

The Rôle of the Dār al-ḥadīth in Tlemcen in Preserving the Fundamentals of National Identity (1937-1956)

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ABSTRACT : *This study explores the pivotal role of Dar al-Hadith in Tlemcen as a cornerstone of the Algerian Muslim Scholars Association's mission to preserve national identity during the colonial era. Through historical analysis, the paper examines how the school maintained the Arabic language and Islamic teachings, safeguarding Algerian culture against French colonial influence. By reviewing archival texts and documents, the study highlights the educational and cultural significance of Dar al-Hadith, showing how it became a center for resistance and a symbol of Algerian identity.*

KEYWORDS : Dar al-Hadith, Association of Muslim Scholars, Tlemcen, Abdel Hamid Ben Badis, National Identity.

المخلص: تتناول هذه الدراسة بالتحليل والتفصيل أهم مدارس جمعية العلماء المسلمين الجزائريين، من خلال معالجة دورها وأهميتها الفكرية والتربوية في الحفاظ على اللغة العربية والدين الإسلامي انطلاقاً من النصوص والوثائق التاريخية المتوفرة، وبالتالي السعي للإحاطة بالأهمية التي اكتسبتها هذه المدرسة حين امتلكت مقومات ومؤهلات كبيرة في التربية والتعليم والإرشاد. حيث مثل التعليم العربي الحر مقاومة شرسة للجزائريين ضد كل المخططات الاستعمارية الهادفة للقضاء على التعليم ومقومات الشخصية الوطنية من لغة ودين وعادات وتقاليده، فتبنت جمعية العلماء المسلمين هذا الدور من خلال الدافع على هذه المقومات بإنشاء المدارس والزوايا والمساجد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دار الحديث، جمعية العلماء المسلمين، تلمسان، عبد الحميد ابن باديس، الهوية الوطنية.

Introduction

By the early 20th century, Algeria experienced a significant cultural revival across various domains, notably in education. Amid colonial pressure, Arab education efforts intensified, marked by the establishment of associations, publications, and educational institutions aimed at preserving the nation's identity.

The Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, founded in 1931, emerged as a central force in these efforts, establishing numerous free schools throughout Algeria. The cities of Constantine, Algiers, and Tlemcen, each rich in cultural and historical significance, served as focal points for these educational initiatives. The association sought to advance educational quality by refining curricula, recruiting qualified teachers, and fostering Islamic values through comprehensive programs. Central to this effort was the preservation of the Arabic language and Islamic religious principles.

This study focuses on the Dar al-Hadith School's foundational role in preserving Algeria's national identity, specifically its educational programs aimed at safeguarding Arabic language and Islamic teachings. The research addresses several key questions: What were the guiding principles behind Dar al-Hadith's establishment? How did its curriculum support Algerian identity? And, what was the impact of this institution on both Algerian society and colonial authorities?

Using a historical methodology, this analysis examines the social and political contributions of Dar al-Hadith's teachers and students, particularly in resisting French colonial policies. Through primary documents, reports, and historical accounts, this research evaluates the school's legacy as a symbol of cultural resilience and a catalyst for Algeria's resistance movement.

1- Construction and Establishment of Dar al-Hadith:

The construction of Dar al-Hadith was part of the projects, programs, and policies of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, spearheaded by Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis and Sheikh Bashir Ibrahimi. These efforts aimed to counter the French colonial policy that sought to obliterate the Algerian identity by eradicating the Arabic language and

Islamic religion and by building numerous French schools to force Algerian children to study there. (al-Moumin, 2019, pp. 117-130)

In resistance to this policy, the Association built free schools to nurture the youth with an Arab and Islamic education (al-Moumin, 2019, pp. 117-130). Dar al-Hadith was one such school. The idea for its construction was conceived after Sheikh Bashir Ibrahimi's visit to Tlemcen in 1923 (Al-Najah Newspaper,, Issue 1334, dated July 27, 1932, p. 2).

The idea gained further momentum with Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis's visit to Tlemcen on April 28, 1927, where he delivered lectures at the Great Mosque. (Al-Shihab Magazine,, Vol. 10, issued in October 1932, p. 17) Seven years later, on November 25-26, 1934, Sheikh Bashir Ibrahimi chaired a meeting with the notables of Tlemcen, deciding to build a school symbolizing the city's rich history and naming it Dar al-Hadith after the Dar al-Hadith in Damascus (A.w.o, 06/12/1934,N° :5808, Oran).

The initiative accelerated with the formation of a committee to oversee the construction preparations during the General Assembly of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama on December 23, 1934. Municipal Councilor Mohammed Mansouri managed to raise 100,000 old French francs (A.m.t, N° :5808, 08/12/1934), and the project advanced rapidly with Sheikh Ben Badis's visits to Tlemcen in 1932 and June 1937, promoting the project during his visits to several mosques in the western region, such as those in Beni Saf, Nedroma, and Ghazaouet (Al-Najah Newspaper,, Issue 1334, dated July 27, 1932, p. 2).

Sheikh Bashir Ibrahimi and the committee initiated the fieldwork (Bomeshra, 2013, p. 19) (Abdul Rahman Ben Bouziane, 2014, p. 101)by purchasing an old shop from a Jew named Saoud Felix Ben Yechou for 125,000 French francs, utilizing its 269-square-meter area (A.N.A, 1955, p. 2) (Courreya, 2016, pp. 531-583). The property was registered as a collective endowment in the name of 171 individuals in the Tlemcen property registry under number 1490, entry 27-28, dated February 17, 1936 (Amer, 2013, p. 120) The construction continued for 18 months, with additional funds raised from mosque donations and benefactors. (Ramdani, Issue 20, Algeria, 2010, p. 46)

2- Inauguration of Dar al-Hadith:

After the construction was completed, Sheikh Bashir Ibrahim invited 200 people (Abdul Rahman Ben Bouziane, 2014, pp. 105-107) to attend the final touches of the inauguration. (Talbi, 1968, p. 561) On Monday, Rajab 21, 1356 AH, corresponding to September 27, 1937 (Fadlallah, 1999, pp. 17-19), a large gathering of scholars, students, men, and women (Matatla, 2000, p. 183) (Ramadan, 2003, p. 53). from all over Algeria attended the opening of Dar al-Hadith (Dahmani, Issue 7, 2015, pp. 308-309) The event was graced by prominent sheikhs including Abdelhamid Ben Badis, Mubarak al-Mili, Al-Arabi Al-Tebessi, Sheikh Mohammed Khair Eddine, Mohammed Al-Aid Al-Khalifa, and Ibrahim Al-Kitani. Sheikh Ben Badis inaugurated the school, and the celebrations lasted three days and nights (Al-Shihab Magazine,, Vol. 10, issued in October 1932, p. 241).

The French authorities were alarmed by the event, prompting them to station a contingent of Senegalese Foreign Legion soldiers at the De Arslan High School as a precautionary measure (Ramadan, 2003, p. 53).

3- The School and the Preservation of National Identity:

The school was located on the second and final floor, containing several classrooms, the director's office, a small storage room, and restrooms. The Association was committed to teaching Arabic in its various branches, including poetry, rhetoric, prosody, Quranic studies, exegesis, Hadith, Islamic education (Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, pp. 185-187), history, and geography. The curriculum catered to all ages and genders, including the illiterate, whom Sheikh Bashir Ibrahim divided into two groups: the advanced group taught by him and the beginners taught by Mohammed Baba Ahmed (Amer, 2013, p. 241).

The Association believed that teaching Arabic was a means to highlight the national identity and one of the constants of the nation, as it is the language of the Quran and the homeland. Teaching it was seen as a means of liberation from French colonial policy (Thabeti, 1 Issue 2, 2020, p. 367). The initial phase of schooling at Dar al-Hadith lasted three months, starting in October and ending in January 1938, when it was closed by French authorities (al-Ibrāhīmī, 29 août 1947, p. 1). Sheikh Bashir Ibrahim continued teaching Arabic and the Quran after the dawn

and evening prayers at the mosque, which remained open (Tawilb, Issue 7, 2013, pp. 175-176).

After Sheikh Bashir Ibrahimî's release from exile in Aflou, the school reopened in 1943, adding three more classes, bringing the total to six. In this regard, he stated: "I used to give ten lessons a day, starting with a Hadith lesson after the dawn prayer and concluding with a Tafsir lesson between Maghrib and Isha (Triki, 1975, p. 167).

Additionally, preaching and guidance lessons were offered on Fridays, during the summer holidays, and in the month of Ramadan, attracting students from central, eastern, and western Algeria (Tawilb, Issue 7, 2013, pp. 177-178). The school's value lay in its pioneering role in education, with 35 out of 123 students obtaining an official primary scientific certificate issued by the Association (Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, pp. 98-99).

Dar al-Hadith adopted modern teaching methods and included religious, linguistic, biographical, geographical, historical, and arithmetic subjects in its curriculum, blending traditional and contemporary knowledge (Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, pp. 101-102). The primary school program encompassed three branches: solid Islamic education, basic Arabic culture, and elementary scientific knowledge, divided into religious, linguistic, and practical sections for both day and evening groups (Hamed, Issue 1, 2017, p. 106). The goal was to instill Arabic language, Islamic culture, and scientific knowledge by learning the Quran, Arabic language, reading, history, and geography (Makawi, 2019, pp. 320-387).

Due to the increasing number of students, especially females, the first girls' school in Algeria, Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin School, was established next to Dar al-Hadîth on May 21, 1952. It accommodated approximately 5,696 female students, teaching them ethics, childcare, and household management (Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 104).

Males	Source	Females	Source
Sheikh Bachir Ibrahimî	(Abdul Rahman Ben Bouziane, 2014, p. 164)	Khadija bendimered	(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)

Males	Source	Females	Source
Sheikh Mohammed Marzouq	(Abdul Rahman Ben Bouziane, 2014, p. 164)	Rabia Benhabib	(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Sheikh Moulay Al-Hassan Al-Baghdadi Al-Qadiri	(Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, p. 186)	Zoulikha Krari	(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Sheikh Al-Hadi Al-Senoussi	(Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, p. 186)	Fatiha Kourso	(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Mohammed Saleh Ramadan	(Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, p. 186)	Khadija Khaldoun	(Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 103)
Mohammed Baba Ahmed	(Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, p. 186)	Zoulikha Ibrahim Othman	(Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 16)
Al-chawi Boudghane	(Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, p. 186)	Khira Ibrahim Othman	(Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 103)
Abdullah Abu Anan	(Chik al-Ibrāhīmī, 29 août 1947, p. 7)	Rabia Bentabet	Mohammed Al-(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Mokhtar Al-Sabban	(Belqassem, Issue 3, 2017, p. 187)	Zoubida Bousaleh	Mohammed Al-(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Mohammed Malouka	(Chik al-Ibrāhīmī, 29 août 1947, p. 7)	Kenza Belkhodja	Mohammed Al-(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Mustafa Bentabet	(Chik al-Ibrāhīmī, 29 août 1947, p. 7)	Fadila Salaji	Mohammed Al-(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
Abdelmajid Meziane	(Chik al-Ibrāhīmī, 29	Zahiya Aboura	(Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 103)

Males	Source	Females	Source
	août 1947, p. 7)		
Mohammed Ben yelles	(Chik al-lbrāhīmī, 29 août 1947, p. 7)	Fatiha merad Boudia	(Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 103)
Aldjilali Hadjadj	(Chik al-lbrāhīmī, 29 août 1947, p. 7)	Rachida Bendimred	Mohammed Al-(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)
abdelwaheb Benmansour	(A.W.O., April 3, 1951, p. 1)	Zoulikha Kour (Blind)	Mohammed Al-(Fadlallah, 1999, p. 16)

Table 1. Table of the Key Teachers at Dar al-Hadith

Through the table, we deduce the succession of a large number of teachers at Dar al-Hadith School, estimating their total at approximately thirty teachers, fifteen of whom were male and fifteen females. Among them were individuals with special needs, such as Zuleikha Kour, who was blind.

The school successfully influenced students and the younger generation through the Association’s program, which played a significant role in nurturing them according to Islamic principles and instilling a sense of national pride. In this way, it became one of the bastions and tools of cultural resistance against the colonial cultural project that aimed to suppress Algerian knowledge and erase its identity. It made a significant step in purifying Islamic beliefs and practices from the harm of innovations and the negative practices associated with some Sufi orders. The school also played a pioneering role in the fields of education and uniting efforts to confront French colonialism.

Name	Alias (if any)	Martyrdom
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Name	Alias (if any)	Martyrdom
Meliha Hamidou	Ben Ali Boudghane (Colonel Lotfi)	Mohammed Ghazlawi
Aouicha Hadj Sliman	Djilali Dali Yousef	Jaloul Ghazlawi
Kamal Kourso	Abdullah Kerzabi	Rashid Reda Qara Turki
djamal Abadji	Qada Marzouq	Nour al-Din ? [Thus
Abdelrezzaq Abadji	Munir Maghili	Mohammed Qada Qalush
Othman Mohammed Ibrahim	Jalali Sari	Munir Kour
Aziz El Saban	Mohammed Ben Yahi	Mohammed Al-Kabir Kahya Thani
Mohammed Al- Saghir Rahil	Mohammed Shaqroun	Hussein Alali
Hadj Hennawi	Ahmed Ben Shakrah	Abdel Razzaq Sari
Sharqi Ahmed Yahyaoui	Qaidar Mahaji	Mokhtar Ghazlawi
Abdel Razzaq Bakhti	Abdel Hafiz Boudraa	Abdel Karim Bouayad
Mustafa Baba Ahmed	Munir Dib	Shakri Alali
Ali Khadim	Mohammed Ould Ahmed Ramadan	Mohammed Khair al-Din Qaruzan
Mohammed Hussein Bufordah	Abdel Hamid Balsaoud	Hussein Kour
Said Ahmed Mazoui Khayat	Abdel Karim Ben Shu'ara	Abdel Hamid Qurti
Hassan Shihmi	Mustafa Ben Shu'ara	

Table 2: Table of Some Students of Dar al-Hadith Who Martyred
 During the Algerian Revolution

Dar al-Hadith School had a crucial role in teaching Algerian youth national values, with many of its students joining the struggle against the French enemy by participating in the liberation revolution. Among them were figures such as the martyr Ali Boudghane, known as Colonel Lotfi, commander of the Fifth Province, as well as Maliha Hamidou and Aouicha Hadj Sliman

The school serves as the ideal place for building character and identity, as Dar al-Hadith is a comprehensive institution designed in beautiful Islamic, Arab, and Andalusian architectural styles. It operates based on programs and curricula that emphasize a true connection to the homeland, which is essential for sustaining, deepening, and building a strong national identity.

Conclusion:

This study concludes that Dar al-Hadith was more than just a school; it was a powerful symbol of Algerian cultural resilience. Founded by the Association of Muslim Scholars, Dar al-Hadith became a stronghold of Arabic language and Islamic teachings, playing a significant role in shaping Algeria's national identity during a period of intense colonial pressure.

The school's establishment, curriculum, and influence exemplify the determined efforts of Algerian scholars to protect and nurture their heritage. Even in the face of colonial restrictions, Dar al-Hadith stood as a beacon of resistance, empowering generations of Algerians to embrace their cultural roots. This legacy underscores the school's lasting importance in Algeria's history and its contribution to the broader struggle for independence.

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“Appendix 1: Photograph of the teachers at Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin School.”



Source: (Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 98)

“Appendix2: Celebration of the Inauguration of Dar al-Hadith.”



Source : (Kalla, Issue 2, 2022, p. 98)