

# Kim Knott's Perspectives of Insider and Outsider in Religious Studies

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## ABSTRACT

Explorative study of religion seems to be stagnant in obtaining the meaning behind the values taught. In fact, the presence of religion can produce the solutions to various problems of life. Religious studies with a scientific approach also contribute to the dynamics that happen in learning religious studies. Especially in this contemporary era, religion is seen to have many sides (multiple faces) with various perspectives, one of which is developed by Kim Knott. This paper aims to understand and describe in detail the ideas or views of Kim Knott's insider/outsider perspective on religious studies. Based on the results of the discussion, Kim Knott made an idea offer in the form of mapping outsider and insider areas as well as methodological and approach development in religious studies. This research is used descriptive qualitative to know how an important problem concerning to standard of objectivity. Knott's approach tries to place researcher on the margin of appreciation as a border line between insider-outsider Kim Knott's insider-outsider theory contributes to the richness of the treasury of scientific studies in Islamic studies so as to be able to fade the stagnation that has been experienced and innovated the development of approaches or viewpoints of religious studies and methods of religious understanding. It starts from a religious understanding which is limited from ideality towards historicity, from doctrine to sociological entity and from essence discourse to existence. Furthermore, by it can give a solution to overcome the problems that happen around the issue in learning religious studies.

**Keywords:** *Insider/outsider theory, religious studies, Kim Knott's approach*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The discourse on religious studies nowadays seems desolate for the deepest meanings stored behind the values of religious teachings which being taught. In fact, religion has an important role in the lives of humankind to present all dimensions of human life and the universe. Religion as one of the crucial dimensions in human life, but interacts more only with issues of creed, divinity, faith, worldview and so on. It turns out that the religion position has not been able to solve various problems of human life that continue to experience drastic developments. Moreover, the rapid modernization and globalization at this time, marked by the achievement of increasingly established science and technology, also have an impact on human life.

Islamic religion is a law of deity in the form of Qur'an, revelation or doctrine. When Islam is positioned as a teaching, there must be a faith. There is no measurable indicator here. Conversely, the religion of Islam which learns Islamic studies, can be examined in accordance with

the properties possessed by science, namely knowledge, systematic, methodological and universal. Religion that is examined by using a scientific approach will be able to solve various problems of human life. It can be present and contribute to face the dynamics of life in various lines so that the values contained in religion can be explored more deeply.

It should be understood that religion from a contemporary perspective has many sides (multiple faces) which are presented with many perspectives. That is, the discussion of religion that is so complex does not only revolve around the issue of creed, faith, divinity and so on, but the discussion extends to various aspects of historical culture.[1] The complexity of the role of religion is increasingly needed in solving contemporary problems as a reflection of the problems posed by religious life. In addition, when religious teachings are applied by adherents it will have implications and are closely related to empirical-historical issues. Therefore, it is necessary to emerge religious studies. A study with a scientific approach that is able to solve problems related to the deepest meaning of religion and its relevance to human life.

As an illustration that propose the anxiety of Kim Knott's academic is by the beginning of the problem in developing the understanding of religion experienced by academics of students studying religious studies. The students learned and understood the biographies of people who were religious as insider, while the students were as outsiders. Instead, they could also become insider when they had their own subjective religious experience which they wrote and described. The next question that arises from the above conditions is can we understand the deep problems of one's religious understanding? What is the difference between insider and outsider opinion about religion? Is there a gap between those who write one's religious experience and those who read other people's religious experiences? As a note that they as researchers must be as objective as possible in understanding religion, and put forward the value of transcendence.

Especially, when it is discussed with discourse between the West and East, each of them has an ideological conceptual content that never ends. Surely, if it is not examined deeply, it can lead to negative prejudice. The West is prejudiced negatively towards Islam and vice versa.[2] The connotation of orientalism that contains negative stigma has a negative influence on the perspective of insider and outsider subjectivity. Although it does not apply to all Western and Eastern academics, the sincerity in studying religion is still owned by scientists in upholding the values of objectivity and transcendence.

Based on the above problems, there are several components that become Kim Knott's academic anxiety that is the difficulty of creating a clear boundary line between two different regions; the realm of religion and non-religious realm, between objectivity and subjectivity. As part of the insider is required to understand religion with an academic approach, on the other hand must maintain the value of religious transcendence. The second problem is related to the understanding of humans who understand religion as tradition and religion as faith, and the third is the problem of methodological stagnation and approaches in the environment of the university (campus community) about religion which in fact is required by all parties possible objective and uphold the value of transcendence in understanding religion. Thus, the main problem that became Kim Knott's academic anxiety was the issue of objectivity in understanding religion.

On the other hand, contemporary religious studies have experienced the development of approaches and methods of religious understanding. It starts from a religious understanding which is limited from ideality towards historicity, from doctrine to sociological entities and from essence discourse towards existence.[1] The development of this approach is as a result of the intensity of interaction between religions and human life which covers a very broad range of lines, such as theological to socio-anthropological, even into politics.[3] Therefore, religious life as an object or subject of the broad development of science requires academics and practitioners to innovate on approaches or perspectives or perspectives on religious studies. It has been done by Kim Knott.

Explorative study of religion, Kim Knott seeks to emphasize the emergence of the attitude of subjectivity by outlining the emic perspective that emerged from the study of Muslims themselves (insider) and ethical perspectives that emerged from non-Muslim people (outsider). This approach is a solution to the problem of objectivity of Islamic scholars from outsiders and insiders so that their scientific validity can be accounted for. The approach offered by Kim Knott becomes an intersubjective-solving effort, positioning a researcher (insider and outsider) on the margin of appreciation as the boundary between the two. Kim Knott's thoughts in the form of a mapping of the approach to religious studies contribute to the solution of the problem of religious studies among campus academics, particularly in the aspects of the approach and methodology used as well as understanding the religious historical-empirical and normative-theological context.

The issue of objectivity is a major problem for insiders and outsiders in studying religion. Thus, this paper will move forward with the offer of the concept of insider mapping out of Kim Knott's perspective on explorative studies of religion. In addition, it will also discuss approaches in the study of religious studies, including the objectivity of the methodology of religious studies and new perspectives offered by Kim Knott. The new perspective includes four elements, namely pure participation, participants as researchers, researchers as participants and pure researchers

Furthermore, this article aims to understand and describe in detail the ideas or views of Kim Knott's insider/outsider perspective on religious studies. Based on the results of the discussion, Kim Knott made an idea offer in the form of mapping outsider and insider areas as well as methodological and approach development in religious studies.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study the writer want to understand and describe in detail about the ideas or views of Kim Knott's insider/outsider perspective on religious studies. This study attempts to explore certain information about a phenomenon or case of a subject. Thus, the writer used descriptive qualitative as the research method. The results of the research emphasize more toward the data interpretation found in the field. The results are not written in the form of figures and tables with statistical measures, but it is illustrated in the form of describing words to the results and it is presented in narrative.

### 3. DISCUSSION

#### ***3.1. Kim Knott's Perspective of Insider and Outsider in Religious Studies***

The concept of insider and outsider which created by Kim Knott stemmed from studies and debates that emerged against Sikh religion in India in the 1980s. When it was debated about what motivation and contribution could be made from the writings on Sikh religion written by western scholars. In 1991, a review of the study was carried out by western scholars. Mic Leod, Darshan Shingh explained that as outsiders, Western thinkers tried to interpret and understand Sikh religion. Religion as an area that is not easy to be understood by outsiders, foreigners or non-participants. Religion can only be understood deeply by participants with following the teachings of their religious practice.[3]

Kim Knott argues that the expression of one's religious experience (in an insider), then responded by outsiders is done by upholding the boundaries of objectivity and subjectivity to religious experience and based on empathy and critical analysis. Thus, between insider and outsider will contribute to the balance of perspectives in the history of religious studies. Kim Knott's concept had been mapped in four elements, there are participants, researchers as participants, participants as researchers and pure researchers.[4] The term insider and outsider relates to the polarization of thought and experience of interpretation and articulation of Islamic teachings by western scholars and Muslims. Western scholars are called outsiders (outsiders/non-Muslims) who want to study Islam in an Islamic perspective. Instead, insiders are Muslims themselves.[5]

Max Muller explained that religion as an object of study must be presented proportionally. Then Cornelius Tiele appealed to scientists in conducting religious studies to uphold the value of objectivity without being skeptical and impartial.[6] Even Kristensen, Van der Leeuw and Rudolf Otto (Germany), Mircea Eliade and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (America) and Ninian Smart (England) have provided methodological reinforcement of religious studies, specifically aspects of religious phenomenology. According to them, all religions are unique phenomena can be viewed from various aspects, autonomous and can present empathic understanding. The phenomenological approach aims to understand religion with empathy in accordance with insider's religious experience and withhold negative judgments from prejudice from outsiders. According to Kim Knott, as quoted by Charles J. Adams, the study of religion requires a phenomenological approach, understanding one's religion to study their choices and commitments in a neutral manner and then reconstructing the experiences of others.[7]

Charles S. Pierce gives thought construction as the basis of religious studies, the first is belief in the form of an absolute social order, the second is habit of mind hereditary traditions, the third is doubt, it is questioning

what has been considered mainstream thought, the fourth is inquiry, it is a research to look for meaning or value, not truth, and the fifth is the logic of theory as the basis for application of studies. Russell McCutcheon even strengthened the insider's response to the outsider into three forms, namely the autonomy of religious experience related to the phenomenological approach, reductionism which is exemplified in the academic attitude taking by academics and neutrality. Every human being has their own religious experience. The experience is in the form of explorative cognitive. Thus, all formal statements related to religious experience make the religious side that seems personal can be articulated to others.[8]

Karen Mc Carthy Brown named the outsider as "the other". He argues that outsiders and insiders are equally able to position emic and ethical behavior in their culture. Some researchers use "ethics" for an objective or external level (researchers' views), while "emics" for a subjective level or within a religious community (the views of the people being studied). The "ethical" construction is in the form of descriptions and analyzes for the context of the schema and conceptual categories that are considered meaningful by outsiders as academics. While the construction of "emic" in the form of description and analysis for the context of the scheme and conceptual categories that are meaningful for participants.

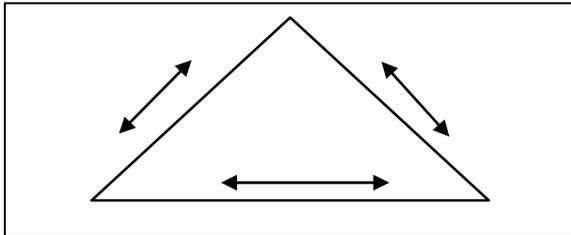
In contrast to Darshan Singh, he argues that the concepts and teachings of religion are not easily accessed by outsiders. In this case, Western researchers are as outsiders or non- religion. For them, it is not an easy thing to interpret and understand religion. Instead, they will be able to find the meaning contained in religion through intensive participation, namely by participating in the teachings of the religion. The mapping of thought carried out by Kim Knott related to insider and outsider to the exploration of religion seems to raise the problem of skepticism between both of them. These conditions raise questions of doubt over objectivity, scientific validity is fulfilled. Through the view of Kim Knott, between insider and outsider is able to intertwine the boundaries of objectivity and subjectivity of religious experience by holding fast to empathy and critical attitudes. This empathy and critical attitude is able to build a perspective balance construction in religious studies.

#### ***3.2. Approach to Kim Knott's Perspective in the Study of Religious Studies***

A researcher must be able to maintain the values of independence, neutrality and objectivity in conducting exploratory activities in religious studies. Religious studies and understanding, both acting as insider and outsider must maintain these values. The independence, neutrality and objectivity are being methodological problem of the study of insider and outsider perspective religion. Kim Knott offered a methodological concept called the rapprochement approach. It is an approach that attempts to place the position of the researcher on the boundary line

between the position of insider and outsider. Below is the relationship between the triangulation scheme of the rapprochement approach:

Triangulation of the Rapprochement Approach:



Subjective (firstness)  
Objective (Secondness)  
Inter-Subjective (Thirdness)

The approach seeks to turn on the synergy between subjective and objective and inter-subjective components, an effort to bring the variables closer together. These three elements are complementing, not independent existence. Furthermore, Kim Knott offered several approaches from experts related to the concept of insider and outsider that can be used to explore religion, namely the phenomenology approach, reductionism approach, neutrality approach and agnosticism method and reflexivity approach.[9]

Phenomenology approach, aims to solve the problem of the autonomous position of religious experience. Through this approach, researchers are able to understand diversity by using empathy and refraining from truth claims or judgments about right or wrong. Phenomenology approaches give priority to similarities rather than differences. In the aspect of inter-subjectivity, Kim Knott stated that rapprochement as an accommodative dialogical instrument. Kim Knott provides an explanation cited by Charles J. Adams, that a phenomenological approach is needed in religious studies. This approach was made to understand one's religion in an objectively neutral way as in reconstructing the experience of others.[7] This approach is only to find aspects of religious experience and human religious responses without regard to space and time dimensions and culture. Thus, the empirical aspects of diversity can be obtained and more in accordance with the existing reality.

The reductionism approach, aims to capture the phenomenon of pure diversity and in the form of interpretations, so that there is no separation between subjects and objects. As for the context of social studies, this approach has three stages, namely the phenomenological reduction stage, the editis reduction stage and the transcendent reduction stage. The use of the reductionism approach is able to deliver researchers to the substance that is in harmony between meaning and something that is seen in the observation.

The neutrality approach and the method of agnosticism, require researchers to avoid the attitude of validation and rejection by remaining neutral when faced with questions about truth and values. A researcher used this approach prefers neutrality and abstention in deciding issues related to a truth. Thus, this approach tends to be mediating because of the neutrality and abstention that is raised.

Reflexivity approach is intended to bring together the gap between insider and outsider. This meeting between insider and outsider is conducted by determining insider's experience with interpretation, So that they are able to connect insider and outsider.

Referring to the opinion of Junker and Emmas, Kim Knott gives four conceptions of the role of the development of religious social interconnection covering several positions: pure participants, researchers as participants, participants as researchers and pure researchers.[4] The following explanation of the four elements is as follows:

- **Pure Participants / Complete Participant :** The method used the position of pure participants here is a religious adherent who is fully involved in religious activities and also as a researcher who studies the religion by utilizing insider's knowledge. Researchers as pure participants in essence already have sufficient data and understanding of the religion being studied. If this kind of research is carried out by emphasizing the emic aspect, then it can produce to a non-apologetic objective study. Examples of genuine participation in a Muslim feminist sociologist named Fatima Mernissi. She is a Muslim writer who explores the essence of Islamic teachings to understand all the rights that women have. In the introduction to her book stated that a Muslim woman must be able to keep up with this era (modern) in order to restore dignity, democracy and human rights. Furthermore, Muslim women must also be able to uphold Western values and take traditions from Islam to participate in the political and social sphere. Fatima Mernissi indeed often criticizes misogynistic traditions. But on the other hand, she was criticized by the editor of an Islamic journal as a liar and did not represent the Islamic tradition. Based on the explanation of the example above, Fatima Mernissi is as an emic (the views of the people studied, subjective level). She only used personal experience with the language of Islam without the approach of religious studies or sociology. Specifically, there is the issue about the concept of the veil to understand Islamic culture exclusively
- **Researcher or Observer as Participant:** The method which uses the researcher's position as a participant is carried out as an effort by a

researcher to be part of the participant in order to obtain accurate information and valid data from religious circles and even internal information. In addition, the researchers can also give religious questions directly, and even they can still communicate with outsiders, including those who oppose the religion being studied. This method was identified by Smart and subsequently continued by Barker around the 1970s - 1980s. He argues that such a method can bring the gap between insider and outsider into two integral sides. Eileen Barker rejected research on Unification Church, both practically and ethically, because he did not want to pretend to be a follower of one of the sects. According to him, in researching Moonies, he must identify, mingle and participate in becoming followers of Moonies. This concept has many similarities with the approach of empathy that is often used by researchers of previous religious phenomenology, such as Kristensen, Van der Leeuw and Ninian Smart. Moreover, in religious research, Smart uses the method of agnosticism which requires neutrality and does not make truth claims.[10]

- Participants as Researchers / Participant as Observer: The participant method as a researcher is done by keeping a distance from the object in order to show the attitude of objectivity. Objective and neutral research can be obtained by keeping a distance from the object. The goal to be achieved by participants as researchers is to obtain objective research and distant criticism by means of participants. As exemplified by Kim Knott, there is a researcher who tries to terms culture, tradition, liturgy and sacred texts instead of using the terms orthodox Jewish.[4]
- Pure Observer Researcher: Pure researchers or pure observers are pinned to outsiders or outsiders as researchers by obeying the principles of scientific research. Research with pure researchers as outsiders is ethical or concerns the ethical realm, social science concepts are used to explain psychological behavior as a result of the influence of religious beliefs. Characteristics of this study include objective, neutral, able to retest, demonstrate the validity of test results and be able to make generalizations. Insider as the object observed is passive, while the outsider as an observer is active, invisible and investigating.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

All the problems of human life can actually be solved by religious studies. The study of religion with a scientific approach will produce the substance behind more empirical teaching values. One idea that is able to make a major contribution to the rejection of ignorance or the freezing of religious studies is Kim Knott. When religious studies stagnate, Kim Knott offers insider and outsider mapping in religious studies so as to be able to uphold the value of objectivity in religious studies. In addition, he gave thoughts related to the approach of religious studies which were not differentiated between the processes of compartmentalization and value elaboration. Researcher named Samuel Hielman felt unable to overcome distance. The use of his experiences near and far, he also cannot avoid the use of the Hebrew term. He often used the language of religious studies and social science to shift his perspective. In fact, he used the only limited to religious research, but could also be used to study other scientific fields. This step is an academic bridge with a scientific approach that harmonizes the methodological skepticism between insiders and outsiders in understanding religion. In addition, exploratory studies of Islamic studies from outsiders actually open a large faucet for the progress and development of Muslim scholars' knowledge in building Islamic civilization. Through outsiders, Muslim intellectuals are able to understand various existing life problems by providing solutions to their solutions. Thus writing related to the perspective of insider outsider Kim Knott in religious studies, further studies are needed in more depth related to the theme, so it can contribute to the religious studies.

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