BENNABI'S THOUGHTS ON CIVILIZATION: ANALYZING FROM A PLURALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Malek Bennabi was a prominent social thinker and Muslim reformer post-world war II. His thoughts on civilization and in particular, Islamic civilization stand remarkable and spectacular. Growing up in a colonial period and under the tyranny of colonizers, where not only the physical condition of his people was at stake, but also their identity and intellectual capacity were in jeopardy. He was, thus, prompted to analyze the root of the problem of colonization. After a long-deliberated analysis, he concluded that the problem of any people lies in things related to their civilization. Consequently, he extensively engaged with the discourses on civilization. He looked at civilization as an equation of three elements, which are man, soil, and time, where religious ideas, or any alternative ideology, act as a catalyst for constructing a civilization. The aim of this paper is, thus, to analyze Bennabi's thoughts in the light of new developments in the discourse on civilization, especially in the field of historical sociology and social anthropology. To achieve this goal, his works are consulted and analyzed alongside other significant works on civilization, modernity, and religion. This conceptual paper was developed based on qualitative research. It presents the idea of multiple civilizations as opposed to the dichotomy of Islamic and Western/Christian civilizations. The analysis of Bennabi's thought from a pluralistic perspective rejects the notion of any clash among civilizations, more specifically between modern and Islamic civilizations. It also challenges Bennabi's view on the genealogy of modern civilization in terms of religion. Moreover, the study gives appropriate theoretical foundations to analyze Muslim world/s spanning over more than a millennium. Bennabi is not viewing the whole Muslim history and the world as a single civilization and juxtaposing it with that of West. His main contention is that all civilizations have their genesis in religion or ideology for their existence.

Keywords: Malek Bennabi, Civilization, Colonizability, Religion, and Intellectual crisis

Introduction

Malek Bennabi (1905-1973), a prominent Muslim social thinker and a celebrated philosopher, was a crucial figure in the development of Muslim thought in the modern era. He is considered by many such as Fahmi Jad'an and Badrane Benlahcene as the second Ibn Khaldūn of Muslim history and the most original thinker to speculate on the phenomenon of civilization since Ibn Khaldūn.[1] Bennabi lived during a turbulent period of Muslim history when most of the Muslim countries were suffering from colonization, and many of his people in Algeria were leaving home in search of a better place to live. As a consequence, the traditional Islamic environment and life started to degrade, and solidarity began to weaken, and thus endangering the unity. His country Algeria, like most of the Muslim countries, was going through a catastrophic situation under French colonization. Under the backdrop of colonialization, Bennabi foresaw a long-term intellectual and subsequently civilizational impact on people's minds.[2]

Bennabi was renowned among the Muslim scholars and thinkers of his time for having mastered two streams of education and thought: modern-Western and Islamic traditional.[3] Initially, he had to face some repercussions of colonialism and political struggle and failed to get admission into his preferred

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[1] Fahmi Jad'an (1979), *Usus Al-Taqaddum ʿinda Mufakkirī Al Islām Fī a-ʿĀlam Al-ʿArabī Al Ḥadīth*, Beirut: Al-Muassasah al-Arabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr; Badrane Benlahcene (2011), *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*, USA: IIIT.
[2] Malek Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr; Fawzia Bariun (1992), "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 325–37.
[3] Bariun (1992), "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah."

university or institute in France.[4] This experience had left a significant influence on his ideas about colonization and the concept of 'colonizability,' which he used as an analytical tool to study Muslim society today.[5]

One of the core themes of Bennabi's works is the phenomenon of civilization, which has become the principal theme of his books. Civilization, for him, is the mother of all problems of any society.[6] He focuses his analysis on civilizational retardation of Muslim society, particularly on the backwardness of Muslim society and their intellectual incapability. Among Muslims, the idea of civilization first materialized in the works of Ibn Khaldūn. He introduced the concepts *Haḍārah* and *'Umrān,* which are not very different from the modern Western notion of civilization. This concept later permeated again in the 19th century as a result of the encounter with modernity and Western advancement.[7] The definition of civilization has not been very lucid in the literature, although people generally associate things like city-dwelling, organization, sedentary life, urbanization, some form of government, security, literacy, reflexivity, a network or social relationship and ideology as the central elements in the definition of civilization. Dealing with the situation of his time, Bennabi relates the phenomenon of civilization with the Western colonization, where the latter helps in developing or instilling a foreign culture in the Muslim world.[8] Nevertheless, he does not reduce the problem besetting the Muslims to external factors only. Instead, he introduces the term 'colonizability' as the main reason for colonization and civilizational retardation.[9]

In light of the above background, this paper seeks to explore Bennabi's concept of civilization and its plausibility in today's world, in particular, the Muslim World. The study attempts to look into two questions related to Bennabi's thoughts on civilization in the light of the pluralistic perspective of civilizations. Firstly, how to look at modern global civilization from a Muslim vantage point? Secondly, what are the best theoretical tools to analyze the long Muslim history and vast, diversified Muslim world/s from a civilizational perspective?

Even though much has been written on Bennabi from various perspectives, but his concepts and thoughts on civilization are not studied as much. '*Mushkilat al-Hadhara inda Malek Bennabi'* is the first systematic study on the topic carried out by Abdussalam al-jafaeri, followed by Suleiman al-Khatib's book *'Falsafa al-Hadhara inda Malek Bennabi.'* A related study was attempted by Fawzia Barium entitled *'Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problem of the Ummah.'* '*The Socio-Intellectual Foundation of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization'* is probably the most recent work carried out systemically to understand Bennabi's thoughts on civilization. Abdelaziz Berghout did another latest study with the title *'Valorizing Time as a Civilizational Asset: Glimpse into the view of Malik Bennabi and Said Nursi.'* However, the questions which have been raised in the present study have not been responded to in any previous studies.

Methodology

This is a conceptual paper based on qualitative research. This paper employs the content analysis approach to achieve its objectives.[10] Through content analysis, themes were developed on Bennabi's concepts, assumptions, and terms, in order to understand his expressions as used to uncover the underlying structure of his approach and comprehend his various concepts as a system for understanding his civilizational framework. The primary sources of reference for this study are the original works of Bennabi, especially his famous book *shurūṭ al-nahḍah* (conditions of the renaissance), and his other significant works.

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[4] Bennabi Malek (1985), *Mudhakkirāt Shāhid Li Al-Qarn*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.

[5] Benlahcene (2011), *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*.

[6] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūṭ Al-Nahḍah*.

[7] Benlahcene (2011), *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*; Ahmet Davutoglu (2000), "Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions of Secularization: A Comparative Analysis," in Azzam Tamimi & John Louis Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, London: Hurst and Co., pp. 170–208; Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (2004), "The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity," in Said Amir Arjomand & Edward A. Tiryakian (eds.), *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis*, London: Sage Publishers, pp. 48–66.

[8] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūṭ Al-Nahḍah*.

[9] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūṭ Al-Nahḍah*.

[10] Amir B Marvasti (2004), *Qualitative Research in Sociology*, Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

Finally, to further understand Bennabi's notion of civilization, his ideas are analyzed from a pluralistic perspective of civilization, which refers here to the pluralistic notion of Arnason[11] combined with multiple civilizations[12] of Talal Asad and multiple modernities[13] of Eisenstadt as this trend "represents one of the most elaborate contributions to the contemporary revival of civilizational theory"[14] especially from a non-Western perspective. This perspective can be defined at two levels: firstly, the Muslim world/s should be seen as multiple civilizations instead of dealing with this vast and complex diversity with a single yardstick. Secondly, Global civilization should be seen in inter-civilizational foundations and trans-civilizational framework.

A Brief Sketch on Bennabi's Life

Malek Bennabi was born in January 1905 to a family with established religious traditions in Constantine, East Algeria. He received his primary and secondary education in a *Madrasah,* where he learned the Quran, Arabic grammar, literature, poetry, French, jurisprudence, and theology. In his time, the *Zawiyah,* a traditional Islamic institute, played a very significant role in preserving Islamic tradition and in resisting foreign influence.[15] During his secondary education, Bennabi came into contact and acquainted himself with the reformist current of Abdul Hamid Al-Badis.[16] However, the Islamic environment of his home played a profound role in the formation of his personality and inculcation of faith.[17] Despite his keen interest and eagerness to continue his studies, Bennabi had to abandon them due to a lack of funding. Therefore, in 1927, he worked at the Shariah court of Aflou in Oran as an assistant officer to gain some income. However, it did not last long.[18]

In 1930, which was also the centenary of Algerian colonialization, he went to Paris and later successfully qualified as an electrical engineer from a polytechnic school. During his stay in France, he joined the *Association des Jeunes Chrétiens*, a Christian youth society, to seek spirituality and piety. On its platform, he grabbed the opportunity to deliver his first public talk on the topic of "Why are we Muslims?". In the same year, he became the vice-president of the Muslim Students Association of North Africa (MSANA), and in 1938, Bennabi was designated as the Director of *the Centre Culturel du Congrès Musulman Algérien* established by MSANA. The rapid success of the center garnered the attention of the French authorities, which consequently, barred the association down after a few months of passionate endeavor.[19] In November 1942, after World War II, when the relationship between Algeria and France was diminished, Bennabi was forced to accept a job in Germany.[20] His first and seminal book *Le Phénomène Coranique* (*The Qur'anic Phenomenon*), was written during the same period in Germany. However, the manuscript was destroyed during an air raid, and it was later rewritten from his memory and was first published in 1946 in Algeria.

In 1948, he wrote his most famous and illuminating, but also a controversial book *Les Conditions de la Renaissance* (*The Conditions of Renaissance*). Since 1949, Bennabi decided to dedicate himself to contribute regularly to the significant Muslim publishers in Algeria, especially *La République Algérienne* and *Le Jeune Musulman*. In 1954, his fourth book *La Vocation de l'Islam* was published in Paris by the renowned *Editions du Seuil*. He visited India on an invitation in 1956 to present his book *L'Afro-Asiatisme* in which he laid down the theoretical and cultural grounds of the non-alignment movement whose first seeds were disseminated during the Bandung Conference in 1955.[21] Following the oppressions and tortures by the colonial powers, he left for Egypt and decided to settle down there as a political refugee. In Egypt, he made contacts with intellectuals, institutions, and influenced them to focus on issues of civilizational renewal of the Muslim *ummah*.[22]

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[11] Johann P. Arnason (2003), *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, Boston: Brill.
[12] Talal Asad (2006), "Islam in Europe and Europe against Islam," in Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Rabi (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion of Contemporary Islamic Thought*, USA: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 302–12.
[13] Eisenstadt (2004), "The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity."
[14] Willfried Spohn (2011), "World History, Civilizational Analysis and Historical Sociology: Interpretations of Non-Western Civilizations in the Work of Johann Arnason," *European Journal of Social Theory* Vol. 14, no. 1, p. 24.
[15] Benlahcene (2011), *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*.
[16] Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawī (2014), "Malik Bennabi's Response to Western Modernity: Contextualizing The Qur'anic Phenomenon," in *The Quran Modernity and Globalization*, Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, pp. 1–22.
[17] Benlahcene (2011), *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*.
[18] Bennabi (1985), *Mudhakkirāt Shāhid Li Al-Qarn*.
[19] El-Mesawī (2014), "Malik Bennabi's Response to Western Modernity: Contextualizing The Qur'anic Phenomenon."
[20] Bennabi (1985), *Mudhakkirāt Shāhid Li Al-Qarn*.
[21] El-Mesawī (2014), "Malik Bennabi's Response to Western Modernity: Contextualizing The Qur'anic Phenomenon."
[22] El-Mesawī (2014), "Malik Bennabi's Response to Western Modernity: Contextualizing The Qur'anic Phenomenon."

From 1957 to 1962, Bennabi was preoccupied with organizing a series of seminars and ideological discussions for Muslim students in Cairo. During this period, he frequently visited many countries to interact with people, mainly, the intellectuals and thinkers, wrote and published many of his well-known books such as *Milād al-Mujtamaʾ*, and *al-Sirāʿal-Fikri fī al-Bilād al-Mustaʿmarah*. Egyptian government offered him sponsorship for publishing some of his books.[23] In 1963, when Algeria achieved its independence, Bennabi returned to his country where the President, Ahmad Ben Bella, asked him to establish a center for cultural orientation. However, exhausted from the bureaucratic routines and belated formalities, Bennabi, on his own, launched a regular intellectual forum series where he concentrated primarily on the cultural and civilizational issues. The period from 1968 to 1970, proved to be a peak in Bennabi's intellectual career where he published several books including his two-volume memoirs, *Le Problème des idées dans le monde musulman, al-Muslim Fi ʿAlam al-Iqtiåa̅d, Perspectives Algeriennes, L'Islam et la démocracie, l'Oeuvre des Orientalistes*. On October 31, 1973, after a long tour of a number of places including Mecca, Damascus, and Beirut, Bennabi took his last breath in Algeria.

Major works and Thoughts of Bennabi

An outstanding contribution of Bennabi in the development of Muslim thought is his introduction of the sociology of independence,[24] which is intimately related to his thoughts on civilization and culture. The aim of this sociology was for him to contribute to the reformulation of the social relations network and to propose the idea of three elements of civilization so that the Muslim society may begin its civilizing process based on this premise.[25] For Bennabi, the conventional definition of society is superficial and unsatisfactory as it does not answer two essential questions: what is the historical function that such an aggregate of individuals accomplishes? Furthermore, what is the nature of the internal organization and the mechanism that enables society to carry out that historical function?[26] He then advanced the idea of natural society and historical society where the former stands as static, and the latter is defined as dynamic.[27] *Shurut al-Nahdha, Mushkilat al-Hadhara, Mushkilat al-Thaqafah, fikrah al-afriqiyyah wa al-Asawiyyah*, *Milād Mujtamaʾ,* and *Qadhaya Kubra* are some of the major works which deal with the issues in question.

Likewise, his contributions to the development of political thought and democracy in Muslim countries is also profound. For him, democracy, above all, is a process of democratization of people in terms of feelings, sentiments, and behavior. He sees democracy as a composite of three characteristics: sentiment towards ego, sentiment towards others, and a cluster of social and cultural features that enable a society to run a democratic system successfully.[28] Another significant contribution of Bennabi was in the study of Quranic interpretations, where he expounded the idea of approaching the Quran in a very multidisciplinary approach combining philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, cosmology, and archeology to respond to the challenges posed by modern materialistic mindset and worldview, particularly the reductionist and subjectivist approaches. His book *'the Quranic Phenomenon'* is a masterpiece in this regard.

An Overview of the Idea of Civilization

Even though the term 'civilization' has been intensely used by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars of different disciplines of social sciences for a long time; it has not yet been defined in simple, precise and lucid terms. Etymologically, the root word of 'civilization' in Greek means to 'lie outstretched' and to be located. *Civitas,* which means the 'city,' is also considered its root.[29] Even though its origin goes back to Greek-Latin history, the word 'civilization' in its use and connotation is relatively modern. It is said that it first appeared, in the 18th century France when it was used by writers such as Voltaire and Mirabeau with the meaning opposite to barbarity or barbarism then, following

[23] Bennabi (1985), *Mudhakkirāt Shāhid Li Al-Qarn*.

[24] Bariun (1992), "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah."

[25] Malek Bennabi (1978), *Bayna Al-Rashd Wa Al-Tayh*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.

[26] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Naḥḍah*.

[27] Malek Bennabi (1986), *Milād Mujtamaʾ*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.

[28] Yahiya H. Zoubir (1998), "Democracy and Islam in Malek Bennabi's Thought," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 107–12; Ahmad Muzakkir Syed & Zulqernain Haider Subhani (2018), "Pluralism, Constitutionalism and Islamic Political Thought," in Limseer et al. (eds.), *Researching Islam in Global Village*, New Delhi: CERT, pp. 381–410.

[29] Philip Paul Wiener (1973), *Dictionary of The History of Ideas*, New York: Charles Scribers Sons Publishers.

them, English writers started using it.[30] However, its derivatives like civilized and to civilize had already been in use in the 16th century Europe.[31] In modern English, it was defined, among others, in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* as "a developed or advanced state of human society; a particular stage or a particular type of this." Further explaining the notion of civilization, scholars, later, added many other meanings to it like the humanization of humans, demolition of barbarism, education in the arts of life.[32] Civility is also a derivative of civilization which connotes conformity to the principles of social order, and behavior that represents good citizen. Thus, among the derivatives of the word civilization that is useful to understand its meaning more clearly include city, citizen, civility, civilization, and to civilize[33]. It is also said that the concept of civilization is closely tied with the idea of modernity and aspirations for it.[34]

In the post-colonial period, when European and Western countries became powerful, their philosophy and notion of civilization began to be reflected in the form of their achievements, their architecture, paintings, literature, music, sciences, sculpture, and philosophy. For the modern West, physical and social security are considered as two main factors in the civilizing process[35]. At this stage, 'development' becomes the most critical element of contemporary civilization. The modern Western concepts of development and modernity became the standard to judge and evaluate the non-Western societies[36]. In the same line, Tylor defined civilization as "degree of advanced culture, in which the arts and sciences, as well as political life, are well developed." [37] Childe further elaborated this notion by adding other elements of development, such as internal social hierarchies, differentiation, specialization, cities, and a precise form of sciences and writings.[38] Such a notion of development and civilization, among the Western and European scholars, began to make Western civilization a singular form of reference and the ideal for human development.[39]

In the prevailing discourse, there has been a debate among scholars on the relationship between culture and civilization. Some view them as two different and separated premises, and others see them as the same and synonymous with each other. Tylor is the first English writer who used the two interchangeably and synonymously.[40] This is in contrast to the German intellectual tradition, which differentiates between the two.[41] Interestingly, there has been a drastic paradigm shift in the concept of civilization when many modern cultural anthropologists prefer to use civilizations, in plural form, in expressing their disagreement with the European sense of self-righteousness and 'the ideal civilization.'[42] Consequently, equal recognition was given to multiple civilizations, where civilization was defined as a cognitive structure and cultural identity, which distinguishes one society from the other.[43]

The contribution of the German tradition to this paradigm shift in the conceptualization of civilization is remarkable. Their premise was on the idea of uniqueness and plurality of civilizations.[44] German scholars differentiated culture from civilization. Kant, for example, defined *Kultur* as 'higher goals of moral cultivation' and *Zivilisation* as 'mere good behavior.' [45] According to Norbert Elias, whose works on civilization provided foundations for sociological analysis of civilization, noted civilization represents a vast and diversified spectrum of facts. It covers, among others, the level of technology, the code of manners, the development of sciences, knowledge, and religious ideas and customs. It can also refer to the type of dwelling, gender relations, the forms of judicial punishment, and the taste and sense

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[30] Norbert Elias (1994), *The Civilizing Process*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
[31] Fernand Braudel (1986), *A History of Civilizations*, London: Penguin Books.
[32] Braudel (1986), *A History of Civilizations*.
[33] Laurence Urdang (1992), *The Oxford Thesaurus*, New York: Oxford University Press.
[34] Edward A. Tiryakian (2004), "Civilizational Analysis: Renovating the Sociological Tradition," in Said Amir Arjomand & Edward A. Tiryakian (eds.), *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis*, London: Sage Publishers.
[35] Shepard Bancroft Clough (1978), *The Rise and Fall of Civilization: An Enquiry into the Relationship between Economic Development and Civilization*, New York: Colombia University Press.
[36] Samuel P. Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
[37] Edward Burnett Tylor (1974), *Primitive Culture*, New York: Gordan Press, p. 1.
[38] Gordon Childe (1978), *What Happened in History*, London: Penguin Books.
[39] Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*.
[40] Edwards Paul (1967), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.
[41] Wiener (1973), *Dictionary of The History of Ideas*.
[42] Keith Chandler (1992), *Beyond Civilization: The World's Four Great Streams of Civilization: Their Achievements, Their Differences and Their Future*, USA: Rivendell Publishing Company.
[43] Chandler (1992), *Beyond Civilization*.
[44] Wiener (1973), *Dictionary of The History of Ideas*.
[45] Said Amir Arjomand & Edward A. Tiryakian (2004), *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis*, London: Sage Publishers.

of food.[46] In short, civilization to him is the accomplishments of society, while culture refers to the dynamic character of civilization and intellectuality.

In Arabic or Islamic tradition, Ibn Khaldūn seems to be the first to have introduced the notion of civilization when he introduced two terms: *haḍārah* and *ʿUmrān*. For him, civilization is a quality peculiar to humans or "the necessary character of the human social organization."[47] It is said that Ibn Khaldūn was the first person to have systematically developed the concept of civilization not only from an Islamic point of view but also as a concept in general.[48] In modern Muslim scholars, there are two notions regarding civilizational discourse; those who have positively employed this such as Afghani, Syed Qutub, and Bennabi, and those who reject the notion of civilizational analysis outright like Ali Shariati, Hamid Dabashi.[49]

It is apparent here that most prevailing notion regarding the conceptualization of civilization is a result of modernization theory where Western trajectory to development and advancement has been considered as a standard to judge other non-Western societies, and thus it has been criticized scathingly by later sociologists and anthropologists like Johann Arnason, and Shmuel Eisenstadt among others. It is also clear from the cursory survey of the literature that the definition of civilization is not outlined precisely. One common problem within the discussions of civilization and its definition is that the elements of spirituality, morality, and ethics are missing from the whole scene. In German tradition and alternative approach proposed by Elias and others, they have tried to highlight the uniqueness and plurality of civilizations, but still, the clear-cut definition of civilization is not presented. Had they been defined in clear elements and constituents of civilization, it would have been easy to look into inter-civilizational relationships in both temporal and spatial terms. Braudel's approach is worth noting here where he connected civilization with geographical areas and proposes land, climate, vegetation, animal species, natural and other advantages, and what people have made up with these basic conditions as points of discussions in the civilizational analysis[50]. Usually, when the civilizational analysis is undertaken, it is assumed that the civilization in question is a civilization built up from the threshold and with rupture from the past. The reason is embedded probably in their definition of modernity as a rupture from the past. While the fact is otherwise, each civilization is a successor and closely definable concerning the previous one as well influenced by interactions with neighboring and surrounding civilizations.

Bennabi's Thought on Civilization

Civilization is the principal theme of Bennabi's works.[51] According to him, civilizational analysis is an essential task for Muslims to undertake. He lamented on the reformist and modernist approach among the Muslim scholars for ignoring the root cause and underlying reasons for the civilizational crisis and focusing only on its symptoms and material factors of the retardation.[52] For him, civilization stands as a theory of development as well as an action plan and a project to bring about development[53], which also, to stimulate social capacities in order to be able to handle and tackle new situations in a developing world. In other words, civilization is a psychological and emotional force that refines the primitive features within the individual and societies and forces human unity, and vibrant energy to catch up with the requirements and expectations of development and progress.[54]

Civilization, according to Bennabi, similar to Elias (1994) and Nelson (1981), ultimately, helps humans to control their behavior and power and utilize them for the benefit of society.[55] For him, in the construction of civilization, the role of collectivity outweighs that of individuals. Society enables individuals, by providing a progressive milieu and a diversified collective force, to construct civilization

[46] Elias (1994), *The Civilizing Process.*
[47] Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldūn (1986), *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Franz Rosenthal (trans.) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 89.
[48] Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg (1985), *Perspective of Civilization*, Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya Press.
[49] Halil Ibrahim Yenigun (2017), "The Rise and Demise of Civilizational Thinking in Contemporary Muslim Political Thought," in *Debates on Civilization in the Muslim World: Critical Perspectives on Islam and Modernity*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 197–219.
[50] Fernand Braudel (1986), *A History of Civilizations*, p. 9.
[51] Bariun (1992), "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah."
[52] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah.*
[53] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah.*
[54] Malek Bennabi (1991), *Qaḍaya Kubrā*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.
[55] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah.*

and contribute to the mission of society to develop itself according to their vision.[56] His concept of culture is deeply rooted in his theory of civilization. He does not follow the culturalist approach of civilization, but he saw culture as the most important factor in the development of civilization as well as the most important definitive element thereof.[57] For him, culture is more about meanings, values, and ideas than forms and actions. In his theory of civilization, the network of social relations occupies a significant place whereby humans can organize social life and live in a group according to their code of conduct.[58] Ideas and intellectual capability stand at the heart of the civilizing process, which, in turn, gives a uniqueness to each civilization.[59] However, when it comes to the precise definition of civilization, Bennabi recognizes the difficulty in defining any social phenomenon in an exact and restricted manner. He noted, "Unlike natural science, human sciences have not yet achieved such a level of maturity as to provide universally applicable definitions for their concepts and terms."[60] His approach to civilization is grounded in psychology and sociology as the two most essential sciences to understand the phenomenon of civilization.[61]

Bennabi used a capsized equation to manifest the ingredients or elements of civilization. For him, civilization is equal to Man + Soil + Time, indicating that the study of any civilization should be carried out by considering these three primary elements.[62] Furthermore, to activate these raw materials, he, based on his analysis of civilization of the world including the Muslim world, introduced the concept of the "catalyst of civilization," which is the religious ideas and drives.[63] Nonetheless, Bennabi's conception of religion is not the same as we find elsewhere. For him, religion is not merely a spiritual and mental engagement, but it is part of a cosmic order deeply rooted in the structure of the universe. It includes all religions, quasi-religions, and ideologies. It is more about ideas and forces or in other words, a relationship between a human being and a power of divine or social nature.[64] Consequently, religion is the most significant factor in organizing and orient these three elements towards developing a civilization. According to Bennabi, no civilization has flourished in history without a religious background and motivation. Hence, modern civilization should also be understood by tracing its elements back into its religious discourse and hence, Christianity.[65] Even though Bennabi has associated modern civilization with Christianity, but his notion is problematic and thus has been refuted from the perspective of the pluralistic approach towards civilization, as we will discuss in some details later.

To further elaborate his views on civilization, he later introduced the concept of three realms of society: objects, persons, and ideas. In the realm of the person, the civilizational process entails the formation of persons who are firmly integrated into society. While the domain of ideas consists of ideas derived from some supernatural or secular sources, and act as a tool to direct and guide society to specific values and ethics. In the Muslims' case, their ideas are derived from the Quran and the Sunnah.[66] Finally, the realm of objects provides tools, resources, instruments for the process of civilization. In brief, any civilization, in order to carry out its journey towards development, needs an entire activity of men using all instruments, resources, and objects within the frame of a particular ideology or system of ideas.[67] Finally, the social relation network facilitates the connections between the three, and thus, civilization materializes.

In his analysis of Islamic civilization, Bennabi considered the period of post-al-Muwahhidin as the era of the demise of Islamic civilization, which started from the 12th and 13th centuries.[68] "Colonizability" (*Qabilliyah li-istimar*) stands as the defining characteristic of that era, which made Muslims vulnerable to civilizational attack and retardation. According to Bennabi, colonization was not as hazardous as

[56] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[57] Malek Bennabi (1984), *Mushkilāt Al-Thaqāfah*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.
[58] Bennabi (1986), *Milād Mujtamaʾ*; Bennabi (1978), *Bayna Al-Rashd Wa Al-Tayh*.
[59] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*; Malek Bennabi (1988), *Islam in History and Society*, Asma Rashid (trans.), Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute.
[60] Malek Bennabi (1998), *On the Origins of Human Society*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawī (trans.), Kuala Lumpur: The Open Press, p. 5.
[61] Mohamed Abdussalam Al-Jafairi (1984), *Mushkilāt Al-Hadarah ʿinda Malek Bennabi*, Tripoli: al-Dar al-ARabiyyah li al-Kitab; Bariun (1992), "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah"; Benlahcene (2011), *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*.
[62] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[63] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[64] Malek Bennabi (1986), *Ta'ammulāt*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.
[65] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[66] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[67] Bennabi (1986), *Milād Mujtamaʾ*.
[68] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.

colonizability and vulnerability to be colonized.[69] He was looking at colonization as a Western civilizational project on Muslim society and criticized the Ottomans for overlooking it as a civilizational control and, thus, resisted it only militarily. When he diagnosed the Islamic civilization in the post-al-Muwahhidin era, Bennabi found out that there are four significant characteristics which can be attributed as the reasons of retardation: (1) weakness of (belief) Imani thought and efforts of learning, (2) separation of action from belief, (3) separation of ethics from politics and governments, (4) ignorance of man from earth and changes of times.[70] Bennabi is one of the strong proponents of the cyclical theory of civilization, and for that, he uses different terms at different places such as 'cyclical phenomenon,' 'pattern of civilization,' 'cycle of civilization,' and the 'phenomenon of civilization.'[71] Each civilization has its imprints on history, and it simultaneously goes on developing or declining in its civilizing process. According to Bennabi, every civilization has to pass through three phases in its course to form its cycle in history: the spirit, the reason, and the instinct. He borrowed this concept from Ibn Khaldūn as he acknowledged it, but his understanding of this cycle is more comprehensive and overarching. He pointed to the constraints of Khaldūn's theory that limits it to a particular social structure and cultural milieu. Ibn Khaldūn articulated this theory in regard to the state cycle, while Bennabi extended it to the phenomenon of civilization as a whole.[72]

Bennabi's thoughts on the conceptualization of civilization are quite different from those of Western scholars, especially in the sense that Bennabi gave a very comprehensive definition to civilization where ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions are considered along with material and other aspects of civilization. However, his view will be elaborated and analyzed further to see how it perceives modern civilization and how it is helpful to study the Muslim world/s from a civilizational perspective.

Reductionist Approach Towards Civilization

It is vital to understand the social, cultural, political, philosophical context in which Bennabi was articulating his thoughts. As with any other thinker, context plays a fundamental role as it interacts, contextualizes, and plays the role of relief in projecting the thoughts of a thinker. Civilization is a modern construe, and an outcome of a particular context wherein Westerners felt a kind of complacency and self-righteousness and carried a connotation of development and superiority over the rest of the world.[73] Ideologies and grand or meta-narratives predominated modern discourse of civilization. Western scholars first defined the global south as backward and lagging during the colonial era and attributed this backwardness of Muslims in particular to Islam, concluding that a 'clash of civilization' between the 'modern western' civilization and Islam is inevitable.[74] Much of the modern development and progress was attributed and defined allegedly by associating them to religion, for their case to Christianity. Asad's latest work, *Secular Translations*, is helpful to understand how new values and developments which had no bearing on any religion were allegedly associated with Christianity.[75] The primary purpose behind this kind of translation was to fuel the clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. Even though the theory of 'clash of civilization' is generally attributed to Samuel Huntington, it was propounded much earlier, for instance, by Basil Mathews in his book *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations* in 1920.[76] Like many other societies, Muslim societies were too suffering from European colonialism, which subjected all societies to accept their values and culture. This is the circumstance where the theory of 'the End of History' and 'Clash of civilization' is quite understandable. In this context, ideas such as 'civilizational conversion' and 'the ideal civilization' were proliferating, and naturally, all other societies and nations felt threatened and thus started to counter those notions with alternative concepts.[77]

Social scientists perceive entities, like villages, regions, ethnicity, nationalities, and other highest cultural groupings and the broadest level of identity as a unit of analysis to study human society. In the wake of modernity, some European scholars started including civilization as the broadest analytical

[69] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[70] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[71] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.
[72] Bennabi (1986), *Shurūt Al-Nahḍah*.; Bariun (1992), "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah."
[73] Tylor (1974), *Primitive Culture*; Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*; Childe (1978), *What Happened in History*.
[74] Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*.
[75] Talal Asad (2018), *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*, New York: Columbia University Press.
[76] Davutoglu (2000), "Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions of Secularization: A Comparative Analysis."
[77] Davutoglu (2000), "Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions of Secularization: A Comparative Analysis."

category in the study of human society and they divided the world in few major civilizations wherein the Western civilization enacted as the result of development and progress and other were defined in terms of retardation and backwardness or even obstacles in the process of development.[78] Furthermore, many scholars tend to identify civilization with religion or perceive religion as a central defining characteristic of civilization[79], in other words, seeing religion as 'the principal source' of civilization as expounded so by the pioneer of the term civilization in the 18th century, Mirabeau and eventually making those religion particularly Islam, responsible for all backwardness and hindrance in development on non-Western societies.[80]

Bennabi, during his analysis of modern Western civilization, concluded that modern civilization is a product of Christianity, and Western scholars have generally expounded the same notion, but this view seems to be very simplistic and based on a superficial analysis of history and civilization. Arnason discussed two notions regarding the origin and sources of modern Western civilization. One is represented by the famous sociologist Talcott Parsons who tried to establish 'the privileged connection' between modernity and Christianity[81], where Christianity is defined as the synthesis of Greek philosophy and the Jewish faith system. Arnason criticized Parsons for overlooking the role of medieval Europe in the development of modernity and modern civilization. On the other hand, Arnason presented the view of Eisenstadt, where the medieval world is studied with a focus on its clear relation to modernity. Modernity is seen dating back to the period of renaissance in medieval Europe, where the connection to the Islamic and Byzantine world cannot be forgotten. Hence, modern civilization should be seen as the contributions of three civilizations; Roman civilizations, Byzantine civilization, and Islamic civilization in genealogical meanings.[82] As far as present analysis of modern civilization is concerned, by extension, the notion has become more open and inclusive to many other peripheral and subaltern civilizations and their ongoing contribution to the development of modern civilization as a global civilization with multiple modernities or cultures.[83]

Multiple Civilizations within One Religion

Bennabi's thoughts on the essential elements of civilization, namely man, soil, and time does not seem to contradict the views of others. However, his theory of 'religion as a catalyst' should be seen in light of the modern discussion on civilization. Arnason's civilizational analysis of Japan and East Asia is beneficial in this regard. He had highlighted how Japan is a distinct and independent civilization despite having the same religion as that of China, which is Confucianism.[84] Similarly, Bennabi had identified five worlds within the Muslim world, which imply that there are five unique civilizations within the Muslim World, according to Bennabi's civilizational Analysis.[85]

It will be misleading to study his idea of 'religion as a catalyst' with Huntington's theory of clash of the civilization, the End of the history of Fukuyama, or Toynbee's Notion of Defining civilizations. Bennabi did not think that Islamic civilization is a single, monolithic, and distinct entity. He used the term Islamic civilization for a cluster of civilizations where what is shared is only religion, and the other three constitutive elements as elucidated by himself are presumably different. As a result, civilizations must have been various and multiple, having their geographical and historical specificities. For instance, Malay civilization was distinct from Turkish or Ottoman civilization, and Indian civilization has nothing in common with Arabian or African civilization except that all these had Islam as their major religion, and all these were influenced to a certain extent by Islam in their development. So, all these very distinct Muslim civilizations were used as one Islamic civilization by many. Arnason had cited the conclusion of a historical analysis of the Muslim World, saying, "the diversity of Islamicized cultures and societies had by this time become too great for us to be able to speak of one Islamic civilization."[86] He preferred to use the inter-civilizational entity instead of the Islamic entity. Bennabi elaborated this point by saying,

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[78] Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*; Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1956), *A Study of History*, London: Oxford University Press; Elias (1994), *The Civilizing Process*.

[79] Toynbee (1956), *A Study of History*; Huntington (1996), *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*.

[80] Jean Starobinski (1993), *Blessings in disguise, or, The morality of evil*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[81] Arnason (2003), *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, p. 29.

[82] See Arnason (2003), *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, p. 33.

[83] Eisenstadt (2004), "The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity"; Arnason (2003), *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*; Tiryakian, *Civilizational Analysis: Renovating the Sociological Tradition*.

[84] Spohn (2011), "World History, Civilizational Analysis and Historical Sociology."

[85] Malek Bennabi (2000), *Mushkilāt Al-Hadhārah: Fikra Kamanwels Islami*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, 2000, p. 42.

[86] Arnason (2003), *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*, p. 25.

"apart from religious similarity Muslim World seems to be divided into very distinctive and unique worlds. So, it is many worlds, not one world. It can be classified into five major worlds: Africa, Arab, Iran, Malay, Afghan". [87] This can be better understood by comparing it with Talal Asad's notion of 'discursive tradition' and 'multiple civilizations.' [88] In this view, discursive tradition is the unifying factor that Bennabi referred to as religious similarity between the Muslim world/s, and then based on specificities, Asad unequivocally differentiated between multiple civilizations. In his opinion, this is very misleading to refer to the vast Muslim World spanning over more than a millennium as a single world and a single civilization. He further argued that it is not appropriate to talk of Islamic civilization or Christian civilization. He instead challenged the very applicability of the concept of civilization as an analytical tool to study society.[89]

Similarly, Alain Touraine (1995) talked about the contemporary post-democratic world as an amalgamation of globalization with many 'localizations. In the same vein, we can comprehend Bennabi's narrative of religion being a catalyst of civilization, linking it with Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition. Since the main elements of civilization, as suggested by Bennabi, are man, soil, and time, the combination of these elements may vary in their nature and outcome. This point stands vindicated historically when we observe that, for instance, the Ottoman civilization and the Mughal civilization were two very different civilizations having nothing in common except their shared adherence to Islam.

Bennabi seemed to be very clear on the point of local distinction between cultures and civilizations. Talking about the difference in the concept of culture, Bennabi clarified the role of the mutual relationship between human individual behavior and cognition and sociocultural specificities in defining the culture, which subsequently turns into civilization.[90] Thus, it will be misleading to compare Bennabi's narrative of civilization with that of Huntington, Toynbee, and Fukuyama. From here, it is clear that to analyze the Muslim world/s from a civilizational perspective, Bennabi thought to follow the pluralistic approach by exploring the specificity and uniqueness of different civilizations within the Muslim world/s.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above discussions, Malek Bennabi paid considerable attention to the discourse of civilization in his work. His definition of civilization as a product of activities of man, soil, and time with religion or ideology as its catalyst is the most comprehensive and remarkable one. According to Bennabi, civilization is the mother of the problems faced by any society. He thus saw civilizational reform as a precondition for the overall reform and change of society. However, his narrative has been misunderstood when it was taken to mean that religion is the central defining feature of any civilization. Religion or ideas, according to him, does not form the essence of any civilization; instead, it works as a catalyst or a trigger to bring unity, awareness, motivation, and orientation.

Multiple civilizations may belong to the same religion, but they do not necessarily demonstrate resemblances and similarities. Henceforth, Bennabi's approach does not coincide with the narrative of binary division and dichotomy in the classification of civilizations. Perhaps more appropriate terms that can be used are Muslim civilizations and Muslim societies, in their plural form. Even though, the notion of civilization was introduced as a Europeanization scheme or conversion to the Western model of modernization, by associating modernity exclusively to Christianity and Bennabi also had accepted that problematic notion but the later developments had rejected this hegemonic project by introducing the idea of unfinished project of modernization where different civilizations in their uniqueness and localized way play their respective role in developing a more sustainable and developed world. Bennabi's work remains an important treasure in the discourse of civilization. Nonetheless, his views on civilizations need to be studied anew in the light of new developments in the discourse of civilization as well as social structure and cultural milieu in the post-industrial world.

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[87] Bennabi (2000), *Mushkilāt Al-Hadhārah: Fikra Kamanwels Islami*, pp. 42–43.
[88] Talal Asad (1986), *The Idea of Anthropology of Islam*, Washington: Georgetown University (Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies).
[89] Asad (2006), "Islam in Europe and Europe against Islam."
[90] Bennabi (1984), *Mushkilāt Al-Thaqāfah*.

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