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**ISLAMIC LEFTISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNISM:
AN ANALYSIS OF HASSAN HANAFI'S THOUGHT IN A
POSTMODERN FRAMEWORK**

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ABSTRACT :

Islamic modernism is considered to have failed to accommodate the needs of Muslims in facing social, economic and political injustice, because it is too oriented towards Western values without paying attention to the local context. This research aims to analyze the concept of the Islamic Left developed by Hassan Hanafi as a critique of Islamic modernism, as well as to explore the relevance of this thought in facing contemporary socio-political challenges such as social injustice, imperialism, and capitalism. The Islamic Left offers a new framework that positions Islam as a liberating force by emphasizing the values of social justice, emancipation, and resistance to structural domination. This study also evaluates the relationship of Hanafi's thought with postmodernism, especially in terms of its rejection of a single narrative and its pluralist approach.

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature analysis technique, which includes a review of Hassan Hanafi's major works and supporting literature relevant to Islamic philosophy, social theory, and the critique of postmodernism. A descriptive-analytical approach is applied to relate Hanafi's ideas to current global challenges, such as economic exploitation, social inequality, and cultural domination. The results show that the Islamic Left offers a profound critique of modernism. Islam is considered to have failed to meet the needs of Muslims contextually. Hanafi's thinking is in line with the idea of postmodernism in rejecting universalism, while still maintaining fundamental values such as social justice and the transformation of the ummah. This idea is relevant in building a more just and democratic society in the midst of current global dynamics.

Key words: *Hassan Hanafi, Islamic Left, Islamic modernism, postmodernism, social justice, liberation.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of modernism in Islamic philosophy is one response to the challenges of the modern world characterized by rapid social, political, and cultural change. Modernism in this context refers to the attempt to reform Islamic thought by emphasizing the importance of rationality, individual freedom, and scientific progress. This modern thinking was not only adopted by many Muslim intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries, but also became the framework for socio-political reforms in many Muslim-majority countries. However, modernism in Islam has also faced criticism, both from traditionalists and from more radical thinkers. One prominent critique of Islamic modernism came from Hassan Hanafi, an Egyptian intellectual known for his concept of the Islamic Left.

Hassan Hanafi introduced the Islamic Left as a movement of thought aimed at reexamining the relationship between Islam and socio-political change. In this concept, Hanafi not only criticizes Islamic modernism which is considered too oriented towards the West, but also offers an alternative that is more progressive and oriented towards social justice. The Islamic Left tries

to reformulate the role of Islam in freeing people from injustice and oppression, both from internal and external forces. Interestingly, Hanafi's thought also shows closeness to postmodernism's criticism of modernism, especially in terms of rejection of claims of universality and the dominance of a single narrative in understanding truth.

Various studies have highlighted Islamic modernism and its critics. Qasim Zaman (2010) emphasizes the importance of Islamic reform in meeting the challenges of modernity, while Masud (2009) discusses a critique of the homogeneous tendencies of modernism. Hanafi's thought, as outlined in *Heritage and Modernity* (1994), combines Islamic tradition and progressive social theory to address structural injustices. However, literature discussing the Islamic Left's relationship with postmodernism, especially in rejecting the singular narrative of modernism, is limited.

Although there are many studies on the critique of Islamic modernism, there is still a lack of research that connects Hassan Hanafi's concept of the Islamic Left with the perspective of postmodernism, especially regarding how these two approaches can reject homogenization and emphasize the importance of social justice in a global context.

This research aims to analyze Hassan Hanafi's Islamic Leftist thought as critique of Islamic modernism and its relevance within the framework of postmodernism. It also explores how this concept can offer a more contextualized alternative to contemporary sociopolitical challenges.

Hassan Hanafi's thought criticized Islamic modernism and offered an alternative that Hassan Hanafi's critique of Islamic modernism is relevant in facing contemporary socio-political challenges, for which it is necessary to answer several key questions related to criticism of Islamic modernism, including: What is Hassan Hanafi's critique of Islamic modernism? How does the Islamic Left reformulate the role of Islam in freeing people from socio-political oppression? How is the relevance of Hanafi's thought within the framework of postmodernism? How can the concept of the Islamic Left be applied to face current global challenges?

Methods

This research method uses a qualitative approach with literature analysis techniques. This research focuses on an in-depth study of Hassan Hanafi's major works, especially those related to the concept of the Islamic Left, as well as supporting literature that discusses Hanafi's critique of Islamic modernism. A descriptive-analytical approach is used to understand Hanafi's ideas in the contemporary socio-political context and to explore the relationship of his thought with the currents of postmodernism. Data were collected through a review of relevant books, articles, and academic sources, with the aim of providing a comprehensive analysis of the relevance and implications of Hanafi's thought in facing today's global challenges.

Result

Modernism in Islamic Philosophy

Before explaining Hassan Hanafi's critique of modernism, it is important to first understand what is meant by modernism in Islamic philosophy. Islamic modernism emerged as a response to Western colonial domination and the new challenges facing the Islamic world in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Figures such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida are considered pioneers of modernist thought who sought to reformulate Islamic teachings to make them more relevant to the modern world. They emphasized the importance of *ijtihad*, or reinterpretation, as a way to update Islamic teachings that were considered rigid and less

relevant to the challenges of the times. Their thinking aimed to harmonize Islam with modern values such as rationality, individual freedom, and scientific progress.¹

However, although Islamic modernism succeeded in sparking a wave of reforms in various Muslim countries, this approach also faced criticism. Some traditionalists rejected these modernist ideas as ignoring the classical Islamic intellectual heritage and being too oriented towards Western thought. On the other hand, radical thinkers such as Hassan Hanafi see Islamic modernism as a failed project because it is unable to address the fundamental problems faced by Muslims, especially those related to social, economic and political injustice.²

Hassan Hanafi was born in 1935 in Cairo, Egypt, and was educated in philosophy in France. It was this background that led Hasan Hanafi to have extensive exposure to Western traditions of thought, including the philosophy of existentialism and phenomenology. This experience strengthened his critique of modernism, which he saw as a project of thought that focused too much on rationality and individualism, and ignored the social dimensions of the world more complex politics. Hanafi argues that modernism in Islam, though well-intentioned, failed to deliver on its promises because it emulated Western models without considering the socio-political context of Muslims.

In his critique, Hanafi emphasizes that Islamic modernism fails in two main ways: first, its inability to liberate people from structural injustice and oppression; and second, its dependence on Western epistemological frameworks that are not fully compatible with Islamic values and intellectual traditions. Islamic modernism, according to Hanafi, offers only superficial solutions, which often amount to technical modernization without addressing fundamental issues such as social justice and wealth redistribution.³

Hence, Hanafi introduced the concept of the Islamic Left as an alternative to the modernism. The Islamic Left is not only a critique of modernism, but also an attempt to integrate progressive values, such as social justice and emancipation, into Islamic thought. In his view, Islam must be seen as a liberating force capable of overcoming the structural injustices that Muslims face, both from within and without. Hanafi also emphasizes the importance of reinterpreting Islamic teachings to support socio-political struggles, especially in the context of fighting imperialism and global capitalism. One of the interesting aspects of Hassan Hanafi's thought is how his critique of modernism intersects with the critiques put forward by postmodernist thinkers. Postmodernism, as a philosophical movement, emerged in the second half of the 20th century as a reaction to modernism and enlightenment. Postmodern thought rejects the claims of universality put forward by modernism and emphasizes plurality, relativism, and the deconstruction of grand narratives.

Hanafi's critique of modernism, particularly in terms of its rejection of the dominance of a single narrative, is very much in line with postmodern thought. For Hanafi, Islamic modernism tends to impose a homogenized understanding of Islam, which often ignores the social and cultural diversity of the Muslim world. Islamic Left thought rejects this homogenization and emphasizes the need for a more contextual and pluralist understanding. In this regard, Hanafi rejects modernism's attempt to focus too much on abstract rationality and universalism, and instead offers

¹ Prasetyo Agus, "Konsep Neo-Modernisme Dalam Pendidikan Islam Menurut Azyumardi Azra" (IAIN PONOROGO, 2018).

² S Kazuo, "Kiri Islam, Antara Modernisme Dan Postmodernisme," *Yogyakarta. LkiS*, 2007.

³ Kazuo.

a more contextualized approach that takes into account the different social and political realities of various Muslim communities.

In addition, just as postmodernism rejects absolute truth claims, Hanafi also emphasizes the importance of deconstructing dominant narratives that define Islam narrowly. He emphasizes that Islam must be open to new interpretations that are able to answer the challenges of the times. In this context, Hanafi supports the idea that no one interpretation of Islam is absolutely correct; instead, the understanding of Islam must continue to evolve in accordance with social and political changes.

However, there is a fundamental difference between postmodernism and the proposed Islamic Left by Hanafi. Although postmodernism tends to avoid universal moral claims, the Islamic Left emphasizes the importance of values such as social justice and liberation as fundamental principles in Islam. In this case, Hanafi offers a vision of Islam that is actively involved in the struggle against injustice, while rejecting modernist narratives that overemphasize individualism and rationality.

The Islamic Left and the Critique of Postmodernism

The Islamic Left, as introduced by Hassan Hanafi, is an approach to thought that seeks to examine the role of Islam in social, political and cultural contexts with a focus on efforts to transform people from oppression to liberation. The term "Islamic Left" is used by Hanafi not in the sense of party politics or mass ideological movements, but as an academic approach that prioritizes the role of Islam as a force for social liberation. Hanafi positions the Islamic Left as a sharp criticism of modernism, liberalism, Marxism, and previous Islamic movements, which according to him tend to fail in overcoming the problems of underdevelopment and injustice that afflict Muslims.⁴

Hanafi identified several factors that led to the failure of the movements Previous Islam in addressing the problems of the people, especially those related to underdevelopment. First, religious tendencies co-opted by power, which caused religion to lose its autonomy in fighting for social justice. Second, the influence of pre-revolutionary liberalism, which fully adopted Western culture without considering the context and needs of Muslims. Third, despite Marxism's ambition to realize social justice and oppose colonialism, the movement failed to develop a repertoire oriented towards genuine national independence. Finally, revolutionary nationalism, which was expected to liberate the Ummah from colonialism and oppression, did not last long because it lacked a strong ideological foundation in Islam.⁵

From this view, Hanafi considers that the various ideologies and movements that have been emerged in the Islamic world, both religious and secular in nature, has failed in provide substantial solutions to the problems faced by Muslims. The Islamic Left, in this case, comes as an alternative that offers an Islam-based approach that is more oriented towards social justice and people's liberation.

The Islamic Left thought developed by Hanafi did not appear in a vacuum, but inspired by some of the thoughts of Islamic figures and groups that have been recorded in history. One of the main inspirations for Hanafi was Mu'tazilah, particularly the version developed by Muhammad Abduh. Mu'tazilah emphasized the importance of using reason as the main instrument in achieving

⁴ M Rodinal Khair Khasri, "Liberating People; Critical Pedagogy on the Revolutionary Thought of Hassan Hanafi," *Nadwa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.

⁵ Kazuo, "Kiri Islam, Antara Modernisme Dan Postmodernisme."

knowledge and freedom of initiative. This thought places reason and individual freedom in a central position, an approach that resonates with Hanafi's efforts to promote freedom of thought and action among Muslims.

In addition to Mu'tazilah, Hanafi also took inspiration from the thoughts of figures such as Muhammad Iqbal and Ali Shariati. Iqbal, for example, is known for his ideas on dynamism in Islam and the importance of renewing Islamic thought to make it more relevant to the modern context. Ali Shariati, on the other hand, was a revolutionary thinker who championed the role of Islam in socio-political transformation, particularly in the context of fighting oppression and injustice. These ideas influenced Hanafi's concept of the Islamic Left, which focuses on liberating people from colonialism, exploitation and social injustice.

One of the main goals of the Islamic Left is to carry out social transformation among the people. Muslims, particularly by freeing them from the shackles of colonialism and economic exploitation. Hanafi argues that colonialism not only oppressed Muslims physically, but also economically and culturally. The Islamic Left seeks to return resources to the people and rejects all forms of exploitation by the capitalist middle class. In this context, the Islamic Left promotes a form of popular socialism based on the principles of social justice and shared ownership.

In addition, the Islamic Left also opposes the systems of nepotism and capitalism that dominate many Muslim countries. Hanafi argues that these systems not only exacerbate economic inequality, but also hinder people's participation in the political process. Therefore, the Islamic Left advocates for genuine freedom and democracy, where people have control over resources and political power.

Hassan Hanafi emphasized that the Islamic Left has an affinity with five principles main Mu'tazilah (ushul al-khamsah), namely tawhid, justice, promises and threats, intermediate positions (al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn), and amar ma'ruf nahi munkar. These principles, according to Hanafi, can be reconstructed to suit the contemporary socio-political context. For example, the principle of justice in Mu'tazilah thought can be further developed to support the struggle against economic and social injustice experienced by Muslims today.

This Amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, which in classical Islamic tradition is interpreted as an order to do good and prevent evil, is also seen by Hanafi as a principle underlying social struggle. In the Islamic Left, this principle is interpreted as an obligation to fight all forms of oppression, whether carried out by internal forces (corrupt and authoritarian governments) or external (imperialism and colonialism). The Islamic Left also explicitly rejects Sufism, which Hanafi considers to be one of the most important aspects of the Islamic Left. the main cause of Muslim decadence. Sufism, especially in the tarekat tradition, is considered to have made Islam an exclusive religion of the Sufis, which then ignores the social and political interests of the people. Sufism values such as faqr (poverty), khauf (fear), and al-ju' (hunger), according to Hanafi, actually exacerbate poverty, fear, and suffering among Muslims. This criticism also includes Hanafi's view of Sufi ecstasy, which he considers nothing more than a form of escape from social reality. In contrast, the Islamic Left interprets ecstasy as a form of sacrifice for humanitarian purposes, and union with God (al-ittihad) as the application of sharia in social life.⁶

On the other hand, Hanafi also criticized the dominance of Asy'ariyah thought, which he said had caused intellectual stagnation among Muslims since the seventh century. Asy'ariyah thought, which tends to be fatalistic and emphasizes divine destiny, is considered by Hanafi as a

⁶ Kazuo.

political ideology that supports the status quo and hinders efforts to liberate people from oppression. One of the main aspects of the Islamic Left is its critique of Western imperialism, whether in military, economic or cultural forms. Hassan Hanafi argues that imperialism today not only manifests itself in the form of military domination, but also through multinational corporations exploiting natural resources in Muslim countries. In addition, cultural imperialism carried out through westernization is also a serious threat to the identity and creativity of Muslims. In this context, the Islamic Left aims to localize the West, that is, to return the West to its natural boundaries and reject the claim of universality of Western civilization.

Hanafi also sees orientalism as a form of cultural imperialism, where Eastern civilizations are positioned as objects of study by the West. Although European idealism claims to promote universal values such as human rights, Hanafi argues that in practice, the West remains limited to its own ethnocentric ambitions and interests. The Islamic Left, in this case, rejecting Western claims to be the center of world civilization and emphasizing the importance of cultural and intellectual independence among Muslims.

The Relevance of Hassan Hanafi's Thought in Contemporary Contexts

Hassan Hanafi's thought, especially the concept of the Islamic Left, remains highly relevant in the context of a contemporary world faced with various forms of social, political and economic injustice. In many Muslim countries, problems such as poverty, economic inequality, corruption, resource exploitation, and authoritarianism are still serious challenges. These phenomena show that many Muslim countries have not fully escaped the legacy of colonialism and imperialism, and continue to be entangled in global dynamics that emphasize structural injustice. In this context, Hanafi's thought offers an alternative perspective that prioritizes Islam as a source of social liberation and political transformation. Through the Islamic Left, Hanafi seeks to reformulate the role of Islam in facing these contemporary challenges, with a primary focus on social justice, popular sovereignty, and the liberation of the people from economic exploitation and political domination.⁷

One of the reasons why Hassan Hanafi's thought remains relevant is his criticism of various modern ideologies that are considered to have failed to provide real solutions to the problems faced by the Muslim world. According to Hanafi, Islamic modernism rooted in efforts to adapt to Western values has led to the alienation of Muslims from their original values.

Modernism, despite its promise of progress, has often been trapped in a framework of It is a way of thinking that is entirely oriented towards Western culture and fails to accommodate the real needs of Muslims in different social and political contexts. For example, modernism often adopts Western liberal views without considering the historical, social and cultural differences that exist in the Muslim world, thus failing to address the challenges that arise in those societies.

In this regard, Hanafi proposes an alternative approach that is offered through The Islamic Left. The Islamic Left emphasizes the importance of a more radical interpretation of Islam, in the sense of daring to challenge the status quo supported by an oppressive system of power. This idea

⁷ Anouar Majid, *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World* (Duke University Press, 2000).

emphasizes that Islam does not only function as a ritual religion, but also as a liberating force capable of opposing various forms of injustice, whether economic, political or cultural.⁸

The Islamic Left views Islam as the basis for building a more just social system, where the welfare of the people is a top priority, and their rights to resources and power are respected and guaranteed.⁹ In addition, in the context of globalization and capitalism, Hanafi's thought also provides a new perspective. It is a sharp critique of global economic hegemony that often exploits developing countries, including Muslim countries. Economic globalization, driven by global capitalism, has created significant economic inequality, with rich countries getting richer while poor countries are marginalized. The economic system dominated by multinational corporations often ignores the welfare of local communities, and instead exploits their natural resources and labor for the benefit of a handful of global elites.

In this context, Hanafi emphasizes the importance of establishing an economic system that is more equitable, where Muslims have control over their own economic resources and are involved in the political processes that determine their future. Hanafi is also highly critical of the cultural imperialism practiced by the West. According to him, this imperialism not only seizes material resources, but also seeks to dominate the minds and culture of Muslims.¹⁰

Westernization, which is part of the project of cultural imperialism, tries to impose Western values into the lives of Muslim societies, often at the expense of local cultural identity and heritage. This process has created an identity crisis among Muslims, where they are torn between the desire to keep up with Western technological and economic advances on the one hand, and efforts to maintain Islamic cultural heritage on the other. In this case, Hanafi argues that Muslims must be able to develop a model of civilization based on Islamic values, which is not only able to compete with Western civilization, but also provides a more just and inclusive alternative for all humanity.

Hassan Hanafi's thinking is also relevant in the context of efforts to fight corruption and authoritarianism in many Muslim countries. Many governments in the Muslim world are still characterized by corruption, nepotism and abuse of power, all of which contribute to social and economic inequality. Hanafi proposes that Muslims take an active role in the democratization process, emphasizing the importance of fair and transparent political participation. The Islamic Left, in terms of This promotes a more inclusive government, where people have control greater over the political decisions that affect their lives. Authoritarian and corrupt governments are not only economically detrimental, but also morally, as they ignore the basic principles of justice and equality taught in the Constitution. Islam.

Furthermore, Hassan Hanafi's critique of Sufism and the Ash'ariyah tradition also has relevance in the contemporary context, especially when it comes to the relationship between religion and politics.¹¹ According to Hanafi, Sufism has distanced Islam from its role as a liberating force by promoting asceticism and passivism, leading Muslims to neglect their social responsibilities. In Hanafi's view, Islam should be a religion active in promoting social justice and opposing oppression. Sufism, with its emphasis on the personal spiritual life and neglect of worldly

⁸ Muhammad Adress Prawira Negara and Neng Hannah, "Liberation Theology of Leftist Islam in the Thought of Hassan Hanafi and Its Contextualization," *Islamic Thought Review* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–12.

⁹ Abdou Filali Ansary, *Pembaruan Islam: Dari Mana Dan Hendak Ke Mana?* (PT Mizan Publika, 2009).

¹⁰ E Kusnadinigrat, "Teologi Dan Pembebasan: Gagasan Islam Kiri Hasan Hanafi" (Logos, 1999).

¹¹ Hamzah Hamzah, *TEOLOGI SOSIAL: Telaah Pemikiran Hassan Hanafi* (Graha Ilmu, 2012).

affairs, was thought to have weakened the power of Islam in resisting oppressive power. Therefore, Hanafi called for a reconstruction of a more sophisticated understanding of Islam social action-oriented, where Muslims not only focus on their spiritual lives, but also engage in struggles against social and economic injustice.¹²

Meanwhile, Hanafi's criticism of Ash'ariyah - which he believes has resulted in intellectual stagnation among Muslims - is also relevant in the context of efforts to renew Islamic thought. The dominance of Ash'ariyah, which emphasizes the concept of destiny and accepts the status quo, has led Muslims to be less critical of their social and political circumstances. Hanafi argues that this kind of thinking should be replaced with a more holistic approach. A more dynamic and critical thinking, where Muslims are encouraged to think independently and actively engage in the process of social change. Such thinking is important in the contemporary context, where Muslims need to take a more active role in determining the direction of their future, both politically and socially.

Conclusion

Conclusion Hassan Hanafi's thought, especially the concept of the Islamic Left, offers a deep critique of Islamic modernism and provides a more radical alternative that focuses on social justice. Through the Islamic Left, Hanafi invites Muslims to be actively involved in the struggle against injustice, both from within the country and from the influence of Western imperialism. In the context of postmodernism, Hanafi's critique of modernism is very much in line with efforts to deconstruct singular and universal narratives, while remaining maintaining fundamental values such as justice and liberation. This thinking is very relevant in the face of today's global challenges, including capitalism, globalization and cultural imperialism. The Islamic Left offers an inclusive and contextual perspective, capable of providing solutions for Muslims who want to fight oppression and build a more just society.

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¹² Adi Wijaya, "The Relevance of Multicultural Islamic Religious Education with Hassan Hanafi's Liberation Theology," *Bulletin of Science Education* 4, no. 2 (2024): 282–92.