at his place of work, so he shared it on an anonymous account and exposed the company he worked for. Then, he told his employees so that the company name would not be badly remembered. He gave permission for Friday prayers for a while. But then he banned it again. I think it has an instant effect like social media posts."

Unfortunately, many public or private institutions in Turkey express their hostility towards religion. Even though it is a Muslim country in general, it would be an understatement to say that there is freedom of worship in Turkey. Although Islamophobia seems to be only hostility to the headscarf by many, it is actually much more comprehensive. Therefore, it is very important to address and examine this issue. For this reason, it is very important to address this issue, to scrutinize it and to listen to people who have actually experienced Islamophobia or who have been in a work environment where Islamophobia is experienced. Another employee made the following sentences; "I think social media seems powerful but it doesn't work. On the contrary, there are those who post anti-Islamic posts. It seems to work for a while. But it has no effect. Everyone continues the same way". Another employee said, "I think Islamophobia is shared more on social media. Even if there are people seeking their rights, it doesn't work. They just post. But the situation does not change. I think social media contributes to Islamophobia." When we asked the reason for this, the employee gave the following answer; "Because people are afraid to claim their rights through their own profiles. Anonymous accounts are also not taken into account. However, anti-Islamic posts are very popular and

supported. When I pay attention to the posts, only a few people wrote that they were exposed to Islamophobia. On the other hand, there are thousands of anti-Islamic posts".

As can be seen, the general view is that social media contributes to Islamophobia. People are afraid to share their difficulties even on social media for fear of losing their jobs. On the other hand, anti-Islamic posts are more supported.

### **Conclusion**

It is undoubtedly true that Islamophobia is a fundamentally global problem. However, in Turkey, more than half of which was Muslim, which experienced a lot of turmoil with the last periods of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic, both overt and covert Islamophobia persists in many areas. It is noteworthy that Islamophobia, which was initially perceived only as hostility to the headscarf, became much deeper over time. Especially with the spread of social media, this situation has moved to a different stage. Many people are afraid to share it even though they have problems. Many people are afraid to share it even though they have problems.

In this study, we tried to deal with Islamophobia, which is mostly ignored, in the working environment through social media. We wanted to take advantage of the power of ethnography to present the event from a more realistic perspective. However, we used virtual ethnography as we conducted the interviews via social media. In this context, we held various meetings on social media with recruiters and employees working in reputable and well-known companies in Turkey. Many people we reached out refused to see us because they found the subject sensitive and were afraid. Nevertheless, we heard many examples from the people we interviewed.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that there is at least as much Islamophobia in Turkey, which is described as a Muslim country, as in countries belonging to other religions. Individuals do not have freedom of worship where they work. Freedom of worship is hindered in many fields and lines of business. Since there are no phrases in the labor law that protect freedom of worship clearly, many people lose their jobs due to their religious lifestyle choices, and many people are not hired at all. We have tried to open only a small window on the subject here. However, this issue requires much deeper research. We think that it would be beneficial to carry out more comprehensive and in-depth studies on this subject in order to increase the awareness and sensitivity of the

societies on the subject. In general, social media can also be seen as a tool for people to have their voices heard. However, according to the answers we received from the interviewees, social media actually feeds Islamophobia.

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