

Contributions of the people of OUED Souf to writing in the newspapers of the reform movement: A historical and statistical reading 1925-1939

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, several prominent figures in Arabic journalism emerged in Algeria. The content of their newspapers varied according to their intellectual orientations and ideological convictions. We find newspapers with a purely religious focus, those advocating integration, and those of the reform movement led by Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1889-1940). This article will employ a historical and statistical methodology to discuss the early writers and contributors from the Wadi Souf region to reformist newspapers, focusing on listing their names and the content of their writings.

Keywords: *Journalism, Writing, Reform, Wadi Souf.*

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Introduction

Journalistic activity and the publication of Arabic-language newspapers were among the most important factors in the spread of the reform movement in Algeria. The first president of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1889-1940), conceived of this idea even before the association was officially founded. In 1925, he purchased a printing press and began disseminating reformist ideology through the pages of the newspaper *Al-Muntaqid* (1925) and its successor, *Al-Shihab* (1926-1939). When the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was established in 1931, it published four consecutive newspapers: *Al-Sunnah*, *Al-Nabawiyyah*, *Al-Muhammadiyyah*, *Al-Shari'ah*, *Al-Nabawiyyah*, *Al-Muhammadiyyah*, *Al-Sirat Al-Sawi*, and *Al-Basair*.

Through our examination of these newspapers, we found that the people of the Souf Valley region had a strong presence as contributors to most of their issues. This demonstrates their belief in and contribution to the Algerian reform movement from its very beginnings. Therefore, we pose the following question: Who were the first Soufians to write for reformist newspapers? And what were the contents of their writings? To answer this question, we will examine the contents of these newspapers through a chronological and statistical study, focusing on the Soviet figures who wrote for them and providing an overview of their writings and articles.

The Newspapers of Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis:

It should be noted at the outset that the writings of the people of Souf in Arabic newspapers did not begin with the emergence of the reform movement, but rather predate it by a considerable margin. In 1914, we find correspondence from Sheikh Ibrahim Ben Amer (1875-1932), author of "*Al-Suruf fi Tarikh al-Sahra' wa Souf*" (The Book of Changes in the History of the Sahara and Souf), with the newspaper "*Al-Farouq*." Similarly, he published a poem in the newspaper "*Al-Balagh*" in 1929. The same applies to Muhammad Ben Al-Bariya Al-Qamari (1884-1949), who wrote for the newspapers "*Al-Najah*" and "*Al-Balagh*." Muhammad Al-Amin Al-Amoudi (1890-1957) is considered one of the first writers from the Souf Valley to contribute to the pages of "*Al-Najah*," when he published an article entitled "A Look at the History of Africa" in issue 110, dated May 11, 1923. Likewise, we find Ben Al-Salmi Salem Ben Al-Tahir, whose article entitled "*Al-Zaqm*" appeared in issue 174 of "*Al-Najah*" on September 12, 1924.

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a) Al-Muntaqid Newspaper (1925):

It is historically known that Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis had two newspapers in his personal capacity, not as the head of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. The first was *Al-Muntaqid*, of which 18 issues were published, from Thursday, July 2, 1925, to Thursday, October 29, 1925. The second was *Al-Shihab*, whose first issue was published on November 12, 1925, and which became a monthly magazine in 1929 until it ceased publication in August 1939. Upon reviewing the content of the *Al-Muntaqid* newspaper, we found six references to the Wadi Souf region, as follows:

- In issue 3, on page 3, the following headline appeared: "A True Congratulation to the Men of Knowledge," where Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis congratulates the sons of Algeria who obtained the "Al-Alimiyya" (degree) from the Zaytuna Mosque in Tunis in 1925. These seven men included Tayeb Ben Sheikh Al-Hashemi Al-Sharif from Wadi Souf and Mohamed Khair Eddine from Farfar, Tolga.
- In issue 5, on page 3, the following headline appeared: "An Open Letter to the Governor-General," signed by 40 merchants from the town of Zaqm in Wadi Souf working in the Tebessa region. In it, they request the Governor-General of Algeria to open a post office in Zaqm due to their urgent need for it and its numerous benefits for both the residents and the government.
- Issue 15, page 2, contained an article titled: "The Manifest Misguidance," written by a 12-year-old boy named Muhammad al-Qarawi al-Nabti. In it, he discusses certain behaviors he witnessed in one of the areas of Wadi Souf that he disapproved of.
- Also in the same issue, page 3, was an announcement by Sheikh Muhammad al-Arabi ibn Qashut al-Sufi, informing readers of the publication of his book, "The Evident Arguments."
- Issue 17, page 3, contained an announcement titled: "The Treatise Entitled 'The Evident Arguments,'" which is the same book by Sheikh Muhammad al-Arabi ibn Qashut.
- Also in the same issue, page 3, was a poem by Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled: "Elegy for al-Rashid."

B) Al-Shihab Newspaper (1925-1939):

As for *Al-Shihab* newspaper, it provided a wide platform for the people of Wadi Souf, who wrote extensive and diverse articles in it, whether political, social, or even protesting the policies of the French occupation. The first Soufian to write for the *Al-Shihab* newspaper was Muhammad al-Sassi Maamir (1880-1967), originally from the town of Zaqm. His contribution appeared in issue 11 of volume 1, published on January 21, 1926, on pages 228 and 230. His article, titled "Demanding Reform," was in the "Letters to the Homeland" section, a complaint from the residents of the Zaqm region to the Post and Telegraph Administration of Constantine, requesting the opening of a post office in their town.¹²

3. Newspapers of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars 1931-1939:

In fact, anyone who studies the history of the Algerian reform movement with a clear and thorough methodology will easily discover the significant connection of the people of the Souf Valley to this movement and their pioneering role within it. The preparatory committee established in 1931 in Algiers, in preparation for the declaration of the founding of the Association of Scholars, was headed by Mr. Omar Ismail. This committee distributed invitations to various Algerian scholars to attend the founding ceremony in May 1931. We find that among the scholars of Wadi Souf, seven were invited, three of whom attended: Ammar ibn al-Azhar al-Qumari, Hamza Boukoucha, and Muhammad al-Amin al-Amoudi. Those absent were: Ibrahim ibn Amer, author of the book "Al-Surouf"; al-Tahir al-Ubaidi and his brother Ahmad al-Ubaidi; and al-Midani Moussaoui.¹³ Following this, the first administrative council to manage the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was formed, consisting of 13 members, among whom was Muhammad al-Amin al-Amoudi (from Wadi Souf), who assumed the position of Secretary-General.

As for the contributions of the people of Wadi Souf through writing in the Association's newspapers, this was prominent and evident in all four of its publications: Al-Sunnah, Al-Shari'ah, Al-Sirat, and Al-Basair. Whenever we consult any of these newspapers, we will find a contribution from someone from Wadi Souf, which we will address in the following sections:

A) The newspaper "Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah al-Muhammadiyyah":

This is considered the first newspaper published by the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars; Thirteen issues of the journal were published between April 3, 1933, and July 3, 1933. The people of Wadi Souf contributed to it on nine occasions, either by writing about it or referencing it:

- In issue number 2, on pages 7-8, there was an article entitled: "On the Margins of Events in Taghzout," written by Tijani.

- Also in issue number 2, on page 8, was a poem by the poet Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled: "There is No Dawn Except the Sunnah of the Prophet," which he composed to greet the Sunnah of the Prophet newspaper. Its opening lines were: "Seek the foundation of justice if you are to prevail, for no tyrant with a firm foundation has ever prevailed."

- In issue number 4, on page 5, there was a news item entitled: "Correspondence and Observations by Muhammad al-Saeed al-Zahiri," in which he analyzes a letter from Sheikh al-Eid bin Ahmed al-Tijani, the head of the Tijaniyya order in Taghzout, concerning his son's marriage.¹⁷ - Also in the same issue, No. 4, on page 6, there appeared an article entitled: "Dispelling Misconceptions," in which Sheikh Al-Eid bin Ahmed Al-Tijani discusses his son's wedding and clarifies that it has no connection to the Taghzout incident mentioned in issue No. 2 of this newspaper.

- In issue No. 5, on page 5, there is another poem by the poet Muhammad Al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled: "A Poem to the Two Years," which begins with this verse: "Did the night descend or did it clear? I know not what followed."¹⁹

- Furthermore, in the three consecutive issues, Nos. 8, 9, and 10, we find three announcements from the Secretary-General of the Association of Scholars, Muhammad Al-Amin Al-Amoudi, entitled: "General Meeting of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars." These announcements mention or announce the upcoming meeting, which will be held on June 26, 1933, at the Al-Taraqqi Club in Algiers. Those unable to attend are instructed to write to Abu Ya'la Al-Zawawi, Chairman of the Permanent Action Committee.²⁰

- The ninth and final contribution to this newspaper appeared in the last issue 13 on page 04. It is a poem by Muhammad Al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled: 'There is no wisdom except the Qur'an. He recited it at the Al-Taraqqi Club when the general meeting was held on 06/26/1933. Its opening is: Add Algeria to whatever you want of generosity *** And to its sanctuary, what a sanctuary it is.

B) The Journal of the Prophetic Sunnah of Muhammad:

This was the second journal of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. Seven issues were published between July 17, 1933, and August 29, 1933, a period of one and a half months. It contained three contributions from the people of Wadi Souf, as follows:

- In issue 2, on page 8, there appeared the poem "Nothing but the Qur'an is Wisdom" by Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa, the same poem he published in the last issue of the Journal of the Prophetic Sunnah of Muhammad.

- In issue 5, on page 5, there is a poem by Muhammad al-Tahir al-Talili al-Qamari entitled "A Poem for Remembrance," in which he praises the work of the Association of Scholars and its members. He begins it with the lines: "Today I soar above the Pleiades with joy, when a reformer from the Arab nation appeared."

- In issue 07, on page 06, there appeared a poem by the poet Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled: "For God's Sake We Endure Harm." He had recited it at the Al-Taraqqi Club in the capital to the Reform Group, calling upon them to work for the sake of God to spread knowledge and virtue and combat ignorance and vice. Its opening lines were: "O shining one, is there? *** Lightning upon the sides, is there?"

C) *Al-Sirat Al-Sami Newspaper:*

This was the third newspaper of the Association of Scholars. Seventeen issues were published between September 11, 1933, and January 4, 1934. We found thirteen contributions from the people of Wadi Souf on its esteemed pages, as follows:

- In issue 09, published on November 13, 1933, on page 06, there appeared an announcement from the Secretary-General of the Association, Mr. Muhammad al-Amin al-Amoudi, entitled: "Invitation of the Administrative Council, Rajab Session," which mentions the date of its convening: November 16, 1933.

- We also find in issue 10, on page 5, an announcement entitled: "To Subscribers," in which the newspaper's management committee informs readers that it has sent Sheikh Abdul Latif al-Qantari to some cities in southern Algeria to be its accredited representative. Among these areas in Wadi Souf are Qamar and l Oued.

- This announcement was repeated in full in issue 11, on pages 5 and 27, and in issue 13, on pages 3 and.

- In issue 13, published on December 11, 1933, on page 7, we find three contributions from residents of Wadi Souf. The first, entitled "A Great Loss," was written by Muhammad al-Tahir al-Talili al-Qamari, mourning the death of one of the young reformers in Qamar, Muhammad al-Eid ibn al-Dawiya, who played an active role in building the Grand Mosque and the Quranic school. Then, we find an article entitled "A Letter of Support for the Scholars," signed by Mahmoud ibn Khalid and a large group of notables and dignitaries from the town of Zaqm. The last article is entitled "Support for the Scholars and Disavowal of Sufism." This is a letter from the people of Al-Bahima, signed by Habib bin Al-Hajj and several notables, addressed to Muhammad Al-Saeed Al-Zahiri. In it, they express their support for the work of the Association of Scholars and deny the conflict with Mawloud Al-Hafizi, who founded the Association of Sunni Scholars.

- In issue 14, published on December 18, 1933, on pages 3-4, there is an article by Muhammad Al-Saeed Al-Zahiri entitled: "On the Margins of Events: Professor Al-Amoudi's Transfer to Aflou." In it, he discusses the injustice of the colonial administration's administrative exile of Al-Amoudi, who was transferred from his workplace in Algiers to the Aflou region of El Bayadh in southwestern Algeria when he was absent from his post and traveled to Tunisia.

- Also, in issue 15, published on December 25, 1933, on page 7, there is an article entitled: "The Students' Celebration." The author is referring to the celebration of Algerian students at the Zaytuna Mosque, including Muhammad Al-Tahir Al-Talili Al-Qamari Al-Sufi, who recited a poem during the event. - In issue number 16, dated January 1, 1934, on page 4, there appeared a poem by Muhammad al-Hafnawi ibn Lakhdar al-Sufi (nicknamed Hali), which he recited in Tunis during a celebration by Algerian students at the Zaytuna Mosque. Its opening lines are: "Hail Algeria and thank those who revive it, and thank those who guide reform." It should be noted that on page 5 of the same issue, under the title "Souk Ahras," there appeared a condolence message from Ali ibn al-Hajj Ibrahim al-Qamari of Souk Ahras to the family of the deceased Muhammad al-Eid ibn al-Dhawiya, whose death was reported in issue number 13.

- In the final issue, number 17, dated January 8, 1934, on page 5, there appeared an article entitled "From Souf (al-Zaqm)," in which the newspaper apologized to Sheikh Ibrahim Kalkami and his friends from the town of al-Zaqm in Wadi Souf, whose names were not clearly stated in the letter of support published in

issue number 13 of the newspaper "al-Sirat al-Sufi." - As stated in the same issue 17 and the same page number 05, there is an article entitled: Repentance from the pantheism of Mr. Muhammad bin Idris Al-Sharif, who abandoned his support for the movement of Al-Mawloud Al-Hafizi³⁵.

d) Al-Basair Newspaper 1935-1939:

This was the fourth and longest-running newspaper of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. Its first issue was published on December 27, 1935, and its last on April 26, 1956, with a hiatus during World War II (1939-1945). It was filled with writings from the people of Wadi Souf, both in its first series (1935-1939) and its second series (1946-1956). Here, we will mention examples of the early Soufians who wrote for its pages. In the first issue of Al-Basair, published on December 27, 1935, we find an article by Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled "Guidance and Misguidance," in which he discusses the Al-Basair newspaper and its objectives.³⁶ In the second issue, published on January 10, 1936, we also find an article by Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa entitled "School Education and its Impact on Society."³⁷ The third issue contains two contributions: a poem by Muhammad al-Eid entitled "We Are Companions in Goodness," and an article entitled "Ethics" by Hamza Boukoucha.

It is worth noting in this context that the people of Wadi Souf also made other contributions, including overseeing the publication of other newspapers and participating in their management. In 1934, Muhammad al-Amin al-Amoudi launched the French-language newspaper *La Défense*, which continued for five years, published every Friday. It was considered part of the reformist movement. In February 1936, Ali bin Saad al-Qamari, known as "Khiran," launched the newspaper *Al-Layali* in Algiers, assisted by Hamza Boukoucha. Twenty issues were published before the French occupation authorities shut it down in March 1937.⁴⁰ Hamza Boukoucha also oversaw the editing of the newspaper *Al-Maghrib al-Arabi* in 1937 in Oran. Its owner was Mr. Bella Mahmoud, originally from the town of Kouinine in the Souf Valley.

Conclusion

The people of the Souf Valley were involved in the Algerian press movement from its very beginnings, contributing diverse articles to its pages, covering social, political, religious, cultural, and other topics. Their relationship with the reformist movement and its newspapers, represented by the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, was very strong. They had a strong presence, and their pens resonated with their reformist ideas and principles.

Our count of articles and written contributions by Souafa writers in these newspapers revealed the following: six in Al-Muntaqid, nine in As-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah, three in Ash-Shari'ah An-Nabawiyyah, and thirteen in As-Sirat As-Sawi. As for Al-Basair, it is replete with their articles, as evidenced by the fact that we found four contributions in the first three issues. Among the most prominent Souafa writers who engaged in these writings are: Muhammad Al-Eid Al Khalifa, Muhammad Al-Amin Al-Amoudi, Muhammad At-Tahir At-Talili Al-Qamari, Al-Hafnawi Hali, Hamza Boukoucha, and Muhammad As-Sasi Maamir.

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