Dynamics of Islamic and Islamism discourse: A critical analysis of Teti and Mura's thoughts

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Abstract:

This study critically interrogates the ideological construction underlying the distinction between "Islam" as a private spirituality and "Islamism" as a political threat within contemporary European discourse. By analyzing Chapter 7 of The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies, authored by Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura, the article explores how these categories are shaped by colonial legacies, power relations, and the normative framework of European secularism. Employing a qualitative method grounded in critical discourse analysis and Foucauldian genealogy, this research demonstrates that the Islam/Islamism binary functions as a hegemonic tool that disciplines Muslim political expression while reaffirming the epistemic supremacy of liberal modernity. Findings reveal that the depiction of Islamism as "radical" and inherently antagonistic is not an objective reflection of Muslim political realities, but rather a product of discursive practices that marginalize Muslim agency and render their political subjectivities illegible within the liberal-secular order. Furthermore, the study highlights the urgency of adopting emancipatory and decolonial perspectives that foreground the voices and experiences of Muslim communities themselves. Such approaches challenge Western monopolies on meaning and open epistemic spaces for alternative narratives. The study concludes that dominant Western discourses on Islam must be deconstructed through the development of critical, context-sensitive epistemologies that restore agency to Muslim political subjects. This research contributes to postcolonial studies, critical secularism theory, and contemporary Islamic political thought by offering a robust analytical framework to rethink the intersection of religion, politics, and power in a postcolonial age.

Keywords: Colonial legacy; Critical discourse analysis; Decoloniality; Epistemic agency; European secularism

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary debates around Islam and politics, the term "Islamism" has become one of the most frequently used but also most misunderstood analytical categories. Often used in academic and political discourse, this term implies the existence of a form of ideology or political movement that uses Islam as its normative basis (Rojaya & Rahman, 2025). However, the use of this term is not free from complex epistemological and ideological problems. In the seventh chapter of Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura's work, entitled "Islam and Islamism", they do not merely interpret Islamism as a political phenomenon, but also critically examine the structure of knowledge and power relations that shape the way the West understands and constructs the category. This chapter is part of the book *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*, and makes important contributions to understanding how power relations, identity construction, and knowledge politics shape the way Islam and Islamism are understood and represented in the Western world (Bigo et al., 2021).

Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura start from the premise that Islam and Islamism are not entities that can be understood neutrally or objectively in the European social science tradition. Both highlight how the construction of meaning towards Islam is often framed by colonial, orientalist, and modernist logics that have been inherent in Western epistemology since the colonial era. In this approach, "Islam" is often positioned as "the Other", a homogeneous and monolithic entity associated with backwardness, violence, and resistance to modernity. Meanwhile, "Islamism" is positioned as a political manifestation of this resistance, often framed as a threat to the liberal-democratic values upheld by Western society (Teti & Mura, 2008a).

This chapter offers a critique of the oversimplified approach to the phenomenon of Islamism by only viewing it as a fundamental reaction to modernity or globalization. Teti and Mura show that the dichotomy between "moderate Islam" and "radical Islam" often used by policymakers and the mass media is not neutral, but rather reflects a normative logic rooted in the hegemonic project of global liberalism. This approach indirectly reinforces the logic of exclusion against forms of Muslim political expression that do not fit into the framework of Western liberalism (Teti & Mura, 2007). In other words, what is considered "moderate" is not merely the result of the internal characteristics of Islam itself, but rather the result of external assessments that base legitimacy on conformity to Western values.

Furthermore, Teti and Mura emphasize the importance of a genealogical approach in reading Islamism. Genealogy here is interpreted as an effort to uncover the origins, power relations, and historical contingencies that shape our understanding of a concept. By borrowing a Foucauldian approach, they see that the label "Islamism" was not born from a vacuum, but from a long history of colonial interactions, international security politics, and the production of academic discourse that tends to be Euro-centric (Tibi, 2024). With this approach, both invite readers not to get caught up in the essentialist dichotomy between Islam as a spiritual religion and Islamism as a political project, because such a separation ignores the social and historical complexities that underlie the emergence of various Muslim political expressions.

One of the important contributions of this chapter is its rejection of the use of the category of Islamism as a fixed and universal categorization tool. Teti and Mura warn that the use of this category often ignores the local and historical contexts of the movements labeled as Islamist. For example, there is no single form of Islamism that can represent groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, or the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey. Each of these groups has very different ideological dynamics, political strategies, and relations with the state (Islam et al., 2021). Therefore, they emphasize the need for a contextual and historical approach to understanding political expressions based on Islam.

This chapter also explores the epistemological dimension of the study of Islam and Islamism, demonstrating that our understanding of Islam cannot be separated from the epistemic tools employed. Teti and Mura explicitly criticize positivistic approaches that claim to be objective, but in fact hide certain ideological biases. They emphasize that our understanding of Islam and Islamism is not neutral, but is tied to certain social, political, and academic positions (Teti & Mura, 2016). In this context, they propose a post-structuralist and critical approach that not only questions the content of our understanding of Islamism, but also questions how that understanding itself is produced.

Seba As a consequence, a critical analysis of Islam and Islamism must go beyond mere discussions of ideology, political strategy, or religious doctrine. It must question the epistemic and institutional structures that allow the emergence of discourse on Islamism as an object of knowledge and an object of surveillance (Teti & Mura, 2007). This reminds us of Edward Said's thesis in Orientalism, where the production of knowledge about the East cannot be separated from the colonial power that produces and regulates that knowledge (Said, 2023).

Teti and Mura's approach also provides important implications for our reading of contemporary phenomena such as radicalism, terrorism, or Muslim integration policies in Europe. They remind us that the use of terms such as "radical Islam" or "political Islam" is often employed to manage and control certain political expressions, while overlooking the structural conditions, including colonialism, social exclusion, and global inequality, that underlie these phenomena (Teti & Mura, 2007). In this regard, this chapter challenges readers not to simply reproduce the dominant discourse but to critically reflect on our own framework of understanding. The choice to make Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura's chapter, "Islam and Islamism," the object of study in this article is based on their analytical strength in combining postcolonial approaches and Foucauldian genealogy in a sharp and systematic manner (Teti, 2014). Both of them not only dismantle how Western discourse frames Islam and Islamism ideologically, but also offer an alternative perspective that opens up space for the articulation of Muslim politics from within.

The title "Critical Analysis of Islam and Islamism" was chosen to emphasize the position of this article as an effort to explore, criticize, and expand the discourse offered by Teti and Mura. This article not only reproduces their ideas but also builds a critical position to challenge epistemic dominance in the study of Islam in Europe, while also showing the urgency of a reflective reading of the power relations that underlie the dichotomy between Islam and Islamism.

Although Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura's work in the chapter "Islam and Islamism" has made an important contribution in criticizing the construction of Western discourse on Islam and Islamism, there are not many studies that specifically analyze and further develop their genealogical-Foucauldian approach and postcolonial discourse in the context of contemporary critical epistemology. This article aims to fill this gap by not only reviewing the contents of Teti and Mura's writings but also providing a broader critical analysis of the relationship between Islam, Islamism, and Western discursive power.

Thus, the novelty of this article lies in the author's development of an analytical approach that combines postcolonial theory and Foucauldian genealogy to unpack the historical power relations that shape the understanding of "Islam" and "Islamism" in European studies. This approach not only extends Teti and Mura's contributions but also offers an alternative epistemology that is based on the narratives of Muslim communities themselves.

First, this article highlights that the distinction between Islam as a spiritual entity and Islamism as a political manifestation is not only problematic but also part of a hegemonic strategy to regulate Muslim political participation in the European public sphere. This approach goes beyond conventional analyses that tend to view Islamism as merely an ideological response to modernity, by showing that categories such as "moderate Islam" and "radical Islam" are actually products of a liberal normative logic that marginalizes non-Western political expressions (Chan, 2023).

Second, this article explicitly links the production of knowledge about Islam to the colonial legacy and practices of exclusionary secularism in Europe. In doing so, this article shifts the focus of analysis from Islamism as an object of security policy to Islamism as a field of epistemic contestation. *Third*, this article proposes the need for an alternative epistemology rooted in the experiences and narratives of the Muslim community itself, as a deconstructive effort against the dominance of Western discourse. This is what makes this article relevant within the framework of contemporary critical and decolonial Islamic studies (Al Mata'ni, 2022).

The study of the concept of Islam and Islamism has developed into a field of discourse dense with epistemological, ideological, and political interests. Since the emergence of colonial and orientalist studies, Islam has often been positioned not as an autonomous value system, but as an object of Western knowledge and supervision. In this context, *Islamism* emerged as one of the most debated concepts, especially after the events of September 11, 2001 which strengthened the depiction of Islam in the framework of security and terrorism (Mustafa et al., 2021). Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura, in the chapter "Islam and Islamism" from *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*, seeks to uncover the ideological roots and epistemic genealogy behind the construction of the dominant concepts of Islam and Islamism in the contemporary European tradition of thought (Teti & Mura, 2007).

Edward Said's works are an important foundation for critical reading of discourse on Islam. In *Orientalism*, Said describes how the East was constructed as "the Other" within the framework of European colonial knowledge and power, which was then inherited into various modern disciplines, including Islamic and Middle Eastern studies. According to Said, representations of the East are never neutral, but always reflect power relations (Said, 2014). Teti and Mura place their analysis in this vein, emphasizing that the dichotomy between Islam and Islamism is a continuation of the logic of colonial representation, in which "moderate Islam" is validated

and "radical Islam" is rejected, not solely on the basis of internal characteristics, but through normative judgments from outside (Teti & Mura, 2016).

In the development of post-Said discourse, postcolonial studies have become fertile ground for rereading Islam and Islamism (Raymond, 2023). Saba Mahmood, for example, in *Politics of Piety*, shows how the Islamic movement of women in Egypt cannot be understood simply as a form of subordination to patriarchal tradition, but as a form of religious agency that challenges liberal assumptions about freedom (Lemons, 2022). This approach is very relevant to the arguments of Teti and Mura, who reject the categorization of Islamism in terms of binary oppositions between modernity and traditionalism, or between liberalism and fundamentalism. Both emphasize that Muslim political expression cannot be interpreted monolithically, because it always arises in diverse social and historical contexts (Teti & Mura, 2007).

In international relations studies, Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel are two important figures in understanding postmodern Islamism. Roy, through his work, *"The Failure of Political Islam,"* argues that the Islamist project has failed because it has been unable to adapt to contemporary political realities. He sees Islamism as a form of religious ideologization that attempts to politicize the public space, but loses its sociological basis (Roy, 1995). On the other hand, Kepel in *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, tracing the transformation of Islamism from a political movement to a violent action, and placing it in close relation to global geopolitics (Kepel, 2002). Although Roy and Kepel's analysis is important, Teti and Mura criticize both of them for continuing to work within a framework that normalizes liberal modernity as the standard of judgment (Teti & Mura, 2007). In other words, they call for moving beyond the functionalist framework that sees Islamism as merely a reaction to the failure of modernization.

Critical studies of Islamism have also developed in a discursive and deconstructive perspective. In this approach, Islamism is not viewed as a fixed entity, but rather as the outcome of a discourse construction produced through power relations in the global realm. According to Roxanne Euben in *Enemy in the Mirror*, Islamic political thought must be seen as a form of ethical reflection on modernity, not merely as resistance to it (Zaman & Euben, 2021). This is in line with Teti and Mura's argument that rejects the essentialist categorization of Islamism, and instead emphasizes that Islamism can be a way to express alternatives to the exclusive and neoliberal global order (Teti & Mura, 2007).

The genealogical approach employed by Teti and Mura, inspired by Michel Foucault, is a crucial tool in this study. Genealogy enables us to trace the production, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge about Islam and Islamism for specific political purposes. In this perspective, the term "Islamism" is not just an analytical label, but also a hegemonic tool to regulate the boundaries of Muslim political participation in the global context (Makhrus, 2016). This approach also resonates with Talal Asad's thinking, which emphasizes that religion cannot be understood without looking at the discursive and political practices that surround it. In *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad shows that the definition of "religion" that applies in the West is the result of a long history of power relations, not the result of universal consensus (Asad, 1993).

Comparing these approaches, it appears that Teti and Mura's analysis offers a unique critical position. They do not reject the importance of political studies of Islam, but they reject the categories that are used carelessly and unreflectively. Their critique does not stop at the content of discourses on Islam, but also at the epistemology that underlies them. In this, they join a tradition of critical studies that seek to deconstruct the basic assumptions of Western social science, while offering a more contextual, historical, and non-Euro-centric reading.

Thus, this literature review shows that understanding Islam and Islamism requires a multidisciplinary approach that includes epistemic genealogy, discursive criticism, and historical understanding. Teti and Mura's approach in "Islam and Islamism" makes an important contribution in this area, because it not only dissects the internal dynamics of Islamism, but also reveals how the Western world frames Islam in the context of global politics (Tibi, 2024). In the post-colonial and post-global crisis era, this kind of reading becomes increasingly urgent to formulate a more equal and dialogical relationship between Islam and the modern world.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach that emphasizes reflective reading of texts and discourse production. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for examining the construction of meaning, power relations, and ideologies that underlie narratives about Islam and Islamism in contemporary Western studies. As stated by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, a qualitative approach allows researchers to enter the realm of subjective meaning and historical context behind certain texts and social practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

This type of research falls into the category of critical discourse analysis (*critical discourse analysis*), which aims to uncover how language is used to maintain or challenge power structures—particularly in the production of knowledge about Islam. This approach is interpretive and reflective, focusing on narrative and rhetorical structures in academic texts to explore the epistemological and ideological assumptions hidden behind the construction of meaning about Islam and Islamism (Van Dijk, 2011).

In this context, Teti and Mura's approach reflects an ideological orientation that favors anti-hegemonic reading, which rejects the essentialization and dominance of Western discourse on the identity and political expression of Muslims. Both not only offer a critique of the way the West understands Islamism, but also firmly refuse to legitimize normative dichotomies such as "moderate Islam" versus "radical Islam" that are often used as policy and security frameworks.

For Teti and Mura, such categorization is not an objective reflection of the reality of Muslims, but rather a product of colonial-secular power relations that serve to regulate and discipline forms of political expression that do not conform to liberal standards. Therefore, they propose an alternative approach that opens up space for local epistemologies and political narratives rooted in the experiences of Muslim communities themselves.

The research method used is library research, namely by examining the main text in the form of Chapter 7.*"Islam and Islamism"* works by Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura, and enriches the analysis through a review of supporting literature from postcolonial theory, Foucauldian genealogy, and critical studies of Islamism (Teti & Mura, 2007). The data sources in this study consist of two types: (1) primary data in the form of the main text of Teti and Mura (2020), and (2) secondary data in the form of the works of theorists such as Edward Said, Talal Asad, Roxanne Euben, and Olivier Roy which are used as references in building a conceptual foundation.

The data analysis technique is carried out through the following stages: (a) identification of key concepts and ideological terms in the text, (b) tracing the historical context and discourse that frames the terms, and (c) critical interpretation of the relations of meaning and power contained in the construction of "Islam" and "Islamism." This method allows for readings that are not only descriptive but also deconstructive of the dominant narrative (Foucault, 1972).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Between Islam and Islamism: A problem of discursive construction

The seventh chapter in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*, written by Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura, provides a sharp and in-depth exploration of how the European intellectual and political world constructs the meanings of "Islam" and "Islamism." Using a genealogical and discourse-critical approach, they uncover the power relations that underlie the formation of these categories, which at first glance appear neutral but are actually loaded with ideological interests. In an analytical style reminiscent of the works of Edward Said, this chapter questions the epistemological foundations of Western policies and knowledge about the Islamic world, and highlights how these semantic constructions are used to affirm Western domination over Muslim subjects (Imam et al., 2023).

Teti and Mura begin their analysis by challenging the often-perpetuated sharp distinction between "Islam" as a religion and "Islamism" as a political expression. This distinction, they argue, is not descriptive but normative and full of prejudice. The category of "Islamism" is often associated with extremism, radicalism, and even violence, while "Islam" is positioned as a private, spiritual, and "tame" form of religion (Jacoby, 2023). In this regard, the authors show how this distinction is not a reflection of reality, but rather a discursive construction that plays a significant role in framing Muslim political participation as something suspicious, if not dangerous (Teti & Mura, 2007). Knowledge about Islam, in other words, has been colonized by categories formed not from within the Islamic tradition itself, but from outside—by the concerns and interests of modern Europe.

This point echoes criticism *Orientalism* (1978) in *Orientalism*, where the depiction of the East by the West is not an objective reflection, but rather the result of a power-knowledge project that justifies colonial domination. In a similar logic, Teti and Mura consider that the separation between "Islam" and "Islamism" is a way for European modernity to maintain the purity of the concept of "secular politics" by eliminating political forms rooted in Islamic values. Secularism, in this narrative, is not a neutral condition in which religion is separated from the state, but is a hegemonic project that imposes boundaries on religious expression. Christianity, in practice, still has space in the cultural and symbolic expressions of European society, while Islam is positioned as the "other" — an alterity that must be subdued or forcibly adapted to liberal norms (Teti & Mura, 2008a).

One of the most significant contributions of this analysis is the sharp focus on how European secularism is selective and exclusive. In many cases, secularism is not merely a principle of state governance, but has evolved

into a political tool for defining which forms of religious expression are legitimate and which are not (Müller, 2022). Then we can see how public regulations in Western European countries consistently target Islamic symbols such as the hijab, the construction of mosques, or the Islamic religious education curriculum in schools (Kramer, 2021). Ironically, Christian religious expressions continue to have a place and are even preserved as cultural heritage, indicating a clear institutional bias. In this framework, secularism is essentially an ideologically driven civilizational project aimed at ensuring that Islam never holds an equal position in the European public sphere (Thames & Scolaro, 2022).

Furthermore, Teti and Mura identify how Islam is consistently objectified in European academic and policy discourses. Islam, especially when linked to politics, is treated as an entity to be explained, controlled, and even "cured"—as if its existence were always a problem. In this discourse, terms such as "radicalization," "fundamentalism," and "inability to integrate" become rhetorical devices that disguise colonial power structures that are still alive in new forms (Teti & Mura, 2016). The study of Islam rarely begins with questions that arise from within Muslim communities themselves. Instead, it is often driven by Western concerns about the security, stability, and compatibility of Islamic values with liberal democracy. This is where the epistemological imbalance is at work: the Muslim subject is constantly positioned as the "researched," while the West holds the reins as the "knower" (R'boul, 2022).

In this context, Teti and Mura's critique of binary logic becomes particularly relevant. They reject the dichotomy between "moderate Islam" and "radical Islam" as an analytical framework that is not only simplistic but also politically problematic. This dichotomy, while seemingly reasonable in policy terms, actually serves as a tool to define which Islam is acceptable and which should be marginalized (Teti, 2014). As Talal Asad argues in *Formations of the Secular* (2003), secularism has never been neutral — it has always structured and regulated religious expression according to certain standards derived from European history and ideology itself. When Muslims voice their political aspirations through religious idioms, they are immediately labeled as a threat to the secular order, whereas similar expressions from other religions are not treated the same way (Asad, 2003).

In response to the dominance of this discourse, Teti and Mura offer a critical and emancipatory approach that emphasizes the importance of listening to the internal voices of Muslim communities. This approach avoids one-sided categorization and prioritizes dialogue between epistemologies, especially those derived from the experience and history of the Islamic world itself (Teti & Mura, 2008a). In this regard, a decolonial approach becomes very relevant. Although Teti and Mura do not explicitly mention names such as Walter Mignolo or Aníbal Quijano, the spirit of their thinking is in line with the idea of "epistemologies from the South" - an attempt to build knowledge that is not dictated by centers of power in the Global North. Knowledge about Islam must be returned to the owners of the experience itself, not monopolized by epistemic institutions that have historically been involved in the colonization of the Islamic world (Whyte, 2024).

This chapter makes an important contribution to the critical study of Islam and global politics. It broadens the horizon of understanding how Western discourses work not only in shaping foreign policy, but also in creating categories of knowledge that limit Muslim agency. In an era where narratives of security, integration, and terrorism dominate Western relations with the Muslim world, Teti and Mura's approach opens up space for a radical rethinking of the epistemological frameworks that have long been taken for granted (Teti & Mura, 2008a). They not only critique policies and discourses, but also invite us to reflect on our position in the production of knowledge: are we continuing a colonial legacy, or are we building new bridges for a more just understanding?

However, there is one important note that needs to be raised: although the discursive critique constructed by Teti and Mura is theoretically strong, they have not provided sufficient space to explore concrete examples of contemporary Islamist movements that articulate progressive and emancipatory political visions. In fact, in recent decades, various initiatives have emerged from Muslim groups - both within the Islamic world and in the diaspora - that try to combine Islamic values with democratic, inclusive, and non-violent political practices (Clement, 2022). Movements such as Ennahda in Tunisia, the AKP in early Turkey, and progressive Muslim communities in Europe can all be used as case studies that enrich this analysis. Without including this empirical dimension, the critique of the category of "Islamism" can get caught up in abstraction (Sasmaz, 2021).

Nevertheless, *Islam and Islamism* Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura's work remains a very important contribution to the critical discourse on Islam in the West. They have succeeded in revealing how seemingly scientific categories of discourse are actually shaped by power and used to perpetuate global inequality. They not only challenge dominant readings, but also open the way to alternative epistemologies that are more participatory, reflective, and just (Teti & Mura, 2007). In an increasingly interconnected world and in an increasingly complex

geopolitical situation, such an approach is increasingly urgent (Dalby, 2020). Not only for the sake of epistemic justice, but also for the sake of a more ethical and humane future of global coexistence.

In closing, in the study of Islam — as in the study of all 'others' — the most important question is not "what is Islam?" but "who has the right to define Islam, in what context, and for whose benefit?" This question is not merely academic. It is a political question that determines the fate of millions of Muslims around the world, both in Muslim-majority countries and in the European diaspora. Answering it requires thinking beyond binary thinking, beyond prejudice, and beyond the epistemology that has long been controlled by those who feel they have the power to understand the world.

Critical analysis of "Islam and Islamism" by Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura

In a contemporary study of the relationship between Islam and secularism in Europe, chapter seven of the book *"The Arab Uprisings in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia"* offers Andrea Teti's work a critical approach of great importance. Through a sharp reading of dominant European discourses on Islam, the two authors not only question the boundaries between "Islam" and "Islamism" but also dismantle the ideological constructions that accompany them. Teti offers a postcolonial critique that targets the epistemic power relations that have shaped the way Europe talks and thinks about Islam. This study becomes especially relevant in the context of rising Islamophobia, right-wing populism, and the normalization of discrimination against Muslims in the name of secularism and freedom (Teti et al., 2017).

Teti and Mura begin their argument by challenging the conceptual dichotomy between "Islam" and "Islamism"—a dichotomy that appears analytical but is fraught with ideological interests. Within a postcolonial discursive framework, they show that this division is not only arbitrary, but also serves certain geopolitical interests. "Islam" is understood as a form of religiosity that is private, benign, and acceptable within the boundaries of Western secularism, while "Islamism" is interpreted as a radical, anti-democratic political expression that threatens the global order (Teti & Mura, 2007). In this regard, they follow in the footsteps of (Said's, 1978), who in his work *Orientalism* (1978) emphasized that the West's representation of the East was never neutral, but rather a projection of the desire for power and colonial domination.

According to Teti and Mura, this Islam/Islamism dichotomy creates a binary framework that does not provide space for complex, historical, and contextual expressions of Islamic politics. In this context, efforts by Muslims to formulate political positions based on Islamic values are often labeled as threats. For example, parties such as the AKP in Turkey or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are often reduced in Western analysis to forms of ambiguous and potentially dangerous Islamism (Teti & Mura, 2016). This view not only fails to capture the internal political dynamics of these countries, but also imposes European secular normative standards on political entities that emerge from different social contexts. Islam, in this framework, is only recognized when it submits to and does not challenge the epistemic and normative hegemony of Western liberalism (Nikjoo et al., 2025).

The critique of this dichotomy leads to a broader reading of secularism as a power project. One of the significant contributions of this chapter is the debunking of the myth of European secularism's neutrality. Teti and Mura show that secularism has never been truly neutral towards religion, especially Islam (Teti & Mura, 2007). European secularism, especially in the form of secularism in France, not only separates religion from the state, but also actively regulates forms of religious expression that are considered "incompatible" with dominant public norms (Bolzonar, 2023). In many cases, such as the ban on the hijab or niqab in public spaces, secularism is used as a justification to limit the religious expression of Muslims. In this case, the state plays the role of an agent that determines the boundaries between "accepted" and "rejected" religions.

In Teti and Mura's reading, European secularism operates as a form of *governmentality* in Michel Foucault's sense—a technique of power that aims to regulate social life through the normalization and control of symbols (Pløger, 2023). The secular state not only regulates religion from the outside, but also shapes religious subjects to conform to constructed public norms (Khalil, 2024). In other words, Muslims are not only required not to express their religion in public spaces, but are also encouraged to internalize secular norms as a new form of piety.

In this context, Talal Asad's thinking becomes very important. Teti and Mura integrate Asad's genealogical approach in understanding the formation of secularism (Teti & Mura, 2008b). In his monumental work *Formations of the Secular* (2003), Asad rejects the understanding that secularism is a product of universal rationality that separates religion and politics for the sake of freedom. Instead, secularism is the result of a particular socio-political history that is heavily influenced by the experience of European Christianity. Asad emphasizes that secularism is a form of power that works through the distinction between public and private space, between the

sacred and the profane, and between the rational and the irrational (Asad, 2003). This distinction, according to him, is not natural or neutral, but rather the result of historical intervention that is laden with ideology.

Using Asad's approach, Teti and Mura demonstrate that secularism in Europe is not a neutral device, but rather an instrument of power that actively defines what constitutes a "legitimate religion" and a "threatening religion." In the European context, Islam is often constructed as a religion that fails to conform to the principles of secularism because of its public expression, visual symbolism, and communal practice. For example, when Muslim women choose to wear the hijab, it is often read not as an expression of personal autonomy, but as a symbol of oppression and bigotry (Teti & Mura, 2016). Thus, the state feels justified in interfering, even under the pretext of defending women's rights.

More than just legal regulation, European secularism creates a regime of representation that defines how Islam can be present in the public sphere. The mass media, state institutions, and even mainstream academic discourse often reproduce the image of Muslims as a homogeneous entity that is backward, misogynistic, and intolerant (Müller et al., 2021). This representation not only creates epistemic distortions but also drives discriminatory public policies. In many cases, Muslim communities are forced to prove their "moderation" in order to be accepted. This creates a form of conditional belonging, where the existence of Muslims is recognised only if they submit to the majority narrative.

However, Teti and Mura do not stop at criticism. They also demonstrate that European Muslims are making efforts to reclaim this space of representation. In recent decades, various initiatives have emerged from Muslim communities to voice their experiences through art, alternative media, activism, and even political engagement (Teti & Mura, 2007). In cities such as London, Berlin, and Paris, young Muslims are forming solidarity networks that not only reject stereotypes but also build a plural and dynamic Islamic identity (Trupia, 2025). Through poetry, hip hop music, documentary films, and digital sermons, they are building counter-narratives that reject the false dichotomy between "moderate Islam" and "radical Islam."

In this context, Walter Mignolo's concept of epistemic disobedience can be employed to interpret the resistance strategies of European Muslims. This resistance is not only political in the traditional sense, but also epistemic—that is, challenging the monopoly of meaning and truth that has been controlled by the West. By building alternative knowledge about Islam from within their own life experiences, European Muslims not only seize discourse, but also dismantle the colonial foundations of the dominant narrative (Mignolo, 2009).

The conclusion of this chapter is an important reflection on the future direction of the relationship between Islam and Europe. Teti and Mura invite readers to rethink secularism not as an absolute requirement of modernity, but as a historical project that needs to be critiqued and negotiated. They do not reject the principles of religious freedom or equality, but demand that these principles be applied consistently and non-discriminatory (Teti & Mura, 2007). Their critique is an invitation to build a truly plural Europe, where Islam does not have to be the "other" that is always monitored and suspected, but can be part of an inclusive and just national narrative.

Thus, this chapter makes an important contribution to the study of secularism, religion and identity politics. More than a critique of discrimination, Teti and Mura's writing is an intellectual call to decolonize the way we understand Islam in Europe. In an increasingly polarized world, such an approach is especially urgent to create a more humane, just and reflective space for dialogue about the history of power that shapes us all (Teti et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

After a long journey, we arrive at the conclusion of this study, which reveals that the conceptual distinction between "Islam" and "Islamism" in contemporary European discourse is not a neutral classification, but rather a discursive construction that is ideological and hegemonic. Through a critical analysis of Andrea Teti and Andrea Mura's chapter "Islam and Islamism", this study reveals that these categories are not only formed in academic spaces but also in the realm of public policy, media, and security politics, all of which operate in postcolonial logic and exclusive secularism. Using Foucault's genealogical approach and Edward Said and Talal Asad's postcolonial framework, this study examines how representations of Islam and Islamism are integral to a normative knowledge project that not only defines but also regulates Muslim political participation in the European public sphere. This study also successfully shows how the narrative of "moderate Islam" vs. "radical Islam" functions as a depoliticization mechanism that limits Muslim political expression to an accepted liberal framework.

The main contribution of this study lies in three aspects. First, this study shifts the analysis of Islamism from normative issues to the field of epistemic contestation, showing how knowledge about Islam is produced,

disciplined, and monopolized. Second, this article presents an alternative, more emancipatory reading that begins with the voices and narratives of the Muslim community itself. Third, this article broadens the horizon of the study of Islam and secularism by bringing it closer to the project of decolonizing knowledge, which allows for the emergence of alternative epistemologies that are more just and participatory. Thus, this study not only provides a critique, but also opens up a conceptual space to re-imagine the relationship between Islam, politics, and modernity beyond the dominant liberal-secular framework.

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