



Transformations of the Contemporary City and Their Impact on the Family Structure: A Socio-Urban Reading

تحولات المدينة المعاصرة وأثرها في بنية الأسرة: قراءة سوسيو حضرية

Dr. Hala LEBERRARA¹

hala.leberrara@univ-khenchela.dz

Dr. Abboud FELLAH²

fellah.abboud@univ-khenchela.dz

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Article abstract:

This paper explores the environmental dimensions of cities and the characteristics of their urban communities, as it also highlights the structural and functional changes in the contemporary family and analyzes the impact of urban factors and their effects on the stability and cohesion of families in modern cities, where it focuses on the magnitude of the social costs associated with weakening family unity and ties, which can be used to address the challenges of urbanization while preserving family values in rapidly developing cities.

Key words : City; Urban Environment; Urban Family; Urban Life.

ملخص المقال :

يستكشف هذا البحث الأبعاد البيئية للمدن وخصائص مجتمعاتها الحضرية، كما يسلط الضوء على التغيرات البنوية والوظيفية في الأسرة المعاصرة، ويحلل تأثير العوامل الحضرية وآثارها على استقرار وتماسك الأسرة في المدن الحديثة، حيث يركز على حجم التكاليف الاجتماعية المرتبطة بإضعاف وحدة الأسرة وروابطها، والتي يمكن الاستفادة منها لمواجهة تحديات التحضر مع الحفاظ على القيم الأسرية في المدن سريعة التطور.

كلمات مفتاحية: المدينة؛ البيئة الحضرية؛ الأسرة الحضرية؛ الحياة الحضرية.

1. University of Khenchela, (Algeria)

2. University of Khenchela, (Algeria)



Introduction

Cities have been the cornerstone of human civilization for thousands of years, with the emergence of urban life dating back to between 6000 and 7000 BCE, as evidenced by archaeological discoveries in regions such as the Anatolian plains in Turkey, as urban life was not merely a matter of large population concentrations but rather a radical shift in lifestyle, where humans transitioned from reliance on hunting and agriculture to engaging in diverse economic activities; this shift led to the development of complex social systems and new cultural values.

In this regard, Ibn Khaldun argued that the rise of cities was not a sudden event but rather a gradual process influenced by environmental and social factors, where he emphasized that cities are shaped by their natural surroundings, which determine their size, function, and external relations; also the transformation from rural to urban societies also marked a shift in social structures, as cities became hubs for innovation, specialization, and cultural exchange.

However, urbanization has also brought profound changes to family dynamics, as traditional extended families, once bound by strong kinship ties, have given way to smaller nuclear families due to industrialization, economic pressures, and technological advancements, where women's increasing participation in education and the workforce has altered gender roles, while the fast-paced urban environment has weakened familial bonds, leading to social fragmentation and new challenges such as juvenile delinquency and emotional detachment.

This paper explores the origins of urban life, the characteristics of urban society, and the ecological dimensions of cities, it also examines the structural and functional changes in urban families, analyzing the impact of technological, economic, and sociocultural factors; finally, it discusses the implications of these changes, highlighting both the benefits of modernization and the social costs of weakened family cohesion. By understanding these transformations, we can better address the challenges of urbanization while preserving the essential values of family and community in an ever-evolving world.

1. The First Origins of the City:

The origins of cities date back several thousand years, that is, to periods much older than most people believe, as urban life most likely emerged around 6000 or 7000 BC, as discoveries have shown that urban life began even earlier in other regions, such as the Anatolian plains in Turkey, where these ancient cities contained a few thousand inhabitants; however, the primary factor in determining the emergence of urban life is not the number of inhabitants, despite its importance, but rather the type and lifestyle prevalent in these societies, which is primarily characterized by people engaging in various types of economic activity not related to food production, such as gathering and gathering, hunting and fishing, herding, or agriculture, which are linked to more primitive and backward forms of life compared to urban and city life.

Furthermore, urban life necessarily requires the stability necessary for the establishment of social systems and complex, intertwined relationships among the population, due to the differences in their racial origins and the diversity of their customs and social values, at least in the beginning, especially when Different ethnic groups migrate to one area and settle there, forming the nucleus of an urban society (Abboud, 2005, p. 75).

Ibn Khaldun believed that the first cities did not appear suddenly and quickly, but rather passed through certain stages in their development process; He also concluded that a city is greatly influenced by the natural elements of the region in which it is located, in terms of its size, function, and external relations with the surrounding areas (Ibrahim, 2003, p. 105).

The question of the origin of urban centers is historically linked to knowing when the village transformed into a city, where some researchers link this change to the emergence of civilization, meaning that the words city and civil have the same origin (Hussein Abdel Hamid, 1989, p. 79) .

2. Characteristics of Urban Society:

Urban characteristics are divided into unified and interacting sociological features, combining cultural and collective patterns, individual differences, technological skills, and intelligence traits, which form the concept of urbanism, as this concept weakens and reduces our distance from urban areas, where there is less contact with other communities within any urban ecological organization, where urban sociologists call this "city culture" (Qabari, 1985, p. 271), characterized by several characteristics that differ from, and may conflict with, the cultural features of traditional societies, and this is evident in the definition we present in the following points:

- **Human intervention in and control of nature is clear:** Living in cities, humans easily adapt to new circumstances and do not hesitate to create new conditions that they deem compatible with fulfilling their diverse desires for a better living, which has prompted them to intervene in changing surrounding conditions and attempt to control them with all their abilities and talents (Shawqi, 1983, p. 135).
- **Speed of change and openness to others:** Urban dwellers are highly mobile, changeable, and influenced by other cultures, as cities are characterized by diverse cultural trends, and their inhabitants prefer to be influenced and influenced rather than maintain their values and traditions.
- **Clarity of individuality:** The urban personality is linked to effectiveness, strength, and talent, therefore, the individual in the city becomes independent at an early age, able to bear the burdens of life and the responsibility for himself or his immediate family, relying on himself to earn his daily living.
- **Weak family control:** With the emergence of individuality in the urban personality early in life, family control in the city weakens significantly, and responsibility for the family is assigned to the breadwinner, not the elder; given the multiple sources of livelihood, each family member can support themselves, achieving independence from family control for both males and females, as in our time, women play an active role alongside men, and they have become self-sufficient, not needing to be supported by men. Rather, they are relied upon to support the family (Ben Naaman, 1996, p. 74).
- **The emergence of specialization and the division of labor:** While life in traditional societies requires individuals to care for the land as their primary source of livelihood, the diverse and resourceful life of the city imposes numerous economic activities, which in turn require a variety of skills and crafts, which forces members of the urban family to spread out across an infinite variety of professions and trades to earn a living based on the principle of diversity for quality.
- **The intensity of interaction between individuals and the rapid change in values and customs:** Due to the high population density in cities, interaction between individuals is rapid and intense. This has led to rapid change in nature and values, and consequently, customs are diversified, renewed, and developed.
- **Mobility on the social ladder:** Given that the prevailing urban values in cities bring about a qualitative change in multiple areas, opportunities are available for individuals to move up the social ladder within these areas without age barriers or moral constraints related to customs and traditions, as there is no obstacle to social mobility in urban society, except in the case of a loss of talent, intelligence, and the ability to do so (Al-Sayed, 1970, p. 70).

- **Planning for the future:** Urban life is characterized by change and development. Individuals tend to consider consequences and plan for the future, both at the individual and family levels, which forces individuals to consider their present and future, relying on themselves, as their value within their family and social environment is measured only by their financial returns and utilitarian benefits (Shukry & Al-Jawhari, 1980, p. 111).
- **High rates of homelessness and crime:** Homelessness is more prevalent in cities than in traditional societies, as crime and theft are also more prevalent in urban societies, where one researcher highlighted the prevalence of homelessness in urban societies, stating, "The problem of juvenile homelessness is usually linked to urban areas, due to the disintegration of both society and the urban family", due to the association with gangs that commit theft, coupled with factors such as poverty and neglect, which can turn juveniles into homeless individuals (Shukry & Al-Jawhari, 1980, p. 114).
- **The shrinking size of the urban family and the disintegration of its bonds:** Civilized societies tend towards the small family in cities, i.e. the reduction in family support, which results in the phenomenon of family disintegration, and this is due to several reasons, including the wife's tendency towards independence in her personality, and her attempt to achieve equality with the man even in the practical aspect and earning a living, which This often leads to the disappearance of men's authority, resulting in an increase in the number of divorces, which leads to the dissolution of family ties and consequently the displacement of children.
- **The elevated status of women and their equality with men in rights and duties:** Women in the past were not the same as women in the present, and women in traditional societies differ from women in urban societies, due to changing circumstances and women's refusal to be subservient to men, not obeying their orders, but rather competing with them even in their field of work, due to women's entry into education and employment, and the disappearance of adherence to customs and traditions in cities, replaced by urban law; Today, women no longer need men to support them and fulfill their ambitions, as they have established their presence as an important member of society, which cannot abandon them (Sultan, 2002, p. 58)
- **The emergence of heterogeneity:** Urban society is characterized by heterogeneity, complexity, and conflict of values between generations to the point of contradiction. It can be said that urban society always lives in a state of instability in values, customs, and cultural characteristics, Due to the large population and increasing human overcrowding, as well as the abundance of freedoms and the weak preservation of customs and traditions, as well as adherence to values, and the ease of being influenced and affected in the place of residence or the place of work, thus, urban society always remains in a state of loss of homogeneity and a constant search for completeness and stability (Shukry & Al-Jawhari, 1980, p. 119).
- **Time appreciation:** Time is very important in the life of the urban individual, in light of the rapid pace of change, as well as the frequent congestion, and also the organized life in factories, homes, and everywhere, calculating time is a prominent feature and a sign of civilization in our time, similarly, laws in the city govern the life and time of the individual wherever he or she may be; if he or she feels free, he or she makes good use of it to benefit him or her physically and mentally (Al-Sayed, 1970, p. 91).
- **Continuous Ambition:** The individual in an urban society is more ambitious to advance life from good to better, compared to those who preceded him or her in improving their standard of living, which is aided by the diversity and abundance of life's requirements in the city, which makes people constantly strive for the best and never be satisfied with the pleasures of life they already possess (El-Kholi, 2003, p. 98).



3. Urban Ecology and Its Dimensions:

If we contemplate the characteristics of individuals, their behavioral patterns, ideas, lifestyles, food types, and governmental and religious systems, we find that all of these are characteristics of the physical environment surrounding humans and the living organisms within them, such as insects and birds, as well as the non-living elements found within them, such as the type of soil, the nature of the atmosphere, and the degree of humidity and temperature, have an impact on aspects of social life, shaping individuals' personalities, culture, behavior, and moral and material values, where sociologists argue that the environment has both a visible impact and a fundamental role in changing society and developing humanity (Dlimi, 2004, p. 27).

Interest in what is called urban ecology began after studying the city as a natural unit, not as a set of systems or processes, but rather on a natural or environmental basis, as among the most important processes of social growth in cities are concentration, succession, polarization, isolation, and invasion.

In his book, Robert Park referred to what we call urban ecology as an essential feature of urban culture. Lewis Mumford also pointed out in this regard that social organization, its form, roles, mechanisms, and the complexity of its control tools are characteristics of urban societies, as technological progress is a necessary condition for urban life, as city economies are more dependent on the outcomes of technology (Dlimi, 2004, p. 29).

It is impossible to study the city without considering its regional relationships with its immediate and distant surroundings, where there is a close interaction between the city and its surroundings, which is a set of actions and reactions that constantly interact within the city community.

Among the most important dimensions of urban society, we find the regional element of the city, as it is one of the basic dimensions of the city, as it is the basic element in the movement of mutual interaction between the city and its surroundings. In planning and development processes, experts must distinguish between local and regional functions, as the functional structure of cities is divided into two categories. There is a primary structure that includes the origin of the city's establishment, and a secondary structure related to serving the craftsmen who perform the primary functions (Boujemaa, 2005, p. 27); thus, urban ecology is the study of spatial relationships between urban communities, all of which are influenced by physical environmental factors, it also highlights the role and importance of temporal dimensions, which define and regulate urban relationships among human populations.

4. Family Changes in the City

Historically, cohesive extended families provided protection and stability through kinship ties. The Industrial Revolution dismantled these structures, transforming them into nuclear families and imbuing them with a new urban character (Maan Khalil, 2004, p. 208).

The family is shaped by its geographical and social environment, as the traditional rural family is marked by structural unity and shared functional roles, reflecting strong social cohesion; In contrast, the contemporary urban family is subject to the city's rapid changes, which impose new behavioral patterns, and this fosters individualism and selfishness, often at the expense of family values.

The pervasive integration of digital technology, epitomized by the internet, serves as a potent accelerant for this phenomenon of social fragmentation within the domestic sphere, for it facilitates a paradoxical state of connected isolation; wherein family members, though physically proximate, are psychologically absorbed into separate, digitally-mediated worlds. This individuation of experience through personal screens and devices effectively erodes the shared temporal and conversational spaces that are fundamental to nurturing familial bonds, and consequently, the quantity and quality of direct, inter-personal communication diminish

significantly, leading to a tangible attenuation of mutual understanding and emotional intimacy. The cumulative effect is a systematic disruption of the very fabric of family cohesion, as the digital realm competes with, and often supersedes, the emotional economy of the home (Al-Khashab, 1981, p. 115).

Simultaneously, the overarching paradigm of urbanism, for all its heralded advancements in science and material progress, has cultivated a socio-cultural environment characterized by sensory overload, anonymity, and a pervasive sense of alienation. This metropolitan milieu, with its emphasis on efficiency, novelty, and commodified experiences, stands in fundamental opposition to the foundational conditions required for the establishment and sustenance of a stable Muslim family structure; indeed, urbanism actively works to dismantle traditional cohesion by subjecting familial ties to a relentless process of analysis and individualization, thereby breaking down collective units into their constituent parts. In this schema, profound human sentiments such as affection, companionship, and intimate fellowship are increasingly supplanted by impersonal digital mechanisms and transactional interactions, and furthermore, the urban framework, in its rejection of traditional moral structures, offers deviant alternatives for emotional and sexual satisfaction—alternatives which are quick, accessible, and disembedded from religious or communal oversight. These alternatives align with the atomized demands of contemporary urban society, but they fundamentally undermine the moral and emotional pillars upon which the unified Muslim family is built (Hattab, 1979, p. 73).

4.1. Explaining family change:

Society is in constant change, impacting its institutions, where technological developments prompted migration from rural to urban areas and encouraged women to work outside the home, achieving financial independence, while this shift in family structure is a powerful indicator of broader societal change.

The move from a traditional to an urban lifestyle has forced the family to alter its value-laden system, as the urban nuclear family often fails to fulfill its traditional roles, with marital and parental relationships shrinking under life's demands (Ihsan Muhammad, 2005, p. 303). Old family organizations and customs have lost their efficacy, leading those in charge of the family to establish new social rules aligned with their changing needs (El-Kholi, 1974, p. 136).

The Industrial Revolution and globalization have created serious problems like unemployment, as a husband's inability to meet family needs can lead to debt, fleeing the home, and addiction, where children may leave school to work, leading to the disintegration of marital and parental ties due to this change in roles.

4.2 Causes of Family Change in Cities:

The family cannot be understood in isolation; it is part of and influenced by society, and family change is subject to several factors:

4.2.1 Technological factors:

Technological development raises living standards and provides luxury but also imposes changes. The extended family shrank to the nuclear family, and cohesion decreased as city society introduced new, often materialistic, values and trends (Sayed Mansour & Al-Sharbini, 2000, p. 113).

A significant observation is the changed roles between men and women and the diminished intensity of parental relationships. In Algeria, industrialization and media influence have led to women working, strengthening their social status but harming child-rearing, a function now often delegated to institutions like kindergartens (Hussein, 2003, p. 110); while technology brings prosperity, it negatively impacts family cohesion.

4.2.2 The Economic Factor:

Economic change is a primary factor at both societal and family levels; A rise in the family's economic level can weaken kinship ties and create disputes without rational spending. Conversely, a low economic level leads to unmet needs, internal unrest, and potential collapse of the marital relationship (Omar Khairi, 1985, p. 67).

4.2.3 Sociocultural factors:

These include family size, the dominant gender, and cultural level.

Family Size: Larger families are associated with complex relationships, frequent problems, and lower child intelligence and self-concept, as the ideal size for stability is four to five members (Omar Khairi, 1985, p. 71).

Dominant Gender: In Algerian society, male authority is often encouraged, leading to tyranny over females and restricted freedoms, reflecting a lack of social harmony (Omar Khairi, 1985, p. 97).

Cultural Level: Families increasingly imitate imported Western trends, which can obliterate native culture. A higher educational level can complicate parental relationships through increased debate and children's adherence to their own opinions, leading to division and estrangement (Maan Khalil, 2009).

In conclusion, family change results from the interplay of these factors; A change in one component affects the entire structure, forcing the family to adapt to its external environment.

4.3 Implications of Family Change in the City:

Urbanization has significantly changed family patterns, functions, and relationships, as the changes include:

Positive Changes: Improved well-being through scientific progress, communication, urban growth, and women's access to education and prestigious positions, granting them economic power and elevated status (Sultan, 2002, p. 103).

Negative Changes: A shift in social values, the weakening of marital and parental bonds due to work absences, the spread of individualism, a decline in cooperation, and the emergence of problems like delinquency and family disintegration (Sultan, 2002, p. 107), in general, the urban family has undergone radical structural and functional changes.

5. Structural Changes in the Urban Family

The fundamental change that has occurred in the family is its transformation from its traditional, extended, and complex structure to the simple nuclear marital family:

- The traditional family was composed of a group of simple households, in which at least three generations (grandparents, father and mother, and children, with possible uncles and aunts), as the complex family shares common social characteristics, with all members subject to unified norms, traditions, and customs, where their behavior, choices, and social actions are governed by values and rules from which they never deviate. Roles are divided and distributed between men and women, as men are required to work outside the home and provide for the family's needs, including food, drink, clothing, and medical care, while women are responsible for household chores and caring for their children and their husbands.
- On the other hand, the simple (marital) family is often composed of a husband, wife, and their children, this pattern of family structure has emerged as a result of the demands of modern societies and contemporary social developments, as the nuclear family requires independence and a departure from traditional kinship units (Ihsan Muhammad, 2005, p. 303).

It can be said that the form or pattern of family structure is alien to the family in Arab Muslim societies because all the characteristics of the urban family are based on individualism, selfishness, and independence, unlike the Muslim family, which is built on solidarity, compassion, cooperation, and mutual visits between relatives, it is based on kinship ties, not individualism.

6. Functional Changes in the Urban Family

The family has undergone changes in three main functions, the biological function, the nurturing, and the emotional function (Ahmed, 2000, p. 18):

- Biological Function:

The biological function of the family has changed, particularly that related to sexual satisfaction for both spouses, due, on the one hand, to women going out to work and returning home late and exhausted, or to the husband's prolonged absence from home due to certain commitments, and on the other hand, the reproductive function remains, but it has been subject to birth control, with couples limited to having one or two children at most, in keeping with the context of social changes and the demands of a costly life.

- Child-rearing function:

The change in roles and responsibilities between fathers and mothers has led to a clear imbalance in child-rearing, as it is difficult for working mothers to instill proper values and sound social habits in their children, and to instill humane and spiritual values, which is reflected in the formation of the child's personality, whose ability to interact with others is weakened, as they grow up in an environment devoid of intimate relationships and successful communication, and they seek an alternative to that family, and the danger lies in the possibility of their associating with bad friends and being led astray.

- Emotional Function:

The prolonged absence of both spouses from home due to endless work, especially the mother's, creates an emotional void in children, leading to feelings of insecurity and instability. This diminishes their sense of intimacy, companionship, love, and parental affection, because living for extended periods away from their parents instills fear and anxiety, threatening their lives and the psychological development of their personalities.

7. Conclusion:

Urbanization has brought about changes in family dynamics due to industrialization, economic pressures, and technological advancements, as the urban environment has also rapidly weakened family ties, especially with the participation of women in the workforce and the changing roles and functions between men and women, which has led to family disintegration and the emergence of new challenges such as juvenile delinquency and emotional detachment.

We agree with all studies that confirm that working mothers contribute positively and effectively to improving the family's economic situation and providing all the means and means for a high standard of living and education for their children, however, children, in turn, suffer from their mother's constant preoccupation, which reduces the time they spend meeting, talking, listening to their problems, and presenting their concerns and viewpoints, which results in the family losing one of its most important pillars, the mother-child relationship; the latter will seek an alternative to express their concerns and resentment toward the absent mother, who prefers to spend most of her time outside her home, away from her children, where children will undoubtedly be unhappy and psychologically broken, developing negative and violent behavior toward those around them, both inside and outside the family. This loss of a sense of security diminishes their academic skills and reduces their confidence in themselves and their ability to progress and persevere, as they face the challenges of their destiny negatively because they are unsure of what is happening around them, and they have lost their source of affection, security, and reassurance, as well as their role model for success and excellence and resilience, all of which occur due to a lack of family supervision and weak communication between parents and children.



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