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Pathology of Transition to Democracy in Egypt, 1950-2020

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Abstract

Non-democratic Politics, brutality of politics, stable presence of military forces in the eco-political life, institutionalization of authoritarianism, detachment of ideological and strategic thoughts, the descriptive function of democracy in the Egyptian political history had turned politics as the exclusive prerogative of political sovereignty and military forces. By discourse of anti-otherness, attempting to monopolize the politics, and considering the democratizing movements as an action vacating the spoiled fervors of collective actions, this kind of governance prevented to transition to democracy. Affecting by the power structure and the behaviors of the main policymakers on the one hand, and the ceaseless cycle of populist authoritarianism, pseudo-democracy, and neo-authoritarianism on the other hand, the failed democratic experience, and fluctuation of transition to democracy in Egypt is regarded as the triumph of the struc-

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ture against the agency. Thus, the main question of the current paper is to study why the process of transition to democracy was unsuccessful in Egypt? According to the main hypothesis, policymaking and governance in Egypt are based on undemocratic liberalism. In other words, despite rising the pseudo-liberal creeds in different periods, Egypt has never experienced an institutionalized democratic political life. So, by the logic of historical sociology and the theory of transition to democracy, this paper will test the mentioned hypothesis analytically. By showing up the cycle of populist authoritarianism, quasi-authoritarianism, pseudo-democracy, and neo-authoritarianism in Egypt, the findings show that alienation with democratic values, institutionalized authoritarian values, and lack of democratic culture in the political life of Egypt led to the failure of democratization movements.

As the most populous country in the Middle East subsystem and the third most populous country in the Black Continent, Egypt is one of the main candidates for the transition to democracy. Despite the suspension of political development and the geopolitical and geostrategic instability of the region, the desire for democracy and the effort to transition to a democratic political life is a social and sustainable demand in Egypt. From a historical point of view, despite the experience of democracy in Egypt, the lack of political participation of the people caused the fragility and instability of these movements until the 1980s. But with the transition to the third wave of democracy, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the gradual transition of Latin American and Eastern European countries to democracy, pro-democracy actions in Egypt were pursued more seriously. Studying the history of political and social developments in Egypt as a vanguard of the transition to native democracy is a sign of the emergence of an authoritarian structure and society, which seeks to lay the groundwork for the emergence of political pluralism and democracy by constantly trying to marginalize the hierarchical structure of power. In fact, the growth of social demands, political developments, the emergence of technological and cognitive processes, and the rising waves of globalization caused democracy to become one of the main demands of the Egyptian society. But such a demand is not a one-time thing, but has a hundred years of political history.

The first round of the transition to democracy in Egypt began with the country's independence in 1922, which continued until 1949 despite its fragility and instability. Colonialism, as the dominant logic on the African continent, made no country capable of transitioning to democracy. Now, during the constitutional monarchy of King Farouk in the years 1922 to 1949, Egypt was able to experience a quasi-democratic political system for the first time. Egypt experienced

the second period of transition to democracy during the rule of Anwar Sadat. The emergence of various political forces, the support of Islamist organizations and forces, and the application of open-door liberal policies were considered as signs of Egypt's desire for democracy, which leads it to political development and social reforms. But the third period of the transition to democracy in Egypt can be seen as the result of the political and social developments of 2011, when the revolutionaries were trying to establish a new political plan for governance and politics. It is worth noting that neglecting the differences between different periods of transition to democracy in Egypt is a kind of cognitive reductionism.

One of the main differences between the third transition period and the previous two periods is the type of democratic and reformist social actors. In the sense that the main reformists and democrats in the first and second period were the political rulers and the main actors in the national power scene, while the main pro-democracy activists in the third period were the society and the people. Democracy and political reformism in the first and second periods were hierarchical and from top to bottom, in the third period it came from the bottom to the top. Unlike the first and second periods, democratization and reformism in the third period were derived from the cognitive equipping of society and the emergence of the third wave of knowledge due to the existence of social networks. Democracy in the first and second period did not necessarily change the structure of political power, while the rotation of political actors and the relative change in the ruling attitudes towards the society have been the reasons for the third period of transition. Despite these differences, fragility and instability are common features of different transition periods in Egypt. In such a way that after a short period of time, the movement for democracy and reformism was stopped. In this article, we want to pathologically examine the pro-democracy movements in Egypt from 1950 to 2020. This question is raised, why the transition to democracy in Egypt has failed? In response to this hypothesis, politics and governance in Egypt is based on undemocratic liberalism; In this way, despite the emergence of pseudo-liberal teachings in different periods, democratic political life was never institutionalized in Egypt. According to the hypothesis of the research, institutional cultural and traditional habits, unfamiliarity with democratic teachings and the institutionalization of authoritarian norms in Egypt caused closeness with some pseudo-liberal behaviors. These conditions, along with the lack of democratic biopolitical institutions, failed the transition to democracy.

In a summary, it should be said that the political and social developments in Egypt during the post-Mubarak era, especially after the inauguration of Muham-

mad Morsi, with the relative increase in the level of economic activity and the creation of a platform for the emergence of various political and social parties and forces, promised democracy in the new era. But the lack of strategic vision between the revolutionary coalition forces, the lack of serious commitment of the Islamist, liberal, secular and leftist forces to democratic teachings, seeking power as the main logic of the Islamists in the 2012 elections and tactical alliance with the military to win the election, increasing the political and economic privileges of the military by The ruling Islamists after the election victory, the cooperation of liberal and secular forces with the military in 2013 in criticizing the Islamists, the inability of the ruling political forces to connect strategic thoughts and ideological stances, the distance from democratic teachings and cultural habits ruling Egypt and the cooperation of transnational forces to support The presence of the military in the political and economic life of Egypt caused the transition to democracy to face many challenges in the current era. In other words, Egypt's failure to transition to democracy and the continuation of the cycle of authoritarianism and quasi-democracy is a strategy to control power and stabilize the political position of those in power.

Key words: Democratization, Authoritarianism, Transition to Democracy, Middle East, Egypt.