



EXISTENTIALISM IN ARABIC LITERATURE: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS, MODELS, FIGURES, AND CRITICISM

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Abstract

This article discusses existentialism in Arabic literature. The purpose of this study is to describe the philosophical foundations that underlie existentialism, models or forms of existentialism, figures who apply existentialism in their literature works, critiques of existentialism. The method used in collecting data is the technique of looking at notes on reference sources in books related to existentialism. The results of the study show that the foundations philosophical of existentialism is that humans have the highest authority in governing themselves with responsible freedom. The models that appear in this existentialism are novels, dramas, poetry with themes of anxiety, sadness and others. Arab literary figures who apply this existentialism in their works include: 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, Khalil al-Hawi, Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati, Taufiq al-Hakim. Later in its development, existentialism received some criticism because of its extreme ideas which were contrary to what was brought by Islam, that humans must believe in God and the values of intellectual heritage.

Keywords: Philosophy Existentialism, Models, Figures, Criticism.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang madzhab Eksistensialisme dalam sastra Arab. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguraikan landasan pemikiran filosofis yang mendasari madzhab Eksistensialisme, model atau bentuk karya madzhab Eksistensialisme, tokoh-tokoh yang menerapkan madzhab eksistensialisme dalam karyanya, serta kritik terhadap madzhab Eksistensialisme. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan desain penelitian *library research* (penelitian kepustakaan). Dalam tahap pengumpulan data, peneliti menggunakan teknik simak-catat pada sumber rujukan buku-buku terkait madzhab Eksistensialisme. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa landasan pemikiran madzhab Eksistensialisme adalah manusia memiliki wewenang tertinggi dalam mengatur dirinya dengan kebebasan yang bertanggung jawab, model yang muncul dalam madzhab ini berupa novel, drama, puisi yang mengusung tema kecemasan. Tokoh sastrawan Arab yang menerapkan madzhab ini dalam karyanya diantaranya: 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, Khalil al-Hawi, Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati, Taufiq al-Hakim. Kemudian dalam perkembangannya, madzhab Eksistensialisme ini mendapat beberapa kritikan karena ide-ide ekstrim yang bertentangan dengan apa yang dibawa oleh Islam yang mengajarkan manusia mempercayai akan Tuhan dan nilai-nilai warisan intelektual.

Kata kunci: Landasan Eksistensialisme, Model, Tokoh, Kritik.

INTRODUCTION

In essence, the world of literature is a world of thought. Literature cannot be separated from philosophy. Literature can influence philosophy as well as philosophy can influence literature, literature and philosophy try to bring out balance and aesthetics in a work. Wellek and Warren said that literature is considered as a document of philosophy or thought. So indirectly in a work, the author states that he adheres to a certain

philosophical school or has the dominant views of his time. In this way, literary works can be traced through the literary context related to the author's background. (Ahmadi 2019:15) One of the schools of philosophy which is also a madhhab in literature is Existentialism. In practice, the philosophy of existentialism does not only focus on human studies, but this study has become a genre in the field of literature, where literature is a reflection of society in the form of fiction represented in a story.

Initially, Existentialism emerged in the 20th century during World War II in France which caused a deep crisis in human conscience and damaged human and moral values caused by the actions of tyrants. The killing and expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people was rife as a result of the war. This incident further deepened the sense of doubt about the spiritual reality of human beings. So the emergence of Existentialism as a philosophical school to express what humans feel and to oppose the times. (Afifi 2018:94)

Existentialism focuses on concrete human phenomena such as those that occurred during World War II, where they justify philosophical contemplation on the reality of ongoing human events. Therefore, Descartes' reflection on rationality, which emphasized the statement "I think, therefore I am", was reversed to the extreme by existentialist thinkers with the statement: "I exist, therefore I think". This existentialism emphasizes more on the subject, not on the object. (Yunus 2011:1)

The existentialist school that emerged from the West then arrived in Arabia due to the influence of intellectual and social currents. Arabs then studied it and reflected it in the production of their Arabic literary works, namely about existentialist thinking which started from a story from the author's subject about the sad events he experienced. However, the difference is that existentialism in the West does not believe in and negates God, while existentialism in Arabia still believes in God as the creator of the universe. (Afifi 2018:97)

The emergence of Existentialism after World War II gave awareness of human rights to be psychologically free. Existentialism is one of the philosophical thoughts of the 20th century which aims to generate self-actualization to have autonomy and freedom. Existentialism appears as a rebellion against the shackles of individual human subjectivity in determining their way of thinking. Existentialism is the antithesis of previous schools such as Rationalism, Empiricism, Idealism and Materialism which were very rigid in determining the nature or essence of humans. (Tambunan 2016:216)

Existentialist thinkers try to break through traditional philosophical schools that have developed for centuries which assume that the essence of rational and empirical thinking is something that is deterministic in nature. They are starting to see that the state of mind which is based on radicalism, speculative essence is no longer enough to mark the current situation that has shifted from manual to machine. Humans must pay attention to the individual as an existence that has more abilities and works. (Tambunan 2016:217)

As a school of thought or madhhab in the study of Arabic literature, Existentialism has several important main ideas which the author will explain in this article, including: the philosophical foundations that underlie existentialism, models or forms of existentialism, figures who apply existentialism in their works, critiques of existentialism.

METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative research method. According to Zaim, qualitative methods are used in language research because this method is more sensitive and more able to adjust to the many sharpenings of the patterns studied. (Zaim

2014:13) This study uses a library research design, in which the author obtains data from books, articles, and other sources of library information. The object of this research is Extensionalism in Arabic literature which includes philosophical foundations that underlie existentialism, models or forms of existentialism, figures who apply existentialism in their works, critiques of existentialism. The data collection technique used is a note-taking technique related to Existentialism. Then the results of the discussion found are presented in descriptive form. (Sugiyono 2013:13).

DISCUSSION

The philosophical foundation of Existentialism

The term existence comes from the word *existere* (ex: out, and *sitere*: exists). So, existence means "something that comes out of existence" or "something that is capable of transcending itself". In the reality of everyday life, no one has the characteristics or character of an *existere*, except humans. Only humans are able to get out of themselves, beyond the limitations of their biological and physical environment. Humans try not to be confined by everything that limits them. Therefore, existentialists refer to humans as a process of becoming as an active and dynamic subject. (Abidin 2006:34)

Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine with ancient roots, but revived in World War II, this tragedy illustrates the collapse of belief in values, and the rise of doubt and disbelief in religion, morals, and traditions. World War II destroyed millions of people. There has been a lot of crime, destruction and violations of the rights of society and individuals which have made people in the West live in loss and confusion. They have come to distrust intellectual heritage, and believe that truth is nothing but falsehood and deception. (Qashab 2005:135)

Existentialism philosophy is a philosophy that places the way of human existence as a central theme.(Saidah 2020:21) This ideology actually aims to restore the existence of humanity in accordance with the basic conditions of life they have. This recognition of human existence means humans as subjects are filled with direct awareness of themselves. Humans understand themselves, their existence, their goals, and themselves as knowing subjects. Because truth is the embodiment of subjective experiences about life. On this basis, humans can understand themselves comprehensively and deeply with full awareness. (Isnaini and Herliani 2022:23)

Existentialism emerged and grew in the West, then in its development this school of thought spread and reached Arabia. This is because the cultural relationship between Arabs and the West has become an inevitable cultural fact. The facts show that most of the great modern Arab writers were indirectly influenced by Western culture and then they adopted and applied it to their literary works. Al-Nadawi saw that Existentialism had fertile ground in the Arab environment after the Second World War due to several factors, including: Scientific missions that spread to Europe in the third quarter of this century, intellectuals who were proficient in foreign languages, they read and studied heritage scientific and philosophical in French, German, English, and others, intellectuals who had contact with scholars and philosophers from the West, Translations of the works of existentialists they have transferred into Arabic. This shows that the Arabs had focused on French existentialism, particularly the works of Sartre, Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. (Al-Nadawi n.d.:1)

The following are some of the philosophical foundations of Existentialism:

- a. Existence precedes essence

Existence precedes essence, meaning that man exists first, then essence exists. Human existence is their choice of what they want.(Qashab 2005:135) For existentialists, humans through their consciousness can create their own values and determine the meaning of their own lives, because humans do not have an identity or values attached to themselves. These identities and values are created by individuals. So humans can make their existence more meaningful. Human existence is a way of being that is unique to humans. In this world only humans have existence. Other living beings do not have it. It can be said that the uniqueness of the human being as a special individual being in his existence is what constitutes his existence. (Tambunan 2016:220)

The basis of this thought is a reaction to the madhhab of idealism, so that existence determines essence. Meanwhile, the reaction to the madhhab of naturalism and materialism is because in reality sometimes humans are placed or positioned in the same position as objects, so that humans are considered as machines and robots that can act on mechanical laws and walk mechanistically, working simply as tools, objects and controlled by the system. (Ekawati 2017:143)

b. Individual freedom

One of the most important pillars of Existentialism is individual freedom. Humans act freely in this universe without being subject to religion, morals, and inherited values, because these values will limit their freedom. They are subject only to the laws of their own mind. Jean Paul Sartre as a very famous Western Existentialist figure believes that people are free to see themselves as the author of everything. Existentialism upholds individual status, subjectivity, and makes humans the masters of the universe. Existentialism, with this concept of freedom, does not aim to destroy society and call for chaos, but aims to destroy what is inherited, and replace it with new values that it creates itself, so that they can achieve the freedom they want. (Qashab 2005:136)

This human freedom appears in existentialism as a logical consequence of the statement existence precedes essence, which means the affirmation of subjectivity which is not preceded by something called human nature or a rational scheme about reality. All concepts that are deterministic by biological, physiological, social and historical laws are rejected by existentialists. Man himself determines his essence. (Fauzia 2013:3)

c. Responsibility

The freedom upheld by Existentialism is responsible freedom. This means that existentialism teaches freedom to humans with the concept of complete freedom in existence, but this freedom is not freedom without responsibility from the actor.(Ahmadi 2019:22) The freedom given is not absolute. Freedom here is bound by the control and laws of the human mind. Humans can freely choose what they want, but they must also bear responsibility for the freedom they choose consciously. Humans, wherever they are and whatever the meaning of their existence, no one is responsible except themselves. In forming themselves, humans have the opportunity to choose what is good and what is bad for themselves. Every choice he chooses is his own choice. He cannot blame others and rely on God. (Fauzia 2013:4)

In practice in Arabic literary works, the Existentialist school of thought or madhhab has its own foundation of thought which is also indirectly influenced by the philosophy of Existentialism. Among them are:

a. Commitment

The author is required based on his responsibility to have a position on the events depicted in his time. Sartre said that literary work is a social reality, and the writer before starting to write he must be convinced that he is not only a writer, but he is a human being who must have responsibility for what he writes in his story to represent the depiction of social reality that is happening. Writing is not a luxury, but a social function. The author not only writes a work for himself, but for readers whose literary existence cannot be achieved without him. He wrote for society, as he was an active and productive member of that society. (Qashab 2005:139)

- b. Existentialism prioritizes content over form in literary works. The function of existentialist writers is not only to create beauty, but also has social and moral functions. In this case, the aesthetic form is not prioritized for fear of deviating the reader's feelings from the intended purpose of the content. (Afifi 2018:96)
- c. In existentialist literary works there are certain doubtful meanings originating from their philosophy which talks about God, the universe, life, and human beings. And the most predominant of these meanings are: anxiety, abandonment, hopelessness, rebellion against the universe and God, absurdity, alienation in the homeland, boredom, fear of unknown mysteries, and many other kinds of meanings and ideas. (Qashab 2005:140)

Models Of Existentialism

Existentialism as a school of thought or maddhab in Arabic literature has characteristics that become a reference for the models of literary works that emerge and belong to this school of existentialism and differentiate it from previous schools. Are as follows:

- a. Existentialist works include novels and dramas, because novels and dramas are better able to present their ideas and express their literary commitments. And according to Badawi, poetry is also the closest work to existentialism. Because the poet can create an independent world of existence. (Qashab 2005:151) Existential concepts of individual freedom, personal responsibility, and the search for meaning in life can be found in works of literature, art, film, and also in ethical and moral considerations in modern society. (Mangolo 2023:2)
- b. Existentialism figures in literary works are humans with their consciousness who experience contemporary human problems with existential density and purity. They understand themselves, their behavior and actions.
- c. The themes in Existentialism contain elements of suffering, freedom, guilt, failure, death, alienation, and anxiety. In this case, the flower of evil is the most appropriate capital for creating existentialist poetry which can cause anxiety in humans.
- d. Existentialist literary works are more concerned with content than form. Because for them, language style is a means and not a goal. (Afifi 2018:96) They prioritize aesthetics in art, the most important thing for them is that the content in it is able to represent social functions.
- e. More specifically, in practice in literary works in the West and in the East, existentialism works are based on the sad experiences that occur to the author or poet himself who is part of a social group. The only difference is that in Arabia they are based on the basic principles they hold in their religion. In contrast to the West which underlies it on freedom that does not believe in God.

- f. Existentialism provides encouragement to explore human life subjectively. Writers must express human existential conditions, including feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and uncertainty, without binding themselves to conventional norms or objectively determined values. Existentialist work reveals unique individual experiences, draws on emotional complexity and personal reflection. (Mangolo 2023:6)
- g. In a film, existentialism is reflected in a cinematic approach that shows the human condition in a state of absurdity and a subjective search for meaning in life. Existentialist films often portray characters who are on an existential journey, facing difficult choices and searching for the truth in an unclear world. Visuals and narration are used to describe the uncertainty, anxiety, and inner struggles of the characters in the film. (Mangolo 2023:7)

Arab Figures Who Apply Existentialism

Existentialism was born and raised in the West with several famous figures, namely: Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980 M), Kierkegaard (1813-1855 M), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976 M), Karl Jasper (born 1883-1969 M), Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973 M). (Afifi 2018:94)

Then after this existentialism entered Arabic, many Arab writers applied it to their literary works while still holding on to their own principles. Some figures and their works that are categorized in existentialism include:

a. ‘Abd al-Rahman Badawi (1917-2002 M)

Badawi became the most serious existentialist philosopher in the Arab world before 1970. He was educated at the intersection of two major currents: classical Islam and Western modernity. In this intensification of French philosophy, Badawi enlarged the space for his intellectual experimentation, where he was able to examine the issue of death in the philosophy of Existentialism. The topic of his master's thesis was entitled 'Le problème de la mort dans la philosophie existentielle'. He was given references by his lecturer, a French philosopher named Koyre, in the form of a number of big names in the universe of phenomenology and existentialism. They taught Badawi that death is not simply an event at the end of a person's life but rather an experience that forms the entire path of existence/the experience of being. Badawi's Existentialism, especially that manifested in the Existentialist tempo, is a creative synthesis of its intellectual wanderings. The brilliance of Badawi's Existentialism in his work has been widely recognized and appreciated. As he wrote in his fictional work 'Humam al-Shabab'. Readers find many meanings that are sought, such as increasing one's potential: individualism, authenticity, fear, responsibility, and freedom. (Umam 2020:1)

b. Khalil al-Hawi (1919-1982 M)

Khalil al-Hawi in his diwan poems, 'River of Ash' and 'Flute and Wind' brings us to the conclusion that these two diwans are the pinnacle of existential poetry in Arabic literature, and they also represent experiences that address anxiety and the divisions that lead to confusion. Khalil al-Hawi also revisits the poet Adonis in his collection "Songs of Mihyar the Damascene". The 7 chapters written contain existential elements which seem to dominate the poetry. (Al-Nadawi n.d.:324)

c. Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati (1926-1999 M)

Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati was an Iraqi Arab poet. When he describes the personality of the foreign horizon, he approaches the existentialist concepts in it a lot. He found in man as described by Sartre. A prisoner in a world that would be ignored if not harboring grudges and hatred. The prisoners' anxiety and cries are like a traveler without

his bag who doesn't know himself, where he came from, and where he lives. All these meanings bring al-Bayati very close to the influence of Existentialism. (Qashab 2005:153)

d. Taufiq al-Hakim (1898-1987 M)

Taufiq al-Hakim is a writer and visionary from Egypt. He was also one of the pioneers of Arabic novels and drama. One of his works is the short story "Wajh al-Haqiqah" which contains existentialist values related to the meaning and purpose of human life to seek truth in himself and in others. The values of existentialism include responsibility, freedom, and a combination of responsibility and freedom. (Habibi 2017:V) Taufiq Hakim also achieved great achievements in his drama entitled "Yaa Thali'a as-Syajarota" which was influenced by the play (The Bald Singer) namely Eugene Ionesco, which is based on the conflict between art and life, things that are not approved by reason, conscience, and society.(Afifi 2018:96).

Critique Of Existentialism

Rifaat Afifi argues in his book that Existentialism is included in the schools of thought. Because as we understand that madzhab contains the values of wisdom. But Sartre and his followers describe the flow of Existentialism by deviating from human values, losing morals, and leaving purity to a dirty world. And they run away from the circle of truth towards obesity and lust. (Afifi 2018:95) Then all the meanings approached by existentialism contain negative meanings that represent human loss, confusion, and feelings about the absurdity of life and existence. Dr. Abd al-Rahman al-Badawi said that it is imperative to prioritize morals and religion in life. (Qashab 2005:149)

Existentialism is the most famous doctrine of the 20th century that has settled in Western literature. This doctrine was born like a crippled newborn, because of the criticisms that led to the deformity. Existentialism sows the seeds of anxiety in humans. Humans are free to choose, but in their choices humans must be responsible for what they have chosen. The anxiety bears the responsibility that arises from what freedom one chooses. They are not bound by religion, custom, or behavior. For existentialists, human existence lies in self-reflection. Therefore, for them there is no God, no ideals, no inherited moral values that are certain. They practice life in absolute freedom. These extreme ideas are contrary to what is brought by Islam, which teaches humans to control their desires, lust, and greed. So, human freedom according to Existentialism is in contrast to Islam which believes in noble principles inherited from God. Existentialists live in anxiety, abandonment, and despair as a result of atheism that does not believe in God. (Badar 1985:187)

However, related to other things, Islamic literature also agrees with the foundation of existentialist thinking regarding commitment, namely in literature the writer is able to position himself and be part of the conditions experienced by society. Then the writer represents these groans and puts them into a work. As Sartre said "what is written? Who did he write for? why write?. So the author must not lie, deviate from the facts, and exaggerate beyond reason and logic. The difference is, the commitment in Islamic literature adheres to the Islamic values that originate from it. Poetry is an imaginary art, but an imaginary one that is based on sharia rules and logic. (Qashab 2005:148). Islamic literature believes that each genre has its own characteristics and style in conveying its message.

Historically, Existentialism emerged as an expression of the moods and styles of behavior that crystallized during World War II. Existential ideas, especially atheism,

undermine Western society through the moral decay that has befallen them due to the loss of standards or scale.(Habibi 2017:46). However, in practice in literature, existentialism is only a study of human existence which starts from themes of suffering and anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Initially, Existentialism in Arabia was influenced by the philosophy of Western existentialism which emerged in the 20th century during world war II in France. This war caused a deep crisis in the human conscience and undermined human values, ideals, and morals. Existentialism emerged and grew in the West, then in its development, this existentialism became increasingly widespread and spread to Arabia. This is because the cultural relationship between Arabs and the West has become an inevitable cultural fact due to the intelligence of their intellectuals. The basis of the philosophical thought of existentialism is that humans have the highest authority in governing themselves with responsible freedom. The model that appears in this school is in the form of novels, plays, as well as poetry that carries the theme of anxiety. Arab literary figures who apply existentialism in their works include: 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, Khalil al-Hawi, Abd al-Wahab al-Bayati, Taufiq al-Hakim. In its development, existentialism has received some criticism because of extreme ideas that are contrary to what is brought by Islam, which teaches humans to believe in God and the values of intellectual heritage.

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