

Hisham Sharabi: The Anatomy of Neopatriarchy and Criticism of Arab Culture

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Abstract

*Contemporary Arab thought has been significantly shaped by attempts to explain the failure of modernization in the Arab-Islamic world. One of the prominent scholars contributing to this discourse is Hisham Sharabi through his concept of neopatriarchy. This article aims to analyze the concept of neopatriarchy as an instrument of social and cultural criticism developed by Sharabi to examine the problems of modern Arab society. This study employs a library research method with a philosophical-critical approach. The primary sources consist of Sharabi's major works, particularly *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, along with various supporting literature discussing contemporary Arab socio-political thought. Data were analyzed using content analysis and critical interpretation of Sharabi's ideas. The findings reveal that neopatriarchy represents a distorted form of modernity, a condition in which societies adopt modern institutions while simultaneously preserving traditional patriarchal patterns of relationships based on domination, obedience, and subordination. These structures are reproduced within the family, education, religion, and the state, thereby hindering the development of rationality, democracy, and individual emancipation. Sharabi's cultural critique emphasizes the importance of deconstructing authority, reforming education, practicing cultural self-criticism (*naqd al-dhat*), and fostering critical consciousness as prerequisites for social transformation. Sharabi's thought remains highly relevant for understanding various issues facing contemporary Muslim societies, particularly those related to education, power relations, and the formation of a democratic culture.*

Keywords: Hisham Sharabi, Neopatriarchy, Arab Cultural Criticism, Modernity, Education.

Abstrak

Pemikiran Arab kontemporer banyak diwarnai oleh upaya menjelaskan kegagalan modernisasi di dunia Arab-Islam. Salah satu tokoh yang memberikan kontribusi signifikan dalam diskursus tersebut adalah Hisham Sharabi melalui konsep *neo-patriarki* (*neopatriarchy*). Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis konsep neo-patriarki sebagai instrumen kritik sosial dan budaya yang dikembangkan oleh Sharabi dalam membaca problematika masyarakat Arab modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan pendekatan filosofis-kritis. Sumber data utama berasal dari karya-karya Sharabi, khususnya *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, serta berbagai literatur pendukung yang membahas pemikiran sosial-politik Arab kontemporer. Analisis dilakukan melalui teknik *content analysis* dan interpretasi kritis terhadap gagasan-gagasan Sharabi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa neo-patriarki merupakan bentuk modernitas yang terdistorsi, yaitu kondisi ketika masyarakat mengadopsi institusi modern tetapi tetap mempertahankan pola relasi patriarkal tradisional yang berlandaskan dominasi, kepatuhan, dan subordinasi. Struktur tersebut direproduksi dalam keluarga, pendidikan, agama, dan negara sehingga menghambat perkembangan rasionalitas, demokrasi, dan emansipasi individu. Kritik budaya Sharabi menekankan pentingnya dekonstruksi otoritas, reformasi pendidikan, kritik diri budaya (*naqd al-dhat*), dan penguatan kesadaran kritis sebagai prasyarat transformasi sosial. Pemikiran Sharabi tetap relevan dalam membaca berbagai persoalan masyarakat Muslim

kontemporer, terutama yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan, relasi kuasa, dan pembentukan budaya demokratis.

Kata Kunci: *Hisham Sharabi, Neo-patriarki, Kritik Budaya Arab, Modernitas, Pendidikan*

INTRODUCTION

The debate about the crisis of modernity in the Arab world is a topic that needs to be studied in contemporary Arab thought. Since the 20th century, various Arab intellectuals have sought to explain why the process of modernization that took place through state building, educational reform, industrialization, and the adoption of modern political institutions did not always result in substantive, massive and comprehensive social transformation. neo-patriarchy. According to Sharabi, modernization in the Arab world tends to be partial because it only adopts modern institutional aspects without changing the cultural structure and power relations that are still rooted in the traditional patriarchal system.

The concept of neo-patriarchy was developed by Sharabi to explain the persistence of patriarchal domination patterns in modern Arab society. In his view, the family, education, religion, and the state are institutions that mutually support the reproduction of patriarchal authority, resulting in a culture of obedience, subordination, and dependence. Although Arab society has undergone modernization in the economic and administrative fields, the pattern of social relations that has been formed still retains a patriarchal character that inhibits the development of rationality, individual freedom, and democracy. Sharabi called this condition "distorted change", which is a change that does not touch the cultural structure fundamentally but is only limited to the performance of change.

In addition to developing neo-patriarchal theories, Sharabi also offers an Arabic cultural critique that emphasizes the importance of authority deconstruction, cultural self-criticism (*naqd al-dhat*), as well as the formation of critical consciousness as a prerequisite for social transformation. Such thinking is not only relevant in the context of Arab society, but also provides a useful analytical framework for understanding various social issues in the contemporary Muslim world, especially those related to education, power relations, and the formation of democratic culture. Therefore, the study of the anatomy of neo-patriarchy and the critique of Arab culture in Hisham Sharabi's thought is important to explain the relationship between cultural structures, power, and the failure of modernization in modern Muslim societies.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the concept of neo-patriarchy developed by Hisham Sharabi, explain its structure and reproductive mechanisms in Arab society, and examine the relevance of Arab cultural criticism to social and educational problems in the context of contemporary Muslim society.

METHODS

This research uses a library research method with a philosophical-critical approach. The philosophical approach is used to examine the conceptual and epistemological underpinnings of Hisham Sharabi's thought, while the critical approach is used to uncover the dimensions of social and cultural criticism contained in the concept of neo-patriarchy. Research data sources are divided into primary data and secondary data. Primary data come from Hisham Sharabi's main works that

directly discuss modernity, Arab culture, and neo-patriarchy, namely: (1) Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society (1988/1992), which is the main work in this study; (2) Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875–1914 (1970); (3) Over the Arab Horizon: Reflections on Culture, Politics and Society (1995); and (4) Al-Bunyah al-Batrikiyyah: Bahth fi al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi al-Mu'asir (1987). The works were chosen because they represent the development of Sharabi's thought on the relationship between culture, modernity, intellectuality, and patriarchal structures in Arab society. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from books, scientific journal articles, dissertations, academic encyclopedias, and various studies that discussed Hisham Sharabi's thought, neo-patriarchy, Arab modernity, cultural criticism, and Middle Eastern socio-political theory. Secondary data are used to strengthen the interpretation of Sharabi's thought while placing his ideas in the context of the development of contemporary Arabic thought.

The data collection technique is carried out through documentation of various relevant literature sources. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify key concepts in Sharabi's thought, such as neo-patriarchy, patriarchal authority, distorted modernity, cultural criticism, and critical consciousness. After that, a philosophical interpretation is carried out to systematically understand the relationship between concepts and explain their relevance to contemporary social and educational issues. To ensure the validity of the data, the study applied source triangulation by comparing Sharabi's primary works with various academic studies that reviewed his thoughts. The results of the analysis are then presented in a descriptive-analytical manner so as to provide a comprehensive picture of the neo-patriarchal anatomy and criticism of Arab culture in Hisham Sharabi's thought.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Intellectual Biography of Hisham Sharabi

Hisham Sharabi was born in Jaffa, Palestine, in 1927 and is known as one of the most influential Arab intellectuals in the fields of critical sociology and Middle Eastern studies. His academic education, which brought together the Arab intellectual tradition with Western social theory, shaped his critical thinking of various forms of political, cultural, and intellectual domination. After the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, Sharabi intensely developed a critique of the Arab social structure and shifted his focus to the problems of cultural backwardness, authoritarianism, and the failure of modernization. For him, the liberation of the Arab people is not enough through political reform alone, but must be accompanied by a fundamental, massive and comprehensive cultural and educational transformation.

Neo-Patriarchy as a Distorted Modernity

The concept of neo-patriarchy is Sharabi's most important intellectual contribution. He defines neo-patriarchy as a condition in which society adopts formal forms of modernity without transforming the underlying patriarchal cultural structure. In a neo-patriarchal system, modernization only results in changes on the surface in the form of the use of technology, bureaucracy, and modern institutions. However, social relations remain colored by traditional patterns of domination that place authority at the center of social life. In other words, a developing modernity is not a substantive modernity, but a distorted modernity. Sharabi argues that the authority of the father in the family is the basic model for the entire power structure in society. The relationship between leaders and the people, teachers and students, as well as clerics and society is

built on a paternalistic pattern that demands absolute obedience. As a result, individuals lose space to develop autonomy, creativity, and critical awareness.

Criticism of the Neo-Patriarchal Educational Structure.

One of the main focuses of Sharabi's criticism is the education system. According to him, education in a neo-patriarchal society functions more as a disciplinary mechanism than a means of liberation. The dominant model of teacher-student relations tends to place teachers as holders of absolute authority, while learners are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. The system gives birth to a culture of obedience, and intellectual dependence. Education does not encourage learners to think critically, but rather forms individuals who are subject to existing authority structures. Sharabi proposed a democratic educational model oriented towards individual development. Inspired by John Dewey's thoughts, he emphasizes the importance of learning experiences, dialogue, freedom of thought, and active participation of learners in the educational process.

Criticism of Religious Authority

In addition to education, Sharabi also criticized the structure of religious authority which is considered to reproduce neo-patriarchal culture. He rejects the monopoly of interpretation of religious texts by certain groups that often function to maintain the political and social status quo. According to him, the dominance of closed interpretation can hinder the development of critical thinking and strengthen the culture of taqlid. Sharabi encourages the strengthening of rationality and the spirit of ijtihad as a form of intellectual liberation. According to Sharabi, religion should be a source of ethics and social transformation, not an instrument of power legitimacy that perpetuates the subordination of society.

Self-Criticism and Cultural Transformation

Sharabi emphasized that political reform will not have an impact on change without cultural reform. Therefore, he offers the concept of naqd al-dhat or radical self-criticism of cultural heritage that is considered to hinder the progress of society. Self-criticism does not mean rejecting tradition as a whole, but rather conducting a critical evaluation of social values and practices that maintain injustice, subordination, and dependence. Through this process, people can build a new awareness that is more open to democracy, rationality, and respect for human dignity.

The Relevance of Sharabi Thought to Contemporary Muslim Society

Sharabi's thought has strong relevance in the context of contemporary Muslim society. His criticism of authoritarian education can be used to read various educational problems that are still oriented towards obedience. Similarly, his criticism of patriarchal culture can be the basis for developing more egalitarian and democratic social relations. In the context of Islamic education, Sharabi's thinking opens up space for the development of an educational paradigm that is humanist, dialogical, and oriented towards the formation of independent learners. Education is no longer understood as a mere process of knowledge transfer, but as a means of liberating human beings from various forms of domination that hinder the development of their potential.

CONCLUSION

Neo-patriarchy is a central concept in Hisham Sharabi's thought that is used to explain the failure of the modernization of Arab society. According to Sharabi, the modernization that has occurred in the Arab world is only formal because it is not accompanied by a fundamental, massive

and comprehensive cultural transformation. Traditional patriarchal structures are still reproduced in the family, education, religion, and state, giving birth to a culture of obedience, subordination, and dependence. Through his critique of neo-patriarchy, Hisham Sharabi shows that social transformation requires cultural reform, education, and critical awareness. Democratic education, respect for freedom of thought, deconstruction of oppressive authority, and the courage to engage in self-criticism are important prerequisites for the realization of a more emancipatory and humanist society. Therefore, Sharabi's thought remains relevant as a theoretical framework for understanding various social, educational, and cultural issues in contemporary Muslim society.

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