Political Pluralism from the Perspective of the Islamic Parties: Study on Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt

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Abstract: After the Arab spring new influential parties have emerged in some Arab countries. Most of them are Islamic parties who announced that they adopt and practice democracy. The focus of this paper is the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) - The Muslim Brotherhood's political arm in Egypt - the most important among these parties; Due to its great attendance and influence in the political, economic and social life of the Egyptian people. Muslim Brotherhood (MB) "the mother of FJP" is also the largest and most spread Islamic movement in the Muslim world; it has branches in about 80 countries. Since its foundation in 1928 MB has been working constantly to fulfill its famous slogan (Islam is the Solution) and implement al-Shari'ah (Islamic law). Specifically, the paper aims to explore MB and the FJP positions on the principle of 'diversity and political pluralism' as it is one of the major democratic principles and political rights. To achieve this purpose, qualitative research methods were utilized. Literatures, platforms and internal regulations of MB and FJP were analyzed. Interviews were conducted with some MB and FJP senior leaders. The findings indicated that MB and FJP respect diversity and the right of the people to form their own political parties, provided that these parties respect the constitution which affirms that Islam is the state religion and al-Shari'ah is the main source of legislation. This condition appears to be problematic for non-Muslims and non-Islamists, which resulted in strong rejection of FJP political vision and rule.

Key words: Political Rights · Pluralism · Political Islam · Muslim Brotherhood · Freedom and Justice Party · Egypt

INTRODUCTION

As an Islamic party with religious background, Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt, believes that diversity is a natural fact. God has created people in different forms. Certainly, you cannot find anyone who looks like the other not only in terms of (shape, style and color) but also in the soul and mind; no one can think or believe in the same way. If you asked for a description of an object, you would have many different opinions or descriptions. Consequently, the efforts of combining all people in the same framework will not succeed. The prudent behaviors require to adopt or compatible with the nature of the humans. The understood of this phenomenon is very clear in FJP literature. Many of FJP leaders affirmed that their party believes that all the attempts to enforce people to live in the same style have been failed. A good example is the Soviet Union which collapsed in 1991.

For those who believe in God, they should know that the lord has created and designed the universe with a very wide diversity in everything, including humans, animals, plants, water and so on. Nothing in the universe looks like other things. It is a lesson for the humans that diversity is a part of their nature. FJP accepts this vision, but its implementations are problematic. For those who do not believe in God and those who believe in anything else, they only need to look around themselves to be aware about that they are living in a world with a huge style of diversity.

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Naturally, diversity is a very important condition for normal and healthy life; without diversity life will spoil. Every element, idea and orientation is necessary for normal life. The same will happen in the political life, therefore, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has struggled a lot to take its normal place and role in the political arena, but the regime refused and has tried to exclude it. There are a lot of rules or systems that our Lord has provided in the nature to ensure the right and concrete existence of it. The human life is the same; there are a lot of facts we should deal with. One of them is pluralism of ideas, believes and concepts. There are no such things (not even in our best imaginative efforts) are identically equal.

Many political ideas depend on and benefit from the facts of the nature. One of the ingenuities of democracy is its ability to benefit from this phenomenon to be compatible with nature. Diversity in democracy means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing individual differences. Anyone can live, work, think and believe as he/she wants without fear or shame of discrepancy from others because they all believe in diversity; and there is no advantage from imposing a style of life on the others.

Diversity and Pluralism as a Democratic Principle:
Democratic societies are facing the questions of whether pluralism is an indispensable element of democracy and whether the democratic state can be discriminative, either on a racial, ethnic or religious basis; and to what extent any regime is considered as democratic if it lacks the ability to deal with all human components, even if they are not genuine part of their homogenous group [1].

Diversity is now recognized as democratic principle that everyone should welcome and the state should protect this principle on the basis of equal respect to all the society aspects: the social, religious, cultural, ethnic and economic. Discussion and dialogue must be the way for solving any conflicts resulting from diversity; no place for imposition or coercion between the citizens in democratic state; respect and dialogue should prevail instead [2].

The constant modernization of the world and the complicity of societies have increased the number of life styles in same state. This increase demands a genuine pluralism to be adopted. The states that managed to invest its people diversity went on the road of success and development and those who did not submit to the reality of diversity changed their life to hell and involved in civil wars. So the choice between the implementation of the democratic principles or not is the choice between peace, prosperity, development or underdevelopment, chaos and violence. Even if there is an exception in the history when some dictatorial regimes achieved notable scientific development, it is still not the rule [3].

Democracy has created mechanisms to regulate these differences. Rules and regulations are major parts of these mechanisms; the respect of the privacy of the others and their faiths, sect and believes is not free choice or preferable behavior, it is part of the law and it is compulsory thing. By the law, no one has a choice to scorn or disregard the values of others. Another mechanism is the multiparty system and freedom of foundation of political parties. This will give people a chance of choice freedom.

In democratic country, multi-party system based on intellectual, economical, beliefs and politics has formed the ground to parties, civil society institutions and syndicates to rely on when they do their work. Any party or institution has a special program that concerns with interests of a group of people without being charged of discrimination, since the other groups of people know by their multiplicity culture that this will not be on their account or against their special interests. Political parties are essential to democracy because disagreement is a human nature. Thus, there should be a way to manage this disagreement [4].

Some believe that party system is ambivalent even it represents the will of various sectors of the population. It is a power which obeys its own rules and - to a large extent - supplants public control. But those who believe in this have not been able to offer or create any alternative systems that can respond to the reality and has the possibility to be applied [5]. Others believe that the main challenge for pluralism or diversity among people is religions or the misinterpretations of religions by people. A huge number of victims have lost; and horrible wars have been declared throughout the history, especially in Europe (1524-1648) [6].

The belief of having the absolute and correct opinion, the claim of executive possession of the fact and the rejection of different faiths are real threats for society. From this vision, the importance of religion tolerance and the strict neutrality of the state toward various religious groups have emerged [7]. Everyone should respect the choice of the others regardless of their own choice. Al-Imam al-Shafi'i said, "I believe that my opinion is right with the possibility that it is wrong and I believe that the opinion of those who disagree with me is wrong with the possibility that it is right" [8].

Apostasy, proselytism and heresy behaviors are rejected by the major world religions [9]. But democracy secures the freedom of choice. In democratic state your choice should be guaranteed and your right to change your religion, belief, opinion, political ideas and so on is also guaranteed by the law. Citizen should be secured against any threat or coercion that might happen because of his choice.

In spite of the development of telecommunications and technologies which have made the globe as a small village, the humanity still have different thoughts and cultures. What is called Cultural Globalization has failed to create one global culture. The differences will never disappear. Thought is a reflection of person's mindset or mentality. This means that variation of culture will continue forever as long as the minds are different. So, no one has an advantage because of his culture or traditions. Democratic man must respect different cultures and accept them as they are. The differences in religion, culture and life style lead to different habits and traditions; since, the culture of coexistence impose all people to respect the traditions of each other. It is your own choice to live alone or within a family, to marry or not, to have kids or not, to wear long clothes or short. No one has the right to forbid or permit you to do this or that. You have the full and unlimited freedom to do what you want provided that you do not harm, assault or disturb other people. In addition, you should respect the choices of the others and never scorn their life style.

Politically, diversity leads to pluralism and multiparty system. Pluralism is the golden recipe to solve the problems and contradictions resulting from diversity of people. It is a democratic way to organize and manage the political life without violence or exclusion based on the belief that the majority has the right to rule and its will should be respected [10].

In a democratic system any group of people sharing the same intellectual, economic, social, or political vision or common interests have the right to establish a party. This right let people work for their beliefs and interests freely and capacitate them to be positive groups in the society; they feel that they are partners in their country and they can follow their interests; no one is monopolizing the power or the right to rule. The competition in serving people and developing the country is the benchmark of appropriateness for ruling and having the power [11].

The concept of multi-party system has a very important supporting factor to work. It is the political tolerance. Any party should believe that the competitive parties are working for the benefit of the country. Tolerance should be among all parties despite the differences in their platforms. They should cooperate and coordinate with each other in favor of the country. The ruling party should leave the authority peacefully and smoothly when an opponent party wins the elections. Parties should also admit and confirm that the country is more important than their interests. The benefit of the country should permanently have the privilege [12].

Political Pluralism from FJP Perspective: MB and FJP literatures have included a lot about diversity and its advantages. They believe that Allah (SWT) created the universe with great diversity for the sake of man. He asked humans to benefit from this diversity and to interact with each other. In general, there is no disagreement between MB vision for diversity and the democratic values. But there is some vagueness about some applications of this principle such as pluralism, political tolerance and people life style [13].

Pluralism has been very difficult for MB to change any of the doctrines that Hasan al-Banna had set. This is one of the major political problems of MB. Their ability and desire to change and modernize the ideas has been very limited. Around 70 years were needed to change the position from pluralism. Al-Banna declared his negative position from multiparty system, believing that it harms the society and deepens the fragment between people. He reached the result that there was no need for it and asked the king to dismantle the parties. Many different and difficult internal and external factors pushed his followers to overstep his opinion in this issue and accepted the multi-party system [14].

To justify their new position, MB figures talked about the need of this principle under the dictatorship. Tawfiq al-Wa'i, MB expert said that, "the establishment of the parties and political groups becomes a compulsory mean to resist the tyranny of the ruling authorities and to change it if necessary. Diversity and pluralism may be necessary in this era because they are the safety valve against the tyranny of the individuals or groups who are in charge" [15]. In their document known as "the Muslim brotherhood and pluralism", they declared clearly their acceptance to the principle of political pluralism and the right of the whole people to form their political parties [16]. This position has been mentioned in all political documents issued by MB and FJP. The election programs, "support and promote political pluralism as one of the assets of the political process and establish the rules of

partnership between the state and civil society organizations to carry burdens of rejuvenation and development of the homeland" [17].

Nonetheless, pluralism from MB and FJP perspectives is still restricted by Islamic concepts. There is no room for any party who rejects Islam or wants to wipe out its regulations or impact in life. This is mooted in the second article in the constitution, "Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic is the official language. The principles of Islamic Law are the main source of legislation" [18]. Tawfiq al-Waʻi, one of the main writers in MB, explains MB position from pluralism. He talks about two conditions for the legitimacy of the existence of political parties: the first one is to recognize Islam as –ideology and law- and do not show hostility toward it. The second one includes (not) working in favor of the enemies of Islam and Muslims regardless of its name or position. So, there is no room for parties which call for atheism or pornography, or discredit religions, especially Islam. Pluralism will be accepted if its benefits are more than its harms and if it is adjusted to be in line with religious values, morals and Islamic law. Thus, he has refused Rashid al-Ghannushi stance from pluralism who has asserted that absolute pluralism is guaranteed by Islam even for the communists for several reasons. First, in the democratic states and the free world like USA, there is no room for the parties with ideology that contradicts the constitution and the main components of the society. Second, in the Islamic history, the acceptance of non-Muslim groups in Islamic society did not mean that they had the right or the permission to call or preach for their religion or ideas. The contemporary regimes do the same since the law of the majority has become the law that its implementation is compulsory. Third, pluralism in the democratic regimes is limited. In the European democratic regimes there are many limitations such as compliance with the constitution, the protection of the public order in the state, the protection of the main ingredients of the society (like its ideology or political system) and the guarantee of sovereignty of the state and its prestige.

Based on the above, the MB has decided to adopt the political pluralism and multiparty system which is limited by the Islamic doctrine and its regulations, the religion of the majority is Islam, the state constitution and the constants of the nation. As will be seen later this vision had become regulations that limited the pluralism [19]. There is disagreement in the contemporary Islamic thought about pluralism. Some scholars believe in it completely and absolutely and others accept it with conditions, including prominent intellectuals such as al-Qaradawi, Huwaidi and al-Ghannushi, whom named by Raymond Baker as the new Islamists [20].

According to al-Qaradawi's perspective, freedom of political parties to develop their own programmers is conditioned by the respect of the Islamic Shari'ah. He stresses that multiparty system is possible under an Islamic state with certain conditions; first, the political party must recognize Islam as a "faith and Shari'a" and must not oppose it or deny it. Second, the party must not work for an entity that is antagonistic toward Islam or the Islamic Umah. Qaradawi then makes it more explicit that neither the atheist political parties are allowed in an Islamic state nor those who are opposed to applying Islam [21]. Huwaidi shares Qaradawi in his point of view by saying that, "there is one condition for pluralism; it is the respect of the constitution which states that Islam is the religion of the state. There is no room for anyone in the political arena if he publicly declares his animosity for the state of religion" [22].

As usual al-Ghannushi has an advanced position in this issue. He agrees that non-Muslim citizens have the right to form parties and to call for their platforms and ideas taking into account that this right is subjected to compliance with the public ethics of conversation. They also have the right to nominate for all the positions in the state inter alia, the head of the state and the army and so on. He has asked the moderate Islamic parties, including MB, not to hesitate in admitting full political right to seculars. All parties have a political right to work if its loyalty is only for the country and the state [23]. Huwaidi and al-Ghannushi have agreed that it is an immoral position if the Islamic movements ask for its right in political participation and then deprive the others from the same right [24].

Many political parties and political activists have accused MB and FJP that they lack political tolerance that helps in reaching common denominators. MB and FJP focus on their interest not on the national interests. They want to have hegemony on the state. They do not desire the participation of the others. Muhammad al-Qassas, from al-Tayar al-Masri party said that MB and FJP are intolerant with their opponents, particularly with those who defected from their party. For instance, they have launched a horrible campaign of calumniation against Abd al-Munʻim Abu al-Futuh when he decided to run for the presidential election [25]. They have dismissed everyone who disagreed with the organization's opinion, for instance, the group of al-Wasat Party in the mid of 1990s [26]. Atiyah Shaʻlan,

member of the Egyptian Social Labor Party Bureau, completely agrees with these accusations, adding that if MB rule Egypt, they will not give the others anything. Their method is: the winner takes everything [27]. They also accused that they have imparted sacredness on the political disagreements. They have changed it to ideological and religious dispute that does not give any chance for different thoughts and opinions [28].

Sa'd al-Din al-Husaini, prominent leader of MB and FJP, refuted these accusations and emphasized that MB is politically flexible to deal with all political parties. MB has coalitions with different parties such as al-Wafd and al-Amal who have refuted these accusations [29]. Tawfik al-Wa'i rejects the seculars' accusations that the Islamic movement will kill the opposition opinion because they are unbelievers or heterodox. He said, "it is completely falsity and the reality denies this" [30].

Another real challenge for MB and FJP is the social aspect of diversity. It is difficult for them to tolerate with what they believe illegal (haram). They cannot tolerate with some life styles and behaviors. Even they are in a democratic party, they cannot accept drinking alcohol or wearing western style dresses or having a girlfriend in an Islamic country such as Egypt. They believe that everyone should respect the values and culture of the society. Islam as a reference for all life's issues has taught us how to act at home, in street, at the market and everywhere. It also draws for us the limitations for the social relations, such as the relations between men and women [31].

Their opponents claim that when they rule, they will cut the hands of thieves, stone adulterer and adulteress and apply all the laws of al-Shari'ah (the Islamic law). They will send us back 1400 years to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) state because they believe that the Prophet's state was the ideal one for life in all its aspects. This vision threatens the modern democratic state that the Egyptian people aim to build after the 25 January 2011 uprising [32].

Conditional Pluralism: The great development in MB position on pluralism adopted in 1994 was not inclusive. The MB and FJP literature still restrict the right to form parties. In Egypt the parties under the ruling of MB should be Islamic, or in line with Islam and the Islamic law. MB depends on the Egypt constitution which states that Islam is the religion of the state and the Islamic law is the main source of legislation. MB and FJP interpret these articles in a way that any party that rejects Islam as a religion, or wants to change the Islamic identity of Egypt

should be prohibited by the law. This understanding may threat all parties that do not have Islamic orientations and programs like the seculars, the socialists and others. There will not be any party, except the Islamic one, that wants to apply the Islamic law. Any party who will do this will be an Islamic one and its members will be Islamists [33].

They further explain that any party that is not compatible with Islam is considered as a threat for the state and the national security. This has happened in many democratic states. The parties that reject the national ideology or aim to change the nation's belief are banned. The communist parties are outlawed in USA and the Nazis parties are banned in Europe as well. Therefore, it is normal to ban the non-believers parties in Egypt [34].

In this vein, the problem remains with the criteria that make the party compatible with Islam. They are very confusing and vague because there are several conceptions for Islam and its regulations, even the Islamic parties do not have one single understanding. There are Islamic parties who believe that MB and FJP do not represent Islam. Al-Qaeda leaders, for instance, have attacked MB many times regarding to MB political behavior. Some of the Jihadists have not recognized Muhammad Mursi as the Muslims Imam in Egypt because they assume that he is not applying the Shari'ah. So, the big question is who can claim that he represents and interprets Islam: the parliament, the Senior Scholars Committee (SSC) or the Islamic parties. All of them are changeable and may change their opinion depending on their interests and the political conditions [35].

In line of this confusion, the only judge should be the people. Each party, group, or movement has the right to put and present its own program. If people accept this program, it will be legal. It is the same logic that MB and FJP have justified the implementation of the Islamic law. They depend on the majority's will. MB and FJP may face the same situation in which they try to put the non-Islamic parties if an extremist Islamic party becomes in charge of Egypt. They will accuse MB with heresy, negligence of Islam and serving the foreign powers, as happened before.

Many scholars, some of them Islamists, agree that any group has the right to form its party without any conditions. This is one of the main rights for them as citizens. They have rooted their opinion from Quran and Sunnah. One of them has affirmed that in the first moment of the creation of the universe, Allah (SWT) gave the Satan, the opponent and the enemy of Islam the freedom of expression and work. Allah (SWT) has the ability to

destroy and vanish His enemies; but He let them choose freely, their way. This is to teach the Muslims firstly, to depend on the discussion and the evidence in the relation with their opponents. Another scholar has declared that the right to form parties is open for all those who respect the state and the constitution, regardless of their religion and political doctrine. They also have the right to publish, declare and call for their ideas and programs. The Muslims have to educate themselves, strengthen their beliefs and encounter the ideas by ideas and the arguments by arguments [36].

The position of MB and FJP and many other Islamic parties, in this point lacks logic. They strongly believe that they have the best, most convincing and most concrete thought and ideology represented in Islam. They believe that if people are totally free to choose they will choose Islam. In the dawn of the Islamic history, Muslims used the force to remove all the obstacles and barriers between people and Islam imposed by the enemies of Islam. This is one of the few main justifications of using force in Islam. The Muslims fought to give the people the right of free choice. Nowadays it is not acceptable to deprive the people from this right when they rule [37].

MB, FJP and all the Islamic parties have shown a lot of fears from the negative influence of non-Islamic parties on Muslims. They seem to be not confident in themselves despite their contiguous and constant speech that they have the comprehensive religion and thought. Their position weakens the status of Islam as a religion in Muslims hearts and minds. Through the Islamic history, particularly at the beginning, Muslims showed a lot of confidence and influence in the world; even when the Muslims were very weak, they were immunized against other thoughts. When the Mongols invaded Iraq in 1258, most of the occupiers became Muslims. In the last century, Muslims were very weak. Most of their countries fell under occupation for long time. Despite that, Islam is still the most turnout religion in the world. Every day many become Muslim. All the missionaries that cost great amount of money have failed to change the religion of the Muslims, even in the very poor countries [38].

Regarding to aforementioned, the MB's fears on Islam as a religion are unreasonable. Their fears are related to political reasons. Their desire to ban the non-Islamic parties springs out from their political vision and historical background. What may call, the complex of the political history has an effective impact on their position. MB has suffered a lot for very long time. During their long adversity no one stood beside them. They have felt that they have no friends in the society. They have the political parties' hateful hypocrisy during the previous political era. This long experience has pushed them to believe that all the other parties are not concerned about Islam and the Islamic state. They also believe that they cannot trust any non-Islamic party since they are opponents of Islam as well as MB and FJP. This problem will be solved just through practice. The lack of confidence between MB and the others needs real actions on the ground. All secular, national and socialists parties and MB have responsibilities to get rid of this dilemma [39].

Their understanding of their religious role also has an impact. They are very keen to implement Allah's (SWT) will in the re-establishment of the pure Islamic empire. They have an ideal concept for the Islamic state. This state will be without sins, evils, bad thoughts and non-Islamic parties. The rivalry will be between the righteous parties only. This state is the state that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) informed Muslims that it would be after the tyranny era. In this state the justice and prosperity will spread all over the world. This perspective has direct and indirect effects on MB and FJP political vision. This vision intersects with their belief that they are the group of people who will achieve this goal. Any secular or non-Islamic party will have unhelpful role in the way to establish the Islamic state [40].

Another reason is the lack of confidence. Their position on pluralism indicates lack of confidence in themselves and in the Muslims. The concern from the non-Islamic parties and their abilities to hinder the implementation of the Islamic programs show that these parties are very strong with strong ideologies and political vision. This is not true especially in the Egyptian case. The national, secular, socialist and the youth groups that appeared after 25 January 2011 uprising have made very weak performance. They did not manage to change any of the president's decisions that they refused; they could not convince the people to refuse the new constitution through the referendum; and they failed to gather large numbers of people in their protests. They appeared as elite parties without large popularity [41].

In addition, education and behavior of MB do not accommodate other opinions and do not desire to have opposition. This long term of education has affected their performance. Rarely they concern about the other opinion and try to benefit from it. Opposition is a kind of disobedience in their experience. After the 25 January uprising they sharply and inflexibly responded to the different opinions inside their movement. The long history

of oppression, fear, conspiracies and exclusion has made them not to trust any party, except their trusted cadres and members [42].

This position may change in the near future. The atmosphere of freedom will help them to develop their vision. If this change does not come subjectively due to internal pressure caused by internal and external factors, other parties, media, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and so forth will have an effective role on MB and FJP. After January uprising, MB and FJP are still being pushed strongly and quickly to civilize and democratize themselves. It would have been better for them and for Egypt if they had had mature vision on all the political and governor issues. There are no choices for them and the other parties better than working hard to avoid all the obstacles on the road of rebuilding Egypt as a democratic modern state [43].

CONCLUSION

MB acts as a representative of Islam. Islam is its inspiration. Its regulations, values and law are the limitation of MB and FJP political vision. Thus, MB and FJP have tried to harmonize all the political aspects with Islam. Sometimes, they have tried to give the political terms Islamic description and vice versa; starting from their definite belief that Islam has a role in everything of life. This vision has pushed MB and FJP to make combination between democracy and al-Shura (consultation).

They have succeeded to harmonize their Islamic vision with democracy in some issues, but still have problems with others, such as political pluralism. A lot of ambiguity still pertains in their stance about pluralism. They do not want or cannot abandon pluralism as a basic right of the citizens. At the same time, they do not want or cannot abdicate the Islamic political values. These values, from one hand, give them their legitimacy as an Islamic party and from the other hand deprive parts of the people from having their own political parties.

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