



THE THREE PHASES OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN THE WEST: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ORIENTALIST, MISSIONARY, AND COLONIAL LEGACIES

Akhmad Jazuli Afandi

Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia

Email: jazzull212@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This study critically analyzes the genealogical development of Islamic studies in the West through three interconnected historical phases: theological, political, and scientific, examining how Orientalism, missionary enterprise, and colonialism have shaped each stage. Employing genealogical and critical discourse analysis following Foucauldian frameworks, the investigation examines historical and academic texts to trace power-knowledge dynamics across these phases. Findings demonstrate that the theological phase (medieval period) featured Christian polemical traditions constructing Islam as a heretical deviation; the political phase (colonial era) transformed Orientalism into an administrative apparatus for governing Muslim populations; and the scientific phase (modern universities) maintained Orientalist residues despite objectivity claims. These three forces collectively generate knowledge regimes that systematically marginalize Islamic epistemology and silence Muslim scholarly voices. Theoretically, the findings underscore imperatives for Muslim-majority regions to critically examine their dependence on the Western academic paradigm, while advocating that Western institutions cultivate inclusive epistemic spaces that incorporate Muslim communities into knowledge production. The study recommends future research through case studies of national contexts, biographical examinations of influential scholars, and explorations of Islamic subfields via decolonial lenses. Also, establishing global Islamic studies networks based in Muslim contexts, democratizing academic access, and implementing dialogical, interdisciplinary approaches grounded in epistemic justice principles.

Keywords: *orientalism, missionary enterprise, colonialism, democratizing academic access, epistemic justice principles*

INTRODUCTION

The scholarly examination of Islam within Western academic contexts has undergone an extensive, multifaceted historical trajectory, generating a discourse that often occupies a dominant position in contemporary discussions. This discursive framework not only shapes the methodologies through which Islam is investigated within academic institutions but also exerts considerable influence upon geopolitical perceptions and transnational cultural dynamics. Following the institutional establishment of Islamic studies programs within Western universities during the nineteenth century and their subsequent evolution to the present, scholarly knowledge of Islam has predominantly emerged from external perspectives that position the religion primarily as an object of academic inquiry. Consequently, the intrinsic heterogeneity, historical trajectories, and autonomous agency of Muslim communities have frequently been reduced to analytical frameworks determined by the epistemic and political



imperatives of external observers. Within this scholarly landscape, Western hegemony over the production of knowledge about Islam may be understood as an extension of historical legacies rooted in Orientalism, missionary endeavors, and colonial enterprises genealogies that trace their origins to premodern periods and continue to shape contemporary discourse (Varisco, 2007; Lombard, 2022b).

Consistent with this trajectory, numerous scholarly investigations have examined the interrelation among Orientalism, colonialism, and the formation of Islamic studies within Western academic institutions, employing both historical analysis and epistemological critique. Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1995) constituted a pivotal contribution to this discourse, illuminating the structural prejudices embedded within Western scholarly representations of "the East," particularly Islam, thereby inaugurating sustained postcolonial interrogation of this intellectual tradition. Subsequent scholarship, including the work of Varisco (2007) and Rizvi (2020), has extended Said's critique by interrogating how contemporary Islamic studies perpetuates Orientalist legacies, revealing how assertions of scholarly objectivity frequently obscure underlying ideological commitments and asymmetrical power relations that fundamentally shape knowledge production about Islam. Moreover, scholars have underscored the imperative to decolonize Qur'anic studies, arguing that such efforts are essential for transcending the epistemic constraints imposed by Western academic frameworks and methodological paradigms.

Concurrently, scholarly investigations by Haustein (2023) and Jacoby (2023) demonstrate that colonialism functions not merely as a historical context but as an active institutional framework through which knowledge about Islam has been systematically codified, serving as an instrumental mechanism for sociopolitical governance and control. Within the Indonesian context specifically, research undertaken by scholars examining missionary activities and Orientalist influences reveals how these phenomena shaped both academic conceptualizations of Islam and colonial administrative policies, with their enduring legacies remaining discernible in contemporary educational structures and the configuration of modern Islamic intellectual discourse (Devi et al., 2024; Mokodenseho et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, existing scholarship predominantly addresses discrete facets of this multifaceted problem. Substantial analytical attention has been devoted to examining Orientalism primarily as a discursive formation. However, such investigations frequently fail to establish systematic connections between this discourse and the concrete institutional mechanisms of missionary enterprise and colonial administration. Conversely, research examining colonialism often neglects the extent to which colonial epistemological projects were fundamentally informed by Orientalist conceptual frameworks and sustained through missionary narratives. Moreover, decolonial approaches within Islamic studies scholarship have remained predominantly theoretical, with genealogical mapping of the historical evolution of knowledge frameworks occurring only infrequently. This deficit becomes particularly evident when one considers that relatively few studies explicitly trace the three principal developmental phases

of Western Islamic studies specifically the theological, political, and scientific stages as interconnected epistemological formations, while simultaneously analyzing how these inherited frameworks continue to structure contemporary scholarly discourse and institutional practices.

This lacuna reveals a significant scholarly gap. No comprehensive study has synthesized historical analysis with epistemological critique to interrogate the nexus between Orientalism, missionary activity, and colonialism in shaping the three foundational phases of Western Islamic studies, while examining how these influences perpetuate epistemic asymmetries and the marginalization of Muslim scholarly voices within global academic discourse. This article endeavors to address this gap by providing a genealogical and critical examination of the transformations in Western discourse concerning Islam across temporal and purposive dimensions. Ultimately, the study seeks to propose alternative trajectories for Islamic studies that demonstrate greater equity, contextual sensitivity, and inclusivity toward Muslim experiential knowledge and epistemic authority.

Conceptually, this analysis proceeds from an engagement with Orientalism as articulated by Edward Said in his seminal work of the same title. Orientalism is understood as a systematic perspective that constructs "the East" particularly Islam as the racialized and civilizational "Other," characterized as retrograde and irrational, positioned in binary opposition to the West, which is represented as rational, progressive, and superior. This representation transcends mere description, embodying normative dimensions that function to legitimate Western political and cultural hegemony over Muslim societies. Said defines Orientalism as "*The corporate institution for dealing with the Orient dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient*" (Said, 1995, p. 3). While this analytical framework has encountered substantial critique, it remains deeply inscribed within numerous contemporary iterations of Islamic studies that assert scientific neutrality and objectivity yet continue to manifest structural prejudices inseparable from their colonial genealogies (Jacoby, 2023; Rizvi, 2020).

The legacy of missionary enterprise has contributed a substantive ideological dimension to Western discourse concerning Islam. Within numerous early missionary texts produced by Christian evangelists, Islam was conceptualized as a theological and spiritual menace requiring neutralization through Christianization efforts. These polemical narratives established the foundation for an apologetic and adversarial theological orientation toward Islam. Although its manifestation has evolved in response to shifting historical contexts, the underlying missionary impetus has not been entirely extinguished; rather, it frequently reemerges in more subtle forms, cloaked within the rhetoric of development discourse, interfaith dialogue initiatives, or liberal humanist frameworks. Consequently, the missionary orientation constitutes not merely a historical phenomenon but rather an enduring ideological configuration that continues to inform contemporary Western comprehension and evaluation of

Islam (Tuoheti, 2021; Goddard, 2024; Hamid et al., 2023).

Colonialism, in its institutional manifestation, established a comprehensive political and administrative apparatus that mediated the nexus between knowledge production and the exercise of power in relations between the West and the Islamic world. Through colonial enterprises, knowledge of Islam was systematically collected, catalogued, and taxonomized as an integral component of strategies to administer and regulate colonial populations. The conceptual framework of "knowledge for rule" elaborated by Haustein (2023) elucidates how examinations of Islamic jurisprudence, social configurations, and Muslim religious traditions were instrumentalized not principally to engage with the epistemic sophistication of these communities, but rather to formulate more efficacious colonial governance mechanisms. Within this analytical framework, knowledge cannot be construed as a neutral epistemological endeavor but instead operates as an instrument of power saturated with ideological commitments and geopolitical imperatives (Mirza, 2024).

The convergence of Orientalism, missionary enterprise, and colonialism has engendered systematic prejudices in the representation of Islam within Western academic discourse. These biases not only configure Western public comprehension of Islam but also exert influence upon how certain Muslims perceive and interpret themselves within epistemological frameworks constructed by external observers. This phenomenon constitutes what scholars term epistemic injustice, which occurs when particular communities or knowledge traditions are systematically marginalized, devalued, or excluded from structures of academic legitimacy because they are incongruent with hegemonic epistemological norms (Afif et al., 2025). Within Islamic studies, this manifests conspicuously when scholarly investigations of Islam proceed without substantive engagement with the intellectual authority, methodological traditions, and epistemic perspectives indigenous to Muslim scholarly communities, thereby generating partial understandings frequently detached from the tradition's contextual moorings (Rizvi, 2020; DeCuir, 2025).

Proceeding from this foundation, this investigation advances three principal research questions. First, how can the genealogy of the three developmental stages of Western Islamic studies the theological, political, and scientific be critically traced within their respective historical and institutional contexts? Second, in what manner did Orientalism, missionary enterprise, and colonialism influence and configure each of these successive stages? Third, what critical implications does this historical legacy present for contemporary efforts to advance more equitable, dialogical, and contextually attuned approaches to the study of Islam on a global scale? Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to analyze the historical forces and epistemological structures that shaped these three stages, while simultaneously exploring alternative methodological approaches capable of liberating Islamic studies from colonial prejudices and epistemic hegemony. Theoretically, this research endeavors to enrich scholarly discourse on Orientalism and Islamic studies while

strengthening the development of postcolonial and decolonial perspectives as substantive epistemological frameworks. In practice, the findings aim to serve as intellectual resources for Muslim researchers and Islamic studies institutions in formulating research methodologies that prioritize epistemic justice, intellectual autonomy, and contextual pertinence.

As Bdaiwi and Rizvi (2023) underscore, the decolonization of Islamic intellectual history concerns not merely an amelioration of research content but, fundamentally, questions of epistemic authority who possesses the legitimacy to speak, which methodological frameworks are deployed, and how institutional power is distributed within the field. This observation underscores the imperative of critically interrogating the epistemic legacy that has structured Western Islamic studies over the centuries, while simultaneously creating opportunities to cultivate more ethical, representative, and inclusive scholarly models that acknowledge the plurality of experiences, intellectual authorities, and voices within Muslim communities. space.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative method to explore the historical and epistemological changes in the development of Islamic studies in the West, focusing on three main phases: theological, political, and scientific. This approach was chosen because it enables a detailed analysis of discourse that is not only factual but also filled with symbolic, ideological, and representational meanings. Instead of producing statistical generalizations, this study aims to reveal the constructions of meaning and power relations behind scientific narratives about Islam in Western academia, as discussed in critiques of Orientalism, missionary efforts, and colonialism (Said, 1995; Varisco, 2007; Lombard, 2022b).

Methodologically, this investigation employs a literature review that analyzes historical and academic texts as primary data sources. Texts are conceptualized not merely as documentary evidence but as discursive fields wherein knowledge production and power relations are constituted and negotiated. Consequently, historical-critical and genealogical analytical methods are deployed to trace the origins and evolution of discourse by identifying the historical stratifications that constitute it, following the genealogical tradition established by Foucault and subsequently adapted within postcolonial scholarly frameworks (Siddiqui, 2022). This methodological approach proves essential for mapping how Orientalism, missionary enterprise, and colonialism historically configured the three developmental phases of Islamic studies in the West and how their influence persists in contemporary scholarship (Haustein, 2023; Jacoby, 2023). Primary sources for this research encompass the writings of Orientalists and missionaries spanning pre-modern to modern periods. In contrast, secondary sources comprise critical scholarship that interrogates Western epistemic prejudices within Islamic studies (Rizvi, 2020; Afif et al., 2025).

Data collection proceeded through a systematic review of canonical works spanning multiple disciplinary domains, with thematic organization based upon methodological and ideological dimensions.

Content analysis interrogated representational patterns of Islam across textual categories, while critical-genealogical discourse analysis excavated the mechanisms of meaning production undergirding scholarly narratives and academic discourse. This methodological approach facilitates tracing continuity patterns extending from the theological to the scientific developmental phases, revealing how foundational structures of representation and power relations persist despite their manifestation through divergent methodological configurations (Haustein, 2023). Consequently, this methodology not only advances scholarly understanding of Islamic studies' historical trajectory within Western academic contexts but also challenges epistemic hegemony and creates space for cultivating more equitable and inclusive paradigms of Islamic scholarship, consonant with contemporary appeals for knowledge decolonization within Islamic scholarly discourse (Bdaiwi & Rizvi, 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Three Phases of Islamic Studies in the West

The scholarly examination of Islam within Western academic contexts has traversed a historical and epistemological trajectory that may be genealogically delineated through three principal developmental phases: the theological, the political, and the scientific. These three phases constitute not discrete or isolated phenomena but rather an interconnected epistemological continuum, wherein the intellectual legacy of each antecedent phase is transmitted and transformed within emergent configurations of power. Throughout each successive phase, Islam has been apprehended not as an autonomous and multifaceted tradition possessing internal coherence, but rather as an epistemological object constructed within asymmetrical relational dynamics between the Occident and the Orient. This investigation undertakes a critical analysis of these transformations to illuminate the representational dynamics, power-motivated imperatives, and epistemological ramifications that have materialized across these historical junctures (Octavia & Anshori, 2021).

The theological phase constituted the inaugural stage of Islamic studies within Western scholarly contexts, emerging after initial encounters between Christian and Muslim civilizations during the medieval period. The historical foundations of this phase were established through interactions between Islamic and Christian societies, particularly following Islam's territorial expansion into the Byzantine Empire and the Iberian Peninsula territories further marked by the trauma of the Crusades. Throughout this era, Islam was conceptualized not as a coequal religious tradition but rather as a heretical deviation requiring refutation, correction, or elimination. Consequently, Islam became the subject of theological disputations aimed at vindicating Christian doctrinal positions and asserting the moral and spiritual supremacy of the West (Said, 1995). A defining characteristic of this phase manifested in its propensity toward reductive and pejorative representations of Islam, frequently characterizing it as a misguided, bellicose religion antithetical to Christian values. Illustratively, depictions of the Prophet

Muhammad consistently employed negative and provocative imagery, portraying him as a charlatan or advocate of violence. Early Christian polemicists engaged not merely in theological argumentation against Islam but simultaneously constructed it rhetorically as a perilous perversion, thereby cultivating hostility and suspicion (Varisco, 2007).

Prominent intellectual figures characterizing this phase included Christian theologians and missionaries such as John of Damascus, Peter the Venerable, and Ricolto da Monte Croce, whose scholarly production comprised polemical treatises targeting the Qur'an, hadith traditions, and Islamic jurisprudence (Dawczyk, 2019; Human Assistance & Develop Intl, 2021; George-Tvrtković, 2012). The predominant textual genres encompassed apologetic expositions, refutational compositions, and selective Qur'anic translations accompanied by deliberately antagonistic exegetical frameworks (Frassetto & Blanks, 1999). Missionary enterprises during this epoch functioned as the principal mechanism for knowledge production concerning Islam, oriented not toward hermeneutical comprehension but toward theological vanquishment (Ferree, 2006). These Christianization efforts not only generated hegemonic narratives about Islam across European intellectual circles but also established foundational structures for Orientalist discourse in subsequent historical periods (Ferreiro, 2003). Consequently, Orientalism and missionary activity during this theological phase operated in mutual reinforcement as ideological instruments in fashioning representations of Islam fundamentally incongruent with its authentic historical trajectories and spiritual dimensions.

Upon transition to the political phase, Orientalism transcended its apologetic function to become an administrative and strategic apparatus embedded within European colonial enterprises. Colonial territorial expansion into Muslim-majority regions, including India, Egypt, Algeria, and the Dutch East Indies, created the imperative for colonial administrations to understand social configurations, religious leadership structures, and Islamic legal systems as mechanisms of governance. Within this framework, Islamic studies metamorphosed into an instrument of socio-political cartography and regulatory power conceptualized as an "epistemic apparatus of empire". Knowledge about *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the authority of ulama (religious scholars), religious movements, and indigenous customs was instrumentalized to construct efficacious colonial administrative systems for the systematic regulation of Muslim populations (Haustein, 2023).

The defining characteristic of this phase manifests in the ascendancy of empirical-pragmatic methodological orientations that conceptualize Islam not exclusively as a theological system but as a political variable requiring management. Knowledge production concerning Islam assumed strategic dimensions shaped by colonial power interests. Institutional entities, including the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, the *École des Langues Orientales* in Paris, and colonial intelligence apparatuses, exercised pivotal roles in cultivating increasingly institutionalized and systematized Orientalist discourse. The institutionalization of Orientalism within modern

universities reflected the administrative exigencies of imperial governance. Colonialism furnished the principal framework legitimating the conceptual bifurcation of normative Islam (characterized as ossified and immutable) from localized Islamic practices (perceived as malleable for colonial instrumentalization). This knowledge apparatus was decidedly non-neutral, constituting instead knowledge engineered for regulation, intervention, and control (Varisco, 2007).

The third phase the scientific phase materialized concurrently with the development of modern universities and disciplinary specialization within the social sciences and humanities, spanning the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries. During this phase, Islamic studies achieved institutional incorporation within academic domains, advancing claims of objectivity, neutrality, and secular methodology. Islamic studies evolved into a discipline nominally independent from Christian theological frameworks, progressively deploying philological, historical-critical, anthropological, and sociological analytical instruments. Notwithstanding formal disentanglement from explicit religious and colonial motivations, this scientific approach continued to bear traces of antecedent epistemic inheritances. Claims of objectivity frequently obscured Eurocentric presuppositions undergirding contemporary Islamic studies (Rizvi, 2020).

The proliferation of academic subdisciplines, including Middle Eastern Studies and Religious Studies, signified the integration of Islamic studies into global knowledge systems. However, this transformation failed to dismantle Orientalist paradigms comprehensively. Instead, representational biases persisted in increasingly subtle manifestations. Islam continued to be frequently constructed as a social "problematic," an ideological menace, or an object of cultural exoticism. The secular academy frequently rearticulated Orientalist reasoning through the rhetoric of methodological neutrality (Bdaiwi & Rizvi, 2023). Consequently, the scientific phase became a domain wherein Orientalist and colonial legacies underwent renovation within ostensibly scientific and secular frameworks, thereby perpetuating their hegemony over indigenous Islamic narratives.

This genealogical examination demonstrates that the three phases of Western Islamic studies represent not merely transformations in form and methodological orientation but rather evince the persistent operation of epistemic power structures manifesting through variant configurations. Although each phase exhibits distinctive characteristics and historical particularities, the unifying thread connecting them remains the dominance of external narratives concerning Islam, which systematically marginalize or delegitimize Muslim epistemic authority. A genealogical analysis of these three phases proves essential for comprehending the historical evolution of Islamic studies while simultaneously constituting a foundational step toward dismantling enduring epistemic asymmetries and cultivating more equitable, inclusive approaches to Islamic scholarship (Mirza, 2024).

The Legacy of Orientalism, Missionaryism, and Colonialism in Three Phases

The intellectual legacy of Orientalism, missionary enterprises, and colonialism within Western Islamic studies has engendered an intricate, systematic, and enduring epistemological framework traversing three historical epochs: the theological, political, and scientific phases. Across all three phases, patterns of Islamic representation manifest not merely as repetitive but as stratified and reconfigured to accommodate the exigencies of each historical conjuncture. During the theological phase, Islam was constructed as a deviation from Christian theological truth, with figures such as John of Damascus characterizing the Prophet Muhammad as a "pseudo-prophet" and the Qur'an as an error-laden imitation (Curtis, 2009). This representational framework transformed the political phase, wherein Islam transcended doctrinal contestation to become an administrative object embedded within colonial projects of social cartography and regulatory control. Subsequently, during the scientific phase, previously constructed images of Islam generated through theological and political lenses were repackaged under the guise of academic neutrality while continuing to harbor problematic presuppositions, including conceptualizations of Islam as a social "problem" or an exotic subject of scholarly inquiry (Rizvi, 2021). These representational patterns generated an epistemic architecture that Said (1995) characterized as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'".

The nexus between knowledge and power is a fundamental component of this epistemic system, in which Western scholarly constructions of Islam frequently derive from political, ideological, and imperial imperatives rather than from principles of neutrality. Foucault's conceptual framework reminds scholars that knowledge does not exist in isolation but remains perpetually enmeshed within networks of power that determine who possesses authority to speak, how discourse is articulated, and toward what purposes communication is directed. Within the context of Islamic studies in Western academia, this signifies that representations of Islam do not merely reflect empirical reality but also construct novel realities that serve Western interests across both epistemic and political dimensions (Foucault, 1972). Haustein (2023) states that colonial Islamic studies were oriented less toward comprehending Islam in terms of its internal coherence than toward generating knowledge instrumental to the more efficacious governance of Muslim populations.

The religious dimension of this legacy remains inextricably connected to the missionary enterprise intrinsic to the theological phase, which established ideological foundations for subsequent developmental stages. During the theological phase, missionary imperatives manifested explicitly through narratives characterizing Islam as a "false religion" requiring refutation through apologetic discourse and conversion initiatives. However, over time, these motivations did not dissipate but instead transformed into increasingly subtle configurations. Throughout the colonial phase, missionary activity converged with colonial modernization and educational programs. Within the Indonesian

context specifically, Christianization agendas were frequently embedded within narratives of moral and social development, maintaining underlying objectives of transforming Muslim religious convictions and identities. Contemporary manifestations of missionary activity operate through increasingly subtle modalities, including interfaith dialogue initiatives, social development projects, and humanitarian assistance that advance Western universalist values, potentially retaining normative biases (Hamid et al., 2023).

The colonial legacy similarly exerts a pivotal influence in configuring knowledge politics that continue to shape contemporary Islamic studies. Throughout the colonial era, knowledge about Islam served to legitimize imperial power structures. Illustratively, investigations of Islamic jurisprudence in India and North Africa were conducted to identify juridical vulnerabilities exploitable for colonial interests (Haustein, 2023). Within this framework, Western scholars operated not exclusively as observers but as technocrats directly implicated in engineering colonial social architectures. Meanwhile, within contemporary Islamic studies, Rizvi (2021) criticizes that vestiges of colonial epistemology remain discernible in research agendas and funding mechanisms that frequently prioritize concerns privileged by donor nations or Western research institutions. Research priorities in Islamic Studies frequently reflect Western geopolitical anxieties rather than the epistemic concerns of Muslim communities.

Finally, analysis of continuities and discontinuities across phases demonstrates that although methodological forms, institutional configurations, and scientific discourse continue evolving, the underlying power relations, stereotypical representations, and ideological imperatives structuring Western Islamic studies remain fundamentally consistent. Methodologies initially constituted as theological polemic have transformed into philological and historical-critical approaches while maintaining epistemic distance between the subject (Western researchers) and the object (Islam). Institutions originally religious in character, including missionary orders, have been replaced by modern Islamic studies centers, yet numerous such centers continue to exercise epistemic control over Islamic narratives (Varisco, 2007; Bdaiwi & Rizvi, 2023). Even scientific discourse, frequently characterized as neutral and objective, remains susceptible to representational prejudice. Consequently, genealogical comprehension of these transformations proves essential for deconstructing the myths of methodological progress that are frequently accompanied by ethical regression in engagement with Islamic traditions.

This cumulative legacy configures a discursive landscape that not merely reflects historical Islam-West relations but simultaneously constructs global epistemic architectures that systematically delegitimize, reduce, and define Islam from external perspectives. Decolonizing Islamic studies necessitates transcendence beyond merely incorporating Muslim voices it demands a fundamental reconceptualization of the architecture of knowledge production itself. This formulation underscores the imperative of comprehensive evaluation regarding the legacy of three historical forces Orientalism, missionary enterprise,

and colonialism which persistently shape Western comprehension of Islam (Bdaiwi & Rizvi, 2023).

Towards a More Fair and Contextual Approach to Islamic Studies

In confronting the epistemological legacies of Orientalism, missionary enterprise, and colonialism, it becomes imperative to cultivate alternative methodological frameworks that not only critique antecedent paradigms but also construct more equitable and contextually situated approaches to Islamic scholarship. The scientific phase within the evolutionary trajectory of Western Islamic studies, initially conceptualized as a methodological advancement, invites substantial interrogation of its claims to objectivity. Scientific methodologies predicated upon secular principles and epistemic neutrality frequently elide recognition that the analytical categories they deploy including "religion," "myth," "doctrine," or "ritual" emerge from particular historical and philosophical contexts indigenous to Western intellectual traditions. Assertions of objectivity in Islamic studies often obscure the deeply embedded Eurocentric presuppositions undergirding Western epistemological frameworks. Within this analytical frame, purported "objectivity" often constitutes a veiled mechanism for perpetuating epistemic hegemony through ostensibly neutral scientific discourse that implicitly embodies particular value systems and power configurations (Rizvi, 2021; Jacoby, 2023).

Moreover, the hegemonic scientific orientation within Islamic studies engenders manifestations of epistemic injustice directed toward Muslim traditions, intellectual authorities, and scholarly voices. Epistemic injustice, as conceptualized by Fricker (2007), refers to circumstances in which individuals or communities experience epistemological degradation, either through testimonial injustice (whereby credibility is systematically discounted) or hermeneutical injustice (whereby conceptual frameworks necessary for articulating experiences remain unavailable). Within Islamic studies, this phenomenon materializes through the systematic exclusion of Muslim scholars, Islamic intellectual traditions, and indigenous interpretive methodologies, which are frequently deemed inferior to Western scientific approaches. Muslim scholarship is frequently characterized as subjective or apologetic, thereby disqualifying it from mainstream Islamic studies discourse (Afif et al., 2025). Consequently, narratives concerning Islam circulating within global academic spheres often fail to reflect Muslims' experiential realities and self-understandings, being instead configured through external perspectives that constitute Muslims as passive discursive objects.

To rectify this asymmetry, initiatives promoting decolonization of Islamic studies have emerged. The reorientation of Islamic studies necessitates active participation from Muslim scholars and institutions in shaping narrative construction, research agendas, and methodological frameworks. This proves essential given centuries of Western institutional and epistemological dominance that inadequately reflect Islamic complexity and diversity. Creating intellectual space for emic perspectives the internal viewpoints of Muslims articulated through values, terminology, and concepts indigenous to Islamic traditions

constitutes a fundamental priority. Simultaneously, establishing balanced dialogue between Western and Muslim scholarly communities requires substantive rather than symbolic engagement, necessitating redistribution of epistemic power across academic institutions, funding architectures, and scholarly publication venues (Bdaiwi & Rizvi, 2023). Decolonizing Islamic studies transcends mere diversification of voices, demanding transformation of knowledge production and validation structures themselves.

Within this framework, postcolonial and decolonial theoretical approaches constitute essential analytical instruments. Postcolonial approaches facilitate the dismantling of colonial residues within academic discourse while illuminating how power dynamics have configured knowledge concerning Islam. Conversely, decolonial approaches operate not exclusively critically but constructively, furnishing alternative frameworks grounded in marginalized knowledge traditions. The decolonial orientation requires the imagination of knowledge systems that transcend Western metaphysical assumptions while recognizing multiple rationalities. Within Islamic studies contexts, this entails creating intellectual space for both classical and contemporary Islamic epistemologies while acknowledging the validity of diverse ways of knowing that may not conform to Western academic conventions (Ict, 2025).

As the foundational architecture for the proposed alternative methodologies, the principle of epistemic justice must serve as the central pillar. Epistemic justice encompasses recognition of knowledge, authority, and diversity, wherein no singular epistemic tradition including Western frameworks operates as the exclusive arbiter of scholarly validity. Within Islamic studies, this signifies creating a dialogical space between Islamic epistemology (encompassing both traditional and modern iterations) and contemporary scientific methodologies predicated upon equitable foundations. Mere inclusion of Muslim scholars as participants is insufficient; paradigm transformation remains necessary to enable their voices to configure research trajectories. Epistemic justice materializes not through inclusion alone but through restructuring authority within knowledge production processes (Ehsan, 2023).

Proceeding from this principle, dialogical, interdisciplinary, and contextual methodological approaches acquire critical significance. Dialogical approaches transcend conversational engagement between traditions, acknowledging each tradition's epistemic autonomy. Interdisciplinarity signifies that Islamic studies no longer remain confined within singular methodological or disciplinary parameters, permitting examination through historical, sociological, anthropological, theological, and philosophical lenses while preserving meaning within Islamic frameworks (Sehlikoglu, 2025). Concurrently, contextual approaches emphasize studying Islam through modalities sensitive to the particular spatial, temporal, and social circumstances that characterize Muslim communities. This methodological orientation mitigates overgeneralization and essentialist perspectives that have distorted the comprehension of Islamic complexity.

Ultimately, these endeavors should strengthen Muslim institutions' and

scholars' positions in shaping global Islamic understanding. Presently, Western institutions continue dominating the definition, evaluation, and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. Transforming this configuration requires fostering the development of global Islamic studies institutional networks rooted in Muslim-majority contexts, with equivalent epistemic and methodological capabilities. Furthermore, democratizing access to academic resources, publishing venues, and international platforms enables Muslim scholars to contribute equitably toward generating more inclusive representations of Islamic studies. A critique of dominant structures must be accompanied by the construction of novel frameworks in which Islamic thought can flourish according to its intrinsic terms.

Through adopting alternative approaches grounded in critique, reorientation, and construction, Islamic studies can achieve greater epistemic equity, cultural representativeness, and social relevance. This constitutes not merely a scholarly undertaking but a moral imperative, ensuring that knowledge of Islam remains connected to justice for its adherents.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the historical trajectory of Islamic studies within Western academic contexts may be genealogically delineated through three principal interconnected developmental phases: the theological, the political, and the scientific. The theological phase was characterized by the predominance of apologetic discourse grounded in Christian polemical traditions that constructed Islam as a "divergent religion" constituting theological deviation. The political phase emerged concurrently with European colonial territorial expansion into Islamic domains, during which Islamic studies served as an instrument for social cartography and the administrative governance of Muslim populations. The scientific phase materialized within modern university contexts, which, notwithstanding assertions of scientific neutrality and objectivity, continued to manifest residual Orientalist orientations and epistemic prejudices regarding Islam. These three phases constitute a continuous historical configuration through which knowledge concerning Islam has been discursively articulated and produced within Western intellectual spheres.

These findings substantiate that Orientalism, missionary enterprise, and colonialism operate not merely as historical contextual factors but as constitutive elements fundamentally shaping and perpetuating discourse concerning Islam. Orientalism functions as a representational apparatus that constructs Islam as "the Other" and positions it as inferior. Missionary activity introduces religious dimensions that influence antagonistic narratives and proselytization efforts. Colonialism institutionalizes knowledge regarding Islam as an instrument of power, operating through colonial educational policies and research oriented toward social regulation. Collectively, these three forces generate a knowledge regime that systematically marginalizes Islamic epistemology while silencing Muslim voices as active participants within academic discourse.

The theoretical implications of these findings prove consequential for advancing Islamic studies across both Muslim-majority contexts and Western

academic environments. Within Muslim-majority regions, this investigation underscores the imperative to critically interrogate dependence on Western academic paradigms that may not invariably align with Islamic values and knowledge architectures. Within Western contexts, this analysis advocates cultivating more inclusive epistemic spaces that valorize emic perspectives and actively incorporate Muslim communities into knowledge production processes. Exclusively through more ethical and collaborative methodological orientations can Islamic studies achieve greater Equity and representational Authenticity.

At broader analytical levels, these findings exert influence upon Islam-West relations across discursive and policy dimensions. Quotidian discourse that constructs Islam as a menace, a challenge, or an exotic object affects foreign policy formulation, security paradigms, and social integration dynamics across diverse Western nations. Consequently, transforming academic understanding of Islam has the potential to mitigate cultural tensions while fostering substantive intercultural dialogue.

Nevertheless, this investigation acknowledges several limitations. Its analytical scope remains circumscribed to identifying three principal phases within Western Islamic studies, emphasizing academic literature and institutions that developed predominantly within Western European and North American contexts. The study has not yet comprehensively examined the development of Islamic studies across alternative geographical contexts, including Africa, South Asia, and Muslim-majority territories with distinct colonial trajectories. The analyzed sources similarly remain restricted to academic texts and polemical literature, whereas performative and praxeological dimensions of knowledge have not been exhaustively explored.

Accordingly, recommendations for subsequent research emphasize more targeted investigative directions, either through case study analyses of particular national contexts (exemplified by postcolonial Islamic studies within France, India, or Indonesia), examinations of influential Orientalist scholars and Muslim intellectuals, or explorations of specialized subfields within Islamic studies including Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), or Sufism approached through decolonial analytical lenses. This methodological orientation will facilitate advancement toward cultivating more equitable and contextually grounded Islamic studies paradigms through more direct, pragmatic modalities aligned with epistemic justice ideals undergirding this research.

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