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Factors Behind the Spread of the Wahhabi Movement in Algeria and Its Impact on the Scholars of Algerian Muslim Ulama Association

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Abstract:

The study of Islamic movements in Algeria is of crucial importance, as it contributes to understanding the emergence of sects and schools, as well as discerning the doctrinal and intellectual differences between each movement. Algeria has witnessed the presence of multiple Islamic schools of thought since the early Islamic conquest, and while historical studies have adequately addressed the earlier phases, contemporary scholarship has turned its attention toward modern Islamic movements that influenced Algerian scholars. Among the most significant of these was the movement of Sheikh Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, commonly referred to as the Wahhabi movement. This movement was among the most widespread in the twentieth century.

This paper aims to examine the factors that facilitated the spread of Wahhabism in Algeria and to assess its impact on the scholars of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama.

Keywords: Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Wahhabi movement, Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, Algeria.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Algeria has witnessed several religious transformations following the Islamic conquest. These fluctuations were often linked to the rise of various Islamic dynasties that established themselves in the region. After the spread of pure Islam by the end of the first Islamic century, certain states emerged that adopted specific doctrinal orientations. For instance, the Rustamid dynasty embraced the Khārijite ideology represented by Ibāḍism, which was introduced to the Central Maghreb (present-day Algeria) by its propagators (Al-Ḥarīrī, 1987, p.71). Later, the Fāṭimid dynasty, founded upon Ismā‘īlī-Shī‘ī beliefs, came into power and sought to suppress all manifestations of Sunni religiosity rooted in the Mālikī school of law (al-Mīlī, 1986, p.132).

Following the fall of the Fāṭimids, Mālikism was restored as the dominant school in the Central Maghreb. Yet, doctrinal disagreements persisted as Ash‘arite theology spread throughout Algeria in

the fourth Islamic century (**Al-Qīlālī, 2019**). This introduced diversity among the adherents of the ḥadīth-oriented school and those aligned with Ash‘arism.

Ash‘arī scholars in both Egypt and the Maghreb began producing works that systematically elaborated their theological positions, whereas the ḥadīth-based school of theology remained largely confined to Ḥanbalīs in the eastern Islamic world, particularly in Damascus, until the eighteenth century. It was in this period that the movement of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, in collaboration with Prince Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd, reinvigorated Ḥanbalī theology in Najd and the Ḥijāz. This revival gained momentum, especially after the incorporation of Mecca and Medina into the domain of Ibn Sa‘ūd, thereby ending Ottoman sovereignty over the holy cities.

The annual Hajj and ‘Umra pilgrimages provided opportunities for North African scholars to meet their Najdi counterparts who had embraced Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s teachings. These encounters often led to debates and discussions, which in turn shaped scholarly attitudes—some Algerian scholars were influenced by Wahhabi doctrines, while others opposed them. This pattern can be traced as early as the nineteenth century and continued into the early twentieth century.

Among those most notably influenced by the Wahhabi movement were members of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama (**Jam‘iyyat Al-‘Ulamā’ Al-Muslimīn Al-Jazā’iriyyīn**). Their writings, particularly in newspapers and journals during the 1920s and 1930s, reflect this influence. This article, therefore, undertakes a close reading of selected writings and opinions of prominent scholars within the Association to assess the extent of Wahhabi influence.

The central research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- How did the Wahhabi movement originate in the Arabian Peninsula?
- What factors contributed to its spread across the Maghreb, and Algeria in particular?
- How were its early manifestations received in Algeria?
- What led certain scholars of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama to adopt and defend Wahhabi principles?

Previous Studies

Several studies have addressed the influence of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb on the reformist orientation of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, particularly under the leadership of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādīs. These works have highlighted aspects of Wahhabi impact on Algerian reformist thought. Among the most notable are the following:

‘**Uwīs, ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm (1985)**: The Influence of Imam Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Call on Reformist Islamic Thought in Algeria. This study examined the influence of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s ideas in Algeria by focusing on specific figures such as Ibn Bādīs, al-Ṭayyib al-‘Uqbī, and al-Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī.

Marghīt, Muḥammad (2014): Issues of the Reformist Movement in the Thought of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādīs, Department of History, University of Constantine 2. This study discussed points of similarity and divergence between the two reformist movements, as well as the extent to which Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s movement influenced Ibn Bādīs and his later views.

Lūṣayf, Fawziya (2016): Doctrinal Thought Between the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and the Wahhabi Movement, University of Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir, Constantine. The research aimed to compare the doctrinal frameworks of both movements, highlighting similarities and differences from her perspective.

Al-Murādī, Farīd (2005): The Position of Algerian Scholars Toward Imam Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and His Salafī Call. This work compiled the statements and opinions of scholars of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama as they appeared in newspapers and journals affiliated with the Association.

1. Defining the Wahhabi Movement (The Call of Sheikh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb)

1.1. Origin of the Term

The Wahhabi movement is a reformist Islamic political and religious movement that emerged in the Arabian Peninsula at the end of the twelfth Islamic century under the leadership of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792). The movement called for a return to the foundations of Islamic creed (‘Aqīda), emphasizing the realization of monotheism (Tawḥīd) and the rejection of polytheistic practices, superstitions, and innovations. Thus, it was not a new legal school (Madhhab) nor an invented path, but rather a revivalist current adhering to the methodology of the early generations (Al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ). (Ben Abdul-Muhsin, 1419 AH, p. 149)

The designation Wahhabi was initially employed by opponents of the movement as a pejorative label meant to dissuade Muslims from joining it. Critics claimed that it represented a novel sect within Islam. In reality, its adherents upheld the creed of the early Muslims, the four imams, and those who followed them faithfully (Al-Muqadam, 2008, p. 37). In matters of jurisprudence, they aligned themselves with the school of Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, known as the Imam of Sunnah and Ḥadīth. In the early stages, followers of Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb identified themselves as Al-Muwaḥḥidūn (unitarians) or Al-Salafiyyūn (Salafis).

The widespread use of the term Wahhabi can be traced back to the Ottoman Turks and Sufi shaykhs who were at odds with Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers. In an attempt to discredit the movement, they associated it with the name of his father, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Sulaymān Āl Musharraf (Al-Sheikh, 1971), a well-known scholar. It would not have served their purpose to name the movement after its actual founder, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, since calling it “the Muhammadan Call” (Al-da‘wa Al-Muḥammadiyya) might have lent it popular legitimacy. Consequently, the term Wahhabi gained traction in historical and scholarly discourse. Ironically, the

Ottoman efforts to discredit the movement by this labeling inadvertently contributed to its notoriety and spread across the Muslim world.

1.2. Biography of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

Lineage and Birth:

He was al-Imām Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Sulaymān Āl Musharraf al-Tamīmī al-Najdī, born in 1703 CE in the village of al-‘Uyayna, north of Riyadh. He came from a scholarly family; his father was a distinguished jurist, and his grandfather Sulaymān was considered the leading scholar of Najd in his time (Āl al-Shaykh Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, 2003, p. 5).

Educational Background:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb memorized the Qur’ān before the age of ten and studied jurisprudence extensively. He developed a passion for the works of Qur’ānic exegesis and ḥadīth and was particularly influenced by the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. Among his notable teachers were Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sayf al-Najdī and the jurist Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī, who opposed rigid adherence to madhhab partisanship—a stance that deeply shaped Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s outlook (Zāhir, 2003, p. 35).

His scholarly journeys took him to Mecca, Medina, Basra, Damascus, and other centers of learning. Despite facing hostility in certain places (notably Basra), he returned to Najd and began openly calling for a revival of pure monotheism, the eradication of innovations (bid‘a), and the dismantling of practices inconsistent with Islam. Supported initially by ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥamad ibn Mu‘ammar, the Emir of al-‘Uyayna, and later by Prince Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd of Dir‘iyya, his movement gained political and military backing, allowing its influence to spread throughout Najd, the Ḥijāz, parts of Yemen, and eventually to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Impact Beyond Arabia:

His movement resonated far beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Reformist figures across the Islamic world—such as al-Ālūsī in Baghdad, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Egypt, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī in Damascus, Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān in India, and Amīr ‘Alī in Calcutta—were influenced by his call to revive Islam on the basis of Qur’ān and Sunnah.

Works:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb authored numerous works distinguished by clarity of expression and reliance on Qur’ān and Sunnah. His writings consistently centered on ‘aqīda. Among his most important contributions are:

Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (The Book of Monotheism)

Kashf al-Shubuhāt (Removal of Doubts)

Al-Kabā’ir (Major Sins)

Al-Uṣūl al-Thalātha (The Three Principles)

Al-Qawā'id al-Arba'a (The Four Foundations)

Summaries of Ibn al-Qayyim's Zād al-Ma'ād and other works.

His fatwas and treatises were later compiled into the multi-volume collection Majmū' Mu'allafāt al-Imām Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb under the supervision of Imam Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd University.

Death:

Sheikh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb died on Monday, June 18, 1792 (at the end of Shawwal 1206 AH) in the city of Al-Dir'iyyah, after a period of illness. He was buried in Al-Dir'iyyah, which was then the capital of the First Saudi State (Al-Ansari, 1995 [1416 AH], p. 152).

2. The Spread of the Wahhabi Da'wa in Algeria during the Nineteenth Century

One of the most significant factors that enabled the arrival of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's call to the Maghreb in general, and Algeria in particular, was the Ḥijāzī pilgrimages undertaken by Maghrebi travelers. These pilgrimages included not only scholars and jurists but also political figures and members of ruling elites. Their presence in Mecca and Medina exposed them to the influence of Wahhabi doctrines, which were actively supported by local rulers, most notably Prince Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd. Since scholars of Najd did not traditionally travel to the western Maghreb to propagate their views, it was primarily through the channel of pilgrimage and travel that Wahhabi ideas reached North Africa.

The earliest instances of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's teachings appearing in the Maghreb were recorded in Tunisia, where his treatises condemning intercession through saints and practices at graves sparked strong opposition among Tunisian scholars. Responses included a treatise by Shaykh Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar ibn Qāsim al-Maḥjūb, the mufti of Tunis (d. 1807 CE) (Ibn Abī al-Ḍiyāf, 2001), as well as a refutation by Shaykh Ismā'īl al-Tamīmī (d. 1832 CE) titled al-Minaḥ al-Ilāhiyya fī Ṭams al-Ḍalāla al-Wahhābiyya (Al-Tamīmī, 2016).

Given the geographical proximity of Algeria to Tunisia, these polemics inevitably reached Algerian scholars, who thus gained an early and partial impression of Wahhabi teachings. Additionally, the anti-Wahhabi propaganda of the Ottoman authorities played a role in shaping perceptions, as scholars in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia wrote extensively against the movement. Nevertheless, not all rulers succumbed to this campaign; Sultan Mawlāy Sulaymān of Morocco, for instance, resisted the negative portrayal of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's teachings.

In Algeria itself, some scholars helped disseminate Wahhabi ideas—either critically or sympathetically—through their pilgrimage experiences. Two notable examples of such encounters are the following:

2.1. Sheikh Abū Rās al-Ma‘askarī (d. 1823 CE)

In one of his writings, Sheikh Abū Rās al-Ma‘askarī recounts his meeting in 1811 CE with a group of Wahhabi scholars—nine in total. They debated issues such as the use of prayer beads, the recitation of the devotional work *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt*, and the demolition of shrines built over the graves of saints (Al-Ma‘askarī, 1986, pp. 118–119). Abū Rās maintained that he bested them with argument and evidence, causing them to retract some of their claims.

Researchers have differed in interpreting this episode. Some, such as al-Mahdī al-Bū‘Abdalī (al-Bū‘Abdalī & al-Akhḍarī, n.d.) and ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm ‘Uwīs, saw it as evidence that Abū Rās was persuaded by Wahhabi doctrines (‘Uwīs, 1985, p. 13). Others, however, argue that he merely defended his own Mālikī-Ash‘arī orientation and was not genuinely influenced by Wahhabism (Faḡīqī, 2020).

2.2. Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Sanūsī al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 1859 CE)

Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Sanūsī of Mostaganem traveled twice to the Ḥijāz, where he engaged with Najdi scholars shaped by Wahhabi teachings. He absorbed much of their emphasis on combating innovations and superstitions, to the extent that some suspected him of inclining toward Wahhabi principles (Arslān, 1973, p. 399).

The Sanūsīyya order he later founded bore similarities to Wahhabism in its austere practices and its rejection of excessive Sufi rituals. Egyptian writer ‘Abbās al-‘Aqqād noted that the Sanūsīyya, active in desert regions, closely resembled Wahhabism in their zeal, their rejection of superstitions, and their call to return to the Qur’ān and Sunnah (Al-‘Aqqād, 2006, p. 74).

From a political perspective, Abū al-Qāsim Sa‘d Allāh observed that opinions diverged regarding the Sanūsīyya’s position toward Ottoman authority. Some viewed the movement as calling for the removal of unjust rulers and for the establishment of a universal Muslim imamate independent of hereditary monarchy, which drew comparisons to the Wahhabi movement (Saadallāh, 2007, p. 263). Despite these similarities, al-Sanūsī retained a distinctly Sufi character in his movement, establishing *zāwiyas* in the Ḥijāz and Libya. Unlike Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, he did not demolish shrines or domes over saints’ graves, lacking the material and political support that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had secured from Ibn Sa‘ūd.

His Algerian followers maintained contact with him, especially those involved in anti-French resistance. Among them was Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Sharīf, leader of resistance in Laghouat, Touggourt, and the Awlād Nā’il region, who corresponded with al-Sanūsī to update him on local conditions (Al-Dajjānī, 1967, p. 295).

3. Factors Behind the Influence of Wahhabism on the Scholars of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama

3.1. Pilgrimages to the Ḥijāz

The earliest signs of the Association's scholars being influenced by Sheikh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's reformist call came through their journeys to the Ḥijāz. A particularly significant moment was the meeting between al-Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādīs in Medina. Their encounter was foundational for the establishment of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. Al-Ibrāhīmī recounts this providential meeting as follows:

“It was among the divine decrees and hidden blessings for Algeria that, after I had settled in Medina for over a year, my brother and future companion in the struggle, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādīs—the most learned scholar of North Africa, without exaggeration, and the builder of Algeria's intellectual, literary, social, and political renaissance—arrived. We became inseparable.” (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, p. 278).

He further describes their nightly discussions:

“Every night, after performing the final 'Ishā' prayer in the Prophet's Mosque, we would go to my home and spend hours in deep conversation until dawn, when the mosque reopened for the Fajr prayer. This continued throughout Ibn Bādīs's three-month stay in Medina. Those continuous night sessions were devoted to planning the means for Algeria's revival and outlining detailed programs for comprehensive reform. These ideas, which were at the time only images in our minds, were later realized, by God's grace, after about fifteen years. I testify before God that those nights of 1913 were the very moments when the foundations of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama were laid, although the Association only formally emerged in 1931.” (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, p. 278).

From this testimony, it becomes evident that their first meeting took place in Medina in 1913. Ibn Bādīs remained there for three months, while al-Ibrāhīmī had been living in Medina since 1911 and stayed until 1917 due to the political upheavals following the Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule and the subsequent deportations of Medina's inhabitants to Syria (known as al-Safar Barlik) (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, p. 275).

This raises the question: Was a three-month stay sufficient for Ibn Bādīs to be influenced by Wahhabi teachings? Or was it al-Ibrāhīmī's six-year immersion in Medina, where Wahhabi ideas were dominant, that shaped their joint reformist vision?

Although Ibn Bādīs had been thoroughly trained in Mālikī and Ash'arī traditions during his education in Algeria and at the Zaytūna University in Tunis, his exposure to Wahhabi-inspired reform in Medina—facilitated by al-Ibrāhīmī—likely offered him a clearer picture of the movement.

At the same time, another Algerian scholar, al-Ṭayyib al-'Uqbī, was residing in Medina. Having

emigrated there with his family as a child, he absorbed the Wahhabi environment firsthand (**Ṭīṭūsh, 2020, pp. 384–399**). Although some accounts suggest that he met Ibn Bādīs and al-Ibrāhīmī during their stay, the stronger evidence points to their meeting later in Algeria during the early 1920s.

3.2. Books, Journals, and Newspapers

The influence of Wahhabism on the Association was not limited to pilgrimages. Books, journals, and newspapers played a crucial role in transmitting Wahhabi ideas. Works such as *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and *al-Uṣūl al-Thalātha* were printed in Algeria (for example, by the Rodosi Press in 1932). Periodicals from Saudi Arabia, such as the newspaper *Umm al-Qurā* and the journal *al-Shūrā*, were frequently reprinted or cited by the Association's own press.

A particularly significant vehicle for Wahhabi ideas was the journal *al-Manār*, edited by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. In 1926, he published a series of articles under the title “The Wahhabis and the Ḥijāz”, which detailed the history of the movement, its link to Ibn Taymiyya, and its reliance on his works (***Al-Manār*, 1926**). In 1928, *al-Manār* ran another series titled “Sunnis and Shī‘a, or Wahhabis and Rāfiḍa”, which engaged critically with Shī‘ī arguments against Wahhabism and Ibn Taymiyya (***Al-Manār*, 1928**).

3.3. The Incorporation of Mecca and Medina into Saudi Rule

The fall of the Ottoman Caliphate and the incorporation of Mecca and Medina into the Saudi state in 1924–1925 (***Naṣīf, 1930, pp. 199–200***) marked a turning point for the spread of Wahhabism. The Saudi rulers adopted Wahhabi doctrines as the state creed, financed the printing of its works, sponsored articles in journals and newspapers, and established institutions to promote it.

This political transformation had a profound impact on Algerian scholars. Ibn Bādīs, for instance, praised King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Sa‘ūd in an article reprinted from *al-Shūrā*. He referred to Ibn Sa‘ūd as “the Arab Salafī king whom God has honored with the guardianship of the sacred sanctuary, under whose rule security, justice, refinement, and pure religion now flourish throughout the Ḥijāz.” (***Ibn Badis Al-Sanhaji, 1968, Vol. 4, p. 230***).

In that article, he also cited a journalist who described Wahhabism as “a reformist movement in Islam initiated by the great Najdī scholar Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in the early eighteenth century, aiming to purify Islam of innovations and superstitions, and to elevate it above the worship of saints.” (***Ibn Badis Al-Sanhaji, 1968, Vol. 4, p. 236***).

Ibn Bādīs frequently highlighted Saudi defenses of Wahhabism. For instance, he republished King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s speeches from *Umm al-Qurā*, where the monarch insisted that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had introduced no new creed or madhhab, but merely upheld the teachings of the four Sunni imams. Moreover, in *Al-Sunna* newspaper, Ibn Bādīs lauded the Saudi government as “a Sunni state that implements Islamic law in belief, ethics, and legislation, ensuring unparalleled security and justice

throughout its vast Arab territory.”

Similarly, Mubārak al-Mīlī emphasized the significance of the Saudi state in his *History of Algeria in Ancient and Modern Times*, describing it as a beacon of Islamic revival. He even dedicated his work *Risālat al-Shirk wa Maẓāhirihi* to King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and his sons, Saud and Fayṣal (**Al-Murādī, 2005**).

4. Examples of Wahhabi Influence in the Newspapers and Journals of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama

As noted earlier, the writings of Ibn Bādīs in Association-affiliated newspapers such as *al-Sunna* and *al-Shihāb* reveal his admiration and praise for the Wahhabi movement, as well as for the Saudi rulers who sponsored its spread. Yet Ibn Bādīs was not alone—other members of the Association also expressed similar sentiments in their publications.

The establishment of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama in 1931 significantly contributed to the dissemination of Wahhabi ideas. The French colonial administration quickly recognized this influence, monitoring the Association’s activities, gatherings, and members. In 1933, the General Secretary for Native Affairs, Michel, issued a directive calling for the surveillance of scholars sympathetic to Wahhabism, attributing their influence to pilgrims returning from Mecca and Medina (**Al-Baṣā’ir, no. 31, 1936**).

The colonial authorities also observed growing hostility between Association scholars and leaders of Sufi orders, who had traditionally aligned with French interests in Algeria. These Sufi shaykhs perceived Wahhabi-inspired reformism as a direct threat, fearing that their followers would abandon them for the Association (**Al-Shihāb, 1935**).

4.1. Sheikh al-Ṭayyib al-‘Uqbī

Among the Association’s scholars, al-Ṭayyib al-‘Uqbī was perhaps the most openly influenced by Wahhabi teachings. Having grown up in Medina, he absorbed Wahhabi principles directly, and upon his return to Algeria, he became one of the most vocal critics of Sufi practices. When accused of being Wahhabi, he responded:

“They say my creed is the creed of the Wahhabis. I replied: If that is so, then the Wahhabis are the true monotheists.” (**Al-Shihāb, 1927**).

In an article in al-Samīr, Dr. Abū ‘Alī Khayr Allāh cited al-‘Uqbī’s declaration:

“When these detractors increased their slander by calling our movement Wahhabi, al-Ṭayyib al-‘Uqbī of Algeria replied: If Wahhabism means worshipping God alone in accordance with what He has legislated for His servants, then that is our creed, our religion, and our community. Upon it we live,

upon it we shall die, and upon it we shall be resurrected, if God wills.” (Al-Samīr, 1934).

4.2. Sheikh Mubārak al-Mīlī

Another example is Mubārak al-Mīlī, who also exhibited strong Wahhabi influence. His treatise *al-Shirk wa Maẓāhirihi* (Polytheism and Its Manifestations) closely aligned with Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. In the introduction, al-Mīlī candidly acknowledged drawing upon Wahhabi scholarship:

“After completing my work, and before sending it to print, I received a gift from Jeddah—from my brother in God, Sayyid Muḥammad Naṣīf. It contained the book *Fath al-Majīd fī Sharḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. I extracted valuable notes from it, which I appended to my book in their relevant places, citing the source. Had I received it earlier, it would have spared me much effort in devising and arranging headings.” (Al-Mīlī, 2001, p. 38).

Al-Mīlī also recorded how critics disparaged the Association by branding its scholars Wahhabis:

“They hurled at us accusations they scarcely understood. They claimed we were nationalists working for independence, spread rumors among the common folk that we were Wahhabis and Mu‘tazilites, and hurled other baseless charges—exaggerated slanders as fanciful as the tales of ghouls, though equally effective in frightening the ignorant.” (Al-Mīlī, 2001, p. 167).

The examples cited above represent only a small portion of the abundant evidence found in the Association’s newspapers and journals. Collectively, they demonstrate a consistent pattern: the scholars of the Association not only defended Wahhabism against its detractors but also actively praised its principles and the Saudi rulers who promoted them. In particular, the Association strongly echoed Wahhabi opposition to grave worship and shrine veneration, viewing their own struggle against Sufi orders in Algeria as parallel to Wahhabi reforms in the Ḥijāz.

Conclusion

This article has examined the factors that contributed to the spread of Wahhabi thought in Algeria by identifying both internal and external reasons that led certain scholars of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama to embrace this movement in its formative years. These factors can be summarized as follows:

1. Pilgrimage and Migration to the Ḥijāz:

The journeys of Algerian pilgrims and migrants to the holy cities were a primary avenue through which they encountered Wahhabi teachings, which they later transmitted upon returning home.

2. The Incorporation of the Ḥijāz into Saudi Rule:

The entry of Mecca and Medina under Saudi authority significantly bolstered the dissemination of Wahhabi ideas. With the Saudi state adopting Wahhabism as its official creed, these teachings were

spread more widely through political and material support, including the sponsorship of Ḥanbalī doctrine.

3. Books, Journals, and Newspapers:

The circulation of Wahhabi works and reformist periodicals from the Mashriq, such as al-Manār, along with Saudi publications, played a vital role in clarifying Wahhabi principles for North African audiences, who had previously relied on hostile or incomplete portrayals.

4. The Influence of the Association's Scholars:

The writings of Ibn Bādīs, al-Ibrāhīmī, al-‘Uqbī, and al-Mīlī reveal a clear engagement with Wahhabi doctrines. Through their articles, books, and sermons, they defended the movement against accusations, praised Saudi rulers for their role in spreading it, and sought to replicate aspects of its reformist agenda in Algeria.

In conclusion, the Wahhabi movement provided both a theological framework and a practical model that inspired many members of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. While their embrace of Wahhabi principles was not absolute—given Algeria's own doctrinal and historical specificities—the movement undeniably shaped the Association's reformist discourse and its struggle against what it deemed innovations, superstitions, and colonial-backed religious authorities.

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