

PAISAGENS COLONIAIS E PÓS-COLONIAIS:
ARQUITETURA, CIDADES, INFRAESTRUTURAS

DEBATES ON NORTHERN AFRICA

The «Plan of Constantine» and the modernist utopia

Ahmed El-Amine Benbernou

'A land of minerals': Oil Extraction and Constructs of French Coloniality in the Algerian Sahara

Gemma Jennings

Retracing continuity and discontinuity of a vernacular typology mass housing in the colonial context of Morocco: the case of the city of Casablanca

Fatima Zohra Saaïd, Najoua Beqqal, Mouna Sedreddine e Siham Elgharbi

DEBATES ON WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Surveying essences, producing culture: virgin landscapes and the architectural reinvention of the late Portuguese empire

Rui Aristides Lebre

"Uma Guiné Melhor": the psychological action and the spatialization of population control in rural areas. The strategic villages in Guinea-Bissau between 1968-1973

Francesca Vita

Divided Urbanism – On the Spatial Production of Transportation Infrastructures in Livingstone during Late Colonialism

Carl-Philipp Bodenstein

In between on all levels – [Applied] Foreign Affairs

Baerbel Mueller

ENTREVISTA

Johan Lagae

Entrevista conduzida por Ana Vaz Milheiro e Ana Silva Fernandes

ÁFRICA EM DEBATE – PODERES E IDENTIDADES

La configuration inachevée de la modernité: L'expérience narrative qualifiante d'Idriss al-Gu'aydi, voyageur marocain en Europe durant l'été 1876

Nizar Tajditi

L'itinéraire d'un orientaliste au Portugal et ses réseaux européens. Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira, militaire et éthiopisant

Hervé Pennec

NOTAS DE LEITURA

Watson, J. (2021). *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization*. New York: Fordham University Press

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Capa: Tower in the railway station of Ressano Garcia. Mozambique, 2019. Foto: Ana Silva Fernandes.

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The «Plan of Constantine» and the modernist utopia

Ahmed El-Amine Benbernou*

pp. 9-24

1. Introduction

Through this topic we will explore a phase of history that strongly marked the Algerian territory, and which is the War of Algeria and more specifically the period of the “Constantine’s Plan”. We intend to consider the motivations of the French administration through such an undertaking and its impact on the urbanity of Algerian cities today. In what ways did it impact on the way of thinking the Algerian territory? The ‘Plan of Constantine’ had a significant effect on the Algerian real estate. This apotheosis of the mass construction of the colonial period has greatly changed the landscape of Algiers in contributing to the gradual mutation where its image of Algiers the White was resolved into that of a city dotted with *Grands Ensembles*. Concerning the emergence of these symbols of modernity that are the *Grands Ensembles* in Algiers and in most Algerian cities, we believe that the “Plan of Constantine” was originally their proliferation.

Through this text we will try to understand how the development plan of 1958 participated in the transformation of the image of the Algerian landscape through the social housing process. For that we will consider two points: We will focus first on what the “Constantine Plan” was through its context and objectives. We will see afterwards what strategies and measures were put in place to achieve these objectives, which had to deal with the emergency situation and at the same time had to plan over the long term, where housing played an important role as a tool for social and economic advancement. This will lead to our conclusion about the learned lessons from this Plan which was launched there more than 50 years ago.

2. Integration through industrialization

The “Plan of Constantine” was defined as the successor to the “decadal Perspectives of the economic development of Algeria”, whose main objective was the country’s industrialization. With this document, the basis of social action promoted by the Plan took as principle that integration would be made by industrialization.

2.1. The stated goals and implied goals

The “Plan of Constantine” was in fact a political will to lift Algeria out of its underdevelopment. Therefore, its major concern was the industrialization of the country, which meant major

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reforms in the fields of employment, economy, administration, but also social reforms through education and health in order to establish a sustainable coexistence between the two peoples (Europeans and Algerians) and whose housing was considered as a key issue for this famous Plan. Having said that, the context in which General de Gaulle inaugurated the development plan on September 3rd, 1958, on the heights of Constantine, may leave some doubt about the sincerity of this great point in the French colonial policy in the country. Indeed, the urgency of the economic and social reconstruction of the Metropole devastated by the Second World War had led to relegate Algeria to second place in the priorities of the state. So why this sudden interest? Tarnished by the policy of collaboration and the Vichy regime, which was very powerful in Algeria, France has engaged in neocolonial wars to rebuild the empire and regain prestige, but the defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 during the Indochina War was a great loss. The war of Algeria was increasingly widespread and resonated internationally, taking a new turn with the announcement of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) in Cairo on September 19th, 1958, under the chairmanship of Ferhat Abbas. That was also the day after the independence of Guinea, granted by France, and on the eve of the promulgation of the French Constitution. Thus in his speech, General de Gaulle emphasized the uniqueness of France and the will to open the Metropole to its colonies when he treated the war of liberation as a “fratricidal fight” (De Gaulle, 1994). We can detect here an initiative of the last chance to win back this land, where France became aware after four years of offensive of the reality of the situation in Algeria. Impoverishment of the countryside, misery, rural migration and proliferation of slums, mostly in the capital, where 65 % of the population were European¹, this was what the “Plan of Constantine” had to face at its launch. Following the publication in 1955 of the report “Maspétiol,” which evaluated the investment needed to develop the French Algeria, to see if the state was able to meet such an objective, a group of young officials and professionals chose to come together to see how to implement the report’s conclusions (Vibert, 1959). This gave rise to the “decadal perspectives of the economic development of Algeria” filed in March 1958 and was intended to serve as a basis for two successive five-year plans². Its main objective was made to overcome the delays encountered in terms of development assistance of Algeria which should have been imposed to the Metropole “as a duty of national solidarity”³ a long time ago. It is precisely this document which defined the basis of the “Plan of Constantine” and where housing was conceived as “factors of social evolution” (CEDA, 1959) because the country’s industrialization could not be realized if the consumption habits of people changed by owning modern housing (Saigot, 1960). Moreover, housing should be a factor that promotes “communities interpenetration” (Saigot, 1960).

A period of 5 years was set to meet the various objectives set by the plan. The challenge was to “urbanize this rural old body” (Marié, 1989) by raising the economic, social and cultural level at the metropolitan area and reducing inequalities between Muslims and Europeans for whom statistics estimate that the relationship between the two communities was about 1 European for 9 Muslims⁴.

To implement the “Plan of Constantine” and ensure peace, General de Gaulle appointed Delouvrier as General Delegate of the Government in Algeria, a position he held from 1958 to 1960. This member of the Resistance, a high-ranking official of the French government who had served under the Fourth and Fifth Republic, played an important role in the planning sector of the metropolis and its colonies. Thus, Delouvrier was the man of action and reflection of the economic and social plan of development of Algeria.

¹ L’ambition du «Plan de Constantine», in: *Revue Entreprise*, n.º 245, 14 mai 1960, p. 33

² Interview I conducted with Mr. René Mayer, director of the habitat of Algeria from 1956 to 1962, 10.30.2012.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ L’ambition du «Plan de Constantine», *op. cit.*

2.2. Housing as support of the social promotion

The “Plan of Constantine” had two parallel main actions: land reform and industrialization. From these two points resulted a third action which was to provide housing and public amenities for both categories of population involved. The aim was to identify in cities or in their neighborhood the areas of implantation of industrial zones and areas of new housing, and in the countryside to identify the character of the new agglomerations (see Ilustração 01). Far from us to say that the plan for economic and social development of Algeria based its entire approach on the single axis of the housing, but it must be said that the habitat was considered by planners of the “Plan of Constantine” as an essential element of economic and social development because it represented a lever for employment and decentralization and it was supposed to play a crucial role in the social development of indigenous peoples. At the conclusion of a series of lectures on a survey about habitat in Algeria which was organized by the Technical Institute of Building and Public Works of Algeria (ITEBA), in May 1959, Paul Delouvrier was adamant that the building could be considered as one of the cornerstones of the activity because it had to distribute wages which should be spent for the benefit of the consumer goods industries. Also, it is an activity which is suitable for long-term programs. Mr. Lathuillère, architect DPLG, President of Regional Council of the College of Architects of Algiers said during the same cycle: “[...] *la promotion humaine est désormais liée au logement*.”⁵

For the Algerian capital, this thought is not new. Jacques Chevallier –mayor of Algiers from 1953 to 1958 and known for his humanism– understood that the Algerian problem was more social than political and saw the importance of housing in the construction of the Franco-Muslim civilization (Fralon, 2012). Beyond economic expectations, housing was considered to be a major integration challenge. As noted by Fralon (2012), Chevallier was also known for his right-wing position and reactionary pre-war attitudes prior to the adoption –on his arrival at the head of the commune– of this more social policy to deal with threats of war on the integrity of Algeria. This is how he appointed Pouillon in 1953 as chief architect for the construction of public housing in the capital to address the plight of Muslims in the *bidonvilles* for whom he felt that nothing was done. From this collaboration were born three major projects, *Diar Saada*, *Diar Mahçoul* and *Climat de France*. Completed between 1954 and 1957, these achievements were true emblems of the housing policy in the capital. Whether in the search for a local identity, in the materials used, or in the uniqueness of their design, Pouillon conceived of these projects by emphasizing the human factor. In his memoirs, he wondered if he was a good architect, but he had the belief that he was a man of heart and had achieved human work (Pouillon, 1968). Chevallier's reflection on the conditions of housing was so strong that it opened up a new field of reflection on the Algerian question and prompted a reaction from the state authority about the reality and fate of this country.

3. Emergency of social challenges and the target figures policy

At its inception, the “Plan of Constantine” was confronted with two-time scale actions. It had to face the emergency in which Algeria was caught, where the independence movement was gaining more and more partisans among the indigenous population who has been affected by a high rate of poverty. This implies action in the short term which should be accompanied at the same time by investment in the long term to achieve industrialization and development.

⁵ Which we can translate by “human development is now linked to housing”.

This paradoxical situation, in relation to time and budget, instantly impacted on housing, which was taken as a pillar of this gigantic enterprise.

3.1. Forecasts and regional rebalancing will

The satisfaction of social needs, as they have been estimated by the “Plan of Constantine” based on “decadal Perspectives” had to address three major concerns:

- Catching up the delay accumulated over the previous years, estimated at approximately 100,000 urban housing units;
- Gradually replace 100,000 dilapidated housing units;
- Provide housing for extra population estimated on 10 years at 1.8 million people for the 50 major cities.

The realization of this triple objective required the construction of 560,000 homes in 10 years and considerable effort in terms of business investments for the buildings and their equipment. For that, this effort could only be gradual; the plan’s goal was to house one million people during the first 5 years. The annual growth rate of housing starts was estimated at 10,000 additional homes per year.

Fiscal years, in Algeria, extended from April 1st to March 31st overlapping on 2 calendar years. Since 1960, the public authority has fixed it on the calendar year to have a global vision of investment per year. The year 1959 served as a transition: it was reduced to 9 months (April 1st to December 31st). The appropriations for the habitat for 1959 passed to 15 billion francs, while for the year 1958-1959 the amount was 10 billion for the 12 months.

Given the limited time, and the large number of housing units to produce, it was crucial to recognize the achievements and projects already begun in the previous five-year plan (1954-1958) ⁶, in the balance of this major project that Deluz described as *«gigantesque machine à chiffre»*⁷ (Deluz, 1988). And for good reason, on paper, this five-year program provided for the period 1959 to 1963, the production of 210,000 urban housing units over the whole of the Algerian territory⁸ with nearly half in the Centre region⁹. Obviously, the largest share was attributed to the capital with 53,000 housing units (CEDA, 1964). In 1962, 21.5 % of the total housing program was carried out and launched in the Center region for a total of 45,136 units, which represents 50.1 % of the goal in the Centre region, over more than three-quarters of the period laid out (see Table 01). In addition to these “modern” type dwellings, it was planned to build 110,000 housing units of a “rudimentary” type. 90,000 of them were reserved for rural dwellers and 20,000 for slum clearance. According to Sgroï-Dufresne (1984), Algiers inherited 10,000 units of 90,000 planned in the program. Algiers population was 588,000 inhabitants in 1954, while the estimate of population growth for 1959 was 810,000 inhabitants.

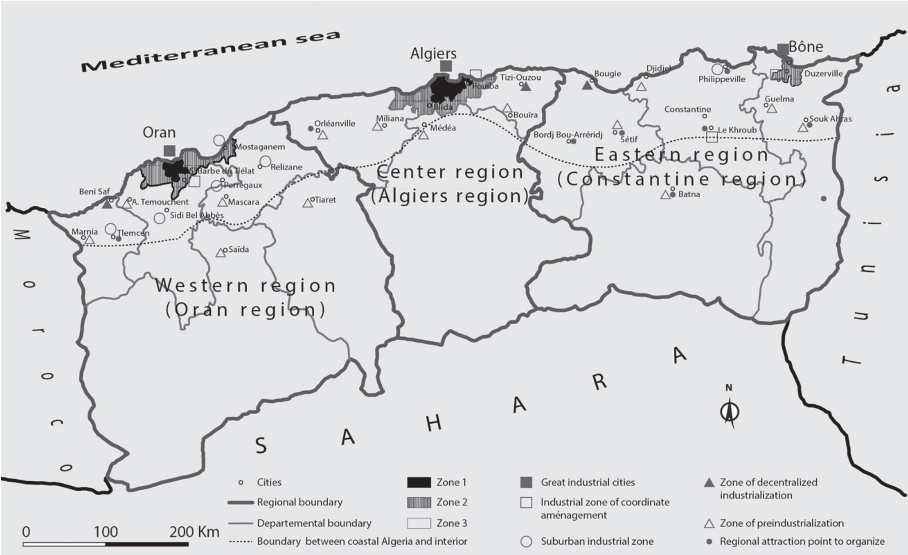
⁶ The balance sheet does not include the 15,000 homes built in the Chelif valley after the earthquake of 1954 and whose implementation was continued outside the framework outlined by the “Plan of Constantine”.

⁷ I translate: “gigantic machine of figures”.

⁸ To implement the plan, the distribution of programs took over the administrative division of the Algerian territory of 1959 (French departments of Algeria): *l’Algérois* (Algiers region for the center), *l’Oranie* (Oran region for the West) and *le Constantinois* (Constantine-Bone region for the east). The South enjoying a different status (French Departments of the Sahara) was not included in the program only through the construction of gas pipelines for the industrialization objectives.

⁹ 90,000 dwellings precisely.

Ilustração 01 – Administrative division of French Algeria at the time of the “Plan of Constantine” (1959)



Source: Caisse d'équipement pour le développement de l'Algérie, *Aménagement du territoire Urbanisme et Construction*, in *Revue Urbanisme*, N.º 73, Paris, 1961, 76 p. Map produced by A. B.

Table 01 – Cross between forecasts of the “Plan of Constantine” and housing starts in the Center region

	1959	1960	1961	1962	Total	Share in % of the program in the Centre region
Planned housing	6,000	26,600	30,400	27,000	90,000	42,9 %
Completed housing and Starts	5,679	19,977	12,378	7,102	45,136	21,5 %

Source: Caisse d'équipement pour le développement de l'Algérie, 1964.

Housing starts have struggled to align themselves on the program forecasts, in the central region, and experienced a sharp drop during the last two years of colonial rule. We can assume two major factors were at work here. The first is reflected in the geographical rebalancing will of housing starts. So in 1960, the number of construction sites in the department of Algiers decreased by a third in favor of Oran and Constantine, marking a clear commitment to decentralization (CEDA, 1961). The second point may result from the impact of the announcement of the referendum on self-determination of Algeria (speech by General de Gaulle of 09.16.1959) and the events to which it gave rise.

The urban housing consisted of 3 rooms on average, 7 % were of higher standard called “normal HLM” and 93 % distributed by thirds as follows (Saigot, 1959: 5), (see Table 02):

- “LOGECO” with an area of 50 m² for a cost of 2,200,000 F;
- Housing “million” whose surface was 40 m² 1,300,000 F;
- Housing “semi-urban” 32 m² for 650 000 F.

With the presentation of these figures, it is the social character of modern housing that was put forward. Indeed 80 % of the program was intended for the poorest. This strong commitment has led to wide variations in the types of housing programmed as a direct result

of the public authorities' action that decided to orient the map to the construction of housing for the poorest urban classes by encouraging villages inside the territory to fight against the hypertrophy of large industrial cities. In recontextualizing these remarks, two other issues in this action strategy must be considered. The first is to target populations under the control of the FLN in the maquis more than meeting a growing demand for housing in the cities. The second was to provide, for different industries, a workforce generated by the sedentarization of the rural population who fled campaigns or have been grouped by force.

Table 02 – Distribution by type of 210,000 urban housing provided from 1959 to 1963 and housing starts on 4 years of achievement (1959-1962) by the Plan at the Center region in comparison with the rest of the territory¹⁰

Types of housing →	Higher Normal	Economic or LOGECO	Million	Semi-urban	Total	% relative to the objectives of the Plan
Center region (Forecast)	6,000	26,600	30,400	27,000	90,000	42,9 %
Total Algeria (Forecast)	14,000	62,000	71,000	63,000	210,000	100 %
Center region (Housing starts)	5,679	19,977	12,378	7,102	45,136	50,1 %
Total Algeria (Housing starts)	10,022	49,320	28,875	25,032	113,249	53,9 %

Source: *Caisse d'équipement pour le développement de l'Algérie*, 1964.

The department of Algiers has known 7 times more construction of public housing than the other three departments of the Center region (Tizi-Ouzou, Medea and Orléansville) (see Table 03). This imbalance is due to the difficult adjustment of public offices to their new regional focus as they have a well-established administrative structure in large cities. Added to this is the composition of the program that addressed more than the average social stratum of the population, usually located in this area.

Table 03 – Geographical location of the HLM program – Comparative per year between HLM programs in Algiers and other departments of the Centre region

Center region ↓	Years →	1959	1960	1961	Total
Department of Algiers		2.300	1.200	1.800	5.300
Other center departments		100	–	600	700
Total		2.400	1.200	2.400	6000

Source: *Caisse d'équipement pour le développement de l'Algérie*, *Exécution du programme d'équipement en 1961*, Secteur X "l'habitat", 1961.

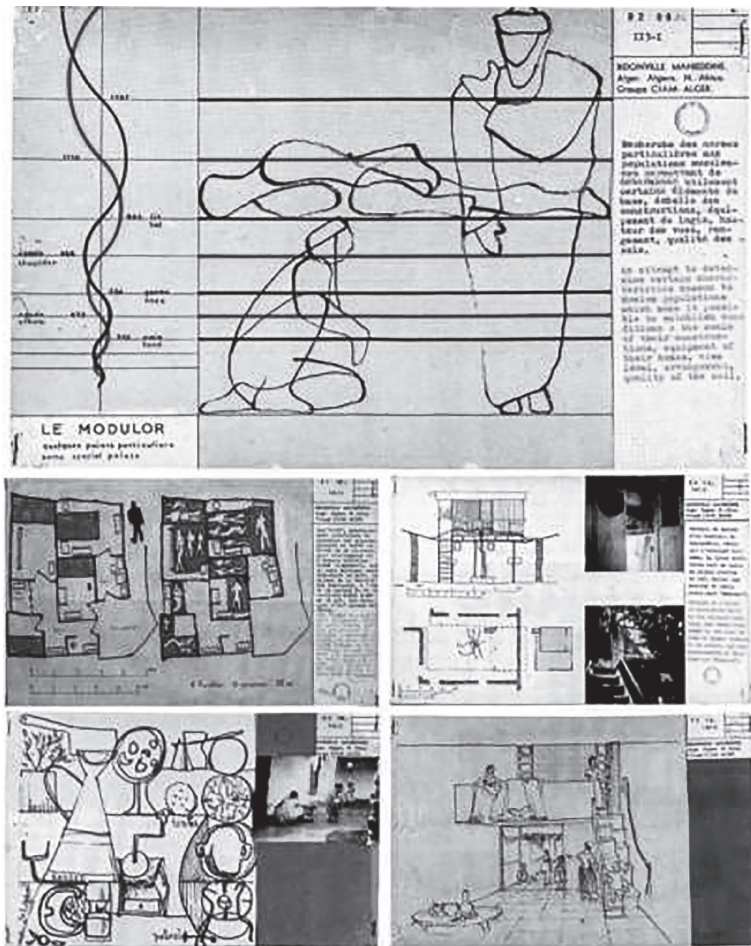
The body of builders counted 11 HLM (4 with regional competence and 7 others with municipal jurisdiction), 29 cooperatives HLM (including 8 public limited companies and 4 credit companies real estate), 55 cooperatives societies non HLM and one SEM¹¹: the Algerian Company Real Estate (CIA)¹² (DGGA, 1960).

¹⁰ Achievements include housing for specialized administrative sections (SAS), National Education (EN) and the homeownership crate and rural exploitation (CAPER).

¹¹ *Société d'Economie Mixte*. (I translate: Mixed Economy Company which is a semi-public company).

¹² *Compagnie Immobilière Algérienne*.

Ilustração 02 – Planks from the presentation of CIAM-Alger group at the CIAM 1953 at Aix-en-Provence



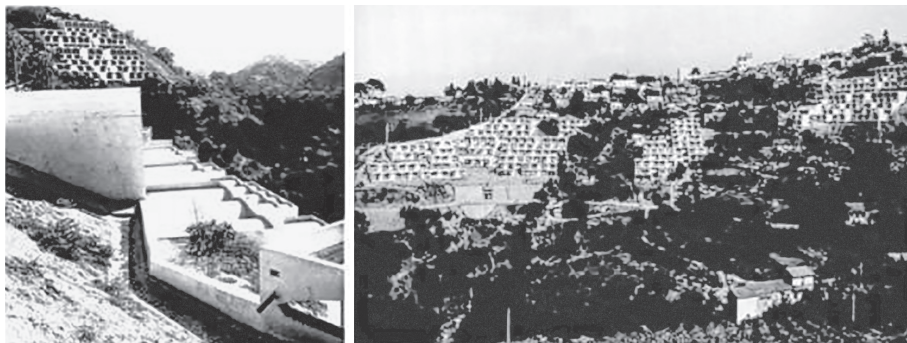
Source: ©Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP.

3.2. The *Grands Ensembles* as design model of social housing

Given the time limit and the significant number of dwellings to achieve, the adoption of the model of large sets has represented a logical and obvious choice for grouping buildings and to meet the requirements of speed and efficiency. But this choice can also be explained by the introduction of ZUP¹³ as a procedure to fight against the fragmentation of projects (Fourcaut, 2007). It requires for projects of more than 100 dwellings to take place in defined areas– where communities make major development work simultaneously– and give as objective to fight against land speculation. Intensification of social housing in the form of large sets emerged in Algiers in the early 50's. (Reverdy, 1963) The predominant model of social housing for “Indigenous” of the 30's had a horizontal development on the ground floor only. This model

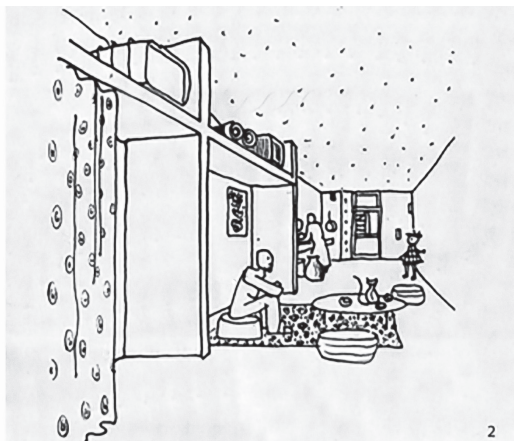
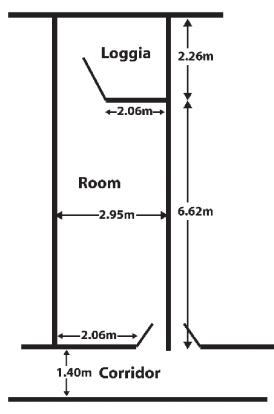
¹³ Zone à Urbaniser par Priorité which was translated by: zone to be urbanized in priority (Çelik, 1997).

Ilustração 03 – Images from 1959 of the housing units Djenane el Hassan of the architect Roland Simounet built on rough terrain which gives them the appearance of a large set. Municipality of Oued Koriche



Source: Institut Français d'Architecture.

Ilustração 04 – Cell of the Carrières Jaubert district (Alexis Daure, Henri Béri, Roland Simounet, Vladimir Bodiansky, 1957) – Municipality of Oued Koriche



1 - Schematic of the Type cell (Plan redesigned by B. A. Source: Reverdy J.C., op. cit., p. 35.

2 - Perspective sketch of an interior of a housing. Source: *Alger Revue*, 1957.

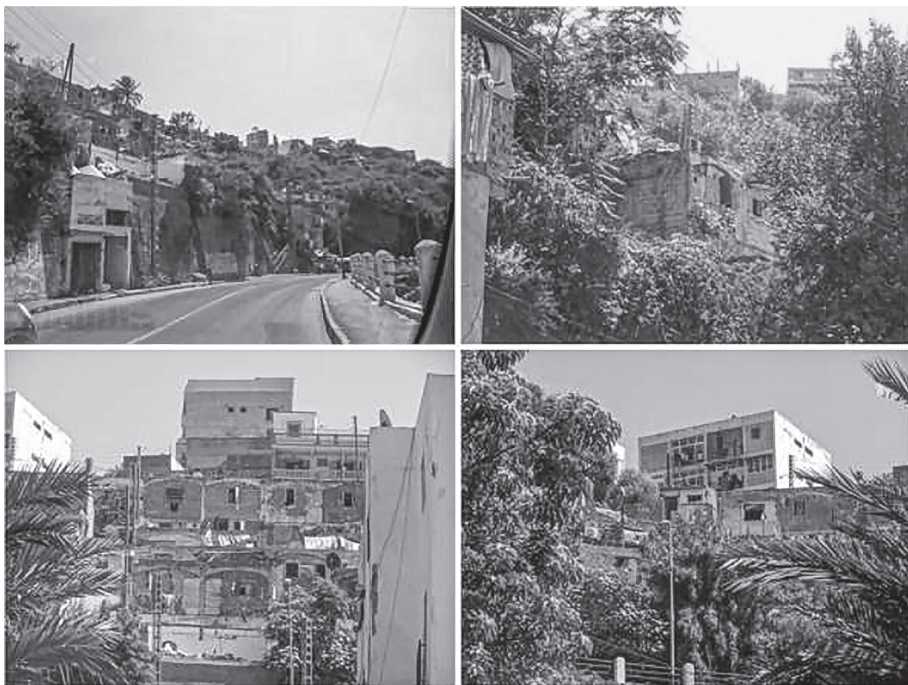
very quickly emerged as unsustainable, due to the spreading it generated and the increased transportation costs and servicing it engendered. Thus, the three housing projects *Diar Saada*, *Diar Mahçoul* and *Climat de France* were the first large groups in the Algerian capital.

The city of Algiers experienced in the time of the war of Algeria a disproportionate increase of *bidonvilles*. This term coined in the Maghreb in the late 30's (Descloitres *et al.*, 1961), represented the living conditions of the poorest indigenous populations in the Algerian capital. In 1960, the *bidonvilles* population is estimated at 140,000 people (Sahli, 1990). During CIAM 9 of 1953 in Aix-en-Provence, CIAM-Algiers group, composed of the urban planner Jean de Maisonneuse and architects among whom Roland Simounet and Louis Miquel, made a remarkable presentation of the *bidonville Mahieddine*. By representing Algerian silhouettes through the *Modulor*, the goal was to see in the vernacular and popular culture a way to renew modernity (Abram, 1999). This meticulous work, which included questions related to urban planning, legislation and construction as well as those related to social thinking, gave birth to a sketch of the Muslim

home cell (Ilustração 02). The latter was tested in various applications both in a horizontal shape as in the example of *Djenane el Hassan* of Simounet in a vertical shape as in the example of the housing estates of the *Carrières Jaubert* district (Ilustração 03 & 04), but had its climax through the “millions” and “rudimentary” housing programs of the “Plan of Constantine”.

The government strategy to respond to this crisis focused on the provision of affordable housing to Muslims population but to the detriment of their consistency with the socio-cultural characteristics of targeted populations and how they were living their housing. This last parameter could only promote their degradation (Lalonde, 2010). Despite the best efforts made by the group of CIAM-Alger, deteriorating of *Djenan el Hassan* and the *Carrières Jaubert* district was inevitable (Ilustração 05 & 06). It was exacerbated by their excessively

Ilustração 05 – Current views of *Djenane el Hassan* from the Frais-Vallon road – Municipality of Oued Koriche



Source: Photos taken by A. B. September 2013.

Ilustração 06 – Housing for Indigenous «la Montagne». Architects: Alexis Daure, Henri Béri, Roland Simounet, 1958 – Municipality of Hussein Dey



1 - Housing view from the courtyard. Source: Les Cahiers du CSTB, 1958.

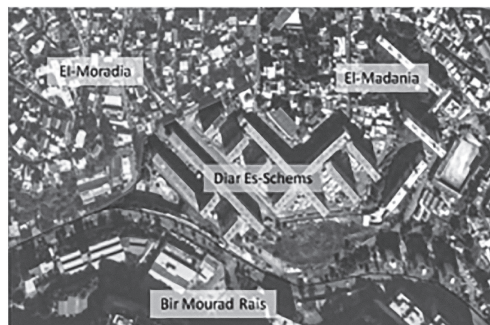
2 & 3 - Current state. Photos taken by A. B. September 2013.

rudimentary nature and the total lack of comfort dictated by economic constraints, plus the inadequacy of extremely narrow surfaces¹⁴ with sizes of extended families that make up the Algerian society. We can also make two other assumptions about the reasons for this degradation. The first results in the failure of studies to take into account the aspirations of these neo-city-dwellers about their homes. These studies have focused strictly on the observation of an improvised organization and dictated by means of edge available to these families. The second were the principles of urbanization, which was based on zoning, leading to segmented space production and monofunctional, which contributed to their isolation.

The Algerian law of 1981, concerning the transfer of State property, has only accentuated the steep degradation of these kinds of dwellings where the abolition of the *concierges* marked definitively the State's loss of interest in the requalification of its built colonial heritage.

Diar Es-Schems represents the last *grand ensemble* made in Algiers before independence and which used the model of the Muslim home cell type. Located in the municipality of El-Madania, at the junction of the municipalities of El-Moradia and Bir Mourad Rais, it had to meet the goal of slum clearance of Clos Salembier (see Ilustração 07 & 08). It consists of

Ilustração 07 – Location of *Diar Es-Schems*



Diar Es-Schems, © 2004 DigitalGlobe

Source: Google earth.

Ilustração 08 – *Clos Salambier's* Slum and the construction site of *Diar Es-Schems* in background



Source: Caisse d'équipement pour le développement de l'Algérie, *Aménagement du territoire Urbanisme et Construction*, in *Revue Urbanisme* N.º 73, Paris, 1961, 76 p., p. 16.

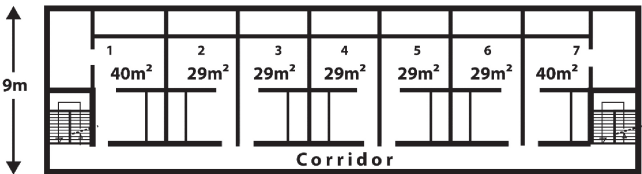
¹⁴ 16 m² for *Djenane el Hassan* and 18 m² for careers Jaubert.

1341¹⁵ units on a 6-hectare difficult terrain and had the highest yield of the Center region with an average of 220 housing units / hectare. This project was to house nearly 6,000 people. Made of precast –which reduces both the time and cost of construction– this largescale housing project has only two types of housing (see Ilustração 09 & 10):

- Single-room housing with an area of 28.76 m². This type represents 70 % of dwellings in this *Grand ensemble*. It includes a kitchen, with inside it shower and toilet, connected to a bedroom opening onto a loggia.
- Two-room housing of 40 m². They are located at the ends of the corridors next to the stairwells. This location allows them to benefit from an additional bedroom of 11 m² approximately.

Housings are served by passageways connected to a stairwell at each of its ends.

Ilustração 09 – Survey of the housings organization per level

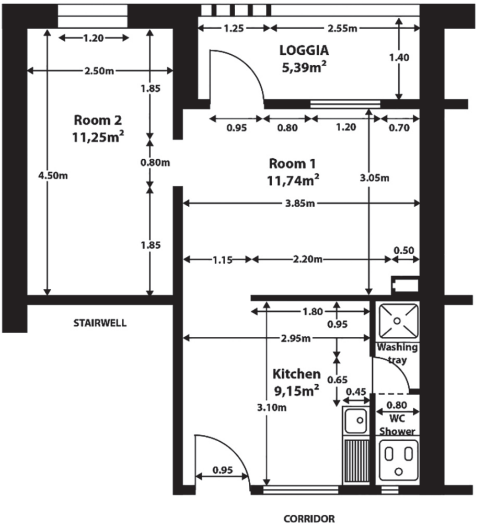


Source: Reverdy J.C., op. cit., p. 35. Plan redesigned by B. A.

Ilustração 10 – Plans of the Type cell of *Diar Es-Schems*

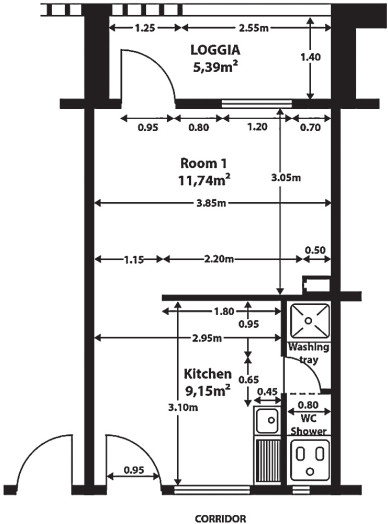
DIAR ES-SCHEMS
Two-room housing

39,94m²



DIAR ES-SCHEMS
Single-room housing

28,69m²



Source: REVERDY J.C., op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁵ Interview I conducted with an agent of the municipality of El Madania who lived at *Diar Es-Schems*, 09.05.2013.

Overcrowding of this housing estate, built from 1959 to 1962, was instantaneous. Three months after the arrival of the first inhabitants, a survey was conducted by Jean-Claude Reverdy for the *Centre Africain des Sciences Humaines Appliquées* (African Centre for Applied Human Sciences), from April to July 1961. This study aimed to examine the physical adaptation conditions which were imposed on the new inhabitants of *Diar Es-Schems* by the builders in terms of area, equipment, organization of the housing... etc. The conclusion was unequivocal. Depending on the application of French standards, 28 dwellings were already experiencing a critical overcrowding on a sample of 42 households surveyed. Only 7 units were experiencing a normal situation. It was the two-room housing which had the most reduced individual surface with an average of 5 m². 40 % of the usable area of the single room is occupied by furniture: deducting the loggia and the shower/toilet, the space devoted to family represented only half of the total area of which two thirds were in the kitchen. Population growth over the last 50 years has only worsened the indecent situation of these families who were affected in their intimacy and their dignity. Youth unemployment, children who grew up and had founded in turn their own families, the housing and land crisis, all these reasons meant that leaving the family home (called in French the “*décohabitation*”) became impossible. The people of *Diar Es-Schems* have used several tricks to earn a few square meters more, like the integration of the loggia or a part of the corridor and stairwells in the space of housing. The cellars of this housing estate were squatted to organize makeshift apartments. Electricity and water were diverted inside them. The outdoor areas have seen the establishment of hovels in every cranny available (Ilustração 11, 12 & 13). This situation of extreme ghettoization gave rise to clashes that made the headlines in the news in 2009 and 2010 too. My last visit to *Diar Es-Schems* dates back to September 2013. Nearly 339 families were still waiting for rehousing, not counting those who occupy cellars. Of these, there were 50 cases of appeals. These correspond to families who refused the proposed offer of relocation. These extended families wished to take this opportunity for living separately but the public authorities refused their request. Therefore, these families have preferred to stay at *Diar*

Ilustração 11 – Current external views of *Diar Es-Schems*

(We note the embankment of housing already evacuated to avoid further squats)



Source: Photos taken by A. B. September 2013.

Es-Schems instead of being piled up again elsewhere. *Diar Es-Schems* is not an isolated case. The situation is the same in most “millions” and “rudimentary” housing estate which meet the Muslim home cell type.

For the people who arrived at *Diar Es-Schems* after independence, mainly the young, they think that this housing estate was a student residence at the origin. Through my fieldwork, I

Ilustração 12 – Trace of integration of part of the staircase in the housing space
(A wall divided the bearing in two and stairs were processed as two half-levels)



Source: Photos taken by A. B. September 2013.

Ilustração 13 – Interior views of the current state of *Diar Es-Schems*

[Despite their rudimentary nature, we find, in the rubble, traces of a significant investment on the part of occupants for appropriate and beautify their homes (floor tiles, plaster moldings, earthenware, interior changes ...). The apartments still occupied are identifiable by the presence of a curtain over the entrance to the hallway door. The evacuated dwellings were demolished to avoid squats.]



Source: Photos taken by A. B. September 2013.

identified several myths about the original function of various “millions” dwellings produced by the Plan. As a form of denial, to think that these homes were directly intended for them seems to them inconceivable, even humanly impossible.

Beyond goals of profitability and financial savings, the error of this habitat model was to have wanted to provoke a rapid and immediate urbanization, causing breaks that were too brutal in adapting conditions to housing as the example of the implicit limitation of family size. These problems compromise the challenges of the housing policy of the “Plan of Constantine” as a factor in social evolution.

4. Conclusion

With the Plan’s objective to help Algeria emerge from its underdevelopment, the country knew a globalization process before time. With the adoption of the model of large groups, the Algerian urbanization aligned itself with the metropolitan regulations and the functionalist thinking of the modern movement that prevailed there. This has resulted in an urban planning where zoning was thought out to its extreme and the implementation of mono-functional housing projects folded on themselves.

Following its investigations in social housing projects, Michel Marié (1989) denounced an attempt to impose an argument in favor of the “Algeria-French” through the establishment of ethnic diversity at the expense of respect of the way that Muslim families lived their houses. The “Plan of Constantine” dared put on the front a new concern in the way of thinking urbanism: “diversity”. Maria Sgroï-Dufresne (1986) explained that only part of the Muslim population was covered by integration. This is the one defined in the real estate programs, such as the “solvent” part of the Algerian population. And she denounces the isolation of the poorest who were considered dangerous. This situation reminds us the example of Parisian popular classes in the urbanization of the nineteenth century (Chevalier, 1978). If the “Plan of Constantine” has tried to deal with questions of social mix by the establishment of an ethnic mix, it fostered the emergence and proliferation of a new mode of segregation in Algeria’s own population through socio-occupational classes. The other issue is to see the consequences of this “change of face of social segregation” on the independent Algeria and the housing units produced by the Plan in their current state. With the departure of Europeans in 1962, they were immediately and entirely replaced by the Algerian population. As raised by Deluz (1988), the question is whether the built environment produced in a segregative mind can be reunited by the mere fact of ethnic unity.

In her thesis, Nora Semmoud (2001) discovers that at independence, facing the massive movement of reappropriation of the city and vacant property, the State intervention was limited to reserve a portion of the existing housings for their officials. The Social redistribution of the population was made through the rent policy. This policy consisted in blocking public housing rents in popular neighborhoods to maintain social groups with low-income. In contrast, rents in some housing estates became accessible only by social groups with higher incomes. This reinforces our idea that social segregation would somehow become Algerian with the development of state capitalism and the advent of a “bureaucratic society of consumption led” (Lefebvre, 1968) even if consumption remained for a long time based on quota regulations. Thereby housing projects produced for the poor continued to impoverish while those produced for higher income populations have fared better.

In his memoirs, General de Gaulle pondered the relations of domination which founded empires, where he asked about the possibility of transforming the old dependency relationships in preferential links of a political, economic and cultural nature (De Gaulle, 1994). This implies an ideology of a new enslavement mode behind the objectives of the development plan, but

debate on the real intentions of the “Plan of Constantine” can only be sterile. The real question would be to reflect on lessons inherited by its actions on the Algerian territory. The five-year project of 1 million dwellings started in 2004 can challenge us. Because even though times change and influences too, we can cite the project of 1 million dwellings launched in South Africa or in Brazil, but we can see the instrumentalization of housing production as an obvious and strong response to the ills of society. So why make so many challenges and issues the sole responsibility of housing? Is the habitat itself capable of supporting such a burden? What about reviewing ways of thinking about planning and its process and the production of habitat? Have they really changed or are they still based on programmatic principles of the famous “Constantine Plan” initiated there more than 50 years ago? The question is open to debate.

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