The Egyptian Arab Spring and Political Islam

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Abstract

This study elaborates and analyzes the phenomenon and concept of political Islam, the reasons of the increased role of the Islamists and their political and reformist tendencies in the light of the Egyptian revolution of Arab Spring, reasons and the main factors that have contributed on their advent into power and their influence in that time, the issue of the application of Islamic Sharia and complex realities about this dilemma. The revolutions of Arab Spring, including the Egyptian revolution, are considered one of the most important and most dangerous events in the XXI century after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, not only in the Middle East but throughout the world because of their impact on peace and global security. The growth of the phenomenon of political Islam and the advent of Islamists into power in Egypt has represented one of the most remarkable features of this sudden revolution. No doubt that the issue of the relationship between Islam and the state's political system raises many confusing questions for many people. In this sense the importance of this study will directly identify the fact that the leadership of Islamists in Egypt is not the implementation of Islamic Sharia but their movements and ideology.

Keywords: Political Reform, Islamic Sharia, Secularism, Islamic Movements, Ideology.

Introduction

Contemporary Islamic organizations and movements that emerged in Egypt and Arab world in the political arena and which have adopted Islamic thought were not created at once. The state and politic repression during the third decade of the twentieth century was the source of this thought and a contributing factor in forming and establishing one of the most important and powerful active Islamic groups in this regard, respectively the "Muslim Brotherhood" in Egypt and its founder Hassan al-Banna in 1928 (Rua, 1996, 41).
Islamists or Islamist movement, as it is called, have agreed on the urgent need to convert the society into Islam, or in other words to Islamize the society. The concept and theory of the Islamization of society from their point of view, understood as the result of a comprehensive social and political action. This tendency requires to get narrowed the scope of the concept of the mosque, on the concept of direct and clear intervention in political life. In fact, this tendency grew and appeared prominently in the beggining of sixties of the twentieth century, which was shown with the fact of goals of the donor of power. Islamists do not look the religion in a narrow sense, such as the act of charity, performing the prayers or messages and statutes of religious legitimacy. But, on the contrary, they took another look, in a full faith. Religion is

a broad curriculum, which includes socio-economic and socio-political relations, confusing and complex, or in other more accurate words that Islam is a complete and comprehensive thought and vision for all aspects and details of life (Rua, 1996, 41- 42). During the past decades, in the arab political arena in general and Egypt in particular, are emerged two salient characteristics: *Firstly*, the tyranny which has dominated all aspects of life, be they political, economic, cultural, artistic, mediatic and other. *Secondly*, is the increase of the level of the movement of political resistance of community, as a natural result to deal with the issue of tyranny that is mentioned above. This movement was represented clearly in the movement of Political Spirit of Islam or Political Islam (Tlady, 2012, 12).

The Concept of Political Islam

The phenomenon of political Islam has taken many labels containing ideological connotations. So, we find that the term political Islam can take the other terms that have the same meaning, such as "Islamic Awakening", "Movement for Islamic Renewal", "Islamic Revival" or "Islamic Renaissance" (Ali, 1999, 10-11). Also, this phenomenon can be called "Reform" or "Religious Roots", "Islamic Fundamentalism" or "Political Islam" (Ali, 1999, 24). Given that the term "Islamic fundamentalism" seems biased and is described as a negative term that indicates a certain attitude that refers to these movements and Islamists as fanatics, radicals and extremists. So, this term was wholly and firmly rejected by the Islamist movement (Ali, 1999, 27).
Thus, the term Political Islam as a social phenomenon can be understood as: *"a social movement that functions in the form of organized groups that associated with Authentic Islam or Salafi. These movements think and believe they have a holistic theory and comprehensive vision for all aspects of human life according to the joint statement **Islam is the religion, life and state**. This understanding has considered politics as an important and critical tool for making many changes and advancement of the Islamic Ummah"* (Ali, 1999, 10-11).

The Role of Islamists in Political Reform and Revolution

Islam is the dominant religion and widespread in Arab society as a fundamental doctrine. Schools of Islamic jurisprudence may vary from one country to another but the general framework in Islamic religious thought remains common among those nations (Ismail, 2013, 82).
Trends of political reforms for movements and Islamist groups in Egypt have considered the power and the state as a strategic object for the road to reform. In this context, are featured four different spectra in its strategy and tactics, to achieve certain goals, as follows:
1.   The movements exercise politics in the presence of existing systems;
2.   The movements create organizational structures similar to the form of state;
3.   The movements publish specific political and ideological concepts to create a secure base;
4.   The movements exercise violence against the existing political system to achieve the objectives set.

It should be noted that these movements have directed a large part of their energy to implement programs of scientific and cultural organizations aimed at educational, educational and religious aspects in order to achieve their reformist ideology within the community (Salem, 2013, 31).

The significant role of the Islamic movement in all stages of the revolution is the greatest proof of the success of these reform tendencies, which came after the application of long-term programs, in having an image and influence in the community. It is not secret that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi represent a substantial part of egyptian revolutionary political scene, in all its stages, positive or negative. Also on the other hand, should not be exaggerated in that role (Jelloun, 2012, 71).

With the outbreak of the first spark of the Egyptian Revolution of January 25, 2011, Islamic forces, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, took the initiative to stay abreast with various community groups, to seek the overthrow of the Mubarak regime. Perhaps the crowd felt that the Islamic movements have suffered greatly from repression and injustice during the previous decades. So, the time has come to lead the movement of change and to have a more important role in the revolution (Group of authors, 2012, 74).

In any case, we can say that the role of Islamists, especially in the starting stage of revolution or at the stage after the fall of Mubarak, had a positive and successful role to a large extent, especially in light of solidarity with all national and political forces and factors, toward a clear and specific purpose. The purpose was to drop and change the dictatorial and authoritarian regime. Therefore, we can shed light on the factors that helped the emergence of the role of Islamists on revolutionary political scene, including the following:

1. The absence of the commander of the revolution, led the Islamists in the forefront of the scene, especially in light of their apparent popularity;
2. The lack of large political forces that can effectively represent the opposition and be able to play the role of alternative and replacement of the ousted authoritarian regime (Ismail, 2013, 82);
3. Optimal exploitation of the open political climate by the Islamists;
4. Exploitation of the wider role of Islam in the social environment;
5. The existence of objective, political, social and economic reasons used by Islamists in their fight for power;
6. Possession of large sources of financing for Islamic forces, especially the Muslim Brotherhood;
7. Ability and possibility of Islamic forces to mobilize the masses of the population at the time and right place;
8. Strong influence of Islamic forces over some civil society organizations (Group of authors, 2012, 102-103).

The Strength of Islamists in coming into Power in Egypt

A year after the revolution of 25 January 2011 in Egypt, surprisingly the Muslim Brotherhood and their party "Freedom and Justice" together with the Salafi with their party "Light", won the parliamentary elections, and not only this, but they

have managed to get 70% of the total number of seats in the Assembly. Voter turnout was about 60% of eligible voters. This participation was rated as higher real rates in Egypt's modern history. This overwhelming percentage has given the Islamists a large political strenght, of which did not have any political power in elections in previous decades. At that time, it was considered that the most important implications of this victory were as follows:

• There was no value the use of the term moderation or extremism, or other terms that have negative effects on Islamic movements, as long as 70% or more of the people support the Islamists, not only in religious level but also political;

• The results of the elections showed that the Islamists have the ability to bring legal or constitutional amendment, by majority that exceeds two-thirds of voters;

• Confirmed that the next presidential candidate in the presidential elections as a second stage after the parliamentary elections must have the consent of these Islamic forces, especially the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi;

• Secured a unique and historic opportunity in front of the Islamists to rebuild the country again and to cleanse it from the control of oppressive and military regimes, especially since the post-independence period;

• Has given the opportunity that in case of success of Islamists to achieve the goals that affect the daily lives of citizens, then it will give them greater opportunities to continue in power for the next parliamentary sessions;

• The delivery of the full power from the Military Council (which has captured power at that time in Egypt after Mubarak was ousted from power by his resignation) to this Islamic force and its presence at the time of power, will give them the opportunity to rebuild a mental and military culture in order to return once again to defend the homeland and their citizens, because this is the role of the army, without transition to other remote objectives from its leading and vital role;

• The absolute control of the Islamists in the pillars of the state, either directly or through allies, will reduce a large scale the manifestations of corruption;

• The fact that the success of Islamists in Egypt to provide a positive political model of governance, will boost the other countries in the region to seek the change in the same way;

• This huge percentage of the success of the Islamists in parliamentary elections, has made foreign forces to face a fait accompli, particularly those forces that do not want this political and ideological transformation;

• There is no doubt that the arrival of Islamists to power in this unexpected way and the stunning election result, faces many challenges and difficulties. We can say that these projections and the expected achievements depends specifically on the relationship between Islamic forces themselves, and in particular the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi. Thus, the political landscape in general will depend on positive or negative predictions mentioned above (Fahmy, 2012, 123-126).

The Issue of applying Islamic Sharia

The issue of the application of Islamic Sharia was and is still one of the most difficult and complex issues, especially when it comes to Political Islam and its movements. It represents a source of concern for some, this on one hand. While on the other hand,

it is the source to scare people. These perceptions when examined, we find that those come either from someone who is ignorant of Islamic Law (Sharia) or by another who wants to fight and deform it. Of course, this issue needs to be explained and clarified, to elucidate many dark facets and to uncover unknown facts (Talimh, 2013, 37).

Choosing a specific legislative system of a country is considered one of the actions of the state's sovereignty in norms of international law. So, there is nothing that prevents a member state of the United Nations to choose the Islamic Shariah as a source of its legislation. But, we have to specify that a country that is willing to apply the Sharia, at the same time it must act in accordance with international laws and treaties. In fact, the challenges of implementation of Sharia does not just stop by submission and the Islamic country's commitment to respect international laws and treaties, but passing this and many other issues unresolved, such as the issues: minorities, women, homosexuals, freedom of opinion and expression, science research and formation of civil society institutions (Al-Shatti, 2013, 66-68).

The challenges of implementing Islamic Shariah are not only at international level but also at national level, which is presented as the biggest challenge. In this context, political and intellectual elites emerge as a major obstacle to the application of Sharia, as a result of influence of western culture on those elites. More than that, we can say that one of the most important obstacles to the application of Sharia lies at the Islamists themselves, who have not shown any real and practical project on how to implement it. This fact was directly and effectively reflected in the period after the Egyptian Parliamentary elections in 2012 and Presidential elections in the same year (Al-Shatti, 2013, 69).

In any case, we must emphasize that the implementation of Sharia does not mean the creation of a radical and extreme religious state, as imagined by many (Talimh, 2013, 34).

In this regard, *Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi*[1] tells us that "the state in Islam is a civil state, based on allegiance and Shura, and is not a religious state. This state is with constitutional legitimacy, which implies the existence of the Constitution and specific laws, under which the state is developed. The Constitution represents the principles and provisions brought from the Qur'an, and the Sunnah, beliefs, worship, ethics, transactions and personal, civil, criminal, administrative, constitutional and other international relations." (Imad, 2013, 196).

State that is built by Islam is a civil state; its authority refers to Islam. It is not a religious or theocratic[2] state; it controls people's minds or their conscience in the name of divine law. It is not a state of priests or clerics who claim to represent the will of the Creator in the world of creation or the will of Heaven to the people of the land. It is civil state governed by Islam, where the men of this country are selected from persons who are renowned for their integrity, scientific and ethical strength (Al-Qaradawi, 2009, 30).

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[1] Yusuf Abdullah al-Qaradawi, one of the most prominent Sunni scholars in the modern era and President of the World Federation of Muslim Scholars. Born on 9 September 1926, in the village of Saft Trab, El-Mahalla El-Kubra, Gharbia, Egypt.

[2] Theocracy: means religious government that prevailed in the Middle Ages in Europe. This government represents a political system based on divine mandate beyond the control of human will and take control of this government by clerics. For more see: Ismail Abdel Fatah Al Kafi, Encyclopedia for political terms.

Islam in its concept does not recognize the term cleric, as defined in other religious communities. But it has scientists specialized in Islamic sciences as other scientists such as ethics, philosophy and law at other communities. We need to know the difference between what is Islamic and what is religious, is great. Many people think that what it is Islamic is also religious the same time. But, in fact, Islam is wider and bigger than religion, to the fact that active scientists of Islam religion have made religion one of five things necessary that Islam came to save them, which include religion, themselves, money, mind and blood (Al-Qaradawi, 2003, 157-159).

In the Egyptian case, the Islamists demand on the application of Islamic Sharia in fact was a popular demand that has many dimensions. Thus, the Egyptian people, its majority Muslims[3] by their nature are believers, so it was natural that they require the application of Islamic Sharia. In fact, the concept of applying the Sharia does not mean the establishment of the limits of Islamic law, such as cutting the hands of thieves or throwing stones to adulterers and so on. The limits of Islamic law represent about 2% of Islam. Islam is more than a branch that deals with all aspects of life such as:

- *Firsty*, Beliefs: which include faith in God, His angels, His books, messengers, the day of resurrection and written sweet and bitter destiny, good and evil;
- *Secondly,* Worship: such as prayer, fasting, zakat and hajj;
- *Thirdly,* Islamic ethics and its subsidiaries: such as social, political, economic, cultural morality and other;
- *Fourthly,* Transactions: which include all aspects of life and people.

The issue of aplication of the limits of Islamic law (Sharia) is a very difficult and complicated issue to reach the stage of implementation. For example, the limit of thievery (Cutting the hands of thieves) cannot be applied before the community (state) provides an essential halal source of livelihood (Talimh, 2013, 40).

Here it is worth talking about the fact that the fear of the application of Islamic Sharia is not in the provisions of Sharia itself, but in that of who will apply it and how will be applied? (Talimh, 2013, 42).

Egypt and Arab countries have applied Islamic Sharia so far and for a long time, and in particular in the field of personal status or family law and inheritance. With the exception of this field, most of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, applie the laws derived from Islamic Sharia. As for the rest of the Arab countries, they are based on legislation in other fields, in the western resources, fields such as: Sanction Law, Trade Law and National Court Systems (Imad, 2013, 198).

Conclusions

- Islamists or Islamic movements pose one of the most important characteristics of the societies in the Middle East, especially the Arab countries, and specifically Egypt;
- The role of Islamic movements cannot be ignored as an integral part of the body and structure of these countries, their religion and culture;

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[3] Percentage of the number of Muslims in Egypt of approximately 94.9%, according to statistics from the American resear ch center in Washington (Pew Research Center), in 2012. Look for more: Pew Research Center, Religion & Public Life, Retrieved from: http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-muslim/.

- The role of these movements will continue effectively in the political arena to the extent of political pressure and security, which define the scope of its work and impact. Thus, we can emphasize that cannot be ignored the role of these movements in any future process of political change or democratization;
- Application of Islamic Sharia to be the constitution of a state is a very complex issue which needs to be applied to more controls and regulations. Sharia does not have to do absolutely with radicalism, extremism or fundamentalism, but these features are related to persons who possess a misguided ideology and opinion, which may have the wrong approach in its application.

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