



Cannabis in Morocco Before and During the French Protectorate: A Medical History

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ABSTRACT

The history of cannabis in Morocco goes back several centuries. Its consumption was subject to social norms limiting its market as well as its impact on society. The advent of the protectorate (1912-1956) made cannabis an economic product of great value through a monopoly of its cultivation and marketing despite the undeniable impact on public health. This article traces the history of cannabis in Morocco from its earliest origins, passing through multiple historical events that marked the place of this product in Moroccan society and finally pausing on the great change that will experience the cultivation and consumption of cannabis under the protectorate.

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1. Introduction

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) investigation, in 2003; Morocco was the world's largest producer and exporter of cannabis [1]. This present situation has its origins in a distant history of the region as well as a colonial heritage of about half a century (1912-1956). The use of cannabis in Morocco has remained for centuries a limited and tolerated social practice. Later during the protectorate period; cannabis use in Morocco became a real social phenomenon with a significant impact on public health [2]. This article takes stock of the historical aspect of cannabis in Morocco before and during the protectorate.

2. The beginnings of cannabis in Morocco

The cannabis plant was reportedly introduced in the Maghreb from the 7th century, when the Arabs arrived in North Africa [3]. After, its cultivation was established in the country of Sanhaja, in the Moroccan Rif, in the 15th century [4]. From the 17th century onwards, some Zaouia (religious confraternities) promoted the development of cannabis cultivation. It was used as a magical drug and introduced into religious ceremonies. The zaouia of Issaoua, the Hmadcha and the haddawa use cannabis during the dikr (worship of God) [5]. Spiritual use has popularized it and it has become a product with multiple uses, it allows to bear the hardness of work and cold in winter and, as a recreational drug, it causes drunkenness and promotes social ties [2]. Cannabis use was ritualized, allowing for socio-cultural tolerance and the establishment of local consumption habits and knowledge of standards of use: quantity and quality of the product consumed and the risk of abuse [2]. But that doesn't preclude the fact that certain prohibitionist measures have appeared from time to time, often, as a result of incidents related to the misuse of the product. Saadians in the 16th century publicly burned stocks of tobacco and cannabis [2]. In Fez, the Ulama

also banned the use of cannabis on the basis of Qur'anic verses: "He will allow them to use good things and will defend them from the bad" [6]. However, these prohibitions had no lasting effect [2]. From the 19th century the cultivation of cannabis became under the control of the Makhzen (state), which, after several armed confrontations with Spain; Sultan Sidi Mohamed Ben Abderrahman created taxes managed by a monopoly of the kif (cannabis) granted to the state [3]. Towards the end of the 19th century; and to avoid revolts in the Rif, Sultan Moulay Hassan I officially authorized the cultivation of cannabis in five villages of the Ketama tribe and among the Beni Khaled of Ghomara [7]. During the same period, Moulièras reported that several tribes of the Moroccan Rif had traditionally cultivated cannabis. He noted that during this time, the Rifain kif was known throughout the country [8]. Cannabis was grown in small quantities alongside other traditional crops. It was smoked as a kif in pipes called "sebssi" or consumed as a cake called "maajoun" [3].

3. The start of the French interest for Moroccan cannabis

Before the official protectorate, Moroccan cannabis had attracted French interest. By the end of 19th century, 90% of pharmaceutical cannabis used in France came from the Moroccan Rif [3]. Since the half to the end of the 19th century, cannabis still used in psychiatric cares [9]. Cannabis then becomes a particularly profitable product. Hence the great change that his culture will experience; since it is no longer a question of a traditional substance for local use but rather a commodity of great economic value [2]. This is how was created the tobacco and kif agency in 1899, a company with a French capital, and which was located in Tangier. In 1906, France obtained the monopole of the agency in the Algeciras conference, and had developed the cannabis culture in the middle atlas, in the west and the occidental Rif [3].

4. The period of the protectorate

From 1912, when the protectorate began, France faced several challenges due to the use and cultivation of cannabis. Most of the French writings preceding the protectorate give a dramatic image of the social phenomenon of kif consumption and its toxicity [2]. It is described as a poison provoking havoc in the man of the people [10]. Some authors cite among the modes of transmission of syphilis in Morocco, at that time, the traditional pipe for smoking cannabis (the "Sebssi"), which was shared among smokers [11]. During the same period, there was a big debate among doctors in Metropolitan France about cannabis with a new trend that no longer considers cannabis as a medical means but rather a substance dangerous for mental health; especially after the increase in the number of forensic cases due to cannabis [9]. This debate will be crowned in 1916 by the vote on the first law that strongly constrained the use of cannabis in France in the name of public health [12]. Despite all these considerations, France has adopted different measures in Morocco, protecting the highly profitable cannabis monopoly. It was therefore decided that the supervisory authority should ensure a "wise and prudent application of the law" [12]. Cannabis- like other substances- remained a commodity like any other in the French colonies until the eve of decolonization [12]. Economic pragmatism has therefore taken over the way in which France has handled the cannabis issue in Morocco [12]. For France, the revenue from the monopoly on the sale of kif and tobacco was the second recipe from colonial budgets after the import duty [13]. The cultivation of cannabis and its use will then undergo a strong expansion under the influence of a powerful commercial policy of the tobacco and kif authorities [2]. A new tendency to use cannabis then appeared among new social classes and among women [14]. That was a historic turning point. Cannabis is no longer a local product whose consumption has remained limited for centuries but rather a commodity with a special status. Since the Geneva Treaty of 1925, international law put cannabis among the narcotics. However, France continues its policy of promoting the culture and marketing of the product in Morocco [15]. In 1926, a new tolerance zone for cannabis cultivation extended north of Fez [4]. The substance continues to cause public health damage, which could explain the widespread diagnosis at this time of psychosis induced by cannabis [14]. The situation remained stationary until 1932 and in a global context marked by the pressure of the United States for the prohibition of cannabis, where we then see the French administration reluctantly undertaking measures limiting the cultivation of cannabis in the areas managed by the tobacco and kif agency [4, 12]. It was only two years before the end of the protectorate that cannabis cultivation was banned throughout the French zone following the Royal Decree of 24 April 1954 [4]. After independence, Morocco

faces a problem that is far from being solved. The protectorate's legacy has marked cannabis on several levels: socio-economic and political. The state's attempts to combat the cultivation and use of cannabis are being met with a new reality, making the product a challenge for decades and up to the present day [4].

5. Conclusion

Cannabis in Morocco has a history. Its use was for centuries a socially integrated and limited practice. The advent of the protectorate made of this substance a commodity of undeniable economic value and allowed it to expand towards new social strata. A new reality, with a definite impact on public health in Morocco.

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