

The Role of Hamdan Bin Othman Khoja in Documenting the Algerian Cause(1830-1845)

دور حمدان بن عثمان خوجة في تدوين القضية الجزائرية (1830-1845)

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Abstract:

The colonial policy pursued by France since the beginning of the occupation to achieve its goals is clearly evident, as is the national resistance it encountered under the leadership of political figures, including Hamdan Khoja, who lived during the late Ottoman rule and the early years of the French occupation. He was distinguished by his political acumen. Hence, this research paper aims to highlight the importance of the subject, as Hamdan Khoja contributed to documenting the Algerian cause. He was one of the most prominent nationalist leaders in Algerian history and a reformist in the Islamic world. The following question can be posed: What was Hamdan Khoja's political and intellectual contribution to defining the national cause?

Keywords: French Occupation; Hamdan Khoja; National Resistance; Historical Documentation; Reform and Renaissance.

ملخص باللغة العربية

تتبين لنا بصورة واضحة السياسة الاستعمارية منذ بداية الاحتلال ، التي اتبعتها فرنسا للحصول على اهدافها ، وما واجهتها من مقاومة وطنية تحت قيادة شخصيات سياسية ، ومن هؤلاء حمدان خوجة ، الذي عاش أواخر الحكم العثماني ، والسنوات الأولى من الاحتلال الفرنسي ، وتميز بحنكته السياسية ، ومن هنا جاءت هذه الورقة البحثية ، لتبين ما يكتسبه الموضوع من أهمية ذلك أن حمدان خوجة ساهم في تدوين القضية الجزائرية ، وكان من أبرز زعماء الوطنية في تاريخ الجزائر ، ومن زعماء الإصلاح في العالم الإسلامي ، ويمكن طرح الاشكالية التالية: فيما تمثلت المساهمة السياسية والفكرية لحمدان خوجة في التعريف بالقضية الوطنية؟

كلمات مفتاحية: الاحتلال الفرنسي; حمدان خوجة; المقاومة الوطنية; التوثيق التاريخي; النهضة والإصلاح.

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1- Introduction

At the outset of Algeria's colonial occupation, the brutal nature of French colonial policy became distinctly evident. France pursued its objectives through oppressive means, encountering persistent national resistance led by prominent political figures committed to preserving Algerian identity and autonomy. Among these figures were Ibn al-Anabi, Mustafa al-Kabbabti, and Hamdan Khoja. The latter lived during the final years of Ottoman rule in Algeria and the early period of French domination and occupation. He was distinguished by his political acumen, moderate ideology, and patriotism, which earned him a prominent scholarly and practical standing, positioning him as one of the foremost leaders opposing French colonialism.

The national movement in Algeria began with Hamdan Khoja who initiated the first steps toward national advocacy. The political scene experienced substantial development through the formation of associations and clubs which appeared during the late nineteenth century and extended into the early twentieth century. During this time the Young Algeria Movement together with the Algerian Youth Movement appeared to represent peaceful political approaches which expressed their demands.

2- The Figure of Hamdan Khoja

Hamdan Khoja was born (Naamia, Maamar, & others, 1654, p. 122) in Algiers, Algeria, in 1773, into a family of Turkish descent that served in the senior administration of the Regency. His uncle, Al-Hajj Muhammad, held the position of treasury official before the French occupation (Hamdan bin Uthman, 2017, p. 13).

The guidance from his father helped him learn law and he took his place at the university to teach civil law and Islamic jurisprudence after his father died. The year 1784 marked his journey with his uncle to important Balkan cities including Constantinople plus Tunis and Livorno along with Marseille and London and Gibraltar. Through this trip he gained proficiency in Turkish as well as French and English languages (Mohamed Tayeb, 2016, p. 19).

The following period saw him start trading with his uncle to achieve significant commercial success. The Algiers city recognized Khoja as its top merchant man whose extensive business opportunities attracted numerous partners from across the Ottoman Empire and European territories. His exposure to new cultures and political systems enabled him to gain first-hand knowledge about foreign traditions and customs. He dedicated his entire fortune towards protecting Algiers during the French military invasion of Algeria (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 71).

In 1820, he visited France and acquired proficiency in the French language. Following the French occupation of Algeria, and in light of France's failure to honor the conditions stipulated by the Ottoman government prior to the transfer of sovereignty, he served as a member of the Algiers municipal council. In this capacity, he sought to safeguard what remained of Algerian property, notably refusing to relinquish several mosques to the French authorities, who used this as a pretext to

demolish them and replace them with public institutions and infrastructure Hamdan exerted considerable effort to serve his fellow Algerians; however, the French colonial authorities soon perceived the Algerian members' intentions within this committee, leading to its dissolution and the cessation of compensation payments (Amoura, 2002, p. 102).

Hamdan Khoja is regarded as one of the most significant figures worthy of scholarly attention due to his political, intellectual, and reformist roles. His abilities were primarily employed in service of the nation during the late Ottoman period and the onset of the French occupation. Nonetheless, his origins and life stages have not received adequate scholarly focus and have been insufficiently studied. Consequently, many aspects of his life remain ambiguous and are subject to divergent interpretations among historians (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 72).

3- Hamdan Khoja's Political Activity during the French Period

The year 1827 marks a critical turning point for the Regency of Algiers, triggered by the escalation of conflict between Algeria and France following the so-called Fan Incident, which culminated in a naval blockade and eventual occupation.

At the onset of the French occupation, certain segments of the capital's population initially aligned themselves with the French, believing that the collapse of the existing regime would lead to improved conditions and expanded freedoms. This expectation aligned with the French authorities' policies, as some individuals from these groups were appointed to prominent positions. Three main social forces played diverse roles during this period: the first led the political movement, the second organized popular resistance, and the third spearheaded structured armed opposition. The first group primarily consisted of prominent figures from the capital, many of whom initially sided with the French. Notably among them were Hamdan Khoja, Ahmed Boudraba, and Hamdan bin Amin al-Sikka, although their views on the French varied (Saadallah, 1982, pp. 103-104).

A new political landscape emerged under the changed circumstances, giving rise to three distinct political currents, which we may tentatively refer to as parties:

- The National Party: This group consisted of individuals who focused on internal affairs and worked for the public interest, national liberation, and the use of all means to achieve unity.
- The Ottoman Party: Its members aimed to maintain their allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphate, sought to liberate Algeria from French domination, and, if possible, to restore Ottoman rule in Algeria.
- The French Party: This party's interests were aligned with those of France, and its members were beneficiaries of the new political order (Amiraoui, 1987, pp. 101-102).

3.1- Position Toward the French and Relations with Their Authorities

The notable figures of Algiers accepted the idea of negotiating with the French and surrendering the city without resistance, motivated by the belief that the French represented a civilized nation and had come to liberate Algeria from Turkish domination. This belief was further reinforced by Bourmont's assurances, which led people to expect that France would return Algeria to its inhabitants within a maximum of six months. Among these notables was Hamdan Khoja, who trusted Bourmont's promises in the surrender document dated July 5, 1830, which stated that "no harm shall come to Algerians, their property, trade, honor, or mosques," and Bourmont pledged honorably to allow them freedom of religion. Hamdan Khoja was also influenced by leaflets distributed among the population from Tunisia (Amiraoui, 2004, p. 28).

At the onset of colonial rule, Hamdan Khoja called for brotherhood and cooperation with France, wishing to halt the fighting to preserve the lives of Algerian Muslims who lacked the capacity to sustain resistance. He sought to reassure Algerians who wished to migrate out of fear for their religion, steadfast beliefs, regional customs, and Arab dignity. His counsel to the Algerian notables was not to abandon their homeland, making him the first to courageously and sincerely proclaim: "Algeria is for the Algerians (Mortad, p. 26)."

Hamdan viewed France as a symbol of European civilization, a bastion of freedom, and a source of humanitarian laws and human rights. In multiple writings, he emphasized that generosity, pride, a spirit of human compassion, and the defense of liberty were characteristic virtues of the French people. His positive perception of French civilization persisted even during the early days of the French occupation. However, Hamdan later confronted France's imperialist intentions and became aware of the inhumane practices and the obstinate nature of the colonial administration in Algeria, which flagrantly violated the sanctity of the July 1830 Treaty. Consequently, his view of France shifted, and he came to regard it as a symbol of oppression and a perpetrator of civil rights violations (Awadi & Cherikhi, 2015, p. 303).

4- Hamdan bin Othman Khoja as a Diplomatic Representative of Algeria Abroad

4.1- Political Resistance of Hamdan Khoja in France, 1833

Following Algeria's signing of the surrender treaty on July 5, 1830, Algerians reacted by organizing political resistance against French colonialism. They established the first national political party under the leadership of the activist Hamdan Khoja. This party was known as the Committee of the Moors or the Resistance Party. Initially, its activities were clandestine, but as circumstances deteriorated, it openly demanded political independence and the complete withdrawal of French forces (Allouache & others, 1995, p. 169).

Regarding Hamdan Khoja's departure to Paris, historical records present conflicting accounts about whether this move was enforced by the French authorities or voluntary. For example, Bassam al-Asli states that after a conflict with the Duke of Rovigo, the latter exiled Hamdan Khoja from Algeria. Conversely, Munir suggests that the French authorities attributed false accusations to Hamdan, including bribery, embezzlement, and immoral conduct. Subsequently, the French Duke compelled him to relocate to France in 1833 (Assali, 1980, p. 134). Meanwhile, memoirs of Ahmed Bey, Hamdan Khoja, and Boudriba indicate that Hamdan opposed the occupation of mosques and their conversion into churches and hospitals, which led to his dismissal from the French-established Compensation Committee and his exile to Paris (Khoja, Khoja, & Boudierba, 1981, p. 138).

It is most plausible that Hamdan Khoja did not arrive in Paris as an exile, but went there voluntarily to defend the Algerian cause. Aiming to fully understand its dimensions and bring it to international attention, he aligned his efforts with British political interests. The English Consul in Algeria supported this by introducing Khoja to the British ambassador in Paris, Granville, to strengthen his position and amplify his voice. Khoja's deliberate decision to move to Paris received further confirmation when important Algerian leaders together with scholars chose him to be their official representative. The French Parliament became a platform for Khoja to fight for Algerian rights while pushing for the return of French-confiscated property during his time in Paris (Pichon, 1833).

Hamdan made his way to Paris in 1833 to build French public support and reach both French and British authorities regarding Algerian matters. Si Hamdan bin Uthman Khoja along with other Algerian dignitaries submitted a petition to the French king which stated: "On behalf of the undersigned, we authorize Si Hamdan bin Uthman Khoja to present this petition to Your Majesty." The French government along with any protectorate under the French crown received their representation through Khoja who had been given authority to defend their interests. The authorized inhabitants of Algiers appointed Khoja to deliver their petition to the king who received the letter with the statement: "I have received authorization from the inhabitants of Algiers to present this petition to Your Majesty." His freedom-driven mission for Algeria remained unimpeded as he stated: "My only desire was to bring peace to my suffering homeland (Djilali, 2010, p. 256)."

Naturally, Khoja's efforts took the form most appropriate to the political context in which he operated. His role in presenting grievances to the French government is reflected in his statement: "Upon my arrival in Paris, I presented to the President of the National Assembly a petition outlining the well-known conditions of my countrymen, without mentioning my own personal case, which is currently before the Council of State (Mohamed Tayeb, 2016, p. 40)."

The Role of Hamdan bin Othman Khoja in Documenting the Algerian Cause

On June 3, 1833, he also sent some of these petitions to the French Minister, Marshal Soult, listing crimes committed by French generals and requesting an official response (Hamdan bin Uthman, 2017, p. 256).

His petitions included eighteen complaints, the most prominent of which were: First, the injustices following the exile of the Hanafi judge and the seizure of endowments from Mecca and Medina—charitable donations intended for the poor. Second, the demolition of property under the pretense of street expansion. Third, the confiscation of grand mosques and others, which were turned into churches, leaving Muslims with only four major mosques and a few smaller ones. Fourth, the exhumation of ancestral graves, with bones being dug up and sold (Temimi, 1985, p. 100).

4.2- Representing Algeria before the African Committee

The petitions of exiles, especially those submitted by Hamdan Khoja, influenced French policy and led to a new approach: the formation of a fact-finding committee to investigate the situation in Algeria. Several factors contributed to the decision to send this committee, including ongoing parliamentary debates over funding the continued war in Algeria (Tayeb, 2010).

Hamdan Khoja's correspondence with Marshal Soult, in which he appealed for intervention and the creation of an investigative committee, was especially influential. His memorandum documented the violations committed against Algerians and urged: "A neutral and impartial investigative committee must be appointed to examine the injustices to which the Algerian people are subjected daily."

European public opinion—particularly in Britain, which had opposed the occupation from the start—also pressured France, demanding a clear statement (Saleh, 2011, p. 53) on whether it intended to retain or withdraw from Algeria.

King Louis-Philippe of France approved the formation of the African Committee on July 7, 1833. He declared that the committee's goal was to gather information, assess conditions on the ground, and submit reports with clear recommendations about Algeria's future. Hamdan Khoja sought to influence the committee in favor of the Algerian cause, stating: "If what has been happening in Algeria over the past three years continues, French honor will be at risk. Aware of this, the government of His Majesty King Louis-Philippe dispatched a committee composed of honorable men to examine the situation firsthand, and one hopes that from this committee will emerge a victory for justice and humanity." This statement was part of his broader effort to gain the committee's support. (Amiraoui, *The Role of Hamdan Khoja in the Development of the Algerian Cause (1827–1840)*, 1987) (Amoura, 2002, p. 63)

Hamdan Khoja appeared before the committee during its fourth session, where he was asked thirteen questions with a translator present. The committee chairman referred to a book Hamdan had written about Algeria, noting that it included issues beyond the committee's mandate, as well as

personal grievances that would be handled by the courts. He asked Hamdan to focus on public matters and those issues the committee intended to bring to public attention. The chairman assured him that the complaints raised would receive proper judicial consideration. (Saleh, 2011, p. 70)

He then asked Hamdan whether implementing the principle of property restitution would promote prosperity in the areas occupied by France in Algeria. Although the official minutes recorded only a brief summary of Hamdan's response, he stated that such an outcome would not be achieved quickly. In his view, the justice system might benefit urban residents, but would have little impact on the rural population. (Assali, 1980, p. 89)

At the conclusion of the discussion, the chairman invited Hamdan to make any further remarks. Hamdan declined, explaining that he saw no need to add to what he had already presented in his book *The Mirror and the Memoirs*, which he believed sufficiently covered the subject. It is possible that Hamdan was exercising caution, as those familiar with *The Mirror and the Memoirs* would understand his points more clearly than he could convey through direct explanation (Amiraoui, 1987, p. 154).

Ultimately, the committee failed to advance the demands championed by Hamdan Khoja. In reality, the committee had been established to justify the legitimacy of the occupation, and the French government implemented only the recommendations that served its interests. In the end, the government consolidated its control over Algeria—agriculturally and commercially—under military protection. This outcome deeply disappointed Hamdan Khoja, yet he continued his political struggle against the occupation through both his writings and speeches (Abbad, 1999, p. 13).

4.3- His Activities in Istanbul

After approximately 56 sessions, the committee reached conclusions nearly identical to those of the initial committee, particularly concerning the administrative system, and with a similar degree of clarity and precision. This outcome was unsurprising, as nearly all members of both committees shared the dual objective of retaining Algeria under colonial control while ensuring government oversight of its affairs (Amiraoui, 1987, p. 154). Consequently, on July 22, 1834, Algeria was designated a military colony subordinate to French possessions (Tayeb, 2010, p. 112).

At this point, Hamdan Khoja became convinced that French promises to restore Algeria to Ottoman rule were empty. This realization came after judicial authorities in both Algeria and Paris rejected his claims to recover personal property, his relatives' estates, and compensation for travel expenses to Constantine. On June 19, 1835, he submitted a petition to King Louis-Philippe, stating:

"...I am an old man of nearly sixty-two years, and my family and I are in a distressing situation... This is a humble appeal I present to His Majesty the King from your devoted servant, Hamdan Khoja... now impoverished and without means... Before the French government seized Algeria, I was among the

The Role of Hamdan bin Othman Khoja in Documenting the Algerian Cause

wealthy and respected men of this city... Today, I cannot provide for my family's needs... I implore Your Majesty to consider my unfortunate circumstances and not to dismiss this appeal."

During his political activities surveillance Hamdan Khoja and his family members in Paris decided to depart French territory at the end of May 1836 to establish their residence in Istanbul the Islamic Caliphate's capital. The Caliphate authorities supplied him with residential quarters and awarded him monthly payments of 1,000 qirsh. The financial aid reduced part of his difficulties especially when the French authorities seized his properties which had a total value of 40 million francs (Yever, 1913).

The political scene in Ottoman Istanbul prohibited free political movements while preventing independent press operations and banning political parties. All Islamic figures faced tight surveillance regarding their complete range of activities. The Algerian activist Hamdan Khoja pursued his mission in Istanbul through methods that differed significantly from his activities in France. Hamdan Khoja refrained from applying the same forceful pressure against Ottoman officials which he had used to push the French government toward direct intervention in support of Algeria (Alayeb, 2011, p. 48).

Khoja selected a tempered strategy which stemmed from his knowledge about Ottoman internal problems and external threats such as separatist movements and French influence on the Sublime Porte.

The restrictions failed to prevent him from dedicating himself to the advancement of Algerian interests. The official authorities regularly summoned him to participate in meetings where important matters about the Maghreb region including Algeria received attention. At these meetings he delivered expert advice on potential courses of action which the Ottoman state could implement. (Mohamed Tayeb, 2016, p. 96)

Khoja worked at Amira Press, where he did writing work, translation, and editorial responsibilities in addition to his political activities. The translation of correspondence from Algeria, together with drafting replies including Ahmed Bey's letters, fell under his responsibility. Through his appeal to the Sublime Porte, the Sultan started diplomatic and military operations to support him. The Ottoman Empire's diminished condition during that time period caused these initiatives to fail. (Khoja, Khoja, & Boudierba, 1981, p. 64)

5- Conclusion

This research leads to several key conclusions:

- Hamdan Khoja's roots in a prominent and influential Algerian family, along with his religious and scholarly education and extensive travels through European countries, gave him a broad cultural background and multilingual skills that qualified him for many important roles in the country.

— These official positions brought him into close contact with influential figures and allowed him to build relationships with rulers—most notably Dey Hussein, who trusted him deeply and assigned him many confidential tasks.

— Hamdan Khoja is recognized as the first political figure to document the final period of the Ottoman era in Algeria, covering its economic, social, and political dimensions, as well as the onset of French occupation. Through his work *Al-Mar'ah* (The Mirror), he denounced the oppressive practices and arbitrary policies imposed by the French military leadership.

— As a patriot advocating reform within the Islamic world, Hamdan Khoja stood out among politicians who defended their ideas and homeland with irrefutable evidence and compelling arguments. He served as the articulate voice of the Algerian people before the African Committee and on the international stage.

— Hamdan Khoja remained in Algeria with Dey Hussein instead of leaving because he wanted to protect his country and its population. Hamdan Khoja accepted French rule initially because he wanted to convince Algerians about its sincerity and to establish independence for Algeria.

— At the beginning of the colonial period Hamdan Khoja supported French cooperation together with French fraternity. After understanding colonial brutality to its full extent Hamdan Khoja changed his stance to focus on political opposition.

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The Role of Hamdan bin Othman Khoja in Documenting the Algerian Cause

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