



Tolerating Misrule while Accounting/Un-accounting Misdeeds: Ibn-Khaldun with Hadraawi

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“A government is an institution which prevents injustice other than such as it commits itself.”

Ibn-Khaldun’s definition of a governmentⁱ

[Bulshadeenu waa duul
Daacad iyo xishood badan
Dun xariira weeyaan
Cidna uma darraadaan
Dar Allay ku dhaqantaa
Dareen waw dhegweyn tahay
Ogow doqonse maahee
Qofka maamul dalabliyo
Dabbaal-joogto hoosiyo
Dibindaabyo ugu maqan
Degdeg uma tilmaamaan
Nabar kulama duulaan
Dib bay ugu muddaystaan
Dulmigiisu waw kayd
Umad yahay daryeelkaa
isku duubnidaa iyo
Adigiyo dedaalkaa
Dawadaadu waa taas
Dhan hadday ka debecdana
Gabbalkaa dam weeyaan]ⁱⁱ

[Our society is renowned
for its honesty, for humility;
woven from a silken thread
our people would harm no-one;
fearing Allah, their feelings
are slow to stir – still,
they are not so easily deceived:
those immersed in misrule,
pretending to stand tall while
swimming in its depths, weaving their
unseen nets – our people do not rush
to blame nor to lash out at them, but
they keep an excellent account
of such misdeeds and store it well.
People, you prosper
as one unit, as you share in
your shouldering of the burden –
that is the only balm.
If it weakens in one wing
then its whole end is woe.

Ibn-khaldun suggests that societies evolve when a strong, cohesive group with assabiya (feeling of intense group solidarity) imposes its influence on fragmented communities. The weaker constituents often lack organized assabiya with charismatic leadership of their own. The better organized group projects coercion providing security in exchange for legitimacy and subordination from the wider society. Fearing the consequences, the society tolerates such arrangement. However, following the dominant group’s subsequent inattentiveness and public misdeeds, the group’s monopoly to rule declines. Witnessing the diminishing of societal tolerance, another group with stronger emerging assabiya maneuvers to replace the disgraced rulers.

Hadraawi, on the other, considers people at the bottom and middle levels of the society, from diverse constituents and biographies, equally mobilizing and enforcing their capabilities.

These groups do not necessarily aim to dominate and rule, but to counter public mischiefs and reduce suffering. With persistence and curiosity, such constituents eventually succeed in diversifying political rule. They might potentially establish a society prioritizing persuasion and commonalities.

History changes when communities organize

Once a traditional Somali ruler called Geeddi Baabow exercised extended power over the province under his rule. The leader heavily taxed his followers and viciously excluded and oppressed opponents. No longer tolerating such transgressions, communities held consultations to remove the unpopular ruler. Among the ideas presented included the recruitment of his deputy to join the revolt. In accepting the proposition, the deputy shared the community tricks he knew of making the weapons carried by the guards dysfunctional. He also told the community the appropriate time for an effective assault. Caught in bewilderment, the ruler and his supporters panicked over the failure of their defenses. Wounded and captured, Geedi Baabow, in final testament, blamed his deputy (called Kume) for the downfall: “*Kume waa kula joogaa, kashiisuna waa kaa jirtaa*” (meaning deputies/advisors sticking with you physically/in appearance, while conspiring with adversaries).

The wisdom of this classic Somali story contradicts the canonized explanations of how political transformation occurs (particularly by Hobbes, Machiavelli, and others). The idea that in politics the end (the ruler’s position, wishes and command) justifies whatever means the ruler might deploy. The process could be the reverse. The coordination and the collaboration of the diverse means applied by the wider public resulting in an alternative inclusive end. Subsequent historic political transformations, including revolutions in America, Europe, Asia and Africa, have since confirmed the core point of the Somali traditional story. The existence of constant instability and uncertainties regarding political rule and public mobilization. The story also tells us that the public (the supposedly ruled passive people) remain active in contributing to the transformation of political rule. Initially they observe and tolerate. Then they grow suspicious and distrustful of authorities. Eventually they mobilize and respond to the correction of existing public deficiencies.

Ibn Khaldun takes a position different from both the society centered Somali story and the elite (ruler) centered narrative presented in canonized European stories. He points out that the progress and the stability of a society depends not necessarily on a dominant singular ruler or a collective public mobilization. Political rule emerges from the ambitions and actions of a well-organized dominant group. This group initially possesses a strong internal *assabiya* (social cohesion/solidarity)ⁱⁱⁱ. Such traditional commitment allows the group to exert both coercive and persuasive influence over potentially competing groups as well as in the wider society.

The dominant group claims to represent authenticity and commitment for the wellbeing of the society. However, with the group accessing power and privileges, misgovernance/mismanagement becomes prevalent. The process then erodes not just the group’s integrity and internal unity, but also the group’s public image and trust^{iv}. This decline creates an opportunity for ambitious rival groups with emerging *assabiya* of their own. The emerging group challenges the establishment and might potentially replace the ruling group. This cycle of repetitive dominance and subordination characterizes the dynamics of actualizing the society.

Organizing around and with group solidarity (assabiya)

Ibn-Khaldun proposes *assabiya* (group solidarity) as an essential precondition for strong social and political organization. It is not just about creating political dominance. It is also successfully maintaining and prolonging such superiority. This requires frames of sustaining, which often religion partially provides. Though the role of intellectuals (whether traditional or modern), the economic and environmental conditions of the society remain relevant, decisively conquering and maintaining political power requires strong *assabiya* (ruling group solidarity).

Individual members, people whose focus rest on daily existential routines, influence less on the overall transformation of the society. For the dominating *assabiya* driven group, nobility and inheritance remain key for social and political recognition and association.

Hadraawi views social transformation linked to the daily routines of public life in the society. Through cherished social and cultural practices, the society upholds agreed upon conventions, protecting communities from harm. However, excessive caution and adherence to routines make people complicit to both visible and hidden wrongdoings. Over time, this ambivalence leads to tolerance for recurring offenses. Despite this, the collective suffering and patience of society serve as a form of organic cohesion, preventing complete societal collapse. Through popular culture and literature, the society records and shares these offenses, particularly those committed by powerful figures.

Hadraawi considers transformations emerging and occurring around and with the activation and the mobilization of the masses. People that are often underprivileged and excluded. The top-down structures promote the interest of the powerful with emphasis on legality, authority, and coercion. However. Public encounters and interconnections, including performances of literature, art, daily practical livelihoods (family relations, working, labouring, educating, empowering) also contribute to the cohesion of the society:

“Duddiyo gacal bay lahayd; Dareen xidid bay lahayd; Xormiyo deris bay lahayd, Dul iyo magan bay lahayd; Xishood dedan bay lahayd, Dux iyo soddoh bay lahayd; Dumaashi dhan bay lahayd, Dad kala-guran bay lahayd; Rag iyo dumar bay lahayd; Nin-door taliyay lahayd; Marwiyo degel bay lahayd; Duq iyo garashay lahayd; Haween darban bay lahayd, Barbaar diran bay lahayd; Habliyo dardaray lahayd, Halyey diriray lahayd; Darmaan boqran bay lahayd, Duud iyo oday bay lahayd; Da' iyo da' dhexay lahayd, Da'aad yar-yar bay lahayd; Is-daaddihin bay lahayd, Deryaale cad bay lahayd; Dalaandaliyay lahayd, Hor-weyn dal maray lahayd; Irmaan dararay lahayd, Hal iyo dalaway lahayd; Wan dool culus bay lahayd, Sal iyo daab

bay lahayd; Dallaayad saray lahayd; Shishiyo duluc bay lahayd; Wixii dumey bay lahayd”^v

[the society has relatives and kin, with deep-rooted feelings, with neighbors and companions, with shelter and protection, with modesty and dignity, with a mother and a grandmother, with an aunt on both sides, with a person of wisdom and respect, men and women, power and leadership, homes, elders and guidance, with strong youth, daughters and children, with champions and warriors, full of prosperity, with family, youth and experience, firmness and resolute, a source of wisdom with deep thoughts, strength and resilience, with ability to stand tall.

Neglecting responsibilities and avoiding mob justice

A society can create, and recreate its core identities, rather than sticking to the past with social formations that might not be suitable for solving current complex situations and challenges. Such willingness in recreating the society requires new forms of accounting of major events in the society. This provides an opportunity for the society to tell alternative better stories. Therefore, the idea that one privileged group or constituent with internal strength and cohesion *assabiya* should dictate others to follow and subordinate is outdated.

Instead, a society should consider each individual or group of individuals becoming active participants and contributors to the society. Here, no specific group has a monopoly for exploiting and suppressing others. Dividing the society into “*rulers and the ruled*,” “*the dominant and the dominated*”- in which the superior has the right to control and discipline the inferior, is classic and might not necessarily function in a much more complex transnational and even globalized society. With emphasis on superiority and hierarchy, the society might, in diverse ways, neglect and delegate public responsibilities:

“Shirking responsibility: The Africans had a field day with the Somalis; the Arabs had a field day with the Somalis; ...; the Marxists had a field day with the Somalis; the West had a field day with the Somalis; the Soviets had a field day with the Somalis; the Americans had a field day with the Somalis ... And Somalis, in awe of ancestral blood, had a field day with the Somalis”^{vi}

In a fairer ideal society, members have equal rights to participate and even rise to the top if they wish. There are no groups designated from birth to rule over others. People might have strong kins, capable associates or wealthy constituents to rely on. However, what matters is how the different people comprising the society converge and contribute to the improvement and the welfare of the society. Especially, the efforts and the hope of elevating the livelihood of the struggling people. Such a society monitors and scrutinizes those in government or in an authoritative position. The earlier this awareness happens the better. If decision makers keep ignoring, people might abruptly act on their own terms. However, if not combined with caution and carefulness such unsupervised public mobilization risks further degeneration:

“Mechanized Mob Justice—Today flail high overhead; daggers, arrows, spears and machetes; peasant masses parade to judge in the town streets ...no plea bargain from communal punishment served in mob justice”^{vii}

Communal mob justice builds not on the transformation of the society in a more balanced and inclusive way. It is destructive *beel* mobilization. *Beel* has, for the Somali case, created immense devastation and fragmentation. People applying *beel* formation produce social and political process bereft of any form of positive outcome, regarding human dignity, social justice, and citizenship. Insisting on such conflictual *beel* (with extreme *assabiya*) fosters disharmony, delays recovery and eventually hinders the ability of the society to account and recount political deficiencies and risks:

*“Beeleey ba’dooy, beeleey; Waxaad
beri nagu sameysay, haddii aan la
barin caruurta, Taariikhdana lagu
bayaamin; Waxaad bushi nagu*

*tallaashay, Markaan bogsodoon ka
reysto; Waxaa ballan eebbahay ah in
aan bakhtigaaga jiido”^{viii}
(Beeleey ba’dooy, beeleey;*

What you once did to us, if we do not
teach the children and not clarify in
the history; when we recover from the

sickness you infected on us, we
promise Allah to drag your deceased
body)

Moving beyond ascribed identities

In societies that emphasize traditional *assabiya*, maintaining hierarchical relationships based on ascribed identities (characteristics given to people) becomes a priority. The dominant group often relies on traditional ties, allies, and clients. In maintaining power, the group appoints trusted senior officials and advisors to privileged positions. The group imposes top-down decisions, leaving little or no room for public input and flexibility. Over time, such actions generate resentment, especially from excluded communities or those seeking to challenge the ruling group. This sets in motion a cyclical process in which new groups, with stronger *assabiya*, challenge the established order, perpetuating cycles of dominance and subordination. As a result, long-term societal cohesion and development becomes unsustainable.

Eventually, segments of the society recognize the limitations of traditional *assabiya*. While useful during transitional periods or in times of external threats, long-term social cohesion requires a more civic-oriented approach. An approach gradually cultivating acquired identities. With this approach, the society does not totally reject *assabiya* but acknowledges the coexistence of multiple forms of social solidarity. As time and space no longer connect as it was in the past, communities increasingly mobilize transnationally and digitally, making a singular unidimensional group solidarity more complex and unpredictable. The current world therefore provides spaces for differentiated networking.

With the existence of such complex networking opportunities, Sheydaan once promised to continuously assault humans from at least four main directions; front, back, right, and left. Such regressive enterprises include the society pursuing extreme networking- *assabiya* (*beel ba'day*) mixing it with the “*shirking responsibility and awe of ancestral blood*” and crowning it with “*mechanized mob justice*.” Fortunately, the society has also the capabilities of generating complex forms of networking in which optimistic people seek “*prospering in unity*” and jointly “*shoulder the collective burden*” for better future.

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ⁱ Ibn Khaldun (1967) *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

ⁱⁱ Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame Hadraawi. *Daalacan*. (<https://www.poetrytranslation.org/poem/clarity/>)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah* [I, 285].

^{iv} (Alatas, S. F. (2014) *Applying Ibn-Khaldūn: The recovery of a lost tradition in sociology*. Routledge).

^v Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame Hadraawi (2003) *Dabahuwan*

^{vi} Ali Jimale Ahmed (2002) *Fear is a cow*. Red Sea Press. P. 35

^{vii} Mohamed A. Eno (2013) *Corpses on the Menu: Blood, Bullets and Bones*. Outskirts Press. P 17

^{viii} Cabdi Muxumed Amiin- cited in Abdulkadir Shire Farah. *Matxafka Cadaabta*. Kasm Publishing. p. 358