

Muslim women's issues in the interests of the Algerian reform movement press 1925-1939

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Abstract:

In this scholarly contribution, we aim to shed light on various issues concerning Algerian Muslim women as addressed by the prominent newspapers of the reformist movement in Algeria during the period from 1925 to 1939. This timeframe coincides with the outbreak of World War II. The issue of Algerian women was notably raised by reformist figures through the various newspapers they published, driven by the circumstances of colonial domination under which Algerian women found themselves.

In religious matters concerning women, reformist newspapers brought forward numerous issues such as the hijab (veil), polygamy, dowries, and more. On the cultural front, they emphasized the necessity of educating and enlightening women, following the footsteps of their Eastern and even European counterparts.

Furthermore, the social aspect of women was also of great concern to reformist newspapers. They highlighted the value of women within the society and stressed the importance of their roles, which were no less significant than those of men.

Keywords:

Reform, Women, Hijab, Clothing, Education, Polygamy, Al-Shihab, Al-Basa'ir.

Introduction

The issue of women was prominently addressed by reformist men in Algeria from 1925 until the outbreak of World War II through various newspapers they had published. This attention to women's issues was a direct result of the challenging circumstances Algerian women faced under the dominant colonial conditions.

In matters related to religion and women, reformist newspapers tackled numerous issues, such as the hijab (veil), polygamy, and dowry. On the cultural front, they advocated for the necessity of educating and enlightening women, following the examples of their counterparts in other parts of the world. Furthermore, the social sphere of women also captured the attention of reformist newspapers, where they emphasized the value of women within society and highlighted the significance of their roles, which were no less important than those of men.

Through this article, we aim to highlight how the reformist press addressed these issues and the different perspectives they took.

Before delving into the religious issues concerning Algerian women, it is essential to first address the general religious context in Algeria during the colonial period. Since 1830, mosques and religious institutions were incorporated into the properties of the French state and came under its control. Many of them were even demolished, and Muslims were not allowed to conduct their religious ceremonies in these places.¹ The purpose behind this was to replace Islam with Christianity, a fact confirmed by General "Dolamour Yassir," who stated, "We entered the city of Algiers and turned schools into warehouses, barracks, and stables. We seized the properties of mosques and schools, thinking that we would teach the Arab people the principles of the French Revolution. Unfortunately, Muslims saw this as an attack on their faith and beliefs." It's worth noting that Algeria had numerous endowments (waqf) that served the poor, religion, and education, totaling around 2600 properties, including the "Waqf Sabil Al-Khairat" and the "Waqf of Mecca and Medina"²

Furthermore, French authorities worked to spread their missionary policy among the Algerian population, employing both peaceful means such as providing humanitarian services and coercive methods, including erasing religious symbols by closing Sufi lodges, religious centers, and subordinating Islamic jurisdiction to French courts. An illustrative example of this was the conversion of the "Ketchaoua Mosque" in Algiers into the Church of Saint "Philip" during the era of de Rovigo.³

When it comes to discussing religious issues concerning women, the writings in various reformist newspapers addressed several matters, including:

A: The Issue of Women's Veiling

The issue of women's veiling has been extensively discussed, and many books have been written on the topic. Among these books is "Al-Libaab fi Ahkam Al-Zeenah wal Libaas wal Hijab," authored by Muhammad ibn Mustafa ibn Khwaja in the year 1907. In this book, he elaborated on the rules of adornment for women,⁴ stating that it encompasses everything that enhances a woman's beauty, including clothing. He also emphasized the importance of modesty and advocated for women to cover themselves with clothing made from materials such as wool, cotton, or linen. According to him, for a woman to have value in society, she should observe veiling.⁵

This viewpoint is echoed in the book "Kashf Al-Niqaab an Asraar Al-Hijab" by Muhammad ibn Al-Amir Abdulkadir. It is also suggested that the practice of veiling is not exclusive to Muslims but rather an ancient custom prevalent among most nations. Consequently, colonial authorities worked diligently to strip Algerian women of their veils through various means. Regrettably, some women responded to these efforts, as mentioned by "Marie Bougie," by attending schools unveiled and wearing European attire.⁶

The issue of women's veiling was also extensively discussed in the reformist newspapers. "Al-Basa'ir" newspaper published an article by Mr. Mustafa ibn Haloush, in which he argued that the heavy and strict veiling of women somewhat hindered their participation in various religious, social, and other activities. He claimed that such veiling, dictated by tradition, deprived women of their rights and duties within the community, preventing them from

enjoying equal status alongside Jewish and Christian women. He contended that the heavy veil was primarily a product of excessive male control over women rather than a religious obligation.⁷

This article sparked considerable controversy, particularly from the writer "Hamza Boukoucha," who responded with another article. He argued that veiling in Islam, even if taken to an extreme, was a noble and honorable tradition that existed among Arabs and other ancient civilizations, such as Greece. Historical and religious texts indicated that even figures like Ibrahim (Abraham) had veiled their wives.⁸

The Veiling Issue: A Debate on Algerian Women's Attire

The term "hijab" refers to the covering of a woman's entire body except for her face, hands, and feet. Some argue that it is obligatory to cover the face and hands, especially among the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).^{9, 10} This led to the call for the widespread adoption of this form of veiling. In the Islamic system, women are allowed to reveal their faces and hands when necessary, such as for essential activities outside their homes. However, some individuals make the maximum requirement the starting point, going beyond face and hands to expose hair, arms, and more.¹¹

Another issue that arose was the question of the "niqab," which is the covering women use for their faces. Hamza Boukoucha believes in the necessity of women covering their faces. He views it as a means for women to resist male desires and limit their gaze, emphasizing that the woman's veil is a "religious" matter, not merely a "custom," as argued by Mustafa ibn Haloush.¹²

Amidst this conflict between the two aforementioned writers, a neutral party emerged in the form of Abu Ya'la Al-Zawi.¹³ He wrote an article aiming to clarify the intentions of both writers and reduce the intensity of the debate. Al-Zawi attempted to emphasize that Mr. Haloush did not advocate for or endorse the complete unveiling of Algerian women. The crucial aspect is not the words used but their intended meanings. As for Mr. Boukoucha, he expressed concern that Algerian women might follow the footsteps of women in Turkey and Egypt if restrictions on veiling were imposed. This demonstrates an Arab sense of pride and an Islamic protective attitude.¹⁴

The debate on the veiling issue continues, with Mr. Haloush writing another article to clarify his previous stance and respond to Boukoucha. He stated that in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), women did not adhere to the strict form of veiling that covers the face and hands, imprisoning them within their homes, and preventing them from spreading goodness and inviting believers. He argued that the issue of veiling is no longer a hidden matter, even among those with limited knowledge of religion and sociology. Scholars of religion and sociology, both in the past and present, have opined that the strict veiling of the face and hands is not the correct Islamic form of hijab, as it was not imposed by Allah or His noble Messenger.¹⁵

"Hamza Boukousha" is another writer who clarified his position in an article regarding the issue of the veil. He suggested that if "Halouche" were to replace the commonly heavy term "hijab" with the more noble term "chaste covering," it would be better. He also responded to the writer "Abi Ya'la Al-Zawawi," who commented on what "Halouche" wrote, saying that the essence lies in intentions, not in words. He further elaborated, saying, "Without words, we would not have reached the meanings," implying that "Halouche" meant every word he said about the hijab as a tradition, not as a religious obligation.¹⁶

Another writer addressed the same issue in an article, arguing that the status of women has evolved in Islamic countries compared to previous centuries. Women, who were once submerged in ignorance, illiteracy, and seclusion, now enter markets, public streets, work in various government positions, buy and sell, just like men.¹⁷ However, this does not mean that women should be lax in adhering to the Islamic requirement of modesty and not go against what God has ordained.¹⁸ He highlighted that the female's 'awrah (private parts) in front of unrelated men is a definite matter requiring the veil. In the eyes of Islamic law, a woman's entire body is 'awrah except for her face and hands, based on the Quranic verse: "And not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof..." (Quran 24:31). Likewise, it is incumbent upon men to lower their gaze.¹⁹

Among other reformist newspapers, there is the "Sunnah Al-Nabawiyyah" newspaper, which published an article titled "The Sunnah Among Algerian Women," written by Professor "Al-Zaheri." He argues that for some Algerian Muslim women, the word "Sunnah" is synonymous with both "caution" and "veil" together. They have assigned the meaning of "Sunnah" to "unveiling and exposure." To them, "Sunnah" means that women should never leave their homes, even if they are veiled. In their view, it is not permissible for women to step out of the "Sunnah" until they grow older. In their perspective, "Sunnah" signifies the highest standard of pure femininity. Furthermore, some Algerian women still believe that the veil is a symbol of honor and righteousness. According to his opinion, women who remove the veil deserve contempt and scorn.²⁰

The magazine "Al-Shihab"²¹ published an article discussing the issue of Muslim women's veiling in general during an interview with the Chief Judge of Mecca. He was asked about the ruling on lifting the veil and revealing a woman's face. He responded that it is forbidden, fearing the occurrence of temptation, based on the Quranic verse: "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful" (Quran 33:59). He also cited the hadith of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) that when riders passed by them while they were with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), they would lower a part of their garments from their heads over their faces.²²

Many have advocated for women not to unveil, considering the veil a means of preventing significant harm, and therefore, it is seen as virtuous.²³

In the same context, the issue of covering a woman's face was discussed based on a hadith narrated by Malik from Hisham bin 'Urwa from Fatimah bint al-Mundhir, who said, "We used to veil our faces while in the state of ihram, and we were with Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with them)." Veiling the face here means covering it without a niqab, where a woman lowers her garment over her face, leaving only her eyes visible. Covering the woman's face from the sight of unrelated men is mandated by the prophetic tradition during the time of ihram, which is the time of revealing the face.²⁴

The veil is considered a custom and a matter of the woman's welfare in preventing men from being attracted to women due to their appearance. When the risk of temptation is not present, it is not necessarily obligatory to cover the face, making it permissible to reveal it.²⁵

In this context, regarding the issue of a woman's religious devotion, the newspaper "Al-Basa'ir" published an article stating that Algerian women are not sufficiently religious, and what they have in their beliefs is nothing more than old superstitions. This is a result of their ignorance,²⁶ as they were immersed in outdated customs and traditions, such as seeking blessings from saints and using amulets for protection from evil spirits and the evil eye, as expressed by some of them.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon every woman blessed with knowledge and awareness to guide others to adhere to the faith and obey its commands.²⁷ The greatest responsibility facing Algerian women is the responsibility of religion, so they must nurture their hearts with true faith.

B. Polygamy:

The phenomenon of polygamy has become prevalent in Algerian society, despite being a legitimate right subject to specific conditions, as stated in the Quran: "And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]" (Quran 4:3).²⁸

The French colonial authorities claimed to have put an end to this practice, as it gradually disappeared in urban areas, becoming prevalent mainly among wealthy families. The poorer segments of society often do not practice polygamy, as some have advocated for ensuring financial stability for the man, which would discourage him from marrying multiple times. In this context, Consul "Dufal" recommended prohibiting Algerian employees in the French administration from practicing polygamy. Furthermore, the French were advised not to attend second marriage ceremonies, and French women were discouraged from entering households

with multiple wives. Studies indicate that 9% of polygamous marriages occurred in the occupied regions, while in areas not colonized by Europeans, like the Sahara, polygamy was around 50%.²⁹

This issue was a significant topic of debate and discussion in various newspapers. "Al-Basa'ir" newspaper published an article by "Mohammed Abada Al-Mili," in which he argued that normal everyday life and the efficient management of a household can only be achieved with one wife. He noted that human nature tends toward monogamy, as indicated in the Quran: "Allah has not made for a man two hearts in his interior" (Quran 33:4). This practice generates jealousy, resentment, and envy among wives. He mentioned that polygamy had been a contentious issue among the Arabs and cited the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who remained with Lady Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) for 17 years before his prophethood and 11 years after it without marrying anyone else.³⁰

However, it's important to note that the issue of polygamy does not deny what Allah has ordained, as mentioned in the Quran: "And if you fear that you will not deal justly..." The reason for its revelation was to ensure the welfare of orphans, as men would marry them for their wealth and hope to inherit from them. Hence, they were prohibited from marrying them unless they intended justice. The wisdom behind allowing polygamy is to protect those who are unable to suffice with one wife due to overpowering desires and to increase the population while closing the doors to corruption, always under the condition of justice, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever has two wives and does not treat them equally will come on the Day of Judgment with one side hanging down."³¹

In the same newspaper, an article by Mr. "Mohammed Al-Arabi Al-Harakati" was published in response to an article by "Mohammed Abada Al-Mili." He argued that this discussion comes at a time when there is a strong need to respect personal rights and that every nation has its own nature, and each individual has their own household affairs. The matter of polygamy primarily pertains to personal freedom and interests.³²

In the same context, "Abu Ya'la Al-Zawawi" consistently wrote articles discussing the issue of polygamy. He mentioned that polygamy is acceptable as long as it is based on justice and does not favor one wife over another. Allah forgives a person for what is beyond their control in terms of inclinations. He also pointed out that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) showed preference for "Aisha" (may Allah be pleased with her) over his other wives but did not differentiate in any other aspect without their consent. He even suggested that in Algeria, if the approximately ten thousand wealthy individuals capable of marrying multiple wives did so, it could potentially save around forty thousand women from difficult circumstances.³³

Another article by "Ahmed Bouzid Qusaiba" discussed the same issue. It highlighted that in his speeches, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encompassed people from various backgrounds and nations. If a community desired polygamy, he advised them to adopt what suits their circumstances from his flexible sharia. If another group chose not to practice polygamy, he told them that it is praiseworthy, as polygamy in Islam is permissible, not obligatory. It serves to fulfill natural human needs that some individuals cannot meet through monogamy. This information was taken from a lecture titled "Muhammad and Women" by the Moroccan intellectual ambassador, Mr. "Abdelqader Al-Maghribi."³⁴

Polygamy, when practiced with fairness among wives, has social benefits, including preventing adultery.³⁵ Houses of adultery used to be as common as marital homes due to excessive freedom. Polygamy also acknowledges the biological reality that women have a shorter period of fertility compared to men when they are of the same age. Men remain capable of reproduction up to around the age of eighty, while women's reproductive ability is limited to around fifty. Additionally, women are more prone to diseases related to reproduction, such as miscarriages and infertility, making them unfit for reproduction at times.³⁶

It's worth noting that Western critiques often view this practice as a social disgrace, but they may not fully understand that Islamic law places many restrictions on a man who wishes to marry multiple wives, making it a challenging endeavor.³⁷

C. Dowry (Sadaq):

Before discussing this issue, it's essential to note that the French consider Muslim women to be backward. They view the dowry or sadaq paid by the man as a price for purchasing a woman, similar to buying any commodity.³⁸ However, in Islamic Sharia, the dowry is a condition in the marriage contract. It is a sign of the man's respect and responsibility for the woman. It serves to strengthen the bond of love and compensate for any inheritance that the woman may miss out on. Allah has decreed that He would reduce the woman's share in some aspects and increase it in others.³⁹

In this regard, Sheikh Al-Bashir Al-Ibrahimi published an article stating that the issue of dowry is one of the social diseases that promote corruption. Extravagant dowries have become a source of conflict, with poor families aspiring to reach the same level as the wealthy. This situation leads to hardships and burdens. He believes that as long as women's understanding has not reached the point of recognizing these facts, our hope for rectifying this situation is weak. Some have attempted to set a fixed dowry amount that would be equal for both the rich and the poor. However, they overlooked two factors. First, some poor individuals cannot reach the specified amount, making it a burden for them. Second, rectifying this situation can only be achieved through improving morals and upbringing. It is better to set limits for the wealthy and

obligate them to follow these limits, while allowing more flexibility for the poor, enabling them to pay according to their capabilities.⁴⁰ Dowry is a fundamental condition in the marriage contract. It is not correct to say that the wife is being sold, and the husband is the buyer. Instead, the dowry serves as compensation for what the woman might miss in terms of inheritance. A woman deserves her dowry, and it is not permissible for a husband to deceive his wife. Hence, they were advised: "Do not wrong them to take away part of what you have given them unless they commit a clear immorality."⁴¹

D. Women Going to Mosques:

"Al-Shihab" recently introduced a noble prophetic saying regarding the issue of women going to mosques. Muslim reported in his Sahih with his chain of transmission from "Salem ibn Abbadallah ibn Omar ibn Muhammad" - may Allah be pleased with them - who said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) saying, 'Do not prevent your women from going to the mosques when they seek permission from you.' Bilal ibn Abdullah said, 'By Allah, we will prevent them.' Abdullah then turned towards Bilal and harshly rebuked him with words I had never heard him use before. He said, 'I am informing you about the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), and you say, 'By Allah, we will prevent them.' This implies that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) allowed women to go to the mosques and participate in the goodness, and it was confirmed that men should not prevent them. However, they should seek permission from men, and they should not display their adornment except what becomes apparent".⁴²

2. Cultural Issues of Women in Reformist Newspapers:

The cultural conditions in Algeria have garnered the attention of many reformist leaders, who have worked diligently to elevate them to the ranks of Arab-Islamic and even global cultures. They initiated efforts to promote education, opened schools for both male and female students, and even reformist newspapers did not neglect the cultural aspect. They published articles on knowledge, its significance, and the necessity of involving Algerian women in the cultural field.

Among the advocates for the importance of educating girls was Ali Merhoum, who believed it was crucial to exert maximum effort in providing Muslim girls with proper education. This would liberate them from ignorance and elevate them to a life of refinement and happiness without compromising on virtue, modesty, or breaching the boundaries of decency and respect. He emphasized the importance of not subjecting them to the French institutions that disregarded both religion and the customs ingrained in Algerian society. According to the writer, this matter deserves due attention and research to find a solution to this issue – as he put it. He believed that parents bear the responsibility of raising their daughters and guiding them towards a satisfying path, without surrendering them to the moral deviation inherent in the

French education system. This system may appear to wear the cloak of knowledge, but underneath it carries a deadly poison. This concern arises from the fear that Algerian girls might become immersed in a foreign environment that neither abides by the laws of morality nor respects the customs of Algerian society.⁴³

For a long time, Algerian Muslim women were deprived of what is commonly referred to as education. The primary reason for this unfortunate stance was the erroneous belief that educating girls would corrupt them. However, after many years, a new era dawned for Algerian women. Doors to education were opened to them, but regrettably, many parents leaned towards foreign education after initially opposing it. The primary reason for this shift was that Algerian girls desired to emulate European women in terms of civilization. Strangely, this trend followed a hierarchy from top to bottom. This form of education did not yield significant results because most female students were content with acquiring only the elementary French certificate. This type of education, which reformists labeled "false dawn," commenced in 1931 with the establishment of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. The movement followed a modern system of Arab-Islamic education.⁴⁴

Algerian women strongly supported the reformist movement. In Tlemcen and Constantine, in particular, there were remarkable examples of women contributing to the fields of reform and education. Many women willingly parted with their jewelry and possessions to support Ibn Badis Institute and the Student's House. This demonstrates the profound interest of adult women in education.⁴⁵

The woman is considered the fundamental and active element in the process of comprehensive development, given her significant impact on building society, especially concerning her role within the family as a mother who nurtures and imparts the culture of the community to her children. The social status of Algerian women has captured the attention of many reformists in various newspapers, as they have highlighted her value within society and her effective contributions.⁴⁶

In this context, the newspaper "Al-Sirat Al-Sawi" published an article titled "Who is Responsible for Preventing Our Children's Education?" In this article, it was emphasized that the issue of educating children in their religion and the language of their faith is one of the most important matters and greatest demands. This education preserves Islam in the hearts of both sons and daughters without any gender discrimination. However, there have been instances where access to this type of education was restricted, leading to increased demands for the establishment of private educational institutions.⁴⁷

Regarding the education of Algerian women, it is imperative for them to manage their households only after acquiring a certain level of intellectual and literary knowledge. When they learn to read, write, and delve into the principles of scientific truths while exploring the history of nations, their minds are prepared to accept sound opinions and reject myths and

fallacies. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage them from a young age to love virtues and seek essential knowledge. It is their right to access education and Islamic culture to emerge from the darkness of ignorance. Asserting that education is not suitable for women and does not align with their position is a grave mistake.

According to some, women are deemed fit only for household chores, disregarding that the home is the child's first school, where they learn manners and ethics. Mothers play a crucial role in nurturing their children with good upbringing. Their responsibilities extend beyond the home, as both men and women are needed in various roles, such as teachers, nurses, and midwives. If Algeria aspires to be among the distinguished nations and progressive societies, it is essential to educate both sons and daughters together, allowing them to collaborate in building their future.⁴⁸

Therefore, the Algerian Association of Muslim Scholars, within its reformist movement, dedicated its efforts to educating women who had long been deprived of education.⁴⁹ They aimed to produce educated women capable of carrying out their mission and conveying it effectively. Women rose to defend their rights and support their less fortunate sisters.⁵⁰

The association also initiated the establishment of girls' schools, including the "Aisha School" affiliated with Dar Al-Hadith in Tlemcen, named after Lady Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her). This initiative was led by Sheikh Al-Bashir Al-Ibrahimi, the founder of the scientific movement in Tlemcen.⁵¹ Sheikh Al-Arabi Al-Tubsi issued a public invitation to open this school, where he delivered a speech to women, reminding them of their duties in Islam. The school witnessed a significant influx of female students during its inauguration.⁵²

Algerian women put forth tremendous efforts in education, steadily advancing towards progress and development.⁵³ They set noble goals aimed at uplifting Muslim women to the desired level.⁵⁴ As Tlemcen was a source of culture and knowledge, the women of Tlemcen became shining examples of dedication, especially in the cultural field. They progressed through various stages, transforming from students to teachers, preachers, and guides.

The newspaper "Al-Basa'ir" published the names of successful girls from Dar Al-Hadith School in the sixth year, including names like Zahra Abouda, Khadija Khaldoun, Amina Hamidou, and Fatima Al-Zahra Tabi.⁵⁵ These girls were candidates for education in the girls' sections of Dar Al-Hadith. Many girls aspired to have institutes open to them, just as schools were opened to boys, as the elementary certificate no longer fulfilled their ambitions.⁵⁶

The call to include modern Algerian women in the field of journalism, similar to Arab women in the Arab East, such as Egypt, gained momentum. Algerian newspapers were devoid of female writers until the first Algerian female writer emerged. She wrote an article in which she admitted that she was once among the ignorant Algerian women. However, after the Algerian Association of Muslim Scholars armed itself with knowledge and provided her with education,

she praised the association, stating, "In Algeria, there is no one who works sincerely and devotedly for the good of the country and the benefit of the people except the Association of Scholars, which adheres to the Book and the Sunnah and follows the path of the righteous predecessors".

Speaking of education, the magazine "Al-Shihab" published an article titled "The New Life in Summary," emphasizing that the schools of the Algerian Association of Muslim Scholars illuminate minds, dispel the darkness of ignorance, and elevate nations to the highest ranks. There is no happiness without knowledge, and there is no knowledge without establishing schools, expanding the scope of education, and selecting competent teachers who possess qualifications, good character, and broad knowledge. Among the required education is the widespread dissemination of the Arabic language because no good is expected from a person who is ignorant of their own language.⁵⁷

From the platform of "Al-Shihab," the call was made for the necessity of educating girls. Women are humanity as a whole, contributing effectively to preserving the human species and refining its morals. In the past, France believed it was necessary to provide Muslim women with French education for its own interests. However, some argued that the budget allocated for public education in Algeria was insufficient for educating Muslim children. If the Algerian nation does not educate its sons, how can it educate its daughters?⁵⁸

3. Social Issues of Women in Reformist Newspapers

An article in the "Al-Shihab" magazine discussed the impact of women on the social structure. It emphasized that a nation is made up of mothers because women lay the cornerstone of a nation's moral values. Anyone who disrespects or mistreats a woman is a sign of their own degradation. Conversely, treating women with respect reflects the person's fundamental decency. The magazine also published that society evolves with the progress of women. When we seek a balance between the Western and Islamic worlds, we find that the latter sometimes stagnates due to the subjugation of women.⁵⁹

In contrast, the West advances because its women hold influence and respect, supporting men in various fields. This disparity in policy, ethics, and laws between nations can be traced back to the role of women within them, as they are the vital, influential factor in the stages of life.⁶⁰

B. Women's Roles and Value in Society

While men have their responsibilities and roles, women also have numerous tasks and duties that should not be overlooked. Women are the complementary half of men, and they should prepare themselves to be beneficial members of society, supporting and standing by men. They must realize that they are Algerian, and they should not neglect their responsibilities or lose their identity.

In this context, "Al-Basa'ir" newspaper published an article about the value of women in society. It emphasized that women are like the soul of a nation. When they are righteous, the entire nation becomes righteous, but when they become corrupt, the nation follows suit. Women are the first teachers, imparting valuable knowledge. Children look up to them as beacons of guidance in times of darkness. Thus, women are the other half of men. While men are responsible for providing financially, women have sacred roles in managing the household and raising children. The newspaper also stated that the value of women in society and their active roles have existed since ancient times. When Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) was cast into the sea and picked up by Pharaoh's family, it was a woman from Pharaoh's family who spoke out in defense of Moses, saying, "Do not kill him; [he may be] a benefit for us, or we may adopt him as a son." Moreover, Arab women in the past used to participate alongside men in wars, tending to the wounded and providing comfort to fighters. One woman alone can instill hope in a man. To make their roles more effective, it is essential to educate women, especially in religious matters, such as lowering their gaze and concealing their adornments except what is apparent. Some may oppose this by arguing that women may use religious lessons as a pretext to mingle with men. Therefore, there was a call from the writer Al-Yahyawī to all fathers to treat their daughters equally with their sons and not differentiate between them. Even if they fear education may lead to unwanted outcomes, ignorance is a more significant threat. He expressed this sentiment through poetic verses: ⁶¹

"Teach your daughters and do not fear harm,
For the era of ignorance has passed and hidden itself". ⁶²

One of the social phenomena that Algerian women have faced is:

B. Divorce Issue:

The matter of marriage is a religious issue that should not be subject to individual customs or preferences. Islam lays down its orders and prohibitions. It mandates the consultation of the daughter and requires the man to discuss his qualities and flaws before her, just as she does with him. This is because marriage is a matter of life and the formation of a family. If a woman cannot find the desired match, what is known as divorce may occur. ⁶³

When a man decides to divorce his wife and dissolve the marriage contract, we often find the woman's guardian willing to give up all her possessions in exchange for the husband reconsidering his decision. ⁶⁴ Here, the issue of dowry becomes apparent, which has burdened many fathers. In many cases, a father would gift his daughter's husband a house. However, when it came time to marry his second daughter, he might not have anything to offer, leading to a situation where he marries off his daughter without considering anything other than the financial aspect. How many fathers married their daughters to drunkards because they had

given away jewelry and wealth? In this way, the wife ends up in distress, and all these issues may lead to divorce. Strangely, divorce was prevalent for trivial reasons. A man sitting with his friends might get into an argument, swear by divorce, and as a result, a family is torn apart, and children are displaced.⁶⁵

Despite all this, Algerian women were not deprived of participating in their social lives naturally. Within the realm of social activities, women used to organize special gatherings to relax and escape the burdens of household chores and life's demands. An example is the event organized by the Education and Teaching Association at the Green Mosque, attended exclusively by women. It was a joyous occasion, unlike anything seen in the history of Algeria, with more than a thousand women in attendance and a few men, approximately fifteen to twenty, who were fathers of the female students. The event was presided over by Sheikh Ibn Badis.⁶⁶

In honor of Algerian mothers, a day was dedicated to them called "Mother's Day." On this day, motherhood is celebrated, representing her significant role within the family and society as a whole. Gifts and congratulations are given to mothers, and the French used to celebrate this day even before, aiming to reduce family tensions.⁶⁷

C. The Issue of the Modernization of Algerian Women:

Al-Basa'ir published an issue titled "Muslim Women" by Ahmed Sahnoun, in which he emphasized the importance of caring for women. He believed that the primary reason for Algeria's delay was linked to the delay in women's progress. He likened women to the wings of a bird, emphasizing their vital roles as household managers, child-rearers, and keepers of secrets. Consequently, they should not be ignored or left to wander without guidance. As they are the central figures within their homes, they must uphold the values and norms of their households. However, this doesn't mean they are confined within their homes; rather, it signifies that they shouldn't separate from their homes entirely, like going to the cinema or the opera, to maintain the balance between their roles and their social lives.⁶⁸

Building on this idea, the issue of the modernization of Algerian women was raised. Many Algerian women became concerned when they saw their French counterparts adopting modern movements in dress, speech, and behavior. The perception of modernity among Algerian women was primarily associated with changes in dress, language, and gestures. However, this form of modernization was considered shallow and blind imitation. There was no observation of French women speaking other languages or changing their appearance.⁶⁹ True modernization is achieved through raising children with good education, enabling them to defend themselves with words and deeds. The Al-Basa'ir newspaper called on all fathers, being responsible for their children, to assist in the formation of a new generation of both daughters and sons.⁷⁰

Regarding the delay in Muslim women's progress and their lack of interaction with men as their counterparts, many questions were directed to Mr. Chakib Arslan to understand the reason behind this delay. He responded that the root cause was the delay in men's progress. He explained that in some generations, women were more refined than men. As for the issue of segregation, he clarified that Islam takes precautions to safeguard honor and lineage. The mere act of a woman being alone with a non-mahram (a person with whom marriage is permissible) raises suspicion, which is prohibited in Islamic religion.⁷¹

In the same context, the idea of women entering the workforce and preparing themselves for taking on responsibilities outside the home was raised. This would enable them to contribute to establishing a stable family budget and alleviate the burdens on men. Many men prefer not to marry an uneducated woman and would rather have a wife who works alongside them as a doctor, pharmacist, teacher, or in other professions. The higher living standards in European families are attributed to the cooperation between men and women. In contrast, the Arab Islamic world has lost this balance.⁷²

However, it's essential to ensure that women's participation in public life remains within the boundaries of Islamic principles. Some believed that women should not be called to work until their educational level is raised, allowing them to align their thinking with that of men. They considered inviting women to work in this field to be premature.⁷³

Nevertheless, if we take a broad view of Algerian women, we find them lagging behind in various aspects of life within society. It's unfair to place the sole responsibility for this delay on women; men share this responsibility as well. Moreover, many women were deprived of knowledge, leading them to lose touch with themselves and their role as the primary educators of society. The demands placed on women should allow them to enter society practically and assist them in fulfilling their complete duties.

The progress of women benefits society, as it elevates their status and responsibilities as partners to men, without deviating from the boundaries set by Islamic law. Women cannot fulfill their roles as wives and mothers if they are not cultured themselves. Additionally, the care for this new society should occur through the education and preparation of girls to establish material and social balance. Society should welcome the idea of women's progress and their social advancement as a complement to men's progress.⁷⁴

It's worth noting that within society, there are two categories of women: those living in rural areas and those in urban areas. Many differences exist between these two groups. If we consider rural girls, they often endure the harshness of life and engage in strenuous work. They may wake up in the morning to tend to their livestock and return home to find their mother struggling to provide food for her hungry daughter. On the other hand, urban girls wake up in the morning, have breakfast, and then go to acquire various types of knowledge. Upon their

return, they are welcomed by their families with delicious meals. Despite these differences, we can observe contentment and genuine faith in the hearts of rural girls. They hope for happiness in the hereafter rather than happiness in this world. They perform their prayers as they've seen their mothers do, even if their understanding of the prayer's requirements is limited. In contrast, some educated urban women, despite having ample education, neglect their prayers, absorbed in the sea of amusement and fun.⁷⁵

Conclusion:

From the aforementioned discussion, we can deduce that despite the severe restrictions and constraints imposed by colonial authorities, reformist journalism managed to carve its path to existence and deliver the message it carried on its shoulders. It raised numerous issues and incidents, and Algerian Muslim women had their share of these matters. They addressed various topics related to women, including religious matters, where they primarily focused on the issue of hijab and the covering of women's faces. Additionally, they delved into the long-debated issue of polygamy in Islam.

Furthermore, these newspapers tackled educational issues, serving as a platform for advocating the advancement of Algerian women and their involvement in the field of education. This was aimed at enabling women to benefit themselves, their families, and their society.

The social aspect of women was also of great interest to reformist newspapers. They emphasized the value of women within society and highlighted their roles, which were no less important than those of men.

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