The Sociology of Knowledge

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE: A Preliminary Analysis on The Sociological Approach to The Development of Islamic Religious Sciences

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Abstract

This paper attempts to descriptively explore the exposition on the sociology of knowledge as a new branch of sociology. This description aims at proposing the basic understanding of the nature of the discipline and further introducing its possible application for the rejuvenation of Islamic religious sciences. It is due to the fact, however debatable, that these sciences are sometimes discerned so rigid, absolute, and unproductive; so that the application of the method becomes inevitable. Within this context of applying the sociology of knowledge to develop Islamic religious sciences, the paper critically discloses fallacy in that the method generates ideological premises of pluralism, relativism, and liberalism. The demanding application thus poses intellectual challenges against the Muslim community.

Tulisan ini secara deskriptif mencoba mengeksplorasi eksposisi tentang sosiologi pengetahuan sebagai cabang baru sosiologi. Deskripsi ini bertujuan mengajukan pemahaman mendasar terhadap disiplin keilmuan tersebut dan lebih lanjut mengajukan kemungkinan aplikasinya untuk menyegarkan kembali ilmu-ilmu keislaman. Ini karena adanya fakta, meskipun bisa diperdebatkan, bahwa ilmu-ilmu ini kadang-kadang dianggap begitu kaku, absolut, dan tidak produktif; oleh sebab itu aplikasi metode tersebut tidak terelakkan. Dalam konteks penerapan sosiologi pengetahuan untuk mengembangkan ilmu agama Islam, artikel ini secara kritis menemukan

bahwa ada kekeliruan (fallacy), yakni bahwa metode ini menyebabkan timbulnya permasalahan-permasalahan ideologis terkait pluralisme, relativisme, dan liberalisme. Dengan demikian, tuntutan terhadap aplikasi tersebut menimbulkan tantangan intelektual terhadap komunitas Muslim.

Introduction

Discussion on the development of higher Islamic educational institutions and their role in enhancing the Islamic religious sciences, like fiqh, tasawwuf, falsafah, and kalam, seems to undoubtedly grasp widespread attention of many Muslim and non-Muslim experts and intellectuals. It is true since, at least, recent decades have been a witness for a sort of crisis of irrelevancy that throws light to a gap between Islamic religious sciences and the contemporary life, between ideal and real. Islam that retains essential guidance for the human's life emerges as the reliably ultimate source of sciences and knowledge, yet successfully conveys its spiritual messages merely upon a rhetorical basis. This rhetorical success does not simultaneously run in parallel with that of the *praxis* upon which real problems of existence lie and therefore remain untouchable. Whereas seminars, talks, and discussions on Islamic values and prescriptions are vigorous of a commonplace, still complexities of morality and humanity keep intact, and Muslim's intellectual achievements in empowering society's development area, if not none, rare.

The construct of Islamic theology, on the one hand, has provided vast range contributions toward the making of normative guidelines so conventionally constrained into the domains of intellectual discourses. However, on the other, it does not produce competitively a sustained and practical answer sufficient to respond to current perplexities. It, in one sense, explains why, in term of socio-political and intellectual advancements displayed in the West, the Muslim community is historically left behind by far (Ibn Khaldûn 1978, 431; Al-Hassan 1996, 366-84; Black 2001, 172-4; Zarkasyi 2006). It is therefore discerned so urgent, among other attempts to reformulate ways of rejuvenating Islamic religious sciences and reproducing an established paradigm that would increasingly embolden processes of

their dynamics. This agenda is arguably necessitated to diminish the increasing alienation of the role of religion, due partly to an ill-adjustment to meet with modern living and acute inability to touch the core problem of humanity. Besides, it has to find out possible breakthrough to put both ideal and real on the same mode of stance. It is true, however debatable, some attempts to harmonizing both domains have been made up to present days and keep occupying the mind of all intellectuals. It remains one of the primary objectives for their intellectual pursuit. This task, nevertheless, seems to persist all the time.

This article tries to describe this discourse and explore in short the exposition, made by contemporary scholars, to introduce a sociological approach toward the study of (religious) science and its dynamics. While proposing this new direction, critical and rational arguments are indeed devised thus refraining from a likely blunder it could bring. It, finally, came up to be another alternative to the already displayed array of options that integrally seek to remedy the rift as mentioned earlier; provides a preferential recommendation for the related Islamic educational institutions on their way to carefully measure the application of scientifically specific liberal approaches to the study of Islamic sciences. Liberal thought has been adopted by many thinkers in the Islamic world, including in Indonesia originating from Western thought (Zarkasyi 2009; Syafrin 2009).

The Islamic Religious Sciences: A Critical Perspective

During this modern era, there has been a shared consensus among society and strong tendency to complicate the relationship between religion and the sciences (Abdullah 2006). This tendency builds its proposition firmly on the ground that both are verily having spheres of their own and divergent. While the former operates within a domain of normatively ethical and spiritual horizon, the former differently works out to explore technically and practically hard materials attained through the intellectual working of speculative minds. Opposed to that, the religion that seeks to relate human with the Unseen, has been evolving mostly around intuitive and supra-rational notions to approach through prescriptions associated with the works of the traditional scholars, the 'ulamâ,' who lived in the past. These prescriptions are, without any specific change or attempt for necessary reformulation occurred, inherited by the new generations from their ancestors, and until presently remain in use.

The Islamic religious teaching, thus, has successfully retained this characteristic of finality and non-changeability keeping the Muslim community out from pronouncing behaviors alien to its very nature and or professing ideology and speculative understandings divergent, and therefore deemed as of deviation, to that concluded conventionally by the old scholarship. If applied to scientific hallmark, this condition could have been a sort of ideological obstacle for the development of modern sciences and obvious barriers before the never-ending search for speculative inventions and discoveries.

In order to develop science, hence does not need to be final and or rigid; it requires continued assessments and further critical deliberations that might refresh and even reconstruct its old fashion and bring about the finding of a new one realistically and more reliable regarding positivistic. Unlike religion, these sciences are competitively and continuously expanded to come across an apparent anomaly conveyed within ideas and theories and looked forward to introducing a new paradigm based upon latest inventions making them dynamically reliable, modern and purely scientific. This liability, however debatable might it be, to change and openness or acceptance toward critiques, toward which religion is arguably too allergic, guarantees the dynamics for the history of science. Unfortunately, this, in a rigorous sense of liberal perspective, is not found about the world of the traditional Islamic intellectualism.

In a more precise sense, there still retains the innate difference, added to the above, between both entities concerning methods, approaches, a definition of truth, and others. In terms of criteria for defining truth, both shared no similar conception. Whereas religion would always point out to its religious values as the final frame of reference, sciences turn to hold that it is the only reason and sense that qualify to play such role; it is only that which could be sensibly proven and or rationally understood that is right. Concerning the method applied, both are of different. Religion, to a significant extent, used to be explored through extensive reliance normatively upon textual and philological approach and thus depending wholly on the understanding of, in Islam, the Quranic text. This textual paradigm, in turn, requires a comprehensive mastery of specific languages through which religions to grasp. Comprehension upon Arabic grammar is accordingly necessary and a must for every Muslim to make him conversant with the Islamic teachings as contained within the Quran. This kind of textual approach, however, was the reason behind the impending

impotence and intellectual stagnancy from which Islamic religious sciences suffered. It could be agreed since traditional mindset that focuses too much energy on textual paradigm, contributes considerably to the formation of reluctance and passiveness, promptly embedded in their minds, to absorb the esoteric meaning of the text (Fanani 2008, 105-6). Conversely, this is not the case about, say, social sciences on which, the scientific method is wholly applied ranging upon some fundamental nature like rational, empirical, objective and systematic; rarely found in the religious realm.

It is accordingly wise to urge, research activities and intellectual devotions on Islamic religious sciences have been inclined toward defending the already established structure of science, the status quo, which would never allow critical attempts, in whatever forms and levels, to reshape its direction into discovering new paradigm and ideas. This rigidity is apparent if we look at the structure of the traditional Islamic intellectualism that is merely of repetition of comments, explanations, and comments of the comments on various classical literatures, without being moderately and progressively determined to step further into taking sort of inspirational attitude toward constituting a likely sum of novel notions and outlooks (Rahman 1982, 37, 38, 150 & 151). While the response to this task still rigidly remains undisclosed, the Muslim community could hardly subscribe to be committed, as it were, wholly with their religious overtones; of a worldview currently seen as losing confidence to exhibit a contributive position against this world of secular modernity. The Muslim community should accordingly be awakened from their conventionally closed worldview and therefore shifting from this old mindset into one that suits the contemporary circumstances. Awareness upon this urgent necessity and challenge, hence would positively be part of our determination to face the impending distortion pertaining fundamentally to our lack of intellectual development and poor performance regarding socio-political and scientific advancements as compared to our Western counterparts'.

Amidst this discourse of bringing and transforming the Islamic religious science into a new paradigm, there has been a notion that seeks to introduce theories and ideas insistently to convincingly brush aside limitations so acutely blocking the ways for these sources to advance. These ideas imply further the necessity to critically put both religious and non-religious sciences on the same spot for the sake of mutual dialogue; there has to be a mutual interchange with regards to, at least, methods and approaches. It continues to, then, the applying of these methods and

approaches, as deemed so incredibly instrumental in developing those non-religious sciences, to the specific fields where Islamic religious sciences evolve. Literal and philological approaches, to mention some, are therefore no more the only way by which Muslim intellectuals come to know their religion; those scientific methods that include, say, historical, sociological and phenomenological ways of understanding the truth, are having similar reliability in order for the Muslim community to absorb more comprehensively of its religious system of belief.

The application of these diverse approaches to the study of religious sciences will, however, knock the door of their consciousness to be more realistic, moderate, and plural; enrich their understandings upon the meanings of this life; inspire the dynamization of their traditional way of life and sustain a critical mind against the very established worldview. One of the methods to mention is the sociology of knowledge which tries to uncover forms of interdependence between society and knowledge.

This sociological approach toward the study of religious sciences provides a more varied accumulation of social factors that could explain more widely why and how any thought or phenomena occur within a society. This method avers that nothing in society is taken for granted; there must be rational explanations upon every phenomenon, and these explanations are not derivative from merely a factor rather so many (social) factors. This involvement of various social factors in the understanding of reality concludes that social backgrounds became recognizable and discerned as the invisible forces underlying the knowledge. Thoughts, ideas, theories, and others, are not the result of an isolated inspiration of genius intellect. They are constructed by social ups and downs around which these thoughts and ideas emerge.

This method, perhaps, brings with it not only all the reformative elements, but also the deconstructive ones eroding the conventional way of thinking of the reality. Thus, it needs to take wisely in, as Muslim intellectuals, our account. It is therefore interesting to discuss this method; its propositions and instrumentality which are then followed by necessary remarks.

The Sociology of Knowledge and Its Demanding Application

The term 'sociology of knowledge' (*Wissensoziologie*) was first coined by a German philosopher Max Scheler in 1920s. These three facts are quite crucial for the understanding of the genesis and further development of this

discipline. It is originated in a particular situation of German intellectual history and a philosophical context, and when introduced into a sociological context proper of the English-speaking world remained to be marked by the problems of the particular intellectual therein (Berger and Luckman 1966, 15-16). There has been debate as to who first introduced the discipline. Within the Western intellectual circle, Karl Mannheim, has recognized the most congenial figure for sociologists.

Mannheim was born in Budapest and spent his formative years in Hungary and Germany during the period of extraordinary social and political ferments; the period of World War I and the chaos time of revolution and counter-revolution during which several currents exercised a powerful influence upon Mannheim's thinking and contributed to the development of the science. Among those currents are Marxism, Nietzschean, and historical philosophy. Some of the germinal ideas around which Mannheim developed his sociological theory of the mind expressed in an early work (Mannheim 1952a, 1-27).

It is due to that he brought a formulation that marked the transposition of the sociology of knowledge into a more narrowly sociological context. This formulation was the one in which the disciple arrived in the English-speaking world (Berger and Luckman 1966, 20-21). It is accordingly reasonable to say that sociologists today usually refer, in their sociological interests, to the formulations made by Mannheim (Mannheim 1936; Mannheim 1952b; Mannheim 1953; Mannheim 1956; Mannheim 1964; Mannheim 1949; Mannheim 1957). Apart from that, as Muhyar Fanani insisted, ideas on the sociology of knowledge had been unprecedentedly introduced by Ibn Khaldûn (1332-1406) in the 14th century. He recognized the systematic and interdependent characteristics of the sciences; meaning. All sciences are dynamically influenced and determined by certain social conditions (Fanani 2008, 32).

Having counted his traditionalism and empiricism as the essential foundation for his attitude with regards to the philosophical sciences, Ibn Khaldûn stressed the primacy of rational sciences natural to all men and is found among all civilized nations. A man, in order to distinguish from animals and the quest for what is specific to him, seeks to develop sciences and arts considering both to be taking the second place after the necessities of life (Rosenthal 1968, 103-106). This quest, nevertheless, is much dependent upon the decline and or wake of political, economic and social

determinations of the society; of an inseparable interconnection between the sciences and reality in which they come up.

The sciences, in whatever form, are hence liable to be approached through multi-sided perspectives by taking as many factors as possible into one's account, thus resulting in a more extensive and inclusive understanding. He summarily propounded, says Rosenthal, the realization of the causal interdependence of the several factors of social life, specifically, the power-state; economic, military, cultural, and religious (Rosenthal 1968, 106; Black 2001, 166-169). It is therefore reasonably concluded since it is not our primary purpose of discussion, that Ibn Khaldûn is the Muslim scientist who first laid down idea and thought which later inspired further genealogical development of the sociology of knowledge.

The sociology of knowledge is one of the youngest branches of sociology; as a theory, it seeks to analyze the relationship between knowledge and existence; as a historical-sociological research it seeks to trace the forms that this relationship has taken in the intellectual development of mankind (Mannheim 1970, 109; Stark 1958, 112-13). The primary contention of the argument of this definition is explicit in that reality is socially constructed, and sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which it occurs. Within society, there exist so many factors that could be taken into account and utilized, through many and convergent perspectives, to satisfy the thirst of the suspicious minds as to what constitutes a reality among society. This reality is not derived from a vacuum condition; it instead comes from the dynamics of different social elements of different societies.

Every social element of the society has its perspective as to what is meant by reality; of a theory likely deviates that of another. It also implies that there exists no single conception of the meaning of reality; there are as many conceptions of reality as social elements available; definition as to what serves reality is far from being monolithic, it is pluralistic instead. If hence reality is meant to be knowledge, then its foundational structure is made of various conceptions proposed by the so-called existential determination of that knowledge (*Seinsverbundenheit des Wissens*) (Mannheim 1970, 111). If that knowledge is a proposition like, "smoking is dangerous for health," then a sociologist is to find out possible explanation has come to be taken for granted in one society and possibly not in another. Also, how its reality is maintained in one society and how, even more interestingly, this reality may once again be lost to an individual or an entire

collectivity. Thus sociological interest in questions of "smoking is dangerous for health," is thus initially justified by the fact of its cultural relativity. What one believes to be true with the proposition as mentioned earlier is likely not true, according to others; thus "smoking is dangerous for health" is right for one but untrue for others. It is evident from the definition of truth pertains only to a specific social context.

Here it is, then, the importance by which a sociologist concerned with the analysis of the social construction of the reality. He believes that no human thought is immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context. He has contended, unlike layman who does not ordinarily trouble himself about what is a reality taking merely for granted nor a philosopher who is professionally obligated to obtain maximal clarity as to the ultimate status of what he believes to be that reality. Also, it concerns with whatever passes for reality in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity, by whatever criteria, of such reality (Berger and Luckman 1966, 14-15).

Sociology of knowledge, therefore, does not require any assertion about reality to be treated as right or false, valid or invalid; a sociologist thus should not be confused with this if compared to philosophical relativism which denies the validity of any standard and the existence of order in the world. Sociology of knowledge sees that the nature of truth on any knowledge is no more objective or relative, it is (in contradistinction to relativism) relational instead; a sober recognition that knowledge must always be known from a particular position.

In so doing, ideologizing influences not eradicated to mitigate by the systematic analysis of as many as possible of the different socially grounded positions; the object of the knowledge (thought) becomes progressively clearer with the accumulation of different perspective on it. This rationalism does not imply that there are no criteria of rightness or wrongness for a given proposition. It is ultimately related to a specific perspective of a certain situation where it appears; thus particularization. This particularization seeks to narrow the scope of rightness that was once deemed absolute and universal to be more particular and limited under a situational constraint (Mannheim 1991, 309; Fanani 2008, 62).

Regarding the relationship between the discipline and development of Islamic religious sciences, there has been a notion that urges the possible application of the former insistently upon the former. This reforming agenda, as Arif Budiman argued, if functioned as an instrument to comprehend the Islamic religious teaching, would increasingly enable the

Muslim community to differentiate its essence and form; the eternal and the temporal (Budiman 1991, xiii). The religious teaching would perpetually remain relevant to the modernly social reality, should it be consistently set under the frame of the sociology of knowledge; religious teaching has to be viewed through the frame of social context wherein [20] takes place. In short, the application of sociology of knowledge's method to the study of Islamic religious sciences would warrant the achievement of certain significant advantages. For instance, is grasping the essential paradigm of the reality, putting aside of all secondary elements, and developing new paradigms through critically relating it to its socio-historical context. Besides, it also enriches the variety of scientific methods to the study of Islamic Religious Sciences, hence the dynamic development (Fanani 2008, 89-125).

We shall discuss below, a bit in term of, for example, kalam. As already known, paradigm, whatsoever, that takes root prevailingly among society, will inescapably encounter the problem of irrelevance; with the due passage of time and other situational variances, it is finally reckoned irrelevant. In this regard, the current trends which circle traditional Islamic discourse on kalam; like textual (*Ahl al-Ḥadîth*), rational (Mu'tazilah), and moderate (Ash'ariyyah) worth mentioning (Fanani 2008, 140-43). Theoretical formulation around kalam, as framed by a dialectic relationship among these theological strands, is no more relevant, obsolete and thus calling for an immediate and invigorating reformulation (Fanani 2008, 145). This old paradigm, however doubtful, has produced nothing but Islamic sciences, unfortunately insensitive in a strategic context and unfavorable to day-to-day realities. Human's intellectual energy and devotion, once concentrated upon pondering the Ultimate Being, should now shift to be employed to accomplish real problems of humanity; of a shifting paradigm which is taking more side of the human; no longer God. It does not connote that religion, as an absolute source of knowledge, is put into dispute, it is instead the ways through which we approach this absoluteness now set in a critical query. Henceforth, to endlessly sustain this reforming agenda, contemporary scholars seek to introduce theoretical formulas within which new paradigm, gained through historical analysis upon contemporary problems, come up; to name some, critical paradigm by Ali Shariati (1933-1977) of Iran and liberation theology of Asghar Ali Engineer (Engineer 1990; Taib 2006). All of them affirm the utilizing of, no more single, various methods and theories to advance Islamic religious

sciences. This availability of plural methods applicable to the study of Islamic religious sciences ascertains a variety of interpretations upon religion (Islam). These are proposed merely from personal religious experiences upon which different individuals of different places come through; everyone has the independence to give meaning to his religiosity. It is in this way when we tolerate the emergence of these diverse theories on religion, only then could the Islamic religious sciences go further. Here it is, even though simple, epistemological discourse on kalam that foresees the possible application of sociology of knowledge as a method for advancing the Islamic religious sciences; of a philosophical program with both appreciation and critical record.

In this regard, Ḥassan Ḥanafî and Naṣr Ḥâmid Abû Zayd worth mentioning. Both urge the application of various methods and theories to advance Islamic religious sciences. According to Issa J. Boullatta, Ḥanafî's thought is predicated upon Islamic tradition or history, phenomenology, and Socio-Marxian analysis (Boullatta 1993). This predicament is further encompassed within his idea of Left Islam (*al-Yasâr al-Islâmî*) upon which three main narratives are laid down.

The first, employing a reconstructive method in the way Muslims look into their old tradition. It is indeed calling for its immediate revitalization. *The second*, the use of a phenomenological and dialectic method, implied as Occidentalism, in the way they look into the Western tradition. For Ḥanafî, Occidentalism is proposed to level criticism against the West's hegemony generally reflected in Orientalism. *The third*, engaging interpretative method, or verstehen, in their demeanor, to understand the reality. This effort reflects Ḥanafî's disillusionment with the old Islamic tradition that, in an attempt to understand the meaning of life, tends to rely wholly on the sacred text. The text is based merely on a sacred book that constitutes neither reality nor solution to that reality (Hanafi 1993). Ḥanafî is of the opinion that the old Islamic conceptual framework is substituted for the new-fashioned one derived substantially from the modern culture and intellectuality (Hanafi 1991, 6).

In correlation with this discourse, Naṣr Ḥâmid Abû Zayd set forth his controversial opinion, which asserts that, as a text, the Quran is merely a cultural product (*al-Muntâj al-Thaqafî*). As the Quran was revealed gradually for almost 20 years, it was arguably molded by the very socio-political and cultural condition of the Arab people. Throughout its course of revelation,

Quran experienced a formative period (*marḥalat al-takawwun wa al-tashakkul*) which refers to the processes of its emergence and the interaction with the cultural reality of the Arabs. It also experienced its establishment period (*marḥalat al-tashkîl wa al-takwîn*) which implies it is forming a new culture. As such, the Quran is only of a cultural product and output (Abû Zayd 2007, 22 & 27). Like other cultural product, Quran is open for any interpretation however diverse. What Muslim society demand right now is, in fact, absolute freedom that will set them free from the shackles of revealed texts like the Quran. Everyone is thus free to interpret the Quran and come up with his inferences individually; the ones which suit with the actual and contemporary life of the interpreters (Abû Zayd 2007, 36; Fauzan 2015).

Implication

The above discussion, however simplistic, has just tried to introductorily regard the sociology of knowledge as part of a new method to approach, and further assert its possible application to, the Islamic religious sciences. What is expected from this application, as it summarily implies, is the preservation of fundamental Islamic values while at the same time desacralization of traditional Islamic thought viewed, however controversial, as rigid, subjective, and absolute. This rigid attitude associated with the traditional thinkers does consequently reflect in the rigidity of the sciences they explore.

Moreover, since this rigidity has resulted in the creation of backward Islamic society, it is convincingly deemed so urgent to reconstruct this old mindset and shift it with a more moderate, open and inclusive paradigm; one who could finally bring about socio-political and intellectual betterment of the Islamic society. Amidst this debatable necessity, current quest for searching ways, ideologically and normatively justifiable, to encourage intellectual spirit of progressiveness among the Muslim community continuous to yield an extensive result; for example, in term of the socio-historical analysis, Amin Abdullah proposed a multidisciplinary paradigm (Abdullah 2000, 94-95; Abdullah 2014), and scientific-historic paradigm and theory of *Ḥudûd* (limitation) by Muḥammad Shaḥrûr (Shaḥrûr 1994).

Despite these emerging paradigms, the Muslim community is not supposed to respond reactively; it has to treat such a matter of intellectual and epistemological temptations to the studying and developing of the Islamic religious sciences as wise as it is necessarily conformed to the already established framework of the Islamic worldview.

We need thus respond carefully and explore much more in-depth into grasping the true nature and foreseeable implications it would take should we accept and realize the ideas encompassed within this discipline of the sociology of religion. Our standing, like the basic premise of the discipline, is that nothing new of intellectual and philosophical elaborations, partly derived from West's socio-political and cultural achievements, is taken for granted. This notion is by far not to reflect a distortive and antagonist attitude of Islam against West's very nature regarding their ideological and philosophical behavior. It is instead of assertion to displaying our rigorously careful and thorough consideration over, in this case, the paradigm novel to our ideological and intellectual formulation. This discourse of dynamization of Islamic religious sciences through the application of the sociology of knowledge as its core method of study has, therefore, to critically elaborate and judge from a genuine and sincere perspective of the Islamic worldview. It signifies that the applicability of the discipline, as contended by some, is not a guarantee for the validity, according to the Islamic framework, for the whole or merely parts of its values and implications. Put differently, what is rationally suitable for humankind is not always normatively justified by religious tenets.

To start with this exertion, let us now come to this phase of understanding the true nature and implications of this application of the sociology of knowledge. It is as a method to enhance the dynamics of the Islamic religious sciences, as a philosophical program. There are immediate intellectual antecedents to the sociology of knowledge which include three developments taking place in nineteenth-century German thought; the Marxian, the Nietzschean, and the Historicist (Berger and Luckman 1966, 17-19). It is from Marx that the sociology of knowledge derived its root proportion in that man's consciousness is determined by his social being. It is, therefore, the situational reality that influences and dictates human's formulation of existence. Moreover, it is Nietzschean whose ideas the discipline has taken over; *false consciousness*; thought alienated from the real social being of the thinker and *art of mistrust*; that the discipline is always suspicious toward ideological content, whatsoever, implicitly embedded in thought or knowledge. Last but not least, historicism immediately preceded the discipline to come up with a positively dominant theme which overwhelmingly underlined the sense of relativity of all perspectives on human events, that is, of the inevitable historicity of human thought. It is

this precedence through which, from a point, we wonder whether the program is ideologically and philosophically justifiable or not.

It is thus adequately clear that the sociology of knowledge stands with its primary concern to understand the relationship between knowledge and social reality; how knowledge emerges as determined vastly by the situational condition; and conceived of the truth brought inherently within this knowledge as merely relative. Well, this initial tendency to promptly signify the relativity of knowledge results appeared in a disavowal of the absolute truth entrenched within its main source; the religion (Islam). It becomes much more apparent; whatever conceptualization of knowledge attained through contemplative elaboration upon religious teaching is thus relative.

From this point of view, it is summarized that there is no absolute truth; what we conceive of it as true is fundamentally based upon our perspective; thus subjective. Religion (Islam), even though is one, is therefore encompassed with a variety of subjective exegesis and diverse, if not conflicting, interpretations, leaving the Muslim community to hardly find out ways as to incorporate them under a single shade of construction which is in fact contra productive (Sururin 2005, 58; Husaini 2006, 22-24). It is finally this paradigm of relativism which eradicates gradually absolute truth claimed by every religion, and relativism is about to put religion at the edge of its final day; namely extinction.

The sociology of knowledge, so long as it runs within this direction inflicting the involvement of relativism (and apparently of pluralism) and regarding it as its fundamental standpoint, is henceforth sticking up in contrast with fundamental values of Islam. Islam is absolute and so is its truth, and it is this conviction that resists the skeptical and the agnostic mind from taking control upon Muslim's bearing. He would be wandering all over the road of life to rule by this relativism; one who pronounces mostly sort of shift of paradigm which turns out to be the current trend, even surprisingly, among Muslim intellectuals. The application of the discipline thereof receives defiance as indicated concisely by the perspective mentioned above; the sociology of knowledge as a method comprises intrinsically philosophical and epistemological values, namely relativism, pluralism and finally liberalism, alien to Islam.

It is only through this understanding of the true nature of the sociology of knowledge, as prescribed by our secular Western counterparts, could we then get prepared intelligently to remind our Muslim fellows of

such challenge and weather with discernment the pestilential winds of liberalism. In this regard, higher Islamic educational institutions could play their role to conceptualize, clarify, elaborate scientific and epistemological problems encountered by the Muslim community in this present age. Also, it is to provide an Islamic response to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world. It also includes various schools of thought, religion, and ideology; to formulate an Islamic philosophy of education and science and others (Al-Attas 1993, xv).

Conclusion

Developing Islamic religious sciences is, of course, fundamental and helpful in developing the Muslim community. Amid intense debate as to whether these sciences are so rigid, absolute and unproductive, the demanding application of the method peculiar to the sociology of knowledge will widen the intellectual horizon the Muslim in curbing with the modern world. However, there are always complexities. The embedded method is full with some western ideological premises of pluralism, relativism, and liberalism alien to the Muslim world. More specifically, these premises could be traced back to the three developments in nineteenth-century German thought that refer to the Marxian, the Nietzschean, and the Historicist. The demanding application, thus poses intellectual challenges against the Muslim community; who has to respond wisely and carefully by ascribing attitude and behavior as confirmed by the very nature of Islamic worldview; thus remaining consistent to brush aside anomalies inherently embedded within this method.

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