

Between the Fantasies of Theory and the Realities of Practice: A Critical Review of the "Societal Alternative" Thesis

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بين رغائبية التنظير وصلابة الواقع:
قراءة نقدية في أطروحة "البديل المجتمعي"

In the past period, I have been busy reading a recent thesis by a contemporary Islamic writer multiple times to digest it and try to extract - what I agree or disagree with, and therefore, this article relates to an intellectual thesis aiming to diagnose the tragedy of the nation and its revival movements. It also attempts to provide structural alternatives and a substitute thesis to break free from the cycle of repeated failure as perceived by its author.

I am not inclined to name the writer or his thesis so that the matter does not become personal, and also to take my freedom in criticism. Therefore, I will suffice in this article to critique the theory without delving into names and details, as I hold respect for its author with differences.

Initially, upon reflecting on the major joints of this thesis, I found that it essentially does not depart from being a "recycling and merging" of three contemporary classical intellectual schools: First, the legacy of the Islamic

movement (activism and politics) focusing on building the Muslim individual (doctor, engineer, thinker) and infiltrating society and the state through them; second, the literature of scientific Salafism represented in the jurisprudence of "purification and education"; and third, a mixture blending between the deconstructions of the Arab thinker Jamil Akbar in his book "Justice and Reality" and the critique of the power of the modern state in the vein of the writings "The Impossible State" by Wael Hallaq, with due respect.

In my opinion, this makes us face a rephrasing of old slogans with a contemporary theoretical framework, and perhaps a new title for a new thesis, although overall it did not bring anything new in the field of presentation, even if it is brilliant in the field of narrative and historical rooting throughout the introduction and details.

Description of the Thesis and its Major Points

The proposed theory relies on a radical diagnosis of the tragedy of the Islamic revival movements that emerged within the context of "Western modernization" and colonization, considering them to have fallen into the trap of "warring pendulum movement", with recurring rises and falls without real accumulation of results or experiences. The thesis also calls for surpassing the format of "secret identity organizations" that collide with the state and are often uprooted after being controlled and used, proposing a strategic alternative based on "specialized elites and social phenomena and independent institutions".

This thesis relies on the specialization of the distinguished, and the formation of competency institutions (such as education and services) independent of secret and political organizations based on the idea of "internal societal accumulation" and enduring efforts in upbringing, education, and qualification across generations to revive the nation from its social base and win the battle of consciousness independently from the noise of direct political confrontation with power.

The Illusion of Liberation Through Societal Rooting

The criticized theory is based on a fundamental premise: that the solution lies in departing from "secret and hierarchical organizations" and liberation through

building "internal societal roots" and specialized elites that manage the institutions of daily life and social phenomena.

However, this idea collides with the rock of lived reality; talking about building a civil or local society independent of the dominance of the modern state lacks realism. This is because the comprehensive modern state does not leave a void that can be controlled, and if it does, it returns to it as soon as it senses its movement or importance, seizing what has been built or altering it, as it monopolizes all the levers of living (security, livelihood, food, medicine), and drags any movement into a web of influence, material, and force.

Therefore, the judgment of this idea lies in the question: who today has the luxury "to live as a nation" under an unforgiving security and institutional authority? Attempting to build independent blocks means -in the eyes of the authority- an announcement of rebellion, and these blocks will find themselves forced -optionally or compulsorily- to close and confine themselves within specific identity molds that are easily detectable and crushed, which brings the theory back to the same point it tried to stand against.

The Strategic Illusion: Internal Accumulation Versus External Grip

The thesis then bets on the issue of "internal societal accumulation" and the long process of upbringing across generations, ignoring the hard truth that external and international power and influence are the ones that truly control the nodes of conflict and determine who stays and who departs.

In my opinion, betting on time and cosmic laws independently from global power balances is "beautiful theoretical idealism" on paper, but devoid of means of execution in an Islamic nation assailed from all sides, as it is subject to international and regional interactions managed by major powers that do not desire any real independence.

Unlike the Zionist experience -for example- which succeeded in establishing because it had control over international and material nodes before the local ones, the Islamic nation today entirely lacks this external empowerment, making any attempt at calm internal accumulation vulnerable to being ground and uprooted with every shift in international or regional winds.

The Paradox of Secret Organizations.. An Unwelcome Necessity

The thesis agrees with the criticism directed at secret and hierarchical organizations considering them a cause for pendulum conflict and uprooting, but it falls into the trap of canceling them altogether.

The reality contradicts this proposition; despite the criticisms of these secret organizations, their existence -or rather their remaining as a specter or a rough opponent- remains an important vital factor for the realization of this thesis -in my opinion-; it occupies the other side of the thesis (the authority and the state) and exhausts its effort, allowing movement space "for the middle side" (social phenomena and community).

Thus, entirely canceling the organizations leaves the arena completely free for the state to focus on gradually grinding the society and its root without any political or security safeguards.

The Risks of Betting on the Institutional and Generational Alternative

The thesis then bets on "the independent institutional alternative" across generations, and in my opinion, this bet is fraught with risks; human generations are unstable, each generation comes with its ideas, methods and mood, and the continuation of "the accumulative line" cannot be guaranteed without deviation.

Historical experiences prove that any group or social phenomenon that starts open and flexible, soon with intensifying conflict and the inability to control external nodes, it transforms sooner or later into "closed clusters" on itself, to reproduce the same crisis of the organizations it stood to critique.

Conclusion

Despite the quality of the book and its number of pages and the writer's skill in narrating events in a way that serves the idea he wants to present, this theory appears dazzling and very creative in terms of "narrative and theoretical

diagnosis", and successfully records the weaknesses of the past and the failures of traditional organizations. But in terms of "practical and alternative presentation" it lacks -in my opinion- the feasibility of execution, and overall adopts the same traditional stances but with a new theoretical framing and wrapping.

Relying on "theoretical idealism" and ignoring the grip of the state and the dominance of external influence will not change the bitterness of reality, rather it remains merely a new attempt to reread the scene with tools that are not strong enough to face the storms of the struggle for power and influence in today's world.

Note: This article is a critical and intellectual reading of the thesis under discussion, and does not represent an invitation to violence or armed action, nor an endorsement or promotion of any group or secret organization or unlawful practice. The reference to some organizations or discussing their roles comes in the context of analyzing the idea and critiquing it, not in the context of inviting to them or justifying their practices.

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