

Transforming The Post-Muwahhiddūn Man: Malik Bennabi's Critique of The Contemporary Muslim Society

Muhammad Yusuf Patria

International Islamic University Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: patrialis Yusuf@gmail.com

Abstract

Since gaining independence, the contemporary Muslim society still unable to overcome the backwardness it has experienced. This article is aimed at discussing the critical analysis of a Muslim thinker, Malik Bennabi, of the state of contemporary Muslim society. This paper is literary research and using a descriptive-analytic approach to analyze the collected data from Bennabi's works as the primary sources and other relevant works as secondary sources. Bennabi's definition of a society, especially its origin, basic elements, and its stages, is described in detail as a basis for understanding Bennabi's thoughts. then, the article discusses Bennabi's analysis and criticism of the current state of Muslim society. For him, the root of all the problems experienced by Muslim society today is an internal weakness or what he calls "colonisability". This situation, according to him, creates vulnerable individuals and societies to be "colonized" again. Bennabi referred to these individuals in Muslim society as "Post-Muwahhiddūn man", as a sign that internal weaknesses began to emerge in Muslim society after the Muwahhid dynasty. Based on his explanation, it can be concluded that the current Muslim society is disoriented and has lost its identity. The author also concludes that Bennabi's approach and analysis are able to describe the current state of Muslim society and the root of the problems it is experiencing.

Keywords: *Bennabi, Colonisability, Post-Muwahhiddūn, Muslim Society*

Abstrak

Sejak mendapatkan kemerdekaan, masyarakat Muslim kontemporer masih

belum mampu mengatasi kemunduran yang dialaminya. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk membahas analisa kritis seorang pemikir Muslim, Malik Bennabi, terhadap keadaan masyarakat Muslim kontemporer tersebut. Tulisan ini adalah sebuah studi pustaka dan menggunakan pendekatan analisa deskriptif untuk menganalisis data yang dikumpulkan dari karya-karya Bennabi sebagai sumber primer dan karya-karya lain yang relevan sebagai sumber sekunder. Definisi Bennabi tentang sebuah masyarakat, terutama asal usul, elemen dasar dan tahapan sebuah masyarakat, dipaparkan secara detail sebagai dasar untuk memahami pemikiran-pemikiran Bennabi. kemudian, tulisan ini membahas analisa dan kritik Bennabi terhadap keadaan masyarakat Muslim saat ini. Menurutnya, akar dari semua masalah yang dialami masyarakat Muslim saat ini adalah kelemahan internal atau yang ia sebut sebagai “kolonisabilitas”. Keadaan ini, menurutnya, menciptakan individu-individu dan masyarakat yang rentan untuk kembali “dijajah”. Bennabi menyebut individu-individu ini dalam masyarakat Muslim sebagai “manusia Pasca-Muwahhiddūn”, sebagai penanda bahwa kelemahan internal mulai muncul dalam diri masyarakat Muslim pasca dinasti Muwahhid. Berdasarkan penjelasannya, dapat disimpulkan bahwa masyarakat Muslim saat ini mengalami disorientasi dan kehilangan identitasnya. Penulisan juga berkesimpulan bahwa pendekatan dan analisa Bennabi mampu menjabarkan keadaan masyarakat Muslim saat ini dan akar dari masalah yang dialaminya.

Kata Kunci: *Bennabi, Kolonisabilitas, Pasca-Muwahhiddūn, Masyarakat Muslim*

INTRODUCTION

After being freed from colonialism, the Muslim society which divided into many countries began to “clean up” and to revive the glory of the past. Various attempts were made to free the Muslim society from the shackles of backwardness, decline, poverty, and ignorance, and to rebuild their

civilization. This situation drew attention from many thinkers and scholars. To achieve their goals, they tried to find out the root of the problem and then suggested their thoughts about winning the politics or gaining economic control, or even proposing a new method in understanding Islam. Among them were Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhānī, Abul

A'la Maududi, Sayyid Qutb who offered a political winning, and Mahmoud Mohammed Taha and Mohammed Arkoun who proposed a new method for understanding Islam.

However, since gaining independence until now, the Muslim society has not been able to realize these aspirations. According to Malik Bennabi, this happened because of the inability of the Muslim society to analyze and criticize the root of all the problems they experienced, even before they were colonized. This inability resulted in errors in formulating various actions and policies to rebuild their society and realize their goals. (Bennabi, 1984) Then, Bennabi comes with his analysis of the current state of Muslim society.

Some studies have been conducted on Bennabi's analysis of the current state of Muslim society. Among those studies is the work of Shāyif 'Ukāshah (1986), *al-Ṣirā' al-Haḍārī fī al-'Ālam al-Islāmī, Dirāsah Tahlīliyah fī Falsafah al-Haḍārah 'ind Mālik Bin Nabī*. He analyzes the main problems of the Muslim society according to Bennabi and elucidates that the main problems are the lack of methodology and colonization. Another work is *al-Takhalluf wa al-Tanmiyyah fī Fikr Mālik Bin Nabī*

of Al-Tāhir Sa'ūd (2006). He deals with the concept of backwardness (*al-Takhalluf*) and development (*al-Tanmiyyah*) of Bennabi.

In the work *Method of Studying Civilization according to Malik Bennabi*, Abdul Aziz Berghout (1998) examines Bennabi's integrative method in studying the phenomenon of civilization as applied to the context of Islamic civilization. He explains that Bennabi was able to develop a linkage method that consists of the theoretical framework, tools of analysis, and applications. The theoretical framework contains certain consistent concepts which were used to discern the nature of the problems of the Islamic society. In the work *The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi*, Philip Chivigas Naylor (2006) deals with the French influence on Bennabi. He found that Bennabi recognized that decolonization was a process continuing into the postcolonial period. In Bennabi's opinion, Algerian decolonization was incomplete, and *colonisability* remained a postcolonial reality.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that Bennabi's analysis on the contemporary Muslim society is less studied, particularly, his ideas of the main

reasons for the backwardness of the contemporary Muslim society and the way to overcome it. Therefore, this paper aimed to describe Malik Bennabi's critical analysis of contemporary Muslim society. The discussion uses the descriptive-analytic approach to elaborate on the thoughts of Bennabi. The data used are taken from his works as the primary sources and other relevant works as secondary sources.

The significance of this paper can be viewed from the perspective of Bennabi who a prolific author and prominent thinker of the 20th century whose ideas have inspired many intellectuals in the Muslim society. He was a scholar of the highest standing having studied not only all the rational religious sciences, but also modern sciences. In an interview with Azzam S Tamimi, Rachid Ghounnuchi asserted that "*Bennabi undoubtedly represents an element of the Islamic culture of rationalism and particularly a revival of Ibn Khaldun's historical culture of rationalism*" (Tamimi, n.d., 20). On the other hand, Asma Rashid, in the introductory chapter of *Islam in History and Society*, mentioned that Bennabi as a writer and thinker is probably the first social philosopher produced by the

Muslim society since the era of Ibn Khaldun (Bennabi, 1987b).

Though Bennabi graduated as an electrical engineer and was not trained as a social scientist, he presented us with a comprehensive and systematic interdisciplinary approach with a worldview of Islam as the bedrock to study (El-Mesawi, 1998) and understanding the socio-cultural problems and historical challenges faced by the Muslim society for centuries. The importance of Bennabi's works is based on their comprehensiveness and complexity. They cover almost all parts of human socio-political issues, including religion, philosophy, history, education, economics, and politics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHOD

The framework employed in this study was colonialism. Colonialism comes from the English word colony that is derived from the ancient Latin term *colonia*, denoting an outpost or settlement. Colonialism is the system by which a country maintains foreign colonies, (*Webster New World Dictionary*, 2016) or the policy of acquiring colonies and keeping them dependent. (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 1995) It is the domination of a

society by settlers from a different society.

Bennabi described colonialism as “*a lousy little seed, it would not have sprouted and borne fruit if the fertile soil is not prepared in our minds and souls*” (Bennabi, 2005). Bennabi explained that the activities of colonialism are tangible and intangible and follow the spirit of the maxim ‘divide and rule’. Unfortunately, we bear in our personality structure some short lenses which oddly distort our vision in the respect that we can perfectly perceive the tangible activities of colonialism and we are no longer able to perceive once these activities become subtle and sophisticated. (Bennabi, 1998) Furthermore, Sartre explains that colonialism creates a system that attempts to separate the colonized people from their identities and to bar them from the road of history. (Sartre, 2001)

The literary research adopted by the researcher analyzes the discourse of Bennabi. The researcher used a descriptive-analytic approach to elucidate the thought of Bennabi from the collected data. The primary sources are the major works of Bennabi, where the researcher extracted the thought of Bennabi. Then, the researcher referred to

the works on Bennabi and other relevant works as secondary sources, to elaborate his thought.

The paper began with the definition of society according to Bennabi. This is important as a basis as well as a reference for understanding the thoughts of Bennabi, especially those relating to the Muslim society. This is then followed by an explanation of the critical analysis of the current state of Muslim society and the roots of its decline according to Bennabi. Then, the last part provided the conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bennabi's Definition of Society

In his book *Milād Mujtama'*, *Shabkah al-'Alāqāt al-Ijtimā'iyah* (On the Origins of Human Society, The Social Relations Network), Bennabi stated that, fundamentally, there are two origins of the society: the natural or primitive society and the historical society. The natural or primitive society is a society which has not changed in any tangible manner the characteristics of its personality since it came into existence such as the African tribe of the pre-colonial era and the Arab tribe of the *Jāhili* period. And the latter, the historical society, is a society born in each primary

situation and has subsequently transformed its fundamental features in accordance with the laws that have governed the evolution of the society. (Bennabi, 1998)

In its development, the historical society is not uniform in its nature. It may come into existence in two different ways. First, it may be made up of the new elements from its beginning. Such a society is built on new components which were not found before in any historical transformation. Among this category are the early historical societies during the agricultural revolution in the new stone age. Secondly, the historical society may be formed by elements of the previous society which have been left because they disintegrated or due to expansion. The present American society is an example of this category. The elements that constitute this society were the borrowing from European society in the 16th century which was in the state of expansion. (Bennabi, 1998)

However, the historical society is not incidental, but rather the result of a continuous transformation affected by many factors. These factors are the historical source of the process of perpetual change, the elements which may be transformed from a pre-social into a social stage,

and the universal laws and norms. Therefore, Bennabi stated that there are two kinds of historical societies, which are the geographical type of society and the ideological society. The geographical type of society is the historical society whose birth takes place in response to the challenges posed by the natural circumstances of its environment. On the other hand, the ideological society is the historical society which comes into existence in response to the appeal of certain ideals. (Bennabi, 1998)

For the types of historical society, the present American society belongs to the first type, the geographical type of society. The people of America migrated from Europe and had to adapt to the natural conditions in the new continent. In contrast, the Islamic society and the early European society belong to the second type. (Bennabi, 1998)

In addition, Bennabi pointed out that there is also a variation of historical societies which originated from its very structure. There are societies whose structure is based on several layers and the societies based on one layer only. The Hindu society is a historical society which is based on multi-layer structures. This society is divided into super-

imposed castes: the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Sudras. (Cush, 2008) The European society in the 19th century is another example of the multi-layer structured society. On the other hand, the Islamic society is an example of the one-layer society type. Its structure involves a homogeneous form. (Bennabi, 1998)

However, there are a few number of common characteristics to all the above-mentioned types. There are also a number of constant fundamentals where a society is indebted to its continuity to its individual members. Bennabi stated that it might be a society lost in history because of some reasons, but its members are not affected. These members preserve their instinct to live in a group, and therefore they are ready to affiliate with a new social entity. Otherwise, it might be a society that lost all its member, but the society still exists. Under this circumstance, the society will attract newcomers and strangers to assimilate into it. The Gallic society is an example for the first model and the Manchu and the Mongol society is an example for the second model which is by assimilating into Chinese society. (Bennabi, 1998)

Based on the origins of society mentioned above, Bennabi criticized the definition of society according to the ordinary lexical meaning, that is an association of individuals who have common habits and customs, living together under the rule of the same legal system and sharing common interests. He stated that the definition does not provide any explanation on the historical function fulfilled by the association nor does it give any information on the internal organization of the association which enabled it to fulfill such function. Then he urged to substitute that descriptive definition with a dialectical one, with references to the time factor. (Bennabi, 1998)

Accordingly, an association cannot be categorized as a society if its internal relations have not been modified and its activities do not change with the passage of time. The primitive societies in which life does not change its form also cannot be categorized as a society according to Bennabi's definition. He asserted that "any group which does not progress and adjust itself in the course of time does not therefore conform to the dialectical definition given here by the term society". Therefore, for Bennabi, a society is an association of individuals which

starts from a certain point in time which is called 'birth.' (Bennabi, 1998)

Moreover, talking about the birth of a society, what is meant by Bennabi is that an event that marks the emergence of a collective life and becomes a starting point of a transformation of it. The new form of collective life arises in the form of relations between individuals in the group. However, Bennabi asserted that this form of collective life could begin only with one individual who would later become the nucleus of that society. To support his argument, Bennabi quoted a Qur'anic verse, 16:120, that says that the Prophet Ibrahim was an ummah or a society. (Bennabi, 1998)

Furthermore, Bennabi asserted that a society is not merely an association of individuals, but it is a specific organism bearing a human nature based on a given pattern. The pattern consists of three major factors; (1) movement as a characteristic feature of the human group, (2) generation of the means of movement, and (3) function and direction of the movement. (Bennabi, 1998) The idea of movement is equivalent to that of change and evolution. This idea can also help to distinguish between a society and all forms of

human society which do not bear a social characteristic.

Hence, Bennabi describes a society as:

a group of human beings which perpetually changes its social features by creating itself the means of change, and which perceives the objectives it seeks to achieve through such a process of change". Furthermore, he stated that "the human group acquires the quality of society when it starts moving, when it begins changing itself in order to achieve its goals. This event coincides, in the historical perspective, with the moment when a civilization emerges. (Bennabi, 1998, pp. 15-16)

To conclude, every movement either leads a society to progress and civilization or to decline and decadence. On the other hand, when a society stops moving, it ultimately loses its history and becomes an entity without purpose.

The Three Elements of Society

As pointed out earlier, a group of human beings can be called a society when they move continuously to achieve their goals. This continuous collective movement carried out by the persons, ideas and objects is engraved in history. Therefore,

Bennabi mentioned that the making of history is the result of the interaction of three elements of society: (1) the realm of persons, (2) the realm of ideas, and (3) the realm of objects. These realms are related to one another and cannot act separately. The action pattern is determined by the paradigms which originate from the realm of ideas applied in the realm of objects to achieve specific objectives in the realm of persons. (Bennabi, 1998)

Accordingly, any historical movement is an outcome of the dynamic relations of these three realms. Thus, it is obvious that no concerted action can be achieved without the existence of a set of relations which are integrated in a concrete link. This synthetization of these social realms will actualize the transformation of the aspects of life and the evolution of human history. Then, it will be manifested in the form of a civilization and implied in the existence of the fourth realm which represents the sum-total of the necessary social relations, or what Bennabi called the social relations network. (Bennabi, 1998)

The Realm of Persons

In developing a society, for Bennabi, transforming the human being from the state of being an

individual into that of a person is the first task. This transformation will occur when the primary qualities of the person that link him to the species can be changed into social trends that link him to the society. Then, it will become specific relations within the realm of persons which provide the necessary bounds between ideas and objects. (Bennabi, 1998)

The bounds between ideas and objects in the realms of persons that concerted in a specific action, a given place, and a certain time undertaken by a society indicate that the civilization has already started.

Similarly, a strong and genuine expression of its social networks would be carried out by gathering people together with a society's first task. For example, in the Muslim society, the Friday congregational prayer which gathers the Muslims in the mosque reflects in its content the sublime values which remind the society of its birth. Indeed, that reflection can be found in the other specific gatherings of individuals. Bennabi stated that that is a universal phenomenon which exists in every society formed by a certain belief system. For instance, the Sunday mass gathering in the

churches of the Christian society. (Bennabi, 1998)

Bennabi distinguished between the individual and the person. The individual is the disintegrated man who is still incapable of realizing his civilizational role. Otherwise, the person is the integrated man, the transformed individual. The realm of persons represents this category. It also denotes the sum total of relations among certain groups and emphasizes the significance of those relations. (Benlahcene, 2013)

Moreover, Bennabi explained that the relations of the person to one another depend on the fundamentals of a given culture. Culture, according to him, is “the climate which moulds the personality of the individual and that it is a set of ethical and aesthetic values and norms”. (Bennabi, 1998)

The Realm of Ideas

According to Bennabi, the realm of ideas consists of the impressed and the expressed ideas. The first category originates from a universal philosophy which is peculiar to the entire social context. It is a general frame of thought that orients and guides to certain values and ethics. The second category, the expressed ideas, bears a personal aspect as it is a brainchild and a

specific way of viewing things. Moreover, Bennabi argued that the impressed ideas would transform the human being and the expressed ideas would transform the objects. (Bennabi, 1994) Nevertheless, the expressed ideas got an impression from the impressed ideas as their original plasma. If the expressed ideas lost their roots in the original plasma, they are no more able to express anything. (Bennabi, 1994)

For Bennabi, the realm of ideas is the real measurement of the wealth in a society. It cannot be measured by the quantity of objects that it possesses. It might happen that a society loses its realm of objects or is destroyed by circumstances such as flood or war, yet the disaster would become more devastating when a society loses control over its realm of ideas. However, if a society could save its ideas, it would be able to reconstruct its realm of objects. (Bennabi, 1998)

For instance, Japan underwent such severe circumstances after their defeat in World War II. This country witnessed the war that destroyed their realm of objects when the atomic bombs hit Hiroshima and Nagasaki in such a manner that almost nothing was left. (Ishikawa, 1981) And yet, they reconstructed

everything because they preserved their realm of ideas. (Bennabi, 1994)

In spite of that, the task of reconstruction is insufficient only with ideas. Furthermore, the realization of the reconstruction is impossible in the absence of the social relations network. This is because the network would regulate and channel the reconstruction towards a concerted action and specific ends. To prove this statement, Bennabi examined the history of Muslim society. He stated that the realm of ideas of the Muslim society was still embryonic and vague, compared to other civilized society, while it was beginning its ascendancy in the 7th century. Then, six centuries later, the Muslim society started declining where they had the richest library of the world at that time and it collapsed under the new nations. (Bennabi, 1998)

Thus, Bennabi concluded that the libraries cannot help to avoid the decline, and the efficacy of the ideas depended on the social relations networks. He asserted:

the efficacy of ideas therefore depends upon the network of relations, i.e., we cannot think of a harmonious action incorporating the persons, ideas and objects without these indispensable relations. Such an

action is efficacious and effective inasmuch as the network of relations approaches firmness and compactness. (Bennabi, 1998, p. 42)

The Realm of Objects

In transforming a society, the realm of objects, which is part of the elements of society, must be linked with other elements or realms and utilized in a good manner. The realm of objects provides tools, channels, instruments, and natural resources for developing a society. Significantly, it also provides the materials needed for the historical movement of a society and expresses the position of society in the civilizing process. Therefore, the importance of the realm of objects is not only in its availability but also its relationship with people and how people consider and deal with those objects psychologically and socially. (Bennabi, 1986a)

In this regard, Bennabi asserted that the development or the degeneration of society is not the reflection of the amount or the size of the objects but of the will and the capacity of society to direct its objects. (Bennabi, 1998) Hence, it is not necessary for society to have objects to be synthesized, since it can be borrowed from other

societies, but the wrong use will lead to dis-harmonization of the social relations. In other words, the use of the realm of objects depends on the quality of the people and the originality of their ideas.

As mentioned above, the Muslim society began falling into a state of decadence and collapsed catastrophically when it had the richest libraries in the world as well as a wide range of material and instruments. Thus, the efficiency of the objects is determined by the position of objects in the psychology of the people.

Moreover, the realm of objects is also the result of the relationship. Every corrupted relationship in the realm of persons as well as in the realm of ideas has a direct impact on the realm of the objects. According to Bennabi, the three realms do not act separately. These realms are incorporated in common action and pattern that are determined by ideological archetypes which originate from the realm of ideas applied to the realm of objects to achieve objectives specified by the realm of persons. (Bennabi, 1998)

The Social Relations Network

The social relations network is one of the concepts of Bennabi that has strong links with his

understanding of the nature and the dynamism of society. Based on the preceding discussion, the existence of the social relations networks is the implication and the result of the dialectical relationship between the realm of persons, ideas, and objects. The social relations network is the fourth realm which represents the sum-total of the necessary social relations. (Bennabi, 1998)

Accordingly, this set of relations is necessary to provide a link within each realm as well as among them to one another. The link is necessary to mould the three realms into an integrated body of relationships. When a society can realize this twofold link in a united action then it can make a historical movement. Hence, Bennabi considered the social relations as the foundation of society because it is the internal and external relations between the three realms that constitute the society and not a mere gathering of individuals with simultaneous relations. (Bennabi, 1998)

In the absence of the social relations network, which is the result of the very conditions and circumstances that generate the historical movement, the three realms cannot function. Thus, in order to change its status, the first task of a society is to carry out the

network of relations. (Bennabi, 1978) Bennabi asserted:

it is a known fact that the first task a society carries out in the course of changing its status is conditional upon the completion of the network of its relations. Accordingly, one can assert that the construction of the network of relations is the first historical task a society carries out upon its birth. (Bennabi, 1998, p. 29)

Bennabi presented an example from the history of the early Muslims on the importance of the social relations network as the first task to be carried out by a newborn society. The first historical task accomplished by Muslims is the Hijra or migration as the reference point in Islamic history, and the covenant of brotherhood between the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār* is the first weaving of its social relations network. In fact, at that time, the three realms of the society had not yet taken their distinctive shapes. (Bennabi, 1998)

According to Bennabi, history may start before the completion of the three realms. Likewise, history may come to an end even though the society abounds with persons, ideas, and objects. It happened to the Muslim society which, started when its three realms had not

yet taken their distinctive shapes and was at the age of decline and decadence, and when it was very rich in its realm of persons, ideas, and objects, the Muslim society became backward because of its social relations network that was torn apart and struck by the coefficient of colonisability. (Bennabi, 1998)

The Three Stages of Society

According to Bennabi, every human society transfers from one situation to another following the psychological values of its development. it does not fix itself in one situation throughout its life. Those situations or stages of society are: (1) the pre-civilized society, (2) the civilized society, and (3) the post-civilized society. (Bennabi, 1994) Throughout history, every human society is at one of these specific stages which is characterized by specific values.

When a society is in the pre-civilized stage, it has not yet started its civilizing process. However, it has its own peculiarities and potentialities of making history, yet it is still incapable of making history. Hence, all of its vital energy, civilizing faculty, and capacity remain in a state of passivity and not capable of performing the important action. (Benlahcene, 2013)

However, Bennabi argued that the individual in the pre-civilized society is a natural man and ready to undertake the civilizing process. He presented an example from Muslim history, the Arab Bedouin during the Prophet Muhammad's era as the natural men joining the cyclical civilization when Islam came. (Bennabi, 1986b)

Further, Bennabi argued that a society cannot begin its civilizing process without the dynamic interaction between man, soil, and time and yet, these elements of civilization are in an unmovable position without the force of the religious idea. Thus, this religious idea is a frame for a dynamic interaction between those elements. (Bennabi, 1998)

The second stage, the civilized society is the stage in which a society has the ability to organize and orient its civilizing capabilities and faculties to its maximum. All the concentrations and skills of the individual and society are directed towards the accomplishment of the civilizing process. Therefore, at this stage, the social relations network of a society is at its strongest. With the strong social relations network, a society would have a clear vision, an effective and systematic movement,

and an active culture. (Bennabi, 1998)

The third stage, the post-civilized society is the stage in which the religious idea of society ceases to synthesize the civilizational values, and its social relations network starts degenerating and its dynamic features lose their driving forces and motivating functions. At this moment, the society arrives at the end of its dynamism and goes through a state of backwardness and decline. (Bennabi, 1998)

However, Bennabi distinguished between the third stage and the first stage. He argued that usually historians make no distinctions between the pre-civilized society and the post-civilized society. This confusion of stages will complicate any effort taken to resolve the problems of society and create delusions. To him, the post-civilized society is not motionless like the pre-civilized society. After having lost its ideal links and deviated from the path of its civilization, it is moving backwards. (Bennabi, 1994) In other words, the society continues its movement, but it is destructive and harmful and leads to disintegration and demise.

The disintegration and demise of a society follow a gradual process; the society produces a disintegrated

man who is no longer able to undertake the historical action. Then the society loses its criteria and standards. This creates chaos in the realm of ideas of the society and makes the culture of the society decivilizing. At that moment, the disintegration of society is inevitable. This stage coincides with the age in which a state of colonisability anchors its roots and, thus, paving the way to colonialism. (Bennabi, 1998)

Colonisability and the Problem of the Muslim Society

Colonialism which occurred in the Muslim society for several centuries caused a variety of damages and setbacks, even when the Muslim people were able to liberate themselves. This situation drew attention from many thinkers and scholars. They tried to find out the root cause of colonialism to overcome the damage and setbacks.

Bennabi is one of the thinkers who produced several works in analyzing the current state of the Muslim society. According to him, the Muslim society today is a product of a mixture of residual inheritance of what he referred to as, the Post-Muwaḥḥiddūn and from new cultural deposits brought by reformists and modernists.

This situation is not the result of a reflected orientation or scientific planning but rather a mixture of various remnants of the past and non-filtered innovations. Furthermore, Bennabi asserted that the syncretism of elements of different cultures and different periods, without dialectics, had endangered the Muslim society even for some time. (Bennabi, 1987b)

In their attempt to revive, Muslims adopted many things from outside of their own civilization. However, instead of adopting notions and means, they adopted objects and needs in the place of those things. (Bennabi, 1987b) As it can be seen, some Islamic countries are importing a lot of technologies produced by western countries without understanding the spirit behind these objects. More specifically, we can find schools in the Muslim society that were designed to restore the state of the Muslim society as before, falling into the duplication of schools founded by their colonials. There have been changes in buildings, classrooms, desks, and chairs, but without changes to a better curriculum.

When a new society develops itself, it has traditional elements which are a legacy from other or previous societies and modern

inspiration obtained from a society that has developed and advanced. The latter, borrowed from a society that has been established and organized itself, demanded proper assimilation and adaptation that constitute an effort of creation and synthesis. (Bennabi, 1987b) Nevertheless, this is not new in the history of the Muslim society. Since Prophet Muhammad was sent, Muslims have adapted and assimilated all the habits of the people in accordance with Islamic teachings. This process of Islamization (see Al-Attas, 2018) continued in the following centuries when Muslims began to encounter other civilizations. For instance, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā Islamized Greek philosophy in their works. (Bennabi, 1986c) In addition, they and other Muslim philosophers, developed their own Islamic philosophy based on Islamic religious teachings. (Acikgenc, 2017)

In his explanation, Bennabi said that Muslims today are faced with two crucial problems, namely, the problem of the current situation and how to overcome it and the problem of borrowing from modern civilization. He stated:

The Muslim dilemma concerns, on the one hand, the problem of borrowings from modern

civilization and falls in the bio-historical order, and on the other, constitutes a psychological and dialectical problem, concerning the attitude of Muslim towards his current life. (Bennabi, 1987b, p. 42)

For the latter problem, even though there was no civilization that has not adopted some foreign elements to it, (Al Faruqi, 2013) some sociological elements that characterize different cultures and civilizations were not always interchangeable. Thus, it is dangerous to adopt foreign solutions for solving the problems that the Muslim society was facing because it deals with different stages of development and different attitudes and objectives of a society. (Bennabi, 1984)

Consequently, new sociological elements must be assimilated in certain determined conditions provided by an imperative need and a superior imperative. Yet, the Muslim society has failed to take into account these conditions due to their snobbism and spiritual bankruptcy. The snobbism and spiritual bankruptcy, according to Bennabi, happened because of the confusion that reigned in their intellectual, moral, and political domains. This confusion was a

result of a *mélange* of decayed ideas inherited from the past and borrowed ideas. Those ideas became dangerous because of their displacement from their historical and rational context. Therefore, it demanded a filtration of the dead and deadly ideas consciously and systematically. (Bennabi, 1987b)

The other problem, concerning the attitude of the Muslims toward their current life, can be witnessed in their incapacity to think and to act. This incapacity is due to the absence of a dialectical link between thought and its concrete finalization in the psychological domain. The root of this inertia of the Muslim spirit is also a confusion that reigns in their thoughts. Muslims could not differentiate between the essence of phenomena and their appearance. In fact, it is the influence of the western sciences borrowed by Muslims. These sciences did not mean “being better” but it means “appearing better”. (Bennabi, 1987b) Therefore, the Muslim society could not produce any outstanding personality in the realm of human knowledge as the early Muslim society produced many outstanding scholars such as al-Shāfi’ī, Ibn Manẓūr, al-Ghazali and many more.

The organic cause of the weakness of the Muslim intellectual,

according to Bennabi, lay in the absence of the intellectual domain. He stated “*Intelligence is constantly the function of the spirit: when the latter no longer possesses its purity, the former no longer has all its depth*” (Bennabi, 1987b: 44).

Hence, Muslims who have lost their spiritual power are unable to develop their intellectual attitude. Consequently, Muslims always fail to liberate themselves from apathy and incoherence. Bennabi analogized the state of the Muslims as a man who has been awakened but does not know what he must do. (Bennabi, 1987b)

Bennabi showed how the current state of Muslims is experiencing spirit degradation. Nowadays, people consider themselves to be perfect by concluding that Islam is a perfect religion, and when he/she becomes a Muslim, he/she becomes perfect. The feeling of being a perfect person makes people do not want to develop themselves and feel comfortable in a lazy situation. In the end, these people will find their ideas petrified and assume that reason is not needed anymore. Consequently, the people abandon or even reject the “*Ijtihad*”, or the effort and the critical thinking necessary to arrive at properly formulated legal conclusion, and

only depend on “*Taqlid*”, or the effort and the critical thinking necessary to arrive at properly formulated legal conclusion. (Bennabi, 1987b) Eventually, people fall into the abyss of “individual cults”.

In these circumstances, these people would not be able to rise even a little to rebuild their civilization that was once glorious. Bennabi stressed that Islam and Muslims are not the same, and likewise, Islam and civilization are different. Islam is a religion that was revealed by the God of the universe, or “God-made”, whereas civilization is “man-made”. Further, he stated that Islam will never change even by one letter, even if humanity has changed completely, while civilization continues to change throughout history. (Bennabi, 2005)

The absence of this direct link between thought and action, according to Bennabi, led Muslims to perform blind and incoherent actions. Furthermore, it has led to an appreciation of the facts subjectively, under-estimation or over-estimation. This attitude has paralyzed the Muslim mind with the psychosis of ‘easy things’ and ‘impossible things.’ In Algeria, Bennabi stated there were three well-known axioms that paralyzed its people. These axioms are ‘we

cannot do anything, because we are ignorant’, ‘we cannot realize that, because we are poor’, and ‘we cannot undertake this work, because there is colonialism.’ (Bennabi, 1987b) In fact, these axioms paralyzed the morality and mentality of Muslims all over the world with the same or different narratives.

It is a fact that we are ignorant, but this stemmed from colonialism. The colonizers exerted all efforts to close every access to education for the colonized people. The existing schools are directed to teach their students a curriculum that is in accordance with the desires and interests of colonialism. Nevertheless, some colonized people who became educated did not use their education then as elementary and immediate means to fight general illiteracy. If so, the myth of ignorance is dangerous because it becomes a mask for the profound problem of colonisability under the problem of an illiterate man. (Bennabi, 1987b)

The second myth, which is equally dangerous, is the myth of poverty. In fact, there were always rich Muslim bourgeoisies in the Muslim society. In spite of that, according to Bennabi, it would suffice to consider that their social efficiency of financial means is

ranked below that of the poor class. It indicates that the entropic evolution has reigned in all fields of modern Muslim life. Therefore, the problem in the Muslim society is not financial, but rather psychological and technical orientation of the capital. (Bennabi, 1987a)

The third myth is colonisation which paralyses all good wills. Colonisation is considered as the reason and at the same time, is blamed for all setbacks, and even considered as the justification for the veritable moral and political deceptions. Bennabi stated that, indeed, colonisation strangled thoughts and intellectual efforts, and tentative of moral and economic recoveries, but the suppressing cause did not come from outside; it came from within. Colonisation does not affect the fundamental worth of the individual that escapes his power. The thing that influences him is what he called as colonisability. He stated:

thus, colonialism acts, at the same time, as a reality when it effectively inhibits action, and as a myth when it becomes an alibi or a mask for colonisability. Now we can find the individual inefficacious and inert even in domains where colonial pressure cannot be incriminated. (Bennabi, 1987b, p. 47)

Colonisability is a term coined by Bennabi, which came originally from the French word *colonisabilité*, to depict the state of internal weakness and susceptibility to colonization in the Muslim society. For him, it is a universal law that applies to every society and civilization.

Moreover, colonisation, to a certain degree, is the most fortunate effect of colonisability. Colonisation makes the engendered colonisable to be aware of his state of being colonised and thus, finds himself obliged to decolonise himself and become incolonisable. In this sense, according to Bennabi, colonisation is a historical necessity. In addition, Bennabi made a distinction between a conquered and occupied country and a colonised country. The former is a pre-existing synthesis of man, soil and time which implies an incolonisable individual and the latter is a social condition that has been exposed to colonisability and thus colonisation is inevitable. (Bennabi, 1987b) For instance, Greece was conquered by Rome and India was colonised by the British.

Hence, the primary cause of the bankruptcy of men and the lethargy of spirit in the Muslim society is not colonisation. Colonisation, at first, would introduce itself as a contradictory factor that helps the

colonised people to overcome its colonisability. By this intermediary, these colonised people become conscious of their state and thus force themselves to decolonise. Thus, the positive aspect of colonisation is liberating potentialities that remained dormant for a long time. On the other hand, it also has the negative aspect that tends to destroy the same potentialities by paralysing the morality and mentality of the Muslim. (Bennabi, 1987b)

In fact, in history, colonisation never becomes perennial even when the colonizers paralyse its victim. In the end, the force of colonisation transforms the soul of the colonised people. Hence, these two concurrent notions, colonisation and colonisability, are quite distinct, and are fundamental to consider when examining the situation of a colonised country. Therefore, whether it is a concern of political doctrine or reform, the entire success depends on the consideration of these two aspects of the problem and considering the one without the other is distorting the problem. (Bennabi, 1987b)

The Post-Muwahhiddūn Man and The Decline of the Muslim Society

Based on the preceding discussion, Bennabi examined the

root of the decadence and decline of the Muslim society. He explained that if the process depicted by a curve, the point of inflexion could be found somewhere during Ibn Khaldun' time. In spite of that, the reversion is not instantaneous and marked the distant culmination of the battle of Şiffin that had turned the Khalifah's democratic power into dynastic power. This turning point had caused a gap between the state and the people's consciousness. Furthermore, the turning point contained the potential of all the future political antithesis and separatisms. (Bennabi, 1987b)

From the political angle, Bennabi viewed that the first schism in the course of Islamic history has constituted one of the crises which had changed the institutional framework of a country. Then, there came a moment when the power could not be guarded or seized and adapted to new institutions. At that moment, Bennabi stated that the scepter was broken into a thousand pieces and picked up by a thousand of petty princes. (Bennabi, 1987b)

In the historical evolution, according to Bennabi, this moment marked the point of inflexion and the reversal of the values of civilization and yet, it is no longer the problem in political affairs, it is

the problem of man himself who loses his civilizing élan, capacity and capability to apply the ideas of his genius to soil and time. Bennabi stated:

it is no longer the question of a change in the political framework: it is the man himself, the civilized man, who loses his 'civilizing élan': and is thus unable to assimilate and create. It is no longer a question of institutions but of the human factor: these are the men themselves who no longer know how to apply their genius to their soil and time. It is the fundamental synthesis itself that disintegrates and with it the social life that gives place to the vegetative life. (Bennabi, 1987b, pp. 12-13)

In other words, the social relations network of the Muslim society at that time produced a disintegrated man who was no longer able to undertake the historical action. The society also lost its criteria and standards, leaving its realm of ideas chaotic and its culture decivilizing. More than that, the social relations network of the society degenerated, and the dynamic features lost their driving force and motivating function.

In the course of Muslim history, Bennabi dated this phenomenon

from the fall of the Al-Muwaḥḥid dynasty which ruled over North Africa and Spain from A.D 1130 to 1269. According to him, that was the fall of the Islamic civilization and the end of its breath. Then, the decadence era commenced with what he called the Post-Muwaḥḥiddūn man. Even when there was a great kingdom like Aghlabid which had been the metropolis of a million inhabitants, there was no more than an insignificant township like other townships such as Baghdad and Samarqand at that time. (Bennabi, 1987b) All parts of the Muslim society had suffered the same fate.

From the sociological angle, Bennabi maintained that the symptoms of political or urban problems were the expression of the pathological state of the Post-Muwaḥḥiddūn man, the new man who had succeeded as the man of Islamic civilization and who carried out in himself the germs of all the problem faced by the Muslim society. The man who is not only the predecessor whom we owe our sociological heredity, but the one who is also our contemporary. Bennabi argued that "*he is not only the invisible instigator of our present failures, he is also thereof the co-actor; he has not merely transmitted his psychology born of a moral,*

social, philosophical and political bankruptcy: he has transmitted himself" (Bennabi, 1987b, p. 13).

Accordingly, Bennabi asserted that the renaissance of the Muslim society cannot be made until its passive inheritance of its six centuries of bankruptcy is liquidated, and the man renovated according to the Islamic tradition and the Cartesian experience. Thus, he argued that the need for moral, social, and psychological sciences is far greater than the need for material sciences. Evidently, it is more difficult to produce a civilized man than to produce a technology. When the former remains ignorant, the latter would constitute danger. (Bennabi, 1987b) In other words, Bennabi stated that what can be offered in the service of peace is conscience, not science. (Bennabi, 1984)

To conclude, Bennabi stated that the Post-Muwaḥḥiddūn man is none other than the incarnation of the colonisability, the typical visage of the colonial era. He is the clown who accepts all the roles made by the colonizers including to perform the role of the indigene. (Bennabi, 1987b) Moreover, this man unconsciously gave away to colonialism over himself and let himself to be colonized.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there are several conclusions that need to be underlined. Bennabi with his definition of the origin of society, its basic elements and social relations network has provided us a comprehensive approach. Although in his works Bennabi uses Muslim society as an example that he analyzes, his approach is universal because it can be used to analyze other societies.

His analysis of the current state of Muslim society is able to provide a clear picture of it. It can be concluded from the above description that Muslim society has experienced the disorientation and has lost its identity. Many factors have made the Muslim society like that, either in the political field such as colonialism, or in the economic sector such as exploitation, or other factors such as dependence on other countries in various aspects. However, Bennabi's analysis of the root of all these problems provides a strong and rational explanation for why this happened.

Colonisability as a concept proposed by Bennabi that represents an internal weakness in an individual also affects groups of individuals or what is known as society. Bennabi named individuals experiencing

colonisability in Muslim societies as the Post-Muwaḥḥiddūn man. This is because, based on his observations, internal weakness plagued the Muslim society in the post-Muwaḥḥid dynasty era.

The use of the word Colonisability, which means “susceptibility to colonialism”, creates confusion, especially by those who do not understand the concept it provides. However, if observed in more detail, the use can be understood because Bennabi lived in an era of struggle against colonialism and the era of independence. Furthermore, the word reflects the profound consequences of the internal weakness experienced by Muslim society. The Muslim society has experienced colonialism as a result of the internal weakness they have experienced since after the era of the muwaḥḥid dynasty. So, although nowadays the Muslim society has been in spite of the colonialism, the possibility of a repeat of the colonialism, in the form of the same or different such as colonialism of thoughts, economics, and others, will continue to exist as long as these shortcomings cannot be overcome. So Bennabi's proposal to transform the Post-Muwaḥḥiddūn man meets its relevance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Book

- Acikgenc, A. (2017). *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History*. IKIM.
- Al Faruqi, I. R. (2013). *The Essence of Islamic Civilization*. IIIT.
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (2018). *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy Education*. Ta'dib International.
- Benlahcene, B. (2013). *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi's Approach to Civilization*. IIIT.
- Bennabi, M. (1978). *Bayn al-Rashād wa al-Tih*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Bennabi, M. (1984). *Mushkilah al-Thaqāfah*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Bennabi, M. (1986a). *Milād Mujtama' Shabkah al-'Alāqāt al-Ijtimā'iyah*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Bennabi, M. (1986b). *Shurūṭ al-Nahḍah*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Bennabi, M. (1986c). *Wijhah al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Bennabi, M. (1987a). *Al-Muslim fī 'Ālam al-Iqtisād*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Bennabi, M. (1987b). *Islam in History and Society* (A. Rashid, Trans.). Islamic Research Institute.

- Bennabi, M. (1994). *The Problem of Ideas in Muslim World* (M. El-Tahir El-Mesawi, Trans.). Budaya Ilmu.
- Bennabi, M. (1998). *On the Origins of Human Society, The Social Relations Network* (M. El-Tahir El-Mesawi, Trans.). The Open Press.
- Bennabi, M. (2005). *Majālis Damashq: Muḥadārāt Ulqiyat fī 'Āmī 1971-1972*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Cush, D. (2008). *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Routledge.
- El-Mesawi, M. E.-T. (1998). *A Muslim Theory of Human Society, an Investigation into the Sociological Thought of Malik Bennabi*. Thinker's Library.
- 'Ukāshah, S. (1986). *Al-Ṣirā' al-Haḍārī fī al-'Ālam al-Islāmī, Dirāsah Tahlīliyah fī Falsafah al-Haḍārah 'ind Mālik Bin Nabī*. Dār al-Fikr.
- Ishikawa, E. (1981). *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*. Basic Book.
- Naylor, P. C. (2006). *The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi*. Michigan State University Press.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (fifth edition). (1995). Oxford University Press.
- Sa 'ūd, A.-T. (2006). *Al-Takhalluf wa al-Tanmiyyah fī Fikr Mālik Bin Nabī*. Dār al-Hādī.
- Sartre, J.-P. (2001). *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Routledge.
- Webster New world Dictionary* (fifth edition). (2016). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Thesis

- Berghout, A. (1998). *Method of Studying Civilization According to Malik Bennabi* [Phd Thesis]. University Malaya.

Unpublished Paper

- Tamimi, D. A. S. (n.d.). *Democracy in Islamic Political Thought*. 26.