

# Emic-Etic Distinction and Islamic Studies in Oslo/Norway

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## Introduction

Islamic studies has been a contentious field, inviting discussions on theological and political aspects of its naissance.<sup>1</sup> The field spans various disciplines and interests by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike in Near East, Middle East, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish studies, as well as in religious and political thought. Its history began with early Orientalists' curiosity of studying and analyzing Muslim subjectivity and the origins of the Qur'an, which was often accompanied by an obfuscated attempt to define and set the boundaries of the field (Salaymeh 2021, 250 f).

Given what is commonly referred to as Islamic studies, either within Religious studies, Islamic theology, or Oriental studies programs in combination with the study of classical Arabic, these programs rely on various epistemologies and methodologies that are both enriching and problematic – for instance, related to how certain programs across Europe and the US envision, structure, and engage with pedagogy and the curricula they assign. In some programs across these diverse regions, as it will be indicated below, less emphasis is paid to theoretical sources and engagement from history, philosophy, ethics, and elsewhere, which would naturally stir self-examination and critique about pedagogical and research methods to study things as

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nuanced and historically contingent as Islamic civilization, law, jurisprudence, and philosophy. Instead, there has been a move towards pragmatism in how departments arrange course offerings, which do not fully testify to the plurality, historical processes, or even global traditions that undergird Muslim-majority societies (Bauer 2011).

By analyzing the emic-etic distinction and a few concrete examples of Islam programs in Norwegian academia today, my contribution tries to rethink how and for whom researchers and lecturers “do,” perform, and teach Islam-related courses in general and in Norway more specifically. In this rather short piece, I survey Islam programs across four programs at two different universities in Oslo – MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society (MF); Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), which includes Middle East studies section and Religious studies section; and the Faculty of Theology (TF) – with a call to diversify epistemological and methodological approaches to Islamic studies scholarship beyond current academic structures.

My aim is to address not only crucial contemporary concerns of the academy and its pedagogy but also the value of Islamic studies for the humanities, which should bring about responsive and critical theoretical contributions beyond identity politics. In this regard, the case study carries broader, transnational implications about how Islamic studies is conceptualized in Western academy.

### The Emic-Etic Discourse and Islamic Studies

The emic-etic distinction was introduced in 1964 by Marvin Harris to the field of anthropology and, by extension, to religious and Islamic studies. It is commonly understood that emic research seeks to reconstruct how individuals understand their own interests and behaviors, within their own personal contexts, as religiously driven. In other words, the emic articulates a particular religious perspective on the world. Etic scholarship, concomitantly, seeks to transcend particular religious perspectives in order to develop generalized theories to explain human behavior and action. Accordingly, the etic researcher is not bound to emic accounts but rather seeks to understand and analyze the world in which he/she lives.<sup>2</sup> Although anthropologists began to dismantle the emic-etic distinction in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as we shall see below, its assumptions still remain relevant in the Norwegian academy about the

<sup>2</sup> For a brief overview of the emic-etic distinction, see Till Mostowlansky and Andrea Rota, “Emic and Etic,” in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2020): 1–16. See also George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg (eds.), *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion* (Sheffield, U.K.: Equinox Publishing 2019).

study of religion and in particular Islam. In Islamic studies more specifically, the distinction became known along the lines of Muslim insider (emic) versus academic outsider (etic) scholarship and forms of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

For some scholars, Islamic studies have not fully “integrated” into Religious studies due to the conviction that Islamic studies scholars offer apologetic and normative approach to Islam, its history, and belief system (Hughes 2012, 314). Muslim scholars, Hughes argues, would not be capable of employing critical methods in studying Islam and might tend to be essentialist in their scholarly construction of Islam (Hughes 2012, 314), depending on their audience (Crone 1977).<sup>4</sup> For Hughes, Muslim scholars are theologizing Islam and hence projecting their own liberal interpretations onto the historical religious sources. On the other hand, Juliane Hammer argues that normativity does not need to be the enemy per se but that it requires restructuring and reframing. She also points out that scholars nurture prejudice toward some type of normativities (like Islamic studies) and not others (Religious studies or Environmental humanities) (Hammer 2016, 98 f). For Oliver Scharbrodt, this separation reflects the modernist paradigm of private vs. public reason, as well as the secular non-confessional preference of the outsider perspective in Religious and Islamic studies or the adoption of methodological agnosticism that might be a continuation of Eurocentric, hegemonic discourses on Islam from the privileged vantage point of Western liberalism (Scharbrodt 2017). Scharbrodt asks if this separation of academic scholarship and identity politics might in reality be a viable option only of white (male) European academics because their identity is seen and perceived as normative, hegemonic, and therefore constitutes normality, whereas the scholarship of academics with other racial, religious, or ethnic backgrounds, is not that easily accessible because it deviates from that norm. The push for distinction between academic scholarship and identity politics is even more obscured with the changing demographics in academia, Scharbrodt warns. Those conceptualizations of Islam that merge identity politics and academic scholarship hence tend to challenge Eurocentric representations of scholars’ own religious traditions, Orientalist stereotypes, and also address issues of prejudice in religious tradition.

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<sup>3</sup> For Megan Abbas, there are some differences between the emic-etic and the insider-outsider distinctions. In her understanding, the former is about the type of research conducted, whereas the latter about the identity of the scholar/researcher. Nonetheless, she points out that many scholars in religious and Islamic studies use the two terms interchangeably. See Meggan Abbas, “Beyond the Emic-Etic Distinction: Conceptualizing Islam in Our Inter-Connected World,” draft, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> See also Ragnhild Johnsrud Zorgati and Cecilie Endresen, *Mobile Muslims and Invisible Islam*, University of Oslo, accessible at <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/mobile-muslims-and-invisible-islam/>.

Furthermore, Megan Abbas argues that “*all* efforts to define Islam carry both performative potential and normative force” (Abbas 2022, 4). Accordingly, scholars of Islam certainly do not merely describe Islam as an innate, fixed objects but “do things” to Islam, to Muslim subjects of their own study, and thus co-create discourses and conceptualization about them. She argues that academics must be willing to accept the fact that Western academics do not simply analyze but also impact the very work of Islamic and Muslim scholars and vice versa. Consequently, since no scholar works in a vacuum, scholars’ arguments are inevitably context-driven discourses that refer to past and current ideas, texts, and materialities, whether an author intends that or not.

In this sense, all academic conceptualizations of Islam are both etic and emic at the same time – they carry normative and performative nature in themselves. Abbas warns that because normativity and performativity are inevitable, they do not constitute shortcomings in and of themselves. The problem occurs when one fails to recognize this insight. In order to move beyond the emic-etic distinction – which is, as we shall see below, still very much in place in the academic study of Islam in Norway – scholars of Islam should be able to acknowledge the complex realities that we are not solely etic/outsider/objective spectators treating our objects of study as fixed, innate, stable phenomena, but since we are studying them through the very lenses of our comprehensions, understandings, perceptions, reasonings, and interpretations, we are also, at least to an extent, active/emic/normative participants in the process of defining Islam/Islamic.

The emic-etic distinction is continually present also in the Norwegian context, especially in Religious studies and more recently in Islamic studies.<sup>5</sup> The distinction pertains to particular politics of knowledge – that is, the different and competing views about what ideas are important and should be seen to prevail or hold value over others – in how academic programs that offer Islam-related courses are structured. Religious studies scholars might find the following case study interesting in that they can draw parallels to other similar programs and divisions in Western academy. For instance, surveying three different institutions in Oslo – MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society (MF); Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS); and the Faculty of Theology (TF) (the last two are part of the University of Oslo) – indicates that Islamic studies, despite these institutions’

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<sup>5</sup> The distinction has been challenged by some scholars from TF, see e.g. Ingvild Flakerud and Leirvik Oddbjørn, “The Study of Islam between University Theology and Lived Religion: Introductory Reflections,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2018): 413–27, accessible at doi: 10.1080/09596410.2018.1521561.

different history, is not an independent discipline and, by extension, that these institutions place Islamic courses under the Study of Religion or as part of History. There are, of course, historical, economic, and political reasons why this is the case, given that Norway has largely been on the periphery when it comes to the study of Islam in Europe, despite the wonderful and path-breaking contributions by some of its scholars to the fields of Arabic, Turkish, and Middle Eastern studies in the last decades.<sup>6</sup> The situation is further complicated by the (on the surface) clear epistemological and methodological distinction in Norway between the fields of the Study of Religion (*religionsvitenskap*) vs. Theology.<sup>7</sup> This distinction presupposes that the scholars in the Study of Religion affirm the objective, historical, and theoretical approaches to religious traditions, whereas scholars in Theology engage also in prescriptive, normative analysis of religious phenomena (McCutcheon 2017; Hughes & McCutcheon 2022; Ogden 1978), even though there have been instances of cross-pollination of various methodological backgrounds through common platforms and projects in the last years.<sup>8</sup> While this distinction has been often challenged by scholars who come from Religious studies themselves, in that some scholars' work indeed reaches well beyond what would be considered a normative study of (Christian) theology, the distinction still holds water in academic circles in Norway at least nominally (Eidhamar 2019, 28 f). In such context, Islam (and scholars of Islamic studies) can be easily seen as an oddity by the Study of Religion scholars, not necessarily because of one's alleged religious affiliation, but because of the lack of historical tendencies to accommodate methodologically and religiously diverse scholarship on Islamic studies in existing academic structures despite the increased emphasis on interdisciplinarity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Worth mentioning, for instance, are Einar Berg's contributions to the Qur'anic translation; Finn Theisen's to the study of Hafez; Ruth Laila Schmidt's to Urdu language and literature; Bernt Brendemoen's to Turkish and Turkish studies; Knut Vikør's to the field of Islamic law; Gunvor Mejdell's to Arabic language and literature; Kari Vogt's to public understanding of Islam; and Brynjar Lia's and Bjørn Olav Utvik's work on political Islam, among many others.

<sup>7</sup> Despite occasional collaborations between the three institutions, historically and politically they have viewed each other as competitors, especially when it comes to Theology and the Study of Religion. Hence, the designation of an institution and its programs as "normative" might influence the number of students that enroll at a particular institution, which is directly linked to governmental financial support. On the history of MF and TF, see e.g. "Det teologiske fakultets historie," Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, accessible at <https://www.tf.uio.no/om/historie/>; Tor Ivar Hansen, "MF vitenskapelig høyskole," *Store norske leksikon*, accessible at [https://snl.no/MF\\_vitenskapelig\\_høyskole](https://snl.no/MF_vitenskapelig_høyskole).

<sup>8</sup> E.g. RVS Research School, which is a collaboration between Uppsala University (UU), Umeå University (UMU), VID Specialized University (VID), Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Volda University College (HiVO), University of Oslo (UiO), University of Agder (UiA), University of Bergen (UiB), The Arctic University of Norway (UiT), and MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society. For more about the RVS Research School, see <https://rvs.mf.no/about>. See also "ATTR: Authoritative Texts and Their Receptions", a PhD school co-founded by MF, UiO, UiB, NTNU, and UiT, <https://www.tf.uio.no/english/research/phd/research-schools/attr/>.

<sup>9</sup> Similar is the case with other fields in Norway, for instance with Middle East history, which is not part of European/World history; Arabic literature, which is not offered at departments of Comparative Literature

## Islam Courses and Study Programs

At MF, Norway's largest center for the study of religion, theology and society, there are no Islamic studies programs, but Islam-related courses can be found in two Master programs, "Religion and Globalization" and "History of Religion," in addition to the BA programs that are taught in both Norwegian and English.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the vast majority of the faculty who are offering courses on Islam are trained in Religious studies, Sociology, History, and other fields, and not in classical or modern Islamic studies (whereby Arabic would be a necessary language component). IKOS offers courses in the field of Area studies, that is, primarily in politics, society, culture, and languages of the modern Middle East, rather than Islamic studies per se.<sup>11</sup> Already in 2007, a committee was put together by the rectorate of the University of Oslo to establish a Center for Islamic Studies, which due to the lack of resources never came to fruition.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, there has been a push to restructure programs in Middle East studies in order to cut specializations and to marketize those programs that would be linked to students' higher employability rates. This is true not just for IKOS but across academic departments in Norway and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> At the section of the Study of Religion at IKOS,<sup>14</sup> which according to some scholars offers an objective study of Islam (religion),<sup>15</sup> the courses on offer cover a fraction of the global

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and Literary Theory, but at Middle East Studies departments; Islamic philosophy, which is not offered at Philosophy departments, and other fields. A similar problem can be found across Europe, too. For instance, Barbara Winckler, a Professor in Arabic Literature at the WWU Münster, states that "In our field – Arabic, Islamic or Middle Eastern studies –, students tend to choose topics related to political Islam, social movements or Islamic law, as those seem more likely to provide job opportunities. The broader public discourse, too, is mainly focused on these kinds of topics... On a broader scale, knowledge production concerned with world regions beyond Europe and North America is marginalized, as it is typically not included in the 'systematic' disciplines, such as history, philosophy, political science or literary studies, that are mainly focused on Western contexts." See e.g. Barbara Winckler, "The Potential of Arabic Literary Studies: (Re)Situating the Field Between 'Systematic' Disciplines and Area Studies in Western Academia," *Forum Transregionale Studien*, August 2022, accessible at <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/40028>. For a similar argument in the field of Arabic-Islamic philosophy, see Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, "On Contemporary Arab Philosophy as a Field of Study," *Forum Transregionale Studien*, October 2021, accessible at <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/31052>.

<sup>10</sup> For more on MF's programs and course offerings, see <https://mf.no/en/studies/programmes>.

<sup>11</sup> For more on IKOS programs and course offerings, see <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/studier/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> I would like to thank Bjørn Olav Utvik for bringing this to my attention and for providing a full report on the establishment of the center.

<sup>13</sup> On debates on internationalization in academia and introduction of tuition fees in Norway, see e.g. Karen Anne Okstad, "How Can We Meet the Rapid Growth in Internationalisation at Norwegian Universities?," University of Stavanger, 2022, accessible at <https://www.uis.no/en/about-uis/how-can-we-meet-the-rapid-growth-in-internationalisation-at-norwegian-universities>; Ole Kristian Dyskeland & Regina Paul, "Are we Dissuading International Talents from Norwegian Academia?," *Khrono*, 2023" accessible at <https://www.khrono.no/are-we-dissuading-international-talents-from-norwegian-academia/783447>; Sophie Hogan, "Norway Confirms End of Free Non-EU Tuition to Dismay of Student Groups," *The Pie News*, 2023, accessible at <https://thepienews.com/news/norway-non-eu-tuition-fees/>; Regheringe, "Slik er lovforslaget om studieavgift for utenlandske studenter," 2023, accessible at <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/slik-er-lovforslaget-om-studieavgift-for-utenlandske-studenter/id2968132/#:~:text=Stortinget%20har%20vedtatt%20at%20fra,gjelde%20for%20flyktninger%20og%20utvekslingsstudenter>.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the department of the Study of Religion at the University of Oslo, see <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/people/aca/study-of-religion/tenured/>.

and historical phenomenon of Islam. This is not surprising, since there are only three faculty members who teach Islam-related courses. Some of the courses are, for instance, “Islam in Europe” and “Islam: Myths and lived religion,” in addition to other more general courses in the study of religion. The programs, however, do not offer training in Islamic legal discourse, Islamic philosophy, Islam in South (and Southeast) Asia, Islamic arts, Islamic intellectual history, and/or Islamic epistemology from the perspective of intellectual history, which would per se be distinct from theological analysis of the phenomenon of Islam. Further, employing specialists from the Middle East or South(east) Asia would also naturally bring into conversation varied and competing epistemological and methodological perspectives and traditions on Islam at the respective department(s).<sup>16</sup> The institutional developments at these departments, of course, have to do with the lack of resources as they do with the expansion of the section of the Study of Religion over the years that has prioritized a particular approach to Islam.

The Faculty of Theology (TF) at the University of Oslo seems to have – in the Norwegian context – the most substantial course offerings in what is called “Islamic theological studies” (Teologiske islamstudier) as part of faculty’s profile in Interreligious studies, having courses in Islamic philosophy, theology, aesthetics, and others.<sup>17</sup> There are also plans to further expand Islamic studies at TF in the near future by offering a specialization in Islam. Yet, TF is by the Study of Religion scholars

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<sup>15</sup> This view was in different capacity offered by Ragnhild Zorgati, a Professor in the Study of Religion, during conversations at two events in Oslo: at the Forkningsetisk seminar og Islam, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, November 1, 2023; and at Boklansering: Moral og etikk i islam, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, December 14, 2023. Furthermore, for Zorgati, IKOS programs are comparable to the Islamic studies programs found elsewhere, such as at McGill University. The Institute for Islamic Studies (IIS) at McGill, however, has hosted some of the world’s specialists in Islam, including Toshihiko Izutsu, Fazlur Rahman, Wael Hallaq, and many others. Moreover, the institute has produced numerous graduates in Islamic studies who have gained prominent positions in their own respective countries, most notably, in Pakistan and Indonesia. While this is not unproblematic in and of itself, in terms of where knowledge about Islam is produced and then further reproduced, the two institutions – IIS and the section of the Study of Religion at UiO – are in my opinion different, in that IIS has been offering core courses in Islamic sciences and the languages of the Muslim world, in addition to courses in other areas and disciplines. For a comparative view for programs in Islamic studies at the Institute for Islamic Studies at McGill University, see <https://www.mcgill.ca/islamicstudies/>.

<sup>16</sup> This is a fairly established practice at other international institutions across Europe and North America. See, for instance, the interdisciplinary Islamic and Middle East studies programs and faculty’ specializations at Leiden University (The Netherlands), <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/nvic/education/arabic-islamic-studies> and <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/education/study-programmes/master/middle-eastern-studies-research>; Lund University (Sweden), <https://www.ctr.lu.se/en/research/research-disciplines/islamology/>; the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), <https://lsa.umich.edu/middleeast>; Columbia University (New York City), <https://www.mei.columbia.edu> and <https://www.mei.columbia.edu/islamic-studies-at-columbia-university>; and McGill University (Montreal, Canada).

<sup>17</sup> For more on TF’s programs and course offerings, see <https://www.tf.uio.no/english/index.html>; [https://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/relroots-master/index.html?gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwzN-vBhAkEiwAYiO7oIZ2HB5sM60zsyY4k0Pn7RsuoJ9NBAJwnnfbK59xjSRED39k9ePmsRoC2vAQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/relroots-master/index.html?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwzN-vBhAkEiwAYiO7oIZ2HB5sM60zsyY4k0Pn7RsuoJ9NBAJwnnfbK59xjSRED39k9ePmsRoC2vAQAvD_BwE). See also “Fagfelt: Islam,” Det teologiske fakultet, UiO, accessible at <https://www.tf.uio.no/om/fagfelt/islam.html>.

often designated as offering primarily normative study of religious traditions, especially Islam (Flaskerud & Oddbjørn 2018, 423).

The examples in Norway (Oslo) are perhaps by no means unique, since division between various academic departments and their focus on emic/etic discourse in relation to Islam can be found elsewhere in Europe, too.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, these varied programs leave us with a series of questions – who is doing Islamic studies and whom is it made for? What are the academic backgrounds of lecturers at these institutions and who has the upper hand in deciding what type of knowledge is applicable in classrooms? Who determines what is etic or emic knowledge based on preconceived notions of this very division and of Islam scholars' work? And, perhaps even more importantly, what kind of students are we producing and what kind of training are the students receiving when it comes to fundamental theories in Islamic studies and Postcolonial theory as part of their curricula, in addition to extensive language training?

Non-comprehensive offerings of Islam-related courses based on the fixed or unchallenged emic/etic division carry an epistemological problem. Departments that study Islam and the Muslim world while neglecting historical-critical research on Islamic sciences and their epistemic significance have little chance of succeeding in educating young people about the humanity of pedagogy, let alone about an informed study of Muslim thought and practice beyond the idea of the “other.” Rather, we might ask ourselves how did the 1,400 years old tradition survive and evolve in academic circles and how should it be analyzed in our global and interdependent world in which we live – what kind of methods and epistemologies do we need in order to critically evaluate Islamic traditions and the very field of Islamic studies? Perspectives that employ the fixed emic-etic dichotomy present an aggregate group of problems that leave out a comprehensive, critical study of Islamic heritage, both classical and modern, under the pretext of such scholarship being “normative”. A critical study of Islamic traditions is not about lamenting the loss of *Shari‘a*'s moral law or about a normative study of religious tradition, but rather about a rational project that should (also) be rooted in local (indigenous) structures of thought processes, narratives, and

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, departments' description of programs in Middle East and Islamic studies is often linked to a particular institutional vision which reflects also the course offerings. For instance, at Radboud University in the Netherlands, Islam studies program is described as focusing “on Islam in the formative period as well as on its contemporary social, cultural, and political expressions in both the Middle East and Europe. Its research deals with four fundamental *tensions* in Islam: inclusion – exclusion; religion – politics; the individual – the collective; and finally, the *tension* between the religious and the secular. The first two have been characteristic of Islam since its inception, the last two are predominantly modern and have emerged after the *confrontation* with the West and its specific political order, legal system, social structures and cultural norms and practices, giving rise to new internal dynamics.” (emphasis mine). For more, see <https://www.ru.nl/islamstudies/>.



sources, based on original languages of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Urdu, Bahasa Indonesia, Bosnian, and beyond. This also entails a rethinking of the center-periphery dichotomy as a geographical and epistemological division (Kaps & Komlosy 2013), in terms of what constitutes a scientific approach to and study of Islam/Islamic. Concerning narrowing the gap between the different understandings of normativity by Islamic studies and the Study of Religion scholars, we might ask how does our own positionality as scholars and educators alter in our own classrooms when we for instance replace a novel as a legitimate form in Western literary canon for orality found in indigenous African cultures as a source of knowledge? How does our comprehension of normativity (of religion) change if we introduce to our students, for instance, Ibn Khaldūn's view on history and society (Ibn Khaldūn 2000; Ibn Khaldūn 1996) or Izutsu's idea of Qur'anic concepts (Izutsu 2002) as points of departure, and skip referring to dominant figures in Religious studies, such as Durkheim, Weber, Eliade, Geertz (Pickering 1984; Weber 2017; Eliade 1963), and others, whose works usually serve as anchors for providing definitions of key terms in the field. In order to reach beyond the normative/descriptive dichotomy, we must occupy an ability to move between and among various intersectional identities – or as Ogunnaike argues – it is an imperative to acquire multilingualism of various intellectual traditions (Ogunnaike 2022; Ogunnaike 2017).

### Conclusion

It is more important *how* we study Islam than *who* teaches Islam, and to what extent programs and course offerings intend to provide a comprehensive historical account of both classical and modern expressions of Islamic thought and practice. One then must ask how scholars' various roles as scholars contour those studies, and in what ways Islamic studies offers a contribution to humanities (Morgenstein & Ayubi 2016, 641).

If there is no pure or raw Islam somewhere in the past that has been contaminated by cultural and political norms of modern (liberal) interpretations, then, there is equally no pure objective scholarship of Islam outside of culture, politics, and production of knowledge that is carried out by (the Study of Religion) scholars of Islam in Western academy. This has been asserted by thinkers from the post-Orientalist critique of Islamic studies, and, in addition to Edward Said, include Talal Asad, Wael Hallaq, Saba Mahmood, Sean McLoughlin, and numerous other scholars (Said 1979; Asad 2009; Hallaq 2018; Asad, Butler, Mahmood 2013; McLoughlin 2007). Understandably, academic scholarship must move beyond identity politics, in order to un-

derstand historical processes and modern expressions of any religious tradition, but the key issue in contemporary Islamic studies seems to be the very politics of the production of knowledge of and about Islam.

For Walter Mignolo, modernity's history is linear and singular, in that it provides a single line of narrative (Mignolo 2007, 456; Mignolo 2011), which is diametrically opposite to Islam's polyvalent epistemic cultures that nurtured an array of methods and paths to truth (Bauer 2011; Ahmed 2015). When orientalism developed it was commanded by the political and economic structures of the nation states. Orientalism as cultural tradition of modernity is based on theory of progress and linear history (Hallaq 2018; Mignolo 2007, 472; Hunfeld 2022). Its rational tradition of inquiry encapsulates an Euro-American paradigm and has two centuries of existence. Writing about Islam as a modern trend that arose during colonialism is necessarily political. Rethinking theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies to study Islam is therefore similarly necessarily political. Since power relation is very important in this debate, to have an informed discourse about Muslim thought and practice in the twenty-first century, the best post-colonial approach would be to delve into languages, cultures, and texts of both classical and modern Islam through its multiple and polyvalent expressions that challenge the prevalent understanding of what constitutes rational, objective study of the other. Since representation is shaped by predeterminations of power, scholars in Islamic studies are in a need of new categories of knowledge so that they can include varied pedagogies beyond the methodological determinants from the Study of Religion.

There is a lack of theoretical clarity in how Islamic studies fits (or not) in existing Religious studies programs. One way of remedying this is to continue introducing students (and faculty) to an array of methods and epistemologies, as well as training in interdisciplinary Islamic studies – including epistemologies, approaches to, and cosmologies of Islamic ethics, philosophy, intellectual history, jurisprudence, mysticism, and literature – the vast majority of which seem to be chronically absent. Incorporating non-European and non-Western traditions indicates that sources of knowledge are, first, different (not less rational) from those found in Western academy, and second, multiple. Our task as scholars in Islamic studies is to actively try to introduce these sources of knowledge production to students if preserving a well-rounded and critical engagement with the academic field is a prerogative.

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