



The repercussions of social division in Algeria's new cities The situation of some residential areas in the new city of Ali Mendjeli in Constantine



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Abstract

Researchers have addressed the urban phenomenon in Algeria with a focus on urbanisation, which has led to the neglect of studying the field in terms of its diverse and profound sociological dimensions. This can be considered the motivation for including the variable of field in the study of society, through this variable, it is possible to understand phenomena related to concentration and aggregation or dispersion and fragmentation, in addition to studying the dynamics of individual movement and group stability. In this context, this article focuses on the socio-spatial division of the new city of Ali Mendjeli, as a newly emerging urban model, and because it has managed, in a short period of time, to transform itself into a major urban centre influenced by political and economic modernisation, producing a set of spatial and social divisions that reflect the nature of social relations and transformations associated with rapid urban expansion. Analysing these phenomena provides an in-depth understanding of the interactions of the new urban space and its role in shaping social structures and directing the dynamics of society within the framework of urban sociology.

Keywords

Social Division;
Space;
Socio-Spatial Division;
City;
New Cities;
Algerian City

الكلمات المفتاحية

التقسيم الاجتماعي؛
المجال؛
التقسيم السوسيو مجالي؛
المدنية؛
المدن الجديدة؛
المدنية الجزائرية.

تداعيات التقسيم الاجتماعي لمجال المدن الجديدة بالجزائر حالة بعض الاقامات السكنية بمدينة "علي منجلي" الجديدة بقسنطينة ملخص

تناول الباحثون الظاهرة الحضرية بالجزائر بالتركيز على التحضر، ما أدى إلى إغفال دراسة المجال بما يحمله من أبعاد سوسولوجية متنوعة وعميقة، وهو ما يمكن اعتباره الدافع لتضمين متغير المجال في دراسة المجتمع، فمن خلاله يمكن فهم الظواهر المرتبطة بالتركيز والتجمع أو التشتت والانشطار بالإضافة إلى دراسة ديناميكيات حركة الأفراد واستقرار الجماعات. في هذا السياق، يركز هذا المقال على التقسيم السوسيو مجالي بمدينة علي منجلي الجديدة، باعتبارها نموذجاً حضرياً حديث النشأة، ولأنها استطاعت وفي فترة وجيزة أن تتحول إلى قطب حضري كبير متأثر بالتحديثات السياسية والاقتصادية، مفرزا لمجموعة من التقسيمات المكانية والاجتماعية تعكس طبيعة العلاقات والتحويلات الاجتماعية المرتبطة بالتوسع الحضري السريع. تحليل هذه الظواهر يتيح فهماً معمقاً لتفاعلات المجال الحضري الجديد ودوره في تشكيل الهياكل الاجتماعية وتوجيه حركية المجتمع ضمن إطار علم الاجتماع الحضري.

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I. Introduction:

Urban space often reflects a dual structure in its formation and composition. whether viewed from the inside or the outside. This duality is manifested through spatial practices resulting from social interactions between different groups, and sometimes as a result of policies and trends imposed by urban planning authorities themselves, contributing to the creation of a dynamic relationship of influence and impact within the urban sphere.

The dynamics of the urban space are usually linked to the distribution of land use within the city, which is known as the internal structure or internal architecture of the city. This dynamism contributes to facilitating the movement of individuals and their social mobility within a natural system, where individuals seek places that match their social and economic status within the real estate framework, resulting in a convergence between social status and spatial status through the process of separation and division between social groups using spatial strategies that include the choice of places of residence, education, work, entertainment and patterns of social interaction. This may also occur due to ethnic, cultural, social or economic factors.

The disparity between different sectors of the city can reach significant levels, reflecting a form of population division within the geographical area of a single city and highlighting the existence of a social distance that explains the spatial differences between one area and another. It may also lead to the emergence of what can be described as 'spatial differentiation,' where the city becomes a complex space that reflects interrelated social and spatial inequalities, making the study of this differentiation necessary to understand the mutual impact between urbanisation and social structure.

Algerian urban space has undergone a transformation from ethnic differentiation during the French colonial period to spatial and social differentiation, manifested in the concentration of certain groups in specific neighbourhoods, with physical and symbolic boundaries separating them. This dynamic led to the structuring of residential communities in a sequential manner, with a dichotomy between rich and poor neighbourhoods, which made the urban fabric characterised by these two distinct patterns.

Starting in 1995, Algeria launched several new city projects to relieve pressure on major cities, adopting several housing models that varied according to social hierarchy, this opened the door to real estate partners, on whom the state relied to organise human and urban settlement, producing a phenomenon from which several ecological processes emerged: "concentration, separation and isolation." In recent years, several luxury housing developments have appeared in the new city of Ali Mendjeli in Constantine, which have become part of major housing programmes proposed by some real estate projects targeting broad segments of the population, including middle-income groups who can purchase these homes through bank loans.

These residences are completely enclosed, i.e. surrounded by a concrete wall, and offer their residents a lifestyle isolated from neighbouring neighbourhoods. They feature a range of recreational, sports and even educational facilities, as well as tight security systems. Apartment prices vary according to size, view, floor, and number of apartments on each floor. These features give the residences a special character and enhance the privacy of their residents, who are thus separated from their social surroundings.

This pattern, which is not accessible to all groups, reflects a new way of life that manifests social differences. Therefore, in this paper, we will attempt to understand how the spatial division of the new city of Ali Mendjeli contributes to the reproduction of social differences. This main question is accompanied by the following sub-questions:

- What are the motives behind the spatial separation of these groups from the rest of the population of Ali Mendjeli?
- What are the socio-spatial implications of this type of division?
- Can this new container be considered a sign of the emergence of a city with liberal ideas influenced by current political and economic changes?

II. First Theoretical and conceptual framework:

II.1. Importance of the topic:

The importance of the research topic and its scientific and societal value are among the reasons for its selection. The topic of 'socio-spatial division of new cities' is considered worthy of researchers' attention due to its connection to the dynamics of the city and its multiple effects on urban life.

Research on this topic is not limited to the study of the urban aspect, but goes beyond it to include an analysis of the social, cultural and economic interactions that contribute to the formation of the urban space, thus providing new insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Algerian cities in their urban and social context.

II.2 Reasons for choosing the topic:

Choosing a research topic is a complex process that requires the researcher's personal inclinations and scientific interests in guiding their choices influence a balance between subjectivity and objectivity, as this stage. Objective factors such as

timeliness, relevance to the field of specialisation, availability of sources and references, and suitability for study cannot be ignored.

II.3 Research objectives:

The research aims to study the social division of the New Ali Mendjeli City area in an attempt to explore the social and spatial background of the emergence of these residential communities, in order to provide a clear scientific vision that contributes to understanding the phenomenon.

II.4 Defining concepts:

II.4.1. Social stratification:

Sociologists use the term social stratification to describe the system of social status. Social stratification refers to the classification of society according to social and economic levels based on factors such as wealth, income, ethnicity, education and power. ⁽¹⁾

Others define it as the hierarchical arrangement of individuals or groups in society based on their socio-economic or political status. The layers of the social hierarchy are often referred to as social classes and can have a significant impact on society. Social stratification can create inequality in opportunities, access to resources and power, this can lead to many negative consequences for individuals and society as a whole. ⁽²⁾

The above concepts indicate that social division is class-based in society and is determined by classifications that include economic, social, ethnic and even political status, emphasising the negative nature of inequality in opportunities, resources and power.

Therefore, we can define social stratification as the hierarchical classification of people according to certain dimensions of inequality, whether in terms of income, wealth, power, status, age, ethnicity, or other characteristics.

II.4.2. Field:

The concept of space is one of the most problematic due to its connotations and implications and its complexity and paradoxical nature, as it is considered a point of intersection for several fields of knowledge, including philosophy, mathematics, psychology, geography, economics, anthropology, and sociology, not to mention art, architecture, and aesthetics, which leads to the deep dimension of the concept. ⁽³⁾

Manuel Castells defines it as "a physical product that is related to other physical elements... The urban space is built, meaning that it did not arise by chance and is related to the social process, i.e. it expresses the specificity and limits of each model and each stage of social organisation. ⁽⁴⁾

The above definitions highlight the importance of economic factors in defining the concept of space, but also emphasise that these factors, despite their importance, are not sufficient on their own, as other factors involved in the structure of space must also be taken into account. Space can therefore be defined as follows:

The field is considered a product of social interaction; it is not merely a geographical space, but has material and moral dimensions. It is a space for living and influencing, and expresses the relationship between social groups and their environment, i.e. between society as an integrated unit and a specific part of the earth.

II.4.3. Social division of space:

The social division of space illustrates the relationship between social and geographical space, where social relations are divided and defined according to social affiliation, as each group or class occupies a location that reflects its social characteristics and creates distances between them. These social distances are at the same time geographical spatial distances that manifest themselves in forms of segregation and isolation that encompass individuals as occupying a spatial area and social affiliation, because they are distributed in the social sphere as in the geographical sphere, according to the type and size of capital they possess. ⁽⁵⁾

Others believe that social division or class affiliations and the positions occupied by individuals determine spatial differences and geographical separation. Here, the (social and geographical) sphere appears divided into parts and units that reflect social hierarchy and class classifications, in which there are specific forms of social interaction that vary according to objective determinants that draw social boundaries and spatial affiliations.

We therefore address the social division of space as. ⁽⁶⁾

the process of distributing and arranging individuals and groups in the social and geographical space of the new city of Ali Mendjeli, according to social, economic and cultural criteria such as income level and type of social and cultural capital. This division is manifested in the existence of spatial distinctions and specific residential patterns that reflect the social and economic differences between different groups and lead to the emergence of social and geographical distances separating them.

II.4.3. The city:

The city is considered the most complex urban pattern constructed by the human mind, with characteristics and features that define its historical identity and social and cultural heritage.

It can be said that there have been attempts to define a comprehensive meaning and concept of the city, with both Sorokin and Zimmerman providing definitions that identify eight basic elements or criteria that generally constitute a city:⁽⁷⁾ Occupation: where most of the population is engaged in industry and trade,

- The environment: man's attempt to adapt to it,
- Population density,
- The size of the community, which tends to be relatively large,
- Population heterogeneity and differentiation, where there is a high degree of heterogeneity,
- Diversity and class hierarchy, where the population is diverse and stratified,
- Social mobility: where mobility in the city seems more pronounced,
- Pattern of interaction: where the city is characterised by multiple, secondary and contractual relationships.

This is consistent with Lewis Wirth's view that the city is a pattern of population variation and that its growth can be seen as a continuous historical process, as it is a permanent place of residence for a diverse population. There are three variables that determine the character of a city: the first is population size, the second is population density, and thirdly, demographic diversity and community life. It is also a place of residence characterised by its size and density, inhabited by heterogeneous individuals.⁽⁸⁾

From the above, it can be said that the city we are discussing in this research is the new city of Ali Mendjeli in Constantine, a large, culturally and socially heterogeneous population centre reflected in the area through different residential patterns and forms.

II.4.4. The Algerian city:

The Algerian city first appeared in the modern sense during French colonialism, given that the tribe, as a social, political and economic organisation, was the predecessor and represented the basic unit of Algerian social organisation.

Since its colonization, Algerian society has undergone a profound transformation at all levels, which can be summarized in the processes of urbanization and modernization that have reflected the change from a simple rural agricultural lifestyle to a modern industrial and service-based one.⁽⁹⁾

Since its occupation of Algeria, France has sought to Frenchify Algerian territory by issuing several laws, decrees and policies that have pushed the population to leave their land and move to the cities. The colonial administration adopted urban plans aimed at expanding the urban fabric of cities by creating neighbourhoods and equipping them with basic facilities to attract Europeans.⁽¹⁰⁾

The process of preparation in Algerian society did not proceed at the same pace as in European societies. Urbanisation brought about material changes and changes in the nature of individuals' professional activities, their ways of thinking, their values and their daily habits. This affected the cultural system, which had previously focused on honour, obedience and collectivism. to embrace the values of freedom, individuality and differentiation.⁽¹¹⁾

II.4.5. New cities:

Several terms are used to describe new urban communities, such as the new society or new cities. The latter is used to refer to many communities that differ from each other in terms of functional objectives and size and, of course, affect the political, economic and social conditions of the state or regions in which they are located.⁽¹²⁾

New cities are parts of existing cities that are more comprehensive and larger, with their own customs and traditions, customs, and social, cultural, and economic structures. They are integrated communities established through plans and programmes to address rural or urban social issues, with population problems and increased pressure on resources and services being among the most complex issues facing society.⁽¹³⁾

It is also defined as a community that has the elements of an ancient society in terms of building the social, economic and political systems necessary for its survival. It was established through a planned human will to achieve economic and social goals to overcome the problems of the ancient society.⁽¹⁴⁾

MERLIN PIERRE believes that a new city is a planned city that is created within the framework of regional development policy and is self-sufficient in terms of employment opportunities, housing and services necessary for workers, as well as various facilities and activities.⁽¹⁵⁾

Others believe that new cities are urban agglomerations generally established for political purposes and built in small cities on land with few or no dwellings, with the aim of absorbing population growth and creating new job opportunities, in addition to alleviating population pressure on major cities.⁽¹⁶⁾

Based on the concepts of new cities presented in this research paper, the new city of Ali Mendjeli is described as "an urban model for planned urban expansion by the state, created to alleviate demographic and urban pressure on the city of Constantine and limit random sprawl. However, this expansion was not merely a technical response to the housing

problem, but rather resulted in - due to housing policies and social distribution patterns - an urban space characterised by clear spatial disparities, with the wealthy concentrated in luxurious, gated residential complexes, while low-income groups were located in neighbourhoods lacking in amenities and facilities, making it a model that reflects the spatial and social inequalities that characterise the social division of the contemporary Algerian city.⁽¹⁷⁾

III- Theoretical foundations:

Given that in sociology we need to identify theories related to research topics in order to explain and interpret phenomena or show the relationship between two phenomena or variables, this paper addresses the social division of space (urban segregation) and refers to the spatial differentiation between residents of the same urban area based on social variables including ethnicity, religion, and social class, in addition to language, occupation, property value, and the symbolic value of areas and neighbourhoods.

The theory of urban segregation is one of the theories developed by the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, which is based on the idea that large cities consist of separate areas or 'neighbourhoods' characterised by different social, economic and cultural compositions. It argues that this segregation is not merely a geographical distribution of the population, but rather the result of complex social and economic processes that lead to unequal access to resources and services and the formation of distinct collective identities for each neighbourhood.

According to Park, the socio-spatial processes associated with competition and adaptation to the growth and expansion of the city create a multi-level spatial segregation. On the one hand, specific and predictable areas of segregation appear cartographically. on the other hand, the city's expansion is manifested in peripheral urbanisation as a continuous escape from pathological areas, where poverty and poor living conditions are associated with deviance, crime and stress. Thirdly, inequality becomes a spatial reality and the city emerges at this level, not as a functionally divided space, but as a spatial hierarchy that mirrors the radical social hierarchy.⁽¹⁸⁾

IV- Research hypothesis:

This research represents an exploratory attempt to discover what makes prediction and extrapolation from a hypothesis difficult. In this case, according to Maurice Angres, the hypothesis is replaced by the research objective, which is to understand.

how the spatial division of the new city of Ali Mendjeli contributes to the reproduction of social differences. It has been treated as a hypothesis for defining dimensions and extracting indicators.

VII. Second: The new city of Ali Mendjeli and the social division of space

This part of the research deals with the different areas of study, spatial, temporal and human, by defining the research community, the sample and how it was selected, and concludes by clarifying the methodological procedures for the subject, including the approach, techniques and data collection tools.

VII.1. Research areas:

Spatial area (public and private) - Temporal area - Human area

VII.1.1. Public domain New city of Ali Mendjeli

Field	Basic data
Historical overview ⁽¹⁹⁾	• The idea for its creation dates back to the 1980 Master Urban Plan (PUD). • It was approved as part of the 1998 Master Plan (PDAU). • It was officially established by Presidential Decree No. 2000/17 on 5 August 2000. • Its management is regulated by Executive Decree No. 14-118 of 2014. ⁽²⁰⁾
Geographical location	• Located west of the Ain El Bay plateau, east of the city of Constantine. • Adjacent to Provincial Road No. 101. • Bordered to the north by the East-West motorway, to the east by National Road No. 79, and to the northeast by Mohamed Boudiaf Airport. ⁽²¹⁾
Area	• Original area: 1,500 hectares. • After expansion: more than 2,600 hectares distributed between the municipalities of Al-Khroub (1,002 hectares) and Ain Samara (498 hectares). ⁽²²⁾

Spatial division	• Comprises 21 neighbourhood units spread across five main districts. • Urban diversity between north and south of Provincial Road 101. ⁽²³⁾
Housing types ⁽²⁴⁾	• Social housing: 40% • Cooperative housing: 36% • Promotional housing: 24%
Demographic characteristics	• Rapid population growth since 2000, with the population of the new city estimated at over 500,000 in 2021, an increase of 200,000. • Large influx of displaced persons from old neighbourhoods in the city of Constantine. • Uneven population density between neighbourhoods. ⁽²⁵⁾
Urban function	• A new city to relieve pressure on the parent city of Constantine. • A space for resettling the population and expanding the urban and social fabric.

VII.2. Private sector

■ City residence (Shaar al-Deeb)

The residence is located in the western extension of Ali Mendjeli, in neighbourhood unit (21), on the road leading to Ain Samara. It enjoys a strategic location close to major road junctions and various essential facilities such as educational institutions and shops. The residence comprises 370 high-quality residential units, distributed across a variety of apartment types: F2, F3, F4, and F5*

■ Luxury Residences (Chare El Dib)

Located in neighbourhood unit no. 18 in Ali Mendjeli, it features 9-storey buildings with two residential apartments on each floor, with prices varying according to size and views. The sale of these luxury apartments (according to the real estate upgrade description) began at the end of 2019. The complex comprises 171 residential units equipped with all modern amenities.

■ Maryam Residence (Dembri)

Located in neighbourhood unit 20, this is a gated and guarded residence with two to three apartments on each floor, two electric lifts in each building, a secure enclosed play area for children with green spaces, and 138 residential units.

VII.3. Time frame:

The time frame of the study covers the period from September 2024 to September 2025. This time frame was carefully chosen based on theoretical and field considerations. Theoretically, this period represents a turning point in the urban transformations that the city of Constantine has undergone, both in terms of infrastructure and changes in the social use of space. This coincides with the views of a number of urban sociologists, such as Manuel Castells and Henri Lefebvre, who have emphasised the importance of transitional moments in understanding the dynamics of urban spaces, considering the city to be a mirror of major social and economic transformations.

In the field, this period made it possible to track some of the actual changes in lifestyles associated with housing patterns and community interaction within the urban fabric through direct observation, field surveys and interviews with social actors. This overlap between theoretical analysis and field observation provided a deeper understanding of the relationships that are woven between individuals and space, as well as how social affiliations and spatial identities are being redefined within the city.

The choice of this time frame was not random, but based on the desire to capture a sociological moment in which the interactions between urban policies on the one hand, and the reactions of residents and their reproduction of space on the other, were evident.

VII.4 Human domain:

■ Research community:

The research community consisted of a specific population group living in certain luxury residential complexes in the new city of Ali Mendjeli. It was selected based on theoretical and field criteria consistent with the research problem and objectives, as it allows for the analysis of the dynamics of social reproduction within the new urban space and provides a suitable field framework for understanding the practices of field production and the redrawing of social boundaries in the contemporary urban context.

This choice is also scientifically important because it allows for the analysis of the dynamics of spatial segregation, strategies of class differentiation, and the construction of closed spaces within an urban fabric in the process of formation.

■ Sample and selection method:

For this research, we chose a snowball sample, as one of the forms of purposive (intentional) sampling, due to the methodological flexibility it offers, which is appropriate to the specificity of the subject and the nature of the study community. The sample was selected based on the criterion of their residence in luxury residential complexes in the new city of Ali Mendjeli, given that they share a specific residential pattern through which we can reveal whether it reflects a form of spatial withdrawal from other residential formats. The use of this type of sample is justified by the fact that it is more suitable for qualitative research, which does not rely on random distribution or statistical control, but rather focuses on selecting individuals with specific, predefined characteristics. We began by interviewing four respondents from the 'Luxury Residences' complex who, through their acquaintances, gave us access to other respondents at the Maryam 2 residence, according to a cumulative mechanism whereby each participant leads to another, which is what distinguishes the snowball sample as a procedure that allows for the gradual expansion of the data. The sample size was not predetermined, but was left open until the principle of information saturation was achieved, i.e. the moment when new cases ceased to provide additional or different data, which was verified through the successive transcription of interviews and monitoring of content repetition. Thus, the sample size was determined in a cumulative manner based on the abundance of information rather than the number of words, in line with the research objectives of deepening the sociological understanding of the phenomenon of social division in the new city of Ali Mendjeli, rather than aiming for quantitative generalisation of the results.

VIII. Methodological procedures for the subject:

VIII.1. Methodology:

Given the nature of the subject, which is linked to one of the theories of interpretive paradigms, this research adopted a qualitative interpretive approach to understand the dynamics of social and spatial differentiation within the city of Ali Mendjeli. To achieve this goal, a case study approach was adopted as a procedural framework to enable a deeper understanding of a specific situation, namely the category of residents of closed or gated communities, as a manifestation of what is known as residential fortification or selective housing within the city.

The research also relies on qualitative field tools such as observation and interviews, both guided and semi-guided, to understand the contexts that frame the production of urban space and the reshaping of social relations within it. It also aims to reveal the mechanisms of differentiation that accompany this new residential phenomenon in the city.

VIII.2. Data collection tools:

■ Observation:

Observation was not used as a primary tool, but it played a preliminary and analytical role in shaping the subject, as it enabled the monitoring of socio-spatial indicators that reflect the logic of residential fortification, such as urban privacy, security surveillance, and class symbolism evident in practices and signs of belonging within residences.

Interviews:

The research relied on two types of interviews: guided interviews with institutional actors, such as the marketing manager at Al-Tarquouma Real Estate, who revealed to us the economic, social and cultural dimensions associated with housing in residences, and unguided interviews with residents of the residences to understand the experience of daily life within a closed and secure space.

The interviews were based on a conceptual guide built on analytical indicators, and the process of immediate transcription of the content allowed for greater accuracy in the analysis and a deeper understanding of the logic of spatial fortification and social differentiation in the city.

■ Content analysis:

The research methodology relies on thematic content analysis as a tool to support the analysis of interviews by deconstructing the implicit meanings of the discourses of social actors and classifying them into analytical categories related to the research objective.

The analysis was carried out along two central axes: social separation, to understand the mechanisms of class differentiation and the symbolic formation of belonging within the urban sphere, and spatial separation, to reveal the forms of reproduction of spatial barriers that establish a divided society within the city.

The analysis of the field data began with the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, which were presented in descriptive tables. We followed this with a qualitative treatment of the axes of social and spatial segregation, concluding this part of the article with a presentation and discussion of the results in light of the research objectives and the adopted theory.

IX. Third: Presentation of data, analysis of data and discussion of results:

IX.1 Presentation of data:

■ Personal data of respondents:

Table 1: Shows the distribution of sample individuals by gender variable

Gender	Number
Male	10
Female	04
Total	14

The table shows that the research sample consisted of 14 respondents, divided between 10 males and 4 females.

Table 2: Distribution of sample members by age variable

Age group	Number
35-45	06
45-56	05
57-67	03
Total	14

According to the table, the ages of the sample members range between 35 and 67 years old, with 6 of them aged between 35 and 45, 5 between 46 and 56, and 3 between 57 and 67.

Table 3: Distribution of sample members according to educational level

Educational level	Number
Secondary	07
University	04
Doctorate	03
Total	14

According to the table, the educational level of the respondents is distributed as follows: 7 have a secondary education, compared to 07 who have a university degree, including postgraduate studies (04 university degrees) and (03 doctorates).

Table 4: Distribution of sample members according to occupation variable

Occupation	Number
Self-employed	06
University professor	03
Employees and executives	02
Retired	02
Total	14

The table shows that 06 of the sample members are self-employed, such as taxi drivers, specialist doctors, businessmen, 03 university professors, 03 employees and executives, and 02 retirees.

Table 5: Distribution of sample members according to their previous place of residence

Previous place of residence	Number
Social housing	02
Subsidised housing	07
Shared family housing	05
Total	14

The table shows that seven members of the sample lived in supported accommodation, five in shared family accommodation, and only two in social housing.

Table 6: Distribution of sample individuals according to current accommodation type

Accommodation type	Number
Luxury accommodation	04
Semi-luxury accommodation	10
Total	14

According to the table, 10 of the sample individuals chose semi-luxury accommodation, compared to 04 who chose luxury accommodation.

Table 7: Distribution of sample individuals according to the number of rooms variable

Number of rooms	Number
Two rooms	01
Three rooms	06
Four rooms	05
Five rooms	02
Total	14

The table shows how the sample individuals are distributed according to the number of rooms in these residences. Six of the sample members chose to live in three-room flats, five in four-room flats, two in five-room flats and finally one in a two-room flat.

Table 8: shows the distribution of sample members according to the variable number of children

Number of children	Number
No children	01
Two children	03
Three children	07
Four children	03
Total	14

According to this table, the highest number of children in the sample was three, which was the case for 07 of our respondents, while the rest of the sample had the same number of children (02).

IX.2. Data analysis and discussion of results:

■ Social division:

Since independence, Algerian cities have undergone significant demographic, economic and cultural transformations, resulting in urban challenges, most notably the housing crisis caused by heavy migration to cities in search of better living conditions.

As part of its efforts to address precarious housing and unsanitary conditions, the Algerian state has adopted a series of housing reforms, the most important of which is public rental housing for low-income groups. This is clearly evident in the new city of Ali Mendjeli, which has become the largest residential complex in Algeria since 2000, having received thousands of families relocated from shanty towns.

Despite the residents' initial satisfaction, multiple problems arose related to their inability to adapt to the new environment, the lack of facilities, high financial burdens, and the spread of certain forms of deviance. The grouping of the population according to regional origins contributed to maintaining a kind of social harmony, but later led to an undeclared social segregation, prompting the authorities to adopt a more dispersed distribution policy.

This spatial concentration resulted in a clear social division between classes, with the poor living in neighbourhoods lacking in amenities and facilities, while the wealthy were confined to upmarket neighbourhoods, creating a fragmented urban space based on class and material status, with deepening differences in income, culture and lifestyle.

In addition to public housing, new housing models have emerged since 2005, including:

- Cooperative housing for the middle classes.
- Rental housing for sale to the upper middle classes.
- Private and cooperative housing.
- Real estate upgrade housing for the wealthy.

Despite the diversity of these options, the middle class continued to struggle to find suitable housing. The state therefore encouraged private individuals and real estate developers to invest in construction, provided legal and financial facilities, and reorganised financing mechanisms, such as:

- Reducing full subsidies.
- Offering soft loans.
- Facilitating access to public property.

As a result of these efforts, in recent years, alongside other housing options, luxury and semi-luxury gated communities have emerged and have recently become part of the housing programmes offered by major real estate developers to a wider segment of the population, including middle-income earners, as they can be purchased through bank loans or instalments.

We will attempt to shed light on the dynamics of socio-spatial segregation as a phenomenon in the new city of Ali Mendjeli, as a concrete manifestation of the social injustices resulting from housing policies and spatial exclusion. The policy of mass relocation from fragile neighbourhoods to public rental housing was introduced as a mechanism to address the housing crisis, but it has produced forms of class differentiation through the spatial concentration of social groups with similar socio-economic characteristics, which has contributed to the creation of socially homogeneous areas as opposed to areas of marginalisation.

This urban dynamic has had structural consequences, including difficulties in social adaptation, an imbalance in the city's functional structure, and an increase in indicators of spatial fragmentation, particularly in the absence of equitable distribution of facilities and services. The urban pattern resulting from these transformations also reflects the class hierarchy between the wealthy, who live in luxury residences, and the disadvantaged, who are concentrated in high-density social housing.

Despite the diversity of housing options (public rental, subsidised, cooperative, lease-to-own, etc.), housing policies have shown a structural inability to accommodate the middle classes, thereby reproducing social segregation within the city. From this perspective, the urban space in Ali Mendjeli constitutes a fragmented sociological space, governed by mechanisms of symbolic and spatial exclusion, where housing is not merely a biological necessity, but a factor in the reproduction of class differentiation within an unequal urban system.

A first reading suggests that these residential complexes can be a mechanism for socio-spatial positioning that reflects changes in lifestyles, as these spatial areas have become relatively closed and respond to the needs of social groups with high purchasing power seeking to enhance their social and spatial privacy.

The choice of housing in these residences is not only linked to urban quality, but is based on a social and symbolic logic through which individuals seek to embody their class distinction within the city. In other words, it is an expression of class affiliation and a desire for distinction and isolation from other shared urban spaces. The results of interviews conducted with a number of residents of the new residential complexes (Dambri and Shaar al-Deeb) showed that these spaces represent more than just housing units; they embody a deliberate choice of a modern lifestyle centred on class affiliation. Most of the respondents, including four university graduates, two of whom are professors in higher education, stated that their move to these residences was in response to a desire to live in a residential space that respects privacy and offers a sophisticated lifestyle that guarantees a high degree of social selectivity, where living alongside prestigious groups (such as doctors and senior executives) a gateway to acquiring symbolic and social capital, and a sense of stability and class recognition, far from the mixing of traditional spaces and their urban problems. This was confirmed by one of the respondents desires to leave social housing and register for one of the accommodation programmes in search of a better living environment that provides amenities such as lifts, parking spaces, security and intercoms, as well as bringing her closer to those who are socially and economically similar to her.

The cases studied also showed that this spatial transition often takes place through complex pathways, according to six of the respondents (two in social housing and four in subsidised housing), who sold their previous homes to purchase housing in a semi-luxury residence, reflecting a willingness to sacrifice their previous housing gains in exchange for access to a space that is more symbolic of social status, in a kind of class-based investment in the area.

Two employees and two other self-employed professionals (one of whom was a taxi driver) indicated that they had resorted to bank loans to finance this housing transition. A retired executive from a border state added that he was looking for comfort and seclusion and that the cost of the accommodation had been paid for by a bank loan as he was unable to pay for it in full. Luxury accommodation is seen as a kind of symbolic investment, as it is a space that establishes a sophisticated lifestyle based on tranquillity, security, cleanliness, and the availability of modern facilities as a means of achieving social distinction. This was confirmed by the commercial manager of the real estate promotion, Shaar Al-Dib, who stated that only 15% of the residents paid the full amount, while 85% paid through bank loans and instalments, reflecting a social divide between what the middle classes want in terms of symbolic advancement and what they can afford financially.

What drives some middle-class groups to purchase such housing despite resorting to bank loans that burden them economically and socially? The answer came from one of the respondents (a university hospital administrator), who said, 'He bought it to provide a decent life for himself and his children, as he does not want them to grow up in a mixed environment.' This socio-spatial data confirms that this type of housing is no longer merely a functional or urban necessity, but rather an expression of a conscious social choice that seeks to build the self within a space that reproduces class differences in a smooth and flexible, yet effective, manner.

Another businessman added: "I could afford to buy a more luxurious home, but I chose to live here for several reasons: First, these residences offer a sense of comfort, security and belonging. The neighbours here are from the same social and cultural background. I don't need to explain who I am, and I don't feel targeted as I do in some neighbourhoods. Second, the accommodation provides everything I need without having to leave the premises: security, facilities, cleanliness and tranquillity. This harmonious community atmosphere gives me a sense of balance. I don't just want a place to live, I want a social environment that respects my privacy and supports me psychologically. Simply put, here I live at a level that suits me."

The demand for these residences, described as luxury or semi-luxury, especially from the middle class, cannot be understood in isolation from the logic of class symbolism and socio-geographical segregation within the city. The residential space here serves a dual function: the first is material, providing security and comfort... and the second is symbolic, embodying social status and class affiliation, in the sense that it is an investment in social identity before it is an investment in real estate. It can also be seen as part of the logic of reproducing class differentiation within the urban sphere, where housing becomes a means of controlling social belonging and identity, and reinforces practices of segregation within the city of Ali Mendjeli, which is undergoing spatial transformations based more on social positioning than on actual housing needs.

■ Spatial division:

Interviews conducted with a group of residents of Ali Mendjeli revealed a clear spatial differentiation that reflects a complex interaction between urban structure, individual choices and social constraints. This separation is not limited to urban or economic dimensions, but is based on a conscious collective desire to live in a space that reflects class and cultural affiliation.

Our analysis distinguishes between an imposed spatial segregation resulting from mass relocations to social housing in the early days of the city's formation, and a voluntary segregation represented by the migration of certain groups, particularly from the middle and upper classes, to luxury housing despite its high cost (between 104,000 and 125,000 dinars per square metre). This voluntary separation was expressed by one of the respondents (a retiree) who left his old social housing to live in an environment that reflects his social status and provides him with comfort and tranquillity.

In the eyes of their residents, luxury residences are not only a comfortable living space, but also a means of expressing class affiliation, in the sense that the place has become a mirror of class identity. Phrases such as: 'Buy the neighbour before the house', 'I bought peace of mind', and 'I live among people like me', which were mentioned by the respondents, translate into what Robert Park calls 'positioning within urban space according to social status, where the city is divided into distinct ecological units, differentiated by their functions and inhabitants, producing a kind of city within a city. This paradox reminds us of what Bourdieu calls the symbolic capital of place, where housing becomes a means of displaying taste, distinction and belonging, rather than merely a means of stability or utilitarian function.

In the same context, a number of respondents reported that their resort to gated communities was linked to a clear security concern. As a result of the spread of crime and chaos in some densely populated neighbourhoods, this concern motivated them to choose gated or fenced neighbourhoods equipped with security guards and cameras, and basic amenities (lifts, central heating, parking spaces, etc...), thereby reproducing a kind of spatial division, soft spatial boundaries.

These data confirm Park's assertion that the larger the city, the greater the differentiation and separation within it. Marginalisation.⁽²⁶⁾

This spatial separation also reproduces inequality in the distribution of services and facilities. Researchers have pointed out that some neighbourhoods, especially social ones, suffer from a lack of infrastructure, while other neighbourhoods have the best facilities. We recall Henry Lefebvre's concept of "spatial justice", which argues that the right to the city should not be a privilege, but rather an equal guarantee of access to urban space, without class discrimination or spatial exclusion.⁽²⁷⁾

Although it is relatively easy to access these residences through subsidised bank loans (as stated by Aoun from the Savings and Reserve Fund), these formulas are linked to precise conditions relating to income, age and housing price. Analysis has shown that most of the respondents resorted to mortgages, while only a small number were able to pay in cash, indicating that this type of housing remained a privilege for a certain class only, even if it was formally open to other groups.

The spatial segregation in the city of Ali Mendjeli reveals a new elitist urban pattern, mimicking a 'chosen city' within the larger city, where the wealthy and middle classes reproduce their social position through housing choices that reinforce differentiation and hinder social mixing. This segregation appears to be optional on the surface, but it carries symbolic and material dimensions that reflect the process of spatial hierarchy and discrimination in the urban space.

The data obtained through interviews confirms that luxury housing in Ali Mendjeli is no longer just an urban choice, but an expression of a desire for social differentiation and escape from disturbing spatial mixing. The neighbourhood has become a space that classifies individuals and reproduces class differences within the emerging city.

Thus, spatial segregation in this city is a direct result of socio-spatial transformations driven by the desire for belonging, distinction, security, comfort, and positioning within an urban space that is being reshaped according to market and class logic rather than state logic and equitable planning.

- Discussion of results in light of the objective

The objective of this research was to deconstruct the mechanisms of socio-spatial division in the new city of Ali Mendjeli by exploring the relationship between the social status of residents and their chosen patterns of residence, with a focus on luxury and semi-luxury residential areas. The results obtained from interviews and field observations showed that the choice of these residences was not random, but rather reflected a conscious trend among the upper social classes (university professors, doctors, businesspeople, and senior executives) towards a residential style consistent with their position within the social hierarchy. These groups seek a lifestyle that guarantees privacy, comfort, and security, and provides a kind of selective isolation from other urban spaces characterised by class and social diversity.

Most of the sample confirmed that this type of housing provides them with a suitable environment in terms of services, security, and neighbourhood quality, which are central determinants in the process of producing space within new urban environments. The data also revealed the role of housing policies in reproducing social inequalities by denying middle- and high-income groups access to public rental housing due to income-related eligibility requirements, while grouping vulnerable groups from deteriorating neighbourhoods in the city of Constantine into other housing schemes, which has contributed to the consolidation of spatial segregation within the new city.

It is noteworthy that the resort of many individuals to bank financing to acquire high-end housing reflects a shift in social positioning strategies, whereby housing has become a tool for highlighting status and achieving belonging to select social circles. The diversity of residences in terms of size and design reflects the multiplicity of levels within the upper classes themselves and reveals an internal logic of differentiation even within a single residential area.

In conclusion, it appears that public housing policies, alongside economic and social factors, have contributed to the formation of new residential patterns that take into account the symbolic and social dimensions of place, making these residences an urban phenomenon that expresses the dynamics of social hierarchy and its reproduction in urban space.

- Discussion of the results in light of the adopted theory:

Based on the research objective, which considers that spatial segregation in urban spaces is a direct manifestation of social division, ecological theory as developed by Robert Park was used to understand the dynamics of spatial distribution within the new city of Ali Mendjeli, assuming that the city is not only an urban framework, but also a living social entity shaped by conflicts of positioning and adaptation between groups, leading to a class-based distribution of space that reflects social and economic differences.

The results of the field study confirmed that a large proportion of respondents – belonging to higher professional categories such as doctors, university professors and senior executives – chose to live in (luxury or semi-luxury) residences in response to their need for a lifestyle that reflects their position within the social hierarchy. This type of housing also reflects what Park described as ecological selection, whereby social groups are attracted to certain areas according to their economic capacity and their desire to belong to socially and culturally homogeneous groups.

The research findings also coincided with what Park pointed out regarding the inverse relationship between the size of a city and the intensity of social segregation within it. The city of Ali Mendjeli, which has undergone rapid urban expansion driven by demographic growth, produced distinct residential patterns targeting specific groups with purchasing power and distinctive consumption patterns. Thus, the planned residences did not arise by chance, but were formed as an ecological response to the demand of certain groups for spaces that guarantee comfort, privacy, and symbolic isolation from other groups.

Ecological theory contributes to the interpretation of social distance as the basis for spatial distance, with the results showing clear differences between residents of these residences and their counterparts in other residential areas within the same city. Even within these residences themselves, an internal distinction emerged between 'luxury' and 'semi-luxury,' indicating the persistence of a hierarchy within the enclosed space.

The results are also consistent with the concept of spatial polarisation, whereby some urban neighbourhoods exert a selective pull, attracting certain groups over others, which explains the limited number of such residences and their relatively homogeneous populations. The nature of cultural contagion referred to by Park is also consistent with what the field has revealed about the uniformity of values and lifestyles among the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods, where they live in similar social conditions and share collective representations of privilege and exclusivity, reinforcing the closed and fenced-off nature of these spaces.

Thus, ecological theory has not only enabled us to understand the mechanisms of spatial distribution, but has also shed light on the symbolic and elective relationships that govern the formation of residential spaces in the new city, confirming its relevance in explaining urban transformations based on the logic of social differentiation.

X. Conclusion:

The case study of Ali Mendjeli, through an analysis of the positioning of social groups within luxury and semi-luxury residential areas, shows that urban space in Algeria is no longer a neutral space, but rather a direct reflection of social and economic inequalities and a visible manifestation of power relations and hierarchies within the class structure of society. A socio-spatial reading of the data revealed that socio-spatial division in Algerian cities is not based on urban needs or rational planning, but is shaped by social and economic contexts resulting from the interplay of structural factors, foremost among which are the decline of the state's role, the imbalance of housing policies, and the rise of market logic.

The luxury and semi-luxury residences that were the subject of the research represent urban spaces, but they carry social connotations that go beyond architecture and appearance. They reflect the distinct class positions of their residents, who possess the economic and professional capital that enables them to choose residential locations that reinforce their class

privilege. and provide them with a kind of symbolic and spatial isolation from the rest of society. In contrast, the less fortunate are pushed to the margins of the space or displaced according to urban plans that do not take spatial justice into account, but rather reproduce exclusion and inequality.

The social contexts surrounding the development of the city of Ali Mendjeli – as a demographic extension of the city of Constantine – have contributed to the construction of a divided urban landscape, defined by differences in income, professional status, and the ability to own high-end housing. The city here is not just a population centre, but a class map in which social groups are distributed according to their ability to control resources and space, making housing not a right, but a social privilege.

The repercussions of this socio-spatial division are not only reflected in the structure of space, but also affect the form of social relations, and patterns of urban interaction, weakening the foundations of integration and cohesion within the city. This calls for a rethinking of urban policies, not only as technical tools, but as means of achieving social and spatial justice that guarantees the right to the city for all its groups.

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*The symbols F2, F3, F4, and F5 are French abbreviations commonly used in the real estate market in Algeria and France to classify flats according to the number of rooms. Example: F3 is a three-room flat (living room + two bedrooms + kitchen + bathroom). The letter F stands for Fonction (function/main room), and the number indicates the number of rooms.

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