NEO-PATRIARCHY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE ARAB CRISIS: A CRITICAL STUDY ON HISHAM SHARABI’S WORKS

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Article History: Received on 25th July 2019, Revised on 01st September 2019, Published on 07th October 2019

Abstract

Purpose of the study: The paper tries to elaborate on the ideas of Hisham Sharabi on Neo-patriarchy culture and its relevance to the current situations. He perceived that Neo-patriarchy as one of main causes of the Arab crisis. According to him, the Arab societies, in general, did not adopt modernism in its real form. Therefore, rather transforming into modern society they turned into “distorted modernism.”

Methodology: The data of this research particularly are Sharabi’s works published during 1980s as crucial period of his intellectual journey.

Results: The paper found three major conclusions on neo-patriarchy culture postulated by Sharabi: 1) neo-patriarchy culture is the real form of Arab’s failure in transforming its societies into modern one, it reflected such as in authoritarian political system, economic dependent, and social-political fragmentation; 2) criticism is pre-conditions for modern Arab societies’ transformation. One of the efforts to achieve real modernism according to Sharabi is to deconstruct some distorted definitions of democracy, civil society, and etc., and build the fresh meaning of the terms.

Applications of this study: This research can be used for the universities, teachers, and students.

Novelty/Originality of this study: In this research, the model of the neo-patriarchy and the problem of the Arab crisis: a critical study on himash sharabi’s works are presented in a comprehensive and complete manner.

Keywords: Neo-patriarchy, Arab crisis, distorted modernism, Arab criticism.

INTRODUCTION

Recently we have witnessed various social, political, economic, and even humanitarian tragedies in the form of continuing civil wars in the Middle East and the Arab World in particular. Since the Arab states apart from the Ottoman Empire, independent of European colonialism and formed into nation-states, the Arab states are still faced with crucial issues that seem to be never finished. The issue of authoritarian political leadership, socioeconomic imbalances, clashes between tradition and modernity, women's position, and other crucial issues as if they were never solved and even to be more complex.

Arab intellectual responses to the crisis experienced by Arab society can be traced to the era of Islamic modernism or the so-called as Nahda era, starting from the idea of Pan-Islamism of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), followed by the idea of modernization of Islamic education by Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and the call for Islamic purification promoted by Rashid Ridha (1865-1935) which also stressing on the importance of modern progress. The blend of Islamic interpretation as an answer to the modernism exhaled by the West continues until the end of the 20th century. Ultimately, the idea of Islamic modernism with its variants must end with the defeat of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. After the defeat, the common enemy of Islam was no longer the West but themselves or which is called then as self-criticism.

Therefore, the problem of the Arab world crisis was seen as the effect of the powerlessness of the Arab society in criticizing their crucial problems. One of criticisms expressed by an Arab thinker is related to the strengthening of patriarchal culture which he regarded as the cause of the failure of Arab society to achieve the real movement of modernism. This idea was developed by a Palestinian thinker, Hisham Sharabi. This paper seeks to elaborate Sharabi's thoughts about the causes of the crisis facing by the Arab nation and its reflective solutions. The peculiarity of this paper lies in an attempt to showcase one perspective on the Arab crisis from indigenous intellectuals. In particular, the paper tries to elaborate important works of Hisham Sharabi on Neo-patriarchy in the context of the modern Arab world: Neo-patriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society, and his articles titled “Patriarchy and Dependency and the Future of Arab Society” in The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures; and Cultural Critics of Contemporary Arab Society.

ARAB CRISIS THROUGH INTELLECTUAL PERSPECTIVES

This section explores some crisis or issues that are considered crucial by the Arab intellectuals. The crisis of the Arab World has certain priorities based on a particular era. In the era of renaissance or Nahda, for example, the Arab intellectuals see that the Arab crisis and problems as summarized by Kassab (2010: 21-22) lie in the following issues:

1) Political justice, for the majority of Arab intellectuals, political justice was the basis for European achievement and as the primary condition for the Arab renaissance;

2) Science, some of the Arab intellectuals regarded science as another core point of European power;
3) *Religion*, the question of religious relation with progress/modernity became an important issue of the first Arab awakening. In addition, the question arises whether Europe is advancing because Christianity supports progress? Or is it, on the contrary, the progress of Europe precisely by marginalizing religion?

4) *Gender*. European accusations, that the decline of Arabs-Islam, because they were discriminating against women, has been a trigger for modern Arab intellectuals to rethink women's position in the reality of Muslim society.

Meanwhile, stated that the important issues discussed by the Arab intellectuals during the *Nahda* era are as follows:

1) Reviving the rational elements of Islamic tradition and find solutions based on Islamic teachings,
2) Embracing the main features of modernity that is philosophy and science,
3) Establishing new institutions and academies of religious education to meet the challenges of modernity,
4) Reviving the knowledge of *Kalam* and,
5) Reviving Islamic languages and begin to learn foreign languages.

The above issues became the main subject of Arab intellectuals during the *Nahda* era. The whole themes above got its portion, depending on the extent to which an Arab intellectual discussed a problem. Any in-depth discussion raised by an intellectual then put him into a certain category. For example, if the discussed theme in depth was about the issue of gender, then he will be referred to as the pioneer of the first Arab feminists, and so on.

Meanwhile, after the defeat of the six-day Arab-Israeli war in 1967, it marked a new era of arising more complex issues of the Arab nation. Post-war defeat, the trigger of the birth of Arab thought is no longer from the West but the issues that are more focused on internal issues of the Arab World.

According to Boullata, although some writings have been produced during the 20th century and have even begun in the 19th century during the *Nahda*, writings of the Arab intellectuals produced in 1960, 1970, and 1980 was much more urgent and very critical. The works had a sad note about the condition of the Arabs and showed a great desire to fight with modernity. The writings were meant for the process of change, albeit too abstract or even idealistic.

Some of the works strongly inspired by the three main trends of Western schools of thought: Anglo-American criticism, Western Marxism, and structuralist and post-structuralist thought of France. In 1967 at once gave a sign of the outpouring of a number of critical Arabic writings about the Arab situation, ranging from the nuances of philosophy, religion, and literature. Many post-1967 Arab thinkers are forced to rethink some of the major issues that have been taken for granted, even to the stage of the secularization of the text (*Haghshenas et al., 2015; Ajallooeian et al., 2015*). The issues raised by the Arabic intellectuals are numerous and some themes are still related to the thoughts generated in the era of *Nahda*. Each intellectual has its own tendency and focuses on looking at one problem. Therefore, one particular theme may be discussed in more detail than the other (*Ameen et al., 2018; Lima et al., 2018; Kozhabergenova et al., 2018*).

The themes mentioned above, for example, the position of women in Arab-Muslim societies, generally obtain a larger discussion than the education system. The position of Islam in Arab society receives a very serious concern over humanitarian problems and individual rights. Political issues, especially those related to foreign policy, are much more often a reference to economic issues. The idea of socialism and nationalism in the Arab world attracts more studies than the idea of freedom and democracy. Western imperialism and Zionism as an obstacle to Arab progress, are analyzed more deeply than the problem of the class system in Arab society.

More specifically, the issues and problems raised by the Arab intellectuals after the Arab defeat as stated by Akhavi are as follows:

1) The methodology of Islamic studies, namely how to formulate and introduce new methodologies by utilizing Western theories,
2) The search for the basic model for an ideal Muslim society,
3) Problem-solving of the gap between grass root and elite,
4) A search for the right model for socio-economic development,
5) The role of the state in the public sphere,
6) The social base of the Islamic movement.

Slightly different from the above themes, *Murphy in Passion for Islam* with his modifications, compiled several themes raised by contemporary Arab intellectuals in the form of the following questions:

1) How should the Qur'an be read?
2) What is the most appropriate relationship between religion and the State?
3) What role can Muslim scholars play in the political sphere?
4) Who holds the authority in Islam?

5) What is the nature of religious knowledge and how can it be distinguished from religion itself?

6) Should Islamic fiqh be modified?

7) Can Shari‘ah be applied in the modern state format?

8) Does "Islamic secularism" really exist?

9) If intellectual freedom is a right, how far can a modern Muslim express his confusion of confidence?

10) Are critical criticisms of established assumptions that can lead one to apostasy? And who has the authority to punish that?

From the issues mentioned above, the question of how Islam is positioned in the realm of socio-political life remains the main issue of the intellectuals of both generations. This is an important indicator that the position and role of Islam in the socio-political context will remain a major issue for even those who have a tendency towards Liberals, Marxists, or Islamists with different portions.

SHARABI’S INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Sharabi was born in Jaffa, Palestine in 1927 under the British mandate. Therefore, his formative years were shaped by colonialism and imperialism. Besides, he experienced a refugee during Palestinian rebellion of 1936-1938 by the Zionist colonial movement. This anger led him to his political activism and intellectual formation. He arrived in the United State in 1947 as young graduate student at the University of Chicago. The Arab alumni of the University of Chicago did not seem popular with Indonesian academics. Sharabi’s thought is rarely studied and researched. This was probably because his intellectual works have not been widely introduced by Indonesian academics especially by those who graduated from the Middle East universities. Nevertheless, in the contemporary Arab intellectualism, Sharabi's thoughts show its own peculiarities when it comes to the diagnosis and solution to the problems facing by the Arab society. Moreover, at the international level Sharabi such as Edward W. Said was known as prominent intellectual and activist who voiced the struggle for the independence of Palestine people (Sayigh, Y. (1991)).

Sharabi plays an important role in raising awareness and understanding of the Arab world with a special emphasis on Palestinian issues. He devoted much of his professional life to facilitate public education for his Palestinian people. For 24 years, he worked as an editor of the British Journal of Palestine Studies, published by the Institute for Palestine Studies. In addition, he is the founder of the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University. Sharabi began his academic career in 1953, teaching history at Georgetown University, USA. When he died on January 13, 2005, he was professor emeritus at European Intellectual History at the university where he worked. (Hudson, M. (1969.).)

His political activity could be seen from his involvement in the Syrian Socialist Party in 1947 and became the editor of the party's journal. After the Arab defeat of 1967 war and student’s demonstration movement in 1968, it had a powerful impact on Sharabi's political and intellectual vision. Since then he turned his back on left politics and began to explore the works of Marx and Freud as the foundation for his ideas for the future on the Arab world crisis. Some of Sharabi's works were al-Jam' wa al-Ramad: Dirāsāt Muthaqqaf ‘Arabi published in 1978, and Shuwar al-Mādhī: Sīrah Dzātiyyah (Portrait of the Past: An Autobiography), published in 1993. However, the most influential work that led him as prominent Arab intellectual was Neo-patriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society, as most widely read of his intellectual product, published in 1988. A book that attempts to auto-criticism of social conditions of Arab society by emphasizing its neo-patriarchal culture ("The Life of an Arab Intellectual: Dr. Hisham B. Sharabi, 1927 - 2005 - The Jerusalem Fund," n.d.). In short, much of his intellectual production reflected his dissatisfaction with the political and social conditions of the Middle East as well as the struggle for Palestinian people. So, he was an activist but at the same time as public and prominent Arab intellectual.

THE GENESIS OF NEOPATRIARCHY CULTURE

Through a critical reading of the reality of the Arab nation, Sharabi sees that since the end of the 19th century (as a reference to the modernism movement in the Arab world) to the Arab defeat of 1967, the Arab world deems it unsuccessful in progressing and trapped in apparent modernism. Sharabi states that this pseudo-modernism or “distorted modernism” is a new form of patriarchal culture. Arabs transformed from old patriarchal culture to a new patriarchal culture, which he called then as neo-patriarchy culture.

Sharabi defined neo-patriarchy as:

By neo-patriarchy I refer both to a theoretical formulation as well as to as socio-historical reality. In the former sense, neo-patriarchy occupies the space between traditional patriarchy and modernity; in the latter sense, it is a concrete history reality, describing a social entity neither purely traditional nor authentically modern, but a hybrid formation combining both. Neo-patriarchy is a unique product of imperialism and of decolonization, comprising the elements that characterize, in various forms and combinations, the institutions and practices of contemporary life in all developing countries, including those of Arab North Africa and the Middle East (Hudson, M. (1969.).)
According to Sharabi (1991: 1-3) in his introduction on *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Future*, stated that the failure of the Arabs in adopting western modernism characterized by the birth of four characters of Arab society as follows:

1) **Social fragmentation**, an attitude in which Arab society constitutes their social and organizational relationships based on family, relatives, religious or ethnic relationships. *(Hudson, M. (1969).)*

2) **The authoritarian organization**, a pattern of leadership characterized by dominance and paternalism that can be seen from the microstructure of a family to the macrostructure of a country. In fact, modern society should promote cooperation, recognition, and equality;

3) **Absolute paradigm**, rather than placing plurality indifference, openness, and other democratic attitudes, Arab society in general, in fact, exhibits absolute awareness in both theoretical, political, and everyday life. Such attitudes stem from the transcendental, metaphysical, and revelatory paradigms;

4) **Ritualistic practice**, the nature of community life characterized by various ceremonial, custom, and ritual practices. They tend not to be creative and innovative, in contrast to modern society.

For Sharabi, neo-patriarchal society will be more visible when compared to modernity in real practice. For example, the category of "knowledge" which in the context of modernity is commensurate with the concepts of “thought” and “reason,” then in neo-patriarchal societies “knowledge” is identical to “myth”/ “belief” (religion). Another concept such as “truth” wherein the tradition of modernity it is equivalent to scientific/fronic while in a patriarchal society it is synonymous with the concept of "religion/metaphorical". Likewise with language, in modern society the nature of language is "analytical" while in neo-patriarchal tradition language means "rhetorical". In reading and interpretation of al-Qur'an for example, in the Arab or Muslim world, the reading al-Qur'an means “recited” or “repeated.” Al-Qur'an rarely read in a real meaning in order to produce new meaning and interpretation. Besides, interpretation according to Sharabi, still monopolized by those who are specialists or religious officials which based their interpretations merely on the sacred text than contextual interpretation.

Thus, the Arab community according to Sharabi moves from patriarchy to neo-patriarchy characterized by an attitude of dependence, and neo-patriarchy as a social transformation is nothing but distorted modernity. The corrupt factor in the neo-patriarchal society is not only caused by the patriarchal culture itself (traditionality), but its historical roots originate from Western imperialism. Dependence here is not only caused by aggression and domination, but more important than that is the economic and military dependence of the Arab community as a peripheral society towards the West as the center.

Suzanne Kassab in her book *Contemporary Arab thought : cultural critique from comparative perspective* (2010: 256) narrated that Sharabi’s criticism of the Arab intellectual failure of Nahda Era mainly targeted three major trends: Muslims reformist, Secular, and Western-Christians. The first of the two trends according to Sharabi was trapped in the back-ground defense of Islamicization, while the third due to their social status as minority, their ideas were perceived as too marginal and difficult to break with traditional beliefs. Moreover, the reformists were too focused on how to achieve transformation in Islamic societies while cautioning the dangers of the West rather than criticism. The reformers were more busy with the issues facing by the Muslims but unable to criticize Islamic doctrine and thought. Unlike the conservatives who are content with Islamic values and reject any external challenges, the Islamic reformers are very much concerned with external issues and seek to solve them but not in the form of sharp self-criticism *(Yoyo, Y. (2018)).*

While secular Muslims are a little free from religious confinement, yet according to Sharabi they are socially and intellectually trapped in strong religious culture and often subject to social pressure. Secularists avoid religious questions and distance themselves from direct confrontation with deeply rooted beliefs. Thus, just as Muslim reformists, they see Europe as the "other," an agent of modernization but also seen as a threat to the Islamic world *(Kassab, 2010: 265).* As with the two mentioned groups, a scholar of the Christian community has a sharper tendency of thought and is able to adapt well with Europe. This is due to their educational background following European model. As a minority, they are more interested in secular views about history and society and less interested in defensive arguments against issues related to the West. Because of their social position, Christian intellectuals according to Sharabi always guard themselves by maintaining more general statements and arguments to avoid confrontation with Muslim majority. Therefore, they do not really take a firm stance in the form of sharp criticism, as the main condition of the renaissance, *nahdhah* *(Kassab, 2010: 266).*

From the various modes of thought that existed in the Arab world especially during the 1980-1990s, Islamic fundamentalism or Islamism according to Sharabi was dominating compared to other modes of thought. However, the future of the Arabs cannot be left to this group. For Sharabi, there is no guarantee that the Islamist groups will provide fundamental changes in the structure of neo-patriarchal society. So, if this group wins the arena in political contestation, then the essence of the neo-patriarchal society will still exist (Sharabi, 1988; Tamadonfar, n.d.). Then, what kind of solution did Sharabi offer for the Arab society to be detached from neo-patriarchal culture and achieve complete modernity? While there was a possibility of revolution, but it is impossible to be conducted during his time. According to him, there is no guarantee when the authoritarian regime was overthrown, justice and democracy can be achieved. Then the urgent and long-term solution that must be done according to him is by way of criticism and deconstruction of the old neo-patriarchal conception of liberation.
SOME SOLUTIONS

Criticism for Sharabi is a vital need that not only pursues a "critical discourse" that can generate self-critical awareness but far more important than that is to deconstruct neo-patriarchal consciousness that has bounded thought and action for more than a century. Criticism for Sharabi is a key condition in the process of overthrowing neo-patriarchal discourse and paving the way for modernity. By studying the various schools of thought and politics that ever conceived and implemented in the Arab world, such as Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism, and parliamentary democracy controlled only by the bourgeoisie, Sharabi proposed that concepts of democracy, unity, social justice, and others social and political terminologies, need to be rethought and redefined again by looking at the new existing reality. This possibility can only be done by starting from the structure and institution of the status quo, not through a utopian vision. This pressure should be done by formal legal approach, not violence and revolution. The younger generation of Arabs should be introduced in these ways and not through repression and violence are known to Arab political reality.

Therefore, Sharabi stated that there are four mains areas where new critique should be addressed: on the linguistic, interpretative, ideological, and social levels. On linguistic level, the new critique should transform the vocabulary of neo-patriarchy discourse into a new terminology and a new language; on interpretative level it tries to eliminate dominant interpretations and to build new perspective in order to displace limiting horizon of neo-patriarchy understanding; on ideological level it aims at deconstructing all existing ideologies and replacing it with more open ideological space; and on ideological level it tries to de-legitimate theological authority and political power. To this project, language and linguistic plays important role in overcoming the rhetorical and ideological of naïve interpretation (Arawi, A. A., & Laroui, A. (1976).).

Sharabi further asserts that in order to make an update in the radical democratic paradigm it proposes, there are two methods to be met critical and contestation: critical attitudes using diverse disciplines and approaches and excluding those occupying hegemonic and privileged positions; while contestation is a dialogical, non-violent approach, and takes the critical attitude of society as a basis for struggle. The action, according to him, will involve various elements of the organization, whether individualistic like intellectuals, as well as professional worker groups, student and women's organizations, as well as various political parties. In essence, all elements of society must be involved in the movement and should pay attention to the condition and reality of each country. Some Arab countries according to Sharabi allow acceptance of change, but there are also leaders who resist change. In this last model state, considerable violence may occur.

Therefore, Sharabi firmly stated, the aim of the struggle above is no longer sectarian and not tied to a particular ideology, but must be based on a universal value and recognized by the majority as appropriate and politically feasible. The general and specific objectives are human rights and political struggles: human rights derived from the Declaration of Human Rights (specifically translated into the Arab Organization for Human Rights); and political rights based on the constitution and provisions that apply specifically in each of the Arab countries. While the specific objectives according to Sharabi should be the establishment of a nation and Pan-Arab racial vehicle for social and political purposes. The most potent social groups according to Sharabi that can make radical democratic changes are professional associations (academia, medical and law), trade unions, farmer groups, women's and student organizations, and all other autonomous organizations.

All of the above proposals according to Sharabi are possible considerations by looking at the conditions prevailing at the time. According to him, the proposal is not an agenda or program that must be done. Such activities or agendas are only possible when all elements of society are willing to work together in concrete situations. Sharabi acknowledged that the Arab World is a place that is socially and politically very complex and difficult. Nevertheless, the optimism for going to the better Arab world according to him should still be given priority to the effort to get out of neo-patriarchal culture and towards real modernity. In short, the pessimism of what the intellectuals think must not abolish the optimism of one's will.

CONCLUSION

The social and political conditions analyzed by Sharabi was a critical period. The Arab defeat of 1967 was shocked and destroyed intellectual projects even political dreams of most Arab intellectuals. Socio-political portraits during the 1970s and 1980s dominated by the clash among competing ideologies. This will certainly be much different from the recent socio-political conditions. Nevertheless, the urgency of Sharabi's ideas lies in his theory of neo-patriarchal culture that gives a picture of pseudo-modernity that takes place in various spheres of Arab society. Instead of achieving modernity just as it did in Europe, the Arabs were trapped in a new form of patriarchy of social, political, religious and economic life that was still confined and dependent on the West—mainly in economic and military fields. The facts about this can be seen in geo-cultural and political developments taking place in the Middle East to this day where most Arab countries have a strong dependence on arms products from the West and high foreign debt as experienced by Egypt today.

Besides, religious tensions and conflicts among Muslims in the Arab world reflected that “neo-patriarchy” in religious life has lead to bloody conflict. Religious teachings used just to legitimate brutal actions. This fatalistic interpretation of religious texts as stated by Sharabi was very dominant. Therefore, reading religious texts in hermeneutical way should be elaborated in response to recent situations.
However, the ideas of Sharabi in general as stated by are less applicable in all parts of the Arab world in particular and Third world in general. What we probably do is to look at Sharabi's neo-patriarchy concept as an analytical concept to look at certain sociocultural conditions by seeing that each region in the Arab World has different neo-patriarchal charges. Since neo-patriarchy is a product of imperialism, it is the existence of a synthesis between tradition and modernity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author confirms that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

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