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HAS THE ARAB SPRING CHANGED THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE? THE CASE OF LIBYA

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ABSTRACT

The Arab Spring, which first erupted in Tunisia and spread to parts of the Arab world, remains one of the most realistic issues on the international political agenda in recent years. With the deepening of the political transformation in the Middle East, the political development of Libya, Turkey, Iran and other countries has encountered more and more difficulties. Libya has also experienced the Arab Spring, and whether the socio-political landscape has changed has become a topic of debate. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether the socio-political landscape of Libya has changed politically and economically since the Arab Spring. In the early days of the Arab Spring, Libya's political system has changed, and some economic achievements have been made. However, these achievements at the political and economic level are superficial, which means that Libya's political and economic landscape has not been fundamentally transformed, and what was achieved at the time did not last long. After a brief introduction to the Arab Spring and the current social situation in Libya, this paper will discuss the specific changes in Libya's socio-political landscape from both political and economic aspects.

KEYWORDS: Arab Spring, Socio-political Landscape, Libya, Political System, Economics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring that first broke out in Tunisia and spread to some countries in the Arab world had become one of the most practical topics in the international political agenda in the past years (Bang and Mitra, 2013). At present, with the deepening of political transformation in the Middle East, some countries such as Libya, Turkey, Iran and other countries have encountered more and more difficulties in their political development (Darendeli and Hill, 2016). The pattern formed at the beginning of the Arab Spring has been disrupted, and social factors such as regional turmoil are increasing. Libya has also experienced the Arab Spring and has become a controversial topic whether the socio-political landscape has changed.

The people of Libya hoped to gain democracy through the Arab Spring, overthrow power and achieve freedom and equality. Blind expectations and the unclear understanding of national conditions, as

well as the turmoil in the domestic and international situation, are full of obstacles in the process of the country's move towards political democratization, there is development here but there is also a fall back. Therefore, according to the issue of whether Libya's socio-political landscape has been changed, different scholars have analysed Libya's political situation in detail in different aspects.

The purpose of this paper is to study whether the socio-political landscape of Libya has changed since the Arab Spring in political and economic terms. The original intention of the Libyan people is to achieve democratization through the Arab Spring, change the country's political structure, and achieve national stability and economic development. Indeed, some scholars have investigated and proved that in the early days of the Arab Spring, Libya's political system has shifted, from all these perspectives, the people's expectations are slowly realizing, and the economy has also made some achievements. However, there are also some other scholars who believe that these achievements at the political and economic levels are superficial. The political and economic landscape of Libya has not fundamentally achieved a successful transition. This may be due to Libya's lack of appropriate political leadership and unfavourable domestic and international circumstances at the time. And the achievements made at the time did not last long. Libya's political and economic transformation still needs a long way to go. After a brief background which tries to elucidate the information of Arab Spring and the current social situation in Libya, the discussion section will analyse the socio-political landscape in Libya from two perspectives. The first is the possible political factors, which are the transition to democracy in Libya, the choice of democracy and people's livelihood, and the leadership of the country's political organization. Second, it will analyse the economic aspects.

2. BACKGROUND

Arab Spring refers to the democratic uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world in 2011. The movement originated in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly took hold in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan (Hilsum and Lindsey, 2012). After the outbreak of the revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, protests against the Qaddafi regime appeared in Libya, and the opponents were united in a short period of time. This became Libya's main opposition. The first opponents of the civilian protest movement continued to fight against the militants against the government (Aghayev, 2013). During the war, social media sites were used by the opposition to organize people, but the Libyan government imposed restrictions on the Internet. Although Qaddafi's rulers imposed various obstructions and attacks on the rebels, they eventually announced the end of Qaddafi's military dictatorship. In response to the demands of the international community, the then interim government set up a 'commission of inquiry' to investigate Gaddafi's death (Fahim and Nossiter, 2011). General National Congress election was held on July 7, 2012, the first free national election held in Libya in the past 60 years. The National Election Committee announced that Mahmoud Jibril's National Forces Party had 39 seats out of 80 seats, therefore, it was the majority party on July 17. The Justice and Construction Party won 17 seats, the third being the National Front Party with 3 seats (Aghayev, 2013).

In Libya where the situation is turbulent, the tragedies caused by the refugee crisis have occurred from time to time. Libya still faces the most complicated refugee situation in the world (Vandewalle, 2012). Statistics released by the United Nations refugee agency recently showed that Libyans displaced by war and conflict have exceeded 22.6 million and those who have returned to their homes but still face great security risks exceed 26.7 million (Elarabi and Bataineh, 2018). Due to the lack of a strong central government, Libya's public security is facing a crisis, criminal behaviour is rampant, and armed conflicts continue. Thus, many people choose to leave their hometowns to become refugees. In the process of migration, refugees also face the risk of abduction and abuse, as well as various serious threats such as personal safety (Mabroka, 2013). Libyan militia groups throughout the country have played an important role in overthrowing Gaddafi's regime, but the government that was formed subsequently failed to disarm the militias and did not achieve effective control over them (Darendeli and Hill, 2016). In the six years after the Arab Spring, conflicts between armed groups continued and they often resorted to force to resolve conflicts. The upcoming Libyan new parliamentary election has also brought uncertainty for the future development of the situation (Elarabi and Bataineh, 2018). However, public opinion analysis believes that it is difficult to change the status quo in Libya when parliamentary elections are conducted again. On the whole, the Libyan Western National Unity Government and the Eastern Harvester Armed Forces will continue to confront each other; they specifically armed in various Libyan areas, although the factions have signed the Libya Political Agreement with the mediation of the United Nations and agreed to end the separatist situation and jointly establish a government of national unity, they are still, in fact, pursuing their own responsibilities and it is still a long way to go to improve the security situation in Libya.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Political Aspect

The political situation in Libya has undergone regime change since the Arab Spring and has undergone democratic transition, and dissimulation (Tian, 2014). Different scholars hold different views on whether Libya's political situation is affected by the Arab Spring and change this issue. The internal contradictions in the countries of the Middle East are complex, they depended mainly on strongman regimes and authoritarian regimes to maintain stability in the past (Hilsum and Lindsey, 2012). After the dramatic change in the Middle East in 2011, it was an undeniable fact that Libya's strongman political collapse. Lynch (2013) points out, in order to eliminate the evils such as the tenure system, Libya abandoned the authoritarian regime, initiated democratic transformation, and began to implement multi-party checks and balances and popular elections. This seems to show that Libya's political structure has developed in a stable direction. However, Traub (2013) claims that weakening the government's authoritarian power can easily make the country into a dysfunctional state. And Huntington (1989) once pointed out that the degree of political stability is directly proportional to the fairness of the political system, and it is inversely proportional to the degree of public participation. The Middle East countries have long implemented centralization rules and generally, have a low degree of the political system. Traub (2013) question that starting a democratic

transformation in this context and not following the steps of the times to create many new problems out of thin air will probably lead to greater turmoil and chaos. Barducci and Sosnow (2013) go on to point out the fact that after Gaddafi collapsed in Libya in 2011, there are hundreds of militia groups and political parties. They colluded and fought each other, and the government gradually lost control of the country. As a result, violent incidents frequently occurred. Besides, Megan (2012) finds that on the level of the political powers, decentralized competition has led to the establishment of political parties and the fragmentation of power. Due to the weakening of government authority, countries in transition experienced varying degrees of national capacity loss, political stagnation, and deteriorating security conditions. He also shows that at the private level, the enthusiasm of the general public for participation in politics is nowhere to be released, and street protests are becoming more and more popular. The social situation is once in turmoil. Therefore, based on the above situation, the Libyan government still faces the issue of implementing a decentralized or centralized system.

In the process of political transition, the Libyan government also had some differences on the priority of democracy or the people's livelihood. Lang and Sterck (2014) claim that the goal of the Libyan people's initial rebel struggle was to achieve political democracy and a stable economic order. This has made some progress in theory. However, in the transitional practice, this thought seems convincing at first but it ignores the current situation, which is democratic elections can solve the procedural legitimacy of the ruling power, but it cannot make the social and economic problems resolved automatically in the society at that time (Tian, 2014). More importantly, under certain time and space, the two goals of political democracy and economic development cannot be achieved at the same time. Darendeli and Hill (2016) explained that if the Libyan government really wants to improve people's livelihood and achieve equality in economic and social status, it will need to forcefully break the existing class privilege and change unreasonable social production relations. However, to accomplish these tasks requires strong rule and a high degree of centralization. They also pointed out that if the Libyan government wants to implement constitutional democracy, the premise is to abolish the rationality and legitimacy of the current political-economic order, and not to fundamentally change the current economic and class structure. As Huntington (1989) said, the cost of reform comes when the arbitrary government is used to suppress the expression of will and the long-established state system, and the price of safeguarding freedom is to continue to retain the outdated old privilege, property, exclusive rights, class structure, and church participation in the country political. Therefore, giving priority to the promotion of democratic transition will inevitably impair economic development, and practice has also proved that the democratic transition and the resulting political chaos have worsened the economies of the countries concerned. In this context, more and more people are dissatisfied with the country's development direction and believe that the country's economic situation is worse. Therefore, improving people's livelihood has increasingly become a top priority for the public. However, as the democratic process has begun to implement, it has to continue to move forward and there is no time and effort to promote economic development in the short term. Under this status quo, Scherer, Palazzo, and Seidl (2013) predict that if the

democratic transition cannot bring benefits to the people for a long period of time, the people will not be able to recognize the road to democratization and may even start a new revolution.

In the Arab Spring and the transition to democracy, Islamic organizations survived under the cover of religious nature and became the most influential social and political organization with a clear ideology and a high degree of organization (Hugh, 2014). However, most countries in the Middle East have always pursued secularism and viewed the separation of politics and religion as a basic prerequisite for full modernization. Therefore, Islam is mainly confined to the field of belief, and religious forces are subordinate. However, Islamism, as the most influential social and political organization at that time, had emerged in Libya as a situation in which Islamic forces gained power and even regime. After these political forces came to power, they vigorously promoted the "Islamization" policy, such as prohibiting alcohol, wearing veils, separating men and women (Alex and Daniel, 2013). Since many political Islamist positions (such as the integration of politics and religion, the implementation of Islamic law) and secular values cannot coexist, the trend of political Islam taking office and "Islamization" has led to an increasingly prominent contradiction between secular and religious forces in the relevant countries (Hugh, 2014). Megret and Samson (2013) concluded that the history of political transition in the Middle East has repeatedly shown that the implementation of democratization will inevitably lead to the development of political Islamist forces and Islamization. The Middle Eastern countries must maintain the secular development path, mainly relying on authoritarian rule. Hence, either autocratic secularization, or democratic Islamization, but there is no secularized democracy. So far, Libya has still not found a suitable development model. Libya's democratic transition has not brought stability and development to the country. Instead, it has increasingly faced a constant social dilemma, and the national elite and the people have become increasingly disappointed and confused. The political transition in the Middle East is a dilemma, and turmoil may persist for many years (Tian, 2014).

3.2 Economy Aspect

In 2011, millions of Arab people took to the streets to protest and strongly demand political, social and economic justice. The Arab Spring has revealed a serious economic weakness that has been hidden under economic and political stability for many years. Malik and Bassem (2013) pointed out that after the Arab Spring, Libya's economy has indeed achieved some superficial developments, for example, indicators of poverty and inequality have improved, and reform of the economic structure has also made new progress (International Monetary Fund, 2017). This view seems convincing at first but it ignores some facts, such as high unemployment rate, poor living conditions, and lack of economic opportunities, which will arouse strong dissatisfaction with the current political situation and economic situation in most parts of the Arab world (Wendy, 2013). Therefore, the economic stability is conducive to the stability of the political rule, and the rational planning of the political structure affects the economic development.

When the campaign broke out, the global economy had not recovered from the financial crisis. In this extremely unfavorable external environment, Libya's domestic economic turmoil, tense social relations, and controversial conflicts that continue to spread throughout the region have together restrained the region's economic performance, dragged down trade and investment, and made its economy and politicization is more vulnerable (Arail, 2017). Although the start was not smooth, the Libyan government still maintained its macroeconomic stability and avoided the economic crisis that has brought harm to the people. For example, exhaust the reserve buffer and expand the deficit by accumulating national debt, and as domestic politics have become more stable and foreign aid efforts have increased, Libya has begun to gradually rebuild its foreign exchange reserve buffer and began to cut its budget deficit (Bang and Mitra, 2013). These early achievements will help Libya maintain its positive economic growth. However, the conflict between Libya and Yemen later destroyed this progress and left Libya's economy backward for many years (Alex and Daniel, 2013).

Libya in transition has made some progress in structural reforms, although this progress is not balanced. Libya's energy subsidies have been significantly reduced, allowing financial resources to be used for more targeted social security and public investment for growth (Bang and Mitra, 2013). The government has taken steps to improve various aspects of the business environment, such as competitiveness, bankruptcy and investment regulations, strengthen taxation policies and management, and implement fiscal sector reforms (Allan, 2015). Plans to stimulate the creation of job opportunities and reduce skills mismatch in the labor market are being worked out. At present, there have been some improvements in the business environment indicators (International Monetary Fund, 2017). Based on the above facts, although Libya's economy began to gradually recover and develop, Sdrlevich et al. (2014) stated that there are still many practical problems in fundamentally reforming the economic system, such as the reliance on the public sector remains high and the private sector is still reluctant to invest and create job opportunities. At the same time, Malik and Bassem (2013) also continued to supplement Libya's economic management approach remains an important issue, and targeted social security networks are not yet in place and still do not provide adequate basic services. On the whole, Libya's economic challenges will continue to exist. These will likely continue to intensify social dissatisfaction and significantly weaken the reform of the public sector and the response of the private sector to these reforms. This will likely have a negative impact on Libya's political and economic landscape.

4. CONCLUSION

Whether the Arab Spring changed Libya's social and political structure is a controversial topic. This article attempts to explore this point from two perspectives. From a political point of view, the Libyan people hope to overthrow power politics and achieve democratic transformation through the Arab Spring. However, how to coordinate people's livelihood and democracy in the process of democratic transition has become a difficult problem for leaders to make decisions. And at that time, the Islamic organization was the most influential political organization. However, due to the backwardness of

Libya, the final disease of democratic transition has not been truly realized, and Libya's political transformation has become a predicament.

On the economic front, after the Arab Spring, Libya's economy has indeed achieved some success, but the basic livelihood issue has not yet been resolved. Coupled with the international background of the global financial crisis that was not in the past, Libya's economy has become turbulent. Stabilizing government organizations to take measures to improve the business environment has not produced substantive results. Libya's economic challenges will continue to exist, which will have a negative impact on Libya's economic and political structure.

In general, the outbreak of the Arab Spring seems to have had an impact on Libya's political situation. However, due to the unfavourable leadership of the national government organizations and the unfavourable international background and the deterioration of the economic environment, the political situation in Libya seems to It has not been fundamentally changed. This seems to imply that the Libyan people and government should carefully consider which model of the regime is more conducive to leading the country. At the same time, understanding these will help change Libya's political and economic landscape and promote the country's political and economic development.

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