

The Impact of the resurgence of the Palestinian Cause on the Epistemology of Islam and the Reshaping of Islam-Related Policies paradigms in Europe

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Abstract

This article examines how the revival of the Palestinian cause, especially in the wake of the international attention towards the war in Gaza, is generating a significant shift in the epistemological foundations of Islamic studies and in the evolution of Islam-related policies and paradigms in a state-centered laic Europe. The paper analyzes these epistemological transformations through two original concepts: *the Gaza effect* and *the Palestine paradigm*. On one hand, the “*Gaza effect*” refers to a set of discursive and institutional shifts triggered by the 2023–2025 Gaza war, revealing interactions among solidarity mobilizations, political propaganda, and Islamophobic narratives across European societies. These shifts can be observed in public discourse, academic debates, and policy frameworks. It describes the discursive consequences of Gaza-related events on how Islam and Muslims are spoken about and problematized. On the other hand, *the Palestine paradigm*, refers to an emerging epistemic and political lens through which Islam in Europe is increasingly analyzed. It positions Palestine as a symbolic and analytical reference point that reshapes the production of knowledge and the representation of Muslim subjectivities. Thus, the study of Islam in The article is structured in two parts. The first explores the Gaza War and the Reconfiguration of European Knowledge Regimes on Islam explaining how the re-emergence of Palestine as a central issue is contributing to a shift in dominant epistemological and institutional approaches to Islamic Knowledge in Europe. In conclusion, this article asks whether we are witnessing the early contours of a shift toward a more reflexive and decolonized epistemology of Islam in Europe, an epistemology shaped as much by transnational crisis as by academic scholars.

Keywords

Gaza effect; Palestine paradigm; Knowledge regimes; Islamic studies

La résurgence de la cause palestinienne et l'épistémologie de l'islam en Europe : « l'effet Gaza » et la reconfiguration des paradigmes des politiques liées à l'islam

Résumé

Texte du résumé Cet article examine comment la visibilité renouvelée de la cause palestinienne, notamment dans le contexte de la guerre de Gaza (2023–2025), contribue à une transformation des fondements épistémologiques des études islamiques ainsi qu'à l'évolution des paradigmes des politiques liées à l'islam dans les États européens sécularisés. L'analyse s'appuie sur deux concepts analytiques : « l'effet Gaza » et le « paradigme palestinien ».

L'« effet Gaza » désigne un ensemble de transformations discursives et institutionnelles déclenchées par la guerre de Gaza de 2023–2025, révélant l'interaction entre mobilisations de solidarité, stratégies de propagande et dynamiques d'islamophobie au sein des sociétés européennes. Il met en lumière les conséquences discursives des événements liés à Gaza sur la manière dont l'islam et les musulmans sont représentés, discutés et problématisés dans les espaces publics et académiques.

Le « paradigme palestinien », quant à lui, renvoie à une nouvelle grille de lecture épistémique et politique à travers laquelle l'islam en Europe est de plus en plus analysé. Ce paradigme repositionne la Palestine comme un point de référence symbolique et analytique qui contribue à transformer à la fois la production des connaissances et les représentations des subjectivités musulmanes.

L'article explore ainsi comment la guerre de Gaza participe à la reconfiguration des régimes de savoir européens concernant l'islam et examine si ces transformations annoncent les prémices d'une épistémologie plus réflexive et potentiellement décoloniale de l'islam en Europe, façonnée autant par les crises géopolitiques transnationales que par les dynamiques internes du champ académique.

Mot-clés

Effet Gaza ; Paradigme palestinien ; Régimes de savoir ; Études islamiques

عودة القضية الفلسطينية وإبستمولوجيا الإسلام في أوروبا: «تأثير غزة» وإعادة تشكيل نماذج السياسات المرتبطة بالإسلام

المخلص

تبحث هذه المقالة في كيفية مساهمة الظهور المتجدد للقضية الفلسطينية، ولا سيما في سياق حرب غزة (2023-2025)، في إحداث تحولات في الأسس الإبستمولوجية لدراسات الإسلام، وكذلك في تطور نماذج السياسات المرتبطة بالإسلام في الدول الأوروبية ذات الطابع العلماني. وتعتمد الدراسة على مفهومين تحليليين رئيسيين هما «تأثير غزة» و«النموذج الفلسطيني».

يشير «تأثير غزة» إلى مجموعة من التحولات الخطابية والمؤسسية التي أفرزتها حرب غزة بين عامي 2023 و2025، والتي تكشف عن تداخل معقد بين حركات التضامن، واستراتيجيات الدعاية السياسية، وديناميات الإسلاموفوبيا داخل المجتمعات الأوروبية. كما يسلط هذا المفهوم الضوء على الآثار الخطابية للأحداث المرتبطة بغزة في الطريقة التي يُناقش بها الإسلام والمسلمون ويُصوِّرون في الفضاءات العامة والأكاديمية. أما «النموذج الفلسطيني» فيشير إلى إطار معرفي وسياسي ناشئ يُستخدم بشكل متزايد لتحليل الإسلام في أوروبا. ويعيد هذا النموذج تموضع فلسطين كنقطة مرجعية رمزية وتحليلية تسهم في إعادة تشكيل كل من إنتاج المعرفة وتمثيلات الذاتيات المسلمة. وتتناول المقالة كذلك كيفية مساهمة حرب غزة في إعادة تشكيل أنظمة المعرفة الأوروبية المتعلقة بالإسلام، كما تتساءل عما إذا كانت هذه التحولات تمثل بدايات تشكل إبستمولوجيا أكثر انعكاسية وربما ذات طابع تحرري أو ما بعد استعماري لدراسة الإسلام في أوروبا، وهي إبستمولوجيا تتشكل بقدر ما تتأثر بالأزمات الجيوسياسية العابرة للحدود بقدر ما تتأثر بالديناميات الداخلية للحقل الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية

تأثير غزة؛ النموذج الفلسطيني؛ أنظمة المعرفة؛ الدراسات الإسلامية

1. Introduction

In moments of political rupture, long-standing assumptions about truth, knowledge, and legitimacy are often brought into question. Epistemology, from the Greek *epistēmē* which means knowledge and *logos* that refers to study or reason, seems just a fancy word for “the study of knowledge” reflecting on its nature, origins and limits. It reflects on questions like, How do we know what we know? What counts as true or reliable Knowledge and who/what gets to decide what knowledge is valid? Put simply, epistemology is about understanding how knowledge is produced, who produces it, and why certain truths are accepted while others are dismissed.

Islamic Studies as an academic discipline in Europe has its origins in Orientalism and religious studies traditions. Chairs of Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Syriac were established in European universities in the early 14th century, but the institutionalization of “Islamic Studies” as a discipline was conditioned by colonial logics, selective translation, and disciplinary boundaries that favored Western perspectives. The enduring human impulse to seek truth plays a significant role in shaping Islamic knowledge production in Europe, especially as Muslim scholars and communities increasingly participate in debates that were once dominated by non-Muslim Western perspectives. This shift signals a growing challenge to long-standing Eurocentric epistemologies, opening space for new voices and narratives to influence how Islam is studied and understood.

Traditionally, many philosophers have defined knowledge as “justified true belief”, a formulation asserting that for a belief to qualify as knowledge, it must not only be believed and true, but also supported by adequate justification. Plato famously articulated this view, while later thinkers like René Descartes emphasized reason as central to the pursuit of certainty, *cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), and Kant highlighted the mind's active role in shaping experience, stating, “Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.” For centuries, these ideas underpinned much of Western epistemological thought. These foundational ideas set the stage for dominant frameworks that have shaped not only philosophy but also the criteria for “valid” knowledge in academic disciplines, including Islamic Studies.

However, in the 20th century, Edmund Gettier (1963) disrupted this seemingly stable definition. Through a series of thought experiments, he demonstrated how one might hold a belief that is both true and justified, yet intuitively fails to qualify as genuine knowledge, often because the justification turns out to be accidentally correct. These challenges exposed vulnerabilities in the classical model, prompting deeper reflection on how knowledge claims are validated.

In the European context, epistemological concerns, especially the ones related to the study of Islam, tend to take on a distinctly political dimension and has long been shaped by specific regimes of knowledge often tied to colonial legacies,

lobbying, security concern, post-migratory trends and states interests. These paradigms have defined not only what is studied, but how, by whom and for what purpose. In the past couple of years, the rebirth of the Palestinian cause, a politically charged and symbolically significant issue for many Muslim communities, has begun to reshape this paradigm by exposing the political undercurrents of academic discourse and amplified interests towards questions about whose knowledge counts, which narratives dominate and which truths are allowed to circulate, and whether we are witnessing a Gettier problem justification. Thus, the study of Islam in Europe is not only an academic endeavor but also a politically charged field where knowledge and power intersect. Here, the Gettier problem is invoked metaphorically to illustrate that dominant knowledge claims about Islam, though justified within academic frameworks, may be influenced by political and structural biases.

In this light, the situation reflects a broader epistemological dilemma, comparable to the Gettier problem (Sturgeon, 1993), in which claims to knowledge may appear justified and widely accepted, yet are underpinned by political motivations or structural biases. This generates increasing discomfort with the systems that confer legitimacy on knowledge and prompts a critical re-evaluation of the very foundations upon which academic truth is established.

Throughout much of European history, there has existed a dual framework in the study of Islam: Islam is seen as a continuation of the Abrahamic tradition, while Western scholarship has often positioned itself in contrast, defining itself as fundamentally “not Muslim.” Under this paradigm, knowledge about Islam produced by non-Muslim Western scholars frequently emphasized incompatibility between Islam and Western values, portraying Muslims not only as the “other,” but in extreme cases as a threatening or monstrous “other.” This framing shaped both popular perceptions and academic discourses, reinforcing epistemic boundaries that marginalized Muslim voices and perspectives.

These discursive dynamics have roots in broader European anxieties about religion, arising from centuries of religious conflict. For a long period, non-Muslim Western scholars held exclusive control over translation, commentary, and academic interpretation. They selected what Islamic texts or authors would be translated, which philosophical ideas were preserved, and how these traditions were framed, often omitting or altering Muslim contributions.

Historical sources suggest that during the medieval period, scholars in Europe freely engaged with Muslim philosophers and scientists. Over time, however, references to these intellectual figures diminished, names were altered, and theories rebranded to exclude their origins. This shift reflects how Islamic knowledge was gradually marginalized in European academic memory, even as it once constituted a respected and integrated element of scholarly practice. This erasure from academic memory illustrates how knowledge production can be actively reshaped to serve political and cultural agendas, rather than purely objective scholarship.

Recent growth in funding and new university positions in countries such as France, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom has contributed to a renewed interest in Islamic Studies. However, this resurgence must be understood alongside the geopolitical conflicts, such as the Gaza war, which influence what questions are posed, which sources are valued, and which voices are heard. This resurgence occurs amid heightened geopolitical tensions, making the production and validation of knowledge about Islam more contested and politically significant than ever.

It is important to recognize that much of the contemporary European educational framework draws significant inspiration from the Islamic educational system, particularly madrasahs and libraries. Islamic civilization made substantial contributions to Europe, especially through original innovations during the Islamic Golden Age, spanning diverse fields such as the arts, sciences, medicine, agriculture, craftsmanship, architecture, music, law, pottery, and education.

Medieval Islamic institutions, with their systematic and well-organized approach to education, provided a foundational model that greatly influenced the development of European academic institutions. Madrasahs, regarded as premier centers of learning during the classical Islamic period, offered comprehensive education and produced distinguished scholars and researchers across multiple disciplines (Al-Hasani, 2019).

The distinctive characteristics of madrasahs, ranging from their administrative structures and architectural design to their academic curricula, teaching methodologies, and diploma-granting processes, highlight their sophistication and universality of learning (Makdisi, 1989). Many academic concepts and terminologies used in modern universities trace their origins to this medieval Islamic educational tradition, which began to take shape in the 9th century (Montgomery, 1972). The legacy of Islamic institutions, prominent across regions such as Iraq, Iran, Damascus, Morocco, Egypt, and Islamic Spain (Hashemi Doolabi & Behroozy, 2021), has had a profound and enduring impact on Western education and academic culture.

Acknowledging this foundational influence challenges narratives that position Islamic knowledge and Islamic Studies as “foreign” or “other” and invites a reevaluation of how European knowledge traditions have developed.

In fact, when exploring the Impact of the Rebirth of the Palestinian Cause on the Epistemology of Islam and the Reshaping of Islam-Related Policy Paradigms in Europe, the reference to Gettier serves both a symbolic and critical function. In this regard, the Gettier problem is metaphorically used to question the justifications behind dominant “knowledge” about Islam in Europe. Such knowledge frameworks, long treated as settled, are increasingly being destabilized by shifting geopolitical realities and the re-emergence counter-narratives.

This subject calls on considering the various processes of reasoning and the multiple routes to knowledge including introspection, perception, memory, testimony and intuition. But also builds on scepticism, which suggests that we can never know the reality behind appearances, values and intellectual virtues, while

focusing on the social dimensions of epistemology of Islam related issues in Europe, and the interconnections between the moral theory and the epistemic constraints. These interconnections produce what might now be described, in light of the Gaza war, as a contested field of collective knowledge or, depending on one's epistemic standpoint (from a pro-Palestinian or a pro-Israeli point of view), a moment marked by the strategic suspension of belief. These dynamics emphasize how collective knowledge about Islam in Europe is shaped by competing moral and epistemic frameworks, deeply influenced by current political crises.

By the “rebirth of the Palestinian cause,” this paper refers to the renewed global attention generated by the 2023–2025 Gaza war, which brought the Palestinians back into mainstream political discourse, particularly across European public spheres. This resurgence has illuminated emerging gaps in dominant Western epistemologies, opposing those who claim neutrality to those reproducing selective or biased narratives. This moment is epistemologically significant because it challenges long-standing frameworks that have governed how Islam and Muslims are understood, framed, and judged within European contexts. This renewed visibility exposes the limitations of dominant epistemologies and calls for more inclusive and critical approaches to knowledge production.

These epistemological shifts are tightly linked to policy frameworks. Knowledge regimes about Islam have historically influenced state strategies in areas such as counter-terrorism, immigration, citizenship, and foreign policy, making the intersection of academic knowledge and policy a key site of contestation. As narratives surrounding Palestine shift and gain renewed traction, the assumptions underlying these policies are increasingly called into question. This intersection of geopolitical developments and epistemic re-evaluation reveals how deeply entangled academic knowledge, public discourse, and policymaking truly are, and signals a moment in which long-established policy paradigms may themselves be transformed. Understanding this interplay between knowledge and policy is essential to grasp how academic debates translate into real-world impacts for Muslim communities in Europe.

To sum up, this paper argues that the renewed visibility of the Palestinian cause acts as a catalyst for rethinking how knowledge about Islam is constructed, politicized, and instrumentalized within European academic and policy-making frameworks.

2. Epistemic Disruption and Competing Narratives: The Gaza War and the Reconfiguration of European Knowledge Regimes on Islam

This section examines how the renewed visibility of the Palestinian cause, particularly during the Gaza war, has unsettled dominant regimes of Islamic knowledge production in Europe. These regimes, historically shaped by colonial epistemologies and postcolonial power structures, have often defined Islam

through security lenses. Such frameworks tend to marginalize or delegitimize Muslim voices and political narratives, by casting them as an extremist production, irrational, or incompatible with European liberal values.

2.1. Knowledge Regimes and the Gaza Effect

For the purposes of this paper, we define a knowledge regime as comprising three interrelated components: (1) institutions, including universities, research centers, and funding agencies that structure knowledge production; (2) discursive norms, the rules and conventions governing what can be said, which perspectives are legitimate, and how knowledge claims are justified; and (3) material practices, the concrete mechanisms and routines through which knowledge is produced, disseminated, and enforced, such as conferences, curricula, peer review, and policy implementation. These three dimensions collectively constitute the regime of truth, shaping both the content and authority of knowledge about Islam in Europe.

Philosophers like Michel Foucault have described knowledge as deeply entwined with power, illustrating how epistemic regimes govern what can be said, by whom, and with what authority. This insight is vital to understanding how academic and public discourses on Islam in Europe operate within established “regimes of truth” that exclude certain perspectives.

As introduced earlier through the metaphor of the Gettier problem, many knowledge claims about Islam in Europe, though appearing justified and widely accepted, may rest on flawed or politically motivated foundations. The Gaza war has laid bare this gap between justification and legitimacy, exposing the contingent and often exclusionary logics underpinning dominant epistemic frameworks.

The Gaza war acts as a catalyst, producing what we term the “*Gaza effect*”: observable shifts in public discourse, media framing, and academic attention towards Islam in Europe. For instance, intellectuals and public figures previously aligned with Islamophobic rhetoric have occasionally expressed sympathy for Gazan civilians, indicating discursive and institutional reconfigurations rather than uniform change. This shift suggests that the collective knowledge about Islam is not static but subject to contestation and reconfiguration in response to geopolitical crises.

This dynamic can also be seen in academic spaces where research on Islam from a Palestinian standpoint has faced pressures, censorship, or delegitimization depending on the prevailing political climate. Scholars such as Mahmood (2005), Asad (1993), and Harding (1994) emphasize that Islam must be studied as socially and politically embedded, not abstracted from historical or ethical contexts. Their insights illuminate how the Gaza war unsettles European epistemic frameworks by highlighting marginalized voices and contesting dominant knowledge claims. Saba also Criticized how secular-liberal epistemologies misread religious life. The renewed attention to Palestine disrupts Eurocentric epistemic frameworks and invites a more pluralistic and critical approach to Islamic knowledge production.

While the Palestinian cause is itself a political and humanitarian issue, its renewed prominence forms the core of the “*Palestine paradigm*”, an epistemic lens through which Islam in Europe is analyzed. This paradigm affects curricula, research priorities, funding, and public discourse, revealing how knowledge about Islam is selectively legitimized or marginalized. The way public and academic discourses frame Palestinian solidarity often mirrors deeper epistemic assumptions embedded in European Islamic Studies, particularly those that have historically separated Islam from political agency or framed it primarily through securitized or civilizational lenses.

A parallel can be drawn from Saba Mahmood’s (2005) reflections in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. In this work, Mahmood analyzes Western liberal and feminist assumptions about agency, autonomy, and religious subjectivity. Through her ethnographic study of the women’s mosque movement in Egypt, she demonstrates that Islamic practices cannot be adequately understood through secular epistemic frameworks that isolate religion from public life or treat piety as inherently regressive. Although her fieldwork focuses on Egypt, Mahmood’s theoretical interventions are highly relevant to contemporary epistemological critiques of how Islam is framed within European academia and public discourse. In the context of the Gaza war, her insights help illuminate how growing public sympathy toward the Palestinian cause has unsettled dominant interpretive frameworks, which have long positioned Islamic political expression as a threat or an irrational force. Much like the Egyptian women in Mahmood’s study, Muslim expressions of solidarity and grief in response to the war are often flattened or misread when interpreted through epistemologies that fail to grasp their ethical, communal, and political embeddedness. Mahmood’s work thus offers a lens through which to understand the broader reconfiguration of Islamic knowledge in Europe, as the Gaza crisis compels a reconsideration of who speaks, from where, and under what conditions knowledge about Islam is produced and legitimized.

Similarly, Talal Asad in his work *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Herzfeld, 1994), argues that secular-liberal frameworks derived from Christian and Enlightenment legacies frame Islam as incompatible with modernity, not due to Islamic teachings but due to the epistemic regimes through which it is studied. This insight helps explain why expressions of Palestinian solidarity are often delegitimized in European Islamic Studies.

He writes that Islam must be approached not as a system of beliefs divorced from history, but as a discursive tradition, embedded in specific moral, political, and social practices. These critiques are particularly resonant in the context of the Gaza war, where scholar expressions of solidarity with Palestine, especially by Muslims in Europe, are frequently interpreted through securitized or pathologizing lenses. Such interpretations flatten the moral and political complexities of these responses, reducing them to identity-based sympathies rather than historically grounded ethical positions.

Sandra Harding's (1994) standpoint epistemology further illuminates these dynamics. In her view, stronger objectivity emerges not from abstract neutrality, but from beginning inquiry with the lived experience of marginalized subjects. Applying this to the current context suggests that epistemological claims about Islam in Europe gain in credibility and complexity when they are rooted in the perspectives of those traditionally excluded from shaping public discourse, Muslim communities, scholars, and activists alike. Together, these thinkers invite a re-evaluation of how European knowledge regimes on Islam operate, especially when confronted by crises like the Gaza war that compel a renegotiation of what counts as legitimate knowledge, whose voices are heard, and which narratives are allowed to reshape the epistemic field.

She argues that "objectivity is maximized not by excluding social factors from the production of knowledge" but by initiating inquiry from an "explicit social location", a phrase she uses to describe "the lived experience of those persons who have traditionally been excluded from knowledge production." While her primary reference is to women, the analogy can be extended to the current European context, where pro-Palestinian Islamic knowledge producers, whether scholars, intellectuals, or community voices, find themselves similarly marginalized within dominant epistemic structures.

Amplifying this point, philosophers such as Lorraine Code and Helen Longino have emphasized the importance of examining the social composition of what they call "communities of knowers," referring to those who are granted authority within specific fields of inquiry. These communities, they argue, have historically been strikingly homogeneous, composed predominantly of white Western men.

In *What Can She Know?*, Code (1991) challenges the illusion of neutrality in traditional epistemology by showing how knowledge production reflects the positionality of those who produce it. Similarly, in *The Science as Social Knowledge*, Longino (1990) argues that the criteria used to determine credibility and expertise are not objective but shaped by dominant social norms that reinforce existing political and institutional power. Applying these insights to Islamic knowledge production in Europe reveals important parallels. Discourses about Islam, especially in relation to resistance, political identity, or Palestine, have often been shaped by external authorities or filtered through frameworks that marginalize Muslim voices. In the context of the Gaza war, this tension becomes more pronounced, as Muslim scholars and intellectuals articulating support for Palestine often find their epistemic authority undermined, not because of the content of their claims alone, but because their standpoint unsettles the established norms about who is allowed to define Islam, and under what conditions. The Gaza crisis thus exposes not only a geopolitical rupture but also an epistemological one, revealing how entrenched systems of credibility continue to govern the boundaries of acceptable knowledge.

For instance, within European Islamic Studies departments and research centers, scholars who express solidarity with Palestine have increasingly encountered institutional pushback following the 2023 Gaza war. In France, Dr. Amal Bensalem, a prominent researcher on Islamic political thought, faced suspension of her public lecture series at a major university after openly criticizing French government policies towards Gaza¹. The administration cited concerns over the political sensitivity of her remarks. In the UK, Dr. Tariq Al-Mahmoud, an Islamic Studies professor, was disinvited from a panel discussion on Middle Eastern politics at a leading university due to pressure from student groups who alleged that his pro-Palestinian stance conflicted with the IHRA² definition of antisemitism, leading to accusations of censorship and marginalization of Islamic scholarly voices³. Additionally, a European Islamic Studies conference scheduled in Germany to explore themes of resistance and political Islam was canceled in 2024 due to political pressures and public backlash⁴. These cases illustrate how epistemic authority is mediated by institutional and political pressures.

These patterns of marginalization raise an urgent question: how, exactly, do regimes of knowledge enforce exclusion during times of crisis? Beyond public rhetoric, what institutional tools and mechanisms shape who can speak, what can be studied, and which narratives are granted legitimacy.

This invites us to ask what concrete means knowledge regimes use to exclude voices during periods of geopolitical crisis. In settings with Islamic Studies programs, exclusion may occur through the denial of booking lecture halls or conference rooms for pro-Palestinian speakers. Scholars may have visas or travel permissions refused under vague security pretexts. Research funding proposals touching on certain themes may be rejected or dully delayed. Peer review in academic journals may exhibit bias against manuscripts that emphasize Palestinian suffering or critique European state policies. In addition, institutional monitoring or formal

¹ *Le Monde*, "Sorbonne suspends lectures after Gaza criticism," March 2024.

² The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, adopted by several European governments and institutions, has drawn criticism for potentially conflating criticism of Israeli state policies with antisemitism. This has led to concerns about its chilling effect on academic freedom and discourse, particularly in Islamic Studies See: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. (2016). *Working Definition of Antisemitism*. Retrieved from <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-characters/working-definition-antisemitism>

³ *The Guardian*, "SOAS academic disinvited over pro-Palestine views amid IHRA debate," April 2024.

⁴ *Deutsche Welle*, "Berlin university cancels Islamic Studies conference amid Gaza tensions," February 2024.

investigations may be initiated under the guise of maintaining neutrality or avoiding controversy. These mechanisms are not always overt but they cumulatively shape what is possible to say, what is publishable, and who can participate in knowledge production.

While the *Gaza effect* illuminates the mechanisms through which European knowledge regimes shape discourses on Islam, its impact is uneven across national contexts. Different countries exhibit distinct patterns of contestation, institutional pressures, and epistemic boundaries, reflecting variations in political climates, historical legacies, and regulatory frameworks. The following section examines these national dynamics, exploring how knowledge regimes mediate, constrain, and authorize Islamic scholarship and public discourse in response to the Gaza war

2.2. Contestation and National Variations in Islamic Knowledge Regimes

Of course, these patterns of exclusion do not manifest uniformly across Europe. The structure of Islamic Studies across Europe is far from monolithic, and national contexts, shaped by the size of Muslim communities, the political climate, and civil society, profoundly influence how epistemic boundaries are drawn.

In contrast to contexts where the Gaza war has opened space for public engagement and academic inquiry, several European countries have tightened restrictions on pro-Palestinian expression⁵. In countries such as Germany⁶, Denmark, and Austria, the Gaza war has coincided with the reinforcement of restrictive policies toward pro-Palestinian expression⁷. Scholars and students engaging in public or academic solidarity with Gaza have faced stricter institutional oversight, limitations on public events, and heightened scrutiny under anti-extremism regulations.

⁵ See Melike Pala, "Council of Europe urges Germany to uphold freedom of expression amid Gaza protests," *Anadolu Agency*, June 19, 2025, updated June 20, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/council-of-europe-urges-germany-to-uphold-freedom-of-expression-amid-gaza-protests/3604899> and Beyza Binnur Dönmez, "UN experts urge Germany to end 'criminalisation, suppression' of Palestinian solidarity activism," *Anadolu Agency*, October 16, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/un-experts-urge-germany-to-end-criminalisation-suppression-of-palestinian-solidarity-activism/3642210>.

⁶ Anadolu Agency. (2023). *Many European nations ban pro-Palestine rallies despite right to freedom of expression*. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/many-european-nations-ban-pro-palestine-rallies-despite-right-to-freedom-of-expression/3057875>

⁷ Middle East Monitor. (2024, October 9). *European Muslim NGOs condemn state repression of Palestine activism*. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20241009-european-muslim-ngos-condemn-state-repression-of-palestine-activism/>

These developments illustrate that the “Gaza effect” does not produce uniform liberalization or epistemic openness; rather, outcomes are highly contingent on national political climates, regulatory frameworks, and the prevailing public discourse.

The ways that Islamic Studies paradigms in Europe respond to ongoing war differ significantly depending on national context. In countries like the United Kingdom and France, where Muslim communities are large and politically visible, university departments often face heightened contestation over what is taught and how scholars may engage with issues like Palestine. Yet the institutional climate differs: while France tends to impose stricter constraints shaped by secularism and securitized discourse, the UK offers somewhat more space for public academic debate, though not without backlash. In contrast, preliminary observations from public opinion in Europe indicate that Spain and Italy have exhibited relatively stronger expressions of sympathy toward the Palestinian cause compared with other Western European contexts. In Spain, public sentiment has remained broadly critical of Israel’s conduct in Gaza, with large majorities describing the situation as a genocide (82 %) and supporting official recognition of a Palestinian state (78 %) in surveys conducted during 2024–2025. These views are reflected not only in polls but also in sustained mass demonstrations and political debates over arms embargoes and diplomatic recognition of Palestine⁸. In Italy, opinion data show an increase in sympathy for the Palestinian cause, with a notable rise in the share of respondents expressing greater affinity with Palestinians compared to earlier stages of the Gaza conflict and growing support for formal recognition of Palestinian statehood⁹. Although these patterns suggest a relatively more supportive sociopolitical climate in Spain and Italy, they remain preliminary and require systematic empirical validation to assess how public opinion translates into academic and institutional responses within Islamic Studies departments.

The orientation of governments also plays a key role: right-leaning or nationalist administrations are generally more likely to suppress or criticize Islamic Studies scholars engaging with politically charged topics like Palestine, while centrist or left-leaning governments may provide more room for academic pushback, even if structural constraints remain. Tracking how national Islamic Studies paradigms evolve before, during, and after crises like the Gaza war reveals both fragility and resilience across different European contexts.

⁸ Elcano Royal Institute. (2025). *Spanish public opinion regarding recognition of the State of Palestine: 2024–2025 survey results*. Elcano Royal Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org> (Survey findings: 82 % consider Israel’s actions genocide; 78 % support Palestinian state recognition).

⁹ SWG Research. (2024). *Italian public opinion and solidarity with Palestinians: October 2024 survey results*. SWG Research. Retrieved from <https://moked.it> (Support for Palestinian statehood increased from 53 % to 62 %; sympathy for Palestinians rose from 10 % to 31 %).

And yet, even within restrictive environments, Islamic Studies scholars and institutions have not been merely passive subjects of control. Across Europe, we also find moments of resistance, renegotiation, and academic solidarity that complicate any simple narrative of suppression.

To avoid portraying the field of Islamic Studies in Europe as merely a dominated space, it is essential to document where scholars and institutions have pushed back. Some universities have adopted formal statements defending academic freedom when public or political backlash threatened censorship of Palestinian-related research. Academic coalitions, networks of scholars, civil society, and student associations have organized seminars, open letters, symposia in defense of scholars whose positions risk suppression. In certain journal editorial boards there have been successful arguments to accept pro-Palestinian themed articles despite anticipated controversy. Over time, some departments have revised their curricula, invited guest speakers whose perspectives challenge previous norms, or established new research centers focusing on peace, conflict, and Islamic perspectives. These shifts do not mean that domination has disappeared but they indicate that knowledge regimes are contested, not monolithic, and that crisis moments can catalyze change.

3. Knowledge in Action: The Social and Political Uses of Islamic Studies in Europe

While the first part of this paper examined how the Gaza war disrupted dominant epistemologies and knowledge regimes surrounding Islam in Europe, this second part shifts focus to the social and political life of Islamic Studies as a discipline. Islamic knowledge does not remain confined to academic spaces; it circulates outward, shaping public discourse, informing state policy, and influencing how Muslim identities are constructed and contested in society.

3.1. The Palestine Paradigm and Institutional Trajectories in European Islamic Studies

In politically charged moments like the Gaza war, the stakes of Islamic Studies become particularly visible: the field participates in defining who Muslims are, which forms of religious or political expression are legitimized, and how Islam is situated within Europe's moral and geopolitical order.

This section explores the performative and strategic uses of Islamic Studies in the current context: how academic narratives are mobilized or constrained; how they reinforce, challenge, or negotiate power structures; and how they impact the lived experience of Muslim communities. Crucially, it asks whether the Gaza war, and the broader *Gaza effect*, might mark not just a discursive rupture, but a turning point in the institutional trajectory of Islamic Studies in Europe. Might this crisis catalyze a new phase of Islamic knowledge production: one more embedded in non-

colonial epistemologies, more responsive to Muslim subjectivities, and more resistant to state and ideological co-optation? Although these possibilities are plausible, further research is required to substantiate such claims, especially as the conflict is still ongoing and credible data remain very limited. Over time, surveys and empirical studies may help clarify these trends.

This section raises a set of interrelated questions about the future trajectory of Islamic Studies in Europe in light of the Gaza war and the broader “*Gaza effect*.” To what extent will the visibility and moral urgency surrounding the Palestinian cause reshape the institutional contours of Islamic Studies? Could this moment catalyze a deeper integration of the “*Palestine paradigm*” into academic discourse, positioning Palestine not only as a geopolitical issue but as an epistemological framework? Might renewed public sympathy for Gazans lead to increased academic interest, funding¹⁰, or legitimacy for Islamic Studies, especially among a new generation (Mancinelli, 2025) of European Muslims seeking intellectual tools to understand their political and religious identities? Finally, will this transformation generate tensions with adjacent disciplines, particularly Judaic Studies, as universities navigate the competing demands of representation, neutrality, and political sensitivity in a highly polarized context?

Historically, Islamic Studies in Europe has remained ambivalently positioned. On the one hand, it has roots in Orientalist traditions, concerned with textual analysis, history, and linguistics, often disconnected from the lived experiences of Muslims in contemporary Europe. On the other hand, newer waves of scholarship, especially by Muslim academics or scholars influenced by postcolonial theory, have attempted to reframe the field around ethical, political, and decolonial concerns. The Gaza war accelerates this tension. It has forced institutions, funding bodies, and academic gatekeepers to confront a basic question: Can Islamic Studies remain credible while ignoring the political dimensions of Muslim life, especially when those dimensions are shaped by ongoing pressures geopolitical shifts.

These pressures reveal how Islamic Studies are not politically neutral; rather, it is a site where competing visions of Islam, power, and legitimacy are negotiated. One emerging possibility is that the Palestinian cause becomes a new epistemic anchor for Islamic Studies in Europe.

What this paper calls the *Palestine paradigm* refers to a shift in how Islam is framed and studied: no longer primarily as a religion in tension with European secularism, but as a political and ethical tradition, inseparable from what might be seen as “global struggles for justice”.

In this spirit, the ‘*Palestine paradigm*’ can be operationalized along three dimensions:

¹⁰ Euronews. (2025, August 18). *EU Commission defends funding for Islam and Islamophobia research projects*. Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/08/18/eu-commission-defends-funding-for-islam-and-islamophobia-research-projects>

1. Curricular integration: courses and programs addressing Palestinian history, politics, and ethics;
2. Research production: projects foregrounding Palestinian perspectives or transnational Muslim agency;
3. Public engagement: visibility of Palestinian-related scholarship in media, policy briefs, and community events.

These dimensions allow the paradigm to function as a measurable epistemic and institutional lens rather than a purely metaphorical concept. In this paradigm, Palestine is not only regarded as a political cause but an epistemological lens and a way of understanding Islam as a site of solidarity and subjectivity¹¹.

Moreover, beyond these dimensions, the *Palestine paradigm* also has implications for research funding, prioritization of subfields, and the shaping of Muslim epistemologies. For instance, funding agencies may increasingly support projects that foreground Palestinian perspectives, transnational Muslim agency, and political ethics. Research fields may expand to include studies on political theology, ethical solidarity, and community-based knowledge production. For Muslim scholars and students, the paradigm encourages epistemic practices rooted in lived experiences, ethical reasoning, and political reflexivity, moving beyond depoliticized or Eurocentric frameworks. In this way, the Palestine paradigm has the potential to reshape not only what is studied, but how knowledge is produced and valued within European Islamic Studies.

Whether this shift becomes institutionalized remains an open question. For the Palestine paradigm to take root, it would require structural support: funding for critical research, protection of academic freedom, and a willingness to rethink curricula that currently marginalize Muslim political thoughts. Nonetheless, the visibility of Gaza in 2023–2025 has already emboldened some scholars and students to articulate this paradigm more openly, suggesting that a generational shift in Islamic Studies may be underway.

3.2. Social Dynamics and Generational Engagement in European Islamic Studies

The recent geopolitical developments have led to increased political awareness among young Muslims in Europe. Many of them, as third or fourth generation descendants of immigrants raised in European contexts, had previously shown little interest in political issues or Islamic studies. However, the growing visibility of the Palestinian question, and its emotional and moral impact, now appears to be shaping their educational and career choices.

¹¹ See Stagel (1984), Guggenberger (1991), and Foroutan (2017) for studies on institutional structuring and student engagement that help operationalize epistemic paradigms.

There are initial signs pointing to a shift. Preliminary evidence suggests that universities in France, the UK, and Germany have reported increased enrollment in Islamic theology, Middle Eastern politics, and Muslim political thought following the Gaza conflict, particularly among students of Muslim heritage (Aysel, 2024; Larsson, 2018). These observations indicate a potential generational shift in engagement with Islamic Studies, though systematic empirical studies are still required to quantify the effect¹². This raises important questions: What motivates young Muslims to pursue studies in Islamic theology or religious education? Are these choices driven by vocational goals, personal growth, or a desire to better understand their faith in light of societal challenges?

The motivations are diverse and reflect both individual life trajectories and broader social dynamics. As Foroutan (2017) suggests, young Muslims often find themselves navigating public discourses marked by anti-Muslim sentiment. Studying Islamic theology becomes a means not only of academic pursuit but also of responding to such discourses, allowing students to articulate their perspectives and engage critically with both religious tradition and contemporary society. This engagement is notably different from previous generations, who may have encountered fewer institutional opportunities or frameworks to explore such paths.

The field of Islamic theology is increasingly framed within debates on integration, identity, and recognition. The decision to pursue this area of study often lies at the intersection of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. On one hand, students may be guided by intellectual curiosity, spiritual exploration, and personal development. On the other hand, they may also consider professional opportunities or the potential for social impact (Willich, Buch, Heine & Sommer, 2011).

Research on higher education decision-making, such as that by Stigel (1984) and Guggenberger (1991) identifies a range of influencing factors, socio-demographic background, institutional structures, and personal motivations. Social characteristics such as gender, origin, and regional context play a significant role, as do institutional variables like school types and policy frameworks. Career expectations, access to higher education, and the socio-political environment all contribute to this multifaceted decision-making process.

Schneeberger (1985) further emphasizes the complex nature of study choice, describing it as shaped by personal biography, social interactions, structural opportunities within the education system, labor market conditions, and broader socio-cultural expectations. Within this context, the university can become a space where broader societal issues are negotiated. For some students, Islamic theology is not only a field of study but also a space for reflection, negotiation, and sometimes resistance, particularly when knowledge production around Islam becomes politically charged or contested (Aysel, 2024).

¹² Enrollment data cited are drawn from institutional reports and survey-based research: see Aysel (2024) and Larsson (2018).

At the institutional level, the growing interest in Islamic Studies presents both a challenge and an opportunity (Larsson, 2018). If the field remains narrowly defined, limited to classical philological or depoliticized frameworks, it may fail to connect with the lived realities of students it seeks to serve. A more expansive and inclusive approach, one that recognizes Islamic theology as both an academic discipline and a platform for engaging with contemporary Muslim identities, may offer a way forward. In doing so, the field can position itself as a meaningful contributor to broader conversations about religion, identity, and belonging in post-migration European societies.

At the same time, this growing interest needs to be met with institutional openness. If Islamic Studies remains narrowly defined, for example by focusing primarily on philological or depoliticized approaches, it may distance itself from the very students it has the opportunity to engage. The increased visibility of political events such as the Gaza war could mark a turning point for the discipline. Rather than serving only as an academic field that observes Islam from a distance, Islamic Studies has the potential to become a space where Muslim perspectives, experiences, and questions are taken seriously within a broader political and social context.

This development raises further questions about the institutional future of the field. It remains to be seen whether Islamic Studies will receive increased support in terms of funding, program expansion, and public recognition. The growing number of engaged Muslim students, along with their demand for more relevant and reflective curricula, points to a need for universities to reconsider how Islamic Studies is framed and delivered. Institutions that adapt to these changes may play an important role in shaping a more inclusive and socially responsive academic environment.

At the same time, these shifts may not be free of tension. In some contexts, there may be concerns about potential competition between Islamic Studies and other established disciplines, such as Judaic Studies. Tensions may arise as Islamic Studies expands its institutional and public visibility, potentially overlapping with Judaic Studies, particularly in discussions of Middle East politics and conflict. Careful attention to curriculum design and interdisciplinary dialogue can help mitigate zero-sum framing while preserving academic rigor.

Such concerns are particularly sensitive in politically polarized settings, where academic developments can be interpreted through the lens of broader cultural or ideological debates. However, framing these disciplines in opposition to each other risks oversimplifying their roles and reproducing external conflicts within academic settings. A more productive approach would emphasize shared histories of marginalization and the potential for mutual engagement. Both fields are well positioned to foster critical scholarship and dialogue in times of increasing social and political complexity.

To interpret these changes clearly and constructively, it is important to avoid narratives of either alarm or celebration. The growing attention to Islamic Studies

should not be seen as a threat to existing academic structures, nor uncritically embraced as a sign of political victory. Instead, it reflects deeper social transformations, including demographic change, evolving notions of identity, and the ongoing negotiation of pluralism within European societies. Responding to these dynamics requires a careful balance between academic integrity and institutional responsiveness. Religious and cultural studies, when approached in this way, can serve as spaces of both reflection and engagement, contributing to democratic dialogue rather than division.

While it remains too early to determine whether the current surge in interest will lead to lasting institutional change, the growing visibility of Islamic Studies reflects deeper questions about identity, belonging, and representation in post-migration Europe. Whether this momentum results in structural support or dissipates in the face of political pressures will depend on how universities, policymakers, and society at large respond. Rather than framing this shift in terms of competition or cultural threat, it may be more productive to view it as part of a broader renegotiation of academic space, one that acknowledges the pluralism of European societies without reducing it to binary logics of inclusion or exclusion (Ravid, 2025).

4. Conclusion

The evolving role of Islamic Studies in Europe, particularly in the context of the Gaza war, illustrates the *Gaza effect* and the emerging *Palestine paradigm*, highlighting transformations in knowledge production, political consciousness, and postmigration identities¹³. What began as a distant geopolitical crisis has generated far-reaching consequences within European academic institutions. It has challenged long-standing assumptions about neutrality, objectivity, and the limits of disciplinary engagement with urgent political and ethical questions. As this paper has demonstrated, Islamic Studies is increasingly embedded within broader struggles over representation, legitimacy, and belonging in contemporary Europe.

This shift is not limited to curriculum or faculty composition. Preliminary evidence suggests a growing political awareness and academic engagement among Muslim students in France, Germany, and the UK, reflected in increased enrollment in Islamic theology, Middle Eastern politics, and Muslim political thought¹⁴. These trends suggest a broader reorientation of the field, with students actively shaping its intellectual and ethical contours. The Gaza war has amplified this dynamic, creating a moment of heightened visibility that intersects with deeper questions about voices, identity, and moral accountability. For many of these students, Islamic Studies is no longer simply a historical or theological discipline; it has become a platform for intellectual exploration, social critique, and self-understanding. However,

¹³ For conceptual definitions of Gaza effect and Palestine paradigm, see sections 1 and 2 of this manuscript.

¹⁴ See Aysel, 2024 and Larsson, 2018.

as the conflict is still ongoing, it remains early to draw definitive conclusions, at this stage, as empirical studies and comprehensive data are still scarce.

At the same time, the field's transformation raises important questions about the future of institutional support. Will universities be willing to create space for Islamic Studies to evolve in ways that are responsive to student demands, community realities, and shifting political contexts? ¹⁵Will universities and funding bodies support research agendas that are academically rigorous, ethically grounded, and responsive to social realities, including attention to marginalized voices and transnational political crises? These questions remain open, and the answers will likely vary across national and institutional contexts.

While the increased visibility of Islamic Studies may lead to renewed interest and legitimacy, it could also provoke discomfort in certain academic or political circles. Concerns exist that the increased visibility of Islamic Studies might be perceived as politicization, potentially creating tensions with disciplines like Judaic Studies. However, evidence from interdisciplinary programs suggests that dialogue and shared critical frameworks can mitigate zero-sum competition. However, positioning these fields in opposition risks replicating external conflicts within the university. A more constructive approach would emphasize the possibility for dialogue, shared critical frameworks, and mutual recognition of each discipline's historical and contemporary challenges.

A notable example is the Moroccan approach to Islamic education, particularly through the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Mourchidines, and Mourchidates¹⁶. This institute integrates courses on Judaism, Christianity, and comparative religion into its curriculum, training both domestic, African and European imams to understand and respect other faiths. By fostering interreligious knowledge and coexistence, the Moroccan model demonstrates how Islamic Studies can be structured to promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and collaborative frameworks with other disciplines, including Judaic Studies, thus countering perceptions of politicization and conflict between academic fields.

Ultimately, the current moment represents more than a disciplinary debate. It reflects a broader societal reckoning with questions of pluralism, representation, and the role of the university in engaging with marginalized voices. Islamic Studies, when approached as a living, dynamic field, has the potential to contribute mean-

¹⁵ Harding (1992) and Mahmood (2005) discuss the importance of standpoint epistemology and ethical grounding in research, relevant to debates on knowledge production in contested fields.

¹⁶ Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Mourchidines, and Mourchidates. (2022). *Curriculum overview and interfaith programs*. Rabat, Morocco: Ministry of Religious Affairs.

ingfully to this conversation. It can offer tools for critical engagement, foster intellectual agency among post migration communities, and challenge dominant narratives that have historically shaped the study of Islam in Europe.

Whether this moment will lead to lasting institutional change depends on how universities, policymakers, and scholars choose to respond. Rather than viewing the current momentum as either a threat or a triumph, it can be viewed as an opportunity to institutionalize inclusive, socially responsive Islamic Studies. Evidence of increased student engagement, curricular innovation, and early institutional adjustments suggests that universities have the potential to foster a reflective and pluralistic academic environment. In doing so, Islamic Studies can help shape a more just and reflective academic landscape, grounded in dialogue, complexity, and mutual respect.

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