

RACHID GHANNOUCHI AND THE RISE OF MUSLIM DEMOCRAT IN TUNISIA'S POLITICS

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Abstract

The paper highlights Rachid Ghannouchi's political ideas in the context of the growth of political Islam in the Arab world by focusing on historical and political development that underlie the democratic process in Tunisia. It discusses political idealism he developed in Ennahda movement (The Renaissance Party) based on the principles of freedom and justice and its uncompromising opposition to the autocratic regime of Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) and his successor Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011). The study is qualitative in nature in the form of documentary and content analysis. It used descriptive, analytical and historical approaches to analyse data derived from established archival sources. The study found that Ennahda which was founded by Ghannouchi in 1980 had broad influence in mainstream Islamic politics in Tunisia, that espouse to dismantle the autocratic rule and decolonise the corrupt practice and political suppression of past regime. The influence it developed had broadly impacted both Islamic and secular forces to converge and commit toward democratic rule, human rights and the principle of justice, freedom, and the rule of law.

Abstrak

Makalah ini menyoroti gagasan politik Rachid Ghannouchi dalam konteks pertumbuhan Islam politik di dunia Arab dengan berfokus pada perkembangan sejarah dan politik yang mendasari proses demokrasi di Tunisia. Penelitian ini membahas idealisme politik yang ia kembangkan dalam gerakan Ennahda (Partai Renaisans) yang didasarkan pada prinsip-prinsip kebebasan dan keadilan serta penentangannya yang tanpa kompromi terhadap rezim otokratis Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) dan penggantinya, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011). Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dalam bentuk dokumenter dan analisis isi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif, analitis dan historis untuk menganalisis data yang berasal dari sumber-sumber arsip yang ada. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa Ennahda yang didirikan oleh Ghannouchi pada tahun 1980 memiliki pengaruh yang luas dalam arus utama politik Islam di Tunisia, yang mendukung pembongkaran

pemerintahan otokratis dan dekolonisasi praktik korupsi dan penindasan politik rezim sebelumnya. Pengaruh yang dikembangkannya telah berdampak luas pada kekuatan Islam dan sekuler untuk menyatu dan berkomitmen terhadap pemerintahan yang demokratis, hak asasi manusia, dan prinsip keadilan, kebebasan, dan supremasi hukum.

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Introduction

This article formulates Rachid al-Ghannouchi Khrijji's (born June 22, 1941) political views, philosophy and basic principles of democracy expressed in his writings such as *Ad-dimuqratiyah fil-Islam* (democracy in Islam) - translated from Bennabi's commentary, *Al-hurriyyah al-'ammah fi al-dawlah al-Islamiyyah* (general freedom in the Islamic state) and others that reveal his thoughts on the principles of governance, the notion of freedom, division of power, the multi-party system, the basis and philosophy of Islamic politics (*siyasah shar'iyah*). His thoughts on politics are quoted from Azzam S. Tamimi's work which describes the life history and political career of Rashid Ghannouchi: A democrat within Islamism which articulates his role and political strategy in the rise of contemporary Islamic movements and the influence he has exercised in galvanizing secular and Islamist forces in the Middle East.

The background to this study is the development of Ghannouchi's influence in the Islamic world, as a prominent Islamic thinker and activist in Tunisia and North Africa. It highlights his general biography and his influence on leftist and unconventional currents as well as the *ijtihadist* construct he established within the *al-Nahdah* party (*Hizb Harakah al-Nahdah* - The Renaissance Party), as the largest Islamist movement in Tunisia, which gained majority support and widespread recognition in the global political circuit. The reformist tradition in Tunisia stems from its Islamist and secular heritage dating back to the nineteenth century. The process of *Ennahda*'s evolution and formation began in the 1960s, from *Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah*, to *MTI* (*Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique*), to *Ennahda*.¹

Since the transfer of power achieved by the 2011 mass revolution, the *Ennahda*-led government has passed Tunisia's new constitution on January 27, 2014, partially drafted by *Ennahda* parliamentarians - which has laid the foundations for democracy and protected political and religious freedoms.²

¹ Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

² Rached Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The *Ennahda* Party and the Future of Tunisia," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (2016): 33.

Tunisia had also achieved significant political progress in the previous five years made possible by the democratic transition. The rise of Hizbun Nahdah or the Renaissance Party of Tunisia is perhaps the most interesting event that has happened in the Islamic world recently. Ennahda is the model of an Islamic moderate movement that embraces democracy. Its leader Rachid Ghannouchi, who lived in exile in London during Ben Ali's administration, returned home after the Arab Spring and led the party in a general election that eventually won 40 percent of the seats in October 2011, is considered a true Muslim democrat.

Ghannouchi has been outspoken in his stance on the notions of democracy and secularism, terms that are highly contentious in Islamist circles. In a speech at the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy on March 2, 2012, Ghannouchi said: "Perhaps the most important procedure discovered by the secular worldview at this stage is the neutrality of the state. In other words, the state is the guarantor of all freedoms whether religious, political or otherwise. And the state does not have to intervene in favor of this or that party. While the scope or sphere of state power is limited to the 'public sphere', the sphere of religion extends to the 'private' sphere." He also said: "The primary orbit for religion is not the state apparatus, but personal and individual beliefs. The duty of the state, however, is to provide services to the people before everything else, to create job opportunities, and to provide good health and education not to control the hearts and minds of the people".³

This progressive outlook has led to Ennahda's success in easing the escalating political tensions and conflicts in Tunisia. Its struggle has had a significant impact in galvanizing awareness of the values of freedom and nahdah in the realization of democratic ideals in Tunisia and the Islamic world. Its political foundations and policies are designed to defend the desire for freedom (*al-hurriyyah*) and justice (*al-'adl*) and *huquq al-insan*, and to champion plural and collective Islamic values and the principle of shura in the power structure. Ghannouchi considers that a state is more Muslim, more Islamic, the more it has justice in it.⁴

According to John L. Esposito in his introduction to the text of Nouredine Jebnoun's interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, Ghannouchi is crucial to understanding the growth and development of Ennahda as an Islamic movement and to its return and triumph in elections and its role in rebuilding a new Tunisia.⁵ Ghannouchi's importance extends beyond Tunisia where he is widely regarded as a major intellectual-activist, creative reformer who has

³ Rachid Ghannouchi, "Al-'Ilmaniyyah Wa 'Ilaqah Al-Din Bi Al-Dawlah Min Manzur Harakah Al-Nahdah" (Tunisia: Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), 2012).

⁴ Rachid Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat Al-'Ammah Fi Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah* (Beirut: Arab Unity Studies Center, 1993).

⁵ Nouredine Jebnoun, "Tunisia at the Crossroads: An Interview with Sheikh Rachid Al-Ghannouchi: Foreword by John L. Esposito," 2014.

contributed to the issues of Islamic reform and improvement regarding Islam's relationship with secularism, democracy, civil society and women's rights.

The article basically focuses on aspects of Ghannouchi's intellectual understanding and response to critical contemporary issues⁶, his political theories on the question of Islam and democracy and their parallels, the theory of power sharing, and post-Arab Spring reforms as well as his principle of simplicity that celebrates modern Western philosophies and their relationship with the Islamic tradition of thought in the context of *siyasa shar'iyah* and the political agenda it brings. He also reviews other views and analyses that criticize his philosophy and political ideas as well as the strength of his influence and the democratic aspirations he inspired.

Methods

The study is qualitative in nature of documentary review and content analysis. It applies a historical, descriptive and analytical approach in analyzing the data and materials obtained from primary (derived from Ghannouchi's original works and writings) and secondary (other authors' analysis of his thought) sources. These are gathered from archival sources, including manuscripts, theses, books, articles, magazines and journals. The collected information is then analyzed descriptively and inferentially based on Hans George Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to apply scientific and accurate conclusions and formulations.

Result

Rachid Ghannouchi is an Islamic thinker, intellectual and politician known as a democrat and activist of the Islamic political movement that has changed the landscape of Middle Eastern countries from authoritarian-totalitarian systems to consolidated democracy.⁷ He was imprisoned twice under the autocratic regime of Habib Bourgiba, and self-exiled in London for 22 years. Recognized as among the 100 most influential individuals in the world (Times magazine, 2012), recipient of the 2012 Chatham House prestigious award from Prince Andrew, Duke of York along with Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki, for the “successful compromises each achieved during Tunisia's democratic transition”, and listed as one of the defining figures and ideologues of the contemporary Islamic world in *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, and among the 100 most prominent Islamic leaders of the 20th century, Ghannouchi is seen as a global hope for realizing the aspirations of Islamic democrats around the world.

Born on June 22, 1941 in Southeast Tunisia, Ghannouchi attended his secondary education at the Zaytouna madrasa. His traditional studies focused on “issues that no longer concern us which have been imposed upon us by

⁶ Mohammad Dawood Sofi, *Rashid Al-Ghannouchi: A Key Muslim Thinker of the 21st Century* (Singapore: Palgrave Pivot, 2018).

⁷ Gili Argenti, “Rached Ghannouchi, Pemikir Islam Politik Tunisia,” *Republika*, 2014, <https://retizen.republika.co.id/posts/319150/rached-ghannouchi-pemikir-islam-politik-tunisia>.

colonialism and which have become the status quo.”⁸ After completing his studies he temporarily studied at the Faculty of Theology, Zaytuna University (known as the world's first Islamic university founded in 737 Masihi). However, torn between traditionalism and the new Western-oriented society in which he lived, he left Zaytouna, studied first briefly in Kaherah and later in Damascus, where he obtained his first diploma⁹ and subsequently continued his post-graduate studies at the Sorbonne University, Paris.

His time at the University of Damascus (1964-1968) marked a major turning point in his life. The impact of the Arab defeat (the combined armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan against the Israeli military) in the Six-Day War in 1967 shamed Arab nationalism. Like many young Arabs, al-Ghannouchi turned to Islam, but to a more progressive vision of Islam “a living Islam”¹⁰ in contrast to Zaytouna and other conservative Islamic universities that he regarded as “museums”. In 1970, Ghannouchi returned to his homeland of Tunisia and taught philosophy in high school and began preaching in mosques, and formed his small Islamic grassroots movement which later became a major force in the Islamic renaissance in the secularized Tunisian sphere.

Since mid-2021, with an escalating political and institutional crisis, and the threat of a secularist faction, Tunisia entered a deteriorating phase with a series of protests that led to the suspension of parliament and the assumption of emergency powers by President Kais Saied on July 25, 2021. He issued a decree on September 22, 2021 giving him full powers to overhaul the government and dissolve the parliament. This was followed by the arrest and detention of Ghannouchi on April 17, 2023, as the former Speaker of the Tunisian House of Representatives and leader of the Ennahda party, who accused Kais of abusing democratic practices and mobilized opposition and protests against the usurpation of power. The party leaders were charged with planning acts of violence and their main accounts and assets were frozen by the Tunisian Court. Ghannouchi faced charges of bribery, conversion of illegal money, and terrorism and was sentenced to a year's imprisonment on May 15, 2023 on charges of conspiring against state security and wanting to change the pattern of government. In a different indictment, he was sentenced to three years in prison on February 1, 2024 and his party was fined \$1,170,000 on charges of lobbying and receiving foreign funds. Since his own seizure of power in July 2021, authoritarianism has intensified, the silencing of critics has intensified, other presidential candidates have been detained, and democratic institutions have been

⁸ Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁹ Jebnoun, “Tunisia at the Crossroads: An Interview with Sheikh Rachid Al-Ghannouchi: Foreword by John L. Esposito.”

¹⁰ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

abolished. Saied's authoritarian moves are seen as a shallow and decrepit attempt to continue the corrupt culture in his increasingly threatened political strategy.

In his detailed biography of Ghannouchi's political career entitled *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, Azzam Tamimi examines the phenomenon of Islamic politics in the Arab world, focusing on Ghannouchi's life history as representing a modern Islamic political path. He looks at the impact of his thinking in the public sphere and his early inclinations towards socialist, Islamist, pan-Arab, salafist and Marxist ideas from the influences of Nasserism, Baathism, Nasir al-din al-Albani and Ikhwan al-Muslimin that inspired and impressed him. He also highlighted his global views on secular, authoritarian, populist and Islamic issues that showed the strength of his political path and views that were modest, perceptive and moderate in finding common ground with the process of change. His thinking evolved with a post-colonial political narrative with a revolutionary dimension in the context of his activism in *Harakah al-Ittihad al-Islami* or MTTI (Islamic Tendency Movement) which was founded in the 1970s, and later became *Harakah En-Nahdah* which showed a lot of introspection and forward trajectory in his political actions. He was also impressed by the experiences of Tunisian liberation fighters, thinkers and intellectuals such as Khayr al-din al-Tunisi, al-Tahtawi, al-Tha'labi, al-Fasi, Malek Bennabi, Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn 'Ashur (1879-1973) and Muhammad Abduh. However, the debate is limited to general biographies without looking at its development after the Jasmin revolution which saw the establishment of a legitimate Islamic political entity and the realization of democratic Islamic aspirations established in Tunisia.

The question of the validity and legitimacy of Islamist politics in the post-Islamist era is an important theme in Islamic political thought viewed from the framework of *siyasah shar'iyah*, *fiqh waqi'* and the validity of *maqasid*. *Ennahda*, which was systematically abolished for almost twenty-three years by Ben Ali, has made a meaningful decision to replace the autocratic regime with its transition from 'Political Islam' to 'Muslim Democrat' as a democratic regime. According to Maszlee Malik, *al-Nahdah* rejects the radical and extremist approach associated with Political Islam and instead promotes a civil state based on *maqasid* principles inspired by Ghannouchi's democratic formulation with a philosophical twist that articulates universal and ideal democratic sides.¹¹ It embraces the notions of freedom, human rights, justice and plurality and basic concepts such as *shura*, *ijtihad*, *maslahah* as well as the modern values it defends that characterize the dynamic and responsive ethos and experience of Islam in modern history.

Discussion

Democratic Transition

Tunisia's democratic transition was achieved after the fall of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime on January 14, 2011. Sparked from the most dramatic

¹¹ Maszlee Malik, *Tunisia, Al-Nahda Dan Gerakan Islam, Dalam Rasbid Al Ghannoushi Intelektual-Reformis Politikal Islam* (Selangor: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia & Ilham Books, 2016).

social and political upheavals with the 2010-2011 mass protests and anger due to pressure and rising food and fuel prices, problems of corruption, unemployment, and curbed freedoms, the Tunisian Revolution or Jasmine Revolution has witnessed the rise of a new dawn for a multi-party system, democratic government and the first free elections in the republic after 23 years of autocratic rule: "Today, we can assure you that it will not turn into a fundamentalist "religious" or "secular" winter but into a democratic spring where all have a place".¹²

Reaching back to its origins as an "Islamic party", Al-Nahdah has announced a historic shift from its adherence to political Islam to the Muslim democrats announced in the proposal discussed in the party's referendum, which shows its belief in democracy accepted in the perspective of the movement and its voting participation in elections: "We are leaving political Islam and entering democratic Islam. We are Muslim democrats who no longer claim to represent political Islam." We are leaving political Islam and entering democratic Islam. We are democrats who no longer claim to represent political Islam.¹³

Despite winning with a large mandate, En-Nahda chose to cooperate with secular social democratic parties, and formed a political alliance (the "Troika") with the al-Muktamar or *Congres pour la Republique* (CPR) party led by Moncef Marzouq (who was later elected as Tunisia's first post-revolution president on December 12, 2011) and the al-Takattol or *democratique pour le travail et les libertes* (FTDL) party led by Mustapha Ben Jaafar. En-Nahda's willingness to share power and choose the path of allies rather than a single monopoly, is to avoid the possibility of power manipulation and power arrogance through a process of checks and balances and reach collective decisions: "By sharing power with the opposition, we protect ourselves from the temptation of monopolizing power and arrogance of power. At the same time, power-sharing protects us from the threat of being subjected in the future to exclusion, marginalization, and torture".¹⁴

According to Ghannouchi, democracy is not a philosophy or ideology, but a set of tools and mechanisms to safeguard the monarchy.¹⁵ The concept of democracy formulated by Bennabi who explains Islamic polity as a psycho-sociological approach and an educational measure for the whole people.¹⁶ Democracy, as Bennabi understands it, is not simply a political process but a sentiment of society towards collective issues that begins with cultivating the democratic spirit in individuals along with the collective spirit and ethics before

¹² Ghannouchi, "Al-'Ilmaniyyah Wa 'Ilaqah Al-Din Bi Al-Dawlah Min Manzur Harakah Al-Nahdah."

¹³ Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia."

¹⁴ Jebnoun, "Tunisia at the Crossroads: An Interview with Sheikh Rachid Al-Ghannouchi: Foreword by John L. Esposito."

¹⁵ Ghannouchi, *Al-Hurriyat Al-'Ammah Fi Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyah*.

¹⁶ Ghannouchi.

implementing it as a political process.¹⁷ With this, authority can be transferred to the people, and the constitution of a nation becomes sovereign.

Political paradigm

In his prolific writings on political ideas and thought, Ghannouchi emphasizes the aspirations of freedom and the widespread ideal of maqasid. He emphasizes the idea of freedom, the concept of a civil state with liberal foundations and political pluralism, and the principles of maslahah and maqasid sharia which are rooted in an ideal understanding of the practical and realistic demands of politics (*fiqh al-waqi'*): “We want a party that talks about everyday problems, and not one that talks about the Last Judgment and Paradise. We want religious activity to be completely independent of political activity”. We want a party that talks about everyday problems, and not one that talks about the Last Judgment and Paradise. We want religious activity to be completely independent of political activity.¹⁸

Without including sharia provisions in the basic constitution, En-Nahda is characterized as a “political, democratic and civic party”, one that inspires openness and freedom and defends liberal aspirations and democratic principles in a civic society, “The state should not have anything to do with imposing or telling people what to wear, what to eat and drink, what they believe in, what they should believe in”.

The political consensus no longer pivots on Islamism, as defined by Bobby S. Sayyid in his book “A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism” about his political project as: “Islamism is a project that attempts to transform Islam from a central point in the discourse of Muslim societies to a defining parent.¹⁹ In particular, the Islamist project is the attempt to make Islam the decisive point of departure in the political order.”

This political Islam project has taken a new direction after what is known as the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening. The discussion now is not about establishing an Islamic state or implementing hudud laws. The aspiration now is to restore devout Muslims in a democratic state. Ghannouchi, clearly rejects an Islamic state in favor of parliamentary democracy. His party en-Nahda is committed to social justice, multi-party democracy and religious pluralism. Ghannouchi emphasizes that there is no fundamental misalignment between Islam and secularism. He maintains a degree of separation between political and religious affairs in what is known as *as-siyasi* (political or worldly) and *ad-deeni* (religious or sacred).²⁰ According to him: “secularism is not an atheist philosophy

¹⁷ Malik Bennabi, *Al-Qadaya Al-Kubra* (Damsyik: Dar al-Fikr, 1991).

¹⁸ Ghannouchi, “From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia.”

¹⁹ Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 2003).

²⁰ Ghannouchi, “Al-‘Ilmaniyyah Wa ‘Ilaqah Al-Din Bi Al-Dawlah Min Manzur Harakah Al-Nahdah.”

but simply a set of procedures designed to preserve freedom of religion and thought.”

A Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois, Asef Bayat expresses this transition as post-Islamism. There is a clear shift from the old slogan *al-Islam huwa al-hal* - Islam is the solution to all problems - to a more practical approach and solution.²¹ As Ghannouchi points out in interpreting the words of the Prophet (pbuh): “You are the best of those who know what is beneficial in your worldly affairs,” indicating it is not the duty of religion to teach us agricultural, industrial or even governmental matters. Reason is capable of teaching these truths through accumulated experience. The role of religion, however, is to unravel the great ambiguity to us, concerning our existence, origin, destiny and purpose for which we were created. It is to provide us with a system of values and principles that can determine the direction of our thoughts and actions and the regulation of the state we aspire to.²²

Bayat also emphasizes that post-Islamism is not just a condition but also a project, a conscious attempt to frame concepts and strategies in terms of policies and methods to penetrate Islamism in the social, political and intellectual fields. Post-Islamism represents an attempt to combine religion with rights, beliefs and freedoms, Islam and civil liberties and focuses on rights versus responsibilities, plurality versus a single authority, historicity versus a strict and absolute interpretation of the book, and the future versus the past.²³

Islam in one way or another has always influenced the state under Muslim rule throughout history. Islam does not recognize the separation between state and religion in the sense of removing religion completely from public life. However, a clear distinction must be made between what falls under the field of *al-deeni* or religion and what falls under *al-siyasi* or politics. Great Islamic fuqaha like al-Shatibi and Ibn Ashur have agreed that the supreme goal of all revelatory messages is to establish justice and achieve *maslahah* by realizing the interests of the *ummah*. The search for justice and general *maslahah* is pursued only through the capabilities of reason. And religion only provides values and guidelines in this quest.

Civil State

Ghannouchi championed the ideal of freedom and a civil state (*Daulah Madaniyyah*) based on consensus and *ijtihad*. Faced with the challenges of *realpolitik*, he emphasized the principle of deliberation in government. Political aspirations inspired by the tradition of Islamic thought and its epistemological framework that upholds the principles of justice (*al-'adl*), equality (*musawah*),

²¹ Asef Bayat, *The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society* (Fall, 1996).

²² Ghannouchi, “*Al-'Ilmaniyyah Wa 'Ilaqah Al-Din Bi Al-Dawlah Min Manzur Harakah Al-Nahdah*.”

²³ Asef Bayat, *Islam and Democracy: What Is the Real Question?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

negotiation (musyawarah), guarantees freedom (al-hurriyyah), and dignifies the rights and power of the people (Al-sha'b masdar al-sultah - the people are the source of sovereignty).

This moral and ideological vision of thought and its contribution to universal modern and democratic political movements and aspirations is explored by Azzam Tamimi in his book *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism* (Rachid Ghannouchi: Muslim Democrat) which lays out the foundation and nature of Ghannouchi's struggle and his political philosophy.

“The significance of Ghannouchi also emanates from the facts that, unlike other Islamic thinkers who espouse the democratic cause, he is both a thinker and a leader of an Islamic movement. He is a credible authority within Islamic circles at the global level. His thoughts are in no way restricted to an intellectual debate at a time when the Islamic movement has emerged as a major political power in the Muslim world, and when power-sharing or power taking experiments are in process. Ghannouchi is unprecedented within Islamic intellectual circles in his theory that civil society is an Islamic concept and that religion consolidates civil society whereas secularism, especially the model imported to the Muslim world under the guise of modernization, weakens it.²⁴

Ghannouchi's importance is also borne out of the fact that, unlike other Islamic thinkers who support the democratic struggle, he is also a thinker and leader of the Islamic movement. He is an authoritative authority in Islamic circles at a global level. His thinking was by no means confined to intellectual debates at a time when Islamic movements had emerged as a major political force in the Islamic world, and when power-sharing or power-taking experiences were in process. Ghannouchi is peerless in Islamic intellectual circles in his theory that civil society is an Islamic concept and that religion strengthens civil society while secularism, especially the model imported into the Islamic world under the guise of modernization, weakens it.

The Principle of Freedom

Ghannouchi's principles and ideals of freedom are rooted in significant political principles and manhaj that are elaborated in depth in his works such as *Al-dini wal-siyasi fil-Islam* (The religious and the political in Islam); *Al-'ilmaniyyah wa al-'ilaqah al-din bi ad-daulah min manzur harakah al-nahdah* (Secularism and the relationship between religion and politics from the perspective of the al-Nahdah party); *visions for a new Tunisia: how Islam and democracy can support each other* (visions for a new Tunisia: how Islam and democracy can support each other) and others.

In order to demand freedom and establish a modern structure in the political constitution, Ghannouchi proposed the neutrality of the state, that is, the

²⁴ Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*.

state is the guarantor of all freedoms whether religious, political or otherwise. And the state should not intervene in favor of one party or another: “This is good for politicians because they would no longer be accused of manipulating religion for political means and good for religion because it would not be held hostage to politics”.²⁵

This liberal ideal that emphasizes the separation of religion and politics was emphasized in the most recent Ennahda congress in its slogan “Abandonment of political Islam and separation between politics and practice of preaching”. This is for achieving social harmony and seeking a balance that will guarantee freedom and public rights, where “to achieve this balance, we must turn to the issue of distinguishing between religion and politics and adjusting the parameters of what remains in religion (al-thawabit) and what changes”.²⁶

He also explained the relationship between Islam and secularism, which is harmonious and reciprocal, where there is no conflict between the two, “We have shown that secularism is not an atheist philosophy but simply a set of procedures designed to protect freedom of religion and thought.”²⁷ According to him, there is no meaning of forcing people to become Muslims, Muslims do not need hypocrites who flaunt faith and hide kufr; and someone who recites the two kalimah shahadah, must do so based on freedom of choice supported by awareness and conviction.

Tunisia's Islamic Vision

The revolution that erupted in 2010-2011 in Tunisia has created a new strength and confidence for the Tunisian people, which has restored their freedom and dignity, and has triggered important changes in the Tunisian political landscape, which gave birth to a strong spirit of unity and solidarity, “In achieving it, Tunisians must come together and thus, the national unity should be our main priority in maintaining the revolution.” (in achieving it, Tunisians must come together and thus, national unity should be our main priority in maintaining the revolution).

However, this political revolution demanding change is only a small part of the larger revolutionary struggle - revolution and internal change as the real revolution, as Ghannouchi emphasized, “political revolution is only part of the process; however, the real revolution that must take place is the revolution within every people's life and their attitude. The change of the country's system is not enough without the change in people's attitude and their way of thinking. The real revolution must uphold the people's change within to ensure human dignity (al-karamah al-insaniyah) as the cardinal principle of the society”.²⁸ Political

²⁵ Ghannouchi, “From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia.”

²⁶ Ghannouchi, “Al-‘Ilmaniyyah Wa ‘Ilaqah Al-Din Bi Al-Dawlah Min Manzur Harakah Al-Nahdah.”

²⁷ Ghannouchi.

²⁸ Maszlee Malik, “An Interview with Dr. Rashid Ghannouchi,” *Kulliyah Research Bulletin* 5, no. 2 (2014): 1–3.

revolution is only part of the process; however the real revolution that must take place is the revolution within every people's life and their attitude. A change in the state system is insufficient without a change in people's attitudes and their way of thinking. A real revolution must support the internal change of people to ensure the nobility of the human being (*al-karamah al-insaniyah*) as the cornerstone principle in society.

The political transformation and creative renewal introduced by the Hizb Harakat En-Nahda party (Renaissance Party), and its political manifesto that was galvanized from the idealism and ideals of freedom have brought stability in the region, thanks to the strength and political maturity of Ghannouchi, who is committed to fighting for inclusive and plural values, and bringing a moral paradigm and prospects of values, as expressed by Anas Altikriti, a British Islamic intellectual "His vision for the model of an Islamic nation is built heavily on the idea of values".

Economic Recovery

A significant challenge after achieving the transition of power is restoring the confidence of the people and a strategy for rebuilding and restoring the distressed economy. According to reports by the Arab Institute for Human Rights and the Arab NGO Network for Development, the real stimulus and impetus for the Tunisian Revolution stemmed essentially from two main factors: economic hardship and political oppression in the region. It turned out that the uprising against Ben Ali in Tunisia was not religious or secular. Rather, the demands are for an end to graft, cronyism and political oppression and, ultimately, for improved economic conditions.

The protesters had placed high hopes for changing the fortunes of those squeezed by the inequality and depravity of the oppressive system. This vision is complicated by political uncertainty and economic decay where the desire to establish a socio-economic system based on 'dignity, freedom and equality is the overriding demand of protesters across the region and what led them to this profound change.

Ennahda has been given the opportunity to remedy these problems, especially the persistent unemployment that denies so many young Tunisians hope and dignity. Instead, Ennahda calls for a comprehensive national economic dialog with an all-inclusive approach to change based on a vision of "compassionate capitalism" - an approach that balances corporate freedom with ideals of social justice and equal opportunity.²⁹ Ennahda's neoliberal police planning presents a more equal and just economic agenda that utilizes the largest number of people and not just a small handful, in reducing the social gap and economic chasm between rich and poor.

The whole episode of the Arab Spring has not only been understood as an Islamic awakening or aspiration to become more Islamist, but instead due to

²⁹ Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia."

economic grievances. In this regard, Ennahda has successfully pushed for increased government aid to small businessmen and the farming class, in addition to improving Tunisia's trade relations and its export levels to neighboring countries.³⁰ The government with its achievements and long-term horizons has embarked on a path forward to ensure the value of competence, stability and transparency in the economic structure, and a broad socio-culture, eliminating corruption and ideas contrary to Islam in addition to opening up new trade opportunities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and advancing the negotiation of a free trade agreement with the European Union.

The worsening economic and social difficulties are being addressed by helping to improve the living standards of the population and ensuring economic growth and resources. In overcoming dependence on the state, Ennahda calls for a transition by creating a culture of entrepreneurship among young people. Minister of Vocational Training and Employment and Ennahda member Zied Ladhari has introduced a very ambitious and necessary reform, namely a new program launched to train over 60,000 unemployed Tunisians, renovate vocational training centers and establish local authorities as career guides.

This new program is expected to change the national political landscape in meeting new needs in the sectors of education, commerce, entrepreneurship, women and public-private relations through a new approach that includes a focus on economic empowerment and combating corruption, improving living standards and elevating the socio-economic dignity of the people.

Conclusion

Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi's political paradigm and the democratic struggle he waged on behalf of the Ennahdha Party and its constitutional basis for Islamic politics and reform aspirations have contributed to the development of a progressive and significant political movement in the Islamic world. In formulating this endeavor he took into account the local needs and ingrained secularism of Tunisian society (the mother of secularism in the Arab world), where the traditions and struggles he inspired had led to the development of a moderate understanding of Islam, which counterbalanced his broad and mature political views. Her leadership has, without exception, been criticized for its patriarchal tendencies without denying her contributions and image as a democratic pioneer in advocating the ideals of freedom and bringing a modern and liberal, adaptive and democratic political ideology, which adheres to liberal democracy and the principle of non-interference of the state in personal affairs such as the prohibition of the use of alcohol or the imposition of hijab based on the substantive and universal values of sharia, cultural identity and the understanding of universal humanity.

³⁰ Ghannouchi.

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