

of independence.” The starting point for that new sociology is to redefine ‘society.’ He implied that while the natural society is a static society, historical society is dynamic. He argued that some characteristics are common to all types of historical society. The social relations network links members of society and directs activities to fulfill a common function that is the specific mission and vocation of that society.

Chapter Three

Bennabi’s Interpretation of the Movement of Civilization

Bennabi viewed the cycle of civilization as “a numerical series following its course in similar but not identical terms,” suggesting that particular civilizations are cyclical and follow a patterned course. Each social group imprints its specific characteristic upon civilization and each civilization has a distinct identity. Civilizations differ in their specific psycho-temporal conditions but are similar in their general pattern in history.

Bennabi asserted that civilization begins its cycle when its fundamental elements synthesize within the frame of the religious idea, and finishes when those fundamental elements are no longer in dynamic interaction. Every civilization plays its role in history until it declines and ceases to develop and lead humanity. Another civilization starts anew to formulate its cycle in history. This transitory process of civilization justifies the cyclical phenomenon in history.

Bennabi argued that any society in its civilizing process will follow a defined pattern leading to a civilizational transformation. After completing the pre-civilized stage, a society in its second stage (civilized stage) will undergo three phases: the soul (the spiritual), reason (the rational), and instinct (the instinctive).

The cyclical notion can address social problems by determining our position in the cycle of history and understanding the causes of decline and the potential for progress. The cycle concept can explain the movement of civilization and is the underlying framework to analyze and understand human social existence. Bennabi, who developed this idea from Ibn Khaldūn, suggested that human civilization starts from a

given point and follows a determined pattern. In the final phase, the values of civilization transit and move forward to another place. This transition implies the existence of a cycle.

Bennabi believed that the three phases of the cycle are not spontaneous shifts from one situation to another but reflect deep transformations and modifications in humans and society. Exceptional circumstances are necessary to generate the historical organic synthesis of the three factors: man, soil, and time. This synthesis marks the birth of a society as it coincides with the beginning of its historical action. At this point, the social values are not yet concrete reality.

At the beginning of every civilization a religious idea sows seeds to generate the movement of a civilization. Then, the spiritual phase begins to dominate the life of the individual and of society. During this phase, the disintegrated man will change to an integrated man, when the social relations network is densest. This conditioning process organizes instincts in a functional relationship with the requirements of the religious idea. The individual engages in life, in this new state, based on the laws of the Spirit.

The social relations network reaches its perfect state while its religious idea continues to expand. At the same time, civilization can now cope with new problems and necessities, creating a new order and new standards. The spiritual phase then decreases with society's development, the rise of material problems, and expansion of civilization, moving civilization into the second (rational) phase. Reason now controls all activities while civilization continues to progress in history. As civilization shifts into the rational phase, society enjoys its well-developed relations network but suffers from certain defects. In psychological terms, the individual no longer has full control over his vital energy while performing his social functions. Parts of society's forces and energies have fallen into inactivity and others have declined.

Throughout the history of a civilization, the process of its evolution manifests on the individual's psychology and society's moral structure, which ceases to adjust individual behavior. When rational forces start to lose control over the activities of the individual, civilization faces a new context where instinctive forces dominate the spiritual and rational ones. Civilization pushes into the post-civilized stage and its values move to a new synthesis of man, soil, and time. In this third phase, the social network dissolves and religious ideas or society no longer control

individual instincts. Chaos and lawlessness prevail. Instincts are gradually liberated as the control of the soul decreases gradually.

When instincts are completely liberated, man's destiny falls under their influence, the third phase of civilization begins, and the religious idea ceases to fulfill its social function. Consequently, society disintegrates and marks the end of a cycle of civilization. When the inspiration of the soul ceases, the rational work also tends to stop.

Bennabi maintained that civilizations are interrelated cycles that commence with a religious idea and end when instinctive forces dominate the spiritual and rational forces. He believed this complete cycle of civilization with its three phases demonstrates the vital energy of civilization and how it transforms from one phase to another. Knowing each phase of the evolution of civilization and understanding its characteristics will provide us with a general framework of development and evolution.

Based on Bennabi's categorization of societies, a human society does not fix itself at one point in its life. Instead, it transfers from one situation to another following the psychosocial values of its development. Therefore, knowing the position of the society in the developmental axis is indispensable to identify the stage of that society, its related problems, and accomplishments.

On the axis representing the stages of development, a historical society occupies a specific location, Bennabi said. History reveals the existence of three stages: pre-civilized society, civilized society, and post-civilized society. At any moment each society is at one of these three specific stages and is characterized by specific values. Bennabi focused on history, sociology, and psychology for methodology to understand issues of civilization. He used psychosocial interpretation to explain the historical journey of a society to discover the features of the present Muslim world.

Bennabi viewed the individual in pre-civilized society as the natural man (*homonatura*) who is ready, like the Arab Bedouin during the Prophet Muhammad's era, to enter a cycle of civilization. A pre-civilized society needs a driving force to motivate civilizing faculties. Although the society owns the primary elements of civilization (man, soil, and time), they are unmovable without the force of the religious idea. Without the dynamic interaction between man, soil, and time

within the frame of the religious idea, society will not undertake its civilizing process or witness any psycho-social transformations.

Psycho-social development of the individual and society will allow a civilizing movement because the society's capacities are aimed at a social project. When civilized society begins to change itself to achieve its goals, its civilization is emerging. The civilized stage reflects the ability of a society to organize and formulate its own worldview and culture. When man is prepared to initiate a civilizing process, the social relations network is strongest. In this context, society can protect its civilization and keep its pace of development. All individuals at this stage enjoy the protection of society, and society accomplishes its civilizing function.

When society reaches the post-civilized stage, it is no longer dynamic and loses its civilizing capacities, entering decline. Consequently, the religious idea ceases to synthesize civilizational values, and the social relations network degenerates. Yet downfall is not fated. Another civilizing action may prevent society from that destiny and change its path of decline. Once society has lost its cultural framework, its realm of ideas enters a state of chaos and its culture is no longer civilizing. Bennabi noted confusion about stages and misunderstanding of their characteristics among scholars. Confusion of stages will complicate any effort to resolve a society's problems.

Bennabi tried to resolve the problems of the present situation in the Muslim world by viewing it at the third stage, where society has lost original thought or behavior compared to other stages. To resolve its problems, society must regain originality and dynamic behavior by creating a new man who is liberated from the characteristics of post-civilized man. He can then enter a new synthesis with time and soil, and incorporate a religious idea. Bennabi argued the need to know our stage of history and the causes of backwardness or development. Social problems are historical: what is convenient for a society at a certain stage of its development may be harmful at another stage.

Bennabi also approached the evolution of society from the psycho-sociological perspective, and introduced the concept of society's three psycho-sociological ages of development: the age of objects, the age of people, and the age of ideas. He presented a general concept of the dialectic relationship between the realms of people, objects (things), and ideas that gives meaning to the concept of the three ages. Bennabi

said every society has its own complex cultural universe where the realms of objects, persons, and ideas are intertwined with the society's concerted action. One realm is always supreme over the other two realms.

Society at its first age formulates its judgments and decisions according to the criteria imposed by the realm of objects. The nature and quality of judgments are subject to man's primitive needs and ground him in the realm of objects. Bennabi argued that human society experiences the age of objects in the pre-civilized and the post-civilized stages. In today's Muslim society it affects the psychological, moral, social, intellectual, and political levels. At the psychological and moral levels, when culture is centered on objects, the 'object' stands at the top of the scale of values, judgment will be quantitative rather than qualitative, and everything will be judged by the scale of objects, not values.

In its second age, society forms its judgments according to the standards of a human model or example, deriving from the realm of persons, not objects. In this age the realm of objects and ideas should accompany the realm of persons. Bennabi presented the *Jāhili* (pre-Islamic Arab) society as an example of centralizing ideas on the realm of persons, which was confined to tribal boundaries. In present Muslim society there is an interface between the despotism of objects and persons, which Bennabi argued is harmful especially at the moral and political levels.

This author believes the concept of the three ages is an important tool to measure the movement of society in the course of history, and to measure the leading values of society in a specific moment to know if the society is in ascent or decline. The action of society should be seen as an integrated activity whereby the realm of objects mixes with the two realms of persons and ideas. One realm always dominates the other two, distinguishing one society from another in terms of thought and behavior.

The concept of the three ages could be used as a scale to measure a society's psychosocial maturity, the direction of its civilizing process, the organization of its activities, and the transfer of values from stage to stage throughout history. Furthermore, the domination of one realm over the other two shows where society is located in its historical movement. The ages represent the social values and cultural surroundings that dominate and influence society at any point of its development.

Bennabi placed the Muslim world in the pre-civilized stage where it struggles to enter a new civilizing process. He interpreted the movement of civilization through various levels of analysis for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic process of civilization in history. His concepts of the cycle, the three stages, and the three ages are a multi-level analysis of one phenomenon.

The development of society in its civilizing process is recorded qualitatively and quantitatively, Bennabi said, in its social relations network, which indicates the stages of society in the course of its history. He argued that any civilizing process commences before its three realms develop. The formation of the realm of persons is a precondition for the formulation of the social relations network. Society then functions while the realms of ideas and objects are still simple. The realm of persons then changes and integrates in the new order of relations. The social relations network starts to work while the other two realms of ideas and objects are still immature.

The realm of ideas plays the role of social protector while strongly linked with the social relations network. A society undertakes reconstruction, which is impossible without the social relations network. The realm of ideas alone cannot justify the development or decadence of a civilization. Rather, it must integrate with the social relations network. The history of a society is nothing more than the history of the network of its social relations created in the beginning by a religious idea.

Chapter Four

The Roots of Bennabi's Approach to Civilization: The Internal-Social Dimension

Using Ritzer's definition of the internal-social dimension, this chapter focuses on the impact of these factors on Bennabi's approach. Bennabi's biographical sketch is sparse, and his autobiography covers the period from his birth in 1905 until 1939. Limited sources covering the rest of his life are supplemented by his books, his contemporaries' writings, and in historical records of his era.

Malek Bennabi was born in 1905 to a poor family in east Algeria. The Islamic environment that formed his personality also protected Algerian Muslims amid colonial pressure on their culture and civilization.