

## THE NATURE OF TRUTH IN POST-TRUTH CONDITION: CRITICISM ABOUT THE RISE OF RELATIVISM AND ITS RELATION ON POPULAR ISLAMIC DISCOURSE IN PUBLIC SPHERE

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### **Abstract:**

*Based on philosophical inquiries, this article attempts to inquiry and criticize the rise of relativism of truth in the post-truth condition and to reveal its relation with contemporary popular Islamic discourses in the public sphere. It cannot be denied that truth, both truth as a concept or as property, is an extremely basic concept and the philosopher's value par excellence. Considering the extent of its scope, the inquiry of truth in philosophical discourse is often connected to the system of human belief, knowledge, concept of logic, language, and reality. The philosopher's fascination in the discourse of truth could be deduced by three problems: how the truth acquired, the relation of truth to linguistic meaning, and the relation between truth and logic. In ancient philosophy, the idea of truth broadly refers to physical or natural order as truth's ontological sine qua non. Different from classical philosophy, the truth in the realm of modern philosophy refers to the critical and self-reflective subjectivity of the subject that seeks objective truth. While the key terms that illustrate the conditions of contemporary philosophical discourse are postmodernism which is characterized by the mistrust of the grand narratives. In contemporary age—the age of disruption which technology forms and accelerates human life and also driven by the mistrust of the grand narratives campaigned by postmodernism philosophical thought, the nature of truth undergoes some radical change. The symptom of radical changes that occur in truth value lies in the problem that feeling or believing something matter more than fact in shaping public opinion. At the level of academic discourses, the current situation is often expressed as the post-truth condition which is often characterized by the disappearance of objective truth—the prefix “post” does not refer to the temporal sense, but in the sense that truth has been eclipsed. In the post-truth condition, which relativism of truth is often at its peak, philosophical discourses, including Islamic philosophy, find its challenges. By inquiring about the nature of truth through ontological, epistemological, axiological, and semantical inquiries, this article seeks to a better understanding of the dynamics of philosophy in the post-truth condition and try to critically analyze and search for solutions to avoid the eclipsed truth based on the philosophical lens.*

**Keywords:** *Post-Truth, Relativism, Technology, Populism, Fake News, Mass Hysteria.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The main issue illustrated by Heidegger when unfolding the situation of the modern (post-modern) reality is that *the fundamental event of the modern age is*

*the conquest of the world as picture (Bild)*.<sup>1</sup> As a philosopher who struggles with the problem of fundamental ontology that focuses on *Dasein's* (Being-in-there) issues,<sup>2</sup> Heidegger's expression indicates a radical change in the level of reality, even beyond the realm of metaphysical (ontology) discourse. Borrowing Lèvin's interpretation in *The Opening Vision*, Heidegger's phrase illustrates an exceeding reality which is termed "ontology of picture" or "ontology of image".<sup>3</sup> Images become so identical with the essence of modern metaphysics. When reality is dominated by images and accelerated by technology, human cultures undergoes in such radical changes, which also influences how truth manifests itself in reality.

It cannot be denied that truth, both truth as a concept or as property, is an extremely basic concept and the philosopher's value *par excellence*. Considering the extent of its scope, the inquiry of truth in philosophical discourse is often connected to the system of human belief, knowledge, concept of logic, language, and reality. In ancient philosophy, the idea of truth broadly refers to physical or natural order. Different from classical philosophy, the truth in the realm of modern philosophy refers to the critical and self-reflective subjectivity of the subject that seeks objective truth. While the key terms that illustrate the conditions of contemporary philosophical discourse are postmodernism which is characterized by the mistrust of the grand narratives.

Driven by the mistrust of the grand narratives, the nature of truth undergoes some radical change. The symptom of radical changes that occur in truth value lies in the problem that feeling or believing something matter more than fact in shaping public opinion—the idea that things are true irrespective of how the people feel about them. As a consequence, the truth shifts from being substantive to a procedural notion. At the level of academic discourses, the current situation is often expressed as the *post-truth* condition which is often characterized by the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Dasein* is a typical term in Heidegger's phenomenological thought which is often translated as *Being-in-there*. Other than that, the term *Dasein* is also used to indicate several other meanings, such as *Being-in-the-world* or *Existing-in-the-world*) and *Being-toward-death*.

<sup>3</sup> David Michael Lèvin, *The Opening of Vision*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), p. 119.

disappearance of the objective truth values. In other terms, the truth has been eclipsed, that is when facts become something *passe*.

In the age of disruption in which technology forms and accelerates human life and also driven by the mistrust of the grand narratives campaigned by postmodernism philosophical thought, the reality of *post-truth* even becomes more massive. Adapting Derrida's spectrophetic hauntology when illustrating Mark's ideas, that *a spectre is haunting truth—the spectre of populism*. The problem is, why populism is so influential in the character of truth? The reason behind its influence on truth lies in the “empty heart” of populism: populism lacks a commitment to key values, except in its popularity. The truth is no longer measured by philosophical standards, but by emotions and mass beliefs that resonate in the public sphere and amplified in the cybersphere as the new media.

The problem is whether the citizens have a say in the decisions that concern them in the public sphere, without being subject to coercion, then the conversation the public sphere always depending on the intellectual capacities of the people which also affects the value of truth. In the midst of contemporary cultural situations trapped in images and in the *post-truth* condition which “emotional” relativism of truth is often at its peak and also driven by mass hysteria, philosophical discourses, including Islamic philosophy, find its challenges. Thus, based on some issues described above, this article attempts to elaborate the nature of truth through ontological, epistemological, axiological, and semantical inquiries in the *post-truth* condition. This article also tries to critically analyze and search for solutions to avoid the eclipsed truth based on the philosophical lens.

### **THE TRUTH THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY**

Truth is the goal of philosophical inquiry, even it is essentially contested among them—for in its absence, the bewilderment or lost or may even be facing the wrong way, on the wrong track altogether, are inevitable. As a basic concept of philosophical inquiry, truth is so tightly interconnected with so many other philosophically interesting concepts. Sometimes, truth is deeply connected to belief, to knowledge, to language, and to the central concept of logic as well, and

the most important, truth is related to another mysterious concept, reality. Sometimes, perhaps more often, the failure to seek the truth leads someone to put up with simplifications, metaphors, and even myths and fictions. To avoid the labyrinth of truth, philosophers have tried to think about truth and its relation to facts or reality.

Generally, the philosopher's fascination with truth throughout the history of philosophy could be deduced by three problems: how the truth acquired, the relation of truth to linguistic meaning, and the relation between truth and logic. As an initial hypothesis, the truth has undergone a paradigm shift through history; from nature to history; from Being to politics; from history to language; and even from language to image. Thus, a philosophical inquiry concerning truth tries to find out how truth acquired or justified; what is the relation of truth to linguistic meaning; and what is the relation between truth and logic? Then in the age of the world as picture, what is the relation of truth to image?

Historically we have understood the terms of truth as form (Plato), as substance (Aristotle), as agreement (medieval), as transcendental idealism (Kant), or as hermeneutical phenomenology and later as *alētheia* (Heidegger). This section will inquiry, briefly, the dynamic of truth in the history of philosophy, from ancient to contemporary philosophy, to understand the contemporary dynamic of the truth value in the *post-truth* condition. Considering that the philosophers interest concerning truth sometimes in the concept, sometimes in the underlying nature of the property, and sometimes in both, the inquiry itself based on two main questions, truth as a concept (the theoretical aspect) and a property (the substantive aspect).<sup>4</sup> These questions are based on the central questions which

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<sup>4</sup> In simple terms, both as a concept or as a property, the truth accumulates in *robust* and *deflationist* theories. According to Lynch elaboration, *robust* theories assume that truth is an important property that requires a substantive and complex explanation. In this case, the *robust* theories concern the objectivity of truth. Thus, the key issue for *robust* theories of truth is realism. But since the beginning of the last century, *deflationists* have suspected that the so-called problem of truth was a pseudo-problem. *Deflationists* hold that there is no single *robust* property shared by all the propositions we take as true. Consequently, our concept of truth should not be understood as expressing such a property but be seen as fulfilling some other function. In another word, *robust* theorists argue that the various mysteries of truth require substantive metaphysical explanation, while *deflationists* believe that no such explanation is needed. Michael P. Lynch, "Introduction: The

are, *first*, does truth even have nature? and *second*, if it does, what sort of nature does it have?

As a starting point, Aristotle's statement in *Metaphysics* is a good entrance to start an inquiry concerning the question of truth in philosophy; that is about the impossibility for there to be anything in the middle between contradictories which based on non-contradiction principle of logic, but it is necessary either to affirm or to deny one thing. The impossibility was illustrated by Aristotle that "For to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, whereas to say of what is that it is, or what is not that it is not, is true" [1011<sup>b25-29</sup>].<sup>5</sup> In another section which illustrated the priority of things then thought, Aristotle said that "For falsehood and truth are not in the thing, as if the good were true and the bad straightaway false, but in thought" [1027<sup>b25-27</sup>].<sup>6</sup>

In Allen's interpretation, Aristotle's definition synthesizes three assumptions about the truth or false related to the problem of nature, Being, and language. *First*, the priority of nature over language, culture, or the effects of historical experience. *Second*, the idea that truth is a kind of sameness, falsity a difference, between what is said and what there is. And *third*, the secondary and derivative character of the sign by which truth is symbolized and communicated.<sup>7</sup> Based on this interpretation, as Allen observes, to think of truth is to think of truth as something that a statement has because of something else's being one way and not another. Truth's value consists in its adequacy to this "something else"—to beings that are there by nature (*a principle or source or archē residing in the thing themselves and responsible for their characteristic behavior*), and the modifications and interferences they undergo.<sup>8</sup>

The idea that truth is a statement that it is in adequacy to "something else", whether the source or the target, interpreted in many ways. In ancient Greek

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Mystery of Truth", in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), p. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016), p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Allen, *Truth in Philosophy* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Allen, *Truth in Philosophy*, p. 10.

philosophy, the idea of truth generally related to nature (*phusis*) as truth's ontological *sine qua non*.<sup>9</sup> As Collingwood observes, when a Greek writer contrasts *phusis* (nature) with *technē* (skill) or *phusis* with *bia* (behavior) he implies that things have a principle of growth, organization, and movement, in their own right and that this is what he means by their nature; and when he calls things natural he means that they have such a principle in them.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the truth is close to a matter of saying it like it is which involves an ability to articulate things in a way they express themselves; to speak the truth is to speak of reality as it is.

Aristotle's definition concerning truth itself interpreted by many modern and contemporary philosophers. Realist philosophers hold on a proposition that it is true just when it corresponds to reality. They assume that the root behind realism is that truth not on us but the world. Then the basic assumption for the realists is that the root behind realism is that truth not on us but the world. While the idealist philosophers assume that but the problem of truth is the problem in degree of realization within the mind as an ideally coherent system of judgments. They assume that the foundation of truth is the systematic coherence system of judgment which characterized a significant whole. Thus, the foundation of truth is the systematic coherence system of judgment which characterized a significant whole.

For realist philosophers, the truth has a nature and that its nature is objective, so that not depend on what anyone believes or subjective value. According to R. J. Hirst, the traditional doctrine about realism is:

The view that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience. Realism thus opposed to idealism, which holds that no such material objects or external realities exist apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them, the whole universe thus being

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<sup>9</sup> According to Charles H. Kahn, the Greek concept of Being takes its rise from pre-philosophical notion of "reality" as whatever it is in the world that makes some statement true and others false, some opinions correct and other mistaken. C. H. Kahn, "Retrospect on the Verb 'to be' and the Concept of Being", in *The Logic of Being*, S. Knuuttila and J. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Redel, 1986), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 81-82.

dependent on the mind or in some sense mental. (Hirst 1967: 77)<sup>11</sup>

This is the foundation of classical truth known as the correspondence theory of truth which contains the truth bearer (the property of truth), the truth relation (the correspondence of truth), and the truth maker (the reality of truth).

There are two dimensions of realism in traditional doctrine: a claim about what entities exist and a claim about their independent nature. In Devitt's interpretations, for the realist, the world exists independently of the mental. It is something external and objective which is not constituted by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacity to refer to it, by synthesizing power of the mind, by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages. For an object has objective existence, it exists and has its nature whatever we believe, think, or can discover: it is independent of cognitive activities of the mind. The claim that something objectively exists independently of the mental also commits realism only on an undifferentiated, uncategorized, external world, the "thing-in-itself".<sup>12</sup> The problem is, to what degree is the external world considered true?

Bertrand Russel argues that it is beliefs that are true or false and facts that make beliefs true. Russel's argument based on three propositions. *First*, the theory of truth must be such as to admit of its opposite, falsehood. *Second*, if there were no beliefs there could be no falsehood, and no truth either, in the sense in which truth is correlative to falsehood. And *third*, the truth or falsehood of a belief always depends upon something which lies outside the belief itself.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, a belief is true when it corresponds with a certain complex unity (a fact) and false when it does not. The problem is, since we cannot step outside of our beliefs to identifying the truth, we cannot ever check to see if they correspond to the world or not. We can never know whether our beliefs are true.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, p. 14-15, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Bertrand Russel, "Truth and Falsehood", in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p. 18.

Unlike Russel, J. L. Austin argues that truth is not a property of beliefs, but rather the linguistic conventions. Austin insists that correspondence is nothing but conventional. As an apparatus for naming and predication, language determines whether the particular state of affairs (a referential fact) referred to is of the appropriate type to make the statement true. In his essay, Austin explains that there are two sets of conventions: Descriptive conventions correlating the words (=sentences) with the type of situation, thing, even, etc., to be found in the world. Demonstrative conventions correlating the words (=sentences) with the historic situation, etc., to be found in the world.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, a statement is said to be true when the historic state of affairs corresponds with the sentence used to describes it, or the truth of a sentence consists in the reference of its parts to objective reality.

Terence Horgan presents another version of the correspondence theory which allows for both direct and indirect word to world relations which he calls “contextual semantics”. In his essay, Horgan argues that contextual semantics is intermediate between *referentialism* (referential semantics) with its conception of truth as direct language-world correspondence and *neopragmatism* (neo-pragmatist semantics) with its radically epistemic construal of truth. In short, truth is semantically correct assertibility; falsity is semantically correct deniability. It is never epistemic, but semantic correctness, since it involves a type of correspondence with the world. This is because the semantic norms governing truth can vary with context. Thus, there is a spectrum of ways in which statements can correspond to the world.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike realist philosophers, idealist philosophers assume that to think of a thing is to get that thing itself in some degree within the mind. According to Lynch, the truth in an idealist view is a thought and its object do not differ in kind but in degree of realization. Hence, the purpose of thought is to become more developed and coherent until it literally is identical to, or “one with,” reality. In short, a

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<sup>14</sup> J. L. Austin, “Truth”, in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Terence Horgan, “Contextual Semantics and Metaphysical Realism: Truth as Indirect Correspondence”, in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p. 70-71.

judgment is true when and only when it is a member of an ideally coherent system of judgments. Because the coherence theory stresses that truth consists in the coherence, or mutual support, of our beliefs, it is common to label the coherence theory as an “epistemic” conception of truth.<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary epistemologist Linda Martin Alcoff claim that in some sense, the truth is relative. This is because systems of knowledge are at least partly the product of one’s historical situation. Alcoff labeled her theory as “immanent realism” which based on an immanent account of knowledge, against the transcendental account of foundationalism. That is, for *coherentism*, knowledge is ultimately a product of phenomena that are immanent to human belief systems and practices, social organizations, and lived reality, whereas for foundationalism, if a belief is to count as knowledge, it must ultimately be able to establish some link to transcendent phenomena or something that is entirely extrinsic to human existence. This claim stands on the impossibility for human beings to remove all traces of our engaged concern with the world and the substantive conceptual models and interpretive systems we use to make sense of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the realists or idealists, pragmatist philosophers argue that truth consists in its practical effects on human experience. Instead struggling theoretical or propositional problems, the truth in pragmatists has much to do with practical experience as a part of a matter of human interests and attitudes. In classical pragmatism, as Charles Peirce argues in his essay, the whole of our conception of the object based on our conception of the effect, directly or indirectly, of the sensible world.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the truth of judgment consists in its continuous practical use in human lives.

Different from classical pragmatism, the contemporary pragmatism, for example in Putnam’s philosophical thought, combining it with realism which he termed internal (pragmatic) realism. In his essay, Putnam argues that in an

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<sup>16</sup> Michael P. Lynch, “Coherent Theories: Introduction”, in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p.99.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Martin Alcoff, “The Case for Coherence”, in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p.162-163.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Sander Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p. 202.

internalist view, signs do not intrinsically correspond to objects, independently of how those signs are employed and by whom. But a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects within the conceptual scheme of those users. "Objects" do not exist independently of conceptual schemes.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, unlike external realists, the internal realist believes that the totality of objects is not metaphysically fixed, because objects themselves exist only relative to conceptual schemes.

In phenomenology tradition, the truth is not as simple as correspondence between thought and reality. Phenomenology related to the principle of how, in Husserl term, we "back to the thing them self" (*zu den Sachen selbst*),<sup>20</sup> or, in Heidegger term, as "the process of letting things manifest themselves" (*als das Sichzeigenlassen der Sache selbst*).<sup>21</sup> Thus, if the usual concept of truth is correspondence or coherence between subject and object, phenomenological tradition changes, radically, the conception of truth that is not a static-binary relation between subject's representation of an object and the object itself, but the product of an activity that present the world directly as reviving our living contact with reality.

As part of postmodernism (post-structuralism) traditions which is characterized by the distrust of the grand narratives, Foucault assume that truth is by nature political. Through his essay, he argues that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A "regime "of truth."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hilary Putnam, "Two Philosophical Perspective", in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigation*, trans. J. N. Findlay, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2001), p. xxviii.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Preface", in William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 4<sup>th</sup> (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), p. xxii.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Foucault, "Truth and Power", in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Michael P. Lynch (ed.), p. 317-318.

Another significant conception concerning truth is relativism. In the history of Western philosophy, the first known statement of a relativist position is Protagoras (c. 490–420 BC), the Sophist with his famous dictum “man is the measure of all things.” The basic notion of relativism, as Ulf Zackariasson explains, is the human awareness difference which creates a kind of cognitive dissonance. The formula is simple enough: some properties (X) we may ascribe to X are such that they are determined by X’s standing relative to Y. X can, for instance, be an object that is small relative to object Y (or a set of objects) and yet be big relative to Z (or another set of objects).<sup>23</sup> So, perhaps, it is not so surprising that truth, from the relativist point of view, is always related to the plurality in life styles, worldviews, value, and much else—the plurality that leads to an acute awareness of difference. Thus, truth never appears in its purity, but always relational—related to—and contextual.

If the problem of truth was polarized into and interplay critically among many philosophical thoughts throughout the history of philosophy, then what kind of philosophical current issues and dynamics concerning the truth in the contemporary era, especially in the era of technological culture?

## **THE AGE OF THE DIGITAL IMAGE AND THE EMERGENCE *POST-TRUTH* CONDITION**

### **1. Image and The Imaginal Truth**

Technology has changed the rules of interaction in politics, religions, and society at large. In the age of technological culture, how human thinks and talks about truth has changed; from the oral tradition in ancient world to the basis for digital logic in contemporary era. At the time dominated by oral and written traditions, language becomes a fundamental instrument for truth-teller, meanwhile image, especially algorithmic images which can be programmed, becomes the fundamental even for revealing the truth when everything digitalized. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to define the current

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<sup>23</sup> Ulf Zackariasson, “Introduction: Engaging Relativism and Post-Truth”, in *Relativism and Post-Truth in Contemporary Society*, Mikael Stenmark, et al. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 4.

contemporary world as an imaginal culture; a world which characterized by a totalizing tendency to see things, the truth of things, in terms of images.

Based on Heidegger's hypothesis, as mentioned earlier, the fundamental event of the modern (postmodernism) age is the conquest of the world as picture (*Bild*). The term picture (*Bild*) here does not mean the picture of the world, but the world imagined, understood, and even embraced as an image—the reality in image representation, which is then considered as reality itself. The imagined world is reduced in such a way as a reality that controlled and colonized by images.

Regarding the question of the image, Lechte asserts that the image is one of the most enigmatic entities—perhaps, more enigmatic than language system with which it has intimate relations. This suggests that the image has always been more than a representation, more than an analogy, or analogon—more than a resemblance between image and object.<sup>24</sup> In Vernant term when elaborating Plato's *mimēsis* theory, the image as an expression of different kinds of appearance belongs entirely on the side of "phenomena", of the sensible world with its inconsistencies, contradictions, and relativities. This still puts the image on the side of phenomena of sensible world with its inconsistencies, contradictions, and relativities.<sup>25</sup>

In addressing Heidegger's hypothesis concerning ontology of image, the question—the naïve question—that immediately come to mind, then, is: What is an image? And in an equally naïve answer: An image can be a picture, whether pictographic, photographic, painterly, cinematographic, televisual, videographic—all of these would be examples of images. However, besides the naïve question-answer, there are a lot of paradoxes behind the image, ontologically, which requires deeper research, especially in relation to the digital age. Thus, the fundamental question about the ontology of image is

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<sup>24</sup> John Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and Its Digital Future*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Birth of Images", in *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 171.

concerned with the question of the image as it is; Is the image an object like other physical objects? Or essentially not a thing in its own right?

If ontology is possible only as phenomenology, as Heidegger assumes,<sup>26</sup> then the ontology of image is only possible to be discussed as far as it is revealed as a phenomenon. According to Heidegger:

*Phenomenon*—the self-showing in itself—means a distinctive way something can be encountered. On the other hand, *appearance* means a referential relation in beings themselves such that what does the *referring* (the making known) can fulfill its possible function only if it shows itself in itself—only if it is a “phenomenon.” Both appearance and semblance are founded in the phenomenon, albeit in different ways. The confusing multiplicity of “phenomena” designated by the terms phenomenon, semblance, appearance, mere appearance, can be unraveled only if the concept of phenomenon is understood from the very beginning as the self-showing in itself.<sup>27</sup>

In the Greek thought and culture, image related with the issue of *eikōn* (image or likeness), *eidōlon* (second like object, the replica or duplication of the first, double or simulacrum), *phantasia* (appearance), and *phantasma* (semblance). The terms emerge from the activity of presenting the invisible through imitation of appearance. Thus, whatever their differences, all come under the heading of *mimēsis*, of imitation. As Vernant explained, for Plato, everything in human life that is classified as *eidōpoiikē*, of the activity that fabricates an image—everything that belongs to the domain of *mimētikē* (demiurgy of images—a fabrication of images, not of realities). Meanwhile, the Sophist maintains a distinction between two forms *eidōpoiikē*; produces

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 27.

icon-copies (*eikōnes*) that resemble their models by reproducing their actual proportions, on the contrary, produces simulacra-phantasms (*phantasmata*) by sacrificing the exact proportions and substituting those that will create an illusion in the eyes of the spectators.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that the image appearance as the self-showing in itself has an essential connection with the reality, while the simulacrum-phantasms as semblance has cut off the image from the reality.

To grasp the nature of the image ontologically, the image *as* image, the concept of reality and truth are to be elaborated. Following Letchte's elaboration, true knowledge can only be a knowledge of what is real and, in this regard, no image, representation, or craftsman's object can even approximate reality as what is real. Thus, the reality is not accessible to belief or to phantasy as appearance, but to the ability to see. To see, then, is not to engage with a semblance or with an imitation of reality; it is instead equivalent to an engagement with the truth itself.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the image is another form of appearance; that is, as Vernant explained, *eidōlon* which manifests both a real presence and an irremediable absence at the same time. It is this inclusion of a "being elsewhere" in the midst of a "being here" that constitutes the archaic *eidōlon*.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that there is indeed a reality of illusion of an image as much as there is a reality of truth as what is an image; what is not (non-being) becomes no less real than what is (being).

The play of presence and absence, of being-here and being-elsewhere, of the Same and the Other, has raised to a paradox about the question of image. These paradoxes referring to the problem that, in Aristotle illustration, *one who did not perceive anything would neither learn nor understand anything, and whenever one contemplates, one necessarily at the same time contemplates a sort of image; for images are just as perceptions are,*

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<sup>28</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Birth of Images", p. 165, 169.

<sup>29</sup> John Letchte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and Its Digital Future*, p. 14-15.

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Birth of Images", p. 168.

*except without matter* [432a8-10],<sup>31</sup> or borrowing Heidegger's term, in the—mode of—consciousness of a picture (image), there is the picture-thing (image-thing) and the pictured (the imagined).<sup>32</sup>

The paradox has brought the ontological problem of the image to an understanding that an image is not identical with itself. Because, following Lechte's argumentation, to turn the image into a self-identical thing is to evacuate the image's content as image. If an image is equated with a thing or object—as is implied by the notion of an image as having a phenomenal form—the very possibility of distinguishing its essential quality as an image is lost. By contrast, those who cast the image in the role of the pure image, of the simulacrum—even if it be a simulacrum produced by modern technology—turn the image into a thing. If everything (including an image) is a thing, there is no image. By this, they turn the image into an identity and render it identical with itself as it is not a thing.<sup>33</sup> In Sartre's term, the paradox—considering that the image is something which brings to presence what is absent, thus the image becomes the presence of the thing in its absence—can be perceived as part of a “naïve ontology” which based on the “illusion of immanence”, where images are put on the same plane as things, giving both the same type of existence.<sup>34</sup>

The illustration concerning the reality of the image above suggests that the image is not simply as a *mimētikē* of reality, as *eikōn* or as *eidolon*. It also suggests that the truth of images lies in the interpretation of its self-showing, both as appearance or semblance. In the technological era—where the key to digital technologies is not their “immateriality” but the fact that they can be “programmed”, the challenge is how images have changed the mode of

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<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Cristopher Shields, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (United Kingdom: Calderon Press-Oxford, 2016), p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> John Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and Its Digital Future*, p. 19, 109.

<sup>34</sup> John Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and Its Digital Future*, p. 106. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge), p. 43.

consciousness in radical ways. As Lev Manovich points out, as cited by Lechte, that:

New media change our concept of what an image is—because they turn the viewer into an active user. As a result, an illusionistic image is no longer something a subject simply looks at, comparing it with memories of represented reality to judge its reality effect. The new media image is something the user actively goes into, zooming in or clicking on individual parts with the assumption that they contain hyperlinks (for instance, image maps in Web sites).

Thus, according to Manovich, the image in the traditional sense no longer exists and becomes interactive. The image becomes a virtual thing which is no longer something static that the subject staring at, but carries the subject actively goes into. Therefore, the interactive nature of images in the age of new media is one of the conditions that ignites and accelerates the post-reality conditions.

In the reality of the world as picture (image), humans are faced with a situation, as termed Baudlirllard, hyper-reality (beyond reality). In semiotics, what is called hyper in various phenomena of life (commodities of information media, fashion, sexuality, music, religion, etc.) can be interpreted as a condition of “sign domination” spread in various aspects of reality. As explained by Pialang, hyper-reality can be interpreted as a condition of mingling and overlapping of various forms of signs in a representation space. Thus, between the original/false, the past/present, natural/artificial, facts/fiction cannot be distinguished anymore; blend and overlap, then create a space for the indeterminate of meaning.<sup>35</sup> The blurring of the reality boundary and the overlapping conditions of the sign have an impact on the

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<sup>35</sup> Yasraf Amir Pialang, *Post-Realitas: Realitas Kebudayaan dalam Era Post-Metafisika* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2015), p. 24.

rampant condition of pathology, the image and parody of false subjectivity that appear in portraits of ego-logical narcissism.<sup>36</sup>

Narcissism itself is an existential situation dominated by images. In the context of “ontology of image”, narcissism can be understood as a symptom of mental illness (psycho-pathology) which subject’s ego obsessed with an image. Based on this meaning, essentially, narcissistic psycho-pathology is related to the relationship between image and existential suffering of subject’s ego that obsessed with an image, even though the reality displayed in an image does not have any relationship with real reality. Thus, the pathology of narcissism manifests the suffering of the ego—the subject trapped in his own “ontology of image”, trapped in a reality of representation. When the subject entangled in the reality of the image, the subject is not only cut off from the real-reality, but at the same time alienated from themselves (the self) along with their existential authenticity. So, what emerges is false subjectivity.

In the age when reality appears in representation of an image, what determining and defining reality—social, political, economic, even religious realities—is only the images, not reality in itself. The representation of reality as an image illustrates the subject’s desire to rule, dominate, and control the daily life of the world by, mostly, manipulating the image of the world. Everything becomes fully identified through the image, thus losing its essential touch with its own objective reality. Image of reality is the only way the subject rules and controls his reality.

When the development of information technology experiences a massive leap—accompanied by an abundance of signs that transcend the cognitive, affective, and motoric capacities of human beings to interpret it (hyper-semiotics) because of technological acceleration, thus losing its

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<sup>36</sup> In Peperzak’s explanation, egology is the theoretical side of a more fundamental attitude: the egocentrism of Western civilization realizes itself in a peculiar way of life, which is philosophy is the theoretical counterpart. Objectification, material pleasure, and the privilege accorded to seeing, manipulation, planning, and exploitation form a pattern which could be characterized by the word “egonomy”: the world of Western culture is ruled by ego’s law. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Lèvinas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 8-9.

adequate reflective bases—the psychic structure and the daily behaviour of human beings becomes very closely related to the parodies of false subjectivity that roam on various social mediums. The parody of false subject imagery in posters, advertisements, television, and other technological mediums, has played a major role in obscuring the objective reality, both social, political, economic, even religious realities, then reduced to imaginal realities that are not essential. This phenomenon has an impact on the increasingly blurred reality behind image parodies.

Starting from this explanation of the fundamental event of the modern age, it can be understood that narcissism illustrates the subject's pathology: a pathology in which the subject's will to power is truly trapped in the projected image. The reality of human beings become very determined by the image, not the reality that lives and lived in self-experience. In the situation of the colonized reality by the reality of images, the reality of the world has entered into the condition of the death of reality (post-reality), which at the same time necessitates the emergence of *post-truth* conditions.

## 2. The *Post-Truth* Conditions and the Collapse of Objective Truth

It's not an exaggeration to say that the awareness of difference in late-modern societies leads to the condition which objectivity and truth have fallen. The awareness of difference also leads to a condition where skeptical, relativistic and truth-indifferent attitudes increasingly dominate intellectual, public and social life,<sup>37</sup> although it can also, at some point, lead to a critical awareness about the possibilities of the rise of hegemonic ideologies whose power can be detected in institutional practice of dominance and oppression. In a negative sense, the condition is often termed as *post-truth* condition which seem to depend upon self-referential data points.

According to Lee McIntyre, the phenomenon of *post-truth* itself rocketed to public attention in November 2016, following the UK's Brexit and the US presidential campaign and election, that is when Oxford Dictionaries

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<sup>37</sup> Ulf Zackariasson, "Introduction: Engaging Relativism and Post-Truth", p. 1.

announced *post-truth* as its word of the year.<sup>38</sup> The public attention has placed *post-truth* a mainstay in academic, even public discourses, after previously being only a peripheral term. Many see *post-truth* as a global phenomenon where reality bends to fit self-referential opinions, interests, and intentions. This does not mean that facts do not matter, but instead a conviction that facts can always be shaded, selected, presented, and even manipulated, according to one interpretation of truth over another.

The Oxford Dictionaries web page defines *post-truth* as an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”<sup>39</sup> The truth is nothing but the product of emotions—the idea that feelings sometimes matter more than facts. The questions are, what is the meaning contained in the prefix “post”? if *post-truth* is understood as objectiveless fact, then what is the difference with lies and spin?

Undoubtedly, to understanding something like *post-truth* condition requires careful contextualization. That is because there is a fundamentally different phenomenon about *post-truth* than something like lying or spin. In Michael Sawyer interpretation, lying statement is a statement that is at a discernible distance from an identifiable objective fact, while spin is principally understood as a phenomenon of strategies of political messaging. This means something like the observation of a set of facts, that can then be manipulated for political advantage. *Post-truth* condition is a different phenomenon that allows for the later refutation of objective facts, but rests upon establishing an archive (that is accessible to and understandable by the public) of self-referential evidences that are not verifiable through other methods.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that the prefix “post” does not refer to the temporal sense, but in the sense that truth has been eclipsed, banished from

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<sup>38</sup> Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/16/post-truth-named-2016-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries/> accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2019

<sup>40</sup> Michael E. Sawyer, “Post-Truth, Social Media, and the ‘Real’ as Phantasm”, in *Relativism and Post-Truth in Contemporary Society*, Mikael Stenmark, et al. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 56.

establishing objective fact. in this sense, the prefix “post” illustrates the condition of destabilization or even the destruction of the factual truth.

Bruce McComiskey explains that in its current usage, *post-truth* signifies a state in which language lacks any reference to facts, truths, or realities. When language has no reference to facts, truths, and realities, it becomes a purely strategic medium, thus becomes purely strategic, without reference to anything other than itself.<sup>41</sup> At this point, the truth shifts from being substantive to a procedural notion. Besides, it is worth stressing, as Fuller said, that a post-truther does not deny the existence of facts, let alone “objective facts”. She simply wishes to dispel the mystery in which the creation and maintenance of facts tend to be shrouded.<sup>42</sup> At this point, “Evidence” is the key concept to identify the *post-truth* condition, because it feeds directly into the popular image as “post-fact” or “false-factum.”

Different from a purely fact-based conception of evidence from, post-fact, Fuller argues, understood as a willful denial of solid, if not incontrovertible, pieces of evidence.<sup>43</sup> If it refers to the definition put forward by Oxford Dictionary, then the act of willful denial based on emotional revelation concerning evidence. These actions ignite a chaotic cacophony and discordant voices, at least, on two level, language rhetoric and image. At the level of language rhetoric, *post-truth* condition appears in form of bullshits, fake news, hoaxes, etc., while at level of image, it appears in form of framed image. In this *post-truth* condition, both language and image become purely strategic, without reference to evidence other than itself. Which mean, a statement or a meme, in a given situation, is truth if it is as desired; it is false if it is it doesn’t work as desired, without any regard to the truth value or evidence.

## POPULAR DISCOURSE IN CYBER-PUBLIC SPHERE

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce McComiskey, *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017), p. 6-8.

<sup>42</sup> Steve Fuller, “What Can Philosophy Teach Us About the Post-truth Condition”, in *Post-Truth, Fake News, Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, Michael A. Peters, etc. (ed.) (Singapore: Springer, 2018), p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Steve Fuller, “What Can Philosophy Teach Us About the Post-truth Condition”, p. 13.

## 1. Populism

Populism has its first and foremost origin within the context of political competition which deals with the political capacities of the people.<sup>44</sup> The political context indicates, as Colliot-Thélène argued, that in so far as the *populus* of populism must have some kind of relation with the *demos* of democracy, an analysis of populism always engages a determined conception of democracy.<sup>45</sup> Thus, it is nothing outrageous to rely on popular sovereignty to demand, in the name of democracy, that the people have a say in the decisions that concern them. This, however, may serve populism in a negative sense as well as a positive sense, depending on intelligence capacities of the people. The political background also gives us an initial understanding that the term populism can be examined through two directions. The *first* direction is a question about populism as a term or concept which characterize the present conjuncture. The *second* is a question about populism and its relation with the rise of *post-truth* condition in the digital age in public sphere.

As a concept, populism is an unusual and an ambivalent concept. To be an unusual concept considering that populism tends not to have an ideological framework as liberalism or conservatism which are based on well-articulated principles. To be ambivalent concept referring to its “chameleonic character”—populism can be used in a positive or negative sense as an adjective attached to other ideas. In a negative sense, populism associated with the irrationality of the masses, surface, low, ordinary

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<sup>44</sup> According to Hadiz, in Europe, populist politics have been associated closely in recent years with anti-immigration tendencies represented by politicians like the *Le Pens* in France, *Fortuyn* and *Wilders* in the Netherlands, and by the lately vigorous *Far Right* in Nordic countries like Norway, Sweden and Finland. It has been analysed as a major challenge to liberal forms of politics throughout the Continent. In Australia, Pauline Hanson’s bellicose One Nation Party once best represented a similarly xenophobic tendency, though there have been subsequent successors. There is no doubt that the xenophobia inherent in the anti-immigration position—as also expressed by many American politicians on the conservative side of the political spectrum—has been strengthened by deep-seated anxieties about the social and economic effects of globalisation (closely related to the decline of the welfare state), not least among the working and increasingly struggling middle classes of these societies. Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and The Middle East* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> Cathérine Colliot-Thélène, “Populism as a conceptual problem”, in *Populism and The Crisis of Democracy*, Gregor Fitz, etc. (ed.) (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 18.

consciousness, while in a positive sense with the sovereignty of the “masses” against the corrupt “elites” and the “system”. This explains why populist movement often be an episodic phenomenon. Therefore, its broad usage also creates confusion and frustration. This presents both an advantage and a challenge, for how to write about something that is still evolving, unusual and ambivalent.

Taggart gives an illustration that the effort to capture the essence of populism have sprung up at different times and in different places, but it is very difficult to see a consistent pattern. At different times and in different places it has been a force for change, a force against change, a creature of progressive politics of the left, the refuge of a measured defense of the status *quo* and a companion of the extreme right. Most have seen populism as specific to the context in which they are focused. The more ambitious have attempted to define populism in universal terms. Others have portrayed it as variegated—with no essence but with varieties. The difference between contextual, universal, and variegated approaches to defining populism is due, in part, to the different types of work that deal with populism.<sup>46</sup> The best way to deal with the contested nature of the term populism is to work with a *minimal* definition which can help us to identify the main character of the phenomenon.

Through an ideational approach, Mudde defines populism as a “thin-centered” ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.” Other than that, politics in the mode of populism should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.<sup>47</sup> The most important thing in Mudde’s definition lies in the way he defines populism as “thin-centered” ideology that distinguishes it from “thick-centered” or “full” ideologies (e.g., fascism, liberalism, socialism, secularism, etc.). If ideology is a body of normative ideas about the nature of man and society that is related to

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Taggart, *Populism*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Cas Mudde & Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 6.

a view of how the world is and should be, than “thin-centered” ideology such as populism have a restricted morphology, which necessarily appears attached to—and sometimes is even assimilated into—other ideologies.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, populism can take very different shapes and seldom exists in pure form—it always appears in combination with other.

The problem that arises is, why are “the people” such apparently essential in populism? A simple answer is that the people is an idea that is as flexible as populism needs it to be. Thus, we can understand that in populist thinking, based on Mudde’s ideational approach, commitment to the people is the basic value, especially insofar as their values contrast with those of elites. It was from this position that populism derives its anti-elitism which allows us to observe both the demand and supply side of the populist ideas. It also permits us to grasp that the phenomenon is not only and necessarily about an “idol” who is able to mobilize the masses. Populism can emerge and take root only if there are persons who share the populist set of ideas.

By placing populism as an ideological issue, as Taggart did, populism relatively easy to analyze. According to Bonikowski, the problem, however, is that unlike most ideologies, populism is based on a rudimentary moral logic. In other words, populism does not offer a worldview; at best, it offers a simplistic critique of existing configurations of power.<sup>49</sup> But in a deeper analysis, by placing populism in a horizon of discourse, populism is more complex than just ideology.

In the level of discourse, populism is more complex than just what Mudd call “thin-ideology.” According to Laclau, there are three main aspects that form populism:<sup>50</sup> *First*, populism is not a type of movement—identifiable with either a special social base or a particular ideological orientation—but a political logic. Social logics involving a rarefied system of statements—that is to say, a system of rules drawing a horizon within which some objects are

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<sup>48</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London: Verso, 2005), p. 117-120.

<sup>49</sup> Bart Bonikowski, “Three Lessons of Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States”, in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Luiza Silva (ed.) (US: Brown University, 2016), vol. 23, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Cas Mudde & Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, p. 6.

representable while others are excluded. While social logics consist in rule-following, political logics are related to the institution of the social that proceeds out of social demands and is, in that sense, inherent to any process of social change. This change, takes place through the variable articulation of equivalence and difference. This in turn involves, as we have seen, the construction of internal frontiers and the identification of an “institutionalized other.”

*Second*, the political logic that works behind populist reason forms the conceptual characterization of populism which concerning “naming and affect”. ‘Naming’ deals with the fact that the construction of the people is a *radical* one in the sense that the heterogeneity of the demands that the popular identity brings to a precarious unity has to be irreducible. This involves two consequences: (1) The moment of unity of popular subjects is given at the nominal, not at the conceptual, level. (2) Precisely because that name is not conceptually grounded, the limits between the demands it is going to embrace and those it is going to exclude will be blurred, and subjected to permanent contestation. Therefore, populist discourse is always going to be imprecise and fluctuating: not because of any cognitive failure, but because it tries to operate, performatively, within a social reality which is to a large extent heterogeneous and fluctuating. It also affects that the populist reason had always prelude the Symbolic before the Real.

*Third*, and most important thing, relates to the logic that works behind populism, that is *equivalential* logics. In its classical form, populism presupposes a larger community, so the *equivalential* logics will cut across new and more heterogeneous social groups. For its constitution, the *equivalential* logics presuppose the equivalence of a plurality of demands. In its relation to populism, that populism requires the dichotomic division of society into two camps. One presenting itself as a part which claims to be the whole and that the popular camp presupposes, as a condition of its constitution, the construction of a global identity out of the equivalence of a plurality of social demands.

Based on three main aspects that form populism, we can, at least, conclude that the discourse which works behind populism is an attempt to totalize social reality into single identity by utilizing the *equivalential* logic at the expense of the differential one. Only, it must be realized that the plurality of social demands requires *differential* logic. Therefore, *equivalential* logic only works at the surface level to expenses the differential social demands.

## 2. Cyber-Public Sphere

The term of the public sphere, as Salvatore explained, has surged to worldwide significance during the 1990s, in the wake of the English translation of Habermas's German *Habilitation* thesis *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989 [1962]).<sup>51</sup> In his article entitled "Public Sphere", Habermas defines the public sphere—although his development of the idea is largely based on European societies—as a domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed [and] constituted in every conversation in which private person come together to form a public. Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus, with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their views.<sup>52</sup>

In technological era, what defines public sphere is no longer only the actual (objective) sphere, but also cyber sphere which is made possible by new media (the internet things). The problem is, what if the Islamic discourse that is present in the cyber-public sphere is related to *post-truth* conditions mediated and amplified by social media? At this point, the interplay between populism, Islamic discourse, and cyber-public sphere become an important thing to identify the nature of truth in *post-truth* condition. Because, the truth is no longer purely fact-based conception of evidence as happened in pre-*post-truth* mindset in early modern period, but it involves public authority

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<sup>51</sup> Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Habermas, Jurgen, "The public sphere", in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 105.

which is, in some degrees, related to viral-referential opinions, interests, and intentions. Thus, truth shifts from being fact-based authority to viral revelation and popular testimony; from being substantive to a procedural notion.

In the technological culture, specifically through social media infrastructure, these truth patterns even more massif and popularized in cyber-public sphere. As Sawyer explains, technology for the broadcast of real or imagined self-curated material renders the notion that an individual can produce media that is self-referentially authoritative establishes the regime of *post-truth*. Social media becomes an apparatus that implodes the concept of what are traditionally framed as facts. The fact that individuals can now curate and broadcast their own media allows the creation of an infinite number of “networks” which operate in a fashion that facilitates the creation of discourses of internally coherent “truth” that are true only in relation to themselves and are in fact designed to obscure, eliminate, or decenter the notion of what amounts to a fact.<sup>53</sup> As the consequence, the statement or meme becomes true or false regarding the “network of agreements.”

The involvement of social media which takes advantage of public understanding that enables the creation of network of agreement that transcend space-time, and even ideological boundaries has brought *post-truth* condition to another situation, popular-reference authority, where truth measures by how some issues viral in society, without referring to solid evidence. The nature of truth in *post-truth* condition becomes mere contested procedural truth that appears in form of bullshits, fake news, hoaxes, framed image, etc. The problem is, what if the *post-truth* condition, which present in a populist form and is mediated by social media, is related to religious discourse in the context of society that has a high level of religious enthusiasm and sensitivity!?

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<sup>53</sup> Michael E. Sawyer, “Post-Truth, Social Media, and the ‘Real’ as Phantasm”, p. 63.

### MASS HYSTERIA: THE RISE OF EMOTIONAL RELATIVISM

To relate populism with Islamic discourse, especially concerning the dynamic of Islamic discourse in cyber-public sphere, the conception of *ummah* is the closets meaning. That is considering, as Vedi Hadiz argues, that a central conception of Islamic populism is that of the *ummah* as proxy for “the people”—the virtuous masses who are juxtaposed (in classic populist fashion) against an elite characterised as being immoral and rapacious.<sup>54</sup> In this section, besides the ethical, legal, and much more articulation, Islam will be interpreted as an ideology—a set of normative ideas about the nature of *ummah* and muslim society that is related to a view of how the world is and should be according to Al-Qur’an and *Sunnah* as the main sources.

The use of the term ideology here is to describe the general process of the production of meanings and ideas that refer to authoritative religious sources who crystalized into a single meaning. The interpretation of Islam as an ideology based on the differentiation between Islam as religion (*al-dîn*) and religious thought (*al-fikr ad-dîniy*) which is the result of human thinking throughout the history of Islamic civilization. Also, Islamic discourse will be understood in the reality of the latest culture, the age of the world picture. Both of these starting points are important to understand how Islamic populist thinking and movement manifest in the contemporary technological era.

According to Raymond Williams, the term “ideology” finds three main uses: (1) A system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; (2) A system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge; (3) The general process of the production of meanings and ideas.<sup>55</sup> On the other side, according to Thompson, ideology is the thought of the other, the thought of someone other than oneself. Consequently, to characterize a view as “ideological” is already to criticize it, for “ideology” is not a neutral term. But in recent years that this theory has been enriched and elaborated through a reflection on language. Ideology represent the ideas circulate in the

<sup>54</sup> Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and The Middle East*, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 55; John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 165.

social world as utterances, as expressions, as words which are spoken or inscribed.<sup>56</sup> In John Fiske interpretation, ideology as a system of beliefs is closer to psychologists use of the word which refer to the way that attitudes are organized into a coherent pattern. While as a system of illusory beliefs, ideology becomes the category of illusions and false consciousness by which the ruling class maintains its dominance. And ideology as general process of the production of meanings and ideas means that ideology is the source of the second-meanings.<sup>57</sup>

Based on the explanation above, the problem is directed to notion of the subject, the false subjectivity (identity). Referring to Althusser's thesis, 1) there is no practice whatsoever except by and under an ideology. 2) There is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects. In other words, there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject: in other words, by the category of the subject and its functioning.<sup>58</sup> Althusser explained that ideology works through interpellation or hailing. All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, through the functioning of the category of the subject.<sup>59</sup>

In the digital era which is marked by the increasingly massive penetration of social media in various aspects of economic life, politics, religion, culture, and even national security, human culture undergoes in such radical changes. This kind of situation also influences in how ideology manifests itself in reality. In religious context, these cultural changes also influence the projection of human religiosity to be so imaginal and artificial. There has been a reduction in the meaning of religion to be limited to the image market commodity, the commodities of the cultural, economic, even political markets. In the context of populism, these commodities have created mass hysteria in public sphere, and even in cybersphere.

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<sup>56</sup> John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (USA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 165-166.

<sup>58</sup> Louis Althusser, "On Ideology", in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), p. 187.

<sup>59</sup> Louis Althusser, "On Ideology", p. 190.

In the context of society that has a high level of religious enthusiasm and sensitivity, the banality of everyday religiosity is preserved through parodies of false subjectivity. While in the context of the religiosity that is present in the midst of technological culture which is dominated by the power of the image and parodies of false subjectivity, humans are entering the condition of hyper-religiosity; the reality that trapped in the nature of its shallowness; the reality of artificial faith that is no longer related to a commitment and existential demands; the religiosity that has been distorted from the natural character and the principle reference; religious reality that is interpreted based on ontology of image. The phenomenon of human religiosity is increasingly plunged into the chaos of the situation of religious consciousness that becomes so ironic, political parodies, crisis, parodic, commoditized, even more sporadic and brute.

Ironically, considering that religion is so loudly discussed in various public space, but being impoverished into portraits of mere festivals and crowds in pop-culture. Political, considering the increasingly widespread politicization of the Sacred Verses that cover the craving of the will to power behind it. Parodic, considering that the preachers are no longer different from mere robed clowns. Commoditized, considering to the increasing number of religious preachers who sell holy verses for the sake of mere worldly pragmatism. Crisis, considering the occurrence of some sort of symptom of banalization of religious discourses which causes the disappearance of the depth of religious meaning in realities. Sporadic, considering the frequency of religious discourse as mere as a tool alienate, and even suppress the values of justice and humanity. Human religiosity in its cultural anchor becomes so banal (banality of religion).

In modern cultural situations trapped in artificial images, false subjectivity hails or interpellates concrete individuals which is encouraged to be subjects in a particular system (religion, economic, politic, etc.). At the point when false subjectivity and religious ideology merge with each other, populism finds its shape. In other words, populism finds its articulation as false mass religiosity—the mass hysteria driven by an “idol” who share the populist set of ideas and who is able to mobilize the masses. Then, in the level of popular Islamic discourse, the

consequences of *post-truth* condition (fake news, hoax, framed image, etc.) resonate loudly in public sphere at its artificial meaning, and even false meaning. Consequently, driven by *equivalential* logic, Islamic discourse reduced to an inseparable part of populism. That means, Islamic discourse no longer refers to authoritative religious sources and its relation to reality, but only part of popular discourse which is driven by religious patronages based on emotional likes or dislikes of the people. At this level, Islamic discourses that spread in *ummah* consciousnesses are nothing more than market commodities, both political, cultural, ideological, etc.

If the basic logic of relativism the idea that something is relative to, for example, epistemological relativism which holds that knowledge-claims are judged to be justified or unjustified relative to certain epistemic standards, religious relativism which hold that— normatively—truth claim that religious traditions with specific methods for settling belief and determining what to consider right and holy, or that religious truth—normatively—constituted within each separate tradition, and if the basic situation of *post-truth* is emotional likes or dislikes of the people which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief, than the condition can be understood as the rise of emotional relativism. The nature truth in popular Islamic discourse in *post-truth* condition is nothing more than mass hysteria who interpellates *ummah* to the false religious consciousness.

### **CONCLUSION: AGAINST BRUTAL-EMOTIONAL RELATIVISM**

The trajectory of *ummah* consciousnesses that attached to contemporary Islamic discourses are faced with various falsehood. Consequently, Islamic discourses are vulnerable to being trapped in artificial mass hysteria, thus losing its substance. Religion is nothing more than instrument for ideologist who hide his will to power, while the people are nothing more than manipulated device for ideologist for his own shake. I argue, contemporary relativism in the age of *post-truth* more brute consequences than what nihilism and solipsism did in early

modern period. The nature of truth shifts from being substantive to a procedural notion; from being fact-based authority to viral revelation and popular testimony which is grounded in emotional mass hysteria.

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