Islam and Democracy in Soroush Dabbagh's Vision

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At the end of the last century, many new subjects appeared that create deep arguments and debates between scholars. In one side, Islam as a popular religion in the world and eastern religions, in the other side Democracy as modernity conscience and western system are two subjects seem to be causing to gather the oppose ideas surround themselves. As well as, Islam and Democracy could be one of the unique subjects that could divide the Islamic scholars into four totally different visions. Someone of these scholars quite reject relationship among Islam and Democracy, while others like Abdolkarim Soroush believes that democracy is the crucial system to retain Islam; '[…] democracy is the only form of government that can both protect human rights and preserve a proper role for religion in politics'(Vakili 1996, p. 1). It means there is not an opposition between Islam and democracy. Someone like Dabbagh in order to obtain the real image of this relationship tries to divide Islam into four parts then explains which part of Islam could be more compatible with democracy and which part refuses democracy completely. This essay will discuss Dabbagh's vision about the relationship between Islam and democracy. First, it will explain the concepts of democracy and Islam briefly. Second, it will show the main perspective of democracy between the Islamic scholars. After that, four visions of Islam Dabbagh's vision for Islam will be discussed which includes; Traditional Islam, Traditionalists Islam, Fundamental Islam, and Reformist Islam, then explaining the main two types of democracy (Minimum democracy and Maximum democracy). Finally, the relation between Islam and democracy will be discussed.

Soroush Dabbagh, born in1974 in Iran, is one of the well-known Iranian scholars in moral philosophy, religious intellectualism, and language philosophy. In 1998, he has studied Pharmacy Doctorate, at Tehran Medical Sciences University in Iran. In 2002, he continued studies Morale philosophy and in 2006 he went to the UK to study Ph.D. in Philosophy at Warwick University, he conducted a dissertation under the title of "Moral Reasons: Particularism, Patterns, and Practice". In September 2011, he travelled to Canada (Toronto) 'to pursue postdoctoral work with University of Toronto with the support of UTM Professors Shafique Virani and Mohamad Tavakoli' (Noel 2012, p.1). In addition, from February 2011 to June 2011 Dabbagh had participated in International Scholar, Iranian Studies Program at New York University, as well as, from 2006 to 2011 he had worked as managing Director in the Institute of Epistemological Research Assistant Professor, Iranian Institute of Philosophy. His mother language is Persian and he speaks English and Arabic fluently. Dabbagh has published 2 books and 14 articles in English and 13 books and 55 articles in Persian language. He has participated in 55 conferences in different countries and he has been invited more than 45 times to present lectures and seminars from different institutions and universities such as Harvard University, New York

University, Tokyo, and Noor Cultural Centre. Now, Dabbagh is lecturing at University of Toronto Missi ssauga in the department of Historical Studies.

Democracy as a form of government system refers to people's participation in choosing the government through people for people. This is referred as 'self-demonstration' (Osman, 2001, p. 4) or as Ibrahim Lincoln said 'the rule of the people, by the people, for the people' (Kurzman 1998, p. 96). Clearly, choosing a government through elections without any forces seems to be the best way to create an equal situation for them and it is a democracy process. Democracy could be defined as the best way to select leaders by election. The United States have defined democracy as 'representative pluralistic government by national election' (Lobel 1987, P. 824). All scholars believe that election is a fundamental element in any process of democracy. Finally, we can define democracy as 'public participation in decisions affecting public life' (Kurzman 1998, p. 96). Thus, participation in the elections to select leaders directly or indirectly means democracy. A different form of democracy seems to be the main factor for the difficulty of the selecting specific meaning of democracy.

There are several forms of democracy, Sadek J. Sulaiman (1998) has mentioned two types of democracy which include; direct democracy and indirect democracy. These two types are independent of the people's participation in the political process. The best example for direct participation is protested government activity. Indirect participation could be referred to referendum process to accept or reject something (Kurzman 1998). Participatory democracy and deliberative democratic are two other types of democracy. However, someone believes that there are no differences between Participatory democracy and deliberative democratic. Carole Pateman (2012, p.2) argues that 'deliberation, discussion, and debate are central to any form of democracy, including participatory democracy, but if deliberation is necessary for democracy it is not sufficient'. In deliberative democratic, the central argument includes morale and explaining the reasons for political arguments, as well as, deliberating other reasons. According to Pateman (2012, p.2), 'individuals should always be prepared to defend their moral and political arguments and claims with reasons, and be prepared to deliberate with others about the reasons they provide'.

Consociational democracy seems to be the current form of democracy because it has been developed on three decades ago (Luther & Deschouwer 1999). Arend Lijphart already has used the term of "consociational democracy", this form of democracy refers to 'government based on the participation in the executive of all major political parties, and the accompanying preference for decision making by broadly based compromises' (Lehmbruch 1993, p. 44). It is clear that the central point of this theory is all political parties' participation in establishing the government. According to Luther and Deschouwer (1999, p. 2), 'consociational theory seeks to explain the existence of political stability in certain countries with deeply fragmented political cultures'. It means in some countries variety of political ideas exist, so through the consociational democracy could create a stability government, because 'theory of consociational democracy allows one to deduce the crucial role which political parties might be expected to perform in respect of both the political sociology and the overarching elite

behaviour of consociational democracy' (Luther & Deschouwer 1999, p.5). Thus, consociational democracy could be one of the best forms of democracy to establish the strongest government in those countries which include different kinds of ethnicities and nationalities while many of them have a specific political party. However, Dabbagh believes that we can divide democracy at least into two types which include; minimum democracy and maximum democracy.

Generally, there are at least three crucial elements to distinguish any democracy system. First, participating in the elections and right to choose leaders without any force. Second, criticizing the leaders and the government system, it means people feel free and has the freedom to criticize and write their opposed ideas about the past and present political leaders. Third, dismissing peacefully, it means, the leaders after passing their period of authorities dismiss peacefully as the rule limited for them. As a result, through these three characteristics, we can reveal which system is democracy and which system is non-democracy.

Dabbagh (2016) believes that if these three elements are performed in a government or society together totally, we can say that this government or society has the minimum democracy. This means, if a parliament has been established through the election, people have their rights to choose and criticize the system and politicians, as well as, the leaders dismiss peacefully and citizens could participate in this process, all these together tell us that this country or system is a minimum democracy (19-20). Whatever the maximum democracy refers to perform the three essential minimum elements with the addition of another curtail element which is the protection of the minority. As Dabbagh has illustrated in his lectures at Waliasr Institution in Canada (2016) that the most important point to distinguish maximum democracy includes minority rights in the society. The purpose and meaning of the minority in any society is; religious minority, ethnicity minority, gender minority, and nation minority. For instance, in Iran Kurds are ethnic minority, as well as, Sunni is a religious minority. So, the curial point in maximum democracy is minority right and protecting their rights by the government. Obviously, any government could prepare the minorities right in their society such as participating in the political process, doing their religious celebrities, and freedom to share their ideas. Thus, these elements are higher likely to play the most important role to show which system is democracy and which is non-democracy.

As already has been explained that there are several viewpoints about democracy, but the four specific elements of democracy could be the important keys to show how we can argue and compare between democracy and other systems. For instance, the best way to compare among totalitarian system and democracy system is to cover the essential different characteristics between them. Islam as one of the famous religion around the world, and is a system which has specific understanding for government and system structures, for example, economic, political, rules, and other society sectors between Islam and other systems and ideas in somewhere totally different and each one has a special idea about it. Actually, the interesting thing in Islam perspective for other ideas is; several different visions of Islam which have been explained by Islamic scholars.

Also, the opinions about the relationship between Islam and democracy are different. Some scholars believe that Islam is one part and there is only one form of Islam, Islam and democracy are totally different and we cannot gather this two oppose systems in one frame because they believe that Islam includes everything and it could solve all problems.

Someone of the Islamic fundamentalists believe that comparing Islam with democracy is a big mistake and sin, because Islam is a religion and already has specific principles which organize people's lives, as well as, democracy is a form of system which is from western and Christian's civilization. So it is difficult for Islamic society to follow the western's system. Sayyid Qutb states that 'after the decay of democracy, to the extent of bankruptcy, the west has nothing to give to humanity' (Goddard 2002, p.3). It is clear that he believes that western cannot solve their problems so how can they send a system and solve our problems. Some scholars like Abul-Ala Mwdudi argues that Islam and democracy are incompatible together, 'The Islam in which you believe … is utterly different from this dreadful system … There can be no reconciliation between Islam and democracy … because they contradict one another' (Goddard 2002, p.5-6). Obviously, he states that it is impossible to gather Islam and democracy in one frame. As a result of these different perspectives, it is clear that Islamic scholars have different understandings of Islam and it puts influence on their understandings of democracy that is why Dabbagh tries to look at the relation between Islam and democracy; he also divides Islamic scholars understanding for Islam into four visions.

'Divide conquers' which Dabbagh (2011, 2016) used to explain his idea about relation among Islam and democracy. Dabbagh in order to explain his understanding of Islam and then reveals the important points between these two systems divided understanding of Islam into four forms. After explaining each of these visions of Islam, he tries to show the relationship between Islam and democracy, because he believes in order to obtain the correct understanding of this relationship we have to divide Islam into four forms. As he argues that we cannot have real Islam in one form. No one can say, I have the real Islam. He also believes that Islam and democracy are two social constraint concepts.

Four interpretations of Islam include; Traditional reading of Islam, Traditionalist reading of Islam, Fundamental reading of Islam, and Reformist reading of Islam. In fact, Dabbagh in his presentation on December of 2011 at the University of Gothenburg at Global Studies Department just mentioned three forms of Islam. He did not mention about Traditional reading of Islam, but in the last lecture about Islam and democracy which he presented in the Persian language in 2016, he divided interpretation of Islam into four parts as mentioned above. He believes that it is essential to distinguish the different understandings of Islam so that the real image of Islam and its relations with democracy are illustrated.

According to Dabbagh (2011, 2016) when we talk about the relationship between Islam and democracy, we have to remember which account of Islam and which account of democracy we are talking about. It means

through talking about the relation between each one of these visions of Islam we can show the best image of Islam and its relation to democracy.

The first vision of Islam which Dabbagh illustrates is Traditional Islam. Dabbagh has explained that this form of Islam seems to be a popular style that most Muslims follow it (2016). This type of Muslims do not have philosophical thinking and understanding of Islam. Traditional Islam refers to those types of Muslim who obtain Islam because of their families and they got Islam through parents narrating. They do not have any specific reading and understanding about Islam. Most of clergymen and mullahs (who are a Muslim learned in Islamic theology and sacred law) have a great contact with this type of Muslims and they try to solve their daily problems. In the term of relationship with democracy, actually, they do not have a problem with minimum democracy, because Traditional Islam accepts the three main elements of minimum democracy. At least, they are happy with the election process, criticizing leaders, and dismissing peacefully. On the other hand, they do not accept maximum democracy, because they do not refer anything under the title of minority rights. As a result, it is clear that Traditional Islam is happy with democracy process, but without any separation of society under the name of minority rights.

The second vision of Islam is Traditionalist reading of Islam. According to Dabbagh (2011), there are two main points that distinguish this form from others. First, the Traditionalists more focus on the Islamic heritages. Second, they do not accept modern ideas, while they are happy with modernization. It means that the Traditionalist interpretation of Islam are happy with western technology and using it in their daily lives, some of Traditionalist scholars are living in the western cities as well, whereas they do not like western ideas and their theoretical thinking. As Dabbagh has mentioned in this forms of understanding for Islam we can formulate their ideas through separate theoretical and practical aspects. Naturally, Traditionalists more focus on the practical aspects than theoretical aspect, that is why they usually use the modern products and modernization, but reject the modern idea theoretically, because of this; they believe that we have to be careful in contact with western heritages and western ideas. So, they try to compare what has happened and what will happen, and then criticize technology age. The Traditionalists idea about the relationship between Islam and democracy is weak. They do not strongly criticize human rights as one of the products of western ideas. However, they do not talk about democracy explicitly; they also do not criticize democracy and democracy process. Thus, it is clear this form of Islam has no problem with the minimum democracy.

The third interpretation of Islam could be Fundamental reading of Islam. According to Dabbagh (2011), there are several elements which explain this form of Islam. The main element is literality reading of Islam. It means they just focus on what is in the holy text (Qur'an). This form of understanding of Islam does not care about the context dependent or the locality of the text, and they do not believe in plurality and diversity of the text. They believe that the Sharea has to be applied step by step. Indeed, this interpretation could be divided into different types such as Salalfy, and Jihady. Additionally, the last fundamental type of Islam has political

activities, and they work to turn Khalifa back. The current example of this type which could be mentioned is ISIS; they have a specific leader who is called Khalifa. As Dabbagh states that the fundamental reading of Islam totally does not believe the process of democracy, and they think Islam and democracy could not be collected together, and there are not any similarities between Islam and democracy. Conversely, they believe that Islam and democracy are totally opposed because Islam focuses on Shura and choosing Khalifa, while democracy allows people participate in the process of choosing leaders. So Islam is incompatible with democracy. Thus, fundamental interpretation of Islam rejects any relationship among Islam and democracy.

The last one of interpretation of Islam which can be talked about is Reformism Islam. According to Dabbagh (2011, 2016), the Islamic reformists believe that region is a phenomenon and social constraint concept, so they try to work in this field locally and universally as well, they are not literality, in contrast, they more think and emphasize deeply. It means this form of Islam is more focus on rational rather than other understanding of Islam that is why sometimes they are called new Maatazelah. As Dabbagh (2016) states that the crucial point which distinguishes this interpretation of Islam with others is 'Justice is a non-religion concept in the first place, it means, justices is not a religious term'. Clearly, they have not put religion in the first step, because they consider more about justice and ethic. The central point of this type of Islam is humanity, 'they are focusing on human rights' (2011). However they are not happy with the western philosophical secularism and the position of metaphysic and epistemology are not interest for them, but they accept the western Ideas and modernization. That is why they distinguish between religion and politics. Eventually, to understand the relationship between religion and government system he believes that 'we have to separate political secularism from philosophical secularism' (2011). Accordingly, the government has to separate from religion. In the term of democracy and Islam, the reformists accept democracy, because as mentioned above they emphasize more on ethical thinking and understanding for the texts, and they try to have an ethical understanding and interpretation of the holy Quran. As Dabbagh (2011) mentioned 'we have to [focus on] the messages of the Ahkam rather than just the forms, [and finding] what is the crucial messages'. It is clear that they totally reject any literality understanding of Islam. Thus, Dabbagh illustrates that the reformists accept democracy and they believe that there is no opposes between Islam and democracy. Really, their reason for how Islam could be compatible with democracy is 'democracy seems to be the ethical system and it is the crucial thing'. It means, democracy, as government system compares with other systems, is higher likely to be the best ethical system, so the reformists who emphasis on ethical interpretation and human right believe that we can find the democracy elements in the Islam, and they are not inconsistent.

In conclusion, Islam and democracy as two phenomenon are two concepts which include many varieties of definitions and interpretations. Someone believe that we can gather two concepts together, while others believe that it is impossible to gather two different ideas together. This essay has discussed Dabbagh's interpretation to relate among Islam and democracy. There are four different interpretations of Islam, two kinds of Islam as well which include; minimum and maximum democracy. Each of them has a specific vision for Islam and special

understanding of the relationship between Islam and democracy. The Traditional reading of Islam does not have many problems with minimum democracy, but they don't believe maximum democracy which focuses on the minorities in the society. The second one, Traditionalists reading of Islam accepts minimum democracy but does not happy with maximum democracy. Fundamental reading of Islam rejects all types of democracy and does not believe any relation between these two concepts. Reforms' reading of Islam emphasizes more on human right and ethical understanding of Islam, separating religion and politics as well. So they believe there is compatibility between Islam and democracy. Thus, if we divide Islam into different forms and democracy as well, we can obtain the real image of the relationship between Islam and democracy.

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