



Civil Resistance Against Authoritarian and Religious Radicalism



Traditional Islam Facing Radical Islam: Pedagogical and Ethical Practices in Souss Fiqh Madrasas



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Vaclava Tlili

Abstract

This paper examines the role of traditional madrasas in North Africa—particularly in South Algeria and South Morocco—as local actors of everyday resistance against radical Islamic movements. Drawing on recent ethnographic fieldwork conducted in these regions, this research explores how these educational institutions, deeply embedded within local communities, function as custodians of an Islamic intellectual tradition that values pluralism, interpretive diversity, and freedom of thought.

This research highlights the ways in which madrassa curricula, teaching practices, and community engagement challenge the homogenizing tendencies promoted by Islamist and extremist groups. By promoting jurisprudential pluralism, fostering deep study of Arabic literature and poetry, and maintaining connections to Sufi and Maliki traditions, these institutions create intellectual and social spaces resistant to ideological conformity. It is further analyzed how local networks of religious scholars, students, and community leaders subtly contest extremist narratives—not through overt political confrontation, but through the sustained reinforcement of inclusive theological and cultural norms, and the promotion of tolerant Sufi thought and discipline.

It is argued that this form of everyday, nonviolent resistance operates as a stabilizing force in these regions of North African society, promoting religious and cultural diversity while reinforcing communal resilience. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how grassroots religious education can serve as a counterweight to radicalization, offering valuable lessons for global strategies to safeguard freedom of conscience and protect pluralism in Muslim-majority contexts.

Introduction

The Souss region in Southern Morocco lies on the periphery of areas where radical movements have become increasingly active.¹ Across the Sahel—in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—and in neighbouring Algeria and Mauritania, Salafi-jihadi groups affiliated with al-Qaʿida and ISIS promote a puritanical agenda aimed at “purifying” Islam by erasing local traditions, suppressing Sufi practices, and dismissing the authority of classical *fiqh* scholarship. Their power lies in simplification: they offer black-and-white answers and attempt to overwrite rich, plural Islamic heritage with a rigid, militant ideology. As of 2025, the situation has become deeply alarming, with extremist factions expanding their territorial influence and increasingly targeting cultural and religious institutions that represent alternative sources of authority. While not immune to external influence, Morocco has sustained a religious landscape deeply rooted in the traditional Islam that has shaped North Africa for centuries, where moderation and continuity remain the default. This raises a key question: what social, educational, and communal structures enable resilience in the face of radicalizing pressures that have disrupted neighbouring regions?

In this context, the *fiqh madāris*² of the *Souss* region stand out—not as reactive projects aimed at countering radicalism, but as long-standing institutions grounded in tradition, dedicated to teaching and moral formation, which over time foster everyday endurance within their communities.. For centuries, these *madāris* have transmitted Islamic knowledge through canonical texts, while simultaneously fostering community cohesion and nurturing ethical discipline. Embedded in the rhythms of daily life, they shape identity, morality, and social order through study, ritual, and mentorship.

The main courtyard of the madrasa Ben Youssef and its reflective pool



1. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Africa Has Surpassed 150,000 Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Groups in the Past Decade,” Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 28, 2025, accessed October 3, 2025, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/en-2025-mig-10-year/>.

2. The term “fiqh madrasa” is used here to differentiate these institutions from Quranic madāris, which primarily focus on memorization and recitation of the Qurʾān. Fiqh madāris, also known as al-madāris al-ʿāṭīqa, are advanced centers of learning designed to cultivate religious scholars and leaders—not merely students who memorize the Qurʾān and foundational texts.

This study examines how the fiqh madāris of Souss cultivate resilience before rupture—through their pedagogical strategies, spiritual practices, and daily rhythms—functioning as preventive frameworks that render radicalism socially and intellectually unappealing.



Methodological and Theoretical Framework

Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork³ (2017–2025), this research combines participant and non-participant observation in North African madāris with active involvement in teaching sessions and extensive informal interviews with madrasa scholars (fuqahāʾ), students, and local communities. Crucially, one of the researchers is a former madrasa student in Morocco who also received years of training from fuqahāʾ in Algeria and Mauritania, bringing an insider perspective that enriches the analysis and deepens understanding of educational and communal practices. First-hand examination of madrasa curricula and core textbooks provides additional insight into how knowledge and practices are constructed and transmitted within the institution. These pedagogical structures, in turn, highlight how madāris can foster both institutional stability and communal cohesion.

3. Ethnography seems particularly valuable for studying community resilience, as immersive, long-term fieldwork reveals how communities sustain norms and uphold their local traditions. Such insights help to show how traditional institutions can resist radicalization, in ways that external programs or short-term studies often overlook.

Methodologically, the article builds on resilience studies,⁴ interpreting everyday practices as mechanisms that sustain social cohesion and cognitive adaptability. James C. Scott's distinction between *public* and *hidden transcripts*⁵ provides an additional analytical lens. Public transcripts reflect how the *madrasa* appears externally—its formal norms, conduct, and outward compliance with broader educational or social expectations. Hidden transcripts, however, encompass the *madrasa's* internal, largely invisible operations: the use of a distinctive local curriculum, the practice of one *faqīh* instructing all students, and other pedagogical methods absent from state-run or standardized schools. These internal practices are largely unknown to the broader public, yet they are central to the *madrasa's* ability to preserve intellectual continuity and community identity—particularly among *Imazighen* (Berbers) students residing in the southern regions, for whom *Tamazight* is the mother tongue, yet within these *madāris* they achieve remarkable proficiency in Arabic as a scholarly language.



Brooklyn Museum
photograph

A gender-sensitive perspective is integrated by extending observation beyond formal classrooms into domestic spaces—female community members, as well as children of *fuqahā'*, who are active within the community—where moral and intellectual formation is further reinforced. By examining both institutional and domestic settings, the study shows how resilience and micro-political ethnography illuminate the ways in which Souss *madāris* maintain their identity and educational practices through continuity, local adaptation, and subtle internal structures.

4. Key works in resilience studies include Bayat (2010); Sageman (2008); Masten (2014).

5. Scott's theory of public and hidden transcripts (1990) distinguishes between the ways subordinate groups present themselves in front of dominant authorities (public transcripts) and the ways they express resistance, critique, or alternative norms in private or covert contexts (hidden transcripts). Hidden transcripts reveal internal strategies, beliefs, and practices that may be invisible to outsiders but are central to maintaining group identity, autonomy, and resilience.

Fiqh Madāris in Souss: Historical and Institutional Overview

The genesis of the *Souss madāris* is closely tied to the broader history of Islamic learning in North Africa, where rural communities often established small study circles in *ribāṭs* (fortified religious lodges that combined worship, learning, and sometimes defense) and mosques that gradually evolved into enduring institutions for the study of the Islamic sciences. In *Souss*, the oldest *madrasa* known dates back to the 11th century: the *madrasa of Aglou* in Tiznit, led by the *faqīh* Muḥammad Waggāg ibn Zallū al-Limṭī (d. 445 AH / 1053 CE), a student of the prominent Mālikī scholars Abū ‘Imrān al-Fāsī (d. 430 AH / 1039 CE) and Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386 AH / 996 CE).



Brooklyn Museum photograph

Emerging as local initiatives supported by community endowments and tribal patronage, these *madāris* developed a distinctive authority that rested less on state sponsorship than on their embeddedness within everyday social life. The *Souss madāris* sustained their credibility through continuous service to local communities, producing generations of *fuqahā* whose authority derived as much from lived proximity as from scholarly genealogy. At the same time, the state valued the stabilizing role of these institutions, which fostered a relationship of mutual recognition between *Souss madāris* and political authorities. Today, the region remains central to Morocco's religious education: nearly half of the country's *madāris* are located in *Souss*. Hundreds of these are officially registered under the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, following the ministry's updated curriculum, examinations, and graduation requirements. Yet tens of others have resisted these reforms, choosing instead to preserve their older curricula and pedagogical methods, thereby maintaining a continuity with local traditions of Islamic scholarship.

6. Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, Morocco, "School Statistics for the Year 2013," *Habous.gov.ma*, 2013, accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.habous.gov.ma/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%8A/5809-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-2013.html>.

7. M. Sa'īdī, *Madāris Sūs al-‘Atīqa – min al-‘uṣūl at-tārīkhīya ilā makhāṭir al-indithār* [The Ancient Schools of Souss: From Historical Origins to the Risks of Disappearance] (Agadir: Som Print, 2025).

Lessons From Madrasa Resilience Strategies

1. Activate, Not Replace Traditional Structures

Each day in the *madrasa* begins with carefully structured routines, timed in harmony with the natural cycles of day and season. At dawn, following the *Fajr* prayer, students gather on the rooftop of the *madrasa*. Surrounded by the stillness of the mountains, under the pale glow of the moon, and accompanied only by the chirping of crickets, they recite together a full *ḥizb* of the *Qurʾān* before continuing with the *qaṣīda al-Burda*, intoned in local *Amazigh* vocal styles. The recitation unfolds in layered intervals: one group begins while another joins later, creating a cadence of voices rather than full synchronization. Both the bodies and voices of the students embody a collective ethic of concentration and devotion, and this daily performance reflects the *madrasa*'s pedagogical and moral order.

In many rural areas of the Maghreb and Sahel, traditional structures of education, dispute resolution, and social support have weakened or disappeared, leaving communities vulnerable. Attempts to fill this gap with imported programs or institutions have often failed: during the colonial era, European school systems replaced local educational methods without engaging local knowledge; missionary schools introduced European languages, religious teachings, and values, undermining traditional education; frequently struggled to earn trust and adapt to local cultural contexts. In this vacuum, radical Islamic movements and armed groups⁸ have been able to impose rigid interpretations of Islam, gaining authority through indoctrination and fear rather than communal legitimacy.

Conversely, the daily practices of *madāris* in the Souss region activate existing local structures rather than replacing them. While external, top-down programs—often built on imported curricula or secular governance models—struggle to earn communal trust, these *madāris* embed students within networks shaped by the community itself. By maintaining and activating these locally grounded structures, they reinforce resilience, continuity, and culturally coherent authority, demonstrating that sustainable education and social stability emerge not from replacing tradition, but from breathing life into it.

2. Offer Identity, Not Just Control

After breakfast⁹, the students make their way to the first morning circle inside a six-century-old building, their footsteps echoing softly across the sun-warmed courtyard.

8. Notably, *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen* (JNIM) and the *Islamic State in the Sahel* (IS-Sahel) have established themselves as alternative authorities, operating primarily in central Sahel.

9. Breakfast typically consists of green tea, locally baked bread from a bakery near the madrasa, served with argan oil and amlou (a paste of almonds mixed with argan oil).

The movement is calm and self-directed—no loud calls or bells announce the start of the lesson; occasionally, a single student’s clap serves as a signal to begin or conclude an activity. Young pupils from the Souss tribes, still steeped in the sacred cadence of Qur’ān memorization, walk alongside peers from distant lands—students from the United States, France, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia—each carrying their own stories, yet moving together toward the same radiant pursuit of knowledge. The morning air hums with a gentle symphony of laughter, whispered greetings, and the soft rustle of robes, weaving a quiet harmony that spans generations and continents. *Fuqahā’* such as *Faqīh* Mahfoud Agrihim and *Faqīh* Mouloud al-Sariri carefully tend this delicate balance, nurturing a space where students of all ages and origins coexist in peace, guided by mutual respect, discipline, and the shared devotion to learning. Here, students’ identities are shaped.

One of the driving motives of radical ideologies across the Islamic world is the thirst for power, coupled with the obsession with imposing a single, rigid interpretation of Islam on diverse peoples. Such movements thrive on uniformity and control. In the *madrassa* tradition of Souss, shaped by Sufi teachings, humility is emphasized, and individuals are encouraged to avoid seeking status, authority, or prominence. Knowledge is not imposed on students, nor are the books taught treated as binding dogma. Courses are not mandatory: students are free to choose which study circles to attend and for how many years they wish to remain. Yet this freedom does not translate into neglect. The *faqīh*, who may be responsible for as many as 80 to 150 students, remains keenly aware of each individual’s progress.

This spirit of freedom and choice, rooted in a Sufi ethos of humility, resonates deeply with the widely known meaning of the word *Amazigh*—“free” or “noble men.” In this way, the *madrassa* fosters an atmosphere in which authority derives from guidance, supportive relations, and mutual respect, rather than coercion. It is precisely this culture of intellectual and spiritual liberty that makes the recruitment of *madrassa*-trained *fuqahā’* by extremist movements exceedingly difficult.

Within this framework, the *faqīh* is not a distant authority but a paternal figure — addressed with affection and respect, consulted not only on legal matters but also on personal struggles, family disputes, and plans such as education or marriage. He offers financial support when needed, and his counsel often extends to the most intimate aspects of students’ lives. Each student is known to him individually — their background, family circumstances, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Authority here is intimate rather than bureaucratic, exercised through presence and care rather than regulation.

Through these relational practices, each student is not just instructed but recognized. Mentorship, peer support, and participation in communal responsibilities foster a sense of belonging, purpose, and standing within the community. For young people in fragile or high-risk regions — where formal employment, political participation, or social prestige are often inaccessible — participation in these structures offers an alternative path to recognition and status. In this environment, education is not only the acquisition of knowledge but the formation of personal and social identity shaped by the values, traditions, and ethical frameworks of the community.

3. Invest in Sustainable Resistance From Within

In the afternoon, when the scorching sun suspends formal lessons, students use the quiet hours to make their own ink. Seated on the ground, they burn sheep's wool into soot and mix it into a paste, then inscribe glosses (*taqrīr*) on didactic poems (*naẓm*) or Qur'ānic verses on wooden tablets (*lawḥ*)—the very lines they are committing to memory and debating with their peers. Every movement is deliberate: dipping their bamboo pens, tracing precise strokes across the smooth wood, while quietly reciting the verses. Their voices merge with the rhythm of their hands, sustaining an ancient tradition that ties Arabic scholarship to *Amazigh* culture and the surrounding environment.

Souss madāris maintain legitimacy and durability precisely by grounding authority within the community. Their curricula and teaching methods follow local norms, history, and everyday concerns, and instruction takes place in both Arabic and Tamazight, merging the universal language of scholarship with sensitivity to students' Amazigh heritage. This resilience extends beyond pedagogy into the material environment: local food, rainwater wells, climate-adapted architecture, and traditional writing tools replace external supplies, infrastructure, and technology. This allows the institution to remain independent of modern conveniences, using them as supplementary rather than essential to the madrasa's functioning.

4. Pedagogical Tools for Intellectual Immunity

The body of learning is itself a form of resilience—preserving a coherent and rigorous intellectual tradition alongside the living values we observed and experienced during our stay among *madrasa* communities.

“The faqīh Abdallah Rais never asked us about our beliefs, backgrounds, or our opinions about specific people or groups. Nor did he impose any ideas on us—unlike other madāris and Islamic institutions in other parts of the world, including in Europe,” said a former student of Ikdhi, one of the surveyed madāris in Souss.

The *madrassa*’s curriculum, rarely accessible to outside observers, is a carefully structured, step-by-step program covering a wide range of subjects. The historian of Souss, Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī (d. 1382 AH / 1963 CE), recorded that as many as twenty-one disciplines were taught in these institutions during his time, including branches of local and alternative medicine.¹⁰ Academics with prior experience at large Islamic Studies institutions often remark that their earlier education felt like “flowers from different gardens”—scattered and disconnected—due to the brevity of training, limited language mastery, and the pressure to prioritize publications. Within the *madrassa*, students encounter a solid foundation in the Islamic sciences upon which all further learning is systematically built.

The curriculum is comprehensive, encompassing history, poetry, and literature, with sources such as *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb* by al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1632), *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), and Aristotelian logic through *al-Sullam al-Munawraq* by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Akhdarī (d. 953/1546). Traditional practices of memorization (*ḥifẓ*) train students in evidence retention and mastery of linguistic paradigms, while the discipline of commentary (*sharḥ*) cultivates deep textual understanding. Debate-based interpretation further develops critical hermeneutics, ethical discernment, and nuanced judgment, enabling students to navigate complexity with intellectual rigor and moral grounding.

Equally central are Sufi ethics and the manners of the seeker of knowledge, as taught through Mālikī texts of jurisprudence and theology studied in the *madāris*—such as *al-Murshid al-Muʿīn* by Ibn ʿĀshir of Fez (d. 1040/1631), *al-Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd of Kairouan (d. 386/996), and *al-Qawānīn al-Fiqhiyya* of Ibn Juzayy of Granada (d. 741/1340)—interpreted through the lens of local commentators. Combined with the daily practice of Sufism through *dhikr*, *Qurʾān* recitation, nature-inspired spiritual poetry, mutual respect, and community service, these traditions foster intellectual and spiritual growth as well as social cohesion. Together, they serve as a bulwark against radical ideologies, which often gain traction through partial study of religion, exclusivist interpretations, and ethnic or sectarian divides.

10. M. Mukhtār al-Sūsī, *Sūs al-ʿĀlima* [The Learned Souss] (Morocco: Al-Muhammadiyah, Fadāla Press, 1960), 31–58.

5. Spiritual and Ethical Practices for Social Cohesion

It is well known that Islam in North Africa has always carried a Sufi dimension. This is not surprising, given that the region's early Islam was shaped by plural influences—from theological groups extending from Persia to al-Andalus. Even before Islam, North Africa produced profound spiritual thinkers, such as St. Augustine of Hippo. Sunni scholarly *taṣawwuf* in *Souss* has, for centuries, been one of the core components of North African identity. Just as the people of *Souss* follow Imām Mālik in matters of law and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī in theology, they have also drawn deeply on the ethical conduct (*sulūk*) and spiritual cultivation (*tarbiyya rūḥiyya*) taught by Imām Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298 AH / 910 CE). The *Junaydī* path became firmly embedded in Maghrebi and Soussi consciousness because it offered healing at multiple levels—spiritual, social, cultural, and even national.

Today, this legacy is most vividly observed in the *madāris*, where it continues to flourish. The *fuqahāʾ* who teach in these institutions are themselves Sufis, seamlessly blending formal instruction with spiritual refinement. In many respects, these *madāris* mirror the traditional role of *ribāṭāt* and *zawāyā* in North Africa: never merely centers of instruction, but also sanctuaries. A *faqīh* was expected to feed anyone who came to his door, while resources were generously shared to sustain students and seekers who often arrived with nothing but determination.

In this dual role, *madāris* serve both educational and ethical–Sufi functions. Grounded in the conceptual trinity of *Sharīʿa*, *Ṭarīqa*, and *Ḥaqīqa*, the *madāris* we observed nurture not only future teachers, imams, and *fuqahāʾ*, but also individuals inclined toward moderation and openness rather than rigidity or fanaticism. Their education weaves together a balanced legal tradition, a thoughtful theological framework, and a discipline of inner refinement that extends well beyond the classroom. Such formation, while built upon the classical Islamic sciences and *taṣawwuf*, often provides a foundation upon which further studies in the humanities, social sciences, and psychology—fields increasingly vital for religious leaders engaging with broader and more complex societies—can meaningfully build. In this light, the *madāris* may be seen less as isolated sanctuaries of religious learning and more as living reservoirs of knowledge and compassion, where intellectual clarity, ethical restraint, and spiritual awareness quietly shape the moral architecture of future generations.

The universe itself is structured around *ḥaraka* (movement) and *sukūn* (stillness). Yet in modern Islamic discourse, *ḥaraka* has often acquired negative connotations, associated with the proliferation of movements that radicalize youth and, in some cases, push them toward extremist activities.

In this context, *sukūn*—a state of inner calm and balance—emerges as a necessary corrective, restoring religious moderation and intellectual openness that foster peace grounded in justice.

In the Souss *madāris*, students are trained not only in knowledge but also in cultivating peace of mind alongside outward peace. *Sukūn*, understood as tranquility of the heart and clarity of thought, permeates the very atmosphere of these institutions. This grounding in stillness allows intellectual rigor to coexist with spiritual depth, offering a model of education where learning is inseparable from serenity, ethical responsibility, and moral discernment.

6. Empower and Value Women's Roles at Home

“After one week in the madrasa, the children were able to read a poem on the Names of God. After a week in public school, they had only learned some letters of the alphabet — and could not use them to read anything.” It was after *Maghrib*, and in a modest house in a village near Ait Bahaa, a mother from Souss shared this with us, reflecting on her experience with public schools, whose curriculum and pedagogy were introduced to North Africa through Western colonization.

In the Souss region, women have long played—and continue to play—a vital, though often overlooked, role in sustaining and transmitting the intellectual and ethical life of the madrasa. A small cemetery dedicated to female *faqīhāt*, some of whom mastered advanced legal texts such as al-Mudawwana of Saḥnūn (d. 240/854), a foundational Mālikī manual used in *fatwā* and *qaḍā'*, stands as a striking testament to this enduring tradition. While fewer in number due to the many responsibilities rural women carry, their presence shows that women have always received rigorous training comparable to that of men. Women also remain the first initiators of children's education, guiding them in the memorization of Qur'ānic sūras—sometimes up to a third of the Qur'ān or more—while instilling foundational lessons in faith, ethics, and respect for the madrasa community, often reinforced through the examples of outstanding students (*imḥdaren* in local Berber).

Within madrasa households and surrounding communities, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and wives cultivate lively domestic environments that strengthen both learning and moral discipline. Far from being peripheral, women's contributions constitute a living tradition that anchors madrasa education in the rhythms of everyday family and communal life, ensuring that intellectual and ethical formation remains deeply embedded across generations.

Takeaway for Policy and Practice

Engaging with *madāris* in the Souss region demonstrates that strengthening and supporting existing local institutions is often more effective than imposing external programs. By fostering a sense of belonging, ethical practice, and social cohesion, these schools cultivate resilient communities that are capable of withstanding ideological pressures. Their curricula and teaching methods reflect local history, culture, and linguistic diversity, while internal rhythms and unique pedagogies—largely hidden from outsiders—ensure continuity across generations. The women’s central role in domestic and educational spaces—mentoring younger students, maintaining household-based learning, and transmitting moral and cultural values—further reinforces their resilience.

One direct or indirect driver of radical ideologies and religious extremism is social and political injustice. Signs of these injustices often emerge in educational settings as burnout, stress, and mental health challenges caused by rigid deadlines, exam pressure, lack of purpose, and weak relationships with instructors. When young people collapse under these pressures, extremist groups exploit their vulnerability. In response to such pressures, the *madāris* we visited do not treat students as future revenue sources for the state or merely as job-seekers; they prioritize holistic development, moral formation, and communal belonging, protecting students from such exploitative pathways.



The three madrasas at the Registan of Samarkand, built during the Timurid Renaissance

While the *madrasa* model cannot simply be transplanted elsewhere—it is deeply rooted in Amazigh-Berber culture, Mālikī jurisprudence, and local networks of trust—its principles offer valuable insights for broader policy and practice. For regions threatened by extremist movements, three practical lessons stand out:

1. Invest in trusted local authorities rather than relying solely on state-appointed figures, and rediscover the strengths embedded in local traditions.
2. Link religious education to everyday ethics of care and social responsibility, ensuring moral formation is integrated into daily life.
3. Leverage ritual and spirituality as sources of emotional stability, using *dhikr*, chanting, and collective labor to foster both psychological and communal resilience.

Conclusion

The *fiqh madāris* of Souss reveal how centuries-old educational and spiritual practices can stand as living fortresses against radicalization. Nourished by local traditions, ethical frameworks, and communal networks, these institutions cultivate knowledge, morality, and social cohesion in unison. Pedagogical methods, spiritual exercises, and domestic learning spaces intertwine to shape students who are intellectually rigorous, ethically attuned, and socially responsible.

Applying Scott's framework to our study allows us to make sense of the *madrasa's* dual logic. Externally, they present an image of compliance and tradition. Internally, however, they cultivate a rich, culturally grounded, and ethically oriented pedagogy that is largely opaque to outsiders. This internal dimension is particularly significant for Imazighen (Berbers) students, for whom Tamazight is the mother tongue. Within these madrasas, students achieve high proficiency in Arabic as a scholarly language while simultaneously engaging in moral, spiritual, and social education rooted in their local culture. By attending to hidden transcripts, we see how these institutions transmit knowledge and form ethical subjects. They also safeguard community identity in ways not immediately legible from the outside. This highlights the subtle yet profound mechanisms that contribute to social and intellectual resilience.

Rather than responding reactively to extremism, these madrasas operate preventively, embedding resilience in the everyday life of the community. By combining formal instruction with mentorship, ritual, and domestic engagement, they create a culture in which moderation, tolerance, and ethical discernment are internalized, not imposed. Their success highlights a critical insight: sustainable resistance to extremist ideologies emerges from institutions that are trusted, contextually grounded, and deeply interwoven with the social fabric. In this light, knowledge is inseparable from character — it acquires value only when it translates into behaviour that sustains both personal and collective wellbeing.

In an era of global concern over radicalization, Souss *madāris* provide a compelling example of how long-term, locally rooted education—anchored in law, spirituality, and community life—can safeguard both minds and societies. Their enduring model offers lessons not only for North Africa but for any context seeking to strengthen intellectual and ethical resilience against divisive and extremist pressures.

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