

Authoritarianism and the Dokkan Mentality

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Authoritarianism is a socio-political system of near absolute control that starts in Arab society at the family level and extends to encompass the state level. Authoritarian rulers have unlimited powers to rule over their subjects who are not given the right to question their rulers. Subjects are almost always expected, sometimes required to obey their rulers and submit to their will. Because of such powers, authoritarianism has become the system to oppress people, confiscate their rights and freedoms, denigrate them, and show no respect for their intelligence, sometimes their humanity as well.

At the family level, the father is the head of family and the person in charge of taking important decisions that affect the family and the future of its members. He usually feels that he has not only the right but also the obligation to take all decisions related to family affairs. Fatherhood in traditional Arab society grants the head of the family much privileges and does not hold him responsible for his actions. Father must always be praised and adored but not criticized even when his misguided decisions hurt the family and undermine the future of its members. Arab traditions and fatherhood emanating from it make fathers feel that they own all wisdom; they are older than other family members and have more experience than women who have limited duties outside the house where experience is usually gained.

Authoritarianism and traditionalism have given rise to what I call the “Dokkan Mentality.” A *dokkan* is a mall grocery store, or a family owned corner store operating in a small community and managed by one person, the father. The father sometimes orders

one of his male children to help, especially in storing goods and keeping records. However, sons are not allowed to second guess their fathers and have no right to express their opinions regarding the pricing of goods, dealing with customers, or determining operating hours. Nevertheless, it is the older son that inherits the responsibilities of the father, including the running of the business and deciding for other members of the family. Dokkans usually have no daily operating hours; it is the father or the “*dokkanji*” (owner of the dokkan) who determines when to open in the morning and when to close it in the evening. In the evening, it is always possible to stay late chatting with friends and neighbors. The dokkan is a place to do business and socialize as well.

Members of the neighborhood tend to trust the “*dokkanji*” (owner of the *dokkan*); he knows how to deal with government officials and city merchants, how to buy goods and get them shipped to his place, and how to keep records of those buying on credit. Because of such a trust and, at the same time, lack of banks and community trust in bankers, the *dokkanji* often serves as the banker for many members of the community. People, having no trustworthy alternative, tend to use the *dokkan* as an address to receive mail and the *dokkanji*'s expertise to receive funds from and transfer to children residing outside the country. But while people do put their trust in the *dokkanji*, the *dokkanji* does not trust other people, even his own children no matter how old they may be; he usually treats them as children. When the *dokkanji* goes to pray, attend a wedding or funeral or travels to Mecca for the Pilgrimage, he closes his dokkan. The *dokkanji* develops a mentality that entitles him to control the dokkan, all things that are in it, all decisions related to it, and all wisdom to advice others, sometimes to run their lives and control

their meager savings. The dokkanji tends to see all others as not mature enough or worthy of his trust to delegate any decision to them.

The dokkan mentality is today the most dominant mentality in Arab countries; every institution, small business, organization, agency is a dokkan and every director even the head of state acts as if he were a dokkanji. And all decisions are concentrated in the hands of the dokkanji, when he travels, no decision would be made; all business of the dokkan, the company, the organization, the ministry and the state has to wait for it's dokkanji to return. In order to realize the predominance of the dokkan mentality just imagine for a second how an important decision in any Arab country could be made while its king, president of emir in vacationing overseas. Business of state, future of people and national security issues have no priority and cannot demand such a priority; it is the dokkanji that determines priorities, takes decisions that suit him and determine the future of the country and the nation.