

## Civilizational Renewal in the Thought of Malek Bennabi

رؤية تحليلية للتجديد الحضاري في الفكر الإسلامي من منظور مالك بن نبي

Zemouri Lynda<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>university of kasdi merbeh ouargla (Algeria)

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### Summary:

Islam, a complete and integrated system rather than just a doctrine, has significantly impacted human life by freeing the soul and mind from superstitions and delusions. The Sira, Prophet Mohammed's biography, allowed for ijthihad to adapt to current circumstances and requirements. Nevertheless, Islamic thought has become entangled in worldwide intellectual debates and political turmoil, diverting attention from advancing its own civilizational intellectual project.

In the present day, there is an urgent necessity for an Islamic intellectual framework that can effectively assimilate cultural transformations and offer a viable alternative rooted in the synthesis of Islamic principles and the realities of contemporary life. Considering the crucial role that political values play in shaping the foundation of governance systems and presenting a civilizational paradigm, it is essential to examine the extent to which Islamic political thought, particularly in the works of Malek Bennabi, has succeeded in articulating a modern civilizational model that can accommodate the ongoing cultural shifts.

**Keywords:** Islamic thought; Malek Bennabi; civilizational project; political theorizing; Culture.

### المخلص

لعب الإسلام دورا فعالا في الحياة البشرية، حيث حرر النفس والعقل من الخرافات والأوهام، فهو بذلك ليس عقيدة وحسب، بل هو نظام كامل متكامل، والسيرة نفسها تركت المجال مفتوحا للاجتهد (التعديل والتجديد) بما يتوافق والمعطيات والمتطلبات الراهنة، لكن يلاحظ أن الفكر الإسلامي غاص في أتون الصراعات الفكرية العالمية واشتغل العقل الإسلامي بالصددمات السياسية بدلا من تطوير مشروعه الفكري الحضاري.

فنحن اليوم بأمر الحاجة إلى فكر إسلامي قادر على إستيعاب المتغيرات الحضارية وتقديم البديل المستخلص من تفاعل الحقائق الإسلامية مع الواقع المعاش، وعلى أهمية القيم السياسية ودورها في بناء صرح الأنظمة وتقديم نموذج حضاري، فإلى أي مدى تمكن التنظير السياسي الإسلامي وبالتحديد في فكر مالك بن نبي من تقديم نموذج حضاري في حلة معاصرة قادرة على إستيعاب المتغيرات الحضارية الراهنة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الفكر الإسلامي، مالك بن نبي، المشروع الحضاري، التنظير السياسي، الثقافة.

### I- Introduction :

Globalization has manipulated values across all dimensions, seeking to elevate Western values to the status of universal and ideal standards that nations must embrace in order to attain the apex of civilization.

Consequently, pioneers of Islamic political thought have diverged in their approach to Islamic political values based on varying epistemological frameworks. Some, influenced by Western civilization and its paradigm, endeavor to situate an Islamic system within Western structures or templates. Others argue for the necessity of completely rejecting this phenomenon and adhering to the past, attempting to resurrect historical models of governance while preserving constants and advocating for their immutability. A third group has neither reconciled nor synthesized the two preceding perspectives; instead, they have proceeded from Islamic

constants with a sincere effort to renew and reconstruct Islamic systems of governance to embody the essence of Islamic political values, enabling them to keep pace with the times, respond to current changes, and revitalize the declining Islamic civilization. This approach stems from the principle that Western civilization has shaped its environment to reflect the nature of Western culture and values, which cannot find a place in the Islamic context, as the latter carries within its values the potential for self-renewal.

Therefore, we referred to the epistemological approach that engages with Islamic political thought. In this paper, we aim to determine the perspective of thinker Malek Bennabi and whether his writings on the renaissance and studies of the problems of the Islamic world can be considered an attempt to develop a genuine renewal that does not inherently support or imitate Western systems. In other words, he addressed the issues of the Islamic world from the angle of renewal, rather than imitation.

In this paper, we will examine the earnest attempts that present deeply-rooted visions for Islamic political thought, capable of keeping pace with current developments, reflecting the essence of Islamic governance, accommodating contemporary changes, and offering solutions to the challenges faced by the Islamic world. These attempts will be viewed from a civilizational perspective, presenting a strategy that carries the potential to heal the ailments of the Islamic world.

From this, we pose the following question: To what extent has the philosopher and thinker Malek Bennabi succeeded in presenting a civilizational model that absorbs current cultural changes while preserving the essence of Islamic discourse?

The significance of Malek Bennabi's treatment of these topics lies in the fact that he experienced most of the colonization campaigns and attempts at independence in the Islamic world, which he considered to be the most critical periods of the decline of Islamic civilization and the beginning of the qualification for a new Islamic civilization. His approach began with diagnosing the problems of the Islamic world and then putting forward a strategy for civilizational renewal.

### **I.1. The strategy of civilizational renewal in Malek Bennabi's thought:**

Malek Bennabi viewed the process of civilizational renewal as a strategic endeavor, situating the crisis and renaissance within their appropriate intellectual and methodological contexts. He emphasized the necessity of perceiving this process not merely as a sequence of historical events, but rather as a phenomenon whose essence is illuminated by analysis and whose law and way are guided by God. **(Bennabi,1961 p124)**

Through deep contemplation of the phenomena of renaissance and crisis – their occurrence and the ways governing their course – Malek Bennabi sought to establish an intellectual approach. This approach focused on understanding the foundation and development of Islamic civilization, the systems governing its progression, the factors contributing to its weakening and collapse, and the ways acting upon it throughout its history. Subsequently, he explored the means of renewing its construction and the ways governing the reconstruction process.

This proposition imparted a strategic dimension to the process of civilizational renewal, which Malek Bennabi believed to occur under the influence of the following factors:

- The influence of ideas as the guiding referential framework
- The influence of the world of persons as the pivot of the change process, its natural destination, and simultaneously its main biased tool
- The influence of the world of things and the network of social relations as the destination receiving all streams of flowing social energy, gradually increasing in integration, harmony, rootedness, vitality, and renewal.[2] **(Bennabi,1959 p81)**

On this basis, civilizational construction takes place by transforming the human being in a manner that harmonizes his movement with God's ways in horizons, guidance, and support. This transformation can only occur through effective thought that answers the questions posed to man and provides him with the methodological tools enabling him to uncover God's ways and master the art of benefiting from them in upgrading his intellectual, social, political, and civilizational performance.[3] **(Bennabi,1971 p226)**

This thought must evolve into a social reality and a civilizational space that embodies the Islamic value in all its dimensions – political, social, cultural, etc. – with the aim of achieving human aspirations and satisfying his needs.

It is worth noting that in Malek Bennabi's treatment of the concept of civilizational renewal and the proposed strategy, he did not explicitly address Islamic political values. However, by discussing the process of rebuilding civilization or the civilizational problem, he implicitly touched upon values in all their dimensions as presented in Islamic law. The Noble Qur'an encompasses the following values:

- Individual values: truthfulness, patience, charity, and poverty
- Family values: good treatment, solidarity, affection, and mercy
- Social values: cooperation, responsibility, solidarity
- Political values: justice, consultation, obedience, public freedoms
- Economic values: usury and the problem of interest, partnership and Islamic jurisprudence, legitimate ways of transferring money

Nevertheless, it does not provide detailed or prescribed political mechanisms that a Muslim must adhere to. The Qur'an offers political values for the political system, such as justice and equality, but it does not impose specific political mechanisms on people, as political systems are subject to change over time.

Malek Bennabi also addresses the value of enjoining good and forbidding evil in his civilizational project, emphasizing its role and importance in reform. He states:

"In a civilized society, every error in manner falls under the threat of criticism, and every error in behavior falls under societal coercion. Thus, society preserves the survival of its manner and the distinctive classes of effectiveness, which is the function of culture. This exchange between the social body and the individual was recognized by Muslims in His saying: 'You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient' (Qur'an 3:110)."[4] **(Bennabi,1994 p134)**

## **I. 2. Intellectual approaches in the same direction as Malek Bennabi: [5] (Bennabi,1994 p134)**

It is essential to acknowledge other thinkers who share a similar approach to Malek Bennabi, including, but not limited to, the Muslim leader and thinker who successfully theorized contemporary Islamic political values and embodied them in reality, i.e., the practical aspect. We are referring to Dr. Mahathir Mohamad [6] **(TAY Barghout.2004.208-29)**, the Prime Minister of Malaysia from the early 1980s until 2003. Mahathir Mohamad advocates for the necessity of formulating a system of life rooted in Islam, consistent with its specificity and adherence to Islamic values and ethics. He presents a civilizational model capable of responding to the requirements of our contemporary lives, establishing its individual society on the foundation of Islam's tolerance and justice, and safeguarding its development programs in accordance with the provisions of Islamic law.

He further asserts that Islam carries civilizational values. If the supreme reference of Islam is among Muslims, and if this reference is based on a comprehensive system of life that neither

isolates itself from the world of Muslims and their reality nor isolates this world from their hereafter, then it is evident that this system, in turn, is based on a unique value system. To support his claim, he cites the experience of Muslim conquerors in the lands and peoples they conquered, which was a valuable message, not an authoritarian or sword-based one. He referred to the value of mercy and tolerance, which is the essence of Islam, protected by the fence of moderation and justice. He adds the value of balance and moderation in all aspects of life, including the political aspect, and affirms the value of Islam and freedom.[7] **(Louay SAFI,2001 p172-173)**

He does not stop there but also calls for renewal, which he perceives as being inherent to the nature of Islamic legislation because it opens the way for ijihad and change according to two circles: the circle of general rules in legislation, which require detailing and classification, and the circle of the unspoken, which needs rooting and detailing based on the guidance of the rulings of the Qur'an and Sunnah and the interests of Muslims as individuals, groups, states, and societies, as well as the interests of others.

Furthermore, renewal is a civilizational necessity, and what is necessary for the fulfillment of an obligation is itself an obligation. In the face of contemporary cognitive, informational, and technological development, Muslims have no choice but to adapt to the requirements of change. Standing in the way of the movement of history will expose them to further backwardness from the civilization they previously pioneered, especially since the two most significant revolutions taking place in the world now are the revolution of technology and the revolution of globalization, and they will be imposed on Muslims. Moreover, renewal is a historical Sunnah. Reading Islamic history provides lessons and morals, strategies, and methods that Muslims used in dealing with their extended eras. [8] **(OTHMAN MAKKI,200 p96-97)**

They have a legacy in advancement and renewal, and history's giving does not run out. However, renewal requires, in addition to this, voluntary action to make the necessary changes and adapt to those around them while simultaneously preserving their religion and way of life, as the early Muslims did. This will necessitate contemplating the deplorable state that the Islamic world is currently experiencing and searching for appropriate solutions to the actual problems faced by Muslims. This implies that the ijihad of 20th-century thinkers and philosophers, even if they laid the foundation for rooting contemporary political values, 21st-century thinkers must establish a forward-looking study that works to safeguard political values and predict the developments expected to occur in order to create an adaptation mechanism commensurate with the changes that will occur.

Among the thinkers who followed the same approach as Malek Bennabi, we also find the writer Louay Safi, who believed that it is necessary to reconsider the scientific foundations upon which traditional political theory was built, criticize and scrutinize it, and then present new foundations and principles based on revelation and the Sunnah as determinants of the purposes and controls of political action.

He advocates for the creation of a special purposive political science that differs from the science of the purposes of Sharia. He adds that the method of choosing the caliph and the political procedures that prevailed in the Rightly Guided era should not be considered a founding act that subsequent generations must follow. Instead, the model must be developed based on extrapolating the general rules that guided the interaction of the Companions with their historical circumstances. Therefore, the scientific foundations of the Islamic state can be determined, and he believes they lie in four foundations:

1. The political decision is a general right of the nation.
2. Political decisions are subject to the principle of consultation (shura).
3. Political reference in matters related to internal and private affairs is entrusted to the leadership of the nation.

4. The legal reference in the state belongs to the Sharia rulings derived from their sources and approved by the scientific and jurisprudential bodies.

He also calls for the necessity of establishing the legal system of the state by consolidating and enabling the consultative institutions that express the will and choice of the nation. Additionally, he clarifies the role of jurists, which is to distinguish between two things: shura and consultation, to avoid the existing confusion between them that leads to emptying shura of its contents and giving it the characteristic of non-binding consultation, rendering it a meaningless act.[9] (MUHAMMAD AL-AWWAL,2005)

Shura is an inherent right of the nation as the subject of accountability, while consultation is related to the duty of leadership to refer to the people of opinion to clarify facts and examine matters before making decisions related to its work and special competence. It was necessary to establish the principle of the binding nature of shura and to revisit the shura practices in the Prophetic and Rightly Guided eras, re-read historical events, and analyze them. The main problem lies in the fact that the Rightly Guided experience did not develop the institution of shura to reflect the opinions and interests of the different forces of society and its population groups spread in many regions outside the Hijaz, which led to the severe political crisis in the era of Uthman, marking the beginning of the division of the nation into sects and schools of thought. This turbulent experience cast its veneer on Islamic political jurisprudence, resulting in turmoil in the perception of the institutions of shura in political theory and confusion and overlap between political concepts such as the people of choice and the people of the imamate.[10] (ABDULLAH Hamid,2005)

We conclude from the words of Dr. Louay Safi the call for renewal, selection from the Qur'an and Sunnah first, then benefiting from historical experiences and developing the most important political institution in Islamic governance, which is the institution of shura, which requires renewal and change with the change of time and place. This means that he is in the same direction as Malek Bennabi, i.e., that equation that depends on time, soil, and man.

### **1.3: The global civilizational project in the thought of Malek Bennabi**

Before presenting the Islamic civilizational project proposed by Malek Bennabi, we must address the most important points of weakness in Islamic civilization, which is intellectual backwardness in general and political in particular. Its biggest cause is the decline of the nation and its fall from the heights of just consultative governance to the quagmires of authoritarian rule. This highlighted the fundamental flaw in our political culture, and this flaw had its repercussions, reflections, and effects that appeared in everything written in all the human sciences. Therefore, in order to start advancing the civilizational project, we must begin with the idea that Islam came as a spiritual, civil, and political reform, affirming the right of the nation to choose its ruler, its right to monitor and hold them accountable, and affirming political freedom. It also came as an administrative reform that requires equal opportunities, placing the competent and capable in charge, raising the slogan of no compulsion in religion, acknowledging intellectual and political pluralism.

Therefore, the first thing that can be considered as a first step for reform before starting the renaissance project is to define the relationship between the intellectual and the political, i.e., treating the problem of political culture among the elite and the public alike.[11] (Bennabi,1961 p81)

### **1. The relationship between thought and politics:**

A civilizational project cannot be accomplished in isolation from mobilizing creative intellectual energies. The political institution remains paralyzed and unable to exert effective influence as long as it does not provide work projects, programs, and plans to guide it in drawing its future strategies. Therefore, from the beginning, we must address the problem of culture among both the elite and the public.

### **2. The problem of political culture among the elite and the public:**

In Malek Bennabi's view, the intellectual dilemma emerges in the cultural aspects that have spread in the political cultural system, and approaching its treatment is only possible by rejecting the heresies of compulsion from religious discourse and by rooting and Islamizing the concepts of political administration, which are among the human values shared by every nation. As the scholars of fundamentals and eloquence have decided, the deviation in political thought in ancient times occurred after concealing the revolution of reading the concept of consultative governance embodied by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and the Rightly Guided Caliphs after him.[12] **(Bennabi,1959 p74-84)**

Malek Bennabi also addressed this issue and called it the problem of ideas. If minds must meet in all fields in our society in an organized manner to work together to draw the features of a new political system and plan for it realistically, neither idealistic nor reactionary, they should be guided by Islamic political values that the Bedouin society embraced in its early beginnings and whose concept we can expand and modify to include the different environment in which we live today.[13] **(Bennabi,1959 p81)**

The task of this council is to plan for this pattern by bringing together different opinions, attitudes, and forms, and providing the flexible, exemplary religious framework that prepares for these multiple trends the opportunity to formulate and freely discuss results in the form of a plan that enables us to revive the civilizational project based on Islamic political values.

### **3. Features of the desired civilizational project:**

After completing the basic elements of Islamic society and accurately defining its most important duties, we can set features for the desired civilizational project, provided that it is based on the following basic pillars:[14] **(TAY Barghout.2004 p 28-29)**

#### **- The system of spiritual values**

Islamic politics cannot be separated from the religion that carries the spiritual aspect within it. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the system of spiritual values based on faith, knowledge, spirit, and matter, and restore them in accordance with what Islam brought in a balance that fully embodies the characteristic of moderation, taking into account that exaggeration in materialism is one of the obvious gaps in the Western value system that has the greatest presence in our world.

#### **- The system of moral values**

Such as feeling responsibility and acting accordingly, fulfilling the trust, rejecting deception, forbidding aggression, etc., and positive communication between generations, curbing corruption in all its forms and manifestations, and so on and so forth of moral values.

#### **- The system of human civilizational values**

Such as equality, justice, rejecting injustice, protecting human dignity, opposing arrogance, domination and humiliation, fighting racial discrimination, and so on.

#### **- The system of general Islamic values**

Such as political freedom with proposing civil legislation that defines political freedom, controls it, and allows it to influence the political system to generate trust and fight alienation, not to mention paying attention to justice as the ideal value of the political system and applying it

to the ruler and the ruled, and equality, by which we mean fighting racism and slavery of all kinds, especially material.

Additionally, attention should be given to the institution of shura, reactivating it, defining its concept, and making it a permanent body that has its weight in the political system, with its function being shura, not consultation, which means that it must have the characteristic of mandatory implementation. This project represents reflections of the lofty message, its noble purposes, and its direction as determined in the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Prophet, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, and it accommodates various dimensions and various aspects of life and its developments with cohesion and harmony.

Furthermore, it sincerely expresses the human being, adopts his just causes and intractable concerns regardless of his religion, color, custom, and homeland. It is a human being who heralds justice, enables it and opposes injustice, confronts it, exalts freedom, supports it, affirms equality between people, reinforces it, elevates human concerns, and preserves human dignity.[15](LOUAY Safi;2001;172-177)

Not to mention its attention to all fields and all nations. In its global translation of Islam on the ground, this project should accommodate the characteristics of nations and peoples in the East and West and in the North and South, and the project should be completed by encompassing various issues and matters that occupy humanity from cultural, social, political, economic, and other aspects.[16] ] (Bennabi,1959 p81)

Malek Bennabi believes that the direction of the Islamic world should not be imposed by global conditions, but rather by the psychological and intellectual conditions that have been shaped throughout the entire course of history. On the other hand, we find this direction determined according to the strategic tasks entrusted to the nation. Malek Bennabi adds that it is a battle, and our success in the global battle is proportional to our success in our internal battle. This battle is based on the wise choice of the renaissance project that we desire and establish for it. Therefore, a charter of global ethics should be established, with the obligatory arming of all Islamic political values to solve problems and respond to the changing reality and envisioned political environment, while adhering to religious values, as they are the means for Islamic peoples to resist the poverty of spiritual life in contemporary society.[17] ] (Bennabi,1959 p81)

#### **IV- Conclusion:**

The contemporary world has witnessed tremendous developments in the means of communication and knowledge sharing that have made Western civilization the pioneer of the world, as it presented a model for a system of governance that reflects Western political values and went beyond it to globalization. To crystallize contemporary intellectual visions of Islamic political values, it was necessary to emulate the Western political values and the renewal and adaptation they underwent with technological development, and how they resulted in the birth of e-government and e-democracy with the aim of strengthening and consolidating good governance.

Therefore, we had to address Islamic political values in light of globalization, where we touched on the epistemological frameworks of Islamic studies and how intellectual stagnation and lack of renewal prevailed over them. Even if there were some attempts, they represent the presentation of the Western model wrapped in an Islamic framework, except for some serious writings calling for presenting a civilizational project that reflects the essence of Islamic political values in a contemporary form.

We cited the propositions of the philosopher Malek Bennabi and some who followed his approach, without neglecting the applied model of the state of Malaysia, which tried to embody

this in political practices. Then we presented a reading of the civilizational project of the thinker Malek Bennabi from a contemporary angle that works on re-reading the concepts of Islamic political values in light of current changes, starting with solving the problem of political culture among the elite and the public, to setting features for an Islamic civilizational project that keeps pace with the latest developments. This was embodied in the idea of creating an Islamic council, which is a permanent body that includes specialists in all disciplines, and has a number of functions, the most important of which is to understand the phenomenon of globalization and the reality of the new international system and comprehend its theoretical and philosophical foundations on which it focuses, with the need to know the reality of the Islamic world and the capabilities of the nation, and the aspects of deficiency.

In light of this reality and these data, it defines the strategic features that this project will follow, with the aim of achieving its ultimate goals, which is to reformulate concepts of political values that enable us to build an Islamic political system that accommodates civilizational changes and reflects the essence of Islamic political values, using the mechanisms available in the current era with all efficiency, the most important of which are media and information technology.

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