

The Biotic Contributions in Contemporary Algerian Thought: (Hamdan bin Othman Khouja as a Case Study)

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Abstract:

The presence of biotic (bioethical) action does not appear to be a modern or contemporary phenomenon. Rather, this practice was widespread long before, even though its theoretical framing is relatively recent. In this article, we focus on one of the most prominent Algerian thinkers who addressed quarantine, also known as quarantine, as one of the biotic practices aimed at social safety. Hamdan Khouja sought to criticise 'pre-modern' or 'ignorant' practices by returning to Islamic heritage and drawing lessons from the health revolution in Western society, which has made significant progress in health and health prevention. Hamdan Khouja's ultimate goal is to promote health-related practices within Algerian society.

Keywords: Hamdan Ben Othman Khouja, Algeria, biotpics (Beutika/biotica), correspondence (Carantina), Diseases and Epidemics.

Introduction

The contemporary world has witnessed a global health crisis in the form of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. This has compelled the entire world to confront the crisis using diverse and varied approaches. One of the most significant of these was quarantine as a preventive method.

In this research paper, we aim to shed light on the development of preventive health practices in modern Algerian thought, focusing on the figure of the eighteenth-century Algerian thinker Ḥamdān Khūja.

Eighteenth-century Algerian thought was not without influential thinkers, especially since that period was marked by a decline in philosophy and intellectual life across Arab and Islamic territories, and in Algeria in particular. Hamdan Khouja (1773–1842) is considered one of the most notable figures of this era, when Algerian society was caught between the French colonial presence and the declining Ottoman rule.

Hamdan bin Othman Khouja was a man ahead of his time, quite literally. He is considered one of the pioneers of modernity in both the Arab and Algerian worlds in the nineteenth century. As well as being involved in politics and commerce, he had close links with the Ottoman authorities. He travelled widely, absorbing and internalising the Enlightenment discourses and slogans of the French Revolution in many Western capitals. These factors, among others, shaped Hamdan Bin Othman Khouja's vision, which was to see Algerian society enjoy the values of Western modernity that he believed European peoples were already enjoying.

Perhaps the most prominent features of Western culture at that time were its openness and its rejection of anything considered backward or regressive. This was in stark contrast to the situation in Arab and Islamic societies, including Algeria, during the nineteenth century.

Khouja was not just a modernist, but also one of the most important figures in the Algerian reform movement. He left behind a legacy of reforms aimed at bringing about change in many areas, including politics and society. For instance, he advocated imitating Europe in terms of bodily health and physical safety, particularly after many diseases and epidemics spread in Algeria due to poverty, especially in remote areas during the Ottoman period. In his view, the Ottomans had not governed the country well, treating Algerians as subjects and depriving them of the most basic rights of citizenship, participation in governance and genuine inclusion.

Then, almost immediately, Algerian society entered an even deadlier phase with the arrival of French colonialism. The French colonial authorities saw the Algerian people only as inhabitants of displaced territories — those to be expelled, robbed and dispossessed. This led to numerous diseases emerging as a result of oppressive and violent colonial policies. Serious illnesses and epidemics appeared, affecting Algerians and spreading diseases such as plague, smallpox and syphilis. In response, Hamdan Khouja called for *karantina*—what is known today as quarantine (quarantine measures/health lockdowns).

In this article, we will therefore attempt to reveal the most important diseases and epidemics that Algeria witnessed during the Ottoman period. But where does the reformist dimension in the field of health appear in Hamdān Khūja's thought? Furthermore, can we assert that there were Algerian 'biotic' contributions in the nineteenth century, as exemplified by Hamdān Khūja's ideas? Finally, how did these reform attempts compare with the historical period through which our Algerian thinker lived?

1. Firstly, it is necessary to define the concept of biotics (bioethics), its history and the most prominent topics it has addressed.

The term 'biotics' (or 'bioethics') comes from Greek and is composed of two parts:

- 'bios', meaning 'life', and
- mores, meaning 'ethics' or 'morals'.

Conceptually, biotics is defined as: A set of applied works and studies aimed at understanding the interdependent relationship between biological ethics and medical technology¹.

In other words, it is one of the most important branches of empirical, scientific ethics. Its purpose is to regulate and govern medical and biological practices by establishing ethical controls and setting rules for biotechnological practices.

2. History of the term

The term, both as an expression and as a field of practice, dates back to 1970 and was introduced by the American scholar Rensselaer Potter². Its emergence was the result of intensified and accumulated outcomes in the life sciences (biology), leading to the development of this specialisation. It could also be argued that World War II was an integral factor in the emergence of

¹- J. le Médecin, the patient and the philosopher. Paris: Bayard, 2002. Lagrée,

²- Mohammad Ibn Sabab (Sabag): The Body Between Knowledge and Ethics (François Dagognie as a Model). Publications of Difference (Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf), 1st edition, Algeria, 2015, p. 206.

both the concept and the practice, as the scientific and technological developments used in the war raised many questions, such as those concerning scientific experimentation on human beings.

The enormous and rapid development of biology has been accompanied by serious ethical issues. Ultimately, technology remains in human hands, and humans are multi-dimensional creatures capable of both good and evil. As described by Hobbes, humans are driven by instincts and base emotions that can push them towards irrational and catastrophic actions. For this reason, many have called for a relationship to be established between biology and ethics in order to curb the uncontrolled effects of scientific and biological technology.

Without strict conditions, laws and ethical controls, such developments will inevitably lead to crises and dilemmas not only in the biological dimension, but also in other areas such as religion and society, thereby undermining human dignity and disregarding the unique nature of human beings as free creatures with boundaries that must not be crossed — including the right to life. This right can be violated ‘in the name of’ scientific experiments under the justification that biology and its technological capabilities take precedence.

The exaltation of reason within the philosophy of modernity and the Enlightenment was accompanied, within the same chronological sequence, by the exaltation of science, which reached its peak in the twentieth century following the great success of experimental studies across a range of fields, including the human sciences. Biology as a discipline was also subject to this convergence. It could be argued that biological studies reached their zenith at the beginning of the twentieth century, a trajectory that continued until the mid-twentieth century. The experimental method and scientific objectivity thus promoted the development of the life sciences.

However, despite their distinguishing features of objectivity, precision and strictness in their results, the outcomes were catastrophic. On more than one occasion, scientific enquiry was used as a tool and a weapon in World War II, in nuclear experiments and even for personal gain, such as the theft of human organs, as well as in biological warfare. This was accompanied by the subjection of living human beings to experimentation with no respect for their humanity.

Intervention was necessary. In light of the significant growth in biology and medicine, as well as the consequences resulting from this growth, there was a growing interest in integrating ethics into biological and medical research organisations. The aim was to embed ethical values within this epistemology or paradigm, specifically to regulate biological practices and limit dangerous developments in these sciences while preserving attention to human concerns.

While biology has many significant benefits and yields positive results, it can also be used as an instrument of wrongdoing, which has a dark and grim dimension. For this reason, it can be said that ‘the emergence of bioethics amid this techno-biological development is a necessary and important requirement to create balance within this system or model’ (i.e. within medicine and biology)³.

3. Topics addressed by bioethics:

Once we have concluded that bioethical practice has become a human necessity, we can see that bioethics is concerned with specific issues that it adopts and studies in their own right. As we saw earlier, one of its concerns is the application of ethics in the fields of medicine and biology. In this

³- Imadeddine Abd al-Razzaq, *Applied Ethics: The Debate of Values and Contemporary Contexts*. 1st edition, Algeria: Publications of Difference (Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf), 2015, p. 120.

sense, bioethics acts as a gatekeeper, safeguarding the ethical threshold of biological, technological and medical research.

But what does it safeguard? Put simply, it safeguards the moral dimension of these studies — its intensity and strength, and even the moments when it disappears within the biological system and paradigm. Bioethics “raises numerous important and new questions and inquiries in order to regulate the course of this scientific process without any distortions, intrusions or violations occurring within it”⁴.

In effect, bioethics asks: Is there respect for the sacredness of human beings? Are there serious violations of ethics that undermine human values? Is there clear and explicit encroachment upon living beings without regard for their specific characteristics and features?

And, based on the foregoing questions, bioethical studies have found a very fertile environment within the results of contemporary science—specifically, in medicine. Among the most pressing topics in applied ethics is what is known as euthanasia, which has recently been brought to the forefront. This new scientific result (euthanasia) must therefore be assessed and should not be left without rigorous ethical scientific scrutiny.

But why euthanasia? Instead of seeking rapid solutions and taking shortcuts by killing or endorsing regulated suicide, why do we not search for medical and scientific approaches to address the underlying causes that lead a person to request euthanasia? Is it because of their illness and its severity? If so, why do biological studies not focus all their efforts on finding cures or treatments for these diseases rather than opting for an easier solution that exempts everyone from making greater efforts?

Is euthanasia a way out of a problem that haunts human life, or is it a dangerous slippery slope — namely, a medically and legally regulated form of suicide? Why does someone seek euthanasia? Why do practitioners and stakeholders in the life sciences not acknowledge that biology does not have all the answers or medical solutions?

The answer must therefore be referred to other specialisations. Perhaps these specialisations are not ones with which classical life science studies are keen to collaborate. This opens up the field of explanation to psychological and sociological research, for example, without limiting ourselves to these fields. Perhaps these studies provide answers that biology itself does not.

Should biologists and physicians not have the courage to admit that they do not have all the answers, and therefore not seek financial compensation through euthanasia procedures? Biologists should instead continue to work alongside other specialisations to identify the limits of biology and fill those gaps with appropriate solutions from other disciplines.

It should also be noted that euthanasia is not the most important global issue; there are numerous other matters that have long preoccupied societies around the world. Bioethical research covers countless issues and concerns.

As is well known, human transformations occur within the global community, and every new transformation affecting applied science and the outcomes of medicine generates new bioethical questions. One of the most prominent topics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries

⁴- Said Mohammad al-Haffar, *Biology and the Fate of the Human Being*. (n.d./edition not specified), National Centre for Culture, Arts and Letters, 1984, p. 117.

was pathological cloning, which received substantial attention. Other topics include the donation of human organs, stem-cell banks, egg and sperm donation banks, and even maternal milk.

These topics culminate in issues such as artificial pregnancy and surrogacy, which are also prominent today.

It could be argued that the absence of bioethics is extremely dangerous. If we leave matters to machines and science without ethical guidance, human beings may face new existential crises. Science is beneficial when it is a pliable instrument in the hands of human beings rather than acting against them and creating new problems.

Similarly, biology should not merely allow bioethics to enter its field; it must also consider the psychological, social and religious dimensions. It would be better not to transgress metaphysics in a radical way, since the results would also be extreme. At the same time, metaphysics should not encroach upon scientific research.

4. Bioethical practice in the thought of Hamdan Khoja

Returning to the situation in Algeria, this country, like all others, experienced the arrival of diseases and even epidemics via multiple routes. Whether these diseases originated internally or externally, 'most epidemics came through commercial exchanges with Europeans or pilgrimage travel by Algerian citizens, who brought these diseases into Algeria'⁵. This suggests that Algeria was not generally a focal point for epidemics and diseases, but rather that many of these were primarily transmitted through contagion.

However, this does not mean that this society was immune to disease. In fact, certain patterns of life in rural Algerian society and in lowland areas contributed to the emergence of seasonal diseases. In these regions, residents often neglected the requirements of care, hygiene and physical health, which in turn exacerbated the prevalence of disease in these areas and its spread⁶.

In *The Mirror*, Hamdan Khouja wrote that he was not accustomed to this way of life. On one of his journeys, he was unable to sleep in one of the so-called 'barbarian' houses because men, women and children were all mixed together in one place. When they lit a fire for warmth, 'foul vapours' rose from the mouths of the animals and blended with the smoke that was trapped in the space with no outlet.

This lack of care therefore caused many health and physical problems. This was not limited to rural inhabitants; even residents of the plains shared similar traits with regard to neglecting their bodies and themselves. He described women as sacrificing themselves through their household work. He said: 'We see these women in a state of neglect, covered in dirt; this exposes them to fevers and other diseases, resulting in great hardship.'⁷

This made them highly vulnerable to disease due to a lack of attention to health and a failure to take precautions. Such conditions contributed to the spread of epidemics within the country if they were introduced.

⁵- Mohamed al-Zayn, 'An Overview of Health Conditions in Ottoman Algeria at the End of the Deys' Era'. *Journal of Research and Studies*, Issue/Volume 17, University of Sidi Bel-Abbès, Algeria, p. 192.

⁶- Hamdan ibn Othman Khouja al-Jaza'iri (*The Mirror*). Translated by Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Karim. House of Awareness (Dar al-Wa'y), Algeria, 1st edition, 2017, p. 43.

⁷- Hamdan ibn Othman Khouja al-Jaza'iri (*The Mirror*), p. 52.

Researchers attribute the introduction of the plague to Algeria to 1541. It continued to appear at regular intervals until 1822⁸. During the Ottoman period, the epidemic struck Algerian society, causing severe losses of life. The “Plague of 1817” in particular is regarded as one of the most dangerous epidemics, having claimed around 20,000 lives⁹.

Algeria was not the only country to experience such deadly epidemics; neighbouring states also suffered from these fatal outbreaks. As mentioned previously, the source was often the Mashriq countries and Algerian pilgrims returning from Mecca. We should also bear in mind Turkey, given the political relations of that time¹⁰.

Furthermore, the Regency of Algiers was not immune to other routes through which epidemics and plague could spread, particularly via maritime routes. Navigation in the Mediterranean was a direct means of transporting sea-borne disease, particularly after Algeria opened up to Mediterranean countries through commercial exchanges, especially with European states. Despite their advances in medicine, these states were not immune to the disease.

In this regard, Haddu emphasised: ‘Plague entered Algeria from outside, owing to the number of ships laden with goods entering Algeria without interruption from different places.’¹¹

The spread of diseases and epidemics would not leave the inhabitants of these lands untouched, as the illness affected not only the lower social strata, but also the beys’ palaces. Furthermore, disease and epidemics impacted multiple dimensions, including economic, social and human. Describing Algeria’s condition after the epidemics, Khouja wrote, “Algeria’s very form was corrupted after a previously admirable state. The country’s affairs became disordered, knowledge declined, and those who had been a source of strength perished among the military ranks¹².”

For this reason, Algerian society undertook many efforts towards treatment and medical care to lessen the effects of disease. These approaches varied and differed, with the most prominent being herbal remedies, according to local customary practice within Algerian society. For instance, residents of the plains relied on plant-based remedies as they were unfamiliar with formal medicine. Khouja described the treatment of illnesses as follows: ‘As for their treatment of diseases, it is carried out through simple herbs whose merits are known among them. They have no knowledge of the fundamentals of medicine or the causes of disease.’¹³

The herbs used included thyme, tar, cumin, onions, olive oil and tree branches. Plague was treated specifically through profuse sweating. Patients would drink a diaphoretic remedy primarily composed of a mixture of herbs such as fenugreek and thyme, combined with other medicinal

⁸- Arzqi Shoutiyam, 'Algerian Society and Its Actors During the Ottoman Period 1519–1830'. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD (unpublished), 2005–2006, p. 283.

⁹- Ahmad Charif Zahrar, *Memoirs*. Edited and translated by Ahmad Toufik al-Madani. Algeria, 2nd edition, 1974, p. 78.

¹⁰- Habiba Alilich, 'Quarantine in Algeria during the Ottoman period (1519–1830)', *Journal of Mediterranean History*, vol. 4, no. 1, June 2022, p. 134. *Journal of Mediterranean History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, June 2022, p. 134.

¹¹- Arzqi Shoutiyam, 'Algerian Society and Its Actors During the Ottoman Period (1519–1830)', p. 288.

¹²- Hamdan Khouja, *The Gift of the Fair-Minded and Literati in Precaution against the Plague*. Edited and translated by Mohammad Abd al-Karim. Algeria, the Capital of Arab Culture. (n.d.), Algeria, 2007, pp. 46–47.

¹³- Hamdan Ibn Othman Khouja al-Jaza'iri, *The Mirror*, p. 52.

substances. Then, as part of the treatment, the patient would be covered with a cloth or animal skin¹⁴.

As well as herbal remedies, some people used other methods such as cauterisation, cutting and fumigation/incense. They also sought protection by blessing incense and visiting the graves of saints in order to avert calamity. Many other syncretic or pagan rituals were carried out, particularly by women, in an attempt to repel the plague. Meanwhile, others escaped from epidemic areas. In particular, rural residents fled to areas where the epidemic was unknown, “in order to protect themselves”¹⁵.

In the face of the tragic conditions caused by epidemics and diseases, Hamdan Khouja called for the implementation of quarantine, a practice that is now referred to as public health isolation or quarantine/hospital isolation. This clearly demonstrates the modern, reformist and ethical nature of this appeal to implement quarantine.

One could even argue that bioethics was present in Hamdan Khouja’s work. This suggests that contemporary bioethical practice has its roots in earlier texts, as do Khoja’s writings. He was knowledgeable in the field of medicine and open to scientific ideas, and he expressed his views on the causes of the spread of epidemics. He wrote, ‘We do not claim that epidemics occur only through contagion and transmission; rather, they may have other causes as well, according to what we have found in medical books, such as the corruption of the air and the abundance of putrefaction.’¹⁶

The phrase ‘according to what we have found in medical books’ confirms his extensive knowledge of the field at that time. In his book *The Mirror*, he also linked disease to neglect of physical health when describing ‘barbarian’ populations and their way of life: men, women and children lived together in disorderly fashion. When they lit a fire for warmth, ‘foul vapours’ rose from the mouths of animals and mingled with trapped smoke that had no outlet¹⁷ an arrangement that would reinforce the spread of epidemics and diseases, whether seasonal illnesses or major outbreaks.

Examining the concept of bioethics reveals that its purpose is to achieve social good — that is, to secure the greatest benefit for society. This is reflected in the definition presented earlier. We can also identify points of convergence between the concept of bioethics and Hamdan Khouja’s ideas. Bioethics is a multifaceted field — indeed, a set of disciplines — aiming to produce wisdom and knowledge regarding how science should be used to achieve social good, based on a realistic understanding of the biological nature of human beings and the biological world¹⁸.

Hamdan Khouja also seeks social benefit through quarantine, namely protecting society from diseases and epidemics.

¹⁴- Fella Moussaoui Al-Qasha‘i, *Health and Population in Algeria during the Ottoman Period and the Early Years of French Occupation, 1518–1871*. PhD thesis (unpublished), University of Algiers, 2003, pp. 196–197.

¹⁵- Arzqi Shoutiyam, ‘Algerian Society and Its Actors During the Ottoman Period 1519–1830’, p. 292.

¹⁶- Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Karim: *Hamdan Ibn Othman Khouja and His Memoirs*. House of Awareness (Dar al-Wa‘y), 1st edition, 2017, p. 108.

¹⁷- Hamdan ibn Othman Khouja al-Jaza'iri, *The Mirror*. Translated by Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Karim. House of Awareness, Algeria, 1st edition, 2017, p. 43.

¹⁸- Mokhtar Orib, *Bioethics Between Biotechnics and Ethical Principles*. Ibn al-Nadim House, 1st edition, 2018, p. 70.

5. Quarantine as a Post-Reform Practice in Hamdan Khouja's Thought

The initial signs of biopolitical thought emerge more clearly in Hamdan Khouja's work *A Gift to the Just and the Literati*, which was written in response to an epidemic. This complete treatise aimed to explain and advocate for the implementation of quarantine. He describes this preventive measure as being in accordance with Islamic law and draws on rational methods, logic and theology, even invoking emulation of Western culture, whom he refers to as 'the Franks'. He extensively praises their health system and compares it with conditions in Algeria, which had not adopted such life-preserving sciences.

Khouja argues that prohibiting and criminalising quarantine and protection against afflictions is an act of extreme 'bigotry and severity', and calls for the adoption of European civilisational features. He advocates moderation instead of excess, stating: 'Moderation in matters is the strongest pillar.'¹⁹ He also justifies quarantine, asserting that it is not incompatible with religious rules, as some believe, but rather brings many benefits and counteracts greater risks²⁰. Thus, when contrasting the conditions of Muslims and Franks, he describes Muslims as having 'neglected these rules, denied them, and embraced austerity and fanaticism'²¹. Conversely, in the West, where people "took care of politics and safeguarding the public — especially to repel the epidemic", the outcome was different.

This book appears to be addressed to an authority in Algeria with the aim of implementing quarantine in the event of severe epidemics, such as plagues, and of emulating the West in this regard in order to reduce the rate at which epidemics spread and limit the number of victims²².

Reasons for Believing the Book Was Addressed to the Ottoman Authorities

The fact that Hamdan Khouja translated the book into Turkish and presented it as a gift to Sultan Mahmud II leads us to believe that it was intended for the Ottoman authority. By doing so, he hoped to encourage the Ottoman authorities to adopt the rules advocated in the work²³. The text also praises the adoption of quarantine by Western culture during epidemics, and urges Muslims to implement this public health system.

The Concept of Quarantine (*Quarantaine*)

The term 'quarantine' is originally Latin in origin and derived from Spanish. It denotes a period of forty days — the duration of quarantine. In other words, it refers to the preventive system followed by European states when epidemics broke out²⁴.

The aim of quarantine is to prevent the spread of disease by isolating the infected from the healthy. Therefore, the idea of quarantine applied during the 2020–21 **Covid-19** pandemic has deep historical roots; it is not a new concept. This type of prevention has proven its effectiveness in curbing the spread of dangerous, highly contagious diseases.

Importing the West's Influence in the Reform Process

¹⁹- Aḥmida Omirawi, *The Role of Hamdan Khouja in the Development of the Algerian Cause (1827–1840)*. The Ottoman House (Dar al-othmani), Algeria, 2nd edition, 2016, p. 87.

²⁰- Hamdan Khouja, *The Gift of the Fair-Minded and Literati in Precaution against the Plague*, p. 44.

²¹- Same source, pp. 44–45.

²²- Same source, p. 45.

²³- Aḥmida Omirawi, 'The Role of Hamdan Khouja in the Development of the Algerian Cause', p. 79.

²⁴- Said Dourbal: 'The Position of Moroccan Scholars on Quarantine in the 19th Century'. Virtual International Conference on: Famines and Epidemics in the Arab Homeland across Ages, 2021, p. 153.

Khouja points to the West's use of quarantine when epidemics spread, stating:

'Since they committed themselves to warding off calamity by seeking refuge and taking precautions, they did not admit those from within until they had verified their innocence. They appointed officials in well-fortified places with the utmost caution, and they named this quarantine.'²⁵

This process closely resembles what we witnessed during the 2019–2020 pandemic, when airports were shut down and countries implemented measures to isolate incoming travellers in designated places for at least 15 days, in order to ensure they were free of disease and prevent the epidemic from spreading further.

Hamdan Khouja's Critique of Fanatical Islamic Thought

Hamdan Khouja strongly criticises Islamic society for confusing warding off calamity with reliance upon God. Drawing upon logical and religious methods, he establishes comparisons between Islamic and European cultures to highlight the profound differences between these two environments. In his view, while Muslims devoted themselves to theoretical sciences, the West advanced applied sciences such as medicine and astronomy that are genuinely useful to human life. He also criticises the stagnation and backwardness that characterised Muslims, attributing it to two factors. First, he criticises the ignorance of rulers regarding laws, and their failure to keep pace with immediate developments. Second, he criticises the closing of the 'gate of independent reasoning'²⁶. For this reason, he calls for the religion to be purified of the impurities that have become attached to it due to the rigidity of Sufi figures. He thus urges a revival and awakening.

This critique is evident throughout Khouja's writings, particularly in *Ithaf al-Munsifin*, which he dedicated entirely to clarifying the difference between *tawakkul* and repelling calamity — i.e. defending oneself — by drawing on what Islamic *shari'a* enjoins. *Shari'a* calls for the protection of the self, body and soul. In this context, he invokes the Qur'anic verse from *Surat al-Ma'idah*:

'Whoever kills a soul for other than a soul or corruption in the land shall be as though he had killed all people. And whoever saves a life shall be as though he had saved all of humanity'²⁷.

The Reform Aspect at the Start of His Project

From the outset of Khouja's critical project, which called for health prevention and quarantine, we can discern clear manifestations of the reformist dimension in his thought. In his work *A Gift to the Just and the Literati*, which consists of three sections (*babs*), each section contains a set of articles through which he clarifies the idea of quarantine, relying on rational premises, *kalam* (Islamic theology), and the Noble Prophetic hadith and the Qur'an. Throughout this treatise, he also cites numerous Islamic scholars and philosophers in order to reinforce his critical stance towards Sufi thought, especially the view that sees prevention as an escape from God's decree and predestination.

The methods employed in his critique are inseparable from Khouja's intellectual culture. He is described as "a memorizer of the Book of God", much like the people of North Africa²⁸. He also

²⁵ - Hamdan Khouja, *The Gift of the Fair-Minded and Literati in Precaution against the Plague*, pp. 45–46.

²⁶ - Yasmine Zamouli, 'Arab Enlightenment Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Hamdan Ibn Othman Khouja and Rafi Rifa'a al-Tahtawi as a Model', *Journal of Human Sciences*, no. 41, June 2014, p. 34.

²⁷ - The Noble Qur'an, *Surat al-Ma'ida (The Table)*: 32.

²⁸ - Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Karim, 'Hamdan Ibn Othman Khouja and his memoirs', p. 102.

relied heavily on Prophetic tradition, as evidenced by his book *A Gift to the Just and the Literati* on precautions against the plague.

This is also mentioned by Dr Mohammad ibn Abd al-Karim, who produced a critical edition of the work. He describes Khouja as someone who ‘quotes hadiths with omitted isnāds and narrators’²⁹. This indicates that Khujah had an in-depth knowledge of the Prophetic Sunnah.

In addition, he was well-versed in jurisprudence and the science of logic, and mastered the rules of Arabic grammar. He was also notably open to philosophy. This makes his critique grounded in logical principles and foundations, enabling him to appeal to both rulers and ordinary people, particularly as he bases his arguments on transmitted texts, such as the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

Reliance on Logical Tools in the Process of Critique

At the beginning of the first article³⁰, we find that he employs a logical method. First, he asserts that God is the creator of the universe. Therefore, he argues, it is God who created illness and health, poverty and wealth. These are predetermined decrees that God has placed in the unseen realm.

In the second article, he suggests that God created causes and effects and established the causal structure that governs the world. He states:

‘And He made causes and underlying causes a manifestation of everything that appears in existence. He is the Creator of the cause and the effect, the cause’s essence and what is caused, the condition and the conditioned...’³¹

One might ask what relevance this has to the question of preventing disease. Our answer is that Khouja is attempting to clarify the concept of *tawakkul* (reliance upon God), while emphasising that God has placed an orderly, logical structure in the universe. In that sense, God calls on us to take the necessary measures; we cannot simply sit idly by and wait for God’s will to be revealed. Indeed, the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) explicitly claimed that when asked, “Shall I release my camel and rely upon God?”, he replied, “Tie it up and rely upon God.”³²

Thus, Islam does not call for passivity or abandonment of means. This is what Khouja underscores when he continues:

‘Whoever hopes for offspring without intercourse, or a harvest without sowing and cultivating, is deluded and blameworthy.’

This is explicitly supported by the Qur’an’s warnings and calls for preparation, such as: ‘Take your precautions’, ‘Prepare for them to the best of your ability’, and ‘Do not cast yourselves into destruction’³³.

Therefore, the wisdom conveyed in what precedes is a call for Muslims to take measures to prevent disease, to protect themselves from it and to ensure that people do not lose their lives due to a mistaken understanding of the meaning of *tawakkul*. Here, Khujah’s reformist dimension becomes evident. Indeed, his position can be understood as a literal presence of biopolitics — or, more broadly, a philosophy of human health — grounded in rational and religious thinking and supported by his mastery of the comparative method.

²⁹- Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Karim, 'The Previous Reference', p. 102.

³⁰- The first article is in the book *The Gift of the Fair-Minded and Literati*.

³¹- Hamdan Khouja, *The Gift of the Fair-Minded and Literati in Precaution against the Plague*, p. 58.

³²- A noble prophetic hadith.

³³- Hamdan Khouja, previous source, p. 59.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that Hamdan Khouja, particularly in his text *Precaution Against Plague*, transcends the confines of his immediate historical context to pose profound ethical questions related to human life. Bioethics, as a discipline, aims to regulate biological practice towards its proper ends. This field addresses numerous topics, the most prominent of which are euthanasia and cloning.

Algerian society has experienced many deadly diseases and epidemics that have taken the lives of a large number of Algerian citizens. However, rather than standing by in the face of these afflictions, Algerians attempted to treat them through various methods, such as herbal remedies, sweating, cauterisation and seeking blessings. Yet most of these treatments proved insufficient against plagues.

As a modern thinker, reformer and distinguished political figure, Khujah was able to offer effective solutions to limit the spread of epidemics and diseases through his intellectual production. He achieved this by returning to religion (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) through a more open mode of interpretation, which is different from the Sufi reading that holds that *tawakkul* means surrendering and abandoning the taking of means.

Moreover, he compared Algeria's social conditions with those of the Western world, which had achieved a qualitative shift in medicine, quarantine and protecting society against the danger of epidemics and diseases spreading and breaking out. Based on this, he adapted the Western approach to quarantine in his book *A Gift to the Just and the Literati*. In truth, this work was a call for quarantine and health safety measures. Ultimately, the book can be understood as an example of bioethical practice oriented towards social well-being and as a foundation for a comprehensive ethical vision — one that can be described as the reformist dimension of Hamdan Khouja's philosophy and thought.

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