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The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood: Between the Burden of History and the Prospect of Political Change

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Abstract: Political Islam has undergone important changes since the beginning of last century and, more specifically since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 and later on, after the 9/11 attacks in New York. It is the aim of this text to overview the evolution of one of the less known, yet crucial movements in the history of Islamism, that is, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances is certainly one of their most outstanding features: from democratic participation, to radicalization, going through a process of revision after being expelled from Syria to end up at the front line of current political opposition in that country when many thought they had lost the battle and would only be allowed in the country once the regime decided it suited its aims. They recently showed a new stage in their evolution that opens the debate whether they are only pursuing certain objectives or they are indeed committed to democracy. Whatever the answer, their will to become political brokers in Syria is clear.
Key Words: Political Islam, Democratization, Muslim Brotherhood, Syria

Introduction

From all the branches of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian one is the less well-known maybe due to the fact that Syria has been throughout history or, more precisely, its recent history, a country defined by its lack of transparency. Regarding the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood in that country was expelled in the early eighties of last century and that their political labor was only brought back to the surface after Bashar Al-Assad's advent to power in 2000, it becomes easier to understand why the history of the Syrian Brotherhood seems to have been neglected in many sources or reduced to the period of confrontation with the regime (seventies and eighties of the 20th Century).

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Nevertheless, this branch of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood is crucial to understand how changes in context and political attitudes in one's self country can determine how an individual or a group's political visions can evolve, be revised, taken back to its origins or even develop qualitatively in a positive way in a relatively short period of time.

This paper touches upon the evolution of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the last decade and how the uprising in Syria has forced them to abandon some of their maximalist postulates acquired in the seventies in order to draft a new or contemporary political vision that is suitable for all Syrian citizens, at least in theory. Moreover, this vision is probably, if not for sure, the most democratic and most clearly defined one among other branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, namely Egypt or Jordan, those two being more well-known because of their presence in their respective countries.

Brief summary of the origins of the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood

The Syrian branch of the Muslim brotherhood was formally founded in 1945, when different local Islamic associations in various areas in the country, united under the leadership of Mustafa al-Siba'i, who pledged his obedience to the Supreme Guide and founder of the movement in Egypt, Hassan al-Banna, whom he had met during his studies in Cairo.

Mustafa al-Sibai was a pious man who, in his attempt to reconcile different views, tried, for instance, to reconcile socialist ideas with Islam in his book *Socialism in Islam*[2], in which, as Burhan Ghalioun says[3] he explained that, in his view, "justice meant equality, national dignity and *shura* (consultation, a term that many have described as being the seed of democracy)[4], that is, a form of power more concerned with people's sufferings".

As if confirming this, the Muslim Brotherhood took part in various electoral processes in the first years of independence (formally declared in 1946) and was awarded parliamentarian representation, until the government of Adib al-Shishakli in 1952, when they were forced to turn to underground activities. Since then, the history of the Muslim Brotherhood up to the advent of the Baath party to power was one of continuous fluctuation from partial tolerance to total prohibition of its political activities. However, that did not undermine its popularity among Sunni urban classes in cities such as Hama and Homs.

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[2] AL-SIBA'I, Mustafa (1962): *Ishtirakiyyat al-islam*, El Cairo, Dar Ash-sha'b.

[3] GHALIOUN, Burhan (1996): *Islam y política: Las traiciones de la modernidad*, Bellaterra, Barcelona, p. 93.

[4] Not only among Arab intellectuals, but also among others, as can be seen in VOLL John O. and Esposito, John L. (1996): *Islam and Democracy,* New York City: Oxford University Press.

When the Baath party in 1963 overthrew the previous government through a *coup d'etat* (something political life in Syria had got used to since 1949, when the first one took place, introducing the Army in political life forever), social discontent spread. This was more evident among those Sunni urban classes previously mentioned and the Muslim Brotherhood, most of whom where technocrats and worked in liberal professions, and were not men of religion as it is widely believed. Their unease came partly as a result of the rise of the rural bourgeoisie (most members of the Military and Civil commands of the Baath party descended form rural notables), which destabilized the social fabric that had been dominant in Syria for years. In addition, the fact that the rural-urban opposition was seasoned with a religious majority-minority (namely, Alawite after 1970, when Hafez al-Assad became the absolute ruler in Syria) division, didn't ease matters at all and provoked a tacit social schism. This two facts, as well as the lack of real social development due to the failure of the Baath socialist policies, the loss of the Golan Heights and Assad's ambiguous attitude towards the Palestinian question (which Syrian people have always supported) was enough to maximize the Sunni (mainly extremist-thinking individuals)-Alawite divide, driving both sides first to a dialectical confrontation[5] and finally into a progressive escalation of violence from the mid-1970's.

The various episodes of violence that took place, such as the killing of tens of Alawite soldiers at the Aleppo Artillery School in 1979,were perpetrated, according to members of the Muslim Brotherhood, by what came to be known as the Fighting Vanguard, although the original name, chosen by its founder, who had himself formed part of the Muslim Brotherhood, was the "Fighting Vanguard of the Muslim Brotherhood". Despite efforts by the group to deny any connection between both organizations, a man named Riyad Jamour "was the secret contact between both" groups for a long period[6].

The final confrontation between the government and the Brotherhood came in 1982 in the city of Hama after Hafez al-Assad had said his final word about the Brotherhood ("Political plans to combat the Muslim Brotherhood and their counterparts are useless; unless they mean their total eradication, this means that any plan that doesn´t go beyond political confrontation will not do the trick: that type

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[5] Said Hawwa, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood born and raised up in Hama in a conservative family, wrote some of the following opinions: "Those who supported secularization monopolized power in Syria, a fact that let them expand their pagan and damaging ideas […]. We were afraid this would mean the end of Islamic education, of religious institutions, and the Personal Status Code based on the Islamic Law […] They had entered the combat and we had to act if we wanted to avoid the situation exceeding some limits" (HAWWA, Sa'id (1987): *Hadhihi tajribati*, Cairo, p. 77).

[6] Pargeter, A. (2010): *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition,* London, Saqi, p.78.

of war will not affect them, we need to launch a fully aggressive plan"[7]), and had issued the ominous Law 49/1980, which condemned all those suspects of being members (and not only proved members) of the Muslim Brotherhood to death penalty. A full-fledged armed uprising that had started in other cities such as Idleb ended up in the destruction of the whole city of Hama. When the lack of strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were the leading party in the uprising (although they incessantly repeat that they never used any arms[8]), was proved, the rest of the cities abstained from getting involved in the uprising and, thus, the Muslim Brotherhood ended, as predicted, "working almost completely alone"[9]. There was no other option for them but to abandon the country. Since then, there has been no formal Muslim Brotherhood organization in Syria, although they still have a difficult to estimate social base inside the country. Anyhow, it is widely believed that their presence is stronger outside the country than inside.

Auto-critic and revisionism

After the Hama massacre, the Brotherhood underwent a process of revision of the plan they had followed and the errors committed, something which was not easy because, besides regional and strategic divisions (not all of them were keen on armed struggle)in the inner core of the organization (mainly between those from Aleppo and those from Hama) that had characterized the organization from almost the start, discussions over whether they should try to negotiate with the regime in order to return to Syrian deepened the differences. These divisions would remain in place until the election of Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni in 1996 as leader of the organization, when differences were overcome at least theoretically.

According to ZuhairSalim[10], after Hama, the deep process of revision of the Brotherhood's postulates, which in the previous years, partly influenced by the Iranian Islamic Revolution, had become very intolerant and extremist in the sense of calling for a Islamic State to overthrow the Alawite tyranny in the country by

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[7] Consult:

http://www.ikhwansyria.com/ar/default.aspx?xyz=U6Qq7k%2bcOd87MDI46m9rUxJEpMO%2bi1s7CRpV4kc1lvVd%2bluGCuHK6fhrfQ9HWexR2Icw%2bJlvJlHCPsBe6qXWBmuQTeEoCiti7Kz53KFCHbo3JnRH2EWH6//5TnfcwBeej5L4WGxK2AQ%3d.

[8] Muhammad RiyadShaqfa insists that "the Brotherhood did not participate actively in the insurrection, they only helped getting those wanted by the authorities put of the country" (*Al-Jazeera,* 20/08/2011).

[9] FUENTELSAZ, Jorge (2010): *La imposible adaptación de los Hermanos Musulmanes al sistema egipcio: su relación con el régimen durante el mandato de Muhammad Mahdi 'Akif (Enero de 2004-enero de 2010)*, PhD, Autónoma University of Madrid, p.116.

[10] Interview by the author in London (28/07/2011).

means of an Islamic Revolution[11], resulted in the return to "the origins of the movement's postulates" of parliamentary participation and the call for freedom. As a matter of fact, they are always ready to insist on the fact that it was not a "turn towards democratic principles", but a "return". Thus, when accused of being pragmatic and trying to ride the tide of the present-day revolution, they do not hesitate in making it clear that all those principles were in the essence of the organization from the very beginning and that Islamic principles of justice, equality and freedom are all compatible with the idea of a democratic State. Thus, it is beyond the scope of a simple anecdote that, when the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood presented its program for the 2007 elections, Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni criticized it because some of its proposals were incompatible with the concept of civil society[12].

Consequently, it is not surprising that when the Brotherhood presented a document called the National Pact in March 2012, the current leader or the organization, elected in 2010, Muhammad RiyadShaqfa said that their movement was the most democratic of all the Brotherhood's branches because there had been four different guides and it was composed of university professors and intellectuals[13]. Democracy, according to Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni means "mechanisms that agree with the essence of the principle of Islamic consultation (*shura*), but which differentiates from it in some particular aspects"[14].

Coming back to the stage

In the year 2000, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood had still been unable to come back to Syria although various rounds of negotiations had taken place between the regime and the Brotherhood, even before they were expelled from the country "in order to prevent what happened in Hama from taking place"[15]. When direct talks proved to be totally useless (despite some of its members being allowed to return "as individuals"[16]), the Muslim Brotherhood resorted to mediation, or as Ali Sadr al-Din al

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[11] See the methods to achieve the Islamic Revolution in Syria and its political program in Saad al-Din, Adnan (2008): *Al-ikhwan al-muslimun fi Suriya: mudhakkaratwadhikrayat*, Amman, Dar Ammar, vol. 4, p. 227-294.

[12] FUENTELSAZ, Jorge and SOAGE, Ana Belén (2010): "The Muslim Brothers in Egypt" In RUBIN, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, Hampshire, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 39-56.

[13] Jazeera, 25/03/2012.

[14] Al-Majalla, 22/03/2012.

[15] Interview with ObeidaNahas (member of the Broherhood and a prominent broker in the Syrian National Council) by the author in London (04/08/2011).

[16] ZISSER, Eyal (2005): "Syria, the Ba'th Regime and the Islamic Movement" en *The Muslim World,* vol. 95, p.52.

Bayanouni put is: "We were offered assistance, we didn't ask anyone for help"[17]. Whatever the topics of discussion and whoever the mediators (who were mainly members of other Islamist or conservative parties such as the Palestinian Hamas, as well as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, all of whom were conditioned by the margin of maneuver and action they had, which explains why there was not only one mediator), the fact remains that no progress whatsoever was achieved.

Fearing to be left aside with the "promising" inheritance of the presidency in Syria by Bashar al-Assad, who was seen as a potential reformer, and the beginning of what came to be known as the Damascus Spring, soon followed by the return of a long winter that continued until people in Syria decided to confront it in March 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood decided to issue a *Pact of National Honor*, presented to the different opposition groups in London with a view to joining efforts to open Syria's political system. Their lack of following in many sectors of society, the reminiscence of the Hama events, and some of its postulates made it virtually impossible for all the opposition groups and figures to join in.

The pact, which was proposed for discussion, stated that: "This our initiative of presenting these national documents does not take form others their right to have their own view (partial or complete) on how to develop this project or how to change it so that it is accepted more widely […] And from that standpoint springs our open invitation to al political forces to participate in the dialogue about this project". This will for dialogue was the first step in their "return" to openly accepting democratic rules.

The first point raised in the document is important for the standpoint of the Muslim Brotherhood's exclusion not only form political life in Syria (a reality shared by all political forces in a system where one party claimed to be the "leader of society and the State"[18]), but also because of its marginalization in the opposition circles against the government of the Assad family[19]: "The principal exigency that all political forces must struggle for is their right to have legal and official presence" in order to carry their political activities effectively. However, it clarified that their legitimacy would not come from that official presence but from their popular support, which they believe is still wide[20].

As a set of global principles, the pact did not touch upon any particular policies,

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[17] Interview by the author in London (01/08/2011).

[18] See Syria's Constitution (1973-2012), article 8. In the new constitution, in effect since 27th February 2012 and whose legitimacy is very much doubted bearing in mind the delicate situation in Syria, this article was abolished.

[19] This is up to a great extent a consequence of the Hama Massacre for which many people in the country still ask the Brotherhood for an apology.

[20] Interview to ZuhairSalim by the author (28/07/2011).

but described the general assumptions that should be made about Syria, namely its forming part of the wider Arab context (not in a racist or chauvinist way) and the fact that "Islam […] is a cultural reference and an identity for the members of the community (*umma*) […] and for those born in the Syrian Arab region (but who are not Arab), it is either a religious reference or a cultural framework which they pertain to, thus, it embraces and joins all the sons of our nation". The main purpose of this pact, according to the hierarchy of objectives, was to build a "modern country" where, through plural and transparent elections; people would decide who governs, without anyone taking over the country. The inhabitants of this State would be guaranteed freedom, the basis of the concept of citizenship, and equality, but whose differences should be tolerated and respected. In order to achieve such a State, it seemed necessary to confront the challenge of "building up" individuals and society, so as to make them aware of their cultural background and their sense of belonging in a globalised world. It is interesting to note here how Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni defines eleven years later the concept of globalization: "A reality of our age and one of the things asked for in Islam, on condition that it isn´t submitted to the rules of the strongest and richest"[21]. This is directly related to the idea of confronting the Israeli challenge and its presence, especially in the occupied territories (both in Syria and Palestine), present in the Pact.

Whatever the good intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood, the fact remains that almost no one signed this document, although it was an important change if one considers that, throughout the years of the Assad government, the Muslim Brotherhood had developed more radical ideas as explained above[22]. This sudden (re)turn to democratic principles is one of the points that those who oppose the Muslim Brotherhood rise up when they want to show how pragmatic they are.

It is not a secret that all political and social currents need to adapt to new circumstances if they don´t want to be left behind, and Islamist parties[23] and, among them, the Muslim brotherhood (considered the mother of the vast majority of current movements), are no exception. However, they have a point on their side that we have already mentioned, which is that they were the first of all branches to par-

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[21] Al-Majalla, 22/03/2012.

[22] See note 10.

[23] As it is noted in MISAL Shaul and SELA Avraham (2002): "Participation without Presence: Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and the Politics of Negotiated Coexistence" en *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 38, n. 3, p. 1, four different political behaviors have been categorized by Islamic thinkers (reformist), communal (social services), political and combatant-political), however, "Islamic movements have manifested flexibility, adopting mixed elements from the above-mentioned strategies under different social and political conditions"; that is, they are pragmatist like any other political party..

ticipate in democratic parliamentary elections and governments. When compared to other movements such as the ruling AKP party in Turkey and the Nahda party in Tunisia, which throughout the years when it was allowed to take part in politics had allied with different political currents and at present governs Tunisia in coalition, they have more in common with the latter than with other branches of the Brotherhood, of which they say "we have a relationship of consultation and advice, but there is no International Organization whatsoever"[24]. It is our right to ask ourselves what that means when Faruq Tayfur, the deputy leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and a member of the Syrian National Council, was proud to announce that the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood had decided to stop all its activities in Iran in protest against the Iranian support of the repression that the Syrian regime is executing against its people[25].

A Vision for the Future Syria

After the failure of their attempt to attract the other opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood presented in 2004 what they called *Vision of the Muslim Brotherhood of how the future Syria should be*, which comprised both their global vision of the cultural, social and political framework in Syria, and a more defined political program dealing with all kinds of aspects from domestic policy to women issues, and from the official language to foreign policy orientation.

Mentioning the language is important because the program stated that "the official language in Syria is Arabic"[26], in direct confrontation with some ethnic minorities, the most numerous of which, and the most ill-treated by the regime, who did nothing (until, as a result of the uprising, they promised to grant the nationality to thousands of them[27]) to return them their lost rights after a census in 1962 deprived many of them of their citizenship, namely, the Kurds. Kurdish parties have always been quite reluctant towards the discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood because of its emphasis on the Arab identity of Syria as well as because of their insistence on the use of religious sources for inspiration. Despite being Sunnis in general, Kurds have a more "lay" way of understanding religion[28] and, for example, men and women mix with each other in celebrations. In this respect, it was necessary for the Muslim

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[24] Al-Bayanouni in Al-Hiwar, 15/11/2009. Nevertheless, since it became apparent that the Muslim Brotherhood would take the lead in Egyptian politics, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood have shown their support for the Syrian uprising and have met with their Syrian counterparts.

[25] Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 26/03/2012.

[26] Political Program of the Muslim Brotherhood, 2004, p. 140.

[27] Note the use of word "grant" instead of "return".

[28] See, for instance, the prominent Sheikh Muhammad MuradMa'shuq al-Khaznawi.

Brotherhood to issue their *View on the Kurdish question in Syria*, where they declared it was necessary to "recognize the Kurdish specificity and the cultural rights of our brothers and fellow-citizens the Kurds in all their dimensions […], (thus enjoying) the right to express that specificity"[29]. Despite this gesture, the animosity between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Kurdish parties could once again be witnessed during a conference for the Syrian opposition in Istanbul on 16th July 2011, where, Al-Bayanouni, delivered a speech where he insisted on the Arab and Muslim identity of Syria, and where later on, the environment heated up during the discussions on what the country's future name should be, either Syrian Arab Republic or Syrian Republic, as it had been during the first years of independence. After that, the Kurdish parties left, with only a few independent Kurds remaining in place.

In their political project they use, for the first time in an official document, the word "civil State", meaning a State which is not a "theocracy". The Brotherhood refuses to speak about a lay or secular state and they insist on the fact that there is more than one model of laicism and different ways of understanding the concept[30], meaning that laicism in France does not mean the same as laicism in the USA for instance. Although, when asked how he sees the project for future Syria, Al-Bayanouni does not mention the civil State at all and defines it as an "Islamic national civilization project that grants the Syrian specificity its full scope".

This, point, in addition to another aspect of their political project that must be highlighted, should be framed into the right context. When the political opposition in Syria and part of the civil society in the area were preparing themselves and grouping together to form the alliance known as the Damascus Declaration, a name derived from the name of the document that they issued in 2005and where they made important political and social demands, mainly the granting of more freedoms and a political opening, the Muslim Brotherhood needed to show its commitment to democratic values, and, above all, to the idea of the separation between religion and the State. It was then compulsory for them to mention the idea of a civil State. However, regarding the question of women, a thorny issue when it comes to examining Islamist groups, the political program is much less progressive and states that "the natural environment for women is the house"[31], which does not mean they cannot have a share in public life, but they must be aware of feminist movements that, in the name of liberating women, "seek the destruction of the family institution […] and invite them to a certain type of indecorous relationships"[32]. It can be argued that, at that point, knowing that the political system

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[29] http://www.alittehad.net/vb/showthread.php?t=171 [Consulted: 31/03/2012].
[30] Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa, Al-Jazeera, 25/03/2012.
[31] Political Program of the Muslim Brotherhood, 2004, p. 78.
[32] Political Program of the Muslim Brotherhood, 2004, p. 78.

would not be overturned in a fortnight, they didn´t need to attract potential electors. Thus, the question of women, very much related to that of the idea of the family, was not a priority in the sense that they did not need to attract the population at that time, but the other opposition factions.

The Alliance WithAbd al-HalimKhaddam
and the Sudden Suspension of Their Opposition Activities

In 2006, only one year after the Damascus Declaration, the Muslim Brotherhood announced that it would abandon the coalition to join the National Salvation Front set up by the ex Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, who, after being cast aside from the core centre of power in Syria, had fled the country and become an opposition figure.

It was difficult at the time to explain this movement although for the Brotherhood it was very simple a matter: "We wanted to show the regime that we would accept joining any person who deserted and had not stained his hands with Syrian blood"[33]. It was more than evident that that was not Khaddam's case, as he had been one of Assad's three strong (Sunni) men. Many conjectures were made and the most widespread version is that they wanted to send a message to the authorities that they were ready to resume talks with them. Whatever the answer of the Syrian authorities, this unnatural "marriage" gave Khaddam a reputation and the Brotherhood a new frame of action. Nevertheless, it was destined to failure and, unable to find a more convincing reason. For many, the break up meant that the regime had accepted mediation with the Brotherhood because of its international isolation since ex Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri's, assassination[34], the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008-2009 came as a blessing for the coalition to be broken. Khaddam accused Hamas of holding responsibility for what had happened as they had previously fired rockets at Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood would not tolerate that and not only did they announce their breaking up with Khaddam, but also the suspension of all their opposition activities.

Al-Bayanouni, who was the Brotherhood's leader at the time, was asked insistently about the cause of this sudden change. The answer did not convince many, because it did not result in any apparent change of attitude from the Syrian government, although they needed to try first: "We wanted to join efforts and put ourselves at the service of the Palestinian question"; that is, they had found somebody to mediate on their behalf with the regime. Moreover, it seemed that they were offering themselves to be co-opted.

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[33] Interview by the author in London (01/08/2011).

[34] *Al-Jazeera,* 05/04/2009.

Coming Back to the Fore

Two years later, on the 1ˢᵗ May 2011, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, who, from the very beginning of the Syrian uprising had shown their support[35] and had called people to keep on demonstrating in a peaceful way, announced their resumption of their opposition activities. Once again, the Muslim Brotherhood was adapting to a new situation. Demonstrations had already spread to all regions in Syria, people had shown their willingness not to give up on any of their aspirations, and the political opposition would need sooner or later to organize itself in other to conform a credible representation body in charge of the forthcoming diplomatic activity that would become peremptory to attract the international community's support for the Syrian revolution. Staying back could mean the total disregard of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political broker in Syria, something that thirty years of exile would definitely not help to overcome. In this sense, the Brotherhood made its first moves and organized various conferences for the opposition.

As a matter of fact, they showed their disappointment, although they justified the situation saying that they are not allowed to have any formal organization in Syria, when they were not invited to take part in a conference that took place on 27ᵗʰ June 2011 at the Semiramis Hotel in Damascus (many despised it for being organized "under the regime's protection"). Nevertheless, Al-Bayanouni was fast to explain that "we are working hand in hand with the Syrian opposition in exile to convince the Arab governments to show their support for the Syrian revolution". However, the creation of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change[36] on 30th June 2011 and the following conference that was to take place would once again be unsuitable for the Brotherhood (and for many in exile) as it would be celebrated in Damascus. This was the beginning of the division between the internal and the external opposition in Syria.

Finally, the first conference of the Syrian political opposition in exile was celebrated in Turkey, in the city of Antalya at the end of May 2011. This conference, and the one celebrated one day later in Brussels showed, according to many[37], the breach between the sons of Hama and the sons of Aleppo in the Muslim Brother-

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[35] As Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni put it in an interview for *Al-Hiwar* channel (27/03/2011), "We are part of this people, we must support this revolution".

[36] This body has been the main "competitor" of the Syrian National Council along the revolution. It is composed of old opposition figures and parties inside the country, most of them lay and leftist groups, whose main postulates are: "No to intervention, no to violence and no to sectarianism". They believe that conducting talks with the regime in order to stop the blood-spilling and to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

[37] *Al-Safir* (09/06/2011)

hood, which coincides almost completely with the division between what was known as the "military command"[38] (whose existence they have never really recognized) and the rest of the organization. The one in Turkey had been sponsored by the current leader, Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa, who had been elected in 2010; the one in Brussels had been promoted by Al-Bayanouni. Besides that, it was then when the Turkish-Muslim Brotherhood relationship began to come to the fore and many would accuse the latter of taking advantage of the Islamist-oriented conservative government in the neighboring country to dominate the external opposition. At an interview[39], Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa was bound to insist on the fact that "we don´t have any direct relationship with the Turkish government, [we only have] contact with the Turkish organizations of Civil Society".

The polemic around the Muslim Brotherhood would not finish here but would witness a new episode on the 6th July 2011, when a conference was organized in Paris among whose participants, people like the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and the previous Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bernard Kuschner, both known for their sympathy towards Israel could be seen. This aroused the condemnation of many renown opposition figures such as Burhan Ghalioun, the current president of the Syrian National Council. Mulhim al-Droubi, the person in charge of the Muslim Brotherhood's foreign relations was present, although he stuck to the role of mere listener, as he said. The Muslim Brotherhood learnt the lesson and they did not give anyone any more arguments to criticize them either for being divided or for working with pro-Israeli personalities.

Accordingly, on 16thJuly 2011, a conference was held in Istanbul (a parallel one was supposed to take place in Damascus, but the regime's repression in the area the previous day made it virtually impossible). There, Al-Bayanouni responded to those criticizing the opposition for its lack of unity and expressed his hope that the announcement of a coalition would result from the meeting. While it was partly achieved, it proved almost useless. Thus, on the 8th and 9th of September 2011 a meeting of different opposition forces was held in Doha (Qatar) to try to form a definite group that would represent the Syrian people who had been calling for unity since the beginning. It is interesting to note here that on 23rd September 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement where they explained that the Consultative Council (the one that decides how the organization must work, a kind of legislative body) had held a meeting in order to decide how to better work in order to help the revolution in a more positive and effective way.

Interesting as it is, on 2nd October 2011, the Syrian National Council was an-

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[38] Command considered responsible for the armed uprising in Hama.

[39] *France 24*, 12/05/2011

nounced, where the Muslim Brotherhood and "friendly Islamist currents", formed 20% of the members. For Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa[40], "whoever still opposes this Council can only justify it by his belief in the fact that a dialogue with the regime is still possible, despite the massacres", clearly sending a message or reprobation to the National Coordination Committee.

The next month, however, he admitted that the Brotherhood was working on two parallel lines[41]: "the line of the opposition, which includes all the groups that are against the government, and which is what the Syrian National Council has been created for; and we are also working to unite the Islamist opposition […] in order to elaborate a common project for the stage after the fall of the regime". Taking into account the fact that in this same interview he suggested that the establishment of the Syrian National Council came to light as a result of the Brotherhood's calls for a united opposition group, it is understandable that some of those who have deserted the Council recently, such as Ammar Qurabi, have justified their leaving the Syrian National Council because of the domination that the Muslim Brotherhood presumably exerts over it. In an informal interview with an Arab intellectual, whose name will be withheld for the sake of privacy, he expressed his fear that "it's not the Muslim Brotherhood, but the Gulf countries' domination of the Syrian National Council that worries me". This is something not far from reality and not marginal to the Muslim Brotherhood's connections with Arab governments. Take, for instance, the praises made by the organization thanking Saudi Arabia for its help[42] and also the declarations made by Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa on Qatar and Saudi Arabia's decision to arm the Free Syrian Army: "Our Saudi and Qatari brothers have understood correctly the situation; that is, they have understood that the Syrian regime doesn´t understand any language but the logic of force, so the only possible answer is the use of force"[43]. This was enough for an ex member of the Syrian National Council, Kamal al-Labwani, to accuse them (or at least that was the rumor)of monopolizing both the coordination of the shipping of humanitarian aid and the arming of the Free Syrian Army. "We don´t control the money or the arms; on the contrary, we are the ones in more urgent need for both things and it is very painful to see that they need money in Syria and we don´t have anything to give them […] I'm afraid there are people inside the Syrian National

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[40] *Al-Nahar*, 13/10/2011

[41] *Ikwantube*, 08/11/2011

[42] See:http://www.ikhwansyria.com/ar/default.aspx?xyz=U6Qq7k%2bcOd87MDI46m9rUxJEp MO%2bi1s7bVwdb44vu45%2f%2fuuFDCouDLfUeQQEv6kqwx3BtwUU0Bt8AzTWdvnG nAbo%2b%2btQ4IfzUsdPmFP4YCSWTSv935QrubLaCuDC1bAIzup70VDRU9g%3d [Visited: 31/03/2012]

[43] *Al-Majalla*, 07/03/2012

Council who want to defame the Muslim Brotherhood"[44].

Once again, the Turkish-Brotherhood relation was brought to the fore and he had to deny their sending arms through the Turkish border[45]. On 21st March 2012, they were forced to issue a new statement which read as follows: "We are part of you and we belong to you, but we are also human beings and we err sometimes just as we are right on other occasions". These ongoing critics, while the Syrian population were becoming gradually more disappointed with the Syrian National Council, made Zuhair Salim, the spokesman of the Brotherhood, declare after the European Union had recognized the Syrian National Council as a representative of the Syrian people that "even if the whole world recognizes us as the Syrian National Council, it will be useless if the Syrian people withdraw their support. We extract our credibility from our representation in the interior"[46].Whatever the weight of the Muslim Brotherhood, the fact remains that Burhan Ghalioun said that[47] they dominated the external opposition while the lay forces dominated the internal one.

Their Latest Evolution

Just a few days before a meeting at Istanbul was held by the external opposition, delivering a road map whose aim was to re-establish the Syrian National Council and to draw the lines to follow in the post-Assad era, the Muslim Brotherhood surprised the world with a document that showed their convictions of the system that should be established in the event of the fall of the regime. "With it we have reaffirmed our program of establishing a civil State, something which is not new, because this idea forms part of our theories since the organization was founded in 1945"[48]. Indeed, as Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa put it, "we have been forced to come out and reaffirm our ideas on the concepts of 'civil', 'tolerance' and 'collaboration with all sectors of society'". However, it was Al-Bayanouni's statement that was the most elaborate and developed of all: "We have confirmed in this document that the constitution must be the result of a national consensus; that is, that the majority cannot abolish the rights of Christians or Kurds just because they are a minority"[49].

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[44] *A-Quds al-Arabi,* 18/03/2012.

[45] Whoever is sending arms to the Free Syrian Army, it is important to note both that the overwhelming majority of its officers are Sunnis, many of whom regard the battle as a religious struggle. The foggy relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood, established in Turkey for the time being, and the Free Army has caused many to be skeptical about their intentions.

[46] *Al-Hiwar*, 25/12/2012.

[47] *Le Monde*, 31/08/2011.

[48] *Al-Jazeera*, 25/03/2012.

[49] *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 26/03/2012,

This means that what is known as the "dictatorship of the majority" must be avoided by all means, maybe the most important aspect of the Brotherhood's evolution. All those who have spoken since then on behalf of the Brotherhood have insisted on the fact that they do not ambition power and that they will not, in the event of winning a majority, leave anyone aside. As a matter of fact, it is common for them to remind how Mustafa al-Saibai was a member of the Parliament and how in 1950, when a new constitutional text for Syria was under discussion, Mustafa al-Siba'i, who wanted to include an article stipulating that Islam would be the official religion, promoted a solution more capable of being accepted: the President had to be a Muslim and Islamic jurisprudence should be the base of legislation.

At this point, it is necessary to analyze the document presented by the Muslim Brotherhood on the 25th March 2012, which called for the establishment of:

- A civil State based on a civil Constitution drafted by a Constituent Assembly elected by the population.

- A democratic, plural State based on the alternation in power that would take the shape of a "republican representative government"

- A State based on citizenship and equality regardless of an individual's sectarian or ethnic adscription, both for men and women who are equal "in human and familiar dignity".

- A State committed to respecting Human Rights, as recognized by "celestial laws and international accords". Those Human rights are: dignity, equality, freedom of thinking and expression, freedom of religion, freedom of press, the possibility of participating in politics, the right to social justice and the access to basic needs that guarantee a dignified and decent life.

- A State based on dialogue where everybody must respect the particularities of the other components of Syrian society, considering this factor "a symbol of richness".

- A State where its citizens are not the property of anyone but themselves, where a dictator cannot monopolize the decision-making process, and where there is a clear separation of powers, powers that only those who are qualified and work for the nation and not for a party or family can lead. Those people will be subject to a system of checks and balances in order to guarantee their integrity. The Army must not intervene in political life and its duty will be no other than protecting the nation.

- A State where sovereignty is for the Law, where there is no margin for revenges, but for just trials for everyone, including those who "have stained their hands with Syrian blood".

- A State where all the Syrians show affection for their fellow citizens "in the framework of a national reconciliation process where there is no justification for the false pretexts used by the regime to spread fear among the sons of the same country".

Going back to previous statements and documents, this latest pact issued by the Muslim Brotherhood represents a qualitative change in the postulates of the Muslim Brotherhood: nowhere is the Islamic Law to be seen (while their previous political program called for its implementation in an Islamic framework derived from a global understanding of the Muslim religion). However, when it comes to mentioning Human Rights, it is done by saying that they must be in accordance with the "celestial laws" as well as international agreements. The meaning of those celestial laws remains ambiguous bearing in mind that, for instance, when talking about religion, a non-believer is in a lower level than a believer, even in a civil State[50], so that would imply a tacit social discrimination that might lead to the repression of one's own beliefs. In this sense, we still remain in the area described as grey zone by some specialists[51], where the position of the Muslim brotherhood remains foggy.

Another point that triggers some questions is the mentioning of men and women to state that they are equal "in human and familiar dignity". What that means is clear, they are both subject to just and decent treatment both in public and private spaces, but, does it mean they have the same right to be in both spaces and execute the same activities, especially when women in the area have traditionally remained in the household, although the situation for women in Syria is better than in many other countries?

Regarding the fact that they call for a just trial even for all those whose hands are stained with Syrian blood, the question that comes to mind is whether they do not fear being sued for their alleged responsibility in the Hama massacre in 1982 which people are many are still demanding an apology for? Would they accept being trialed for that?

All this questions remain open as this article is being closed, despite the clear evolution seen in the Brotherhood's attitude toward democratic principles of equality, freedom of expression, creed, speech and religion, and political pluralism.

Conclusions

Throughout the text, we have overviewed the Muslim Brotherhood's evolution since its inception in 1945 until the present, when a revolution is taking place challenging the ruthless regime that has governed the country for more than four decades, four decades during which the Muslim Brotherhood has shown its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances in the pursuit of their socio-political aims, begin-

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[50] See Michel Kilo in *Al-Safir,* 15/01/2012.

[51] BROWN, Nathan J., HAMZAWY, Amr, and OTTAWAY, Marina (2006). "Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Gray Zones", *Canergie Papers*, nº 67. See: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp_67_grayzones_final.pdf [Visited:31/01/2012].

ning with parliamentary participation in the early stages of independence, turning to direct confrontation with the Assad regime in the 70s and 80s, and finally committing themselves to working towards the building of democracy in Syria. Whatever the original connection between democratic principles and the Brotherhood's thinking that they themselves claim, it cannot be denied that they underwent a period of extremism, probably as a result of their being in constant friction with the government. Their latest and, it is fair to say, shocking document calling for a national agreement and consensus among the different opposition factions not only in the Syrian National Council but in other formations, where Islam is nowhere to be seen and where the Arab identity of Syria is totally disregarded (something unthinkable of only ten years ago), is a very positive development towards the aim of attracting different sectors of the population and the opposition (namely religious and ethnic minorities). Voices might be raised to despise it as being only a means justified by the ends the Brotherhood pursues (especially after their declaration in mid-July that they would form a political party), which is dominating political life in Syria and establishing a religious government (something they did want in the 80s) in a "one man, one vote, one time" system. Only time will prove this accusations right or wrong (besides the fact that Syrians do not seem ready to accept any more impositions) and how committed they are to their principles, especially taking into account their history of fast and contradictory adaptations to changing conditions, with a view to safeguarding their interests. The Muslim Brotherhood has proved that they will not accept being cast aside or failing to become key political brokers in the transition in Syria. Whether they achieve the control of the post-Assd government and how they would rule in the event of that happening remains to be seen.

Tarihsel Sorumluluk ve Siyasal Değişim Beklentisi Arasında Suriye Müslüman Kardeşler Örgütü

Siyasal İslam olgusu yirminci yüzyılın başlangıcından itibaren bir çok değişiklikten geçmiş bu süreç özellikle 1979 İran İslam Devrimi ve ardından 11 Eylül 2001tarihinde gerçekleştirilen New York saldırılarıyla daha yoğun olarak tartışmaların merkezine oturmuştur. Bu çalışma az üzerinde durulan fakat İslamcılık tarihinde etkili bir hareket olmaya çalışan Suriye'deki Müslüman Kardeşler Örgütü'nün geçirmiş olduğu değişimi ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Suriye Müslüman Kardeşler Örgütü, Suriye'de bir çok kez mücadeleyi kaybettikleri düşünülen ve sadece rejimin izin verdiği sınırlar içinde yaşamasına imkan tanınan, siyasal muhalefetin ön saflarında bir örgüt olarak, Suriye'den çıkarılması mücadelesinden sonra bir revizyon sürecine girerek, demokratik katılımdan radi-

kalleşmeye kadar değişen şartlara uyum sağlayabilen bir aktördür. Son dönemde örgütün yeni bir safhaya geçtiği ve demokratikleşme söylemini kendi çıkarlarını ve siyasalarını gerçekleştirmek için bir araç olarak kullanıp kullanmadığı tartışılmaya açılmıştır. Ancak bu sorunun cevabı ne olursa olsun, Suriye'de önemli bir siyasi aktör olmak için mücadele ettikleri açıktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasal İslamcılık, Demokratikleşme, Müslüman Kardeşler Örgütü, Suriye

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