

The Relationship between the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia before the Liberation Revolution

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Abstract

This study highlights the role of the sacred sites of the Hejaz as an intellectual and spiritual incubator for the pioneers of the Algerian reform movement at the turn of the twentieth century, given that the founding idea of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was conceived in Medina in 1913. The study seeks to document the efforts of al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi in internationalizing the Algerian cause and securing Saudi and diplomatic backing for it, and it addresses the historical dimension of the Hejaz as a spiritual center. The study establishes that this civilizational integration contributed to dismantling both material and spiritual colonialism, to protecting national identity, and to paving the way for the outbreak of the November 1954 Revolution.

Keywords: Association of Muslim Scholars; al-Ibrahimi; al-'Uqbi; Saudi Arabia; the Hejaz.

Introduction

The civilizational communication between the Arab Maghreb and Mashriq has remained an inexhaustible tributary, as the sacred sites of the Hejaz constituted a space for intellectual and scholarly exchange. From this vantage point, no proper study of the founding roots of the reform movement in Algeria at the turn of the twentieth century can be undertaken without tracing the wellsprings of its influence from the Mashriq: Mecca and Medina served as twin spiritual and intellectual incubators for an elite of Algerian pioneers, who, during their sojourn there, drew inspiration for their reformist project before returning to their homeland bearing a civilizational program aimed at restoring national identity and reconnecting Algeria with its Arab-Islamic surroundings.

The problem of this study centers on the nature of the role played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as an intellectual incubator and a spiritual rear base for the pioneers of reform in Algeria, and on how this connection was reflected in the ideological formation and the militant activity of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars prior to the outbreak of the Liberation Revolution in 1954.

To what extent did the relationship between the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contribute to shaping the Association's reformist frame of reference, and how did this relationship evolve from religious and spiritual ties into political and institutional support for the Algerian cause?

How did the first seeds of the relationship between the pioneers of Algerian reform and the scholarly and political milieu of the Hejaz take shape, both before and after the founding of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

How did the visits of the Association's delegations to the Kingdom, and their meetings with King Abdulaziz Al Saud, contribute to internationalizing the Algerian cause and securing an Arab-Islamic cover for its activity?

And what was the tangible impact left by this communication on education and on the strengthening of Algerian national identity in the face of French colonial policies?

This is what we shall attempt to answer in this study, which relies on the descriptive-analytical historical method, supplemented by documentary induction drawing on the archive of the League of Arab States and official Saudi correspondence, linked in turn to the personal memoirs of the pioneers of reform. Our aim is to establish the Mashriqi roots of the Algerian renaissance by demonstrating that the founding idea of the Association of Muslim Scholars was conceived in Medina in 1913. The study also seeks to shed light on the Saudi role, which evolved from a spiritual incubator into a strategic diplomatic and material backing, and to show how this communication contributed to dismantling the dual — material and spiritual — colonialism, while documenting the diplomatic activity led by al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi to internationalize the Algerian cause, ultimately demonstrating that this civilizational integration between the Maghreb and the Mashriq constituted the fundamental pillar for protecting national identity and paving the way for the glorious November Revolution.

The Standing of Mecca and Medina in the Arab and Islamic Consciousness

The sacred sites of Mecca and Medina have long constituted the spiritual center to which the hearts of Muslims everywhere turn — a role historically reinforced by the Hejaz's status as the refuge to which pilgrims' journey in times of ease and hardship alike. The founder of the modern Saudi state grasped this centrality: in Ramadan 1344 AH (April 1926), the King of the Hejaz issued an official invitation to the kings of the Islamic world and its scholarly elites, among them the Algerian scholar Mustafa Cherchali. This initiative, embodied in the call for a general Islamic conference, sought to unify efforts in service of the two Holy Sanctuaries and to secure their future — a step reflecting the aspiration to achieve Islamic solidarity and comprehensive reform of the Holy Land in a manner meeting the aspirations of the nation.¹

"We have sent the invitation to every Muslim, and to their kings, who is concerned with the affairs of the two Holy Sanctuaries."²

¹The abolition of the Islamic Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk left a deep political and religious vacuum in the Islamic consciousness, prompting scholarly and religious forces to attempt to fill this gap through Al-Azhar's call to convene a Caliphate Conference in Cairo. The Algerian journal Al-Shihab covered this event with extensive analytical coverage, monitoring the behind-the-scenes of the meeting that included delegations from Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria under the presidency of the Sheikh of Al-Azhar. Despite the expectations that preceded the conference, its course deviated from the executive endeavor to appoint a caliph to an intellectual and conditional foundation of the concept of the caliphate. The conference ended with a historic decision stating the difficulty of pledging allegiance to any king from the rulers of that era, due to the complexities of the political circumstances and the lack of conformity of the candidates to the required Sharia qualifications, including King Fuad I. See: Al-Shihab newspaper, Issue 27, dated May 20, 1926.

²Al-Shihab newspaper, Issue 26, dated May 13, 1926. <https://cutt.us/HODa2>

In the first third of 1926, the House of Governance in Mecca witnessed a historic gathering that brought together King Abdulaziz — then King of the Hejaz — with some three hundred dignitaries of the land and delegations and scholars of the Islamic world. The King used this banquet to articulate his vision of the concept of the Islamic League, regarding it as the spirit and supreme value of the nation, on condition that it be founded upon the pillar of the word of monotheism grounded in knowledge and insight. His address likewise included a critical reformist dimension, as he warned against innovations and alien practices contravening the Book and the Sunna, particularly those associated with exploiting graves to collect money, calling for the purification of worship and a return to what the predecessors of the nation had agreed upon.³

What may be understood from this text is that the foundations upon which the modern Saudi state was built rested on the idea of the caliphate, which concerns all Muslims; yet the prevailing circumstances of the time necessitated a national orientation for this nascent state — a view expressed by King Abdulaziz Al Saud himself, who held that the Muslims most entitled to unity in the age in which he lived were the Arabs of the Peninsula, and after them those closest to them, with the Arabs of the Hejaz and Najd being the most entitled among the Arabs of the Peninsula.⁴

Members of the Association Who Studied in the Hejaz

1. Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi

Dr. Ahmed Taleb al-Ibrahimi surveys the formative stages of his father Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi's education in the Arab Mashriq as evidence of the depth of this civilizational influence. After the grandfather, Shaykh al-Sa'di, emigrated to Medina in 1908 fleeing colonial rule, his son al-Bashir joined him in 1911 in a journey that formed a bridge of communication between the Maghreb and the Mashriq. The features of this formation began in Egypt, which served as an exploratory stop where he met its intellectual elite, before this formation was completed in Medina, where he became deeply versed in the various disciplines — exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence, and eventually logic and Mashriqi wisdom, together with the foremost works of literature and language — studying under some of the greatest scholars of the Islamic world.⁵

Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi documents his arrival in Medina at the end of 1911 as a pivotal moment in the formulation of his shared civilizational project with his companion Shaykh Abdelhamid Ibn Badis. Despite the diversity of the circles of learning within the Prophet's Mosque at that time, al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi possessed a discerning critical eye, and his scholarly disposition would settle upon nothing less than accomplished authorities distinguished by breadth of outlook and mastery of the sciences of hadith and the jurisprudence of the Sunna — embodied in his two teachers: al-'Aziz al-Wazir al-Tunisi⁶ and Husayn Ahmad

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, collected by Ahmed Taleb al-Ibrahimi, Vol. 1, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1st edition, 1997, p. 9.

⁶Sheikh al-Aziz al-Wazir al-Tunisi passed away in Medina in the aftermath of World War I.

al-Fayd Abadi al-Hindi.⁷ This rigorous formation, received at the hands of scholars who had come from various lands, represented the founding nucleus of the Algerian reformist thought grounded in verification and critical scrutiny.⁸

Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi's journey to the sacred sites marked a strategic turning point in the discovery of the spiritual depth of Algerian identity, coinciding with the zenith of colonial efforts aimed at tightening France's grip on Algeria and cutting it off from its civilizational extension into the Mashriq. Within the precincts of Medina, and during the pilgrimage season of 1913, the features of an intellectual resistance took shape, one that sought to break the French cultural siege by restoring severed ties with the Arab and Islamic Mashriq.⁹ It was there that al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi met Shaykh Ibn Badis, and there the idea was born of establishing an association later named the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars.

The Medina phase of Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi's career was marked by an exceptional scholarly fertility, as he immersed himself in a multi-faceted intellectual milieu that refined his intellectual faculties: he drew the sciences of exegesis from Shaykh Ibrahim al-Iskubi,¹⁰ specialized in the sciences of hadith (criticism and validation of narrators and the science of biographical evaluation) under Shaykhs Ahmad al-Bazarji and al-Shahrazuri, and delved deeply into authentic Arab heritage and the biography of the Prophet ﷺ under the tutelage of Shaykh Muhammad Abdullah Zaydan al-Shinqiti, with whom he studied for years the Mu'allaqat and pre-Islamic poetry. His formation was not confined to transmitted knowledge but extended to rational inquiry through the study of logic with Shaykh Abd al-Baqi al-Afghani, and immersion in the foremost works of Arabic literature such as *Al-Kāmil* and *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* under the study circle of Shaykh Muhammad al-'Umari al-Jaza'iri — a formation that made of him a man of letters and jurisprudence combining the precision of the hadith scholar with the eloquence of the philologist.¹¹

This rich scholarly harvest contributed to refining al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi's character, making of him an exceptional scholarly figure in the Islamic world — a fact foreseen by his companion Shaykh Ibn Badis, who described him as "a vessel of knowledge, learning, and intelligence, and we hope for much good for Islam and Algeria at his hands."¹² Al-Ibrahimi

⁷Sheikh Hussein Ahmed's fate ended with his surrender to the British when Sharif Hussein rebelled against the Ottomans. The British exiled him to Malta, and from there returned him to his original homeland, India.

⁸Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, collected by Ahmed Taleb al-Ibrahimi, Vol. 5, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1st edition, 1997, p. 276.

⁹Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 1, p. 10.

¹⁰Ibrahim ibn Hassan al-Askubi (1848-1913) is considered one of the most prominent poetic figures in Medina; he was born and died there after epistemic journeys that covered Yemen, Najd, Egypt, the Levant, and extended to India and Turkey. Historians unanimously agree on his pioneering of modern Hijazi poetry through his "Distinguished Ode" which he composed in the late Ottoman era and before World War I as advice and warning to the rulers about Western ambitions. The spirit of sincerity to the Ottoman state and pride in Islamic identity was manifested in its verses, in an emotional reaction to the tragedy of Italy's occupation of Libya and the accompanying Ottoman passivity that shocked the nation's conscience at that time. Anas Yaqoub Kutbi, *Notables from the Land of Prophethood*, 1st edition, Volume 2, Medina, 1993, p. 29. <https://cutt.us/FassD>

¹¹See: Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 276.

¹²Mouloud Aoumer, "The Two Sheikhs Ibn Badis and al-Ibrahimi or True Brotherhood," al-Shamela website, accessed March 2, 2023. <https://shamela-dz.net/?p=964>

described his years in Medina as an era of goodness and blessing, in which learning intertwined with giving: while delivering lessons in grammar, doctrine, and literature, he was also engaged in a scholarly retreat within Medina's great book repositories, absorbing most of the treasures and rare works held in the libraries of "Arif Hikmat," "Sultan Mahmoud," and "Bashir Agha," which yielded a rare, encyclopedic formation.¹³

Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi's scholarly standing in Medina reached its peak with his taking charge of lessons in the Prophet's Mosque, while his retreats in the public and private libraries served as an intellectual laboratory in which he prepared himself for a promising reformist future. This scholarly activity moved to Damascus in 1917, when he was summoned by the Syrian government to teach Arabic literature at the Sultaniyya School.¹⁴ Yet despite this intellectual ascent in the Mashriq, the desire to return to Algeria remained his principal driving force, as he intended to invest his scholarly treasury in reconnecting the Algerian people with their civilizational roots. His departure from Medina, however, was not voluntary but was imposed by the repercussions of the First World War and the Revolt of Sharif Husayn, which drove the Ottoman authorities to deport the inhabitants of Medina toward Damascus as an exceptional measure dictated by the circumstances of the conflict.

Beyond these scholarly and bibliographic wellsprings, Medina witnessed a pivotal historic event: the first meeting between the two towering figures, al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi and Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, in 1913. These extended sessions went beyond the bounds of mere personal acquaintance, transforming into precise diagnostic deliberations on the bitter Algerian reality, and yielding a *nahda* roadmap aimed at rescuing the people from the depths of marginalization and civilizational alienation. Ironically, though the two figures were close in age and formation, the soil of their homeland had not brought them together, given their early scholarly preoccupations — fate decreeing instead that the city of the Prophet ﷺ be the cradle of this momentous meeting that would change the face of contemporary Algerian history.

The meeting of al-Ibrahimi and Ibn Badis within Medina was no mere fleeting encounter or literary conversation, but rather amounted to a bilateral conference extending over three months of serious and profound deliberation on the condition of the Algerian nation. Al-Ibrahimi recounts the details of this intellectual gestation, which would begin after the evening prayer and end at dawn, as the two shaykhs withdrew into nightly retreats that continued throughout the duration of Ibn Badis's stay in the Hejaz, devoting themselves to dissecting the situation and devising the strategies necessary to revive the renaissance — a period during which al-Ibrahimi's residence became a veritable operations room for shaping Algeria's future.¹⁵

The strategic dialogue between the two shaykhs in Medina centered on the means of rescuing Algerian identity from the colonial westernization that sought to sever its ties to its Arab and Islamic roots. It may be stated with historical certainty that the pioneering achievements of the Association of Muslim Scholars — which reached their peak in confronting the celebrations marking the centenary of the occupation in 1930 through the

¹³Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 276.

¹⁴See: Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 1, p. 10.

¹⁵Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 278.

expansion of school and club construction and the shaping of public opinion — were no coincidence, but rather the mature fruit of that civil retreat. This is a conclusion confirmed by Shaykh al-Ibrahimi's historical testimony, in which he swore that the founding pillars of the Association had been laid during those nights of 1913, awaiting eighteen years before crystallizing into its organizational form in 1931.¹⁶

Two Colonialisms Devastating the Algerian People

The three months that the two towering figures spent within Medina constituted an intellectual laboratory par excellence, as the two shaykhs set about dissecting the structural ailments of Algerian society. Al-Ibrahimi and Ibn Badis arrived at a strategic vision holding that the people were groaning under the weight of a dual colonialism: the first material, embodied in the French authority founded on repression and intimidation; the second spiritual, embodied in the current of deviant Sufi orders that exploited religion to obscure popular consciousness. According to al-Ibrahimi's characterization, these two poles formed an opportunistic alliance aimed at draining the people's resources and corrupting their religious and worldly points of reference alike.¹⁷

The infernal policies applied to the Algerian people since the French occupation nearly erased them from existence, as happened to many peoples who suffered occupation and were targeted in their identity, heritage, and history, ultimately succumbing to dissolution and decline — whether through assimilation into the culture and entity of the occupier, or through purification and extermination. It may be said that colonialism in Algeria tried every method and means to arrive at this outcome: alongside killing, displacement, and mass massacres, there was a plan for civilizational liquidation, through policies aimed at severing the Algerian people from their constitutive elements. These methods and means may be summarized as follows:

- Seizing the educational institutions that had existed before the occupation and converting them into barracks for the French army, and at times establishing missionary centers in their place.
- Replacing Arab culture with French culture, and restricting, combating, and prohibiting the teaching of the Arabic language.
- Seizing the waqf (endowment) properties that had funded educational institutions.
- Working to divide the Algerian people by stirring up ethnic prejudices.¹⁸

Well-documented historical reports confirm that the French colonial administration pursued a policy of methodical ignorance: it proceeded to close nearly a thousand schools of various educational levels, thereby depriving more than 150,000 students of their right to education, and displacing scholarly elites of teachers across every discipline. France was not content with this alone but imposed restrictive and near-impossible conditions to prevent the establishment of institutions for teaching the Noble Qur'an, in parallel with campaigns of

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 282.

¹⁸Nabil Ahmed Balasi, *The Arab and Islamic Trend and Its Role in Liberating Algeria*, Egyptian General Book Authority, 1st edition, 1990, p. 34.

persecution, killing, and the confiscation of fertile lands for redistribution to the benefit of settlers.¹⁹

These policies produced a tragic reality: the Algerian people became a society groaning under the weight of poverty, ignorance, and displacement — an environment exploited by the deviant Sufi orders to extend their sway and immerse society in erroneous doctrinal practices, distancing people from the essence of sound Islam and deepening the state of civilizational stagnation.

In truth, this diagnosis precisely identified the source of the ailment afflicting the Algerian people, who were steeped in a fatalistic submission to God's decree as embodied in colonial rule, holding that resisting it amounted to a rejection of God's decree and predestination — deadly ideas propagated by certain deviant members of the Sufi orders among Algerians. Colonialism had succeeded in infiltrating the religious leadership among the members of the Sufi orders who held sway over broad segments of Algerians, and colonialism managed to win them to its side, after colonial policy came to regard them as the true representatives of Islam in Algeria; being rigid and deviant, they thus helped — unwittingly — in the success of French policy, since the youth educated in French culture came to shun the Islam represented by these figures, who had extended their influence over the Algerian people in the name of religion, with clear assistance from the French.²⁰ The essential role of these spiritual leaders was to confront any reformist movement that would nullify their authority and cast doubt on their sanctity; and we shall see how the men of the deviant Sufi orders confronted the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, waging open hostility against it with clear support from the French administration.

Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi and Ibn Badis had to begin with this spiritual colonialism, to break the shackles of servitude imposed on the Algerian people and free them from the erroneous beliefs that placed certain Sufi shaykhs at the level of divinity. The Association subsequently laid out a plan to dismantle this false edifice, through a number of actions, which al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi summarizes as follows:

- Organizing sweeping campaigns against innovations, superstitions, and doctrinal error in religion.
- Teaching young children the sound teaching of religion.
- Calling on young graduates of the Zaytuna Mosque-University to teach in the Association's schools.
- Generalizing the educational model that Ibn Badis had begun immediately upon his return from the sacred sites.
- Demanding that the French government withdraw its hand from mosques and religious institutes.

¹⁹Fahmi Tawfiq Muhammad Muqbil, "Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis, Pioneer of Reform and Renaissance in Algeria," *Al-Dir'iyah Magazine*, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2003, p. 230.

²⁰Nabil Ahmed Balasi, *The Arab and Islamic Trend and Its Role in Liberating Algeria*, Egyptian General Book Authority, 1st edition, 1990, p. 38.

- Demanding that the government grant independence to Islamic courts with regard to matters of personal status.²¹

2. *Al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi*

Shaykh al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi, born in 1890 in the town of Sidi Uqba near Biskra, is counted among the most prominent reformist figures shaped by the Hejazi migration. After his family's early emigration to Medina in 1895, fleeing the repressive policies of French colonial rule, al-'Uqbi became immersed in a rich scholarly milieu, completing his memorization of the Noble Qur'an and mastering its recitation, before broadening his knowledge in the fields of Sharia, mathematics, and literature. He received his education from an elite of the great scholars of the Prophet's Mosque, foremost among them Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Shinqiti, Hamdan al-Wanisi, and al-Habib al-Tunisi — the very same shaykhs who oversaw the formation of his companion Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, which produced a shared scholarly wellspring among the leading figures of the reform movement.²²

The migration of al-'Uqbi's family to Medina was not a mere geographic relocation but a matter of principled opposition to the colonial administration, which practiced the most heinous forms of oppression against Algerians. The family followed the well-known path of the Hejazi migration, under the pretext of performing the Hajj pilgrimage, in order to evade pursuit by the French authorities. Despite Shaykh al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi's involvement in reformist work within Algeria after his return, a large branch of his family continued to reside in the Hejaz; this family's presence is manifest today in Saudi society through its descendants holding important leadership and academic positions, as is the case with the historian Dr. Ahmed Hussein al-'Uqbi, who chaired the History Department at King Abdulaziz University.²³

Al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi's reformist method was marked by a doctrinal firmness drawn from its Hejazi source, which made him one of those most influenced by the reformist da'wa of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Al-'Uqbi held clearly that the doctrinal corruption afflicting the Algerian people was primarily the result of the dominance of the deviant Sufi-order mindset; on the basis of this conviction, al-'Uqbi devoted himself to combating manifestations of polytheism and the innovations associated with graves, embodying this in practical stances and in poetic verses calling for the purification of worship for God alone, saying in explicit terms:

*"Never have I circumambulated a grave, nor hoped for anything from what is but inert matter; I do not clothe in silk a tomb whose bones have long crumbled since the age of 'Ad."*²⁴

In contrast to Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi's position, al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi chose to remain in Medina, refusing to comply with the Ottoman deportation orders to the Levant during the Revolt of Sharif Husayn. Historical accounts suggest that al-'Uqbi was close to the circles active in the Great Arab Revolt, driven by close personal ties — as attested by Shaykh al-

²¹See: Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 282.

²²See: Ahmed Maryoush, *Sheikh al-Tayyib al-Uqbi and His Role in the National Movement*, Dar Irrar, 2013, Algeria, pp. 16-24.

²³See: Maryoush, p. 20.

²⁴Mubarak Muhammad al-Mili, *The Treatise on Polytheism and Its Manifestations*, Islamic Press, 1st edition, 1937, p. 317.

Akhdar, one of the shaykhs of the Islamic Youth School, who confirmed the existence of a friendship between al-'Uqbi and Amir Abdullah ibn al-Husayn. This closeness placed al-'Uqbi within the scope of Ottoman targeting, as he was caught up in the security crackdown against advocates of the Arab renaissance, and was arrested on a list of figures accused of harboring nationalist tendencies aimed at establishing an independent Arab state.²⁵

Al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi's return to Algeria on 3 March 1920, at the age of thirty-one, in the prime of his youth, marked a pivotal moment that coincided with the return of leading reformist figures such as Ibn Badis, al-Ibrahimi, and al-Hafizi. Despite the multiple interpretations offered for the reasons behind his return — between reclaiming his family's confiscated properties in Biskra and the repercussions of his exile by the Ottomans — sound analysis links his return to a nahda project aimed at transplanting the idea of the Islamic Arab League, called for by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida, into the Algerian reality. Upon settling, al-'Uqbi immediately embarked on a campaign to purify doctrine of the vestiges of the Sufi orders, holding them responsible for falsifying popular consciousness by propagating a fatalist doctrine that justified submission to colonialism as an ineluctable fate — which al-'Uqbi regarded as the primary obstacle to any genuine liberation.

The debate between the reformist current and the Alawiyya order²⁶ reached its peak when the latter invited Shaykh al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi to a debate, in an attempt to embarrass him scholastically, requesting that he specify the points of contention. Al-'Uqbi's response came charged with intellectual irony, deploying the very Sufi symbolism — the "theory of the point" — to confound them, sarcastically questioning their need to specify points of inquiry when they themselves reduced the sciences of the cosmos and the Qur'an to the "point beneath the letter bā'." With this response, al-'Uqbi did not shy away from the debate but struck at the philosophical foundations underlying the shaykh of the order's own literature, turning their symbolic weapon into a means of demonstrating the untenability of their claims, affirming that whoever reduces the Sharia to a single point has no need to elaborate scholarly matters in order to discuss them.²⁷

Shaykh al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi's name became associated with boldness of expression and sharpness in confronting deviations, particularly through the platform of Nadi al-Taraqqi (the Progress Club). With the founding of the Association of Muslim Scholars in 1931, al-'Uqbi settled in Algiers to become its spearhead of reform there, his renown spreading through his lessons on Qur'anic exegesis at the Grand Mosque. This activity, however, faced fierce opposition from clerics affiliated with the colonial administration — a pattern repeated in

²⁵Maryoush, previous reference, p. 38.

²⁶The Alawiyya Order is attributed to its founder Sheikh Ahmed ibn Mustafa ibn Alawi (1874-1934), whose Sufi experience emanated from the matrix of the Buzidiyya Order before he became independent with his own path. The Alawiyya is classified as one of the most modern and disciplined Sufi orders in terms of structure and organization; it was distinguished by adopting modern mechanisms in propagation and spreading reformist Sufi thought, contributing to the expansion of its spread and its reputation transcending Algerian borders to include regional and international horizons. See: Ghazala Boughanem, "The Alawiyya Order in Algeria and Its Religious and Social Status 1909-1934," unpublished master's thesis, Mentouri University Constantine, 2008, Algeria, pp. 110-115.

²⁷Maryoush, p. 70.

various cities: just as the Mufti Ibn al-Mawhub²⁸ confronted Shaykh Ibn Badis in Constantine, the Mufti Mahmoud Kahoul, known as Ibn Dali,²⁹ confronted al-'Uqbi's activity in the capital, being the principal instigator behind the issuance of a decision barring him from teaching at the New Mosque.³⁰ This clash reflects the colonial authority's desire to contain reformist thought through official religious instruments.

Shaykh al-Tayeb al-'Uqbi paid a heavy price for his bold positions, as the French administration exploited the assassination of Mufti Mahmoud Kahoul to attempt to destroy al-'Uqbi both morally and physically. The French police fabricated a charge against him, claiming that the perpetrator had received the murder weapon and a sum of money from Shaykh al-'Uqbi, along with direct incitement to the effect that it was necessary to kill the mufti and all of al-'Uqbi's enemies. This conspiracy, however, quickly collapsed in the course of the investigation, after the perpetrator retracted his statements before the judge, confessing that he had lied in implicating al-'Uqbi,³¹ leading to his acquittal and his escape from this colonial plot, after a period spent in detention.

The Seed of Medina Bore Fruit in Algeria

Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi recounts the details of the launch of the reformist project that he had pledged with Ibn Badis in the Hejaz, noting that the latter began implementation immediately upon his return by opening teaching classes and delivering lessons in Qur'anic exegesis in a mosque in Constantine. This individual effort soon transformed into a wide popular movement, as students flocked from every direction to seek learning at his hands; and had it not been for the standing enjoyed by the Shaykh's father with the Algerian government of the time, this movement might well have been suppressed in its cradle — yet this social cover enabled him to entrench the foundations of his renaissance and quickly reap its first fruits.³²

The practical steps taken by Ibn Badis represented the field embodiment of the seed planted in Medina together with his companion al-Ibrahimi. The rapid response of the popular base revealed the Algerian people's thirst for reform: al-Ibrahimi did not return to his homeland

²⁸Ibn al-Mouhab (1866 - Constantine) is considered one of the foundational pillars of reformist thought in Algeria, rising through the religious ranks until attaining the rank of "Mufti of Algeria." Historian Abu al-Qasim Saadallah places him in an advanced position as the second reformer in the country's history after Hamdan Khoja, praising the depth of his understanding and his pivotal impact on the national historical trajectory. His experience was characterized by rare political intelligence, described by historian Muhammad Ali Dabbuz as penetrating the depth of colonial administration; Ibn al-Mouhab was able to harness his official position to serve the national cause, practicing intelligent struggle from within the corridors of the colonial system itself. See: Ahmed Sari, "Ibn al-Mouhab: His Life and the Issues of His Era," *Journal of Emir Abdelkader University for Islamic Sciences*, Volume 16, Issue 3, pp. 186-203.

²⁹Muhammad Kahoul (1870-1936): Mufti of Algeria (Hanafi school) and one of the poles of the official religious body, known for his loyalty to the governmental function and his opposition to the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. He was assassinated in the Casbah in 1936 in an operation historians indicate was engineered by the French administration to eliminate him and implicate Sheikh al-Tayyib al-Uqbi in the case, with the aim of weakening the reformist movement and creating a rift in Algerian society. <https://cutt.us/Bdk6D>

³⁰Maryoush, previous reference, p. 129.

³¹Ibid., p. 243.

³²Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 279.

until Ibn Badis had already succeeded in building a solid base numbering more than a thousand students, these young people forming a vanguard that rebelled against the distorted patterns of traditional religiosity fostered by France, adopting instead the reformist theses arriving from the Mashriq, most notably the idea of the Islamic League. Nor can one overlook the profound impact left by Shaykh Muhammad Abduh's visit to Algeria, which lent the reformist project a moral and intellectual impetus that helped accelerate the pace of its success.

Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi summarized the dimensions of this achievement with visionary insight, holding that the scholarly movement led by Ibn Badis was the true harbinger of a comprehensive Arab renaissance in Algeria. In a precise description of the human force thereby formed, al-Ibrahimi regarded that cohort of nearly a thousand students as the first battalion in the army of intellectual liberation, affirming that this well-aimed step laid the cornerstone of a national project whose effects transcended the bounds of traditional education to forge the future soldiers of Algeria.³³

The year 1930 marked a historic convergence between a display of colonial power and the crystallization of organized cultural resistance. While France was spending vast sums — reaching 93 million francs — to celebrate the centenary of the occupation, with its president attending in person, claiming to have liberated the Berbers from Turkish domination,³⁴ Ibn Badis and al-Ibrahimi were putting the finishing touches on the birth of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. In a step marked by selflessness, the two shaykhs issued a call in the name of the nation to convene a historic meeting at Nadi al-Taraqqi in the capital; this four-day gathering resulted in the election of an administrative council unified in its aims, and in entrusting Ibn Badis with the presidency of the Association, with al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi as his deputy — this entity thus becoming the true and enduring response to the illusions of French Algeria.³⁵

With the passing years, that project which had first seen the light in Medina became a towering entity, as the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars grew into one of the most prominent organizations to shape contemporary Algerian history. Imam Abdelhamid Ibn Badis and his companions waged a fierce battle to dismantle the spiritual colonialism that France had harnessed to serve its agenda, succeeding in undermining the authority of the deviant Sufi orders, replacing it with the thought of the Association through its schools, institutes, newspapers, and cultural clubs.

³³Ibid., p. 279.

³⁴The French Governor-General in Algeria Théodore Steeg began in 1923 planning to commemorate the centennial of occupation, forming an official committee for this purpose. His successor Governor-General Maurice Violette completed these preparations, promoting a colonial narrative claiming that the celebrations represent the anniversary of "liberating Berber peoples from Turkish hegemony." To produce this spectacular scene, a huge budget was allocated starting at 40 million francs then jumping to 93 million French francs; invitations were sent to delegations from various countries, and these ceremonies were crowned with the personal attendance of the then French President Gaston Doumergue, confirming France's adherence to its colony on its centennial anniversary. See: Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani, *Life of Struggle*, Vol. 2, Dar al-Basa'ir, Algeria, 2008, pp. 152-153.

³⁵Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *The Works of Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi*, Vol. 5, p. 281.

This path was not strewn with roses: the Association's opponents among the Sufi orders exerted every effort to besiege it, enlisting the colonial administration to incite against its members, resulting in the closure of their newspapers and their persecution, at times through imprisonment and at other times through exile.

The intensity of the conflict reached the point where the Sufi orders launched a newspaper they named *Al-Mi'yar* (The Standard), whose primary aim was to disparage the Association's scholars and tarnish their image in crude language, taking as their slogan the verse "Indeed, the wicked are in Hellfire," intending by "the wicked" the men of reform. Although some enthusiastic youths attempted to respond in kind by issuing a newspaper they named *Al-Jahīm* (Hellfire) in the same style, the Association's authentic current remained committed to its dignity and its objectives.

Despite the infernal colonial schemes to smother the project of Ibn Badis and al-Ibrahimi, the Association's roots struck deep into Algerian soil, flourishing as the people embraced it with fervor. By the time the Liberation Revolution broke out, the Association's educational strongholds had already spread throughout the country.

Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi describes this remarkable expansion, saying: "After three years spent in exile, and with the beginning of 1943, I made my first goal the launching of a school-building movement, and in a single year I succeeded in constructing 73 schools across the Algerian territory, built with the strength and the money of the nation, in a unified Arab architectural style... The nation vied in its giving until the number of schools exceeded four hundred."³⁶

The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was not merely an educational movement; it succeeded in transforming itself into a formidable factor in the Algerian political equation. Although it adhered outwardly to the banner of social and scholarly reform in order to avoid pursuit by the colonial administration, it engaged in national activity intelligently and quietly, and Ibn Badis and his companions succeeded in dismantling spiritual colonialism and undermining the authority of the deviant Sufi orders³⁷ that had served France, replacing it with a new consciousness disseminated by the Association's schools and newspapers across the length and breadth of the country. Despite the "infernal schemes" to obstruct this project, and the exile of its leaders such as al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, the Association proved its strong political presence at major junctures, such as the Islamic Congress of 1936 and the Manifesto of the Algerian People of 1943, confirming that it was the spiritual and intellectual force that paved the way for the Liberation Revolution by forging a generation attached to its identity and prepared to attain its freedom.

Saudi Arabia Funded the Establishment of Schools

The ties between the leaders of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were marked by exceptional strength, as the Kingdom came to be

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷It should be noted here that Sufi orders in Algeria played a pivotal role in cultural resistance to colonialism and confronted the colonial project with all methods. Therefore, colonialism attempted to use some of them by encouraging doctrinal deviations, superstitions, and various rituals that distance from the correct understanding of Islam.

regarded as a strategic ally and a strong rear-guard in confronting the efforts of French colonialism aimed at obliterating national identity and targeting the constants of the Algerian people — the Islamic religion and the Arabic language. Documents from the archive of the Secretariat-General of the League of Arab States reveal the depth of this cooperation, particularly in the sensitive phase preceding the outbreak of the Liberation Revolution: a secret memorandum issued by the Saudi Foreign Ministry in September 1954 documents Riyadh's response to the Association's demands, presented by its delegation headed by Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi. The Kingdom did not merely support the Association's demands for financial and book aid, but sought to internationalize the educational issue through a formal proposal to refer the matter to the Council of the League of Arab States, so as to secure collective decisions supporting the resilience of Arab educational institutions in Algeria against French policies of enforced ignorance.³⁸

We sought out the request submitted by the delegation of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, referred to by the Saudi Foreign Ministry, and found it within the minutes of the sessions of the 22nd session of the League of Arab States, in a memorandum to the Council of the League issued by the Assistant Secretary-General Abd al-Mun'im Mustafa, which states: "On 12 July 1954, an Algerian delegation headed by Mr. al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi came to the Secretariat-General. The delegation described France's policy regarding the education of Algerian Muslims as aiming at the extinction of Arab-Islamic nationalism, and stated that it fell upon the Arab states and the Islamic world to rescue the Muslims of Algeria."³⁹ Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi explained to the Secretariat-General of the League that the Association had discharged part of its duty in confronting the policy of obliteration pursued by the colonial administration, but that it could not do everything on its own, and it therefore demanded the following:

- That it be supplied with funds to open secondary and primary schools.
- That it be supplied with primary-level textbooks.
- That Algerians who had completed their studies in Arab countries be returned to Algeria, even if by compulsion.⁴⁰

These demands received a broad and serious response from the Political Committee, which adopted the Saudi proposal with great seriousness and attention. This engagement was reflected in the resolutions issued by the Committee's meetings held in late 1954, as the Committee, after studying the file, affirmed its full support for strengthening the teaching of Arabic in Algeria, and approved an increase in the material aid allocated to support national schools, as a strategic step to preserve Algerian identity against colonial attempts at obliteration.⁴¹

³⁸League of Arab States, Minutes of Sessions of the 22nd Ordinary Meeting Session of the Arab League Council, October 30, 1954, Cairo, p. 317.

³⁹Ibid., p. 318.

⁴⁰Minutes of Sessions of the 22nd Ordinary Meeting Session of the Arab League Council, October 30, 1954, Cairo, p. 318.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 372.

Conclusion

In concluding this study, which has traced the paths of civilizational and militant communication between the Algerian reform movement and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we may draw out a set of essential findings that confirm the depth of this relationship and its strategic impact on the history of contemporary Algeria:

The sacred sites constituted the intellectual laboratory that contributed to the emergence of the reform movement in Algeria: within Medina, and during nightly retreats extending over months in 1913, the first idea of the Association of Muslim Scholars was formulated by the two leading figures, Ibn Badis and al-Ibrahimi. This solid religious formation granted the Algerian pioneers the intellectual immunity necessary to confront the projects of westernization and Frenchification upon their return to their homeland.

It may be said that the first pioneers of reform, represented by al-Ibrahimi and Ibn Badis, returned with a penetrating vision diagnosing the Algerian malady in terms of two colonialisms: a material French colonialism, and a deviant spiritual, Sufi-order colonialism. From this, the Association drew inspiration from the reformist method in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the call to monotheism, the purification of doctrine, and the dismantling of the spiritual shackles that bound the Algerian people, holding that liberating the mind from superstition was the necessary precondition for political liberation from the occupier.

Documents extracted from the archive of the League of Arab States reveal a strategic transformation in the relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: after having been founded on a shared scholarly wellspring, this bond developed in the 1950s into organized political, diplomatic, and material support. The secret Saudi memoranda and the diplomatic activity of King Abdulaziz and King Saud constituted a strong backing that contributed to internationalizing the Algerian cause in Arab forums, breaking the isolation that France sought to impose on Algeria.

The seed of Medina bore fruit in Algeria in the form of an intellectual army comprising thousands of students and hundreds of schools; this institutional edifice, supported by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with funds, books, and political backing, contributed to safeguarding national identity and made of the Algerian people a solid bloc resistant to assimilation.

The experience of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars in its communication with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia represents a unique model of Arab-Islamic integration, as the reformist thought arriving from the Mashriq succeeded in merging with the militant will in Algeria, together producing a nahda project that restored to Algeria its Arab-Islamic identity before the restoration of its territorial sovereignty.

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