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The Active Human Being in Malek Bennabi's Civilizational Project: An Analytical Study

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Djermani Fatima [1]

[1] University of Naama, Algeria,
Email : djemani.fatima@cuniv-naama.dz

Abstract:

This study aims to highlight Malik Bennabi's progressive consciousness through his approach centered on the development of the active human being within civilization. This individual is considered a fundamental element of the civilizational project, which rests on three essential components: humanity, the land, and time. These components constitute Bennabi's concept of civilization. Given the crucial role of humanity in this framework, the progress of a nation's civilization requires the appropriate cultural and intellectual development of its people, followed by the optimal use of resources and wealth (the land), while ensuring the effective management of time.

Keywords: The Active Human, civilization, Malek Bennabi.

Corresponding Author: Djermani Fatima, **Email:** djemani.fatima@cuniv-naama.dz

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of humanity occupies a central place in the thought of Malek Bennabi, as evidenced by many of his writings. He considers humanity the driving force of change, explaining that its role in society is not limited to the preservation of the species, but that it is God's representative on Earth. This role qualifies it to build civilization. Furthermore, the attention given to humanity implies subjecting it to concrete processes requiring psychological and social transformation, stemming from a culture rooted in faith, thus making it more capable and worthy of fully playing its active role in building its society. This leads us to ask: according to Malek Bennabi, on what foundations does civilization rest? What motivated his interest in humanity? And what is humanity's role in the reform, rebirth, and construction of civilization?

Study Objectives:

•To understand the thought of Malek Bennabi and his conception of the construction of civilization.

• Identify the most important concepts related to the philosophy of civilization in the thought of Malek Bennabi.

• Understand the essential role of humanity in the construction of civilization according to Bennabi.

Importance of the study:

• This study sheds light on one of the most complex and crucial subjects in Arab thought: the foundations of civilization.

• It aims to reaffirm the active role of the individual in the construction of civilization, from the perspective of Malek Bennabi.

Previous studies:

To ask for the continuity of the scientific research, many other studies direct links to the research on their consultations:

1- Yaqoub Muhammad (2014), initulé « The man in the Pensée of Malek Bennabi ». This is the focus of the home as the creator and main engine of the historical renaissance.

2- Al-Shafi Muhammad (2019), initulé “The philosophy of humanity and civilization in the pen of Malek Bennabi who traverses contemporaneous studies” which comes to the place of humanity as a foundation of civilisation. It is said that the life of civilization is linked to humanity in the main motor of civilisation's elements (the temps and the surface).

We will complete this effort and concentrate on the human being as a participant in Malek Bennabi's civilisation project and his son in the civilisation construction. Humanity is an indispensable element of this project, the engine is the main source of civilisation, and its existence ensures a value for other elements (the temps and the surface).

- We relied on the analytical method to understand and analyze Malik Bennabi's texts that concern him when he participates in the civilizational project.

2. Clarification of Concepts:

2.1 Human: In Arabic, this is a generic term designating a living, thinking being capable of speech, deduction, and rational reasoning. It applies to both men and women and is used in the singular as well as the plural. The plurals of "insan" (human) are "anasiyy", "anasiyah", and "anas". "Anasiyy" is originally "anasin", while "nas" is a collective noun designating humanity, the singular of which is "insan" (a different form). Similarly, the singular "ins" is the plural of "insan" (Arabic Language Academy, 3/963).

"Insiyy" is derived from "ins" and is used to describe a very sociable person or anything that fosters companionship. Humans are thus named because they were created with a nature that requires companionship for survival. Humans are therefore said to be social by nature because they cannot survive without each other, nor satisfy all their needs, nor live alone. They always need companionship. It is also said that they are so named because… because they find comfort in everything familiar (Al-Raghib Al-Isfahani, Abu Al-Qasim, 1991, p. 94).

2.2.The Active Human : is defined by his awareness of his historical role and his capacity to transform ideas into concrete achievements that contribute to the building of civilization, rather than contenting himself with mere biological existence or passive consumption. This

is why Malek Bennabi asserts: "Civilization comes to an end when it loses The active human from its consciousness" (Malek Bennabi, 1991, p. 164). In other words, The active human is an agent of change and the cornerstone of the equation of civilization. The latter rests on three elements—man, soil, and time—which do not operate in isolation but within a harmonious combination that enables the realization of a civilized society's will and capabilities (Malek Bennabi, 1991, p. 58). The active human exerts influence over his society through three fundamental levers: his thought (embodying culture), his work (representing effort and production), and his assets (constituting capital). However, these levers require conscious direction to fulfill their civilizational role. In contrast to The active human stands the "half-man": the individual who hinders renaissance through a culture of laziness and selfishness, who divorces freedom from responsibility, and who transforms neither knowledge into value nor work into a mission. He is an individual concerned with his rights yet neglectful of his duties; he demands freedom without linking it to responsibility and claims dignity without adopting behavior that respects the dignity of others.

2.3 Civilization: The term “civilization” in European languages, and particularly in English, refers to stability, settlement, and life in a city. The city is the place of residence, where the citizen establishes their home. Its origins can be traced back to Greek and Latin (Subhi Mahmoud, n.d., p. 3). Linguistically, the word “civilization” comes from the root “civites,” meaning city, and “civis,” meaning

townsperson, or “civilis,” meaning civil or related to the city. It is sometimes associated with the term “culture,” which in its Latin sense means growth, development, and cultivation of the land. This concept persisted until the end of the 19th century, when it acquired a new meaning, referring to intellectual, literary, and aesthetic achievements. In Arabic, it corresponds to the term “culture” (Zariq Constantine, 1981, pp. 32–33). Whatever its Latin origins, the term "civilization" is relatively recent, having appeared at the end of the 18th century in France (Aref Nasr Muhammad, 1994, p. 33), and was formed from the words "civilized" and "civilize", which had existed and been used since the 16th century in Europe (Braudel, 1986, p. 3).

3. Malek Bennabi: Life and Work:

Malek Bennabi was born on 5 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1323 AH (January 1, 1905) in Constantine. His family later settled in Tébessa, where he joined them after a stay in Constantine with relatives. In Tébessa, he memorized the Quran and completed his primary and secondary education. He finished his secondary studies in Constantine in 1925. During this period of his youth, on the cusp of adulthood, his conscience began to develop, influenced by the Islamic movement led by Abdelhamid Ben Badis in Constantine. This movement represented an intellectual awakening, primarily aimed at liberating and transforming the minds of Algerians by freeing them from superstitious beliefs, false doctrines, and the pagan heritage (or dead thought), to use the expression of Dr. Abdelaziz al-Khalidi. This movement was protected by a group that imposed a form of monasticism on Algerians, devoid of divine foundation. This revival

also aimed to strengthen them against the secular and rigorist ideology that seeks to erase Algerian Arab-Islamic identity, which Dr. Abdelaziz Al-Khalidi described as a "murderous ideology" (Bouazza Saleh, 2015, p. 4). It is worth noting here the influence of Ibn Badis's thought on Malek Bennabi, the latter later considering the movement of Imam Ibn Badis as "the beginning of the miracle of the renaissance in Algeria."

Furthermore, his approach to education and social reform is reminiscent of Ibn Badis's. Both used culture and thought as tools for reform and change, and both began with the education of individuals before reforming and transforming societies. Malek Bennabi asserted: “Collective consciousness has awakened, and the individual's monologue has become the people's discourse.” The small alley where the imam's office was located was nicknamed “Thought Street.” Bennabi's trip to Aflou, where he presented the journal “Al-Shihab” to the inhabitants, testifies to the bond between the two men.

The colonial administration, aware of the threat that Malek Bennabi's thought, deeply rooted in Islamic culture, posed to its presence and stability, even during his studies, took measures against him. The school, judging intellectual ills more worrisome and dangerous than material ills (which expressed all forms of rejection of colonialism, from sabotage to destruction), undertook to restrict him and monitor his reading. Bennabi was thus subjected to psychological pressure, and this surveillance continued after 1930, during his stay in France to pursue his studies. Unable to gain admission to the Institute

of Oriental Studies, he enrolled at the School of Wireless Communications, where he earned his engineering degree in 1935. His time in France and his interactions with expatriates and Western society undoubtedly instilled in him a greater thirst for dissent and encouraged him to pursue his intellectual and cultural activities (Mohammed Al-Hadi Al-Hassani, 2013, pp. 279–280).

His stay at the court of Aflou in 1927, followed by his return to Chelghoum El Aid—then a center of colonialism—before his departure for France, allowed him to acquire experience and a perspective on the territory and its inhabitants that contributed to its development. These experiences shaped his thinking and his perception of the concept of civilization and its components (Muhammad al-Hadi al-Hassani, 2013, pp. 280–281).

This profound and intense intellectual and practical experience, with its spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions, shaped Malik Bennabi's thinking on concepts related to humanity, culture, and civilization. Through the unifying doctrine of Islam, its open approach to reason, and its social spirit, he was able to instill a qualitative shift in modern Islamic thought. Furthermore, his precise understanding of the spirits of both Islamic and Western civilizations, as well as his deep knowledge of their intellectual foundations, enabled Malik Bennabi to engage with Western civilization. However, Bennabi believed that the problem lay within Muslims themselves (Muhammad al-Hadi al-Hassani, 2013, pp. 282-283).

4. The Active Human Being in Malik Bennabi's Thought:

Before addressing Malik Bennabi's thesis of the active human being, it is necessary to examine his conception of civilization, given the interdependence of these two concepts. He compares it to the sun, which revolves around the Earth, illuminating the horizon of one people and then transforming into that of another (Muhammad al-Shafi, 2019, p. 72).

For Malik Bennabi, civilization is "a set of moral and material conditions enabling a given society to provide each of its members, at every stage of their existence, from childhood to old age, with the necessary support for their development" (Muhammad al-Shafi, 2019, p. 73). Malik Bennabi considered civilization to be a human construct; Therefore, the backwardness experienced by Muslims stems primarily from their own resources, rooted in the nature of their mentality and character, shaped by harmful cultural elements. He distinguished between an active and an inactive society, asserting that societal effectiveness derives from individual activism. He stated: “If the individual is active, society and history are active; if the individual is inactive, society and history are inactive” (Muhammad al-Shafi, 2019, p. 74), In other words, Malek Bennabi linked the concept of an "active society" to the capacity to generate impact and ensure the efficacy of actions and achievements. It involves transforming abstract ideas into realistic plans and converting potential into tangible results within a specific time and place; it serves as a measure of how successfully an action brings about the desired functional change within society. Bennabi associated this concept with the characteristics of the

practical mind and the logic of viability—which connects ideas to historical reality—as well as with systematic planning, the optimal utilization of time and resources (human capital, land, and time), and the direction of human activity toward precisely defining the society's social function.

For Malik Bennabi, the active human being is “the measure of civilization, for they are the most precious thing in life. The strength or corruption of a civilization is measured by its benefits or harms, and by its degree of harmony or dissonance with nature.” No one can deny that Western civilization is currently exploiting the Earth—and doing so to the fullest—and making the most of time. As a result, it has generated a massive accumulation of Earth's resources, unprecedented in history. Never before has humanity suffered so much from the Earth and from time as in our century, and never before has it been so harmed by its own achievements as the human being within the machine. The bonds of family and social solidarity have dissolved without being replaced by others—modern human beings are alone and anxious. They are free, but they fear this freedom. They live—as the French sociologist Durkheim asserted—in a state of instability (Erich Fromm, 2013, p. 24), From Ibn Nabi’s point of view, any reflection on the problem of man ultimately comes down to reflecting on the problem of civilization, and the problem of the Afro-Asian man is essentially a problem of civilization, meaning that this Afro-Asian, from Tangier to Jakarta, should achieve a general situation free from the negative factors imposed by colonialism and from the susceptibility to colonialism on his life in this region (Malik Ibn Nabi,

2001, p. 77)

Therefore, Malek Bennabi believes that the philosophy of humanity in the West remains trapped by expressions and terms that prevent Western thought from conceiving of peoples sharing the attribute of humanity and aspiring to fraternity and solidarity (Mohammed Al-Shafi, 2019, p. 68). In other words, the solution to the human problem is not found in the political thought that guides the civilization of the great powers, because it is a materialistic thought in its two branches: capitalism and Marxism. In European thought, unilateral solutions prevail, based on materialism. These philosophies perceive humanity as a world of numbers and data, whereas the situation differs radically with Islam, which views humanity from the perspective of the responsibility of peoples toward the Earth (Mohammed Al-Shafi, 2019, p. 27).

For Malek Bennabi, the fundamental condition for effectiveness is that humanity perceive itself as an actor and driving force in history. History is composed of scientific findings, not theoretical pronouncements, because its subject is humanity and time, as well as their implications. The detailed conditions of these elements stem from the inherent conditions of humankind and time (Muhammad Al-Shafi, 2019, p. 74). Consequently, a lack of human awareness leads to a loss of benefits in terms of financial resources, time, and knowledge. According to Malek Bennabi, the elements necessary for the formation of any civilization are three: "humankind, the earth, and time" (Muhammad Al-Shafi, 2019, p. 74).

As for the question of belonging, it arises (by comparing the stages of human growth and development to history). The former is a domain where human beings have no freedom, because it is predestined. How, then, can we compare what is predestined to a domain where human beings can repeat themselves through self-transformation? Malik Bennabi considered the Muslim's position as an internal, not external, challenge: "Change yourself, then change your reality." It can happen, in certain historical circumstances, that a society loses its identity and disappears from history, without the number of its members changing. Each individual retains, in fact, the instinct to live in a group, an instinct that defines humankind as a social being. Individuals then become the vestiges of a vanished society, vestiges ready to participate in the construction of a new social body (Muhammad al-Shafi, 2019, pp. 74-75).

For Malik Bennabi, civilizational reform thus stems from identifying the root of the national crisis, namely "backwardness," for which he finds the remedy in "renaissance," which he considers the initiator. The civilizational question constitutes the cornerstone of his project, as confirmed by his historical vision of the rise and fall of Islamic civilization. Past Western civilization, as well as the paradoxical situation and evolution of contemporary reality marked by the rise and fall of Islamic civilization, indicate that civilization is the driving force that produces things and determines the nature of social relations and the level of scientific and industrial progress (Muhammad al-Shafi, 2019, p. 75).

Malik Bennabi connects all questions of reform, both critical

and fundamental, to the civilizational question, whose cycle begins with the interaction between its fundamental pillars: humanity, time, and the earth. Religion plays a central role in this, as the cycle of the spirit begins and continues until the stage of production, work and accomplishment, which represents the very essence of the religious idea (Muhammad al-Shafi, 2019, p. 75).

What immediately strikes the reader of Malik Bennabi's thought is his insistence on the need to focus on humanity and establish a philosophy specifically dedicated to it, a philosophy that guides and directs it toward a better future. Through this philosophy, we can identify the ills afflicting humanity in its civilizational journey and, consequently, plan according to the principles of foresight, which has become a major science on a global scale (Ya'qub Muhammad, 2014, p. 172).

Malik Bennabi believes that resolving the problem of civilization is linked to three problems that must be examined and resolved:

- **The problem of humanity:** this involves defining the conditions for its harmony with the course of history.
- **The problem of the earth:** this involves defining the conditions for its use in the social process.
- **The problem of time:** it is a matter of anchoring its meaning in the mind of society and the psyche of the individual.

Consequently, Malek Bennabi believes that the civilizational

crisis originates in an intellectual deviation that has led us astray. Despite the inability of our social will to build our economic and social future, Bennabi proposes a method for overcoming this crisis through his studies on socio-economic development. He emphasizes the effectiveness of building the individual within a culture that respects their nature and authenticity (Bouazza Saleh, 2015, p. 6).

Based on this observation, Malek Bennabi identifies the need for a "permanent foundation" in his work "Conditions of Renaissance." This permanent foundation is represented by five essential elements for renewal, civilizational renaissance, and progress: the spiritual dimension, change, building rather than accumulating, and guidance. This permanent foundation is embodied by the individual, the land, and time. Thus, in its beginnings, a civilization possesses no capital other than the simple man who sets it in motion, the land that provides it with the meager strength necessary to achieve its goal, and the time indispensable to this objective (Malek Bennabi, 1986, p. 89).

Therefore, the problems related to the individual, the land, and time constitute "the fundamental problems facing any underdeveloped society. If it wishes to build itself up and break free from the cycle of underdevelopment, it must address these problems and not waste its efforts focusing on minor issues" (Abada Abdel Latif, 1984, p. 121).

The role of human beings in social life is that of both psychological and temporal agents. Their influence is not limited to their temporal existence—that is, their material needs—but also extends to their psychological existence—that is, their spiritual needs.

This is the full reality of humanity, and this is what we must understand in order to grasp it as an indivisible whole. We cannot define the conditions for human change if we neglect either of these aspects, spiritual or temporal. From a spiritual perspective, human beings are first and foremost religious beings. The religious dimension directly influences their introspection, establishing a consciousness in search of itself. This religious consciousness is inseparable from social consciousness; humanity itself has linked them in such a way that one cannot be separated from the other. Therefore, religious reform is essential as a starting point for any social change (Malik Bennabi, 2002, p. 155).

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we present the following results:

Malik Bennabi considered humanity to be the foundation of civilization, for it is humanity that cultivates the land and uses time. Cultural identity is its bulwark, protecting it from collapse due to invasions and aggression, or from stagnation and indolence. Humanity is the central axis of any civilizational project.

Malik Bennabi approached civilization from the perspective of analysis and synthesis, as well as from a functional point of view. He defined it as the capacity to accomplish a specific function or task, and as the sum of moral and material factors enabling a society to offer all its members the social guarantees necessary for its progress.

Malik Bennabi emphasized that the success of any reform and

development project is linked to the success of humanity itself. This is why he placed great importance on the development of the active individual within society, as this is an essential element in the equation for building civilization (Humanity + Earth + Time = Civilization). It is humanity that cultivates the earth and manages its resources, and it is also humanity that invests its time wisely. Thus, humanity is the cornerstone of civilization.

Diagnosing the individual's internal psychological and cultural obstacles; for Malek Bennabi, human development begins with liberating the individual from all vulnerability to colonialism and dependency, through the activation of social networks.

Linking religious thought to social networks by presenting a sociological perspective on "religious thought" as a catalyst and driving force that mobilizes the individual's vital energy to create a network of social relationships capable of building a civilization.

Providing ethical and practical guidance for culture by defining it as a "frame of reference" (that guides culture, work, and capital), and transforming it from an intellectual luxury into a tool for evaluating everyday human behavior.

The added value of this study is evident in the fact that, according to Malik Bennabi, the dismantling of the "civilizational problem" in the Islamic world constitutes a crisis of civilization and not a crisis of means, and that the accumulation of Western "material" products without development of the "ideas" of the active human being leads to a dead dependency.

Future Research Directions:

- A study of "susceptibility to colonization" in the age of digital globalization and artificial intelligence.
- An examination of the contribution of algorithms and communication platforms to the transformation of the "consumer" and the influence of their thoughts and behaviors.
- A comparison between Ben Nabi's concept of "susceptibility to colonization" and Gramsci's concepts of cultural hegemony, as well as the decolonization theories of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said.

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