

# **The Importance of Thoughts in Malek Bennabi's Civilizational Construction Process**

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## **Abstract:**

This study aims to know the importance of thoughts in the process of civilizational construction at Malek Bennabi, who gave the problem of civilization in the Islamic community great attention in his studies and research, in which he concluded that the thoughts held by man are the source and the basis of the entire cultural problem.

Malek Bennabi concluded that the problem of civilization is solved only by solving three problems: the problem of man, the problem of soil and the problem of time. He laid down three basic stages in the Islamic civilization construction, indicating the importance of thoughts in these stages: the stage of spirit, the stage of mind and the stage of instinct.

**Keywords:** Civilization, Thoughts, Civilizational construction.

## **1. Introduction**

The Algerian Islamic thinker Malek Bennabi is one of the twentieth century men who preoccupied themselves with their nation's issues, and sought to develop solutions and suggestions that would bring the Muslim nation out of its combined overall underdevelopment, pushing it to effectively embrace the times.

Malek Bennabi, may God rest his soul, presented an integrated intellectual project that will help - in his appreciation - to understand more about the problems of civilization and the surrounding circumstances. From this point of view, we will try to demonstrate the

importance of thoughts in Malek Bennabi's civilizational construction process through the exposure to:

First: Historical background about Malek Bennabi's life

Second: Malek Bennabi's concept of civilization

Third: The stages of the civilizational cycle of Malek Bennabi – Islamic society as a model –

Fourth: The importance of thoughts in the civilizational construction

## **2. Historical background about Malek Bennabi's life**

Malek Bennabi son of Omar son of Lakhder son of Mostafa Bennabi was born in January 01<sup>st</sup>, 1905 in Constantine, one of the eastern Algerian cities. His father was in a simple position with the French colonial government administration in Tebessa, which has become their home land and the cradle of growing up of Bennabi. His mother was working as a seamstress in order to help in raising the family's economic and living standards, since most Algerian families were at that time as a result of the harsh living conditions of misery and deprivation imposed by colonial authorities. Malek Bennabi introduced the "Book" to learn and memorize the Quran besides the principles of arithmetic and the Arabic language, he subsequently enrolled in French school; however, he frequented to hesitate about the Book as well as on the ancient mosque and attending prayer times.

Malek Bennabi (The Child) was noted for his penchant of learning and attachment to reading, receiving additional lessons in grammar, rhetoric, Arabic language and culture, he was also keen to learn from the lessons and seminars conducted in the mosques.

He travelled to France in September 1930, he inscribed in radio school to study electrical engineering in the Latin neighborhood where the Arabs and Moroccans lived. Bennabi was particularly keen raising awareness particularly in terms of reform, civilizational construction and Maghreb unity in the spirit of the North African call for a

grouping against colonialism, has also allowed knowing many leaders, philosophers and intellectuals. In 1936, he met the Algerian delegation that went to Paris to ask the French authorities for parliamentary participation which headed by two reformists: Abdel Hamid Ben Badis and Bachir Al-Ibrahimi.

In 1956, he also travelled to Egypt, where he had closely knew its political leaders and reformers, as well as he collaborated with some of the leaders of the Algerian National Liberation Front who were making their own militant contributions in Cairo, one of the most fertile stages of his life. During this time, he carried out many intellectual studies, such as: “The Conditions of Renaissance” and “The Problem of Ideas in the Muslim World”, he also managed many debates with prominent Egyptian intellectuals and scientists such as: Sheikh Mohamed Abdullah Daraz, Sayed Qutb.

In 1963, Professor Malek Bennabi returned to Algeria after several years in Egypt and the Arab Mashreq, where he held many positions, including : Chancellor of Higher Education, Rector of the University of Algiers, Minister of Higher Education, but due to circumstances he resigned in 1967 to devote himself entirely for the intellectual work and organizing seminars. From 1973, began to feel sick running through his body. In October 31<sup>st</sup> , 1973 he surrendered his pure soul to Allah.

His most famous publications are: The Quoranic Phenomenon, the Conditions of Renaissance, Modern in the New Construction, Islam and democracy, the Problems of Ideas in the Muslim World, the Memoirs of the Witness of the Century, the Birth of a Society, Orientalist Influence in Modern Islamic Thought, Muslim in the World of Economics, The Idea of an Islamic Commonwealth, On the Origins of Human Society, The Problem of Culture, Afro-Asiatism, The Muslim Role in the Last Third of the Twentieth Century, The Ideological Struggle in the Colonized Countries.

### **3. Malek Bennabi's concept of civilization**

#### **3.1. The functional definition of civilization**

Civilization is “the sum total of the moral and material conditions that allow a particular society to provide to each individual, in every phase of his existence, from childhood to old age, the necessary assistance in each stage of his growth, at school and in the laboratory, the hospital, the transportation system, and security in all its forms across the country. As well as, respect for one's personality represent– according to Malik Binh opinion – the various forms of assistance that the civilized society is able to provide to the individual to whom it belongs.”( Bennabi, 1991, pp.46-47)

It is understood from this definition that society has a major role in the achievement of civilization by providing moral and material conditions for its members, and thus the ability for creativity and evolution.

In this sense, Malek Bennabi disagrees with defining society as a group of individuals governed by the same laws and values. In his perspective, society is “ a human group that evolves from a point where, within historical time, it has always changed its social characteristics by producing the means of change and knowing what purpose it seeks.” (Bennabi, 1986, pp.14-15)

“ It is a particular organization of a human nature, embodied in the social network, in which it is carried out according to a particular system that based on foregoing on three elements to which the human group owes its social characteristics that refer it to a society in the logical sense of the word.” (Lahrach, 2006, pp.69-70). According to Malek Bennabi, these elements are as follows: (Bennabi, 1986, p. 15)

- A movement that characterizes the human community.
- Production for the reasons of this movement.
- Determine its directions.

From these elements, Malek Bennabi concludes that there must be a relationship between the interaction of nature and history within human civilization. He says: “Nature exists as species, but history makes society, and nature’s goal is merely survival, while history’s goal is to progress toward higher form of life, which we call Civilization. “ (Bennabi, 1986, p. 16)

Malek Bennabi has attached great importance to animated and teleological society in the creation of civilization, as it provided each of its members with all the social guarantees necessary for its advancement.

The historical movement of civilizational society is based on the interpretation that: “every human medium incorporated into its movement and produced for its reasons involves an essential factor that overcomes the innate inertia - in accordance with the principle of classical mechanics- when it transforms the elements of inertia in a given medium to dynamic values.” ( Bennabi, 1986, p.15)

### **3.2. Synthetic definition of civilization**

Since civilization, in Malek Bennabi’s view, is a constructive movement, there is no denying that is not an ecstasy, because after all the problem of civilization is not solved by importing products available in other societies -while retaining of course the idea of making conscious use of other societies which is essential to the integrity of interaction between societies. (Lahrach, 2006, p.97), but it requires solving three partial problems as follows: (Ben Nabi)

- The problem of man and determining the conditions for his compatibility with the course of history.
- The problem of soil and the conditions for its exploitation in the social process.
- The problem of time and its meaning in the spirit of society and the psyche of the individual.

In order to build a civilization, “We must, as Malik Bennabi says, create men who walk through history using earth, time and talent to build their goals.” (Lahrach, 2006, p. 97)

From this basis, the following civilized equation can be deduced: Civilization = man + soil + time.

According to Malek Bennabi, civilization should not be measured in terms of its products, but rather in terms of three elements: man, soil, and time.

### **3.2.1. Man**

Malek Bennabi stands at the basic idea that man is the source and basis of the whole civilization problem and any thinking about this problem is essentially based to his thinking itself.

Malek Bennabi believes that the problem of man differs according to the environment in which he lives and its data. He states that it is not possible to balance the current situation between the colonized European man and the colonizable Muslim man because both are at their own historical stage. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 99)

Malek Bennabi points out that there are two types of individuals : city man and an instinct one. The first one lives in an urban agglomerations, and he is either unemployed or selling some drugs and needs, very few works as a lawyer, judge or pharmacist, but the instinctive man lives in a nomad where there is no cattle, a farmer with neither plough nor land.(Bennabi,1991,pp.113-114)

The difference between these two types is that the individual who lives in the city (urban) is represented by scarcity and oligarchy in everything “penetrated into himself the reasons for degradation...It’s always in the middle of the road, in the middle of an idea, and in the middle of an evolution. He does not know how to reach his goal, as he is not the starting point of history as a man of instinct (nature) nor the ending point as a man of civilization, but

rather the commenting point of evolution, of history and of civilization.(Lahrach, 2006, pp. 104-105)

As for the instinct individual, as he pointed out earlier, is a nomadic peasant without plough or land or cattle. In general, it expresses the starting point of history. The two types of individuals have to change their mindsets and move towards awareness in order to be able to construct civilization. (Lahrach, 2006, p. 105)

It follows from this that Malek Bennabi's thought revolves around a fundamental point that man is the main engine of history, and that we have to understand how man influences the structure of history and society. Bennabi (1992,p.33) pointed out that there were three man stimuli: his thoughts, work and money.

It is possible to reverse the formula, and say that the man issue in society – which is experiencing a crisis of movement and growth across various developmental lines (social, economic, political...) – is entrusted with directing him in three aspects : direct culture, direct work, direct capital. (Lahrach, 2006, p. 106)

What is meant by guidance according to Malek binnabi is “basically strength, compatibility in walking, and unity in purpose, in other words, avoiding wasteful efforts and time.” (Bennabi, 1992, p.34). As for the culture according to Malek Bennabi, it is “the medium in which the characteristics of a civilized society (the historical society) are formed besides to each parts, according to the supreme ideal that society painted for itself from the beginning, including the blacksmith, the artist, the shepherd, the scholar, the imam, and thus history is composed (Bennabi, 1984a, p. 76) . From this point of view, culture is historically a civilizing factor, but also an applied educational system. (Kamel, 1985, p. 43)

This educational system or program adopted by the society as a constitution for its cultural life, consists of four elements that Malek Bennabi considers as very important for gathering the conditions for effectiveness, which is the main point through which it is possible to

determine the status of culture in society and the success of any social policy. These elements are as follows : (Bennabi, 1992, p.39)

- Ethical guidance for the formation of social connections and the identification of collective behavior within society.
- Aesthetic guidance within the society.
- Aesthetic guidance to create public taste.
- Practical logic.
- Technical guidance compatible with the needs and requirements of each society.

In addition to directing culture in man, Malek Bennabi believes that “a society that wants to build a civilization should be concerned primarily with the process of practical guidance by educating its members that work is a basic condition and a necessary process for existence and progress, and then it is concerned with guidance in work for the sake of gain.” (Lahrash, 2006, p. 130)

Moreover, as for directing man to capital in order to construct a civilization, it does not always and necessarily require – according to Malek Bennabi – a large and enormous amount of money, but above all, how to manage successfully and rationally the small amount of money that exists in society, transforming its social meaning from “depressed money” into “dynamic capital that creates labor and activity” and in which -unlike the social unrest in Europe resulting from the marginalization of one class to another- there is the contribution of all members of society. (Lahrach, 2006, pp. 130 -131)

### **3.2.2. Soil**

Malek Bennabi believes that soil in general in areas where Islam is predominant is considered worthless because of the delay of the individuals who live on it. Such as in Algeria, where the green land that was available on many of its cities (In Tebessa) is threatened by extinction because the Algerian man is unaware of the consequences of the desert sand. (Bennabi, 1992, pp.64-66), while the opposite is observed in terms of the value of soil in a country like Japan, despite

its poor and generally infertile soil (rochy mountains and islands), it has progressed in civilization thanks to the efforts made by the Japanese man in order to adapt the soil element to social benefits. (Okacha, 1993, p. 123)

### 3.2.3. Time

Malek Bennabi's sense of time element is not defined as a period of time measured by the clock, but rather by his functional that evaluates actions performed within certain time periods. (Mawlay, 1994, p. 301)

Malek Bennabi gives an example of what Germany did after the Second World War, in his book *The Conditions of Renaissance*: "It had nothing left to build upon when the activity began in the same German society in early 1948 -due to the doubling of working hours, the valuing of time, and the rejection of neglect and laziness at work - was when at ground zero in terms of its economic fundamental (Bennabi, 1984b, pp. 147-148) .Thus after years, Germany became one of the developed countries.

According to Malek Bennabi, the civilizational structure consists of man, soil and time, but these three elements cannot achieve civilization if they are isolated from each other, but on the contrary, these elements must overlap with each other and work in the form of an overlapping whole.

The intersection of the elements of civilization, in turn, is done only by the presence of a compound which "may be a religious idea, and for this reason Malek Bennabi paid much attention to the pure idea in general and to the religious idea in particular and its great role in activating man life, soil and time." (Bennaabi, 1984b, p. 50)

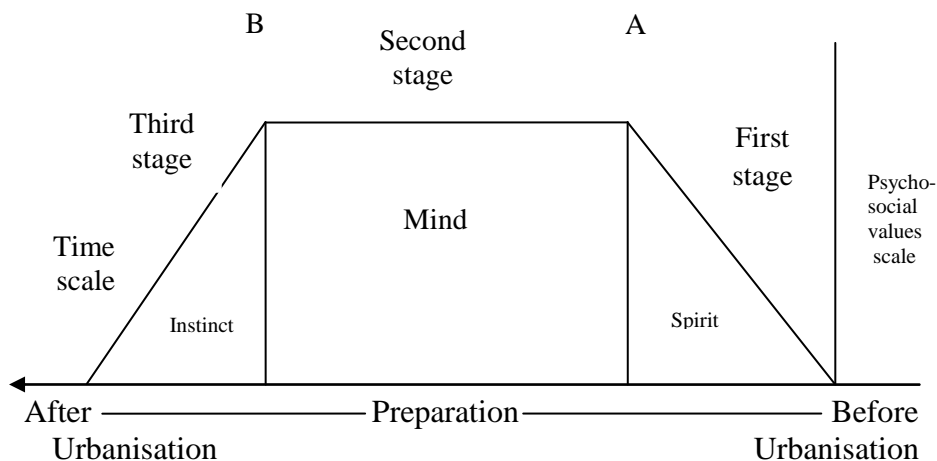
The religious idea of civilized mobilization and development of societies takes in this sense the role of a triggers that rlrvates the efforts of each individual and brings about the intermingling and

interaction of the various elements of civilization (man, soil, time) to give rise to an active force in history. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 137)

Civilization through a historical reading “does not appear – according to Malik Bennabi – in a nation except in the form of a revelation that descends from heaven, in which individuals have a law and a path, or at least is based on directing individuals towards a metaphysical deity in the general sense, as if the sun of civilization was destined to shine upon man only where his eyes extend beyond his earthly life. When he discovers the truth of highest meaning of things dominated by his genius and interacts with (Bennabi, 1984b, p. 56).

#### **4. The stages of the civilizational cycle of Malek Bennabi – Islamic society as a model –**

Malek Bennabi explains civilization as a social phenomenon, having a specific historical process, starting with the stage of the spirit, then entering to the stage of the mind and finally the stage of instinct. These stages will be shown through the graph, “the graph representing the psychosocial values is a picture of changes across various civilizational stages, starting with the first point (m) in an ascending line indicative of civilized growth, and necessarily between rise and fall, a certain completion is : a phase in which civilization spreads and expands, expressed in a horizontal line, as shown in the figure below:(Bennabi, 1984b, pp. 73-74) :

**Figure 1. Civilizational cycle at Malek Bennabi**

#### 4.1. Spirit stage

It is the first stage of urbanization, characterized by a strong spiritual impulse, to which – according to Malek Bennabi – all developments in society, whether retrogressive crises or leaps leading to progress. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 149)

What should be recorded here is that the word spirit, which comes as a title for this stage, versus the word mind, which is the title of the next stage, is shuffled with some ambiguity, but as an attempt to comprehend its content from Malek Bennabi writings, it can be said to mean a commitment to the principle that appears – for example to Muslims– on the personal devotional level, in the form of (Muslim – Allah) bond, and on the collective devotional level in the form of (Muslim – Muslim) bond, which despite its complexity (rulers versus governed, rich versus poor...) are clearly defined by the provisions of Revelation (principle). (Bennabi, 1986, p. 56)

The spirit stage is ultimately represented at the level of what Malek Bennabi calls the ladder of temporal values, which characterizes the level of a civilization at a given time – a historical translation of the organic relationship that exists between belief in the certain idea of principle/belief such as Islam or Christianity, and the individual who, for

that faith, forms the concrete basis, in being a Muslim or a Christian. Therefore, when this faith takes on its role – psychologically and socially – as a trigger and is the organic relationship – the meaning of the escent of every individual's effort, which is transferred from a natural or innate man state that is partially liberated from the law of nature innate in his. Thus, through a conditional process expressed in psychology of Freud as repression – it regulates and does not negate his instincts and his entire life in a functional relationship with the spiritual requirements that adherence to the principle impresses in itself

(Bennabi, 1984b, pp. 74-75).

According to Malek Bennabi, the same is true of the Islamic civilization. The beginning of its formation and effectiveness was known in its first stage which begins from the cave of Hira (the revelation) to the era of the Caliphate. This stage ended in the year 37 AD (657 BC), which coincides with the fact that in the view of Malek Bennabi, transformed the course of Islamic history, as it brought Islamic civilization ou a stage dominated by adherence to principle to one dominated by reason and adorned with grandeur (Ben Nabi, 1984b, p. 58).

#### **4.2. Mind stage**

The word "mind" here comes according to the content contained in it by Malik Bennabi which is synonymous with the personal interpretations freed from the authority of the soul ethical principle, which allows the beginning of the emergence of personal and reformist accounts (the emergence of selfishness), which tears apart aspects of the threads of the large social relations network. As for the mind, as an instrument of perception, foresight and knowledge realization, is in place at the previous stage., on the basis that the development of a civilized society is governed by the opening of the doors of mental activity. In the context of Islamic or Christian civilization, scholars' important productions in many fields are in fact the product of Islamic and Christian engineering of the mind. (Lahrash, 2006, pp. 156, 157)

Therefore, according to the foregoing, the stage of reason represents for Bennabi's owner a slow and partial decomposition of society, and a lack of effectiveness, resulting from a contraction in the impact of principle/spirit on the life of society in general and a growth in

mind, which automatically leads him to cease to rise civilizationally. (Ben Nabi, 1986, p. 40)

At this point, Islamic civilization abandoned the principle that prevailed in its first stage, which began from the cave of Hira to the end of the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate, to enter a new stage in its life, dominated by mind, which seems obvious with the rule of the Mamalik. (Umayyad Age and the First Abbasid Age). Instead of principle, individuals tended to sanctify people regardless of their proximity or distance from principle, resulting in the emergence of doctrines and political and doctrine conflicting (followers of so and so...). It has had a relative impact on the network of social relations, so that some aspects of its thread have been torn apart because of the principle's lack of sovereignty at this stage. This sovereignty, according to Malik Bennabi, will continue to be invisible since civilization entered the stage of mind because instincts at this stage find room for them to gradually liberate from the rules and controls laid down by the moral principle (spirit). (Ben Nabi, 1984 b, p. 76, 77)

#### **4.3. Instinct stage**

For Islamic societies, this stage (the stage of instinct), according to the opinion of Malek Bennabi, is the time of Ibn Khaldoun and post-unite (from 1269 to the present day), is a stage in which the social function of the moral principle (spirit) ends, so that this principle here becomes unable to perform its task in a totally dissolved society, in which nature (with all the instincts that it contains) has regained its predominance. (Bennaabi, 1984b, p. 77)

At this stage, social relations are non-functional when selves become inflated, and joint collective action becomes difficult or impossible. Then the debate takes place not to find solutions to problems but to find evidence and evidence, in addition to the widespread phenomenon of borrowing solutions or ready ideas arising from the complex of inferiority or dependency. (Bennaabi, 1986, p. 40)

Society returns to ground zero from a scientific point of view, because that is illogical from a historical point of view (the society in this case only stops and lags behind the march), but what is meant by this (i.e. retreat) is the return of society in terms of the sharpening factor of

civilization (the moral principle) to Zero point, (i.e. before entering into civilization) due to its absence or loss of sovereignty over instincts, and then over the public life of society. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 165)

Malek Bennabi believes that the reformist thinkers who – despite their efforts – moved away from planning that deals with change, i.e. planning that touches the core of the problem represented mainly in the growing gap between « theoretical Islam » and « practical Islam », which resulted in the impotence of Islamic societies. On progress and the loss of religion in it for its social functions, in short : its ineffectiveness. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 166)

Malek Bennabi also points out that the individual, before the start of the civilized cycle, is in a state prior to civilization, but at the end of it, it is in the post-civilization era (i.e. an individual disintegrated / completely de-civilized) and there is a difference between that, as the individual who Civilized disintegration is not only considered an individual outside civilization – as is the case with the individual prior to civilization (the innate / natural individual) – but more than that, he is no longer capable of completing a prepared work unless he himself changes from his basic roots, while the previous individual remains On civilization ready to enter the civilization cycle.

## **5. The importance of thoughts in the civilizational construction**

According to Malek Bennabi, when talking about culture as a phenomenon that pertains to the way of life in a particular society, attached a certain nation on the one hand, as well as the social behavior that characterizes the behavior of the individual in that society – that nation on the other hand, the process of organizing ideas in society a great and fundamental importance, it is either a reason for the advancement of civilized society, or it has another function that leads it to stagnation, chaos and underdevelopment. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 172)

In the view of Malek Bennabi, some societies in the world have advanced today in the various fields of life only as a result of their elevation of the value of the idea first, then they were later able to build the world of their things by themselves in all aspects of their industry, inspired by that from the world of their ideas, because the wealth of societies is not measured in The reality is in the amount of things you

possess, but rather in the effective ideas you possess, capable of serving, developing and influencing them positively. (Bennaabi, 1984a, pp. 14, 15)

This matter is very important in the view of Malek Bennabi, especially for societies that suffer from civilizational crises or civilizational backwardness – as is the case in the societies of the Islamic world today – which in turn formed a knot that put in their way (the societies) a kind of sick love by measures of strength, that is, by standards based on things rather than the idea-based metrics on which the development of the new world is focused. (Lahrash, 2006, p. 174)

The basis of the civilizational crisis in the societies of the Islamic world does not, then, lie in the opinion of Malik bin Nabi in the nature of their civilizational problems, as much as it lies in the intellectual aspect of the Muslim person, or rather in his position on these problems : this position was characterized by social effectiveness and did not harmonize with The law of motion and change that is related to the “civilized will” which in turn is identical with the noble Quranic verse No. 11 of Surat Al-Ra’d : “God does not change a people until they change what is in themselves.” (Lahrash, 2006, p. 174)

## **6. Conclusion**

Malek Bennabi’s life was a life of struggle with thought and pen. His analytical approach was characterized by Cartesian rationality and Khaldunian abundance. He lived simple in his daily life, but he was a giant school of thought that grew up on his curriculum for generations in Algeria and throughout the Arab and Islamic world and elsewhere. So, the follower of Malek Bennabi’s great intellectual product, as well as qualitatively, will find what constitute answers to most of the questions raised by the skeptics about the ability of Islam to deal permanently with life.

Thus, Bennabi’s ideas raise these problems and establish a solid theory that derives its strength from its roots stemming from the depth and originality of Islam and from its actual ability to keep pace with all modern challenges.

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