

# Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah

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In the last several decades, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have studied the causes of the Muslim ummah's decline. As these scholars have different frames of reference and different political and cultural orientations, each group tends to view the issue according to its own understanding. However, the outcome of these studies are marred by major methodological defects that have made it impossible for the authors to move beyond a mere categorization of the multiple symptoms of that malady.

Most non-Muslim scholars ascribe the Muslim world's backwardness to Islam. Such a conclusion reflects the confrontational stand of the West towards the Muslim world. Although the numerous writings on the subject have been called "scientific" and "academic," in reality they are mostly defensive and far from truly objective.<sup>1</sup>

Muslim thinkers and reformers, while admitting the fact of the ummah's disintegration, have reached a different conclusion: Muslims, not Islam, have to change.<sup>2</sup> Questions as to how and why this change should take place, as well as to who should undertake it, have remained largely incomplete and inconclusive for a variety of political and cultural circumstances. One major weakness was that most of the studies were descriptive, as opposed to analytical, in nature. If there were any analysis at all, it was mainly theoretical and superficial.<sup>3</sup> The lack of freedom on different levels also interfered with intel-

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<sup>1</sup>For a broader critical view on the phenomenon of orientalism, see Edward Sa'id, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Al. L. Tibawi, "English Speaking Orientalism: A Critique of Their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism," *The Muslim World*, 53 (1963): 23-45, 73-88.

<sup>2</sup>Umar Farrū *al Tajdīd fī al Muslimīn, lā fī al Islam* (Beirut: Dār al Kitāb al 'Arabī, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>If taken in its historical framework, Shakīb Arsalān's *Limādha Ta'akhhara al Muslimūn wa limādha Taqaddama Ghayruhum?* might be an exception. It was first published as a series of essays in Rashīd Ridā's *al Manār* in response to questions about the reason for the Muslim world's decline. It was translated into English as, *Our Decline and Its Causes* (Lahore, 1944).

lectuals' ability to pinpoint the causes of any problem when conceived and to openly discuss conceptual or institutional errors. In addition, the rejection of the "other opinion" was and still is the dominant phenomenon among those Muslim intellectuals struggling against the low self-esteem caused by the West's military triumph and intellectual superiority over all other cultures.

## Malik Bennabi: A Profile

Malik Bennabi (1905-73) was, in terms of his education, a product of the West. His strong faith as a Muslim dominated all his cultural and intellectual tendencies. Although he might have suffered from what some scholars call "cultural schizophrenia,"<sup>4</sup> as he was treated as an *indigene* (native) both in France and at home, Bennabi was sustained and inspired by his strong faith in the role of Islam in history and civilization. In France, he lived in the antithetical worlds of East-West, Africa-Europe, and Islam-Christianity. Bennabi was able to resolve the basic intellectual antithesis of Islam and Christianity in his mind. Rejecting the Western assumption that the very foundation of Islam was being challenged, he concluded that the Muslim world's decadence should be attributed not to Islam, but to its historical application by its followers.<sup>5</sup> He substantiated his argument by referring to the fact that Islam had encouraged reason, inquiry, and free will, all of which had enabled Muslims to create a great civilization.<sup>6</sup>

Civilization was the principal theme in Bennabi's books. Unlike other Arab intellectuals, he did not use terms such as *taraqqī* (advancement), *taqaddum* (development), or *nahdah* (renaissance). He consciously and carefully selected the term *ḥaḍārah* (civilization) in order to indicate his broad historical concept of the social phenomenon of human life. His books were usually subtitled *Mushkilāt al Ḥaḍārah* (Problems of Civilization), including his autobiography *Mudhakkarāt Shahīd al Qarn* (Memories of the Century's Witness) and *al Zāhirah al Qur'ānīyah* (The Qur'anic Phenomenon).

Bennabi's use of the idea of civilization as a criterion resulted from his basic concept that "the problem of any people is but that of its civilization."<sup>7</sup> He was interested in studying the phenomenon of civilization "not as a chain of incidents, the story of which history relates to us," but as a "phenomenon,

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<sup>4</sup>Ali Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 27.

<sup>5</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Fikrat al Ifrīqīyah al Āsīyawīyah 'ala Dāwī Mu'tamar Bāndūng* (Damascus: Dār al Fikr, 1981), 32.

<sup>6</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Intāj al Mustashriqīn wa Āthāruhu 'alā al Fikr al Islāmī al Hadīth* (Cairo: 1971), 32.

<sup>7</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Shurūt al Nahdah* (Damascus: Dār al Fikr, 1979), 19.

the analysis of which may lead us to its canon."<sup>8</sup> It was this insight that led him to diagnose the ummah's decline in a way that was not based on the assumption that the intellectual problem is the essence of all problems.

## The Influence of Ibn Khaldūn's Thought

In his *al Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn had subjected to human society to a distinctive sociological and anthropological scrutiny that he called 'ilm al 'umrān (the study of society). Some studies have suggested that Bennabi was the most original Arab thinker since Ibn Khaldūn when it came to speculating on the phenomenon of civilization.<sup>9</sup> There is a clear resemblance between his views on social development and those of Ibn Khaldūn. However, Bennabi was not only a careful student of Ibn Khaldūn; he was an intelligent beneficiary of more recent developments in the modern social sciences. While it is evident that Bennabi read and was influenced by *al Muqaddimah*,<sup>10</sup> his own contemplative philosophical views of civilization went beyond those of Ibn Khaldūn.

In most of his books, particularly *Shurūṭ al Nahḍah*, Bennabi emphasized the concept that every civilization passes through three stages: birth (*mīlād*), peak (*awj*), and decline (*ufūl*).<sup>11</sup> He thus expressed, like Ibn Khaldūn, a belief in the cyclical process of civilization. In fact, Bennabi acknowledged that Ibn Khaldūn originated the concept of such cycles in his theory of The Three Generations.<sup>12</sup> However, Bennabi suggested that Ibn Khaldūn was so limited by the terminology and thought of his time that he restricted the cyclic process to the state level (*dawlah*). He therefore viewed Ibn Khaldūn's work as merely a theory about a state's evolution. He himself felt that the concept could be appropriately and profitably extended to encompass civilization.<sup>13</sup>

In general, Bennabi attempted to interpret Islamic history in light of the cyclical theory. However, he did not adopt Ibn Khaldūn's idea that tribal cohesion (*'aṣabīyah*) leads to the establishment of state and a sedentary way

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>9</sup>Fahmī Jad'ān, *Usus al Taqaddum 'and Mufakkiri' al Islām fī al 'Ālam al 'Arabī al Hadīth* (Beirut: 1979), 401.

<sup>10</sup>This book was published first in French, in 1948, under the title of *Les Conditions de la Renaissance*.

<sup>11</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūṭ*, 71.

<sup>12</sup>This theory states that the ages of a state are completed within three generations. The first generation retains its nomadic savagery as well as its solidarity. The second tends to become sedentary so that it can wield power and enjoy life. Later, it loses its aggressiveness and the desire to conquer. The third generation has completely forgotten the rough nomadic life and the love of power; all it wants is the easy life and luxury, both of which are active agents of corruption.

<sup>13</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūṭ*, 53.

of life (*istiqrār*) that would produce luxury (*taraf*) and ultimately result in decay (*inhiyār*). Instead, Bennabi developed his own three-stage schematization: the spiritual stage, the rational stage, and the instinctive stage.

*The Spiritual Stage:* When a person is in his/her natural stage (*fiṭrah*), Bennabi theorizes, he/she is guided mainly by his/her natural instincts. When a spiritual idea or religion appears, it subjects these instincts to a "conditional process." This does not mean the instincts will be terminated, but rather that they will be reformulated in such a way that they become compatible with the new spiritual idea or religion. Thus the person is partially liberated from the natural state, while his/her spiritual potency controls his/her life.

Applying this theoretical view to Islamic history, Bennabi considers the spiritual period to have lasted from when the Prophet received the first revelation at Hirā' until the Battle of Şifḫīn. The spiritual strength of this period can be seen in two significant events: the case of Bilāl, whose adherence to the new message enabled him to withstand torture and persecution, and the woman who came to the Prophet seeking purification by receiving the punishment for adultery. Bennabi concluded that "only the spirit gives humanity the opportunity to rise and progress to form civilization. When the spirit is lost, the civilization falls, for who loses his ability to ascend could not help but plunge due to gravitation."<sup>14</sup>

*The Rational Stage:* As the society continues to practice its religious principles and integrate its internal bonds, the religion spreads globally. To Bennabi, "Islamic civilization departed as a driving force from the depth of souls, to spread horizontally on earth from the Atlantic shore to the Chinese borders."<sup>15</sup>

At this point the Muslim community is enlarged, and newly created needs and challenges stimulate the society's capacity and creativity. As the sciences and the arts flourish, reason becomes the controlling force and society ascends towards the peak of its cycle of civilization. However, according to Bennabi, reason cannot discipline the instinct as effectively as the spirit did in the first stage. Instinct, therefore, gradually starts to gain freedom, and society's control of the individual decreases.<sup>16</sup>

Applying this analysis to Islamic civilization, Bennabi viewed the Umayyad period as an example of the rational stage. Although he called this

<sup>14</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Wijhat al 'Ālam al Islāmī*, trans. A. Shahin (Damsacus: Dār al Fikr, 1959), 30.

<sup>15</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūt*, 53.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 69.

historical era a "deviated civilization," probably from a political perspective, he asserted that humanity is indebted to it for discovering the percentage system and the experimental method in medicine.<sup>17</sup>

*The Instinctive Stage:* This period is marked by weakness and corruption, which becomes inevitable when society can no longer control its members' instincts. For Bennabi, the mind in this stage has lost its social function and plunged into sterility and obscurity. Society then enters the "darkness of history" as the cycle of civilization ends. This stage applies easily to the period prior to the Mongol invasion. Bennabi chose the fourteenth century C.E., the period coinciding with Ibn Khaldūn's lifetime, as the turning point of decadence. This period was characterized by a moral, political, and intellectual collapse.

## History and the Intellectual Problem

History, as a social phenomenon, occupied a significant place in Bennabi's thought. As he matured intellectually during the 1930s, his interest and attention turned from electrical engineering to history, sociology, and philosophy. This adoption of history as a major reference was not surprising for an intellectual whose scope was civilization, for history is always a central point where past, present, and future meet.

For Bennabi, historical events are simply actions and reactions of psychosocial elements,<sup>18</sup> and history is but a list of ideas and actions. Thus any society which daily records a large number of ideas and actions will attain greater results.<sup>19</sup> This fact led Bennabi to emphasize the importance of studying and perceiving history. His method was both analytic and constructive, for he believed that certain matters could be understood only through analysis. On the other hand, this process is essential to one trying to implement the goals.<sup>20</sup> Studying history is not an intellectual luxury. From an Islamic point of view, the contemplation of history is encouraged, for this activity reveals the far-reaching purpose of life and instructs us about the rise and fall of various peoples. We even read in the Qur'an: "Say: Travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who reject Truth," and: "Many were the ways of life that have passed away before you: travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who rejected truth."<sup>21</sup> This process in itself gives

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<sup>17</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 28.

<sup>18</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Hadīth fī al Binā' al Jadīd* (Beirut: n.d.), 55.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>21</sup>Qur'an 2:11, 3:137.

coming generations meaningful insights. Studying history, Bennabi agreed, does not lead only to theoretical conclusions, but also to applicable ideas.<sup>22</sup>

Since Muslims have distanced themselves from the dynamic essence of Islam, they lack an adequate knowledge of history. For Bennabi, ignorance about the nature of history and the controversy of its elements makes Muslims attribute the results of historical events to predestination which, in turn, and leads to resignation and acceptance of the status quo. History, in this case, neither stimulates our will nor directs our activities.<sup>23</sup>

Historical events and movements, according to Bennabi, result from the interaction of three important realms: the realm of figures (*'ālam al ashkhās*), the realm of ideas (*'ālam al afkār*), and the realm of things" (*'ālam al ashyā'*). While it seems that the realm of figures occupies a more prominent position than the other two, the realm of ideas is, in Bennabi's view, extremely important. For him, a society's wealth is not measured by the "things" people possess but by their ideas,<sup>24</sup> which results in the view that "it is civilization that gives birth to its product."<sup>25</sup> It would therefore be impossible, either quantitatively or qualitatively, to purchase one civilization's products in order to create another for, as Bennabi indicates "civilization can not sell its spirit, ideas, tastes, intimate wealth or the accumulation of untouchable notions and meanings."<sup>26</sup> These harmonious and complex elements are shaped through history to give a civilization its own unique characteristics.

History and ideas have a strong interchangeable effect for, he asserts, the great historical miracles have resulted from creative ideas alone.<sup>27</sup> Islam enables a novice society to emerge in history when its realm of figures is constituted according to the unique concept of Islamic brotherhood. The historical significance of the integration of the Muḥājirūn and the Anṣār on one side and of all members of the Muslim community on the other was mentioned in the Qur'an: "And He put affection between their hearts; not if you spent all that is in the earth could you have produced that affection, but Allah had done it."<sup>28</sup>

Bennabi writes that this point marks the beginning of the rise of Islamic civilization. Unfortunately, he says, scarcely forty years later the ummah suffered its first reverse: the Battle of Şifīn, where the struggle between the

<sup>22</sup>Bennabi, *Hadīth*, 50.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>24</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Milād Mujtama': Shabakāt al 'Alāqāt al Ijrimā'riyah* (Damsacus: Dār al Fikr, 1975), 34.

<sup>25</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūt*, 43.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>27</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Mushkilāt al Afkār fī al 'Ālam al Islāmī*, trans. M. A. Ali (Cairo: Maktabat 'Ammār, 1971), 56.

<sup>28</sup>Qur'an 8:63.

Qur'anic spirit and the characteristics of ignorance (*jāhiliyah*) was launched.<sup>29</sup> He maintains, however, that the elements of Islamic civilization are not restricted to its early period, but rather are perpetually included in the essence of the Islamic religion. Islam, therefore, continued to shape its civilization despite the inner conflict caused by Şiffīn.

The true and eventually total decline of Islamic civilization took place after the period of the al Muwaḥḥidīn, a North African dynasty that tried its best to gather and unite the shattered ummah at the end of its cycle of civilization.

## Characteristics of a Post al Muwaḥḥidīn Individual

A human being, as a social and historical product, plays a major role in the development of his/her society. For Bennabi, a human being has two identities. The first, fixed and unaffected by history, is that of a natural creature honored by God. Humanity, from an Islamic perspective, attained superiority over all other creatures by being appointed *khalīfah* (vicegerent) through its acceptance of the trust refused by other elements of the universe. The second identity, changeable and influenced by history, is that of a social entity. It is the socio-historical structure that transforms the individual (*fard*) into a person (*shakhs*), a complicated being who produces civilization.<sup>30</sup> The sound interaction of persons (or the realm of figures) with an idea and its archetypes (or the realm of ideas), would result in material production and create the realm of things. Any disturbance in that interaction, or in any inner structure of either realm, will affect the process of civilization. The intellectual crisis of the Muslims is, in fact, a result of such a disturbance on both levels.

The post al Muwaḥḥidīn individual, who represented the realm of figures, was described by Bennabi as resembling the water of a storage tank after it has been used for energy production: it has lost its ability to reproduce energy. Likewise, the post al Muwaḥḥidīn individual is "out of civilization" and unable to reenter its mainstream.<sup>31</sup> This individual is not only "outside" civilization like a precivilized person (*rajul al fitrah*) but, contrary to the latter, he/she is unable to accomplish a civilizing work (*oeuvre civilistrice*) unless he/she under-takes a comprehensive change. An individual is incapable of advancing or abandoning the familiar, and consequently fails to create and assimilate new meanings.<sup>32</sup> The Algerian city dweller of the 1940s, of whom Bennabi was critical, exemplified the characteristics of a post al Muwaḥḥidīn

<sup>29</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 27, 28.

<sup>30</sup>Bennabi, *Milād*, 28.

<sup>31</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūt*, 70.

<sup>32</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 31.

person. Such a person lives at the end of his/her city's life cycle, has limited aspirations, a corrupted mind, and a defeated spirit. In addition, he/she is satisfied with mediocrity and is always 'mid way,' 'mid idea,' and 'mid progress.'<sup>33</sup> In short, such a person and such a society have failed to use their faith effectively.

## Aspects of the Intellectual Problem

The dynamic relation of ideas and renaissance, as well as the intelligentia's role in affecting the trends of history, are indisputable. In any society, disintegration usually results from a decline in the realm of ideas which, in turn, is affected by the society's decadence. It is the realm of figures, according to Bennabi, that is qualified to reconstruct society and restore the vitality and effectiveness of ideas. Assuming that such a possibility exists contradicts the belief of Ibn Khaldūn that the collapse of a civilization is inescapable.

Some members of the realm of figures who exposed their intellectual and social activities in the search for a remedy have committed mistakes that magnify the intellectual problems. Bennabi's keen investigation of these problems could be summarized in three major dimensions: methodological, psychological, and sociocultural.

*The Methodological Dimension:* Religion is a fundamental instrument in any civilization, for it is the "compound" that gives humanity, time, and soil the spark with which to initiate a civilizational cycle. Bennabi's concept of religion is far removed from such technicalities as obligatory rituals. It is rather a vital ideology that includes every detail of the cultural and ethical systems.<sup>34</sup>

Through his study of reform and modernization movements, Bennabi concluded that the reform movement initiated by al Afghānī and 'Abduh was concerned only with providing Muslims with self-defensive and self-justifying shields. As its leaders did not perceive the ideological force of Islam, their movement failed to restore Islam's social function.

'Abduh's efforts to reform scholastic methodology (*'ilm al kalām*) failed to generate any remedy to the Muslim's deplorable social, moral, and intellectual conditions. Bennabi saw this concern for *'ilm al kalām* as "the most harmful thing to the Umma."<sup>35</sup> To him, the post al Muwahhidīn person never abandoned his/her doctrine,<sup>36</sup> which means that the real problem was not "how to teach the Muslim his faith, but rather how to restore its effectiveness,

<sup>33</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūt*, 76.

<sup>34</sup>See the chapter "Āthār al Fikrah al Dīnīyah fī Takwīn al Hadārah" in *Ibid.*, 61-72.

<sup>35</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 35.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.



and the social impact of the faith." In other words, Bennabi argues that the problem is not proving God's existence to Muslims, but how to make them sense that His existence fills up an individual's soul as a source of energy.<sup>37</sup>

As the Islāh movement lacked methodological and scientific thinking, in Bennabi's view, he was of the opinion that its intellectuals often criticized external enemies and ignored internal factors of disintegration.<sup>38</sup> The writings of Shakīb Arsalān, 'Abd al Raḥmān al Kawākibī, and Aḥmad Rizā were thus merely apologetic and defensive.

The modernization movement was not any better, Bennabi opines, for it essentially developed during the period of Western occupation "while the society had lost its balance" and, therefore, those who tended towards modernization "took [their] elements from the 'colonial school.'<sup>39</sup> The modernizers propagated external and superficial models of development. The accumulation of material goods embodied the concept of quantity, rather than that of quality, which previously had prevailed in Muslim culture. Bennabi thought that modernizers, like reformists, lacked both a visualization of their goals and means and a sustaining theory. The main concern of the modernizers—saving the Muslim world from its political disorders—was a political approach. Moreover, stated Bennabi, this concern was itself borrowed from the European system and therefore did not focus on the real problem of the individual Muslim.<sup>40</sup>

On the intellectual and psychological level, post al Muwahhidīn society accepted the fact that "Islam is a complete religion." This statement produced in the society's consciousness, much to Bennabi's regret, the logical mistake that "we are Muslims and therefore we are complete."<sup>41</sup> This methodological defect resulted in what he calls "moral paralysis" (*al shalal al akhlāqī*). It is worth mentioning that this paralysis is still exemplified in many contemporary writings that happily acknowledge the decline of Western civilization and the near and complete dissolution of its value system and social structure. These writings naively proclaim that Islam and Muslims are qualified to replace Western philosophy and civilization. Yet, without restoring the ideological power of Islam in its homeland, as explained by Bennabi and others, and without a profound rehabilitation of the Muslim soul and mentality, such a replacement is almost impossible.

One of the fundamental causes of the Muslims' moral paralysis is that they do not relate to their own historical cycle. Bennabi bemoans this fact in

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>39</sup>See the chapter "al Harakāt al Hadīthah" in Ibid., 67-80.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 93.

his *Shurūt al Nahdah*, where he writes that Muslims believe that they live in 1948 C.E. and not in A.H. 1367. This erroneous perspective has placed the "Islamic problem" not in its historical context, but in the framework of Western civilization.<sup>42</sup> Examining the existence of snake charmers in both Marrakesh and Samarqand, for instance, we find no accident, Bennabi states. This phenomenon, on a larger scale, indicates that the common element in the so-called "Algerian problem" and the "Javanese problem" is in fact an "Islamic problem." It is very significant, therefore, to discuss this issue in its own historical sphere.<sup>43</sup>

Within Muslim society, different problems have been arranged in such preestablished categories as illiteracy, poverty, and external occupation. The solutions were also easily defined: knowledge or education, wealth or economic growth, and independence.<sup>44</sup> Historical developments in the contemporary Muslim world, however, have coincided with Bennabi's anticipations that such solutions would, in the end, be invalid, as they overlooked the psychosocial elements of change.

*The Psychological Dimensions:* The post al Muwahhidin individual, as described by Bennabi, carries the germs of his/her society's ills and suffers from various psychological impediments. The individual has "sick soul," one shaped in an atmosphere saturated with moral, social, philosophical, and political bankruptcy.<sup>45</sup> This frustrated individual is afflicted of what Bennabi called "colonizability" (*al qābilīyah li al isti'mār*). The West's invasion of the Muslim world was not mainly due to the external factor of colonization; it is rather attributed to an internal predisposition. In the words of Bennabi, one should look to colonialism not as a politician but as a sociologist.<sup>46</sup> Colonizability results in self-destruction, an inferiority complex, and social atomism, whereas effectiveness on all levels is at a minimum. Colonial authorities cherish these characteristics and utilize them to their benefit, for they "know more about us than we know about ourselves."<sup>47</sup>

The term of colonizability might have been inspired by Ḥasan al Bannā, the leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in its resistance to colonialism of different forms. One of al Bannā's most quoted sayings, also quoted by

<sup>42</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūt*, 48; Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 34.

<sup>43</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 35.

<sup>44</sup>Bennabi, *Hadāth*.

<sup>45</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 36-7.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>47</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Fikrat Kamūnawilth Islāmī* (Cairo: Maktabat 'Ammār, 1971), 79.

Bennabi, is: "Eject imperialism from your souls and it will leave your lands."<sup>48</sup>

Other features of the post al Muwahhidin individual are two mental obstacles: the easiness psychosis (*dhihan al suhulah*) and the impossibility psychosis (*dhihan al istihalah*) One's ideas are either so simple that they require no effort and devotion or so difficult that they cannot be accomplished.<sup>49</sup> Reviewing the list of social activities of Muslim society, we often find either unachieved ideas or activities unsupported by any mental effort.<sup>50</sup>

The post al Muwahhidin person is always attached to the dead ideas of the past (*al afkar al mayyitah*). This attachment is not derived from appreciation: it is due to rigidity and uncreativity. If he/she exposes himself/herself to contemporary trends, he/she is accessible only to toxic ideas (*al afkar al qatilah*), i.e., ideas that have become toxic due to their being taken out of their historical context.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, many notions have entered the Muslims' realm of ideas after having been scientifically refuted.<sup>52</sup>

From a spiritual aspect, the connection between what is spiritual and what is social is very weak in such a personality. When a post al Muwahhidin individual goes to the mosque, for example, he/she feels as a "person" and acts in conformity to Islamic principles. As soon as he/she leaves the place, he/she becomes an 'individual' who has lost his/her moral standards due to his/her coming under the control of social constraints. In short, Bennabi concludes, such a person manifests a schizophrenic personality.<sup>53</sup>

From a materialistic aspect, this personality is both quantitative and inclined to "thingness" and the accumulation of unneeded elements. It is unable to discriminate between real necessities (*al darurat al haqiqiyah*) and forged necessities (*al darurat al muzayyafah*), is more easily attracted to form than to essence, and to things rather than to ideas. It thus contributes to the increase of the society's needs while the society's means are still very limited.<sup>54</sup>

Bennabi's analysis of the collapsed structure of both the individual and the society is an attempt to illuminate different aspects of the ummah's predicament. Although his thoughts are mainly directed to intellectuals and some-times to those officials who are able to influence the course of events, they were and still valid.

<sup>48</sup>Cited in R. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 230. Bennabi quoted the Sayings in *Shurut*, on page 155, in reference to "one of the reformers," thereby avoiding the mentioning of al Bannā's name (the book was translated, published, and marketed in Nasser's Egypt).

<sup>49</sup>Bennabi, *Mushkilāt al Afkar*, 147.

<sup>50</sup>Bennabi, *Wijhat*, 90.

<sup>51</sup>See "al Afkar al Qatilah wa al Afkar al Mayyitah," in Malik Bennabi, *Fī Mahabb al Ma'rakah* (Cairo: Maktabat al Mutannabi, 1972), 135-55.

<sup>52</sup>Bennabi, *Commonwealth*, 36.

<sup>53</sup>Bennabi, *Milād*, 99.

<sup>54</sup>Bennabi, *Commonwealth*, 72.

*Socio-Cultural Dimensions:* In many of his books, Bennabi seems to examine the major issues concerning the fate of the ummah both as a sociologist and a philosopher. The methodology evident in his *Mushkilāt al Thaḳāfah*, *Mushkilāt al Afkār*, and *Milād Mujtama'* reflect Bennabi's interest and qualification in sociology and anthropology, not merely as social sciences but mainly as scientific approaches to study the Muslim situation.

Despite some linguistic and stylistic defects which prevent his books from reaching the ordinary reader, Bennabi's thoughts and speculations are mentally provocative. His scientific qualifications are also a major asset in the intellectual field. He is well known for his careful effort to define his terms, present his premises, and reach his conclusion.

In addition to repeatedly defining civilization, Bennabi is equally interested in defining culture. To him, culture is "the sum of ethical characteristics and social values attained by the individual since his birth, as primary resources, within the environment where he forms his habits and personality."<sup>55</sup> Again, "culture is the atmosphere that includes external elements such as measures, tunes and motions and internal elements such as tastes, customs and tradition."<sup>56</sup> Contemporary Muslims have borrowed most of the material and nonmaterial elements of their culture, "even tastes and needs." This borrowing has caused a proliferation and confusion in social ideas and approaches.

Authenticity is an important cultural element, for culture is but a symbolic foundation through which members of a society interpret the world and establish their relation with reality and with one another. It is characterized by its own distinctive view of life and specific historical evolution. Bennabi's view that a society can not import its culture or civilization from another society or civilization is therefore an extremely important conclusion.

One cause of the Muslims' current situation is their vague concept of culture. Differentiating between culture (*thaḳāfah*) and knowledge (*ma'rifah*), he says that culture is not a theory in learning (*ta'līm*) but a theory in education (*tarbiyyah*), for it is related to behavior (*sulūk*) rather than knowledge and information.<sup>57</sup> Supporting this theory, Bennabi gives an example of a Muslim medical student who goes to Europe to earn a medical degree. While he/she will earn the same diploma as his/her British colleague, he/she will not learn his/her colleague's "effectiveness" and positive attitude towards social problems.<sup>58</sup> Muslim parents send their children to school not to prepare them for certain obligations in life, but to give them the opportunity to attain benefits.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup>Bennabi, *Shurūt*, 83.

<sup>56</sup>Bennabi, *Hadīth*, 71.

<sup>57</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Mushkilāt al Thaḳāfah* (Damascus: Nadwat Mālik, 1979).

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>59</sup>Malik Bennabi, *Āfāq al Jazā'irīyah* (Cairo: Maktabat 'Ammār, 1971), 89.

Positive behavior, the backbone of Bennabi's explanation of culture as an approach to behavior modification, is called effectiveness (*fā'ilīyah*).<sup>60</sup> It is a positive psychomental attitude towards life in general. This attitude not only controls the acceleration of development within society but also affects the direction of its history. Post al Muwahhidīn society began to lose this attitude when the elements of its social and moral disintegration began to form.

The most dangerous aspect of the lack of individual and societal effectiveness is the "cultural vacuum" which, in turn, results in the absence of what Bennabi calls the cultural communication network (*shabakat al 'alāqāt al thaqāfiyah*), or the preconditions needed by ideas to live and produce. Projects of a cultural and intellectual nature are often exposed to failure or distortion and amputation through ideological struggle.<sup>61</sup> Cultural deterioration, Bennabi indicates, is caused by moral paralysis, for moral factors are very essential in "effectiveness." Ethics and morals control and motivate the realm of figures and, without their presence, the realm of ideas cannot function.<sup>62</sup>

Bennabi's analysis of the intellectual problems of his society is always supported by suggestive views and sometimes by detailed outlines of reform projects. His concept of directing (*tawjīh*) the three attributes of society—intellect, labor, and money—deserve to be studied, and his project of purifying culture from "dead" and "toxic" ideas should be the objective of institutions throughout the Muslim world. His projects of moral constitution (*al dustūr al khulūqī*), aesthetic sense (*al dhawq al jamālī*), practical logic (*al mantiq al 'amalī*) and technique or vocational work (*al šinā'ah*) is a challenging starting point for any Muslim civilizational process.

<sup>60</sup>See the chapter "al Fā'ilīyah" in Bennabi, *Hadīth*, 44-61.

<sup>61</sup>Malik Bennabi, *al Sīrah al Fikrī fī Bilād al Musta'marah* (Damascus: Dār al Fikr, 1979).

<sup>62</sup>Bennabi, *Hadīth*, 71.