

The Algerian Muslim Scouts and their role in raising students: A reading of Si M'hamed Bougara's experience (1926-1959)

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Abstract:

The research focuses on the significant role played by the Algerian Islamic Scouts in shaping and training various segments of Algerian society during French colonial rule. It begins with students who graduated, an elite group of scouts who contributed to the national movement and the liberation revolution. This includes martyr Si M'hamed Bougara, who was a student and member of the Scouts. He drew on his training in schools and his scouting principles to strengthen the revolutionary organization in the historic Fourth Province.

Keywords: Algerian Muslim Scouts; Algerian Students; Si M'hamed Bougara; Algeria; Fourth Wilaya.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Algerian Islamic Scouts are among the most prominent organizations that played a significant role in the history of the national movement and the liberation revolution. Many researchers view them as a form of political and cultural resistance, as their educational programs and volunteer activities helped defend the national identity and Islam during the colonial era. This made them a focal point of support, attention, and attraction for parties and groups within the Algerian national movement.

The Scouts helped prepare a new generation that represented different segments of Algerian society during a period when Algeria faced difficult conditions under French colonial rule. They provided these movements with a refuge and an outlet for many people, so students made up a large share, with many involved in various branches and actively participating in activities such as gritli Mokhtar, Benassi Habib, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Hassiba Ben Bouali, Ahmed Ould Tourki, Mouaz M'hamed, and others. Ahmed Bougara, known as Si M'hamed, was among the students who joined the Scouts in Khamis Meliana. This experience later influenced his leadership and organization of the revolution in the fourth wilaya, and the principles and values of the Scouts became a guiding force in revolutionary work.

To analyze the subject, we ask: How did the Islamic Scouts contribute to the formation, development, and upbringing of the revolutionaries? Were the Scouts' values and principles factors in the revolutionary work during the fourth wilaya? What role did Si M'hamed Bougara play in promoting and organizing the revolution in the fourth wilaya?

2. What is Scouting?

The word “scouting” comes from the verb “Kashf”, “reveal,” and it is defined in dictionaries as the act of uncovering something—specifically, exposing what is hidden or covered, thereby eliminating mystery or revealing the truth (Al-'Alam, 2007, p. 687). In the hadith: “Law tkāshftm mā tdāfntm”, “If you reveal what you have buried,” (Ibn, 1999, p. 102) it refers to exposing hidden faults. Ibn al-Athīr said, “Law ‘ilm b’ḍkm sryrh ba’ḍ lāstthql tashyī’ janāzatihi wdfnh”, “If you knew each other’s beds, it would be difficult to hide his funeral and burial.”

In French it is called, “*éclaireur*”. It refers to a soldier sent to reconnoiter the enemy, with the army advancing to reveal the way. The scout then returns, providing information about the enemy’s numbers, movements, and objectives (Al-Hilal, 1919, p. 549). This role is also directed at leaders in a democratic society. In contrast, others see it as an organizational experiment aimed at promoting civic and religious education through practical, engaging methods. This is achieved by offering a free environment where young people’s talents can be discovered, unlike traditional educational models that are rigid, inflexible, and closed (Alwan,

2008, p. 1).

The International Scouting Conference, held in Copenhagen in August 1924, defines it as a movement of a national character. International... Global... Its purpose is to serve each country separately... And so, the entire year... With the youth of the forces of structure... good manners, high motivation.

A national movement, in the sense that it prepares the youth of every nation to be healthy and good citizens of themselves. This is achieved through the formation of national organizations.

The lack of barriers defines the principle of fraternity in the international movement.

A global movement that encourages scouts to see one another as brothers, regardless of nationality or religion. Although the Scout movement's systems aim to reduce the influence of religion, they actually help to strengthen the religious spirit within each boy's heart. The Scouting Law is well-suited for this purpose. Additionally, the movement's teachings and rules prohibit all kinds of religious propaganda in mixed societies (Salem, 1956, p. 11).

This movement evolved from one man's idea into an international brotherhood of nearly five million members, with an estimated twenty-five million former members. Starting with a single camp in England, Scouting is now practiced by boys of many different races in about 70 independent nations. Over 40 years of steady growth, it has provided its global members with a shared model of friendship and some influence in international relations (Spry, 1948, p. 156).

It is a vital doctrine that emerged among the sects at the beginning of the twentieth century. Similar to it, this doctrine arose after the advent of Islam to refine morals, purify souls, inspire courage, spread brotherhood among people, call for virtues, and avoid vices. It is known to Muslims as the *bully*, and its followers call it the plural of boys. The *bully* represents a collection of noble attributes, good morals, sound character, boldness, and generosity in its owner (the boy, *al-Fata*) (Jawad, 1931, p. 285).

Seen as an institution that emerged not to meet boys' needs but rather

to serve adult men seeking to validate their masculinity, Robert McDonald identifies another catalyst in “the failure of modern society to produce strong men, both morally and physically.” McDonald further describes the early Scout movement as “an escape from the reckless feminine atmosphere of the home to a place where a purely masculine character can be formed.”

Lord Robert Baden-Powell was the first to introduce the Scout movement to the world during the Boer siege of the garrison at Mafeking, a small town on the South African plains, during the war between the British Crown and the Boer tribes in 1899 (Graeme & A.Dancer, 2007, p. 265). The regiment was commanded by Lord Cecil, who struggled to hold out due to the small number of his troops. The garrison nearly fell if it weren't for the commander's use of a large portion of his trained soldiers, although he had to send them to the front. He organized a division of boys to help with transportation between the garrison, the town, and the command post. Lord Baden-Powell, then an officer in the regiment, is said to have met one of these boys while serving.

The courage and enthusiasm he observed in this young man deeply inspired him, leading him to write “Scouting for Boys”, the first book to explore the Scout movement thoroughly. In 1908, he organized a boys' scouting camp on Brownsea Island, and in 1909, the first Scout Festival was held in London, where it was paraded before King Edward VII. By the end of that year, the Scout movement had expanded globally.

Scouting first emerged in the Arab world in 1908 in Beirut, introduced by young Indians from Delhi (Al-Khalil, 1974, pp. 9-10). The movement developed in France after World War I and then spread to Tunisia and Algeria. In Tunisia, it appeared in 1912, while in the Far Maghreb, it emerged in 1932, following its introduction to Egypt by Prince Omar in 1914, who organized some scout groups in Alexandria. In Sudan and Iraq, it appeared in 1923. Libya did not adopt it until after 1954 (Tounsi, 2007/2008, p. 20).

3. The Rise of Scouts in Algeria and Their Contribution to Educating Revolutionary Leaders

Algeria faced complex and unique challenges during the 20th century. The decade started with the Algerian people rejecting colonial celebrations

marking 100 years of Algeria's occupation (Bouaziz, 2007, p. 84). In 1931, a year later, a group of scholars, reformers, and students gathered at the "Nādī al-Taraqī" in Algiers, including Mohamed Bachir El Ibrahimi, Abdel-Hamid ibn Badis, Mubarek al-Mili, and Amin Al-Amoudi. This led to the founding of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, which aimed to establish free Arab schools, cultural clubs, and literary magazines, while also addressing social issues such as superstition. The group also promoted Arab nationalism, supported the Islamic League, and opposed naturalization efforts and the integration of Algeria into France (Ibrahimi, 1997, p. 71).

The Scout movement began in a context where colonialism was treating the world well by making Algeria a French colony. After the success of the Scout movement in France at the start of the twentieth century, European settlers brought it to Algeria after World War I in 1914 as an effective way to raise their children. This movement closely followed the Scout model in France (Tounsi A. , 2021, p. 566), where it established universities and federations led by higher councils, similar to its setup in Algeria. It appeared as follow :

1914 - French Scouts Les Éclaireurs de France E.D.F

1920 - Les Éclaireurs Unionistes de France (E.U.F)

1922 - French Catholic Scouts Les Scouts de France S.D.F.

1929 - Scouts of the Free

1929 - La Fédération française des Éclaireuses pour filles laïques (F.F.E.) Les Éclaireurs Indépendants (E.I.)

1929 - Le Guide de France G.D.F (Tounsi A. , 2021, p. 567).

In this political and religious climate, the Algerian Islamic Scouts were founded by Mohamed Bouras and a group of young people around him. When colonial authorities prevented scholars from teaching in mosques, special demonstrations took place in the capital, in which Bouras and his associates participated. Bouras frequently visited the Progress Club "Nādī al-Taraqī", Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema's (Abu Omran & Jijali, 2007, p. 14) headquarters, and met with Sheikh Ben Badis, the group's president. He advised him to establish a scout regiment and to promote meaningful activities aligned with nature. This advice led to the

creation of the “al-Falāḥ” regiment in Algiers in 1935. The founders of the Scouts of Algeria weren’t just thinking about the youth of 1935 but also about the future of all Algerians. They clearly envisioned a model of Algerian Muslim scouting that embodied all the ideal qualities.

It is clear that Bouras was aware of the branches of the French Scouts operating in the capital and other cities, and sometimes Algerians were involved in these groups. The leaders were primarily French, while the leaders in Algiers and other cities were the white missionary fathers of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie. However, all these groups considered Algeria part of France and did not support the Algerian national movement. As a result, young Algerians trained in scouting techniques could not stay involved with them for long. Instead, they joined the Algerian Islamic Scouts (Abu Omran & Jijali, 2007, p. 15).

After the emergence of “al-Falāḥ” Regiment, the scout movement began spreading across the country, leading to the formation of several notable scout regiments. These included the Ibn Khaldūn Regiment in Meliana, al-Rajā’ Regiment in Constantine in 1936, and “al-Falāḥ” Regiment in Mostaganem in the same year. al-Qutb Regiment was established in Algiers in 1937, Iqbāl Regiment in Blida in 1936, and the Regiment of al-Ḥayāh in Setif in 1938. Additionally, Tizi Ouzou witnessed the formation of al-Hilāl Regiment in 1938, the Batna Regiment al-Rajā’ in the same year, and, finally, al-Nujūm Regiment in 1939 (Jawad A. L., 2016-2017, p. 13).

Most Algerian scout teams from the popular circle organized their regiments based on available resources and their own methods, resulting in varying levels of training across the regiments. Mohamed Bouras understood the importance of unifying the work of these scout regiments, coordinating their activities and methods. This was reflected in the first reconnaissance (The National Center for Studies and Research in the National Movement and the Revolution of November 1, p. 32) meeting held from 27 July to 29, 1939, in the capital, El Harrach. A group of Algerian scouts representing the most prominent active regiments in Algeria at the time gathered under the honorary presidency of Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, president of Algerian Muslim Ulema. The rally carried the slogan

“Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, Algeria is our homeland.” During this conference, the Basic Law of the Algerian Islamic Scouting Federation (F.S.M.A) was approved, and Mohamed Bouras was elected as its president, with Omar Laga as his deputy. The Basic Law states that “the Algerian Islamic Scouting Federation is an educational group, founded in 1939 and based in Algiers, to support scouting education, its methods and principles, form scout regiments, and train young people in moral, health, physical, and practical fields according to specific principles, methods, and practices known as scouting” (Alwan, 2008, p. 18).

The Scout Movement played a crucial role in the political struggle and armed resistance. As its activities grew and scout regiments expanded across various Algerian cities, it gained widespread support among citizens. The movement received strong backing from reformist scholars overseeing scouting efforts in many cities, including Constantine under Ibn Badis, the capital under Tayeb el-Oqbi, and Tlemcen under Bashir Ibrahimi. It became an essential institution for teaching young people about national and Islamic principles and for strengthening Arab identity. Through scout camps featuring a variety of activities, such as plays depicting Algerians' suffering under occupation and singing national anthems, the movement helped cultivate a sense of national pride. It encouraged independence among youth (Sabah, 2022, p. 350).

The French government has taken measures against leaders or groups based on false accusations, such as denying licenses for celebrations or camps, conducting interrogations, arresting officials, and shutting down private shops. Algerian scout teams rarely received subsidies from municipalities or other sources, while French teams received generous funding. It is also known that camps and events may be banned at the last minute, requiring efforts and interventions to lift those bans (Abu Omran & Jijali, 2007, p. 16). To weaken their efforts, the occupation administration deliberately expelled Mohamed Bouras from Algeria by appointing him as a teacher in France. Not only that, but he was also charged with treason and collaborating with the Germans to incite rebellion, leading to his referral to the military court. On 27 May 1941, in Hussein Dey (The National Center

for Studies and Research in the National Movement and the Revolution of November 1, p. 35), the court sentenced him to be executed by firing squad. Despite these obstacles, the scouts continued their national duties by (Sabah, 2022, p. 350):

Holding training sessions at activists' homes.

Participation in demonstrations, especially the involvement of scouts in the events of 8 May 1945, including the first martyr Scout Bouzid Saâl, who carried the national flag. The scouts received cheers, including Saad Eddine Mustafay, Mohamed Abdoun, and Abdelmajid Ouchish. Distribution of leaflets for national parties such as the People's Party and the Ahbab al-Bayan Movement (Atomi, 2009, p. 96).

Before the November 1954 Revolution, members of the Scouts held meetings in militants' homes and collected subscriptions to buy ammunition in preparation for the revolutionary struggle. They also used their headquarters as shelters for political activists and provided organizational support for some student and cultural events (The National Center for Studies and Research in the National Movement and the Revolution of November 1, p. 44). Among these leaders who made an impact in the political and educational fields were Abdelaziz Mohamed, Hocine Aït Ahmed, Bekhlouf Mohamed, Badji Mokhtar, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Bougara Ahmed, Mourad Didouche, Boudjemaa Souidani, and Youcef Zighoud (The National Center for Studies and Research in the National Movement and the Revolution of November 1, p. 45).

4. Si M'hamed Bougara, the student and scout in the Fourth Wilaya Command

4.1. birth and upbringing

Born in 1926 in Khamis Meliana to a modest family, he was deeply influenced from a young age by his patriotic and revolutionary spirit, which made him aware of the oppression and tyranny inflicted on the people. He was one of the first to join Islamic scouting in Khamis Meliana in 1944, known as Alwdād Regiment (Derouiche, 1985, pp. 53-54) and part of the National Movement, at the age of only 16 (Amamra, 2006, p. 195). He completed his primary education at a French school, where he learned Arabic and the principles of Islam through al-Katātīb and al-Zawāyā. Later,

in 1946, he continued his studies at al-Zaytūnah Mosque. After returning to Algeria, he initially worked at a pipe factory before joining the railway corporation in Khamis Meliana. Later, he held a modest position at vocational training centers in Blida and Algiers (Alaoui, 2013, p. 124).

He was a militant in the Algerian People's Party *Ḥizb al-Sha'b al-Jazā'irī*, and then he continued his struggle through the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties *Ḥarakat Intiṣār al-Ḥurrīyāt al-Dīmuqrāṭīyah* in 1946. He began to lean toward revolutionary work because of his qualities as a militant leader—courageous, disciplined, and inventive in organization. As a result of his activities, he was arrested in May 1945, but he resumed his fight immediately after his release with greater determination. He endured hardships and took on significant responsibilities, especially within the secret organization. That period was marked by repression and persecution. When the secret organization was discovered on 18 March 1950, he was arrested along with his comrades. After a lengthy imprisonment, he was released and placed under house arrest in his hometown, only to have his resolve strengthened. He continued his clandestine work until the outbreak of the liberation revolution (Alaoui, 2013, p. 125).

4.2. His Leadership for a Fourth wilaya

During the period between 1952 and 1954, Si M'hamed Bougara combined paramilitary training with revolutionary political work by being present in Algiers and the Khamis Meliana region. He grew more determined, becoming more aware and wiser in dealing with the enemy, convinced that the time had come to engage in armed action. He took refuge on the outskirts of Jumaa Ouled Jalal. He settled in the Taglisia area, southwest of Khamis Meliana, where he found the right environment to prepare for his cause (Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 17). He set up hideouts in the region with Qassoum Molouj, amidst a dense forest, establishing contacts with fellow fighters. They met monthly to discuss political developments and organize awareness efforts. He personally ensured the preparations for the revolution remained covert. His activities in the region continued until 4 November 1954, when he left the Khamis Meliana suburbs for Algiers

(Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 4).

After the success of the military operations carried out on the night of 1 November 1954, which included various regions of the national territory, Algeria entered a new phase of the long struggle. This stage required mobilizing all human, material, and military resources to achieve the goals outlined in the November 1st Statement. Regarding Si M'hamed's joining the revolution, it happened when he met one of the militants in the capital, Omar Amirouche, who asked him to send many fighters. He presented six of them, including Si M'hamed Bougara, Arzaqi Belkacem, and El Ghouli Suleiman. They moved to the Palestro district (now Al-Akhdaria) (Taqia, 2012, p. 15) in the eastern part of the Fourth Province, and his joining the region stemmed from his psychological preparedness, training, and preparations for the regiments of the Fifth wilaya from 1947 to 1950, in addition to the efforts he made with his comrades in Khamis Meliana. As for the Qalam region, any operations were carried out there, and during that time, he met with Amar Ouamrane, with whom he began his political and military activities, along with Slimane Dehilès, Karim Belkacem, and Mohamed Saïd (Taqia, 2012, p. 17).

The year 1956 was marked by rapid developments during the Algerian Revolution, culminating in the Soummam Conference. This conference established a modern structure and organization for the revolution across the six historical provinces. The implementation of the conference's decisions began in practice, shaping various interests and the hierarchy of the mandate from the highest to the lowest body. This is evident in the numerous councils, starting with the State Council, then the District Council, the District Council again, and finally the Oath Council (Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 161).

The Fourth Provincial Command was formed immediately after the Soummam Conference by the Commander of the Province, Amar Ouamrane, following the arrest of Rabah Bitat in March 1955. He held the rank of Political and Military Colonel and was deputized to the State Council. His deputies included Si M'hamed Bougara, Boudjemaa Souidani, and Slimane Dehilès (Bouhammoum, 2004-2005, p. 44). Afterward, Dahiles (Si Al-Sadiq) took leadership in December 1957, alongside

M'hamed Bougara (political official), Rabah Mokrani (military official), and Mohamed Zamoum (information and communication officer) (Bouhammoum, 2004-2005, p. 45). This formation aimed to implement the decisions of the Soummam Conference regarding the military and civilian structures and organizations. It began establishing regional leaders, with the first meeting held in September 1956 in the Zabbar Mountains. The leadership of this region was composed of Captain Ali Khoja as president (military-political), Rabah Mokrani, called Si Lakhdar, as assistant (military), Abdel Qadir Omar Mahoub (political), and Abdul Rahman Al-Alaa as assistant (news and communication) (Mujahideen, p. 28).

After Slimane's move to Tunisia in April 1957 and the martyrdom of Major Mokrani, a military official in the Provincial Council, a new council was formed for the fourth wilaya. It included Bougara, a political and military official; Mohamed Zamoum, a political official; Rabah Zirari, an army official; and Omar Siddiq, a media and communication officer.

During his leadership in the fourth wilaya, Si M'hamed Bougara relied on a strategy of revolutionary activity across all fields, including political, military, and health organizations. He confronted counter-revolutionary movements such as the reformists Almsālyyn, the Belhajist movement, and Sharif bin Saidi's movement. He also worked to instill revolutionary principles among young students and intellectuals while coordinating with other provinces. He believed that the entire Algerian revolution was a unified space, and that the true mujahid is anyone who carries out the task anywhere in Algeria (Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 163). Perhaps his scouting experience, based on a paramilitary structure, helped him organize and shape his leadership during the fourth wilaya, as the system promotes the development of values through scouting training. Its structure as a national paramilitary training program emphasizes sports, physical activity, and the use of the country's natural environment (Tounsi A. , 2007/2008, p. 27).

Si M'hamed worked on multiple fronts and levels to organize the revolution in the fourth wilaya. Politically, he embraced a revolutionary ethic that faced the hardships of war, emphasizing that, in his eyes,

everyone is equal (Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 163). This outlook is taught to the scouts, embodying scouting principles through ideals such as self-reliance, duty, respect for others, and the virtue of doing good every day. He believed in preparing individuals to find their way in life, making it a duty to cultivate virtuous morals in boys during childhood, a stage receptive to refinement. The scout upbringing is based on virtues such as dignity, forgiveness when appropriate, loyalty, support for neighbors, protection of the weak, humility, and chastity (Tounsi A. , 2007/2008, p. 27).

This was implemented through structures that complemented each other from the base to the top and vice versa, encompassing all political and military tasks, news, and communications. There was no separation between them or specific roles for each official; instead, they organized the people into cells, regiments, and divisions within both urban and rural areas (Mujahideen, p. 35). The organization included a company specializing in collecting funds, procuring medicines, setting up centers, and monitoring news. After the eight-day strike in 1957, the Front adopted dividing the regime's branches into small cells following the destruction of the system in cities and urban centers. This system is very similar to the one used by scouts, relying on vanguards, each consisting of 6 to 8 scouts who depend on their skills and teamwork. They are led by a corporal or a vanguard commander, operating within units that form battalions, each with its own uniform and diverse training in paramilitary skills, including organized camps that teach techniques such as ropes, first aid, reconnaissance, and topographical knowledge. Mohamed Saleh Ramadan described it as a school for military training across various fields (Tounsi A. , 2007/2008, p. 27).

In the field of education, the political governor supervised the management of the schools of the Holy Qur'an, and worked to disseminate them to all parties, and financed them, such as the Zoubiria school in Medea and the Guidance School in Blida. - Judicial Officer and management. Religious and Cultural Affairs Officer. – Finance and Supply Officer (Abbas, 2005, p. 153). The leadership also worked to develop media and propaganda structures that contribute to the transmission and dissemination of the revolution.

During this period, as we mentioned earlier, interest in the health organization grew as we prepared secure headquarters to help the sick and wounded militants and provide treatment and medicines. This time also saw many students and staffs join, playing a key role in raising this organization to a higher level (Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 166). After the May 1956 strike, Youcef Khatib, Fatima Hussein, and Messaouda Baj, who were members of the Scouts, joined the revolution. (Amamra, 2006, pp. 136-137)

On the military level, he provided significant services during his leadership in the fourth wilaya. After the liberation army began forming the fourth commando unit in early 1957, the following units were established: the first area of the Ali Khoja commando, the second area of the commando Si M'hamed, the third area of the commando si Jamal, and the fourth in the northern part of the third area, including the Al-Hakimiya, Jaluliyah, and Zabaniya battalions (Chatwan, 2007-2008, pp. 96-97). The total number of these battalions reached 26, each composed of three factions, with 105 to 110 soldiers and officers, evenly distributed across different regions of the country, which led to an increase in military operations (Chatwan, 2007-2008, p. 120).

What set this stage apart, besides what was previously mentioned, was the regime's reactivation in Algiers in May 1958. Ahmed Fakhar oversaw the reorganization, and a large number of members from opposing groups, such as Bellounis, Belhaj, and Sharif bin Saidi's groups, joined during the fourth wilaya. Many military operations occurred as General de Gaulle assumed power. The four colonels held a secret meeting at El Milia near Taher from 6 December to 12, 1958. Additionally, France implemented special security plans, such as Operation al-Zurq and other cleansing operations, during the Fourth wilaya (Jabou, 2000-2001, p. 166).

On 5 May 1959, during a fierce and unequal battle, Commander Si M'hamed Bougara fought against destructive forces in the village of Ouled Bouachra, located in the municipality of Sidi Mahdjoub, Medea. He was martyred after information about his location was conveyed through analysis of the wave vibrations from the transmitter, which were triggered by mentioning his name. He was martyred alongside Rachid Bouchouchi,

Mohamed Mesbel, Ammar, Dahou, Bouziane, and ten other soldiers (Bourqaa, 2000, p. 310).

5. CONCLUSION

The Scouts were founded on a set of principles that reflect the unique behavior of its members, most notably: commitment to duty toward God and country, duty to others, and duty to oneself. These values were not just slogans but were demonstrated in the character of the martyr Si M'hamed Bougara, who served as a living example of these principles. He took responsibility for training the militants, establishing teams and regiments, and organizing them into a well-designed structure that enabled them to be more effective in the field. He was known as an experienced leader because of his methods, which helped him overcome and resolve many of the crises he faced.

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