

Bashir: Sharia shopping

Monday 9 July 2012

By Magdi El Gizouli

July 9, 2012 - Obviously challenged by the stubborn show of anger against their long rule in the heartland of the country the high priests of the National Congress Party (NCP) shifted gears from unashamed dismissal to defensive posturing with sharia. "What is happening is a struggle between the camp of sharia and the camp of secularism", said Nafie Ali Nafie, the deputy chairman of the NCP last week. He was addressing a religious function in Khartoum to mark the holy night of mid-Sha'aban in the Hijra calendar hosted by the followers of the late Sheikh al-Burai in Khartoum. President Bashir had the same to say on Saturday to an impressive crowd in Wad al-Fadni, a centre of Sufi preaching east of the capital. President Bashir borrowed class categories to buttress his message. We come from the people, the normal masses, not from the big families or the palaces, he yelled, a reference I presume to Sudan's pseudo-aristocracy, the Mahdi and Mirghani families, and the Khartoum establishment of old. The country's upcoming constitution, reiterated the President, will be 'Islamic' and "serve as a model for all the people who have aspirations to apply religion to all aspects of their lives". He then announced the formation of a committee with generous representation of religious forces and Sufi brotherhoods to draft the new constitution. The President, it seems, thinks he can pull it off by emulating Jaafar Nimayri's sharia gymnastics in 1983. The attempt, even as an oral phenomenon, is both a farce and a tragedy.

Separately, the President's uncle, al-Tayeb Mustafa, advised his cousin to withdraw from the NCP and initiate a process of political reform in the country with free and fair elections as its endpoint. Thereby, he argued, the President could streamline an Arab Spring in Sudan without going through its risky pangs, the non-alcoholic beer of a revolution without a revolution. Power would be delivered to the people, and not to the NCP or any of the other political centres, concluded Mustafa referring to the success of the Egyptian Moslem Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. The NCP's Amin Hassan Omer had a diluted version of the same to offer. In an interview with the Qatari newspaper al-Raya he declared the readiness of the ruling party to organise new elections in case the protests against the government expanded further, while cautioning that the Islamic Movement would in any case remain a permanent feature of the political landscape.

The established parties of the opposition, meanwhile, fielded their 'vision' for a post-NCP future in a document titled the 'Democratic Alternative'. The opposition parties imagined a three years transitional period governed by a caretaker cabinet and a presidential college with rotating chairmanship. Each but one of the seven signatories of the document would occupy the chairmanship for a period of six months. Yasir Arman, the Secretary General of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in North Sudan (SPLM-N), responded with composed frustration to the opposition's plans. The parties, he correctly stated in a press release, are simply repeating the bad habits of old by excluding the forces of the peripheries and the actual protesters 'elbowing' the regime from the kitchen of power in Khartoum.

President Bashir's underclass pretensions phrased in sharia-thirst and Arman's criticism of the establishment parties bring to the fore the challenge of bridging the urban struggles of Sudan's middle class internet-generation and the lot of the rural masses, fractured in turn according to common ideological depiction into the privileged acquiescent 'Arabs' of the heartland and the marginalised rebellious 'Africans' of the peripheries. One #SudanRevolts tweeter said it all when she labelled the lady tea-sellers and gentlemen rikshaw drivers in Omdurman as security informants in a warning to her fellow protesters.

The author is a fellow of the Rift Valley Institute. He publishes regular opinion articles and analyses at his [blog Still Sudan](#). He can be reached at m.elgizouli@gmail.com