



A Sociological Analysis of Population Ageing in Algeria

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Abstract :

Perceptions of older persons vary across societies according to their cultural, social, and historical contexts. In Algerian society, representations of ageing have not yet been fully transformed by the structural changes that have affected the family, particularly the shift from the extended family model to the nuclear family. Despite advanced age and increasing needs for physical comfort, stability, and care, older persons continue to be symbolically integrated into the social fabric. However, their effective participation in everyday social activities has gradually declined, contributing to their portrayal as less productive or dependent within the family sphere. This transformation has, in some cases, led to the perception of older persons as a social and familial burden rather than as holders of experience, memory, and moral authority.

In light of this social representation, and considering the ethical and cultural responsibilities of Algerian society, this study adopts a descriptive sociological approach to examine contemporary perceptions of older persons. It seeks to explore how individuals can contribute to improving the social status of the elderly within the family and to reinforce their symbolic and social recognition.

Keywords: Ageing; Elderly; Family structure; Social perception; Algerian society.

1- INTRODUCTION :

The family is widely recognized as the oldest social unit and one of the most enduring human institutions, which has long placed it at the center of philosophical and sociological inquiry. Across historical periods, major social thinkers have viewed the family as a foundational structure for social organization and moral regulation. This centrality is further reinforced within monotheistic religions, which have endowed the family with a degree of sanctity that often surpasses that granted by human-made legal systems. These religions conceive the family as the primary framework for social cohesion and moral reproduction.

In the Islamic context, particular emphasis is placed on the family as a core institution, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities assigned to each of its members. Islam establishes normative principles aimed at protecting family members and maintaining internal balance,



thereby contributing to broader social cohesion. Within many Muslim societies, these religious principles have historically intersected with customs and traditions to produce a hierarchical family structure, commonly associated with the patriarchal system. In this model, authority is concentrated in the figure of the father, elders occupy positions of symbolic dominance, and younger members are expected to demonstrate obedience, all within a framework intended to preserve family unity.

However, contemporary economic transformations have generated significant cultural and social shifts that have profoundly affected family structures. One of the most notable changes is the gradual decline of the extended family and its replacement by the nuclear family. This transformation is closely linked to new patterns of education, employment, and geographic mobility, particularly work in distant locations, which have fostered new residential and consumption-oriented lifestyles. Practices that once reinforced extended family cohesion such as parental involvement in marriage choices have weakened, leading to increased residential separation between generations.

As a result, older parents who once occupied central positions within large family households increasingly find themselves living alone or rotating between the homes of their children, sometimes reduced to recipients of care rather than active family members. This shift contrasts sharply with earlier representations of the elderly as the “spiritual heads” of the family and guardians of its unity, symbolizing the moral authority traditionally granted to them by society.

In light of these transformations, contemporary reality reveals growing forms of social and emotional suffering among segments of the elderly population in Islamic societies. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the lived experiences of older persons in Algerian society. It explores how adult children perceive the social and moral status of their parents within a modern cultural context shaped by economic restructuring and social change, while considering the evolving role of religion, customs, and family norms in redefining intergenerational relationships.

2- SOCIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ALGERIAN FAMILY:

In the sociological heritage, we see that the family is still a meeting point for several studies trying to find how to restore the true face of the family, which has begun to lose it because of several accelerated variables that overlap to a very large extent, so we see the Frenchman Pierre Bourdieu, for example, speaking of the extended family, considering it as “the basic social cell, and that it is the model in which social structures are organized, because it is not limited to the group of couples and their families. All parents belonging to the patriarchy, thus uniting under the leadership of a leader several generations in an intimate association and union (*Addi. H, p93*).

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Not so long ago, the extended family consisted of all the members of the family, especially the men, their wives and their children, where that family is attached "within the framework of the paternal line" to the authority of the elder, who is often the grandfather, the father or the elder brother in the absence of the others, and despite "as we mentioned earlier" that this type of family has begun to disappear in our society, especially at the level of the large cities, but there is still a growing trend towards the development of the family. rural areas that are still dependent on this type of family, which we believe has helped to reduce social problems because of the large number of control tools that this type of family has over all members of the large family system.

The fears of the peasant "fathers" began to grow gradually out of fear of losing their children in the light of the economic change that the State had undergone, and indeed the children went to education and work in large factories, because the land was seen as a symbol of injustice and misery instead of being for them a symbol of sovereignty and freedom, so that children, especially young people, go to school in the cities all year round and come on holiday to their land to contribute. service, but most of them had a different perception and a new model of life away from the earth and serving it.

From there, the first nucleus of disintegration began to form in the extended families, because the concept of work transcended for the new generation all issues related to solidarity, and the family, and even marriage plans began to form for them far from the traditional frameworks in which the grandmother played a major role in choosing the wife for her son in order to maintain the cohesion and continuity of the extended family.

Algerian society was not in itself an industrial society and not a society that created wealth so that its individuals could rise and at the same time materially and socially, but it was a society that lagged behind civilization because of the long period of colonialism compared to other Arab countries. That is why it became familiar with models of development that sought social cohesion as a mechanism for restoring the social structure of society as a whole, in which land played a major role. Then, after the State's relative stability in the economic sphere, it began to pay attention to the industrial aspect, which introduced the members of society into a movement in search of social change, which led Algerian society to go through periods of rapid transition that directly affected the traditional management model that the family had known for decades.

And after the first signs of the modern family, or the so-called nuclear family, began to appear and take shape in our society, it suffered from the same problems that the factory suffered in the early periods of its formation in our society, because the worker who was inside still carried within it the thought of the farmer, and that is the case with the modern family, it is a nuclear family, but it still carries the values, customs and functions of the extended rural family, and that is perhaps the case. has been the result of the adherence of individuals to Islamic



texts, which still preserves for each family member its function within the overall structure of the Muslim family, despite the different economic, social and cultural levels and areas of residence of each family (*Samia.M.E, p85*).

However, this new family form did not have stability for a long time, especially in the late 1980s due to the fall in the price of oil and the bankruptcy of companies that depended on oil rents for their management, which led to the closure of factories, their privatization, layoffs and the lack of jobs in the public sector except in the security sector, which formed a new working space, a space for learning the cultures of the centre, the south, the south and the south. north and west of our country.

The pressure on them was very strong and had a direct impact on the daily behaviour of the children, especially psychologically due to frequent killings, and morally due to unemployment, which made most, if not all, families close to themselves, which led to a lack of trust even among like-minded children and between neighbours, which led to a transition in the role of the family: from an effective tool for socialization to a simple tool for finding a daily life, security. of security.

Because of the quality of the work of some of the sons and the difficult social situation, many families found themselves faced with the inevitability of moving to the cities, and from there, residential communities formed on the outskirts of the cities in the form of sheet metal constructions that also contributed to the elimination of the extended family that Algerian society had known for decades.

At the same time, and after the spread of education, the characteristics of the formation of intellectual elites began to appear at the level of many families, for the possibility of obtaining university degrees became possible for many young people in the early 1990s compared with the 1980s, which will allow a wide spread of educated families whose members depend at least on more flexible and modern ways to treat their children.

After Algeria entered a period of national reconciliation and ended the security crisis and political and economic détente began to appear on the horizon, government policies were directed towards the restoration of what had emerged from the previous stage, but unfortunately only on the material level, and in order to eliminate the metal housing, buildings were formed and quickly and thoughtlessly through new neighbourhoods around the suburbs. Here the families have moved to these new social housing units, which require the existence of a single family, because of the small size of the housing (F2, F3) compared to the large number of individuals in the same family, because we have to face the fact that the metal housing has been a stage for the elimination of certain traditional social values, in contrast to the fact that this housing has been a source of reproduction of the same problems for the State, in terms of the spread of social problems due to the spread of poverty.

Thus, as mentioned earlier, in the light of the almost complete stoppage of the Algerian labour market and the tendency of children to work in the various security services, which has enabled them to discover other cultures and ways of life in remote cities, and also in the light of the wide spread of university graduates, Algerian families have begun to experience a new



type of thinking among children, a thinking that has nothing to do with traditional ways of life, because it is a thinking that is a way of thinking. on the autonomy of the individual, where the desires and objectives of individual rights "in his or her belief" take precedence over any other social value.

The Algerian family, which throughout the colonial period contributed to the cohesion of all its members, is no longer the form it used to be, because the difficult political, economic and social conditions experienced by the State directly affected the various social ties on which the family was founded within the framework of the social organization, because those ties were affected by the social structure surrounding the family and society as a whole, as we have observed that the beginning of the absence of traditions and customs and even the fragility of values and the way of life were formed. relationships and their livelihoods have given these relationships a new form, sometimes fraught with violence and conflict aimed at satisfying individual needs.

3- THE IMPACT OF VIRTUAL SPACE ON FAMILY VALUES:

The Algerian family is no longer that extended family, in which several matrimonial families live within it. The "large house" in urban areas and the "large tent" in the Bedouin, where there are 20 to 60 people living collectively (*Mechri.Z, p259*), so that the Algerian family, immediately after it emerged from the crisis that plagued it for a decade or more, witnessed the emergence of the Internet and its social media spaces in the country. of the technological revolution. This is due to its great attraction for young people, who saw it as an alternative to their various problems, because it is a space that transcends all ethnic and sexual, geographical and religious theses, where the distant has become close due to social media applications and sites, which have affected family ties, including kinship.

In the context of what has been discussed above, the individual within the family enjoys a kind of individual freedom in decision-making within the family, and the previous criteria for decision-making within the home are no longer the same, each individual has his own legal entity and personality, especially when he reaches the age of majority, and the bases and criteria on which he relies to determine the places and centres that have been adopted in the traditional family have changed, such as age, sex, etc. and kinship, and these norms have become traditional And secondary and other criteria have emerged such as occupation, income and level of education (*Boutfnochet. M, p261*).

In exchange for that freedom, the individual found himself confronted with another, more free space in which the tools of social control, if true, meant that the father, because of the illiteracy of most parents at that time, was no longer able to exercise control over his children in the virtual space, which led the son to reproduce his reality and identity far from the tools of control that the State was supposed to monitor through various means of socialization.

In addition, the problem of poor communication between father and son because of the hierarchy, which was governed by customs and traditions rather than by religion, has led children to other forms of communication and with other parties in order to meet their emotional



needs, which are often carried out outside parental control. This has led to a great overlap between the sexes inasmuch as the prestige of men has fallen and the modesty of women has fallen, which will affect the problem of power and decision-making in the future. within the family. Moreover, for several interrelated reasons, a culturally mutated generation has emerged as a result of its blind imitation of the other, which has made the deviation of children from their traditions easy and controlled under the guise of cultural diversity and freedom of opinion and belief, which will have a direct impact on the traditional role of the individual in the family.

The conditions that accompanied the tremendous development of information technology and the wide dissemination of the various social media in Algeria were somewhat fragile conditions at the level of the consciousness of the Algerian individual and even of the entire family, since the individual did not have cultural immunity in the way he treated that space, which led him to devote himself strongly to it, which accelerated at the level of practice, weakening the most continuous family ties because of the low value of communication. Perhaps what McLuhan was referring to when he said that “globalization has made the world a village, but it has not taken on the characteristics of a village (*Ragheb. N, p305*) ”, which means that this factorization has eliminated all forms of traditional family ties that the family had previously known, including solidarity, synergy and fraternity, and in many cases it has been observed at the level of the written and written media and the or the phenomenon of divorce has begun to spread unparalleled since individuals began to use social media excessively.

I think that no one denies that the Industrial Revolution has been at the root of the change of societies and the emergence of industrial cities, since it is the movement that controls the whole issue of social change, as well as the technological revolution, since its emergence and the world has changed at an unprecedented rate, which confirms the hypothesis that society is a product of its technology that cultivates new values in it, and therefore the values promoted by technology at that time have never been in the interest of society and family. The conservatism that Algerian society has experienced since its inception, which has confronted it with several challenges and at different levels that have surpassed all previous forms of challenges, and this is the same as what the researcher points out in her book *Satellite Media and Cultural Westernization*, “that the Algerian Muslim family suffers from psychological and moral challenges as well as material challenges (*Lamia. T, p05*) ”, because the Algerian individual has been confronted with Western cultural models that call for human rights. And the traditions of our society are seasonal only during the periods of marriage or circumcision, which ultimately contributed greatly to a brutal change of value within the Algerian family.

At the level of fathers and their role in the family, we can say that the values that have come in the name of modernity have led to a change in the forms of authority within the home, which has led to the transition from a patriarchal society in which the father was a source of authority to a family society in which decisions have to be participatory and discussed between the two parties, which has led to the breaking of the traditional social barrier of family traditions to be replaced by a change in the role and function of women within the family. as a result of His possession of material and cultural capital which strengthened his position within the



family, and there are many cases of khul' in our society as a result of conflicts of interest between spouses in this regard.

However, with regard to children, recent events have shown that this category has also been targeted by the outside world, so that the interest of this innocent category of society is limited to games in their various forms. As a result, games in most cases are characterized by the commercialization of various forms of violence and crime among the minds of this segment of society, and sometimes by the commercialization of the idea of suicide, such as the game of the blue whale, from which Algerian society was not isolated. Even the cartoons that are broadcast all the time and through channels dedicated to them, are no longer, as before, the values of love in the minds of children, but have become cartoons that speak of violence, crime, murder and mingling, which is a disturbing fact that indicates the depth of the crisis of values that will affect the attitudes and perceptions of children towards the other party.

In the face of the great social transformation witnessed by the Algerian family, in which the traditional values of the family, including parents and children, have been shaken, comes the status of the elderly within these families, and by elderly we mean the grandfather and grandmother of the father, children have emerged and strengthened new consumption values that do not take into account the lowest percentage of the material conditions of the parents, and children are experiencing a new reality of life because of their orientation towards the big cities, which are the most important places in the world. It is accompanied by the emergence of new life values in the light of the social bond in which parents still view their children through a traditional vision that is far removed from the representations and perceptions that the current generation has of older people.

4- THE IMAGE OF THE ELDERLY IN THE ALGERIAN FAMILY:

When we talk about the elderly in Algeria, we are talking about social ties that have become very different from what they were before, because there is a demographic change taking place within the framework of social and value changes, which means that the question of the elderly has not been posed in that way. Because the elderly are our parents in the final analysis, they were until a long time in our popular imagination the wise men of the family, but the outlook has changed and this is the heart of the subject of this study, so how has the outlook changed, and here we are talking about representations, what is their destiny in reality? Do we still look at them as we considered them wise, sensible? Because we have often made use of their experiences, all the more so since, in the end, they are also parents of children and grandchildren, and within the family ties, they had a very good place.

However, following the rapid changes that have affected all the structures of society, we find that we are faced with a question about how the elderly are perceived within the Algerian family, particularly in the light of the changes that are moving towards a new model and a new vision of life?

The elderly in our country, if we go back a little bit - the traditional society - had more than fifty years is considered to be in the period of old age, because of early marriage,



polygamy, which entails early motherhood and early marriage of children, so that the owner of fifty years very often finds himself and he still enjoys his physical and mental strength that qualifies him to exercise power within the family, and this was due to the nature of earning income at that period, because that person relied on agriculture as a means of subsistence.

Today, in the light of today's society, which has relied on new economic systems to make a living, and following the emergence of retirement and post-retirement, the issue of older people has arisen from several angles, notably as a marginalisation affecting this group, and on the other hand, we can argue that the problem of age is not a measure of the marginalisation affecting this age group, since it has not been observed at the level of men of older age. In our view, this is due to the material role that older persons still play in relation to their counterparts in other social groups, since older persons in other social groups are often characterized by a fragile financial situation and a constant need for medical and social care given the financial limitations of the family to which they belong.

Thus, the issue is not taken from the age side as a measure for dealing with the elderly, but is closely linked to the social, psychological and economic conditions that the elderly person lives in his family, because these conditions vary from individual to individual and from family to family, so that the person is not reduced in age, and sometimes we find that there are those who collapse their physical abilities, but their mental abilities are high, so that the issue of ageing cannot be approached from the point of view of age. The individual, as much as it should be addressed, in terms of how older people perceive themselves, and how they perceive their environment and opportunities.

Society still believes in the traditional image of the elderly, which preserves their place in the family, but practice has shown that, although there is a perception of the elderly in society, they construct their perceptions in terms of their role in the rest of the family, in terms of the quality of life experienced by each family, and also in terms of the emotional capital that these families have, and in terms of the social bond that they also have, and therefore every time that the elderly person enjoys. cases that we see every day, except in some families that are mainly religious or have a high degree of conscience and morality.

However, the real question we are asking ourselves is why this age group is marginalized, especially at the level of political discourse, for example in Morocco it has the "National Observatory of the Elderly", whose tasks are to know the reality of the elderly and their prospects for the future. This leads us to wonder about the Algerian State's view of this group, because reality has shown that it cares only about the age group that provides services to society and not to others.

Therefore, we believe that the role of the state is to protect this group, especially in the absence of the traditional values of our societies in the face of the dynamism of science as a whole in terms of ethics and culture... This is done by rehabilitating and equipping society so that older persons have their natural place in society and away from the narrow material view of themselves, especially as the pressures of current life and way of life and the division of large



families into small families have begun to have a direct impact on the values and social and cultural ties of the individual within the family.

Thus, Algerian society, like other societies, has undergone development and social change that has affected the foundations on which the family was built, but it has not undergone a development that goes hand in hand with that change in political, legal and cultural discourse, for we do not deny the existence of certain laws that protect the family, but they do not amount to protecting the elderly and guaranteeing them the right to security and a decent life, as is the case in several Arab countries, especially since the law obliges children to take care of themselves. occupy and not the State. Despite the fact that the state in Western societies is obliged to provide care to this group, because it is a group that has contributed to the construction of society.

Therefore, I think that when this issue was raised at university level things will change as before, for example, if we go back 40 years and raise within the framework of family ties the issue of the need to take care of parents and provide them with material and moral care, then the shock would have been great for the children, but today, and as a result of the many changes that affected our Arab-Muslim societies in the first place, the question seems to be an answer to those changes, but it seems normal for most of us. who have formed family and social ties within the framework of the nuclear family rather than the extended family.

In the context of this social change, we must break out of the circle of illusion in the management of our societies, so that the regimes of our countries always shirk their responsibility to care for this group, and assign children and the family to do so, because today's family is above all a family whose members are all exposed to the various constraints of daily life, whether it is work and mobility or the departure of women and girls to study and work, which will make older people face the reality of their lives. Thus, this reality may collide with the remaining values of society, because it and the social transformations for which society should have been prepared, even Western society was traditional, in which the father and the grandfather played a large role, but because of the social change that took place, homes for the elderly were created in response to these changes, which, as we see today, have also begun to spread in our societies.

Therefore, our society today is obliged to keep pace with the changes that affect it by providing so-called gerontology at the university level, as a medical specialty that deals only with that age group, and also that our political and legal system at all levels will be prepared to protect the elderly in their society. Because our orientations and perspectives have reflected our perceptions of this category. We have also often observed that political parties focus their election campaigns only on young people, which completely excludes the role of older people in society.

5- CONCLUSION:

The path on which our traditional societies, including those of Algeria, have taken their authentic values, is today clashing, albeit to varying degrees from region to region, with the



values produced by the social transformations resulting from the economic, technological and cultural transformations that have directly affected the way of life of the individual and the family.

The nature of life and its various constraints on individuals to seek a livelihood in new and sometimes remote places, as well as their high percentage of education and their liberation from the traditions on which families are built, including the choice of a life partner, have accelerated the process of elimination of extended families, and the widespread use of social media in the face of the lack of cultural immunity among families has led to the isolation and introversion of children, especially since their presence in the family environment has led to their development. Individualistic Western cultures will compromise their perceptions in order to guide them towards the construction of new representations of the social bond.

As part of this accelerated social transformation, and as a counterpart to the State's abandonment of its social function for older persons, older persons have found themselves confronted with a living reality linked to the extent of the role of children and their families vis-à-vis this segment, as part of the overall material, social and cultural preparation of these families. Values.

Consequently, in view of the scale of the changes and the constraints imposed by the economic and cultural dynamism in Algerian society, as in other societies, it has become the responsibility of the State to provide material, psychological and social care for these elderly people and away from retirement homes, as a Western approach that has nothing to do with our traditions and our religion.

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