

The role of diseases and epidemics in political, economic, and social transformations in 19th century Morocco

A Socio-historical approach



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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on a theme that belongs to history but relies considerably on the tools of sociology in general and the sociology of demography in particular. Indeed, diseases and epidemics in Morocco in the 19th century significantly affected the social aspects and, as a result, caused considerable demographic haemorrhages and tribal migrations. It also placed the power in place in the face of challenges that threatened its symbolic, religious and political status, and as a result, the economic field underwent several transformations. In other words, Morocco found itself faced with a natural force and a turbulent and tense internal situation, so the sultans of Morocco were forced to intervene to restore stability in the light of a fragile social situation and the emergence of opposition movements stemming from tribes and brotherhoods (Zawaya), in which loyalties change according to circumstances and contexts. The study of diseases and epidemics in Morocco in the 19th century will help us to understand the state of social, economic, and political formation and to follow and understand its transformations. Therefore, the object of our work calls for a socio-historical approach making it possible to follow the transformations, understand their nature, and trace trajectories. It will also help to understand what Morocco experienced at the beginning of the 20th century regarding disintegration and imperial penetration, which paved the way for the imposition of protection and its inclusion in later colonized countries.

Keywords:

Morocco. Plague; transitions; sociology; history; epidemic;
Mawla Sulaiman and Structure.

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This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. نُشر هذا المقال في دورية كان التاريخية للأغراض العلمية والبحثية فقط، وغير مسموح بإعادة النسخ والنشر والتوزيع للأغراض تجارية أو ربحية.

“Major deadly epidemics have disappeared. Instead, they have all been replaced by one: the proliferation of human beings”

Jean Baudrillard

Introduction

The study of transformations has often been considered one of the themes of sociology. However, suppose the sociologist follows social and societal transformations and tries to give explanations based on sociological theories and rules. In that case, the historian and researcher in the field of history trace these historical transformations and even makes sure to link them to economic and political transformations by analyzing them based on written and oral documents to achieve the composition of the image of society for a certain period which reflects the actual situation at that time. Furthermore, sociology is interested in certain social phenomena, whether at the macro or micro-social level, while the field of history apprehends, to a certain extent, these phenomena. As a result, this overview makes it possible to describe the state of society at a specific time and, therefore, to give explanations for this situation concerning its field of investigation, on the one hand, and to attempt to reveal all the social, political, and economic aspects on the other hand. In other words, the historian tries to restore the bar of life of society and retrace the stages of its transformations of the past to understand and adapt to the present. Among what led to these transformations in the history of Morocco; Epidemics and diseases, such as the plague that spread to Morocco during several periods of the 19th century, notably during the reign of Mawla Sulaiman, and often this coincided directly with the years of drought and famine.

Based on the above, we wonder about the role of these pandemics in determining the politics of the Makhzen during the 19th century. To this central question are added the following two partial questions:

1. How does it affect Moroccan society in demographic and social terms?
2. How has this affected Al-Aqsa Morocco economically?

In order to answer the questions raised above, we propose to approach the subject through a socio-historical approach, and our choice is dictated by the nature of the subject, which aims to study the history of a domain. Specific in a given context. In doing so, it is necessary to take into consideration

the fact of diagnosing the state, nature, and structure of the society in question and, consequently, analyzing the social phenomena which prevailed there, such as the recourse to occultism in times of crisis, the Mahdist tendency, and the tribal systems.

In general, the subject of this article revolves around the relationship between diseases and epidemics and the course of the history of Morocco during the 19th century on the political, economic, and social levels. Ad hoc, we will approach this problem by dividing it into three main axes: the first axis is considered as an introduction to the understanding of the relationship of diseases and epidemics relating to the history of Morocco in the 19th century, the second axis follows the most important political events and the transformations resulting from the pandemics, in particular the plague during the period of Mawla Sulaiman, while the third axis reveals the economic and political transformations.

1. Diseases and epidemics in 19th century Morocco.

It is easier to understand the evolution experienced by Morocco before the year 1912 by anchoring it to epidemics and diseases, the impact of which went beyond the field of demography to include aspects related to politics, economy and social transformations. Morocco lived until the end of the 19th century, depending on climatic fluctuations, the fragility of structures and the predominance of agriculture over the economy. If, for example, the reform attempts undertaken by Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman failed for reasons, some of which were related to the opposition he encountered; The fatal blow was caused by the severe crisis that afflicted Morocco between the years 1867 and 1869 and this crisis was represented by famine, cholera and the onslaught of locusts.¹ Moreover, and contrary to what some studies indicate that have looked at the issue of managing the spread of diseases and epidemics in Morocco, it has often constituted a point of consensus between the ruler and the ruled. Furthermore, among what has been put forward in these studies is the idea that the pandemic has put both the ruling institution and society on board a "one boat"; periods of prosperity have followed the overcoming of internal social crises related to the spread of famine and the plague epidemic in particular.² This approach seems to us to be a step in the right direction because historical events and facts have shown that the Moroccans' management of pandemics was a

measure of the strength of the Makhzen in ensuring security and the maintenance of peace, but rather a threat to the religious and political existence of the Sultan, such as taking the necessary precautions and imposing preventive measures and sanitary measures. It is not meaningless to say that things require force for people to believe in their effectiveness. "While Western countries believed in the power of law, Moroccans feared the application of this law by the Makhzen."³ This fear often turned into rebellion during times of state weakness, which brought the Makhzen into conflict with the tribes. As a result, these conflicts, and invasions, as well as diseases and epidemics, have been considered black spots in the history of Moroccans. It is also important to say that its harmful repercussions did not concern only the individual who is the victim. However, the whole of society and experiences have confirmed that the source of anxiety and fear of these phenomena was not death but rather the conflicts caused by the spread of epidemics and pandemics in societies.⁴ Among the most tragic diseases and epidemics known in Morocco during the 19th century are the following:

Under the reign of Moulay Sulaiman (1792-1822) and the beginning of the reign of Moulay Abd al-Rahman (1822-1859), Morocco was exposed to three new natural disasters, each of which left its mark on the social Lives of the country., economic and political life, namely:

The plague of 1790 -1800, the Plague of 1818-1820 and the Famine of 1825-1826.

Cholera from 1854 - 1857: It is established exclusively in the north of Morocco, Fez and Salé, and in 1868 cholera spread in Fez;

1878: landed in Fez, Meknes and Safi;

1882: extends to Rabat, Marrakech and Meknes.

Yellow fever in 1865 and 1868.

Smallpox: which spread to Marrakech and El Jadida in 1879.

Diseases, epidemics, and natural disasters in the history of peoples and nations are among the decisive factors in fundamental changes in their course of history. Studying this aspect allows us to understand many mysterious and enigmatic things. It explains to us the causes of most fundamental fluctuations, as they affect all aspects of society, from urbanization to demography, from economics to social aspects, from the way of life and its forms to lifestyles and ways of thinking. Natural disasters such as droughts, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, and other disasters have significantly impacted the demographic map of Morocco, its economic

activities and urban development. That said, it is not easy to understand the upheavals and changes within Moroccan society without resorting to social history in its dependence on diseases and epidemics to experience its profound effects on the historical process of Moroccan society.⁵ It must be said that these changes profoundly marked the 19th century, or what historians call the most extended century in history. They, indeed, marked a decisive turning point in the history of Morocco and, consequently, paved the way for more profound changes at the beginning of the 20th century on various political, economic and social levels.

2. Political changes.

The plague played an essential role in determining the fate of the Makhzen and its politics during the first decades of the 19th century. On the one hand, the epidemic contributed considerably to supporting the efforts of Mawla Sulaiman to consolidate his authority, by contributing to the weakening of the rebel Abda and Doukkala tribes, and on the other hand, by quarantining a significant number of leaders of disobedience. In this perspective, the plague saved Mawla Sulaiman from fierce adversaries like Mawla "Hicham" and Mawla "Al-Hussein", who died after disputing their brother's rule for six years. The same fate awaited each of Abd al-Rahman bin Nasser al-Abdi and al-Hashemi bin Al-Arousi⁶. It must be said that the demographic collapse and the decline in maritime trade following the departure of many European merchants and the interruption of correspondence due to the epidemic meant that the coastal areas did not persist in their rebellion and their disobedience due to the decline in their income and the lack of human resources in the field relating to the war.

Moreover, the plague also had an indirect role in Mawla Sulaiman's collision with scholars and jurists who stood in the ranks of his opponents, as he lost his supporters among the senior jurists of Fez and Meknes, who were decimated by the plague, and this contributed to the weakening of the machine and its power. The plague outbreak left an atmosphere of discontent and resentment on the part of the general public, as they viewed the matter as divine punishment. They argued that Mawla Sulaiman had authorized grain export to Europeans in 1817, during drought and excessively high living standards, and his determination to dismantle the Moroccan fleet. Following this critical situation, the population considered the Sultan as abandoning jihad and favouring the enemies of Islam. Indeed, the brotherhoods (Zawaya) took advantage of this discontent to join the people in blaming the Sultan

and his policies for divine punishment, so the righteous and influential people had to exalt and pray to God to grant them new authority. Which, consequently, will weaken the reign of the Sultan to the detriment of the brotherhoods, and this question can be considered and apprehended from the angle of the Mahdist tendency frequent in Morocco, primarily "when weakness and asthenia spread within the entity of central authority, conflicts spread, famines, epidemics and disasters occur".⁷

In addition, the plague and the pandemics that accompanied it played a crucial role in accentuating the disintegration of the regime of Mawla Sulaiman on the one hand. On the other hand, it was a warning signal that prompted the Sultan to try to reorganize the army and foreign affairs. Nevertheless, things will get worse after the accumulation of crises, conflicts, defections and foreign interventions. Among what can be deduced on the political level is that a state which suffers from internal conflicts and generally relies on questions of the supernatural more than on rationality;⁸ They are subject to disintegration when exposed to disasters that destroy the country and the people. This intellectual structure significantly contributed to the negligence that characterized the position of the Makhzen on the health plan and its inability to create a national committee responsible for the task of protecting the country's health in the face of successive deadly epidemics; in this case, the plague and cholera, which caused numerous human losses and violently shaken the social, economic and political life of the kingdom.⁹

3. Economic and social transformations.

It is essential to point out that the demographic collapse and the drop in maritime trade, following the departure of many European merchants and the interruption of correspondence due to the epidemic, led the coastal regions not to continue their rebellion and their disobedience due to the drop in their income and the lack of human resources relating to the field of war. It must also be said that the positive impact of the plague on the regime of Mawla Sulaiman caused the Makhzen to seize the money of the dispossessed, merchants and wealthy, who were decimated by the plague, and this under Sharia and customs, so that their profits became the property of the Bait Al-Mal (treasury), which allowed the sultan significant wealth, which made him in addition, renounce income from maritime trade and increase the imposition of restrictions on exports.

On the other hand, some low-income families have disappeared. A class of merchants has grown rich due to the monopoly of raw materials such as wheat and barley, which has produced a wealthy class which plays an essential role in colonial interference, through commercial relations with foreigners, and its entry, in the 20th century, in a significant way, under consular protection.

Indeed, Morocco has begun to experience an economic transition towards reliance on trade in foreign goods and smuggling at the expense of agricultural activities. Given the deterioration of crafts and internal trade, due to the scarcity of foodstuffs, and the confinement of the grain and bread trade, especially after the deterioration of agriculture in the plains. An evolution in the dietary behaviour of Moroccans accompanied these facts. In this respect, we evoke the words of Ferdinand Braudel: "The plague only spreads because of food shortages".¹⁰

At the level of socio-spatial transformations, natural disasters throughout the history of Morocco have played an essential role in destabilizing the tribal sphere. This phenomenon applies, in particular, to epidemics, which hit coastal areas harder than desert and mountainous areas, thus creating favourable conditions for the migration of tribes. Many researchers proposed that desert areas were less affected by the epidemic due to drought and heat, which limit the spread of the disease-carrying flea insect, and that the plague does not resist much in front of the high temperature. Because of this, the extreme cold and low humidity of the mountainous regions also hinders the reproduction of the flea. Moreover, the inhabitants of the desert and the mountains were less exposed to infection thanks to their isolation and the distance that separates them. Centres of population congestion. One of the consequences of diseases and epidemics was also the emergence of a constant social movement in search of means of subsistence so that people were no longer able to cope with poverty and pay arrangement tax; some of them sold their land at the lowest price, and others mortgaged it and moved to urban areas, especially the West region as well as the city of Casablanca, where the proletariat was formed at the very beginning of the 20th century.¹¹ It is not meaningless to say that divorces have also increased. The phenomenon of banditry, accompanied by violence, murders and banditry, has worsened, and the phenomenon of "Zatata" (the smugglers) developed in the countryside and at the gates of cities.¹² Thus, natural disasters and their negative repercussions on

the resources of the Moroccan peasant have been a factor in the destruction of the patriarchal family, the dismantling of social solidarity, the fragmentation of tribal communal assets, the decline of its culture and customs, and the proletarianization of the rural world.¹³

In Morocco, epidemics have been considered a decisive factor in maintaining nomadism as a way of life and in disturbing tribal balances. Given the demographic haemorrhage caused by the epidemics, Leclerc rightly indicated that cholera and yellow fever killed three million Moroccans (cf. Abdulaziz bin Abdullah, p. 214). In this sense, and during the crisis of 1867-1869 and 1878-1880, large sections of its population were emptied, and economic activity contracted due to high mortality. According to some foreign researchers, the death toll reached a quarter of Morocco's population.¹⁴ Despite the difference that exists so far on the number of the population of Morocco during the 19th century, and the number of victims of pandemics and epidemics,¹⁵ it can be agreed that the history of modern Morocco, in general, and of the nineteenth century in particular, must be seen, or even explained, mainly from a focus on its calamities and demographic crises, and from the study of the factors and causes of these crises and their manifestations, in order to know its harmful effects and repercussions, and perhaps the most dangerous of them: frequent wars and political tyranny, and successive years of famines, epidemics and various other natural disasters, then foreign immigration, and these are all manifestations of the demographic crisis in the modern history of Morocco.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theme of diseases and epidemics in Morocco in the 19th century goes beyond the field of history to extend to sociology, demography, and biology. The investigation of the historian and its use of the human and experimental sciences remains a key to understanding the issues linked to the evolution of behaviour within societies and the evolution of human natures. In short, the citizen of the 19th century in Morocco found himself in a financial and moral crisis, waiting from time to time for the threat of disease, misery and epidemic, not to mention his exhaustion with tribal conflicts and the taxes of the Makhzen, which paved the way for the emergence of Mahdist tendencies steadily and reinforced the disintegration of the state, which paved the way for the imperial ambitions which formed the essential features of the 19th century in the world, and of course, Morocco will not be spared. It is clear and relevant to say that diseases

and epidemics have multiple roles in Morocco's political, economic, and social transformations.

Notes:

- 1 Jean Louis MIEGE, "Morocco and Europe (1830-1894)". In *Les Difficulties* (Paris: P.U.F edition, 1962), 144-149.
- 2 Ahmed Al-Makkawi, "The Problem of Infection and Precaution against Epidemics in Morocco in the Nineteenth Century AD," *Proceedings of the Symposium on Famine and Epidemics in the History of Morocco* (2002), 405-425.
- 3 Saeed Al Bouzidi, "The Historian and Pandemics: Between Lessons and Reconsideration," *Life in the Time of the Coronavirus COVID-19* (2020), 28.
- 4 Hassan al-Furqan, *Epidemiological Literature in the 19th Century in Morocco, A Model of Sayings of the Obedient in Appeal and Plagues by Al-Arabi Al-Mushrifi, investigation and study*, (Tangier: Al-Tawhidi Publications, 2014), 35.
- 5 Idris Abu Idris, "The contribution of growth to the demographic history of Morocco, famines and their impact on demographic growth and the late 16th century AD - and the first half of the 18th century." *Kananish*, 1, (1999): 139.
- 6 Muhammad al-Mansur, *Morocco before colonialism, society, state and religion, 1822-1792*, translated by Muhammad Hobeida (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 2006), 174.
- 7 Ibrahim al-Qadri Budchich, *Morocco, and Andalusia in the era of the Almoravids, society - mentalities - saints*, (Tetuan: Publications of the Moroccan Association for Andalusian Studies No. 7, 2004), 125.
- 8 It should be noted that at the level of mentalities, the strength, the faith of Moroccans concerning the fatality of successive epidemics and fatal diseases, stems from a religious reference which stipulates that everything is destined. Therefore, they believed in good and evil, and that every pain has a remedy. The religious guardianship of this belief is rooted in the religious practice in which human beings used to find refuge and draw strength from it through isolation, seeking mercy and finally praying to God to banish evil. punishment inflicted on the country and the people.
- 9 Muhammad al-Amin al-Bazzaz, *The International Health Council 1792-1929*, (Rabat: Publications of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 2000), 13.
- 10 Abd al-Hadi al-Harawi, *The Tribe, Feudalism and the Makhzen*, Casablanca: East Africa, 2000, 213.
- 11 René Gallissot, *European employers in Morocco (1931-1942)*, Rabat: Techniques Nord edition Africans 1924, p. 30.
- 12 Abd al-Hadi al-Harawi, *The tribe, Feudalism, and the Storehouse* 217.
- 13 Abd al-Hadi al-Harawi, *op.cit.*, 220.
- 14 Jean Louis MIEGE, *Morocco and Europe (1830-1894)*. In *Les Difficulties*, P.U.F edition, Paris 1962, p: 443.
- 15 We can say that the population of Morocco at the end of the 19th century varied between four million and five hundred thousand, and five million people. See: Mohamed Stito, "The demographic crisis in the history of Morocco", *Kananish* 1, 1999, p: 128.

دور الأمراض والأوبئة في التحولات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية في المغرب خلال القرن التاسع عشر مقارنة سوسيو تاريخية

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مُلخَص

تتهدم هذه الدراسة بموضوع ينتمي إلى حقل التاريخ، لكنه يفتح على أدوات علم الاجتماع والديموغرافيا، فالأمراض والأوبئة بمغرب القرن التاسع عشر، أثرت على الجوانب الاجتماعية، وتسببت بنزيف ديموغرافي، وهجرات قبلية. كما وضعت السلطة الحاكمة أمام تحديات هددت مكانتها الرمزية والدينية والسياسية، كما عرف المجال الاقتصادي عدة تحولات. فوجد المغرب نفسه أمام قوة طبيعية، ووضعية داخلية مضطربة ومتوترة، فاضطر سلاطين المغرب التدخل لإعادة الاستقرار، في ظل وضعية اجتماعية هشّة، وظهور حركات معارضة من قبائل وزوايا، تتغير الولاءات فيها حسب الظروف والسياسات. ودراسة الأمراض والأوبئة بمغرب القرن التاسع عشر، سيساعدنا على فهم وضعية التشكيلة الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية، وتتبع تحولاتها. وبناء عليه فإن الموضوع يستدعي مقارنة سوسيو-تاريخية، تمكن من رصد التحولات وفهم طبيعتها، وتتبع مساراتها. وهي ما ستمكن أيضا من فهم ما سيعرفه المغرب بداية القرن العشرين من تفكك، وتغلغل إمبريالي، مهد لفرض الحماية عليه، وإدخاله ضمن الدول المستعمرة لاحقا.

كلمات مفتاحية: المغرب؛ الطاعون؛ التحولات؛ القرن التاسع

عنترة؛ المولى سليمان؛ البنية