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The Importance of Culture and Civilization in Malek Bennabi's Educational Project: The Algerian Case

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Abstract

According to the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi, education is a purely social process that starts with the human being birth and ends with her/his death. It is continual, teaching the individual life's alphabet. Given the preoccupation of education with the transfer of values, traditions and human systems, from generation to generation, it becomes closely linked with important concepts such as culture and civilization. This paper attempts to identify the main educational issues that Malek Bennabi tackled, considering two crucial components that built his educational project, namely culture and civilization.

Keywords: Malek Bennabi, educational project, culture, civilization, social development

Introduction

Education has been the focus of attention of intellectuals and educational scientists. In this respect, Malek Bennabi, the Algerian international thinker (1905-1973) was among those who considered that the topics of education are central studies that the thinker should formulate their problems. Consequently, his various works appeared to reveal his educational preoccupation and focus on different angles, to include historical, psychological and functional aspects of this human phenomenon.

Indeed, education is described as a human process, it is continual, not limited to a specified place or time frame. Consequently, when determining the concept of education, Malek Bennabi did not limit it to its academic aspect, but rather considered it a general means and a systematic approach to educate, change and regenerate civilization. Thus, appeared the importance of education for the growth of nations, their economic and social development and its ability to meet the challenges of culture and civilization. Hence, Malek Bennabi was keen on linking education with multiple meanings such as society, civilization and culture. This paper attempts to find out this link between education and various other meanings. To what extent was Malek Bennabi successful in providing an appropriate educational project that elevates human being, in general and the Algerian in particular, to make of effectiveness a daily choice?

Education and Culture

Malek Bennabi looked at culture as a social psychologist who knew the secret of the human psyche which inevitably is affected by the social environment in which it exists. This environment is only an actual embodiment of an integrated system of cultural values, which together constitute the desired educational model for both the individual and the community. (M. Bennabi, *The Problem of Culture*, 2000, p. 104) Every social relationship is essentially a culture value represented by the moral law and aesthetic taste of society. (Bennabi, *Naissance d'une Société*, 2006, p. 48)

However, the problem of culture in Algeria, in particular, is not a problem of understanding a cultural model that exists in reality as much as a problem of finding and promoting this model. What is the cultural project Algeria aspires to achieve in practice? This means it needs to promote a new civilization that contributes to achieving the meanings of urbanization in human life, to enable the Algerian to resume his historical journey by rebuilding civilization to which he belongs.

From these angles, Malek Bennabi discusses the concept of education through the problem of culture. He defines education as a process which represents the cultural elements absorbed by the individual social environment in which he lives. Besides, culture is nothing but the psychological and social climate in which he lives. Through this interaction process, the individual absorbs the cultural elements as a form of contribution to self-building and society at the same time. Therefore, Malek Bennabi stressed that the first step that must be achieved to educate the individual is the composition of the elements of culture in a way that forms the cultural system of society within an achievable educational curriculum. (Bennabi, *The Problem of Culture*, 2000, p. 61) On the other hand, the elements of culture are manifested in the moral dimension, which plays an important role in the educational process.

There is no doubt that there is a strong relationship between education as a tool, and the value system as an educational content, and civilization as an educational product because Malek Bennabi dealt with the problem of culture as an educational

curriculum waiting application. Moreover, it aims to embody the meanings of urbanization within an educational framework based on a specific moral philosophy. Thus, education for Malek Bennabi is an effective means of changing the human being and teaching him how to live with his peers, and how to make with them the group of forces that change the conditions of existence towards the better, and how to form with them the network of relationship that allow society to perform its joint activity in history. (Bennabi, *Naissance d'une Société*, 2006, p. 100)

Thus, education is the actual and practical embodiment of the cultural ideals of a society, by building a civilized society. In this respect, Malek Bennabi agreed with a lot of educational scientists who view education as an educational process. For instance, Denis Lawton confirms that education means the transfer of what is seen as a characteristic of the culture of society to future generations. Thus, the behaviour of the individual is only a translation of the prevailing culture in society, which is represented by the individual through the educational process practiced on him. This, in fact, confirms what Malek Bennabi thought about education. As he claimed, it is a kind of psychological assimilation of the cultural values of the society and that culture is the oxygen which is breathed by the individual and the psychological and educational climate in which his character grows and takes the form of values that distinguish this culture from others. (Bennabi, *Les Conditions de la Naissance*, 2005, p. 94)

As suggested before, education for Malek Bennabi is a continual educational process. It is not a circumstance related to a particular historical stage, but is a dynamic that evolves with the development of society, taking into account all the resulting change and transformation at all levels, and thus the education goes beyond the boundaries of the educational institution to touch various areas of social life. This view meets with modern educational theories that consider that education is not limited to the school and the years spent by the learner, but it extends all areas of life and all segments of society. This means that education is a flexible learning process characterized by continuity, variability and development. (Bennabi, *Perspectives Algériennes*, p. 40)

In the context of talking about the cultural crisis experienced by the Algerian individual, Malek Bennabi refers to some of the most important manifestations of this crisis, the phenomenon of stopping the Algerian mind from diligence (Bennabi, *Destination of the Islamic World*, p. 83), and the prevalence of emotional tendency on the logical mind. Although the manifestations of the problem are many and multiple, the stop of the Algerian diligence remains the origin of the other manifestations of disease.

Recognizing the seriousness of such pathological conditions and their effects on the Algerian individual, Malek Bennabi called upon the intellectual community to reconfigure the Algerian mind in order to qualify him to perform his job in life on the basis of methodology, objectivity, comprehensiveness and realism in the consideration and dealing with various problems in reality, providing an

understanding, an explanation and a cure. Indeed, the origin of crises in society is first of all a crisis of culture because civilization at its origin is an idea, and every failure recorded by a nation in its march is an expression of its cultural crisis. (Bennabi, *Destination of the Islamic World*, p. 86)

Thus, it is necessary to rebuild the cultural world of the Algerian, but in terms of education, culture is to dictate to the individual measures of vision, attitudes to behaviour, ethics, methods and mechanisms of taking positions and determine the basis of thinking.

Education and Society

Malek Bennabi suggests another definition of education. Considering education as a process of integrating the individual into society, qualifying him to play the appropriate social role for his innate preparations and acquired skills. There is no doubt that this willingness is only the fruit of an educational process aimed at informing the individual of the harmony with the requirements of the social relations network, and must be distinguished – when talking about the social relations network – between three points, namely the social role and social position and social relations.

The social role determines the type of service that can be provided by the individual to the community, based on the intellectual and psychological capabilities inherent and acquired. The social position depends on the social role and the interest that the person offers to the community. The role determines the position and not the other way around. In civilized society, social role determines social status whereas in backward societies, it is the opposite. The social relationship is fruitful when it is based on respect of the social hierarchy, we find everyone in the place where they should be and perform the service that suits their qualifications and innate and acquired potential.

Based on the above analysis, the general policy of the society and the educational ones in particular should be based on building a social relations network, and ensuring the conditions of health effectiveness and continuity of it. This, in fact, could be achieved through building the human being who knows his destiny in society and his position and social role to maintain the well-being of society.

Indeed, the origin of any change that occurs at any stage in society's history is Man. He is the basic unit of building civilized society. The Man that Malek Bennabi meant is the individual, not the raw individual. Hence, education is first and foremost a process of conditioning and adaptation. These two terms Malek Bennabi quoted from the Russian psychologist Pavlov (1845-1936), with the Classical Conditional Reflex Theory, were helpful. While Pavlov used the concept of conditioning in the psychophysiological field, Malek Bennabi gave it a social dimension and showed how this concept can be applied in the field of social education of the individual; by stating which psychological conditions allow the individual to be integrated into the social

relations network and what mechanisms can be used to do so. (Bennabi, *Le Problème des Idées dans Le Monde Musulman*, 2005, ps. 35, 36)

The conditions meant by Malek Bennabi here, have to do with a set of practical educational measures that should be followed in order to achieve the process of integrating the individual in the society in a coherent and an effective way. Accordingly, society is not just individuals and that the unity of society is not “the individual” but “the conditional individual” (adapted), and that the process of conditionality and adaptation is carried out by society in accordance with its own objectives as the human being is born in a primitive (raw) position that can be formulated in any way. Besides, in order to enter into a network of social relations, the individual must embody a particular psychological reality as a condition to be approved and accepted within the social life. (Bennabi, *Reflections*, 1979 p110)

After the completion of the process of educational conditioning and adaptation, the individual finds himself, free from many social customs and conflicts and has instead acquired new habits and trends that respond to the requirements of a harmonious integration into society. The purpose behind this harmony is to prepare the individual for the art of life with others in order to cooperate in achieving the common historical function.

To achieve this harmony, it is necessary to guide the individual. The guidance is prerequisite, as a tool, for an integrated and continuous educational project based on a clear vision of the project and the conditions for success in achieving these goals, harmony and integration in the movement of society towards the achievement of its historical goals. For instance, the absence of this tool (guidance) for any educational project may harm the individual and society, as many of the energies were lost without achieving its goal. (Bennabi, *Les Conditions de la Naissance*, 2005, p. 84)

When talking about the relationship between education and society, Malek Bennabi focused on the idea of effectiveness, which is one of the most important characteristics of contemporary society, which allows the individual to excel and succeed, and get rid of helplessness and laziness. In this context, Malek Bennabi noted that the Algerian society lives a kind of ineffectiveness and considered that this ineffectiveness is an intellectual and a psychological issue related to the method according to which the human being was prepared for life, then it is an intellectual issue related to the way the Algerian understands the problems he faces. His attitude, direction and behaviour towards it. The problem of ineffectiveness cannot be solved by a political decision, but the individual must be educated to be effective. The issue is not related to political decision, but rather to the psychological dimension facing this activity and social energies. It is rooted in the nature of the curriculum used to build the personality of the individual, and specifically to build thinking skills and means to achieve these ideas in reality. (Bennabi, *Le Problème des Idées dans le Monde Musulman*, 2005, p. 36)

An examination of the nature of society for Malek Bennabi, reveals his focus on the functional dimension of society, and that he addressed society from a functional point of view, away from philosophical meditation and far from the practical reality of the life of the individual. Therefore, we must have a clear idea of the educational system, which is in charge of building a society through the building of individuals. Indeed, there is an organic association between the individual and his social framework. The data of the social environment, whether positive or negative, reflects intellectually and psychologically on the formation of the individual and his life through continuous interaction with the other. Thus, social education, for Malek Bennabi, is an effective means of human change, and therefore, the organization of the vital energy of the individual and its adaptation within a network of social relations is necessary. Here the Algerian thinker refers to a basic concept of bioenergy, which is a component of the human personality; and bioenergy is of great importance in society. It may destroy the society in the case it is not subject to an accurate system dictated by a supreme idea (special relation with the Creator, God, for instance). It reorganizes and directs energy with purely biological functions to energy with social functions performed by Man when he contributes to the joint activity of a given society. (Bennabi, *Naissance d'une Societé*, 2006, p. 100)

Education and Civilization

Malek Bennabi defined education as an integrated project to civilize the human being and qualify him to contribute to the building of a civilized historical society. This definition included the subject, the tool, the goal and the final destination of the project. He claimed that education is not a set of rules and theoretical concepts without power on reality, the world of persons, the world of ideas, and the world of things. Besides, it is not the production of intellectuals and seas of sciences, those who know all words of dictionaries without knowing what these words translate from the facts of good or evil, but is an effective way to change the human being, and teach him how to live with his peers and how to build with them the group of forces that change the conditions of existence for the better, and how to form with them a network of relationships that allows society to perform joint activity in history. (Bennabi, *Naissance d'une Societé*, 2006, p. 95) This, in fact, indicates the close link established by Malek Bennabi between education and civilization. For him, if the education emptied of the civilizational dimension, then it will lose the justification for its existence and the conditions for its continuation. This was confirmed when saying that the meaning of urbanization means that one learns how to live with others in a group, while recognizing the main importance of a network of social relations to organizing human life for its historical function. (Al Abdah, 2006, p. 94)

Thus, from the previous definitions of education and civilization, we can see the organic relationship established by Malek Bennabi between the two concepts. Indeed, both education and civilization represent two sides of one truth. If education is the tool and civilization is the goal that education seeks to achieve through the upbringing

of civilized man within society. Thus, civilization is the justification for the existence of education and its product at the same time.

In fact, the problem of civilization in this sense is an educational problem, and that the real starting lies in the educational reformulation of the human personality in order to prepare it, because civilized man is the only one qualified to produce civilization. Indeed, it is impossible for a character carrying the remnants of underdevelopment, decadence, failure and various manifestations of intellectual and psychological laziness, and inability to diligence to assume the responsibility of civilizing the other. Therefore, it becomes prerequisite for any attempt aiming at reforming the human being in Algeria, to put the civilizational dimension as a fundamental dimension in the concept of education, otherwise it will be a failure, resulting in loss of money, time and efforts. For instance, when Malek Bennabi's proposal of a comprehensive definition of education, considering it a civilizing process of the human being, reveals that in addition, education is the psychological assimilation of the cultural factors conditioning and adaptation for the bioenergy of the individual and his social integration. It also carries a civilizational dimension. He considered this dimension as a cornerstone for all definitions because it imparts a historical significance to human education. The human life becomes empty if lost justifications for its existence and resembled the animal life. Indeed, if the human being cedes the meanings that promote his different aspects of life, he will drown in response to the demands of the body. In this respect, Malek Bennabi added that the objective of education is not to teach people to speak and write nice things, but rather to teach each individual the art of life with his colleagues. Here, he meant, to teach him how to be civilized. (Bennabi, Naissance d'une Societé, 2006, p.99)

In fact, Malek Bennabi's educational project targeted the building of a historical society through the preparation of civilized man who forms the nucleus of this society which is expected to record its distinguished existence in history. We can understand this Algerian thinker's attitude and focus on the civilizational dimension of education when learning that the appearance of his book, "The Birth of a Society", in which he emphasized this important idea, coincided with the success of the Algerian freedom fighters to take back their country's national sovereignty (1962). Indeed, Algeria was then living the joy of victory and preparation for the new civilization take off and rebuilding the post-independence society. Thus, the goal of Malek Bennabi in the first place is to lay the ground work for the construction of the desired historical society, and to develop some mechanisms that help Man, to get ready educationally, to build a civilization not only as an individual but as a society aspiring to create a positive historical movement. (Bennabi, Les Grands Thèmes: La Civilisation, La Culture, L'Idéologie, L'Orientalisme, La Démocratie, 2005, p. 62)

The different definitions given above lead us to conclude that the urbanization is the basis of the entire educational effort, but is the nominal destination that should be

directed to all concerns; and every education that has not elevated the human being to this level of change is a failed one from Malek Bennabi's point of view.

Malek Bennabi dealt with the concept of "human being" as a person that goes through different historical situations and adopts different terms. Each term has a special meaning. Therefore, we tried to present the most important terms used by Bennabi to express these different educational situations of man. (Al Samahrani, Malek Bennabi, *Penseur, Réformiste*, 1984, p. 112)

Raw individual: One of the most important concepts used by Malek Bennabi to clarify the primitive position of man, and the meaning of the Raw individual is the human being at the moment of birth or before undergoing any kind of educational adaptation, which aims to prepare for integration in social life and begin to play a role that is consistent with his innate predisposition and acquired skills. In this case, the individual is the raw material that can be formed according to the educational goals of society. In this context, Malek Bennabi said that nature brings the individual into a rudimentary state, and then society forms it. (Bennabi, *Naissance d'une Société*, 2006, p. 65) In other words, a human being is born as a "raw individual" with a vital energy that manifested in the form of talents and potentials that qualify him to perform the job for which he was created. In this primitive position the main motivation of the individual is to maintain the species and its continuation, and in the case of the survival of human beings at this stage of human life turns into a life similar to that of beasts, and here the need for education is manifested which is a human need that elevates the human being to a higher level.

Adapted individual: This term represents the second position in which the human being is. He is the person who has been subject to adaptation and conditioning. The individual who undergoes this process moves from the stage of raw individual to the stage of the individual adapted, qualified to integrate into society and to play various roles, and here human life becomes distinct from animal life because the individual then understands the meanings and historical dimensions for which he was created.

On the other hand, Malek Bennabi also distinguished between pre-civilization and post-civilization human being.

The pre-civilization human being is the raw individual who deals with all his instincts as created. Man in this case lives in a pre-civilization situation. The most important characteristic of this situation is the ability of Man to enter into a new civilization cycle according to the possessed raw natural qualifications.

The post-civilization human being is a decaying human being who decomposed civilized and robbed of civilization, and by virtue of this was not able to accomplish any civilized act only if he changed himself and re-drafted his character again, it is similar in that to a device used in a project and all its energy is depleted. Therefore, he needs to be recharged to be able to work again, and thus the process of raising post-civilization human being is more difficult than raising pre-civilization, because it

is an important challenge to rebuild this individual, and the reason is that the human being after civilization has already accomplished his historical mission, and it has thus analyzed the most important components that ensure its effectiveness, and must be re-composition of these components to succeed in the completion of new civilization cycle. (Bennabi, Reflections, 1979, p. 25) In this respect, Malek Bennabi considered that the Algerian belongs to a nation that completed its civilization cycle. He lives outside history does not make it and does not affect it. In order to resume a new civilization cycle, the character of the Algerian personality must be reviewed to rehabilitate and create an integrated man because history starts with the integrated man.

According to Malek Bennabi, human of civilization is the integrated man who seeks to match between his effort and his ideal and his basic needs. This means that the issue of the desired educational model is not open as a problem but rather as a clear idea awaits implementation. Thus, the human of civilization becomes able to embody the meanings of this model in reality.

One of the most important results that can be drawn from the presentation of various civilizational situations of man is the realization that the preparation of this man and his education to perform his historical tasks must begin by first knowing the historical journey he is living in. It is not possible to start educating him unless we are aware of the situation in which he lives. If the desired educational model is the end point to which educational efforts are directed to realize in reality, the existing educational model is the starting point from which we proceed to address the educational problem.

From here, the human being becomes the main element of every civilization project, and every civilization achievement depends on the effectiveness of the human in the positive and effective employment of civilizational potential and power. Bennabi matched education with civilization. For him, education is a necessary tool to achieve the meanings of urbanization in man. It cannot be seen as a process of civilization the human being, civilization justified the existence of education; and with education, society realizes the meaning of its existence and continuation in history. Moreover, Bennabi emphasized that civilization is the art of life with the other. (Bennabi, Naissance d'une Société, p. 99) For every work done by man, is not enough to stop at the limits of achievement, but it must be beautiful. Despite the discrepancy that can be observed between different cultures in defining the concept of beauty and its limits, beauty as a value has been present in various human architectures throughout history. Indeed, it is not possible to look at any civilizations known to man without standing in front of its aesthetic taste.

Conclusion

Distinguished was Malek Bennabi's approach in dealing with the educational problem, with a comprehensive, integrated and systematic vision. This latter views

the human being as the central factor of the educational problem and that the essence of the educational problem is to answer the following question: How can one renew the Algerian Man to become qualified to resume his job in history as a witness, leader and role model? This renewal relies on the educational process which aims to reformulate the character of the Algerian human being in order to complete the prerequisite conditions to provoke a new social composition that will allow his effective entrance into history, for history starts with a comprehensive human being. It is this kind that makes the nation qualified to contribute to solving the problems of the human being, the society and the civilization.

Indeed, the comprehensive man is the desired educational model of man or the goal which the Algerian education must concentrate on to realize in reality. From this, must start the reformulation of the character of the Algerian personality by moving him from the status of backward man to the status of civilized man, qualified to face the challenges of contemporary civilization effectively.

The formulation of the total ideas proposed by Malek Bennabi for the educational project is one of the most important achievements of this study, and the Algerian thinker in dealing with the educational foundations and treatment was successful because what Malek Bennabi accomplished is included in what T. W. Moore called General Theory of Education. Keeping in mind that theories of education have two categories: specific theory of education and general theory of education. In his book entitled *The Educational Theory. An Introduction*, Moore confirmed that the most important meanings contained in the general theories of education are a set of ideas that aspire to the model of the individual and society. This, in fact, is related to the formulation of a set of assumptions about the nature of the human being, the society, knowledge and objectives of education to form the desired educational model. (Moore, *The Educational Theory. An Introduction*, 1986, p. 8) Thus, it is clear that the careful reading of Malek Bennabi's works leads us to conclude that the educational project is closely related to man, society and civilization.

Thus, one of the most important issues that the nations stand on the threshold of a historic civilizational breakthrough is the development of an educational programme aimed at building a desired model of man. This is because in such project, we consider the human being an objective goal and a tool at the same time. In order to achieve this project, it is necessary to focus on some important elements such:

1- Reconstruction of the Algerian mind and rehabilitation of the systematic thinking: The origin by which the individual learns ways to use his mind and acquires the standards of proper consideration for himself, the other and reality. In fact, it is really an educational issue, and this means that the personality of the individual grows in its interaction with the psychological, social and educational climate provided by the culture of a society. Therefore, this society must establish the culture of urbanization which works to educate the mind of the Algerian, and guides the intelligence of

generations and the development of their talents and their innate preparations towards building a civilization.

2- The need for a clear vision for a proper construction. In order to rebuild the Algerian mind, and from there the social educational construction, we must have a clear educational philosophical formulation through which the characteristics of the desired educational model for both the individual and society are manifested; and given the fact of the absence of a well-defined educational system in the field of Algerian human education and preparation for contribution in rebuilding a post-independence society, to this day, Algeria is reaping its negative effects.

3- Duty above the right: the shift of focus from right to duty is not easy because it is linked to the conversion of habits and natures harmonious with the human natural tendency to easiness. Therefore, social education must work to develop a sense of duty as a moral value. Besides, it has to multiply efforts to erase ideas that tend to claim the right before the duty, and establish the primacy of the submission of the duty to claim right, and emphasize that the performance of the duty has a greater impact on the results of the claim to the right.

4- Time: The Algerian individual must be aware of the value of time and how to invest it. To achieve this goal, the creation of a practical educational programme becomes prerequisite. This means teaching the Algerian how to benefit from time and this requires modifying a set of psychological and behavioral habits and consolidate the mentality of practical logic, which mainly depends on time organization and more effective use of time.

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