

Equality and Citizenship from the Perspective of the Islamic Parties: Study of Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) of Egypt

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Abstract: New influential parties have emerged in some Arab countries after the Arab spring. A lot of them are Islamic parties who have announced that they adopt and practice democracy. The focal focus of this paper is the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)-the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm in Egypt-the most important factor among these parties; Due to its great attendance and influence in the political, economic and social life of the Egyptian people. Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is also the largest and most spread Islamic movement in the Arab and Muslim countries. Since its foundation in 1928, MB has been working constantly to fulfill its famous slogan (Islam is the Solution) and implement Islamic law. The findings indicated that the woman and the non-Muslim are forbidden from some of their rights as citizens, such as running for presidency, in MB and FJP political doctrine. Depending on their understanding to Islam, they believe that woman and non-Muslim should not be the president. Nevertheless, the analysis of the collected data for the study show that most likely they may follow the advanced stance of some Islamist experts by giving non-Muslims and women the right to run for the presidency if they take their chance to rule democratically.

Key words: Equality • Citizenship • Muslim Brotherhood • Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) • Egypt

INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its political arm, Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), concept of democracy has resulted in a lot of contradictions between the common understanding and application of democracy and the MB perspective. Their Islamic reference that forces them to judge any political issue according to the Islamic criteria has not only led to contradictions, but may lead to create a new ruling system. Their desire to merge between Islam, as a comprehensive ideology that includes a lot about politics and democracy that created and flourished in non-Muslim conditions and states, has caused many difficulties for them. They have spent a long time trying to answer questions about the conflict between democracy and Islam. Still many inconveniences are strongly present despite the great efforts put by MB as a group and many scholars belong to MB.

They have refused the opinion asking them to take democracy completely, or let it completely. They have the right to benefit from any good idea in the world, regardless of its creator, as many of MB cadres believe.

They are convinced that democracy is a result of great human experiences and they have to build on it. From their perspective they have both the right and the ability to accommodate democracy with Islam and the Islamic law. This is their natural right as a part of the international community. As will be discussed, their political and intellectual efforts have led to special understanding to many democratic principles, particularly, equality and citizenship.

Equality and Citizenship as a Democratic Principle:

Equality is one of the prime human and democratic values. It will not exist among people if it is not changed to a conviction and culture. Everyone must deeply believe that all people are equal, regardless of their race, religion, color and economic or social class. Everyone must believe that each person has good attributes as well as negative ones i.e. no one is ideal. Any person could be peculiarity just through his/her efforts and roles in serving other people and his/her nation and humanity, without giving himself/herself any priority or special case; all people have and share him/her the same rights [1].

All people must be protected against all aspects of discrimination such as race, sex, language, color, religion, opinion, economic status, ethnicity and place of birth, because equality of citizenship requires progressive elimination of all obstacles which hinder any group of citizens from practicing and participating in the government. Although the special measures taken to correct existing inequalities do not constitute discrimination; equal citizenship is unattainable in the absence of guaranteed economic and social rights, such as access to education and basic income.

All the people in the democratic state should be equal in the opportunity of education, work, health care, facilities, vote, own property and so on. Personal qualifications and professional characters should be the benchmarks for any required position. This principle of equal citizenship has to allow room for differences in belief, life style and identity. Today, societies everywhere are characterized by pluralisms of language, religion, culture or ethnicity [2].

The first identity that equality gives people is humanity. We are all humans, so we are equal; and for those who live in a country or a state, the identity of equality is the citizenship. All the people in a country are citizens with full citizenship. There are no first class and second class citizens and democracy must assure and secure this way of life. Fruition of all people with their full citizenship is one of the aims of democracy. This means that all people are taking their rights in an equal manner. With equal citizenship no one can allege that he has a special right to rule, to dominate or to have special social, political or economical privileges. All people are citizens in the state. They have the same rights and should do the same duties. The importance of this issue has prompted some experts to consider it as a precondition for democracy since it allows citizens to practice their right of freedom of varied thoughts. It also, "enables civil society to express itself not only within each nation, but also on the international scene, something which is becoming a necessity in an increasingly interdependent world" [3].

All citizens should have political equality whereby everyone has the same legal and political rights, starting from the right of taking political position, voting, nominating, forming parties and resisting the political power using legal means [4]. According to the democratic principle "one man one vote," everyone has the same right in practicing in and deciding on the general affairs. Those who claim that they are democrats should believe that equality is a key principle of democracy; and every person has a roughly equal influence over the government [5].

Likewise, citizens must enjoy social equality that gives everyone the same social importance and gives any person or group of people the right to resist and fight against any kind of discrimination. All people must be treated on same criteria and guarantee equal treatment of women and men in all matters of public concern in both law and practice. From economical perspective, equality means the equality of opportunity depending on merits, ability and qualifications without resort to or benefit from any economic power [6].

Equality is the democratic alternative of the extremist ideas that glorify one race and scorn the others. It is the contradictory of Nazism, Fascism, extremist nationalism and all other radical ideologies. For instance, denial of equality between humans which was one of the reasons of the World War Two, in which around 60-70 millions of people died as a result of wars, had launched by the nationalist extremists in Europe. This gives us a serious lesson that the alternative of equality is the fanaticism, violence, animosity and devastating wars; while we can live in peace, prosperity, dignity and cooperation if we adopt this great value [7].

The humanity has struggled for a long time and in different historical eras to achieve equality citizenship. A great number of people had died before the equality between people has been achieved. The discrimination between people took different forms; some people were discriminated against women and others against minorities. Sometimes, democratic elites believed that just men have the right to practice democracy and to vote in the elections and when they were speaking about equality, they spoke about equality between men only [8]. Despite the longtime of democracy emergence and the reality that most of political ideologies and theories have called for the equality, there are many aspects of discrimination between people in many countries of the world. Some still discriminate against women and minorities; for example, in Saudi Arabia the women are still deprived from their right to be nominated [9].

In reality all cases of discrimination between people have ended to failure and cost the humanity a lot of victims and casualties and great sector of people have been suffering for long time in different places in the world. Fortunately, the human, by their respond to their nature, have overcome this bad situation successfully as it happened in South Africa where apartheid was conquered.

It is the people task to develop their culture constantly toward the belief of equality. Hard efforts are needed in any society to achieve this cultural and political stage. In the democratic states like United States

of America (USA), it took decades of struggling until they officially agreed with equality. In South Africa, for instance, the South Africans had to develop their vision of democracy in conditions which were far from perfection, but they could [10].

Citizenship from Freedom and Justice Party Perspective:

From MB and FJP, ideological and political perspectives all people are equal as humans. In Islam there has no privilege for a person on another because of his nationality, race, color or religion [11]. They have declared many times that they believe in equality of the humankind based on the values and principles of Islam. From their viewpoint there are some special cases that we should keep in mind when we talk about this issue. It is the differences between people, such as gender. In these cases, the best application of equality is to respect the particularity and to give, or to ask, the person what he wants and deserves. It is unfair to ask the woman to do the same work and to have the same duties. He is Allah who creates the differences between people and we have no choice to respond to his will. It is the nature which imposes and gives the people different abilities and merits [12].

In the new Egyptian constitution, mainly supported by MB and FJP, Article 33 states that, "all citizens are equal before the law. All citizens share equal public rights and duties without any discrimination" [13]. The 2011 FJP Parliamentary Election Program also states that, "the state must be based on the principle of citizenship, where all citizens enjoy equal rights and duties guaranteed by law in accordance with the principles of equality and equal opportunities without discrimination because of religion or race" [14].

MB and FJP have faced a lot of accusations for their position about woman, minorities and non-Muslims; although, in the last decade their position toward these issues became clearer, for instance, *al-Jiziah* (capitation). Many seculars and liberal still accuse MB and FJP that they will apply *al-Jiziah* again if they manage to stay long in the power. They claim that they are not convinced to overstep this issue; they just deceive the people by declaring that they will not apply it in the future [15]. But MB and FJP have declared clearly that capitation is a historical issue which overstepped these days. It is impossible to return to capitation in democratic circumstances with citizenship and equality. It is a case related to a historical era when the non-Muslims citizens were not fighting beside the Muslims against the enemy of the state. Instead of that, they had to pay a tax called (*al-Jiziah*) [16].

The second argument is the MB and FJP position about equality. Their decision, which states that presidency is not accessible for women and non-Muslims, has cast a lot of suspicions on their vision to equality and citizenship. The researchers that follow MB political evolution have expressed their disappointment from MB position on this issue. This position did not change by the time. In 1994 MB talked about the rights of women and non-Muslim to take over any political position except the president's [17]. In 2007, the political MB platform became again consistent with the vision of the conservatives which forbid woman and non-Muslim to run for presidency [18]. Later on, after the demise of Mubarak and the establishment of FJP, the stance still invariable. Sa'd al-Husaini, FJP Executive Office member, said: "we will not nominate a Christian for presidency and if any non-Muslim runs in the presidential election, we will not elect him. It is very normal for a society with a vast majority of Muslims to be ruled by a Muslim man" [19]. The recent documents of FJP have remained silent over this issue and just talked about the citizenship and equality in general. But the new Egyptian constitution gives the woman and non-Muslim the opportunity to nominate to the presidency [20].

The third MB and FJP criticized position regarding the democratic principle of equality is their stance from woman. Democracy counts women as "mature adults" with a right to be "free and equal" individuals [21]. Condoleezza Rice said: "society is like a bird. It has two wings. And a bird cannot fly if one wing is broken" [22]. Theoretically MB and FJP agree with these statements. al-Banna agreed that woman has personal, civil and political rights; she also has an independent financial character. He believed that Islam has highlighted the woman's position as partner of man in roles and duties. He also maintained that the natural differences between man and woman impose different jobs and duties on both. Woman should learn what is necessary for her role in compatible with her nature. From al-Banna's perspective, she needs to learn reading, writing, religion, housekeeping and any other sciences that are necessary for her main role as a housekeeper. There is no need for the women to waste her time in learning futile things like law.

Al-Banna saw that the Muslim society is a separately community. There is no room for any relation between both genders at the life out of the Islamic context. There is no room to socialize men and women life. The only legal relationship between man and woman is the marital relationship. Mixing life between both genders leads to the loss and corruption in the social, family and psychological status [23].

MB and FJP focus a lot on the role of women inside home. They stress that the real role of woman must be in nurturing kids and taking care of her family, which guarantees security and peace for it [24]. The 2011, FJP parliamentary elections program mentioned, "the FJP has the greatest respect, appreciation and support for women's role as wives, mothers and makers of men; and the aim is to better prepare them for this role" [25].

At present, the MB and FJP positions towards woman's role are somehow different from and overstep al-Banna's. They now believe that woman is different from man, but she has the right to learn and work whatever she wants [26]. MB and FJP have tried to enhance the role of woman in the party and the society. After the 25 January uprising, the margins of the political work for woman in the party become larger. However, the membership of the Consultation Council and GGO is confined for men. A woman leader of MB believes that after the uprising and the spread of freedom, one day there will be a woman in the GGO of MB [27]. After the Egyptian uprising, there is a revolution in the status of woman in MB and FJP. Fifty six women were nominated for the 2012 parliamentary election and four of them won. There are also two women members, Kamilya Hilmi and Siham al-Jamal, at the executive office of FJP [28].

Those who are criticizing MB position from the role of woman claim that MB and FJP have benefited from women in the election campaigns and the public work, then sent them home after the work had finished. They camouflage their stance by nominating limited number for the parliamentary elections; for instance, in 2000 and 2005, they only nominated one (Jihan Hafnawi and Makarim al-Dairi) [29]. At the last parliamentary election, they nominated 56 women and only 4 won [30].

MB has refuted these claims. It is the only party that nominated such number of women, said al-Husaini [31]. In the past, MB did not nominate women because of the bad security conditions. The previous regime was a security system and it was a gamble to nominate women and then put them at risk. In 2007, the MB General Guide declared that they tended to nominate 25 women to the parliamentary election, but they were very concerned that the regime might disturb them [32].

An enlightened position regarding woman role came from al-Ghannushi. He asked the men to empower women and give them the chance to practice and work in all the fields. He added that there is need to develop the spirit of confidence in women to help them be active and independent from man. Preparing and developing woman in different ways from man is a kind of unjustified separation; it may mean calling for female Islam and male Islam and for female Quran and male Quran. Women,

not only, have the right to participate in politics but also have the duty to do so. He reported a very advanced position by declaring that there is not any considerable reason that forbids women from the general mandate (*Wilayah Amah*) even in governance or judiciary [33].

On the other hand, many are blaming and holding woman the responsibility for the limited role she has in the public affairs. She should educate herself and take the initiative to impose her role in the society [34]. The western media always distort the woman's picture in the Islamic world. It characterizes her as submissive, humble and inactive. This is not totally true as an international survey has found that most of the women in the Islamic world do not accept to be second class citizens; they desire to be equal with men within their own culture and tradition; away from the western culture and habits [35].

It seems to be a common phenomenon that women take their rights after stabilizing democracy in states. So, even the women do not take their real role and right in the society, democracy should be supported and enhanced. The woman political rights are not pre-conditions for democratic transition. The deep-rooted democratic countries like USA and British, as Marina Ottaway said, "began to develop democratic institution long away before women had the right to vote and participate in politics. The resistance to women's participation continued until 1918 in UK and 1920 in USA" [36].

The fourth criticism for MB and FJP related to their vision for citizenship, which still discriminates between the citizens, despite the adopting of many famous Islamist scholars for this principle. From the Islamist scholars' perspective citizenship is an Islamic value. It has deep roots in the Islamic history. It is based on the religion of Islam as well as the Islamic thought. Muhammad al-Awa said: "the constitution of *al-Madinah (al-Sahifah)* is the first citizenship experience in the man history" [37]. Rashid al-Ghannushi added that "the historical constitution that Prophet Muhammad PBUH wrote in *al-Madinah* has been established for the principle of citizenship. It is one of the best documents the humanity has known" [38].

In Egypt when we talk about citizenship, mainly it means the rights of the Copts who are the main Christian minority with around 10 percent of the population. All the political discussion about the rights of the minorities means the right of the Copts. MB and FJP literatures and documents talk about the minorities from this point of view. These days, there is who want to talk about other minorities such as non-believers or those who are not from the people of the Book. But the research will follow what is common in the Egyptian political culture and what the political parties, especially FJP, concern with [39].

Depending on their historical experience with the Copts, MB claims that they have distinguished relationship with them. It started earlier with al-Banna who had strong relations with them. In that era, there were two Copts members at the MB supreme political committee, Wahb Dus and Luise Fanus. Nassif Mekhail was also a consultant for al-Banna in the Nile River issue [40]. The only man who walked in the funeral of al-Banna was Copt, Makram Ubaid [41]. MB leaders consider the Christians as partners in the country [42].

The FJP documents assure this vision. Its program has affirmed that, “the Egyptians, Muslims and Christians are integral parts of the fabric of the one homeland, with equal rights and duties and without distinction or discrimination and all together must remove the injustice inflicted upon them”. It has also affirmed that “the Egyptians, Muslims and Christians, are partners in this homeland and builders of its civilization, rejuvenation, development and defence against all internal and external threats” [43]. In the new Egyptian constitution, it is absolutely citizenship without any conditions or limitations; “citizenship that is equal among citizens in the rights and duties” [44].

The scholars and leaders of MB see that Islam not only respects the political participation for non-Muslims and allow Muslims to elect and choose Copts candidates for the parliament, but it also secures their religious rights [45]. The Copts have the right to build new churches if there is a need [46]. The constitution gives them the right in special civil laws, as stated in Article 3, “persons embracing Christianity and Judaism shall have the right to revert to their respective religious laws in matters relevant to personal affairs, practice of religious (affairs) or (rituals) and nomination of their spiritual leaders” [47].

From the MB opponent point of view, the MB concept of citizenship is faked because Muslims will decide which right to give for the minorities and it must be in line with Islam and the Islamic law [48]. The very famous statement, “*lahum ma lana wa ‘alihin ma ‘alina*” (we have the same rights and duties), that MB and FJP still use when they talk about citizenship does not give the same meaning of citizenship because Muslims, the majority, will define what is for us and what is for the them. Mariz Tadros, Egyptian political expert, claims that the insistence of MB on the Islamic reference for the political and democratic issues such as the citizenship, equality and so on voids democracy from its content. It is a conditional guarantee of rights. From her perspective FJP believe that “People are equal as long as there is no *wilayah* (mandate) of a non-Muslim over Muslim; so Christian and women are forbidden from running as a president. Equal rights to worship but must tied to the minority status of the people of the book. Equal as long as you belong to the people of the book. People of the book

are equal as long as they are mindful of Muslim sensibilities’. She supported her opinion with Article 43 of the constitution, “the freedom of belief and practice of rituals shall be ensured. The State shall guarantee freedom to establish houses of worship for the heavenly religions, as per the provisions of the law” [49]. An extremist opponent *Jum‘ah Sha‘lan*, the member of the political bureau of the Social Labor Party, confirms that there is no place in MB state for women, Copts, non-Muslims and even the Muslims who are not MB [50].

The leaders of MB and FJP have refused all the accusations of discrimination among people. They consider these accusations as a part of the political hostility fuelled by the old regime and other political opponents. They claim that no one in Egypt knows the meaning of discrimination and political and social deprivation similar to them. For many decades MB had suffered from the despotism; so they will not practice it against the others. They paid a huge price from their lives, time, money and dignity; they will not betray their principles [51].

Rashid al-Ghannushi has shared the others their fears. He assumes that the performance of the Islamists is still frightening citizens, Muslims or non-Muslims. Moreover, some of the Islamists (the moderates) are afraid from their colleagues’ performance. The experiences in Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan are not appeasing. In an advanced position, he has declared that the right of citizenship results in the right for non-Muslim to nominate to the president position. Since More than third of Muslims are living in their countries as minorities between non-Muslims majorities; this situation should lead to the admission of the full right of the minorities in the Islamic countries and to fulfil the principle of citizenship [52].

CONCLUSION

The post-25 January uprising constitution of Egypt conserves the democratic principle of equality. Citizenship in this constitution is secured for all the Egyptian people. All people are citizens regardless of their race, religion or color. This constitution is almost prepared and supported by MB and FJP. MB and FJP have shown an advanced position toward controversial issues, such as *al-Jiziah*. They have considered it as a historical issue that will not return. At the same time, MB and FJP still do not agree upon the absolute equality between the people. They have openly talked about few issues that cannot be treated equally between people such as the right of woman and non-Muslim to run for the presidency and enacted special laws for the non-Muslims in the social and economical fields.

MB and FJP want to officially keep distance between the citizens' rights and their own vision of these rights by accepting the absolute equality in the constitution and refusing it in their literature. They do not deprive any one from the right to run for presidency, but they will not support him. From their perspective it is very common in the democratic state that the religion of the president is the religion of the majority. Even the constitutions in these states do not prevent anyone from his/her right to run for the presidency, in the reality just those who believe in the religion of the majority can win. For instance, In USA, British and many other Christian states, the presidents are Christians; in India the president is Hindu and so forth. Egypt as a Muslim country should be ruled by a Muslim.

Regarding to this issue, even in the democratic state there is a difference between the theoretical position and implementations. One of them is the right of woman and minorities to run for the presidency or any vital position in the state. Although this right is preserved by the constitution and the law, in reality it has never happened to have a president from the religious minority. For instance, in USA, France, British and all the democratic states with Christian majority no any Muslim or Jewish has become a president. At the same time, just few women in democratic states managed to be presidents or prime ministers; some of them in Islamic states. It has never happened in USA and France. So the most important thing is to give this right for all citizens and let them elect their leaders.

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