



***From Kinship Ties to Social Bonds in the Urban City
(A Field Study of a Sample of Rural Families Settled in the Urban
Environment)***

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Abstract

The contrast between rural and urban lifestyles plays a crucial role in shaping various social phenomena, particularly of interest to anthropological and social science researchers. Cities, shaped by the influx of rural residents, have become diverse spaces where people seek better living conditions and opportunities unavailable in rural areas due to underdevelopment. Algerian cities have experienced this shift, leading families to adapt to an urban lifestyle markedly different from their rural traditions. Among the most affected aspects are kinship ties, which play a vital role in unity and solidarity. This study investigates how kinship ties evolve into social bonds in urban settings. It seeks to understand whether urban life leads to the weakening of kinship ties and their replacement by broader social connections, as well as the factors driving this transformation.

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1. Introduction

Today, the city serves as a space that brings together diverse groups with varying social and cultural backgrounds. This is due to the intensified migration of rural residents to urban areas in search of stability, employment, and various life necessities that are lacking in rural regions. This situation is driven by several factors, primarily the lack of development and social infrastructure.

Algerian cities have witnessed the relocation of many families from rural areas seeking to settle in urban centers. This shift has significantly impacted the traditional lifestyles these families once lived in their small villages. With their settlement in the city, they have encountered a lifestyle that differs greatly from their rural traditions—namely, the modern urban lifestyle with its various contemporary characteristics. One of the most notable aspects affected by urbanization is their kinship ties, which hold great importance and occupy a central role in the structure of their social relationships.

The core focus of this study is to examine the kinship ties that are reproduced in the urban environment and to explore the social connections formed by rural families who have settled in the city. The study particularly investigates the kinship-based social relationships with other families originating from the same rural background, which have been carried over to the same urban setting, specifically Algiers.

2. The Problem Statement:

The core unit of any society is the family, which cannot exist without kinship

relationships that bind its members together. As stated, "The network of relationships is the first historical work a society undertakes at its birth."¹

Kinship ties are primarily based on blood relations, and the family serves as the traditional medium for preserving these ties through the continuity of relationships such as kinship and marriage. Religious and social occasions also play a significant role in gathering family members and strengthening these bonds. However, the traditional lifestyle begins to fade with the growth of formerly isolated traditional communities or their transformation from rural to urban settings due to various factors. As a result, kinship ties that once carried a traditional character in a socially traditional space begin to adopt modern characteristics in a rapidly changing urban environment. Consequently, new or modified kinship ties emerge, shaped by the specific features of urbanization.

Discussing urbanization inevitably leads to an exploration of the city and its distinct characteristics. Anthropology, after the disappearance of primitive societies, shifted its focus to modern societies shaped by technological advancement. This technological development significantly influences individuals' behaviors and their kinship relationships.

Algerian cities, including Algiers, which serves as the focus of this study, have experienced various changes such as increased industrialization and manifestations of urbanization like the spread of media and communication technologies. These changes have had a direct impact on social relationships,

particularly on kinship systems. This impact is visible in neighborhoods inhabited by rural migrants who attempt to adapt to the urban lifestyle.

Based on this context, we raise the following questions:

- Can rural migrants to the city maintain their traditional kinship ties?
- Does urban culture play a role in transforming individuals' relationships and behaviors, ultimately altering the nature of kinship ties and expanding them into broader social relationships?
- What are the aspects of this change in kinship relationships?

Second: Definition of Concepts and Theoretical Framework:

1-Kinship Ties:

Kinship ties are based on two main foundations:

- **Real ties**, which refer to blood relations.
- **Social ties**, which include relationships through lineage, marriage, and kinship by affinity. Both of these are culturally defined according to the norms of each society, which determine the forms of kinship ties and the social roles of each individual within them.

2- Social Ties:

These are social relationships established and maintained between individuals through direct encounters, whether they are personal or impersonal. Social ties encompass a range of relationships, including familiarity, social companionship, and general social bonds.²

3- Traditional Ties:

These are relationships that bind an individual from birth to other individuals, either through actual blood relations (kinship) or imagined ties, such as belonging to a clan or tribe through a common ancestor.

4- Modern Ties:

These are relationships formed outside the scope of kinship or tribal affiliation. They often include neighborly relationships or friendships.

5- City:

The term "city" is one of the most complex concepts in social sciences, making it difficult to define precisely. It is characterized as a large, permanent settlement with a distinct urban lifestyle.³ Ibn Khaldun, in his introduction (*Muqaddimah*), distinguishes between rural and urban development. He explains that, "Some forms of settlement are rural, found in outskirts, mountains, and desert regions, while others are urban, located in towns and cities for protection and defense behind their walls."⁴

6- Urban Culture:

Urban culture refers to the customs, traditions, and behaviors that characterize individuals living in cities. It is marked by innovation and renewal across various fields and includes the changes that accompany urbanization as people settle in urban areas.

7- Social Change:

Social change refers to the study of transformations or modifications in the nature, structure, and composition of groups and systems, as well as in relationships between individuals and groups. It also encompasses changes in institutions, organizations, and social roles.⁵

Third: Theories of Kinship:

There are two classical theories in anthropology that address the concept of kinship:

1- Evolutionary Theory:

This theory is based on the principle that humanity progresses through stages of historical development, moving from simple to complex forms and then to more advanced complexities. One of its key proponents is **Henry Morgan**, an American anthropologist and pioneering social theorist known for his works on kinship and social structure. Morgan believed that societies evolve over time, which is reflected in the nature of their social relationships and systems. He explored the origins of kinship and its development through marriage and the family structure.

2- Structural and Functional Theory:

This theory revolves around two fundamental concepts in anthropology: **structure** and **function**. The concept of social structure refers to the elements that form relationships within a society. **Radcliffe-Brown**, a representative of the British school of anthropology, referred to these elements as people, not merely as biological beings but as individuals in social relationships.

The concept of function, on the other hand, refers to the role these elements (people) play within the overall social structure. One of the prominent figures of this theory is **Claude Lévi-Strauss**, who explained the differences in marriage and kinship patterns as a result of the prevailing social conditions in each society. According to Lévi-Strauss, kinship is not just a system of names but a system of behaviors, where no name holds

significance without being connected to the overall structure of the system.⁶

Fourth: The City in Anthropological Thought:

1- Historical Overview of the Concept of the City:

The English word "City" has existed since the 13th century, but its modern usage, signifying a very large town, began in the 16th century to differentiate between urban and rural areas. By the 19th century, the meaning became aligned with the rapid development of urban life during the Industrial Revolution. However, the term "city" with its modern connotation, representing a distinct lifestyle, did not emerge until the early 19th century.⁷

2- Urban Anthropology:

Urban anthropology focuses on studying the aspects and issues related to cities, including systems, customs, traditions, and values that shape human interaction within them. It also examines urban development and the changes it undergoes.⁸

Researchers in this field emphasize studying relationships between ethnic groups in cities, the socio-cultural characteristics of marginalized or underdeveloped areas, rural-to-urban migration processes, and the mechanisms of social and geographic segregation and integration.⁹

3- Key Theories in Urban Anthropology:

Anthropology initially focused on tribal and primitive societies. However, as these societies evolved in various aspects of life and new forms of social organization emerged, particularly cities and their urban structures, modern theoretical approaches were developed. These differed from classical anthropological

theories that primarily studied primitive societies.¹⁰

One of the foundational schools of thought in urban anthropology is the **Chicago School**, whose scholars examined religious and ethnic minorities, as well as marginalized groups within the city.

One of the first to directly study cities was **Louis Wirth**, who considered the city as a social entity within the scope of urban anthropology. Wirth proposed the idea that kinship ties in cities ceased to play a significant role in social relationships.¹¹

Among the prominent modern theories in urban anthropology is:

• **Social Network Theory:**

Developed by **Clyde Mitchell**, who applied it to urban areas in Central Africa. His case studies, conducted under his guidance, provided valuable insights for evaluating various approaches and models in urban studies. This theory led to the identification of significant phenomena that became essential subjects of study in urban anthropology.¹²

Fifth: The Transition from Rural to Urban Areas and Its Relationship to Social Ties:

The term "rural migration" is used in social sciences to describe the geographical movement of individuals and groups. People migrate from rural areas to cities to improve their social and economic conditions, often seeking permanent settlement. This transition brings about numerous changes influenced by urbanization, while at the same time, these migrants introduce changes to the neighborhoods they inhabit by transferring their values, customs, and traditions.

Regarding the reciprocal influence between the urban environment and migrants, **Michel Agier** in his book *Anthropology of the City* identifies four scenarios to understand this relationship:

1- **Ordinary Cases:**

These involve two types of relationships: one between individuals and the environment, and the other between individuals themselves.¹³

2- **Unusual Cases:**

These include incidental, unexpected, or exceptional events that affect the laws and social ties binding individuals to society, without the environment playing a stabilizing role.¹⁴

3- **Transitory Cases:**

These are characterized by individual interactions in a specific location, defined by time and place.¹⁵

4- **Ritualistic Cases:**

These occur in defined settings during ritual events, creating a triadic relationship between the individual, the environment, and the community.¹⁶

1) **The Chicago School and Issues of Migration and Urbanization:**

The city of Chicago underwent major transformations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, characterized by significant migration and ethnic diversity. The city's population included a variety of ethnic groups (Poles, Czechs, Italians), whose customs and languages were distinct from those of earlier Irish, German, and Scandinavian settlers. This ethnic mixture led to considerable social imbalance in urban neighborhoods.

These large waves of migration contributed to numerous social phenomena, including poverty, crime, deviance, and ethnic conflicts, making the city a rich field for social studies.¹⁷

One of the notable studies produced by the Chicago School was the famous *Polish Peasant* study, conducted by **William Thomas** and **Florian Znaniecki**. Thomas, who graduated from the first anthropology and sociology cohort at the University of Chicago in 1892, was particularly puzzled by the unconventional behaviors of Polish migrants in the United States.¹⁸

Thomas and Znaniecki emphasized that their work was a genuine social study, requiring analysis of migrants both at their point of origin and in their new environment. They focused on observing patterns of interaction and relationships within the migrant community and with other ethnic groups, highlighting the importance of integration, cultural assimilation, and social values.¹⁹

2) Mohamed Souidi's Study on Rural Migration to Algerian Cities:

Dr. Mohamed Souidi examined the phenomenon of rural migration, focusing on its historical, colonial, and socio-economic causes, as well as its impact on urban and rural settings. He argued that urban growth in Algeria was essentially a process of "ruralizing" cities, as most urban residents were originally rural and retained strong ties to their traditional customs.²⁰

According to Souidi, this process led to the emergence of hybrid family systems that combined characteristics of both urban and traditional families. This gradual transformation of Algerian families was influenced by adaptation

challenges and the difficulty of abandoning rural ties due to ongoing tensions and conflicts in the urban environment.²¹

Sixth: Field Study:

1. Methodology:

The qualitative approach was adopted for this study, a method used in scientific research to understand phenomena through non-quantitative data. This approach aims to explore the deep and complex aspects of research problems, focusing on the meanings and contexts expressed by individuals in their daily lives and personal experiences.

2. Study Sample:

Our field study was conducted in Algiers, involving five families who share the same lineage, originating from a tribe in a village in Batna Province. These families settled in various neighborhoods in the city of Algiers.

3. Study Tools:

To achieve the study's objectives, the tools used included observation and semi-structured interviews.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Results:

1. Sample Characteristics:

- The civil status of the study sample ranges from individuals aged 20 to 70. Their educational levels vary, with most older individuals lacking formal education in their rural environment, though some learned the Qur'an in mosques. Their children, however, received education upon settling in the city, with most attaining university-level qualifications.

- Professionally, the older generation worked as farmers in their rural areas characterized by an agricultural economy. After migrating to the city, their children pursued education and are now employed in various companies and institutions.
- The first wave of migration from rural areas to the city occurred post-independence, as many urban facilities had been destroyed during the colonial period. A second wave involved women and children joining their spouses in the city for education and better living conditions.
- Twenty interviews were conducted, with four members from each family (two elders who had lived in rural areas and two of their children). The interviews were analyzed across three thematic axes: rural life, urban life, and the changes that occurred with migration.

2. Rural Lifestyle:

A. Housing and Economic Activity:

- Housing in rural areas reflects the extended family structure. Houses typically have multiple rooms surrounding a large courtyard, symbolizing the unity of the extended family under the authority of the grandfather, father, eldest male, and senior female members.
- Families with shared lineage live in close proximity, forming their own neighborhood characterized by mutual support and cooperation. This arrangement facilitates mobility and assistance among family members during times of need.

- Decision-making and family affairs are handled collectively through frequent visits and gatherings, with all family members well-informed about family matters.
- Rural families practice self-sufficiency by storing food and other necessities, such as olive oil, to last throughout the year, showcasing their economic resourcefulness despite limited means.
- Women collaborate on household tasks, such as weaving, while men assist one another during harvests. This lifestyle strengthens kinship ties through mutual economic support.

B. Family Gatherings:

- Marriage customs in rural areas emphasize endogamy (marriage within the family), reinforcing kinship ties.
- Participation in wedding preparations and extended celebrations lasting up to a week further solidifies social bonds.
- Endogamous marriage helps retain ownership of family land by preventing outsiders from acquiring it.
- Visits during both joyful and sorrowful occasions, such as illness or the death of a relative, highlight the resilience of kinship ties, with solidarity manifesting in both happiness and grief.

C. Social Relationships Outside of Kinship:

- Social relationships outside kinship are rare, particularly among women, as most neighbors are also blood relatives.

- The strong reliance on kinship relationships leaves little room for building external social connections.

3. Urban Lifestyle:

A. Housing and Economic Activity:

- The extended family structure gave way to nuclear families living separately, with parents solely responsible for raising their children.
- Families often live near their workplaces rather than close to their relatives, reducing direct contact with kin.
- Economic reliance shifted toward purchasing necessities from markets. As stated in Interview No. 3: *"I am married and work. I don't have much time to do household chores like my mother used to in the village, so I buy food from outside. Balancing work and home responsibilities is very challenging."*
- Women, having received education and qualifications, work alongside their husbands to meet household expenses.

B. Family Gatherings:

- With the advancement of technology and the rise of social media, physical family gatherings have declined, replaced by phone calls and text messages.
- Family meetings occur primarily during essential events, such as funerals, with social media often substituting in-person visits for less immediate matters. Time constraints and work responsibilities have

significantly reduced gatherings during holidays and celebrations.

- Weddings, once week-long events held at home, are now condensed into single-day celebrations in rented venues, further weakening family ties due to limited face-to-face interaction during preparations.
- The decline in arranged marriages and kinship-based unions can be attributed to the diminishing influence of senior family members. Today, young men and women independently choose their life partners, aided by their exposure to education and work.

C. Social Relationships Outside of Kinship:

- Interview responses confirmed an expansion of social networks beyond kinship ties. Many family members have formed friendships with neighbors, colleagues, and schoolmates.
- One participant mentioned her close relationship with a neighbor who acts as a second mother to her children while she is at work.
- Workplace relationships have become substitutes for family connections due to daily interactions with colleagues.
- Men also develop strong social ties with coworkers and neighbors, frequently meeting in cafés.
- Children establish diverse social relationships at school and university, compensating for weakened kinship ties after transitioning from rural to urban lifestyles.

General Conclusion:

Our study focuses on the topic of "the transition from rural to urban life for stability, where individuals acquire urban culture that influences their relationships and behaviors, leading to changes in the nature of kinship ties." Through analyzing the data gathered from interviews conducted with five families, the key findings are summarized as follows:

- **The decision to migrate from rural areas to the city** was driven by economic necessity. The deteriorating living conditions and difficulty in obtaining basic needs compelled rural families to move to urban areas to seek better opportunities, particularly for educating their children and ensuring a better future. The lack of development in rural areas made it impossible for families to sustain their livelihoods.
- **Urban life** is characterized by modern features that significantly affect the relationships and behaviors of those who settle in cities. Although these individuals bring their traditional rural culture with them, prolonged exposure to urban life gradually erodes these traditions due to factors such as widespread communication technology and work-related obligations. According to our study participants, when they first settled in the city, they tried to live near each other so their children could attend the same schools. However, over time, the need to find employment forced them to disperse and live closer to their workplaces, leading to physical separation from their relatives.
- The extended stay in the city **led to reduced family visits**, which were increasingly replaced by modern communication methods (e.g., social media). This shift weakened mutual support during both joyful and sorrowful occasions.
- As human beings are inherently social, **individuals compensated for the reduced interaction with family and kin by forming new social relationships**, such as friendships with colleagues and neighbors-relationships that were unfamiliar to them in rural life.
- The families surveyed preferred to **visit their original rural village occasionally**, especially during the olive harvest season, but they unanimously rejected the idea of returning to live there permanently due to the hardships of rural life compared to the comforts and opportunities offered by the city.
- Even **elderly individuals**, despite their nostalgia for traditional rural life, chose to remain in the city because of the ease of access to healthcare services, such as doctors and medication, which were difficult to obtain in rural areas due to poor infrastructure.
- Many participants acknowledged that they **were unable to maintain strong kinship ties** after settling in the city, as urban life caused these ties to weaken significantly compared to the strong cohesion they experienced in rural settings.

- Overall, the study concluded that **rural migrants in urban areas** undergo changes in their behavior and relationships, leading to the transformation of their once-strong kinship ties into more fragile bonds, while forming stronger social relationships outside of kinship. The demands of urban life contributed to the weakening of kinship ties and the strengthening of broader social connections.

Conclusion:

The study found that **settling in the city negatively impacts the kinship ties** of rural migrant families. Over time, these families lose continuous contact with both direct and extended relatives due to factors such as living in separate residences and being preoccupied with urban responsibilities. The loss of communication and regular visits leads to the weakening of kinship bonds, which are gradually replaced by social ties.

Additionally, the study highlights that the **city is a rich and diverse space** for social phenomena, attracting the interest of social scientists and anthropologists. While some may believe that the rural environment—with its traditional lifestyle—is more suitable for anthropological studies, the city's cultural diversity, shaped by migrants from rural areas, presents a dynamic and rapidly changing environment.

Our field study provided insights beyond the sample population, drawing attention to broader issues related to urban life, such as:

- **Kinship and Social Relationships:**

One of the most affected aspects of social change is the family and kinship, as well as the relationships formed between individuals. There is an ongoing conflict between the traditional kinship ties brought by rural migrants and the social changes characteristic of urban life. This conflict results in a struggle between traditional values and modern values, impacting family dynamics and social upbringing.

Researchers should investigate these phenomena to find scientific explanations for the current challenges facing Algerian families, including the diminished role of the family in social upbringing and the emergence of social relationships outside of kinship. Key research questions include:

- How do rural migrants establish social networks in the city?
- Does social change alter the family's role in social upbringing?

These questions open avenues for further studies on the dynamics of urban life in Algeria.

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