



**DIAA RASWHAN**

**The revolution did not yet enter  
into the Egyptians' houses**

**Entrevista**





# Diaa Raswhan

## *The revolution did not yet enter into the Egyptians' houses*

Interview by **Maciel Santos and Marco Alvarez\***

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*In the following interview he replied to a standardized inquiry that a CEAUP research project presented to several Egyptian analysts and politicians.*

*The footnote notes are of the exclusive responsibility of the CEAUP interviewers.*

**Maciel Santos/Marco Alvarez (MS/MA):** Do you think the new Constitution can include “the principles of Islamic Sharia”<sup>1</sup> and would this be feasible in modern societies such as the Egyptian one? In other words, what kind of democracy do you think it is now possible in Egypt?

**Diaa Rashwan (DR):** The problem until now — according to the discussions inside the Commission — is that we have very different views concerning the kind of democracy we need. We have now in power the Muslim Brothers, the current president is a member of the Muslim Brothers<sup>2</sup>.

And we have the former parliament, which was composed of a majority of Muslim brothers and Salafists members. We have now some signs about the kind of democracy they are looking up for our Constitution; and what we see from this discussion it is not really enough to build a democracy.

We heard, for example, about an article cancelling the supervision of the judges in our elections. This is the opposite of what should happen. It will be a catastrophe in the near future because until now, in Egypt, we had and we have these judges: the main condition for clean elections is to have judges and this sort of supervision. The discussion about the suppression of the judges is an indication that we will not be facing clean elections in the next months. And we have some other problems concerning the jury, in general. The High Constitutional Court is also a matter of discussion now — some views, also coming from members of the Muslim Brothers, mean to cancel it. It’s

\* CEAUP.

1 In September 2012, the assembly appointed by the military government to draft the Egyptian new constitutional text debated the text of article 2 (Part I). The Salafist Nour Party wanted it to read “Islamic Sharia” instead of “the principles of Islamic Sharia”. *Al Ahram*, *Weekly* 13-19 Sept. 2012, p. 5. The final version reads: “Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language. Principles of Islamic Sharia are the principal source of legislation.”

2 The Muslim Brothers organised in February 2011 the political party “Freedom and Justice Party” whose later presidential candidate was Dr. Mohamed Morsi.

all very dangerous<sup>3</sup>. Also in the Constitution, we have real problems concerning the freedom of expression<sup>4</sup> and the press. We are now in this transition period and, as you see, we have not even a consensus about the major standards of the Constitution. The real battle for the democracy of the future is running now in the Egypt. Within two or three months, maximum, we will see.<sup>5</sup> Either we'll have a real democracy, a modern one, or we'll have another struggle in the country between the different political views.

3 Article 176 of the new Constitution about the composition of the Supreme Constitutional Court left its composition to further legislation. It reads: "The Supreme Constitutional Court is made up of a president and ten members. The law determines judicial or other bodies that shall nominate them and regulates the manner of their appointment and requirements to be satisfied by them."

4 Discussion of Article 17 of Part I focused on the need to notify the Interior Ministry before public rallies. *Egypt Independent*, 6 Sept. 2012, p. 3

5 The new Constitution was concluded by the Assembly on 30<sup>th</sup> November and approved by referendum in 15-22 Dec. 2012.

**MS/MA: The second question is about development. The "Freedom and Justice" party got the vote of the popular classes. But in the present world recession which is also affecting Egypt, do you think possible that it will implement the necessary economic growth to increase the standard of life of its electorate and to stabilize the new regime?**

**DR:** You know, in our revolution, when it started, we had three slogans. The first of them was "bread"; the second was 'freedom'; the third was: 'social justice'. So when we speak about developing our economy we must have in consideration what the Egyptians really want: they want bread. This means a more human standard of life. Thirdly, as I said, came what we call social justice. We cannot consider nor judge any policy out of these two slogans.



But until now we have nothing to say concerning the development, which has been very low. Plus, the standard of life for the majority of the Egyptians has decreased. We do not even speak now about social justice — not yet. What we have from the headlines of the economic policy of the Muslim Brothers, of the actual cabinet (and also of the president) is that we are going to see the same economic lines that were applied by the last regime. And naturally the current discussion with the IMF, diffused in the country, creates real fears. The lower classes are now afraid of the consequences of such possible agreement because they have already tested mini agreements. There were small agreements of this type in the Mubarak and Sadat era: they created very hard conditions for the lower classes and we have forty percent of our people under poverty. Shortly, I think we have had until now economic policies similar to those under the Mubarak era<sup>6</sup>.

**MS/MA: Of these three possible scenarios, which do you think it is more risky for a future Egyptian parliamentary democracy?**

- a military takeover, similar to the Algerian one in 1992;
- the failure of the Muslim Brother's government to satisfy the popular demands and an electoral shift towards the Salafists Nour Party;
- a process of *Ikhwanisation*<sup>7</sup> of the State, leading to a hegemony similar to that of the AKP party, in Turkey.

6 In early September, it was expected that the Egyptian pound would shortly be strongly devaluated, being then at its lowest point since December 2004. Higher unemployment and rising food prices were the expected consequences. "A Popular Campaign to Drop Egypt's Debt is on the move". *Egypt Independent*, 6 Sept. 2013, p. 10.

7 From *Ikhwan*, the Arabic word for Brotherhood. The term has been used by the Egyptian English press.

**DR:** Let's start with the first scenario, which is the military *coup d'état*. I don't think it would happen in a normal situation. It's very difficult because the military, the SCAF<sup>8</sup>, had during this year and half many opportunities to do such thing. In some occasions they would probably be supported by the majority of Egyptians to make it. But they did not make it. And now, they are accused by many Egyptians of having given the country to the Muslim Brothers. Therefore I do not think that the present situation will give them an opportunity to make such *coup d'état*. And, if it happened, it would be very hard, very bloody. Until now, we have not this scenario.

The second scenario: until now, our regime is playing with the superstructure, not with the infrastructure of society. It means that they are playing with politics, not with the basic demands of the people. They are also playing with foreign policy: going to China, to Ethiopia, to Saudi Arabia. Making arrangements for the regime but not speaking about social and economic issues. And these are the main demands of the Egyptians, as I told you. Now, if we take the parliamentary elections' results and the presidential elections' results, we see that both the Muslim Brothers and Salafists lost about eight million votes<sup>9</sup>. From the eighteen and a half million in the parliamentary elections they came to thirteen and a half million votes in the second round of the Morsi's election but of these votes, about three million are not Islamists. We can speak about no more than ten or eleven millions of Islamic vote. So they had a

8 English acronym for Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, the military junta that took the power in February 2011, after the resignation of President Mubarak.

9 Dr Raswhan compares the results of the first Parliamentary elections (January 2012) with those of the Presidential elections (23-24 May 2012).

decrease of about ten or eight million votes. This was the result of the activities and actions of the Parliament<sup>10</sup>, which was considered very bad by the Egyptians and never responded to their demands. My feeling is that their popularity decreased because the Egyptians expected from Dr. Morsi and from the Muslim Brothers many things, of the kind they stated in their plan for the first hundred days. Every day we have a different date for it to start and the Egyptians feel now they are not really serious.

The revolution did not yet enter into the Egyptians' houses. They are only watching the revolution on the television: discussions among the elites about freedom of expression, etc, but nothing else. Nothing

that may change their homes, their bodies, their children, their health, their education. Nothing that shocks them, nothing radical.

This was not the case of the Nasser revolution, of July 1952. In September, Nasser started the agrarian reform and at the time people felt that something had changed.<sup>11</sup> Until now, nothing has changed.<sup>12</sup> So, I think that we will face

<sup>11</sup> Law 178 of 1952 started the land-reform legislation, which limited individual land ownership to 200 *feddans*. The Nasser landed reform was reversed by the Mubarak regime by law 96/1992 which gave pre-Nasser landowners the "incontestable" right to take back their land. Around one million Egyptian peasants lost their land after its implementation in 1996. In 2000, over 200 deaths and 1500 injuries may be imputed to rural violence. After the 2011 revolution, a farmer's NGO "Sons of the Soil" plans the creation of cooperatives. *Egypt Independent*, 13 Sept. 2012, pp. 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Shortly after this interview, at Farmers Day, President Morsi pledged to cancel the peasant debts inferior to LE 10 000 (which would affect around 44 000 peasants). Still, he left the decision for the bankers: "I hope the Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit will implement this decree." *Al Ahram Weekly*, 13-19 Sept. 2012, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> I.e., the Constitutional Assembly which followed the Parliament dissolved by the SCAF. The Freedom and Justice representatives still kept a majority in this Assembly.



more of the decrease of the Muslim Brothers' popularity, especially in the next few months, i.e., in the parliamentary elections. The real problem will be the reaction of them in face of such decrease of their popularity. They are now real nervous and even preparing special laws, such as the emergency law, for which they have already achieved a new version by the cabinet. And I am afraid that they will try to compensate this lack of popularity by intervening in the elections and by defrauding them. The changes in the judges' supervision give us a real and dangerous indicator about this possibility.

The last scenario, the "Ikwhanization" of the State. We have seen many examples towards this direction in the Egyptian press: in the nomination of governors and in the cabinet... but I think this will be very dangerous for them, more than for society, because the Egyptians are not calm in face of what it is happening now. And one of the problems of the Muslim Brothers is that they have not enough people. I mean, they are not enough to fulfill the superior staff or even the middle staff. We have in this country about six million or more people working in the civil services and in the public sector. And within the structures of the high administration, more than half a million people. Well, all the members of the Muslim Brothers are around half a million people – note, all the members. So, this will not be an easy task although to create loyalties will be one of their tactics. Anyway, I think that in a very short time the whole process would bring very negative reactions and would even touch the stability of the State itself. You know, we have a very heavy State and it is not easy to play with it, at least within a short time.

**MS/MA: Viewed from abroad, Egyptian politics looks very unstable. The new parties have short lives and they often collapse or merge. Why is it so difficult for the opposition to organize itself into political platforms?**

**DR:** This is part of our heritage under Mubarak. The Mubarak regime weakened all the legal political parties. And the rest of the weakness came from themselves, from inside. Now, after the revolution we have dozens of new political parties without any kind of experience and sometimes even without real programs or defined ideology. It has been a new experience for all of them. After president Morsi's arrival they felt that they were in real danger and we have now some coalition blocs:<sup>13</sup> the Popular Current of Hamdeen Sabbahi<sup>14</sup>, the Destour party of Dr. ElBaradei<sup>15</sup>; the Conference Party of Ayman Nour, Osama Ghazali, and Amr Moussa<sup>16</sup>; the Tagammu, the leftist coalition composed of nine political parties. This means we have now clear blocs. They have already started discussions among them and I think that within perhaps days or weeks, maximum, we will have more coalitions than it was the case in the last elections.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the political forces named below, which already resulted from the coalition of smaller parties, were being registered at the time. That was for instance the case of the Popular Current (mainly populist) and of the Revolutionary Democratic Coalition (mainly socialist), both registered in September 2012.

<sup>14</sup> A center-left coalition which included the Popular Alliance Socialist Party, the Free Egyptians Party, the Egyptian Social Democrat party and the Tagammu Party.

<sup>15</sup> A centrist coalition rallied around Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, former Director of the Atomic Energy International Agency.

<sup>16</sup> A liberal coalition organized by a former oppositionist candidate against Mubarak, Dr. Ayman Nour, who was imprisoned in 2005 and released in 2009. He was a member of the Constitutional Assembly and founder of the El Ghad Party.



**MS/MA: Do you think that it is possible — with this government or any other — to have a new foreign policy more South-South oriented and less directed by the Western framework which prevailed during the Sadat-Mubarak era?**

**DR:** Until now the foreign policy of Egypt under Morsi is not clear. Here in our Center we are preparing a national conference about the Egyptian foreign policy under Morsi. This will be in order to know what these policies are, especially what will be the point of harmonization between them. The first visits of president Morsi — to China, to Iran, to Saudi Arabia — gave the impression (at least to me) that in spite of the Muslim Brothers were against Nasser, they were now going on the same line. This is a non-aligned line but in those visits it was not clear what kind of foreign policy it was meant: they are visiting Iran but attacking the policy of Iran — in Teheran; they are going to China, which is Communist but they are Islamist, etc. Concerning the United States foreign policy, what is clear until now is that there is a real mutual interest. A strategic, military, security, economic interest, with mutual visits (our President will be in the United States in the beginning of October).<sup>17</sup> Yet, until now we have never heard of the European Union. It does not appear, even in the discourse. In fact, something is lacking in our foreign policy: about Sudan, about Northern Africa: from

Libya, which is our neighbor, to Morocco, nothing happened so far. Then, until now, we have had not a real foreign policy — we just had visits. We have some imitation of Nasser's era, but without its contents. Nasser visited China, and he was in the making of Bandung, in 1955, but that was a policy, not just visits. Until now there is a very vague foreign policy and I think it will stay this way for a while until the actual power of Egypt elaborates its own internal policy. You cannot make a foreign policy without having your main internal policy, because there's a real link between them.

**MS/MA: Do you think there will be changes in the Egyptian-Israeli relations and a new start of the Palestinian process or will it all remain — as it can be inferred from what you have just said — within the previous status quo?**

**DR:** This is one real dilemma for president Morsi. I think is the main reason for the United States administration to support the Muslim Brothers' government of Egypt is their attitude vis-à-vis Israel. And I think they discussed it even before the elections — there were many meetings between American officials and the leaders of the Muslim Brothers. Anyone familiar to the American foreign policy in the Middle East understands that their main interest is Israel — even before oil and before the Suez Canal. It was acknowledged that Hamas is a part of the Muslim Brothers. Therefore, the American idea of the main mission for the Muslim Brothers is to have them implementing the Camp David agreement, which after 1979 has failed. They want Camp David under a new frame and if it happens by the Muslim Brothers it will be the final solution. This is how the Americans and the Israelis understand it. I think they will push Morsi but not

<sup>17</sup> "We got a clear message that Egypt is open for business" stated Michael Foreman, deputy assistant of President Obama and member of a 110 US delegation that visited Cairo by mid-September 2012. Direct US investment in Egypt is expected to grow and a debt swap arrangement is being discussed, whereby Egypt "would be required to continue to repay its obligations to the US via a special fund that could only be spent on US-coordinated assistance programmes benefiting Egypt." *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 13-19 Sept. 2012.

now. They are giving him some time, probably six months from his election on. At the end of this year, after the American presidential elections, they will start the serious discussion about the future of the Middle East process. By this time, I think that they will have finished with the Syrian question. Then it will be a very suitable time to implement the Camp David frame and I think there must have been promises of this sort made by the Muslim Brothers to the Americans.

**MS/MA: You have already answered part of our last question, which is precisely about the Syrian question. If the interpretation you are making of this foreign policy is correct, then the Muslim Brother's alignment with the United States administration and the European Union about Syria is almost total.**

**DR:** Yes! If you remember the first days of president Morsi after his election, you will remark that he did not declare what his real position vis-à-vis the Syrian

crisis was. He was, I think, intimidated by the Egyptian militaries, which had at that time another point of view and wanted to resolve it by diplomatic tools. But now, and officially in Teheran<sup>18</sup>, president Morsi spoke frankly and clearly. Considering the historical conflicts between Muslim Brothers and the Syrian regime — since 1982, year of the first revolt in Syria against Assad's father —, considering the views of the actual Islamist movement who want to push the Syrian regime by force, considering the coordination between Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the American policy, Egypt has right now chosen his camp. In spite of the Egyptian government statements in favor of keeping diplomatic initiatives within a calm atmosphere, the reality is that they are now aligned. Recently it was heard that some Islamists — in fact, only a few — had been recruited in Egypt to fight against the Syrian regime.

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<sup>18</sup> President Morsi made this statement during his short visit to Iran in 11 September 2012 at the opening of the Non Aligned Movement summit. *Al Ahrām Weekly*, 6-12 Sept. 2012.