

The Spread of the Ash‘arite Doctrine and Its Role in Guiding Social Life in the Western Islamic World at the Beginning of the Almohad Period

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Abstract

This study addresses the Ash‘arite doctrine and its role in guiding social life in the Western Islamic world during the Almohad period. It examines the stages through which both elites and the general population became influenced by its principles and ideas, as well as the role of Muhammad ibn Tumart, the spiritual founder of the Almohad movement, in consolidating this doctrine among the Moroccan and Andalusian communities through his writings and letters addressed to students, scholars, and governors. Over time, it became a fundamental element of their social life due to its noble values advocating moderation, tolerance, coexistence, and rejection of extremism and fanaticism. The study also aims to highlight the main forms of influence exerted by Ash‘arism on this society, which experienced a significant transformation after adopting this doctrine. Its ideas helped establish a sense of religious unity and social solidarity among its members, who became committed to defending their identity and community against external threats with determination and strength.

Keywords: Ash‘arite doctrine, social life, Muhammad ibn Tumart, Western Islamic world, Ash‘arite theological thought, manifestations of influence.

Introduction

The Western Islamic world, in the period following the Islamic conquest beginning in the early second century AH / eighth century CE witnessed a broad intellectual and doctrinal dynamism due to the multiplicity of theological and political currents that characterized the region. The Sufrite and Ibadi branches of the Kharijites were active in spreading their ideas and principles, while the Ismaili Shiites sought to impose their doctrine through both preaching and force. This situation often led to intellectual unrest and sectarian divisions that directly affected social and political life. Amid these transformations, a new doctrine emerged, namely the Ash‘arite creed, which gradually became established in the Western Islamic lands after passing through several stages, beginning with the efforts of scholars who adopted Ash‘arite thought, defended it, and encouraged its adoption until it became the dominant framework of individual and social life at the beginning of the Almohad period. This occurred after it was embraced and followed due to its perception as a moderate doctrine of monotheism that allowed the use of reason, enriched intellectual discourse, and took into account contextual circumstances. Consequently, social organization and structure in the Western Islamic world underwent a qualitative transformation after adopting Ash‘arite theological thought, which came to promote fraternity, reject extremism and fanaticism, and

aim at knowledge that brings one closer to God while contributing to political and social stability in the region. This raises the following questions: what were the stages through which the inhabitants of the Western Islamic world adopted this theological thought? And what were the manifestations of its influence on their daily lives during the early Almohad period?

Stages of the Adoption of Ash‘arite Thought in the Western Islamic Society:

Contemporary researchers differ regarding who first introduced the principles of the Ash‘arite school to the Western Islamic world. Some argue that its introduction dates back to the lifetime of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century AH, while others claim that it occurred at the end of the fourth century AH. In this context, a Moroccan thinker associated with Ash‘arite doctrine is mentioned, namely Ibrahim ibn Abdullah al-Zubaydi, known as al-Qallansi (d. 359 AH). However, there is no conclusive evidence supporting the claim that he was the first to transmit this school from the East to the West. What is reported is that he had a doctrinal disagreement with the Fatimid state after authoring a book on the concept of imamate or something similar. Another figure mentioned is Abu Maymuna Dirās ibn Isma‘il al-Fasi (d. 357 AH), who is known to have traveled early to the East, where he encountered aspects of Ash‘arite thought, authored a treatise defending it, and worked on spreading the doctrine in Kairouan after returning there.⁸⁷

Based on the above and in light of the available information, it is not possible to state with certainty that either al-Qallansi or al-Fasi was the first to introduce Ash‘arite thought into the Western Islamic world. What is certain, however, is that the emergence of Ash‘arism in the region dates back to the end of the fourth century AH, a period during which the Andalusian scholar Abu al-Hasan al-Qabisi (d. 403 AH) emerged. He left al-Andalus for the East in pursuit of knowledge in 353 AH, and upon his return to his homeland he immediately began to disseminate this doctrine and call for its adoption. Subsequently, other Andalusian figures came to the forefront, carrying the banner of this doctrine through their teachers who had studied in the East, such as the hadith scholar Abu ‘Umar al-Talamanki (d. 429 AH) and the Qur’anic reciter Abu ‘Umar al-Dani (d. 444 AH).⁸⁸

Despite the early spread of Ash‘arism in the Western Islamic lands, interest in it during this period remained confined to scholars and specialists⁸⁹. It is worth noting that these scholars did not, at that time, feel the need to disseminate Ash‘arism on a wide scale, due to their adherence to the positions of major Sunni scholars who held that speculative theology should not be addressed to common people, as they were considered unable to fully grasp its methods and modes of reasoning. This may also be attributed to the absence of compelling reasons for its wider dissemination in the Moroccan context. As a result, its spread remained

⁸⁷ Youssef Ahnana, *The Development of the Ash‘arite School in the Western Islamic World*, n.p., Publications of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco, 2003, pp. 51–52.

⁸⁸ Mohammed Hajji, *History and Jurisprudence: Works Dedicated to the Late Mohammed El-Monouni*, Moroccan Association for Authorship and Translation, 1st ed., Casablanca, Morocco, p. 137.

⁸⁹ Hassan Hafid Alawi, *Doctrinal Conflict in the Maghreb*, Publications of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Rabat, Morocco, 1st ed., 2008, p. 25.

limited until the Almoravid period⁹⁰. This orientation appears to reflect the nature of intellectual and religious life in the Western Islamic world at that stage, where scholars were primarily engaged in teaching traditional religious sciences such as jurisprudence, hadith, and exegesis, while theological studies remained confined to specialized scholarly circles. Furthermore, Sunni scholars preferred to shield the general population from engaging in intricate doctrinal debates for fear of causing doubt or intellectual division within society. Consequently, Ash'arite thought circulated mainly within scholarly circles and academic gatherings.

Nevertheless, this limited diffusion contributed to the formation of a scholarly elite well-versed in the foundations of Ash'arite doctrine and its methods of reasoning. This later paved the way for its broader spread at the end of the Almoravid period and the beginning of the Almohad period, when the need to unify the doctrinal and intellectual reference framework of Moroccan and Andalusian society became more pressing.

Despite the enthusiasm shown by Ibn Rushd in defending Ash'arism, his writings also contain a legal opinion that aligns with the official Almoravid position, granting the ruler the authority to prevent the general public from reading Ash'arite theological works. He states: "It is both right and obligatory for whoever has been entrusted by God with the affairs of the Muslims to prevent the common people and beginners from reading the doctrines of the theologians among the Ash'arites, and to prohibit them from doing so as strictly as possible, lest their understanding prove incapable of comprehending them and they become confused as a result of reading them. They should instead confine themselves, in matters of belief, to the proofs set forth in the Qur'an and indicated by God in the Revelation, which are clear and evident, grasped by reason with the slightest reflection. Thereafter, they should hasten to learn the rulings that they are required to understand concerning ablution, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the rest of the religious obligations and legal rulings, as well as distinguishing lawful means of earning from unlawful ones."⁹¹

What Ibn Rushd's statement indicates is that Ash'arism was not known in the Maghreb and al-Andalus as a doctrine adhered to by the general population. During this period, the members of this society were not prepared to adopt or become accustomed to this doctrine, particularly since, from the time of the Islamic conquest, they had been characterized by a deep-rooted hostility toward all rational sciences that diverged from the methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah. Al-Marrakushi described the condition of the people of the Maghreb before Ibn Tumart and their hostility toward these sciences, especially during the Almoravid period, stating: "The people of that time considered anyone who engaged in any aspect of speculative theology to be an unbeliever. The jurists persuaded the Commander of the Muslims that speculative theology was reprehensible, that the pious predecessors had disliked and abandoned it, and that anyone found engaging in it should be declared an unbeliever. They regarded it as an innovation in religion, and much of it was thought to lead to corruption in matters of belief, along with other similar views. As a result, the Amir became firmly opposed to speculative theology and its adherents. He continually issued letters to all regions,

⁹⁰ Mohammed Hajji, *History and Jurisprudence*, op. cit., p. 137.

⁹¹ Al-Mukhtar Al-Tlili, *Ibn Rushd and His Book Al-Muqaddimāt*, Arab Book House, 1st ed., 1988, p. 148.

insisting on the strict prohibition of engaging in it and threatening anyone found in possession of any of its books.”⁹²

Despite all these restrictions, the shift toward Ash‘arism became an inevitable necessity imposed by the various intellectual contexts that prevailed in the Islamic environment, both in the East and the West, as well as by the political developments that took place during this period. Although the Almoravids were concerned with and committed to preserving Islamic unity, they neglected doctrinal unity, which could have brought the followers of the various Sunni schools together under a single theological affiliation through the exercise of reason, the exchange of ideas, and intellectual dialogue in this field. Therefore, a deeper examination of these intellectual factors helps to explain the enigma of the fall of the Almoravid state at the height of its strength and vitality. There is little doubt that the intellectual factor played a role in this outcome.⁹³ On the contrary, Ibn Tumart took advantage of this situation. The most distinctive feature of his creed was its Ash‘arite character in matters of divine unity, as he interpreted Qur‘anic verses and prophetic traditions that were thought to imply anthropomorphism in a manner consistent with absolute transcendence. He was the one who forcibly opened the door in Morocco to the introduction of theological interpretation. In pursuing his political objectives, he employed two methods to establish the Ash‘arite doctrine: one was deception, maneuvering, claiming miraculous powers, and winning over the common people. He also made use of the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong. This provides a clear picture of the manner in which the Mahdi entered history: as one who commanded good and forbade evil, seeking prominence and influence through opposition to the ruling authority and the stirring of unrest.

This constituted an appropriate beginning for the image he sought to project before his society when he chose to appear as a religious reformer rebelling against the realities of his community and the practices he considered objectionable. On his journey back from Alexandria to his homeland in the Far Maghreb, the Mahdi was keen on correcting wrongdoing, focusing particularly on two moral vices that he believed were widespread in his country: the mixing of men and women and the consumption of wine together with the entertainment and revelry associated with it⁹⁴. Throughout his travels, he propagated his ideas under the guise of practicing the duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil, while displaying piety and determination. He would pass through city markets, pouring out wine and destroying musical instruments without authorization. As a result, his followers and supporters increased in number and gathered around him in assemblies and study circles where he expounded his doctrine that is, interpretation according to the Ash‘arite method

⁹² Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakushi, *Al-Mu‘jib fi Talkhīs Akhbār al-Maghrib* (The Admirable Book: A Summary of the History of the Maghrib), edited by Salah al-Din al-Hawari, 1st ed., Al-Maktaba Al-Asriyya, Sidon, Beirut, 2006, p. 120.

⁹³ Mohammed Hajji, *History and Jurisprudence*, op. cit., p. 146.

⁹⁴ Mohamed Ben Maamar, “The Impact of Ibn Tumart’s al-Murshidah Creed on the Spread of Ash‘arism in the Central Maghreb,” *Al-Ibar Journal for Historical and Archaeological Studies in North Africa*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 2024, p. 82.

while criticizing the scholars of the Maghreb. Through these gatherings, he disseminated his Ash'arite ideas and gained the trust and admiration of the common people.⁹⁵

There is another instance in which the social dimension of Ibn Tumart's Ash'arite thought becomes evident through the label he applied to the Almoravids, namely "the Anthropomorphists". He did not use this designation solely to denounce what he regarded as deviations in their conception of God; rather, he also employed it as a characterization of the political and social oppression they exercised against their subjects. These factors, among others, led the society of the western Islamic lands to view the Ash'arite doctrine as the doctrine of divine unity that would bring about comprehensive change affecting all aspects of individual and social life. This was especially so because Ibn Tumart relied primarily on doctrinal content as the principal source from which his revolution drew its concepts and practical applications.⁹⁶

Another indication of the growing interest of the people of Morocco in Ash'arite thought was the numerous questions and inquiries that both the common people and the elite directed to the scholars of the region⁹⁷. They continually sought their legal opinions concerning the incidents and issues they encountered. This demonstrates that the actual influence of the Ash'arite creed, both at the official level and among the general population, was closely associated with the establishment of the Almohad state. Ibn Tumart took advantage of the prevailing intellectual crisis and produced works that assisted him in constructing his unifying project. His **Kitāb al-Murshidah** and **Kitāb A'azz Mā Yuṭlab** constituted the core of the Ash'arite doctrine, containing his treatises on legal theory, jurisprudence, divine unity, and doctrinal issues—precisely the kind of intellectual framework sought by the society of the western Islamic lands at that time.⁹⁸

B. Manifestations of the Influence of Ash'arite Thought on the Society of the Western Islamic Lands at the Beginning of the Almohad Era

The values of moderation and balance were among the fundamental pillars of the Ash'arite creed from its emergence until its establishment in the western Islamic lands. The thinkers of this Islamic doctrine remained faithful to the Qur'anic vision, which formulated matters of belief in a comprehensive and definitive manner capable of achieving its intended purposes in creation, including the formation of the believing individual who employs both revelation and reason while giving precedence to revelation in matters beyond the scope of rational inquiry. This constituted one of the major distinguishing features of the Ash'arite school and its creed. Consequently, it gained broad acceptance among all segments of society at the beginning of the Almohad period.

This discussion demonstrates that the Ash'arite creed was founded upon a balanced intellectual methodology that combined adherence to the fundamental principles of Islamic

⁹⁵ Hassan Hafizi Alawi, *Doctrinal Conflict in the Maghreb*, previously cited, p. 13.

⁹⁶ Abdelmajid Al-Najjar, *The Reform Experience in the Movement of al-Mahdi Ibn Tumart*, 2nd ed., International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia, 1990, pp. 90–91.

⁹⁷ Hassan Hafizi Alawi, *Doctrinal Conflict in the Maghreb*, previously cited, p. 65.

⁹⁸ Tawfiq Marazi Abdelsamad, "The Impact of the Ash'arite School in the Western Islamic Lands," *Journal of Scientific Research and Islamic Studies*, No. 17, Yahia Fares University, Médéa, Algeria, p.

law with an openness to disciplined rational inquiry. This endowed it with a remarkable capacity for continuity and dissemination within Islamic societies in general and in the western Islamic lands in particular. The Ash‘arites recognized that the religious text constituted the foundation upon which doctrine is built; however, they did not neglect the role of reason in understanding these texts, defending them, and responding to the doubts and objections raised against them. Consequently, they adopted a middle course between those trends that excessively relied on reason to the point of giving it precedence over revelation, and those that adhered rigidly to the literal meaning of the texts while almost entirely excluding the role of reason. It was through this approach that the Ash‘arite school acquired its distinctive intellectual character, making it more compatible with the nature of Islamic society and its intellectual and religious needs.

Moreover, this balance between reason and revelation contributed to making the Ash‘arite creed more capable of accommodating various social and cultural groups. Scholars found within it a broad field for research, reflection, and rational argumentation, while the general public found in it a clear doctrine free from excessive complexity and extremism. For this reason, its teachings spread rapidly throughout scholarly centers, educational circles, *zāwiyas*, and *ribāṭs*, particularly with the support provided by the Almohad state for this doctrinal orientation. As a result, the Ash‘arite creed came to constitute the official religious reference framework that sought to unify society intellectually and doctrinally.

Perhaps one of the most significant reasons for the spread of Ash‘arite thought in the western Islamic lands was its association with the values of moderation and tolerance, which were directly reflected in social life. This intellectual current contributed to reducing the intensity of doctrinal and ideological disputes and helped to establish a culture of dialogue and persuasion rather than fanaticism and exclusion. The Ash‘arite creed also reinforced the concept of the unity of the Muslim community and the collective body by emphasizing common religious principles and avoiding contentious issues that could lead to division and discord. This was precisely what the Maghrebi and Andalusian societies needed during a period marked by continuous political and intellectual instability.

Furthermore, the Ash‘arites’ adherence to the comprehensive Qur’anic vision led them to establish a close connection between doctrine and conduct. For them, doctrine was not merely a set of theoretical issues or abstract theological debates; rather, it constituted the foundation for building a righteous individual and a cohesive society. Consequently, Ash‘arite thought influenced various aspects of social life through its call for adherence to moral values, the promotion of coexistence and cooperation, and respect for others. In addition, it strengthened the status of knowledge and scholars within society. This contributed to the consolidation of intellectual and social stability and made the Ash‘arite creed an important element in shaping the religious and cultural identity of the inhabitants of the western Islamic lands during the Almohad period.

Moreover, the Ash‘arites’ reliance on moderate rational argumentation endowed them with a considerable ability to confront opposing intellectual currents, whether those characterized by excessive rationalism or by rigid literalism. They were thus able to present a balanced intellectual model that combined faith based on adherence to the revealed texts with rational

persuasion capable of defending and explaining doctrine. This explains the prominent position occupied by the Ash‘arite creed within society, for it was not imposed solely through political authority; rather, it also spread because of its capacity to persuade and to respond to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the various segments of society. This made it one of the most influential and enduring theological schools in the western Islamic lands.

After people embraced Ash‘arite thought and became accustomed to its doctrine, signs of change began to emerge in both individual and social life. New doctrinal conceptions and new patterns of thinking became widespread among the population. From this stage onward, a distinct religious character emerged that exerted a profound influence on social life. Unity and social integration under the banner of Ash‘arite thought became among the foremost concerns of the Almohads. Anyone who examines the letters and sermons of the Mahdī will find that the reality of divine unity constituted the backbone of his revolution at all levels. He named his followers the Unitarians, and his movement became known as the Almohad Call the Unitarians⁹⁹. This designation did not merely signify the transcendence of God in theological conception; it also called for joining the community of those who responded to his mission and adhered to the social norms that he promoted and established as the basis of their interactions.

For this reason, the call to the divine unity in the Mahdī’s sermons and epistles was often accompanied by a call to justice, social solidarity, and brotherhood. In one of his letters, he states: “What we enjoin upon you is fear of Almighty God, obedience to Him, seeking His assistance, reliance upon Him, adherence to the Book and the Sunnah, and teaching the divine unity, for it is the foundation of your religion and through it your deeds are rectified. Maintain the prayers at their prescribed times; command what is right and forbid what is wrong; abandon flattery, evil conduct, and all the customs of the Age of Ignorance.”¹⁰⁰

If this statement indicates anything, it indicates that Ibn Tumart sought to create a new society beginning with the community that gathered around him and embraced his call. He realized that this objective could only be achieved through a sustained educational system. Accordingly, he established religious lodges for worship in Salé, Massa, and Taza, where students and tribal groups assembled around him. There, he taught them his creed in the Berber language until society gradually came to embody these qualities and social norms¹⁰¹. The number of assemblies also increased, in which scholars and pious men assumed responsibility for preaching to the people and instructing them in matters concerning both their religion and worldly affairs.

All segments of society participated in organizing such gatherings and celebrations, which became widespread throughout the cities of the Maghreb and al-Andalus during the Almohad period. Among these were religious celebrations, such as the commemoration of the

⁹⁹ Ibn Abī Zar‘ al-Fāsī, *Al-Anīs al-Muṭrib bi-Rawḍ al-Qirtās fī Akhbār Mulūk al-Maghrib wa-Tārīkh Madīnat Fās* (The Delightful Companion in the Garden of al-Qirtās on the History of the Kings of the Maghreb and the City of Fez), Dār Sūr for Printing and Publishing, Rabat, Morocco, 1972, p. 157.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Najjār, *The Reform Experience in the Movement of al-Mahdī Ibn Tumart*, previously cited reference, p. 93.

¹⁰¹ Muṣṭafā Maghzāwī, *The Role of the Political Factor in the Spread of the Ash‘arite School in the Islamic East and the Maghreb (5th–8th Centuries AH / 11th–14th Centuries CE)*, Master's Thesis in Medieval History, University of Algiers, 2008, p. 78.

Prophet's birthday, an occasion that received considerable attention from rulers and all social strata of Almohad society. This was manifested through the wearing of fine garments, adornment, and the giving of alms to the poor, the needy, and orphans. Likewise, the celebration of the two Islamic feasts, 'Īd al-Fiṭr and 'Īd al-Aḏḥā, became widespread. People would gather to perform the festival prayers, visit one another in their homes, and some would even undertake visits to the tombs or shrines of righteous saints.¹⁰²

As a result of the social unity and integration that had been achieved, military celebrations also gained prominence. These involved the participation of ordinary people alongside the armies, either after victory over an enemy or before battle as a means of encouragement and motivation. Furthermore, the Ash'arite ideas that had become deeply rooted among the communities of the western Islamic lands allowed for the participation of members of the (Jews and Christians) in their own religious celebrations, such as the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) and the observance of the Feast of Victory, which commemorated the weeks during which God revealed to the Children of Israel the commandments containing the Ten Commandments attributed to Moses (peace be upon him). All of this reflected the spirit of tolerance and coexistence that Ash'arite thought fostered among the peoples of the Maghreb and al-Andalus.¹⁰³

These manifestations suggest that the Almohad state sought to employ the religious and educational dimensions in the service of social stability and the consolidation of intellectual unity among the various segments of society. These gatherings and celebrations were not merely transient festive occasions; rather, they fulfilled important educational and social functions that contributed to strengthening ties among people and spreading the values of solidarity and mutual support. Preaching and scholarly assemblies served as effective means of guiding the general public and instructing them in the principles of religion and proper conduct. They also helped bring scholars closer to society and connected the population to religious institutions, which came to play a central role in the daily life of the Almohads.

Furthermore, Ibn Tumart's use of the Berber language in disseminating his doctrine reveals his awareness of the importance of addressing people in their own language in order to ensure the rapid spread of ideas and their firm establishment in people's minds. This contributed to expanding the intellectual influence of the Almohad movement within tribal circles. As a result, a degree of doctrinal and social harmony emerged, which was reflected in the behavior of both individuals and communities. Values such as obedience, cooperation, and religious commitment became among the defining characteristics of Almohad society.

Moreover, the religious and military celebrations reflect the extent to which religion was intertwined with social and political life during the Almohad period. Religious occasions became opportunities to renew cohesion between the ruling authority and the populace and to demonstrate the unity of society around the state's doctrinal foundations. These celebrations also contributed to fostering a collective consciousness and strengthening the sense of

¹⁰² Kamāl al-Sayyid Abū Muṣṭafā, *Aspects of Economic and Social Life in the Islamic Maghreb through al-Wansharī's Nawāzil*, Shabāb al-Jāmi'ah Foundation Publishing House, Alexandria, Egypt, 1997, p. 44.

¹⁰³ Sharqī Nawārah, *Social Life in the Western Islamic Lands during the Almohad Era*, Master's Thesis in Islamic History, University of Algiers, 2008, p. 154.

belonging, particularly in light of the unstable security conditions that characterized the western Islamic lands during that period. Consequently, society became more cohesive and more prepared to defend the state and its principles.

The tolerance displayed by Almohad society toward the Jews and Christians also highlights an important aspect of the influence of Ash‘arite thought on social life. This intellectual tradition helped to reinforce the values of coexistence and respect for others within Islamic society despite differences in religious affiliation. This was reflected in the participation of Jews and Christians in certain occasions and celebrations, indicating a degree of social stability and cultural openness that characterized the cities of the Islamic Maghreb and al-Andalus during the Almohad era. Thus, the effects of the Ash‘arite creed were not confined to the purely religious sphere; rather, its influence extended to various aspects of social and cultural life, contributing to the construction of a more unified, organized, and cohesive society.

Taken together, these developments produced a profound cohesion within the social structure of this society. The moral factor played a fundamental role in preserving its civilizational framework through the revival of religion and the renewal of doctrine, to the extent that social life increasingly derived its characteristics from the Ash‘arite thought introduced by Ibn Tumart during this period. As a result, life came to be portrayed as moving toward an ideal model characterized by the rejection of corruption and moral decadence, which had reached their peak at the end of the Almoravid era, and by a gradual orientation toward a life of asceticism and simplicity. This, in turn, helped secure a dignified standard of living for the various components of Almohad society through mutual solidarity in times of crisis, particularly during periods of drought and famine.

In this context, the role of influential social groups including leading merchants, scholars, and Sufis—became especially significant. They contributed to building networks of mutual assistance, extending support to those affected by hardship, and providing food, clothing, and charitable aid to the needy. Such practices constituted one of the most important means of addressing social inequality and represented an effort to integrate the general public and vulnerable groups more fully into social life.¹⁰⁴

Another characteristic that emerged within this society was the mobilization for “jihad” as a doctrinal concept that became firmly rooted in the minds of the people of the Maghreb and al-Andalus as a result of the numerous external and internal threats they faced. This mobilization was consistently aimed at preserving the unity of people and the community. It appears that the spread of the idea of “jihad” within Almohad society was not merely a product of military circumstances; rather, it resulted from a religious and intellectual policy that sought to link the defense of the state with the defense of faith and religion. Consequently, individuals came to view participation in “jihad” as both a religious and a moral obligation. This perception helped unite society around common objectives, particularly in light of the challenges confronting the western Islamic lands and al-Andalus from the Christian kingdoms. The call to “jihad” thus became a means of safeguarding the

¹⁰⁴ Safar al-Ḥawālī, *The Methodology of the Ash‘arites in Creed (Manhaj al-Ash‘arah fī al-‘Aqīdah)*, Dār Manābir al-Fikr, p. 68.

unity of the Muslim community and strengthening its internal cohesion. Sermons, preaching assemblies, and religious activities also contributed to instilling this spirit of “jihad” among the population, preparing them for sacrifice and cooperation in the defense of the Islamic polity.¹⁰⁵

The Sufi class played a major role during this period. Its members were among those most willing to engage in “jihad” and self-sacrifice, which earned them official recognition from the ruling authorities and state dignitaries. As a result, they acquired a more prominent position within society and throughout the major cities of the Maghreb and al-Andalus. The author of “*al-Mu‘jib fī Talkhīṣ Akhbār al-Maghrib*” notes that ascetics and righteous men spread throughout all regions of the Maghreb and maintained good relations with caliphs and governors. This situation stemmed from their sound religious formation and strong attachment to religion. Moreover, the Sufis succeeded in attracting the lower social classes and winning their sympathy, particularly because they worked diligently to combat injustice and tyranny, encourage “jihad”, resist the Christian occupation in al-Andalus, and maintain solidarity with the common people and the oppressed while striving to improve their conditions.

Among them were individuals who cared for orphans, while others took the initiative to provide dowries and wedding preparations for women unable to afford them. The people's attachment to the Sufis was further strengthened by the belief that they possessed numerous miraculous favors bestowed upon them by God, including the conviction that their prayers were readily answered. It can therefore be affirmed that this social group played a significant role in the life of western Islamic society. Their activities contributed to strengthening solidarity among the various segments of society within a framework of brotherhood and religious unity under the banner of Islam and the Ash‘arite creed.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the flourishing of Sufism during the Almohad era reflects the nature of the religious and social transformations experienced by society. Sufis came to represent a spiritual and social force with broad influence across different social groups. Their expansion was closely associated with the spread of “*zāwiyas*” and “*ribāṭs*”, which evolved into centers of worship, education, and social reform. These institutions welcomed the poor, students of knowledge, and travelers, while providing a space for religious instruction and the dissemination of the values of asceticism, solidarity, and cooperation. Sufis also helped bring religion closer to the general public through a simple approach based on preaching, guidance, and practical example, enabling their influence to extend beyond the scholarly elite and reach various disadvantaged social groups.

In addition, this group served as an intermediary between the state and society. The Almohad state benefited from the esteem in which saints and Sufis were held by the population, while the Sufis found in state support a means of expanding their religious and social activities. As a result, a relationship of cooperation and mutual influence developed between the two

¹⁰⁵ Nadia Ḥammālī, *Features of Reform among the Sufis of the Western Islamic Lands during the 6th–7th Centuries AH (12th–13th Centuries CE)*, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Sais, Fez, Morocco, p. 723.

¹⁰⁶ Sharqī Nawārah, *Social Life in the Western Islamic Lands during the Almohad Era*, previously cited reference, pp. 100–101.

parties, positively affecting social stability and cohesion. The charitable activities carried out by the Sufis also contributed to reducing manifestations of poverty and social inequality, as their efforts were closely linked to assisting the needy, caring for vulnerable groups, and reconciling disputes among people. Such activities reinforced the values of compassion and solidarity within Almohad society.

Likewise, the discussion of the miraculous favors attributed to the Sufis reveals the depth of their spiritual presence within society. People viewed these righteous individuals as models of piety and virtue, which earned them considerable prestige and moral authority. This popular support strengthened the social and religious bonds among members of society, especially since the Sufis called for the rejection of division and encouraged cooperation in righteousness and piety. Consequently, their influence was not confined to the religious sphere alone; it also extended to the social and cultural domains, where they contributed to the dissemination of the values of tolerance, brotherhood, and unity. These values were fully consistent with the doctrinal foundations upon which the Almohad state and the Ash'arite creed in the western Islamic lands were established.

Another point that deserves attention is that the school during this period was not merely a place for imparting knowledge; rather, it served as one of the principal instruments of social reform. It contributed to overcoming the limited understanding that many among the general population had regarding the Tumartian doctrine and its various intellectual components, including Ash'arite thought, which constituted the central pillar of the Almohad movement. In any case, it is impossible to deny the role of Ibn Tumart and his method in instilling Ash'arite ideas in people's minds and encouraging them to adopt and apply them through the activities he undertook.

During the Almohad era, the school performed a role that extended far beyond the traditional educational function of transmitting knowledge and learning. It evolved into a reformist institution with religious, social, and intellectual dimensions that contributed effectively to guiding society and reshaping its doctrinal consciousness in accordance with the vision embraced by the Almohads. From the outset of his mission, Ibn Tumart realized that the success of his political and religious project could not be achieved through military power alone; it required the establishment of a solid intellectual and doctrinal foundation based on the dissemination of education and the consolidation of religious principles among all segments of society. For this reason, he devoted considerable attention to establishing schools and educational assemblies, transforming them into spaces for the dissemination of Tumartian thought, which was largely grounded in the Ash'arite creed.

These educational institutions helped eliminate the widespread deficiencies among the general public in understanding doctrinal issues, particularly those related divine unity, transcendence of God, and the rejection of anthropomorphism, matters to which the Almohad movement attached great importance.

The Almohad educational system also contributed to the formation of a generation of scholars, jurists, and preachers who carried Ash'arite thought throughout the various regions of the western Islamic lands. As a result, the Ash'arite creed became an integral part of the religious and social structure of society. The role of the school was not limited to the

dissemination of theoretical knowledge; it also helped instill the values of obedience and religious discipline while linking the general public to the reformist project led by Ibn Tumart. The latter employed diverse methods of teaching and persuasion, addressing people in language accessible to their understanding and utilizing preaching, debate, and collective instruction to firmly establish his ideas in their minds. Consequently, the school became a central instrument for the spread of the Ash'arite creed and its integration into the daily life of society, a development that had a direct impact on the religious and social behavior of the inhabitants of the western Islamic lands during the Almohad period.

This reformist role of the school demonstrates the close relationship between education, doctrine, and politics in Almohad thought. Education was not regarded as an independent objective; rather, it was viewed as a means of unifying society intellectually and doctrinally and protecting it from theological divisions that the Almohads considered a cause of the weakness and fragmentation of the Muslim community. For this reason, the spread of Ash'arite thought in the western Islamic lands was closely linked to the educational institutions sponsored by the Almohad state and to the efforts exerted by Ibn Tumart and his followers to disseminate and firmly establish this doctrine within the social and cultural fabric of Maghrebi society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the discussion presented in this study on the spread of the Ash'arite creed and its role in shaping social life in the western Islamic lands at the beginning of the Almohad era, it can be argued that Ash'arism was not initially adopted as a theological doctrine by the general population upon its arrival in the Maghreb and al-Andalus. Rather, it was first confined to a group of scholars and prominent intellectuals who had traveled to the Islamic East, where they became deeply influenced by Ash'arite thought before returning to their homelands. There, they devoted themselves to studying its doctrines and defending them through the various means available to them.

It may also be concluded that Ash'arism became firmly established among the wider population at the beginning of the sixth century AH. The doctrine of Ibn Tumart, which incorporated numerous Ash'arite ideas, played a significant role in disseminating the Ash'arite creed among the general public. As a result, people increasingly adopted its teachings and made them an essential component of their daily lives. This, in turn, gave rise to numerous positive social phenomena and distinctive social characteristics that contributed to the construction of a cohesive and integrated society for a considerable period of time.