

considered civilizations the result of the dialectic challenge and response and stages of growth and decline. He emphasized the nature of civilization as the “whole” or intelligible unit of the study of historical change. Like Ibn Khaldūn, he was a determinist who conceptualized a civilizing process that must end with the breakdown and decline of civilization.

Many scholars agree that Bennabi is the second Ibn Khaldūn by his ideas, method, and concern. Both the notions of causality in history and the cycle of civilization attracted Bennabi’s attention. He believed the notion of the cyclical movement allows the discussion of the conditions of progressive development and the factors of decline. Bennabi transcended Ibn Khaldūn’s state as the intelligible unit of socio-historical study to use civilization as the unit of historical study. Toynbee’s use of civilization as the unit of historical analysis, his notion of the cycle, and his formulation of challenge and response also influenced Bennabi’s approach.

Bennabi used the methodology of the social sciences to analyze social events of his time and discuss the role of religion in the civilizing process. For Bennabi, sociology and psychology were necessary to ignite a Muslim renaissance. He saw religion as the synthesizer of social values and the catalyst for civilization to enter a dynamic interaction. Bennabi viewed man as the primary device of civilization that originates change. He was dissatisfied with the two dominant paradigms of the philosophy of history and the social sciences, the three schools, and various approaches to the study of civilization.

Chapter Seven

The Roots of Bennabi’s Approach to Civilization: The External-Intellectual Dimension

The fourth dimension of *Mu* in the metatheorizing approach includes the external-intellectual factors as an alternative to other academic disciplines for ideas, tools, concepts, and theories in the analysis of theory. The external-intellectual dimension focuses on the influence of sciences and fields of research that are traditionally considered external to civilization studies. In Bennabi’s case, this external-intellectual dimension

involves the impact of the Qur'an and Sunnah, religious reformist thought in the Muslim world, psychology, the natural sciences, philosophy, and other intellectual activities external to the study of civilization and its two traditional dominant paradigms.

Bennabi produced a Qur'anic exegesis and interpretation based on modern scientific discoveries and developments in the social sciences. In explaining the cyclical conception of historical change, Bennabi referred to the Qur'an to explain the work of the religious idea in the civilizing process and credibility of the Qur'anic principle in history. He examined how religion transforms the human personality and directs the civilizing process.

Bennabi's motto was the Qur'anic verse: "Verily, never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change their inner selves." It framed the analysis of man's status and the dominance of the human factor in historical change and change in human conditions. Bennabi maintained that to initiate a civilizing process, society must change a human's status from his natural raw state to a conditioned individual.

Qur'anic principles help us understand historical change and the role of religion in the process, while historical investigation helps prove Qur'anic principles and provides empirical proof. Bennabi opposed modernist thought or the secular spirit which denied religion any active role in human civilization. He sought to prove that the Qur'an and Revelation as stated in the teachings of all prophets are an integral part of human civilization.

To resolve the problem of backwardness in the Muslim world we should consider the permanent patterns of history mentioned in the Qur'an and explained by Ibn Khaldūn in his cyclical notions of historical change, universal patterns, and laws in history. The Qur'an and Sunnah, in the context of *Mu*, were major external-intellectual factors influencing Bennabi's approach to civilization.

Reformist thought in the Muslim world adopted the ideas of *iṣlāḥ*, *tajdīd*, and *nahḍah*, the hallmarks of that movement (reform, renewal, and renaissance). They were the expression of a new paradigm that emerged in the mid-18th century. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's movement sought to revive the original and fundamental worldview of Islam, where the idea of oneness anchors all other dynamic principles. Al-Fghani, the other mentor of reformist thought in the Muslim world,

belonged to the same reformist paradigm stating that the pure teachings of Islam were necessary for any revival or reform to succeed. Bennabi adopted the fundamental ideas of that movement in its intellectual aspects.

In Algeria the reformists did not approach backwardness from a comprehensive perspective. Bennabi turned to psychology for a systematic approach, wanting to understand how the human personality could be changed and developed along with the objective of achieving the civilizing process. He needed to understand how religious ideas enter into the synthesis of social values and elevate human vision.

Bennabi endorsed Freud and Jung regarding the position and function of religion, incorporating developmental psychology from Piaget. Bennabi wrote that the religious idea frees the human soul from the law of instincts and subordinates it to the law of the spirit. Religion directs the individual's behavior toward his/her vital powers and enables society to undertake common activity. Freud helped Bennabi understand the psycho-temporal role of religion in changing the inner side of human personality, and in directing the vital powers of individuals and groups towards a positive role in the civilizing process.

When the religious idea directing the civilizing process loses its dynamic role, society's civilizing process degenerates and ceases to work in unison with its idea or archetypes. Although Bennabi derived the concept of stages mainly from Ibn Khaldūn, he applied modern developmental psychology to analyze the psychosocial progress of society. Influenced by Piaget, he stressed that the individual and society seem to undergo the same three historic stages: the age of the object, the age of the person, and the age of the idea.

Philosophy is the fourth intellectual factor to influence Bennabi's approach to civilization. Philosophy, Cartesian thought, and modernity discourse were his external sources, including ideas of Ibn Ṭufayl, Daniel Defoe, Ibn Rushd, and al-Ghazālī. One of Bennabi's most important borrowings from Descartes was his analytical method. He applied two different, yet closely inter-related analytical mechanisms to study the structural elements of civilization and the function of those elements in the civilizing process.

Bennabi was one of few theorists who tackled civilization as a multi-aspect phenomenon. His contribution can be considered an important

development and an alternative to the traditionally fragmented and contradicting paradigms. Bennabi is important as a system builder and a theorist of the interdisciplinary approach.

External-social factors helped Bennabi determine his starting point to study civilization. His concern about the situation in Algeria and in the Muslim world during his time led him to formulate his approach for an adequate solution to the various problems his society and the Ummah faced. At the methodological level, Bennabi applied the methods of historians, while at the intellectual and cognitive levels, he integrated and borrowed from various disciplines to address civilization's three main dimensions: historical, social, and cultural.

External-intellectual factors included the Qur'an and Sunnah, the religious reformist thought in the Muslim world, psychology, the natural sciences, philosophy, and other intellectual activities external to the field of study and its two traditional dominant paradigms.

There should be more emphasis on the interdisciplinary approach to the study of civilization that Bennabi formulated and developed, and for the adoption of the metatheorizing approach in studying the formulation and development of ideas, approaches, theories, and fields of research for its potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the genesis and growth of knowledge.

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