

The reformist and intellectual efforts of Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi and Ali Marah and their impact on enriching the national cultural system

Dr. Hamed Ali ¹ and Dr. Abbad Youcef ²

¹ Affiliation Foundation, University of Martyr Hama Lakhdar El Oued (Algeria).

Email: alihamed7@gmail.com ; ORCID ID Link: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8231-3969>

² Affiliation Foundation, University of Martyr Hama Lakhdar El Oued (Algeria).

Email: youcef.algi@gmail.com ; ORCID ID Link: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7499-4652>

Abstract---In an effort to highlight the contributions of reformist thinkers in the Maghreb region, this summary aims to present both Professor Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi (1890–1957), Secretary-General of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, and Dr. Ali Marah (1930–2017), a prominent thinker within the contemporary reformist movement. The focus will be on shedding light on the key intellectual milestones of each figure, emphasizing their respective efforts within the broader framework of the reformist movement. This will involve examining, describing, and analyzing their intellectual heritage through a critical review and investigation of their most significant available works. In addition to their deep-rooted immersion in authentic Arab-Islamic culture and active engagement in the Algerian reformist movement, both thinkers also drew from the wellspring of Western (specifically French) intellectual traditions. This dual cultural exposure enriched their perspectives, particularly on concepts such as modernity, democracy, and human rights. It is also worth noting that while the first thinker, El-Amoudi, remained in his homeland throughout his life, the second, Marah, emigrated to France during the 1960s. Through this study, we aim to address the following research problem: -In the context of prevailing settler colonial conditions, how did Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi respond to unfolding events through the lens of his intellectual, political, and cultural formation?; -How influential was Ali Marah's intellectual contribution within the context of the debates surrounding various issues of contemporary Islam during his time in France?. Through an analytical and descriptive methodology focusing on the key issues addressed by both reformers.

Keywords---Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi, Reformist Thought, Ali Marah, Modernity.

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Introduction

Today, the nation does not need words that shatter its bones instead of healing its wounds and lifting it from its stumbles. Nor does it need dead ideas incapable of reversing its decline. True thinking stems from life and serves life. The world was created for us to live in, not to serve it. Yet, understanding the world becomes difficult—and even more so when humanity is absent.

The philosophies that once served as a driving force for progress were those that placed the resolution of human and societal problems at the core of their concerns. Yet, there are those—often superficial critics—who accuse religion of being inherently opposed to life, development, and advancement. They claim that the backwardness experienced by the Arab and Islamic world is a direct result of Muslims' adherence to their religion. To this, one may respond: yes, backwardness exists, but it is a reverse form of backwardness—a detachment from the true, authentic essence of Islam. Reformist and modernist movements have indeed sought remedies for these ailments, each from its own ideological perspective. However, a key critique of such efforts is that they often remained confined to theoretical discourse, locked within books and academic volumes, without achieving tangible implementation in reality. Nevertheless, this does not diminish their clear and lasting influence on the trajectory of Arab and Islamic history.

One of the most pressing challenges facing reformist thinking and advocates of renaissance lies in the inner tension experienced by the self—caught between the authenticity of its religious and cultural identity, and the allure of the "Other" with its advancements in technology and modernity. As a result, the Arab and Islamic self finds itself oscillating between those who cling rigidly to tradition and those who have been stripped of their roots. Some individuals within the nation have gone so far as to call for a complete detachment from our identity, heritage, and foundational values, advocating blind imitation of the West in both minor and major matters—an approach inconceivable to anyone of sincere conviction. Yet, the deeper crisis may lie in the fact that the Arab and Muslim mind has become stagnant and unproductive, unable to generate original ideas or propose effective solutions to the problems facing the ummah. In this context, our decision to explore the intellectual and reformist legacies of two key figures—Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi and Dr. Ali Marah—touches upon this very dilemma. Rather than chasing after ideas foreign to our core, why not delve into the depths of our own authenticity to uncover creativity and pathways for transformation? This is the premise upon which the central research problem of this article is based:

- **In light of the prevailing settler-colonial conditions, how did Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi engage with unfolding events through the lens of his intellectual, political, and cultural formation?**
- **To what extent did Dr. Ali Marah's thought influence contemporary Islamic discourse amidst the intellectual debates he encountered in France regarding issues of modern Islam?**

Relying on a descriptive-analytical methodology to highlight the key intellectual issues addressed by both thinkers.

1. Professor El-Amin El-Amoudi: His Life and Reformist Activities:

His Birth and Early Life:

The martyred writer Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi was born in 1892 in the town of Oued Souf in southeastern Algeria¹.

As for his life, it is best described in his own words through a letter he sent to his colleague Sheikh Mohamed El-Hadi El-Zahiri El-Sanoussi, in which he writes: "As for my life, it is the life of every Algerian Muslim—a life without purpose or hope; a life of one who does not grieve for yesterday, nor

¹ Hafnaoui Kacir. Professor El-Amin El-Amoudi: His Life and Various Activities. Mezouar Press, El Oued, 2008, p. 8.

rejoice in today, nor trust in tomorrow. Such has been my life since the day I came to know what life is."².... The letter was dated July 14, 1927.

"If you wish for my biography, take it in the utmost brevity: I was raised in Oued Souf, in a family that once held a respected status and enjoyed a share of what is customarily called 'comfort and prosperity,' before fate turned against it and calamities followed one after another. I was brought up in the arms of a loving mother and an uncle more concerned for me than I was for myself. I received my education in both the French primary school and the Qur'anic school— in the manner and method that you, I, and people generally know and recognize."

His Family:

His father was Youssef bin Omar bin Abdallah bin Belkacem, known as Al-Talib—a title traditionally given in the Souf region to those who had memorized the Qur'an or taught children. He also bore the title Khouja in El Oued, a word of Turkish origin meaning "scribe" or "writer."³

His mother was Mabrouka bint Ali Obeidi. The El-Amoudi family traces its origins back to Hadhramaut in Yemen—a lineage deeply rooted in Islamic history. This prominent family has produced many notable scholars and figures across both the Eastern and Western Islamic worlds. Some members of the family migrated to Africa shortly after the early Islamic conquests. Among the distinguished scholars from this lineage was Sheikh Abu al-Qasim Al-Amoudi, whose mausoleum remains a site of veneration and blessing in the city of Tozeur in southern Tunisia. His biography was recorded by Abu al-Abbas Al-Darjini in his work *Tabaqat Mashayikh al-Maghrib* (The Classes of the Maghrebi Sheikhs).⁴ Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi was appointed as a legal representative (*wakil shar'i*) in the city of Biskra during World War I. It was there that he entered into his first marriage with Fatima bint Ahmed Jawad. He later married a second wife, Khadouj from Batna, whose father worked as an interpreter. He subsequently married a woman from the M'sila region, and finally, Farida, a Tunisian national. These marriages resulted in eight children—seven sons and one daughter, named Laila⁵.

His Education:

El-Amoudi was raised an orphan, having lost his father at a young age, and his family soon fell into poverty. He reflects on this period of his life, stating: "I was raised in Oued Souf, in a family that once held a respected status and enjoyed a share of what is customarily called 'prosperity,' before fate turned against it and calamities followed one after another." Despite these hardships, he pursued his early education in both the French primary school and the Qur'anic school, receiving instruction in the manner widely known and practiced in his region at the time⁶. He was raised by his mother and cared for by his uncle. When orphans receive proper care and support, it often enhances their self-reliance and allows their innate abilities to emerge and flourish⁷. El-Amoudi notes in his autobiographical account: "I was raised in the arms of a loving mother and an uncle who cared for me more than I cared for myself. I received my education at the French primary school and the Qur'anic school..."⁸. Like many of his peers, El-Amoudi studied and memorized the Qur'an during his childhood at the Qur'anic school. There, he also received foundational instruction in the Arabic language and Islamic

² Mohamed El-Hadi El-Zahiri El-Sanoussi. *Poets of Algeria in the Contemporary Era*, Vol. 2, Al-Nahda Press, Tunis, 1927, p. 58.

³ Hafnaoui Kacir, *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴ Tahir Ben Aicha. *El-Mouqarr Symposium*, Algiers, November 1972.

⁵ Mohamed Salah Ramadan. *Thaqafa Magazine*, Issue No. 43, Algiers, 1978.

⁶ Mohamed El-Akhdar Abdelkader El-Saihi. *Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi: A Multifaceted Personality*, 2nd ed., Houma Publishing House, Algiers, 2001, p. 29.

⁷ Saad bin Al-Bashir Al-Amamera. *Notable Figures from Souf in Jurisprudence, Culture, and Literature*, Mezouar Press, El Oued, 2007, p. 51.

⁸ Mohamed El-Akhdar Abdelkader El-Saihi, *ibid.*, p. 29.

jurisprudence under the guidance of his uncle, Sheikh Abdelrahman El-Amoudi⁹. He later enrolled in the public education school on October 1, 1902—the only official primary school in the town of El Oued at the time, then known as the “École des Indigènes” (School for Natives). It is likely that his father’s position as an administrative courier enabled him to gain access to this institution. He graduated from it in May 1905, earning his primary school certificate. Following this, he enrolled at the secondary school in Biskra, but his stay was brief. His rebellious temperament ultimately worked against him, leading to his expulsion from the school.¹⁰ At the age of sixteen, he enrolled in the Franco-Islamic School in the city of Constantine. This institution offered a dual education in Arabic and French and was specifically designed to train judges, legal representatives (wakils), and court-affiliated translators¹¹.

Although the three official schools at the time included distinguished teachers and respected scholars such as Sheikh Abdelkader El-Majawi, Sheikh Abdelhalim Ben Smaya, Sheikh Mohamed El-Said Ben Zekri, and Sheikh El-Mouloud Ben El-Mouhoub, the administration often entrusted the implementation of the curriculum to French instructors. As a result, the relationship between the administration and some of the more perceptive students—like El-Amoudi—was strained. He was deeply resentful of the administration’s misguided behavior, which he regarded as a reflection of the colonial policy in Algeria. El-Amoudi later recounted his experience at the school in both prose and poetry, stating: “I studied there alongside forty-some students, and what I gained—as did they—was purely the result of coincidence and the grace of God. No credit or merit is due to any child of Eve in that regard—ever”¹².

El-Amoudi spent four years at the Constantine school but, due to various obstacles, was unable to continue his studies at the school in Algiers, where he would have spent two additional years completing the higher division and earning a degree in advanced religious and legal studies. As a result, he settled for the initial qualification, which enabled him to hold positions such as judicial assistant, legal representative (wakil) in sharia courts, or notary (‘adl) in the judge’s court¹³. It is clearly evident that, despite his clash with the system of a school administered by a hostile French colonial authority—and despite the obstacles that hindered his progress—El-Amoudi nonetheless succeeded in acquiring a broad and profound education. His formation was both dual and rich: Islamic and French, legal and juridical. This intellectual depth reflected his nobility and brilliance. For when the light of awareness ignites within the human soul, no authoritarian system can fully suppress its course. At most, such regimes can stir the dust to cloud the atmosphere, slowing the light’s path toward its goals—but never extinguishing it. This is precisely what happened to the gifted student Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi, when the colonial administration, in collusion with a few envious students and complicit teachers, orchestrated a scheme to ensure his failure in the final examination¹⁴.

Factors Behind His Brilliance and Resilience:

Several factors came together to nurture and ignite this proud and dignified soul—one that gave much but received little recognition or scholarly attention, to the point of being counted among the “forgotten figures.” These factors can be summarized as follows:

- The care and mentorship of his uncle, Abdelrahman—one of the prominent scholars of the Souf region—played a crucial role in shaping his character. This guidance allowed El-Amoudi to absorb

⁹ Moussa bin Moussa. *The Reform Movement in Oued Souf: Its Emergence and Development (1919–1939)*, Master’s thesis, supervised by Dr. Ahmed Sari, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of History and Archaeology, Mentouri University, Constantine, 2005/2006, p. 119.

¹⁰ Hafnaoui Kacir, *ibid.*, p. 11

¹¹ Omar Ben Ghenaia. *The Voice of Algeria in Modern Arab Thought: Figures, Issues, and Positions*, University Publications Office, Algiers, 1993, p. 187.

¹² Nouredine Thennio. *Issues of the Reform Movement in the Thought of Rabah Zanati and Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi During the 1930s*, Master’s thesis, supervised by Dr. Ahmed Sari, Institute of Islamic Civilization, Emir Abdelkader University, Constantine, 1996/1997, p. 115.

¹³ Nouredine Thennio, *ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁴ Hamza Boukoucha. “Forgotten Figures,” *Thaqafa Magazine*, No. 6, Algiers, January 1972, pp. 48–49

an authentic Arab-Islamic cultural foundation and contributed significantly to his upbringing, instilling in him a strong sense of national consciousness.¹⁵

- His exposure to French education provided him with eloquence, knowledge, and a clear, methodical approach to addressing issues and challenges. It enabled him to analyze problems with thoughtful insight, identify their root causes, and propose effective remedies for the ailments of the ummah¹⁶.
- His broad intellectual curiosity, which developed as he grew older and enrolled in the Constantine school—despite the obstacles and conspiracies he faced—was a testament to both his resilience and brilliance. As he himself affirmed, no "child of Eve" could claim credit for what he had learned there, emphasizing his self-reliance and perseverance. His literary talents were widely acknowledged in intellectual circles, where his poetry, prose, and exceptional eloquence in both Arabic and French were subjects of admiration and discussion¹⁷.
- El-Amoudi studied under and interacted with a number of prominent scholars and intellectuals, with whom he shared literary and journalistic engagements. Among them were Sheikh Al-'Oqbi, Al-Zahiri, and Al-Ibrahimi—figures whose influence deeply shaped his personality and intellectual formation. This generation played a significant role in inspiring his commitment to public service, both during his time in Biskra and later in Algiers, where he served as Secretary-General of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and as President of the Shari'a Court Legal Representatives. His pen left a notable mark on both Arabic and French-language journalism, contributing to numerous newspapers that emerged after World War I, such as *Al-Iqdam*, *Al-Najah*, *Al-Jaheem*, *Al-Difa'*, and others¹⁸.
- The intellectual and political renaissance that Algeria witnessed at the dawn of the 20th century was marked by the emergence of numerous cultural institutions, including clubs, associations, political parties, and a bilingual press. These movements and entities reflected a diversity of orientations, methods, and demands—ranging from calls for assimilation, to reform, and ultimately, full independence¹⁹.
- France's colonial policy in Algeria was characterized by subjugation, forced assimilation, the exploitation of resources, and the systematic destruction of the country's Arab-Islamic identity. The colons (European settlers) and segments of the Jewish community came to dominate the wealth and strategic sectors of the nation. Meanwhile, the Algerian people endured a series of oppressive laws, including the Code de l'Indigénat (Native Code), compulsory military conscription, and harsh forestry regulations that stripped communities of access to their land and livelihoods²⁰.

The Personality of Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi:

Professor Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi was a social reformer who employed poetry, speeches, and journalistic articles as tools to advance his reformist objectives. He was an exceptional figure—one of the early national activists, a visionary social reformer, and a bold political voice. As a founding member of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, he was known for his fearless defense of freedom, his eloquence in both Arabic and French, and his creative writing in both languages. He spent much of his youth as a rebellious and defiant spirit, and in his maturity, he remained a courageous activist who never hesitated to speak the truth, regardless of the consequences. He frequently visited the city of Constantine, where he would meet with Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis, either at his office or his school, whenever he was in town.

¹⁵ Mohamed Abdessalam El-Amoudi. *El-Amin El-Amoudi: Martyr of the Liberation Revolution – His Life and Legacy*, Nakhlat Print Foundation, Algiers, p. 46.

¹⁶ Mohamed Bek. *Mohamed El-Amin El-Amoudi and His Role in Reform Through the Newspaper Al-Difa'*, Master's thesis, supervised by Dr. Boubekur Hafidallah, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Sciences, Hadj Lakhdar University, Batna, 2008/2009, p. 52.

¹⁷ Mohamed El-Akhdar Abdelkader El-Saihi, *ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Noureddine Thennio, *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁹ Ahmed Toufic El-Madani. *A Life of Struggle (Memoirs) in Algeria, 1925–1954*, Vol. 2, 1st ed., National Book Foundation, Algiers, 1977, p. 356.

²⁰ Mohamed Bek, *ibid.*, p. 53.

El-Amin El-Amoudi was a rebel against the prevailing conditions of his time—from his early years as a student until the end of his life. How could he not rise up against a reality shaped entirely by colonialism, which manipulated circumstances at will and maintained its grip with an iron fist?²¹

The three official schools—those of Constantine, Algiers, and Tlemcen—despite having a number of respectable teachers and esteemed scholars at the time, remained under the control of French administrators who followed predetermined agendas and ideological frameworks. El-Amoudi was among the most perceptive and independent-minded students—students who grew increasingly frustrated with the administration, just as the administration found them troublesome. These institutions restricted their intellectual freedom, scrutinizing not only their actions but even their intentions and interests. El-Amoudi was one of those students who endured harsh treatment and fatigue under such conditions, and he remained deeply resentful of the oppressive environment he encountered within that system.

His Death:

After more than a quarter-century of relentless struggle and continuous contributions across cultural, political, social, and reformist fields, the martyr El-Amoudi met a tragic end. On October 10, 1957, news of his assassination shocked the public. He was killed by the Red Hand Organization (La Main Rouge), which specifically targeted intellectuals. He died a martyr—may he rest in peace²². The primary reason behind his assassination was his authorship and translation of a report submitted to the United Nations on the Algerian issue. The report exposed the hellish torture and brutal methods employed by the French authorities against the Algerian people.

Thus, a flame of authentic Algerian thought was extinguished at the hands of French colonial brutality, adding yet another martyr to the long procession of righteous souls. May they all rest in peace.

El-Amin El-Amoudi and the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars:

His Professional and Activist Life:

1 – El-Amoudi and the Press:

El-Amoudi began writing for Al-Najah newspaper during its early days, before it shifted its editorial direction. He also contributed to Al-Iqdam, a newspaper founded by Emir Khaled, writing in both Arabic and French. His writings in Al-Iqdam largely focused on national reform, and his articles in French formed an integral part of his broader struggle. After relocating to Biskra, he became one of the leading figures in the fields of literature and journalism, alongside a group of young reformist activists in the city and its surrounding region, including Tayeb Al-'Oqbi, Mohamed Al-Aid Al-Khalifa, and others. Their cultural and literary activities left a significant impact on the press of that era, particularly in newspapers such as Al-Muntaqid, Al-Shihab, Sada Al-Sahra', and the early publications of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, including Al-Basa'ir and Al-Jazair Al-Jumhuriya (Algeria Républicaine)²³. The pen and thought of El-Amoudi—both as a literary figure and social writer—emerged vividly, charged with a deep national and social sensitivity. This was largely shaped by his close engagement with the struggles of ordinary people in the courts, as well as his interactions with scholars and literary figures from diverse cultural backgrounds²⁴.

El-Amoudi quickly rose to prominence in the field of journalism, thanks to his broad intellectual background and his boldness. His pen became a powerful weapon in exposing colonialism and its collaborators. Indeed, few Algerian newspapers published between the two World Wars (1919–1939) were without one of his incisive articles or impactful columns aimed at confronting the enemies of the nation. He wrote for a wide range of Algerian—and even Tunisian—newspapers, in both Arabic and

²¹ Anissa Barakat. *Political Movements During 1936*, p. 49.

²² Rabah Turki. *Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis: Pioneer of Reform and Education in Algeria*, 4th ed., National Book Foundation, Algiers, 1984, p. 100.

²³ Hafnaoui Kacir, *ibid.*, p. 16

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

French, addressing a variety of political, social, and literary themes. He skillfully seized upon events and occasions, offering commentary, analysis, and reflections on their immediate and long-term consequences. He contributed to the following newspapers²⁵:

- The newspaper *Al-Najah* in its early phase was first published in Constantine on August 24, 1920, and continued until 1957. During this period, it held a stance opposed to reformist thought and national political movements.
- The newspaper *Al-Iqdam*, founded by Emir Khaled, was published in both Arabic and French from 1919 until 1923. It advocated for the rights of North African Muslims, calling for the repeal of oppressive laws and the establishment of equality.
- The first issue of *Al-Islah* newspaper appeared on September 8, 1927, in the city of Biskra, founded by Sheikh Tayeb El-'Oqbi. From its inception, the newspaper opened a broad front of engagement. El-Amoudi actively participated through poetic exchanges and literary dialogues with prominent writers and poets, most notably his debates with Sheikh El-Hafidhi. The newspaper boldly exposed corrupt Sufi orders that collaborated with the colonial authorities—an approach that provoked strong opposition from *Al-Balagh Al-Jazairi*, which stood firmly against the reformist press. El-Amoudi was one of the most passionate contributors, distinguished by the authenticity of his views and the depth of his thought. He aimed to stir writers and journalists into addressing serious issues that affected the social fabric of Algerian society, such as his notable article on the subject of naturalization²⁶.
- The newspaper *Sada al-Sahra'* (Echo of the Desert), whose editor-in-chief was Ahmed Ben Al-Abed El-'Oqbi, was established in 1925 in Biskra. El-Amoudi contributed to its editorial work and was among its most prominent writers. In its early phase, the paper had a distinctly nationalist and reformist orientation. However, after it deviated from this path, it lost much of its intellectual and literary value. Issue No. 15, published on September 25, 1934—after an eight-year hiatus—marked this shift, as the paper began attacking the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and reformist figures²⁷.
- The newspaper *Al-Jaza'ir* (Algeria), founded by Mohamed El-Said El-Zahiri (1899–1956) in 1925, was a bold reformist publication that openly criticized the tragic conditions in Algeria. Due to its daring stance, the newspaper was short-lived and ceased publication after only three issues.²⁸
- The newspaper *Al-Muntaqid* was launched in Constantine on July 2, 1925. From its very first issue, it made clear its reformist orientation. It stood apart from its predecessors through its fluid style, strong command of language, and the depth of its ideas.
- The newspaper *Al-Shihab*, which succeeded *Al-Muntaqid*, was founded by Ben Badis. Its first issue was published on November 12, 1925, and it continued until 1939²⁹.
- The newspaper *Al-Jaheem* (The Hellfire), co-founded by El-Amoudi and El-Zahiri, was established in Constantine on March 30, 1933, as a reaction to *Al-Mi'yar*, a publication known for its attacks on the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. *Al-Jaheem* quickly stirred significant controversy within both cultural and reformist circles due to its provocative style. In his article, Professor Mohamed Salah Ramadan notes: "Let me emphasize here that *Al-Jaheem* did not speak on behalf of the Association of Scholars, as *Al-Mi'yar* claimed to; rather, it represented those who felt protective of the Association and were willing to defend it. Ben Badis, Al-'Oqbi, Al-Mili, and Al-Tebessi were not pleased with the paper. It was led by El-Amoudi and Said El-Zahiri, who became the central figures in this arena. They demonstrated remarkable skill in countering their opponents through sharp criticism and satire, delivered in both prose and verse—using various literary forms such as anecdotes, jokes, stories, and witty commentaries. Their work blended seriousness with humor, imagination with reality, to the extent that it became difficult to distinguish one from the other."³⁰

²⁵ Mohamed Bek, *ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁶ Noureddine Thennio, *ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁷ Mohamed Bek, *ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁸ Mohamed Nacer. *Algerian Arabic Newspapers: 1847–1939*, National Publishing and Distribution Company, Algiers, 1980, p. 85.

²⁹ Mohamed Nacer, *ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁰ Ali Ghanabzia. *The Contributions of Souf Region Scholars to the National Press Movement (1920–1938)*, p. 133.

- El-Amoudi also wrote for several newspapers affiliated with the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, including *Al-Sunna Al-Nabawiyya*, which was first published on March 1, 1933, and *Al-Shari'a*, which launched on July 17, 1933. He contributed as well to *Al-Sirat Al-Sawi*, whose first issue appeared on September 11, 1933. Additionally, he was a prominent contributor to *Al-Barq*, a weekly newspaper that was published in Constantine beginning on March 17, 1927. In this paper, El-Amoudi frequently wrote under the pseudonym "Samahri." Due to the paper's boldness and sharp critique, the colonial authorities became increasingly alarmed by its content, leading to its suspension in September 1927.³¹
- El-Amoudi also wrote for *Alger République*, a French-language newspaper published in Algiers. At the beginning of 1934, he founded *Al-Difa'* (The Defense), a newspaper for which he served as editor-in-chief. It was published every Friday in French and continued for five years, serving as a platform to defend the reformist current and confront its opposition. The paper became known for exposing the practices of the colonial regime and the oppressive policies of the French administration toward the subjugated Algerian people³².

2 – El-Amoudi's Political and Cultural Life:

The historical period during which El-Amin El-Amoudi lived under French colonial rule is described by historians as the settler-colonial phase. During this era, the French administration intensified the implementation of its legal, administrative, and political frameworks in order to consolidate its economic, social, and cultural dominance.

As for the Algerians, after the fervor of calls for jihad and armed struggle had subsided, they turned to Islam and its values as a refuge, consciously distancing themselves from the customs, traditions, and values of the colonial occupiers. In expressing their rejection, they increasingly turned to the power of the word, replacing the now-impossible armed resistance with political demands as a new form of struggle³³.

France, along with its various allies and collaborators, sought to reshape the nation and perpetuate its subjugation through every possible means. A key strategy involved relying on local elected officials—loyal to the colonial administration—to spread despair among the Arab Muslim population. They employed a demagogic narrative claiming that any form of expression, however minimal, or any attempt at improvement, however trivial, would inevitably lead to disaster. Anyone who believed otherwise was branded a nationalist, a terrorist, or a troublemaker—portrayed as a reckless agitator or a dangerous shepherd of chaos. Such rhetoric aimed to delegitimize all reformist efforts and suppress any movement toward change³⁴.

When El-Amin El-Amoudi became aware of the world around him, the reality of "French Algeria" was already firmly in place. The French administration controlled the levers of the economy and politics, treating Algeria as an extension of metropolitan France, with little regard for the Algerian Muslim population—except insofar as they served the interests of French economic and political expansion. It was within this environment that El-Amoudi grew up, first as a student and later as a legal representative (*wakil shar'i*). Through his professional experience and intellectual development, his political awareness became increasingly clear. His numerous contributions to Arabic newspapers helped shape his understanding of politics, allowing him to grasp its complexities and foresee the consequences that could arise from opposing the French administration³⁵.

³¹ Editor. *Al-Shihab Magazine*, Issue No. 38, Year 2 (1926–1927), 1st ed., Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 2001, pp. 94–95.

³² Mohamed Tahar Abdessalam El-Amoudi, *ibid.*, p. 18.

³³ Mohamed Nacer, *ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

³⁴ Mohamed Tahar Abdessalam El-Amoudi, *ibid.*, pp. 38–40.

³⁵ Hafnaoui Kacir, *ibid.*, p. 44.

● Reviving Islam and Education:

El-Amoudi clearly defined the intellectual foundations and reference frameworks that would guide his political and social engagement. In doing so, he gave these foundations a broader dimension—essentially outlining the general problematique of the reformist and revivalist project that Algeria was in urgent need of, and that the people hoped for in some of their most sincere and committed leaders. The central question thus emerged: How can Muslim Algeria achieve a true renaissance—one that lifts it out of the deep and prolonged state of underdevelopment that had weighed heavily upon it for decades?

The state of underdevelopment that Algerian society has been struggling with—either as a result of or as a legacy of French colonialism—can be largely attributed to fragmentation in action and a lack of unified understanding of true Islam, which inherently calls for tawhid (oneness) and unity among Muslims. The central dilemma that any comprehensive revivalist framework must address lies in the conflicting conceptions and practices of Islam among Algerian Muslims, particularly across different religious orders, traditional leaders, and institutions such as zawiyas and mosques. If Islam is to be relied upon as the foundation for lifting Algeria out of its miserable and stagnant condition, then—according to El-Amoudi—it is imperative to first define and identify authentic Islam, in order to rally the energies of the nation and bring together all its social classes and intellectual elites around shared principles.³⁶

El-Amoudi saw in education and instruction the only path of salvation from a bleak and deteriorating reality. He stated: "There is no life in education unless it is useful, and nothing in it is useful unless it is founded on ethics. And there are no ethics except those that conform to Islam." He further defined the "true Islam" to which society must return as the Islam of the honored and respected early ancestors— a religion of clarity, good conduct, and pure worship practices untainted by later innovations and distortions. For this correct understanding of Islam to be realized, he believed, education must be properly reformed and firmly established.³⁷

El-Amoudi notes that there are indeed individuals capable of undertaking the mission of reform—graduates of state-run schools educated in both Arabic and French, as he himself was. Among them are Muslim intellectuals with a French cultural background who, according to El-Amoudi, can contribute meaningfully to the reform of Algerian society, so long as their efforts are directed toward defending the interests of the Muslim population and grounded in Islamic principles. In El-Amoudi's view, such individuals are rightly considered reformers.

Thanks to his command of both Arab and French cultures, El-Amoudi was able to occupy a unique social and cultural position—one that few others were able to articulate or embody. This distinctive trait enabled him to bridge the concerns of intellectuals rooted in authentic Arab-Islamic tradition, including scholars and reformers, and to serve as a unifying voice among them.

El-Amoudi began from an observation he viewed as a glaring expression of colonial injustice in Algeria—an inconsistency that revealed the deep contradiction in the colonial mindset and its racially driven "civilizing mission." This contradiction lay in the vast gap between Europeans and Algerians. While the law nominally considered Algerians to be French citizens, the regulatory frameworks and administrative practices enforced a system of segregation, effectively legitimizing discrimination in courts and public institutions. The French authorities continued to subject Algerians to Islamic law (shari'a) and to certain traditional customs and norms, which, in effect, barred them from being regarded as equals to Europeans. As a result, Algerians were denied the possibility of attaining full French citizenship³⁸.

³⁶ Mohamed Tahar Abdessalam El-Amoudi, *ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁷ Hafnaoui Kacir, *ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

2 – Dr. Ali Marah: The Overlooked Islamic Thinker and Researcher:

Orientalist institutes in the West were not exclusively run by European orientalists. In fact, several other centers and departments of Eastern studies were established by Arab and Muslim scholars within Western—particularly European and American—universities. These scholars played a leading role in training generations of both European orientalists and Arab researchers specializing in Arabic and Islamic studies. Among the most prominent figures in this regard are Albert Hourani in the United Kingdom, Philip Hitti in the United States, Fuad Sarkan in Germany, and Mohamed Arkoun and Ali Marah in France, among others.

Did this Western academic environment influence their scientific methodology, intellectual output, and emotional connection to their own culture and the fate of their nations? Or, conversely, did they take advantage of the material resources and available opportunities to serve their intellectual heritage and promote their civilization?

His Birth and Early Life:

The thinker Ali Marah was born on October 21, 1930, in the city of Laghouat, in southern Algeria. His birth came exactly a century after France's occupation of Algeria and coincided with the colonial authorities' loud and celebratory commemoration of one hundred years of their presence in the country³⁹.

His Education:

Ali Marah's name began to emerge in the early 1950s. He first studied at the Thaalibia School, where some of his notable teachers included Ben Zekri and Mechri. However, he soon decided to leave the Thaalibia School and requested his father's permission to transfer to the public education system. He enrolled at Bijou High School—known today as Emir Abdelkader High School—and later joined the Faculty of Arts at the University of Algiers, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in Arabic language in 1954. He went on to pursue graduate studies at the Sorbonne University in Paris, earning the *agrégation* in 1956 and a Doctorate in Letters in 1968, after submitting a dissertation on the reform movement in Algeria between 1925 and 1940⁴⁰.

His Death:

He passed away on Friday, May 26, 2017, at the age of 77, and was buried in the Muslim section of the Lyon cemetery. Only a small number of members from the local Algerian community attended his funeral. May God have mercy on him.

In 1963, he moved to France, where he assumed several academic responsibilities, including serving as Director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at Lyon 3 University, and later holding the same position at the New Sorbonne University – Paris 3. He was also a member of numerous advisory and academic committees. Despite his cautious nature and tendency to avoid the spotlight—especially during periods of heightened debate in France about Islam and Muslims beginning in the early 1980s—he remained actively engaged in the discourse. He contributed intellectual essays from time to time to *Le Monde* and was among the first to propose the establishment of an Islamic Conference Organization in France, a proposal officially made on February 14, 1997.⁴¹

In addition to his administrative and intellectual contributions, Ali Marah devoted himself to teaching and research in the fields of history and Islamic studies. His sustained efforts resulted in the training of generations of specialists in the history and literature of the Islamic world. He authored a number of valuable books and scholarly works, including: *The Reform Movement in Algeria between 1925 and*

³⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 48

⁴¹ Ahmed Sari. Ali Marah: The Overlooked Islamic Researcher and Thinker, *Journal of Literature and Human Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 21, Constantine.

1940, Ibn Badis: Pages from Islam, An Introduction to Islamic Thought, Contemporary Islam, The Prophetic Sunnah, Charles de Foucauld in the Eyes of Islam, Islam and Christianity in Dialogue, and The Ottoman Empire and Europe Through the Thoughts and Memoirs of Sultan Abdulhamid II⁴².

Dr. Ali Marah did not limit himself to authoring books; like all serious scholars, he also maintained a steady presence in well-regarded academic journals. He published valuable articles and research papers in numerous periodicals, including the *Annals of the Institute of Oriental Studies* (Faculty of Aix-Marseille University, France), *Al-Adab* (University of Algiers), *Annals of the Faculty of Letters at Censier* (Paris), *Oriens* (The East, Paris), *Orienti Moderno* (The Maghreb, Tunisia), *Al-Manahil* (Rabat, Morocco), *Revue Historique I.B.L.A.* (Tunis), *Modern East* (Rome), and *Revue du Monde Arabo-Islamique et Méditerranéen* (Aix-Marseille University, France).

In addition to this, he consistently contributed to collective volumes published by various cultural and academic institutions, such as the University of Strasbourg, the University of Toulouse, the Algerian Cultural Center in Paris, the Council of Europe, and the Arab League, among others⁴³.

In addition to teaching contemporary Islamic history, Dr. Ali Marah supervised a number of academic theses at four major institutions: Lyon 3 University, Paris 3 University, Paris 4 University, and the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris. These dissertations focused on topics such as modern Arabic literature, ancient and modern Islamic history, the current state of the Arab world, and the dynamics of Islam in contemporary societies.

Among the most important titles of these dissertations are the following:

- The Lebanese Poet Saïd Akl
- The Prophetic Biography by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham
- The Question of the Caliphate (1924–1969)
- Religion and Politics in the Comoros Islands
- Peaceful Relations Between Muslims and the Eastern Franks (1095–1291)

Roots and Trajectories of the Reform Movement:

There is no doubt that Dr. Ali Marah is considered one of the foremost specialists in modern Islamic reformist thought. He gained international recognition in this intellectual field through his valuable contributions, some of which were mentioned earlier. His work unveiled the roots of the reform movement in Islam and traced its trajectories throughout both classical and modern history. He offered a detailed exposition of the conceptual framework of the term reform in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and examined the connections between reformist thought and existing political movements and parties. He also dedicated books, studies, and articles to leading figures of Islamic reform such as Muhammad Iqbal, Abul A'la Maududi, among others. However, he regarded Shaykh Abdelhamid Ben Badis as the greatest among these prominent personalities, stating: "There is no one like Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis who embodied both the authenticity and universality of the Islamic message. No one else, with such immense energy, was able to ignite so many hopes for development and adaptation in the face of the modern crisis."⁴⁴

It is worth noting that Dr. Ali Marah's contributions to the field of reformist thought are significant, particularly through works such as *Contemporary Islam*, which gained wide acclaim. The book has been reprinted multiple times and translated into several languages, including English, Arabic, Turkish, and Spanish, among others.

⁴² Mouloud Aouimer. Ali Marah: A Researcher Between Two Shores, *Al-Shabab Al-Muslim Magazine*, Issue No. 23, Algiers, 2015.

⁴³ Ahmed Sari, *ibid.*, p. 346

⁴⁴ Mouloud Aouimer, *ibid.*, p. 2

In truth, Dr. Ali Marah's book *The Reform Movement in Algeria, 1925–1940* stands as a foundational reference in the historiography of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. No other work matches it in depth, analysis, structure, and conclusions. Although numerous publications have appeared on the subject since its release in 1968—drawing on newly available data and previously obscure documents—Marah's contribution remains unparalleled. This is due to his lived experience within the reformist movement, his close acquaintance with its leading figures, his careful reading of its literature, and his application of modern scholarly methodologies to textual analysis and contextual interpretation. The enduring value of the work lies in its rigorous methodological framework, which proves that solid scholarship depends more on the quality of approach than on the sheer volume of available material.

Milestones and Insights: The History of Algeria:

Dr. Ali Marah took an early interest in Algerian history, both in its ancient and modern periods. In 1957, he published his first scholarly article on Algeria in the *Annals of the Institute of Oriental Studies*. He also studied the history of education in Algeria between 1880 and 1960, as well as the role of Abd al-Mu'min ibn Ali in founding the Almohad state. Furthermore, he examined the development of the Algerian nationalist movement after World War I, focusing in particular on the political activism of Emir Khaled and its resonance among the Algerian elite—especially Shaykh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, who expressed deep admiration for this political leader. Dr. Marah also explored the influence of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on Algerian intellectuals, particularly among the liberal-leaning elites⁴⁵.

There is no doubt that Dr. Ali Marah pioneered an important area of historical research when he documented the development of Algerian journalism between 1919 and 1939. This groundbreaking study, published in Tunisia in 1964, represents the first substantive page in the historiography of Algerian press history. It became a foundational reference for all subsequent researchers in this field, including Zouhir Ihaddaden, Mohamed Nacer, Zoubir Seif El Islam, Abdelmalek Mortad, among others.

Islamic Studies:

Dr. Ali Marah began his academic journey with a deep interest in Islamic issues during his time as a student at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Algiers. Between 1952 and 1954, he published several articles in *Al-Shabab Al-Muslim* (The Muslim Youth), a journal supervised by the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. Under the pseudonym "Abu Jamil Taha," he regularly contributed to a column titled *In the Light of the Qur'an and Hadith*, where he explored and analyzed noble Islamic values derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. His writings addressed themes such as solidarity, brotherhood, generosity, honesty, humility, tolerance, hypocrisy, duty, tribulation, the emancipation of slaves, and compassion toward orphans, among others.

Dr. Ali Marah continued his scholarly engagement in the field of Islamic studies by examining the methodology of Shaykh Ibn Badis in Qur'anic exegesis. He also translated selected passages from the Qur'an and Hadith to help introduce Islam to non-Arabic-speaking audiences. Moreover, he addressed political issues that remain subjects of ongoing debate, such as the concept of *shūrā* (consultation) in Islam and the question of the caliphate system and its relevance in the modern era.

Dr. Ali Marah's Connection to Algeria:

Although Dr. Ali Marah left Algeria in 1963, he maintained strong ties with his homeland. He frequently returned, especially during the 1980s, to take part in intellectual and scholarly discussions. Notably, he contributed to the annual Islamic Thought Conferences organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, where he made some of his most significant interventions.

- From Awakening to a New Start (Algiers, July 2–10, 1984)
- Toward a New Dynamic (Bejaia, July 8–16, 1985)

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

- The Present State of the Islamic World: A Statistical Study (Setif, September 2–9, 1986).

Contributions to Cultural Forums:

Dr. Ali Marah actively contributed to the cultural and intellectual events organized by French associations in public forums aimed at presenting the Islamic perspective on contemporary issues. Notably, in December 1989, he participated in a seminar organized by the Association of Secular Teachers in collaboration with *Nouvel Observateur* magazine, held at the Maison de la Chimie in Paris, on the topic of (Islam and Secularism)⁴⁶. Dr. Ali Marah also showed a deep interest in Islamic-Christian dialogue and participated in numerous conferences and meetings organized by church institutions. He published several articles and books emphasizing the need for mutual understanding, rapprochement, and cooperation between Muslims and Christians—especially as they coexist within the same society and share a common destiny.

Conclusion

1 -The reformist movement found in the figure of Al-Amoudi its political spokesperson, as he succeeded in framing reform-related issues within the realm of public political discourse, ensuring their presence at every significant occasion.

A reading of the history of the reformist movement through Al-Amoudi's activism reveals the existence of a strong political current within the movement that articulated its social and political demands in the French language. This can today be considered a pioneering attempt to address the complex relationship between Islam and modernity. Al-Amoudi's writings demonstrated the potential to engage with French culture within a contemporary enlightenment project, one capable of reconciling the perceived contradiction between reformist thought, the French language, and political activism. His discourse was not traditional in the mold of conservative religious rhetoric, but rather a committed intellectual stance, defending a cause with the power of thought and culture.

Al-Amoudi was able to present a distinct and nuanced experience by successfully bridging Arab-Islamic culture with modernity. In his demand for French citizenship, he never disavowed his authentic values or abandoned his cultural and religious roots.

Throughout his reformist experience, Al-Amoudi remained committed to a critical approach toward the deteriorating conditions in a country long subjected to settler colonialism—doing so through the very language of the colonizer. He challenged colonialism using the principles of the French Revolution, human rights, citizenship, and Enlightenment philosophy.

Al-Amoudi's reformist thought was marked by a critical stance toward the ideological foundations of French colonial policy, expressed with sincerity and clarity in his critique of the settler-colonial project. His reformist vision also opposed corrupt Sufi practices and firmly rejected the assimilationist discourse promoted by advocates of integration.

2 - Despite having left his homeland in 1963, Dr. Ali Marah—according to those who knew him—remained a singular and distinctive voice in reformist thought. Unlike contemporaries such as Mohammed Arkoun and Jamal Eddine Bencheikh, Marah uniquely blended intellectual, social, and political dimensions in his work, all while maintaining a strong commitment to the Arab-Islamic identity.

According to those who lived alongside him in France, Ali Merad adopted a moderate intellectual approach. His extensive experience in Western intellectual circles enabled him to actively engage in contemporary debates and contribute meaningfully to ongoing discussions surrounding Islam in the modern West, modernity, and interfaith dialogue.

As a result of his authentic upbringing within an environment rooted in sound Islamic belief, and his reformist experience shaped by direct interaction with the pioneers of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, Ali Merad developed a thought that was both authentic and tolerant—firmly distant

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

from extremism and fanaticism. This allowed him to gain intellectual prominence within a secular environment far removed from his homeland. Through diverse scholarly contributions, he consistently defended the concerns of contemporary Islam, highlighting a reformist orientation grounded in genuine Islamic thought.

There is no doubt that Dr. Ali Marah's extended stay in France and his long-standing engagement in intellectual, academic, and scholarly circles enabled him to become a modern and contemporary thinker while preserving his Arab-Islamic identity and intellectual foundations. In doing so, he demonstrated a remarkable ability to coexist with others amid a landscape of rich cultural and intellectual diversity.

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