

Research Article

TRANSPPOSITION OF THE SEGREGATIONIST COLONIAL SYSTEM ON SOCIAL HOUSING: CASE OF THE DIAR EL MAHÇOUL-ALGIERS CITY

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ABSTRACT

The French colonial system in Algeria was a political system based on the establishment of political, economic, social and cultural domination of the colonists over the colonized people (G.Pervillie, 1975). In concrete terms, it resulted in the establishment of a set of discriminatory norms tending to grant privileges to European settlers to the detriment of Algerians in all areas of social life. This organized discrimination was at the origin of a visible social inequality that materialized through spatial segregation aimed at separating Algerians from settlers (T.Guillope, 2020).

In fact, the European districts benefited from infrastructures that almost systematically included public services in a high quality designed urban environment. While the Algerian neighbourhoods benefited from very little public investment. The juxtaposition of this discriminatory notion on the architectural and urban design of the district of Diar El Mahçoul is a perfect illustration of this, which makes it an ideal case to be examined in this article.

Keywords: *Diar El Mahçoul, Discrimination, Segregationist transposition, Social housing*

Introduction

During the 1950s, Algeria faced a major housing crisis due to the increase in precarious and anarchic urbanization. Slums (86,500 inhabitants) have settled on large unoccupied plots of the city, at the bottom of the ravines, on the sides of the hills and on all the land that is difficult to construct. (Architectural Information Bulletin, 1984).

Faced with this proliferation of a very uncontrollable habitat, France had decided to build housing for the benefit of Muslims on municipal land including regrouping cities (kinds of wooden shacks with corrugated iron roofs),

rehousing cities, HLMs and large social complexes (Cohen et al, 2003).

Aware of the seriousness of this housing crisis, Jacques Chevallier (former Mayor of Algiers during this period) was convinced that the solution for Algeria lay in the integration of Muslim communities in the large so-called European cities (Jean Jaques Deluz, 1979). J. Chevallier launched a major housing construction operation, large parts of which were intended for Muslims. (Jean Jacques Deluz, 1979).

To best accomplish this mission, J.Chevallier called on Fernand Pouillon to build three cities: Diar El Mahçoul, Diar Es Saada and

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Climat de France. (Jean Louis Planche, 2005) These latter represented rapid and relevant responses to the emergency rehousing of the Algerian population in the slums. In this article, we will focus mainly on the study of the city Diar El Mahçoul.

Indeed, the Diar El Mahçoul city (1954) includes 1600 dwellings on a plot of 11 ha. It is a city divided into two parts and separated by a boulevard: the upper part called the "high comfort" district for Europeans and the lower part called "medium comfort" for Muslims (Fernand Pouillon, 1968). This insignificant separation between these two neighbourhoods responds to a colonial policy of segregation based on an ideology of hierarchy and domination between the two communities. Especially since this colonial policy is visible in terms of the layout of spaces, since the high comfort district benefited from spacious and quality housing. While the accommodations of the average comfort were cramped and did not suit the demographic needs of the Muslim population.

Based on the observation of this presumptive discrimination against Algerians, the objective of this article is to examine the extent of spatial segregation and the inequalities in the design of social housing between Muslims and Europeans during the fifties.

We will try in this study to determine to what extent the Diar El Mahçoul city is a perfect transposition of the discriminatory colonial policy through social housing in Algeria. By emphasizing the architectural and urban aspects, this original research will allow us to demonstrate that discrimination can result in conceptual and architectural inequality in social housing, which a priori is a fundamental right.

This article is divided into four parts; the first addresses the analytical and methodological framework of the study, followed by an overview of the concept of segregation during

colonization, then the analysis of the case study. As for the fourth part, it will include a discussion of the research results and a conclusion.

Methodology

The study conducted in this article required interdisciplinary methods including a legal-sociological approach in order to understand and explain our starting postulate (the notion of segregation in the colonial system). An archive search was carried out on the city of Diar El Mahçoul in order to acquire the plans in original condition. These metric data will be reproduced by software and then analyzed to be discussed in the results. A morphological type analysis seems important to us to put the city Diar El Mahçoul in its urban context. The morphological analysis must therefore include a breakdown by reading level: the city, the building and then the housing.

Concept of segregation in colonized land

The term segregation comes from the Latin *segregare* which means to separate an animal from the herd¹. Juxtaposed to the urban field, it designates the desire to set up a spatial-social separation between two social groups². This territorial segregation is schematized in the form of a barrier, a wall, a boulevard or zoning which aims to prevent a mix or social homogeneity³.

Beyond this simple territorial conception of segregation, the definition of the latter refers to the thorny question of the cause and the type of process leading to this separation. Is spatial segregation the result of a political will to divide based on a rational criterion social, ethnic, economic and social? Or is it based on the desire of a social category to establish itself in a specific space in order to distinguish itself from the whole of society⁴?

¹ Sylvie Fol, Sonia Lehman-Frisch et Marianne Morange, « Ségrégation et justice spatiale : perspectives », Ed : presse universitaire Paris-Nanterre, 2013, 10p.

² Ressources de géographie pour les enseignants, www.géococonfluences.ENS-lyon.fr

³ David FRANTZ, « La ségrégation : la division sociale de l'espace dans la reproduction des rapports sociaux », revue archive ouverte HalSHS, université de Caen, octobre 2001.

⁴ Sophie Gravereau, Caroline Varlet, « Ségrégations sociales et étiquettes spatiales », Dans Sociologie des espaces (2019), p : 82 à 93.



Figure 2. Cité Diar El Mahçoul, high comfort (background) and medium comfort (foreground). Spring : Revue chantiers, revue illustrée de la construction en Africain du Nord, N°23, Alger, 1956.

Genesis of the city

In 1951, the number of Muslims reached a very high rate. Population. The assessment of the housing operations carried out until 1954 shows that these do not meet the needs estimated by the municipality (Municipal review, 1954). This situation, considered a social danger, worried the colonial authorities (Msgroidufresne, 1986). This is how J.Chevallier called on F.Pouillon to respond quickly to this housing crisis in Algiers. Especially since the latter had a good experience in Marseille and had the reputation of building housing in record time. The construction costs proposed by Fernand Pouillon were also significantly lower than the current price, with a requirement for the quality of execution (Bernard Felix Dubor, 1986). From then on, between 1953 and 1957, he created three cities in Algiers, notably that of Diar El Mahçoul: the city of the promise kept (Arabic translation, Fernand Pouillon, 1968).

The financing for the realization of these operations was taken care of by the land credit of Algeria and the industrial bank of North Africa (Menaâ Souham,1998). The program initially included 1,200 dwellings, and in its final version, the architect created 1,497 dwellings, including 925 “medium comfort” (Cohen et al, 2003).

Location of the city

F. Pouillon places 19 buildings on the northern part of the land on a rocky ridge overlooking Algiers, intended for Europeans and establishes 19 other buildings on the southern part of the land intended for Muslims. The location of the buildings in the medium comfort side is denser with an estimated 50% of the land area (of the lower part) the rest left for the market and squares.



Figure 3. View of the two districts: high comfort (foreground) and medium comfort (background), Cité Diar El Mahçoul. Spring : *Revue chantiers, revue illustrée de la construction en Africain du Nord*, N°23, Alger, 1956

The district is mainly organized around the market and the outdoor spaces, which follow one another on two different heights. These spaces of very restricted dimensions, without open views and sunlight of habitations that are too close to each others and poorly lit (Boukabar kenza, 2001). While for the high comfort side (the upper part) due to its location is a less dense, less closed, it dominates the bay of

Algiers. The district is structured around an upper square bordered by the market and a lower square open to the sea. This district characterizes by open spaces on the city's landscape and the treatment of scale. Indeed, this concept of scale manifests by the size of the squares, the esplanades and the monumental staircases. (Boukabar kenza, 2001).

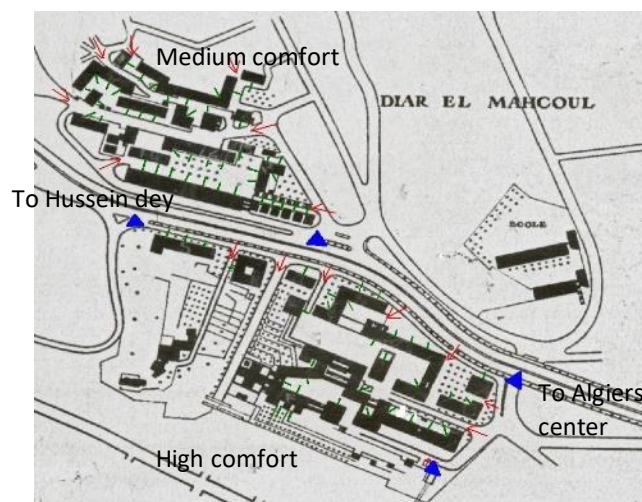


Figure 4. Ground plan, city Diar El Mahçoul. Spring : *Institut français d'architecture, fonds R.Auzelle, reproduction author, 2005.*

Buildings

In both neighbourhoods, the varying sizes and heights of the buildings offered a multitude of housing types ranging from one room to five

rooms. The large apartments were located in the European Quarter, while the smaller apartments were located in the Muslim Quarter (Cohen et al, 2003).



Figure 5. Model on buildings, city Diar El Mahçoul. Spring : Institut français d'architecture, fonds R.Auzelle

Housing

The principle of spatial organization is identical for all the accommodation in Diar El Mahçoul, despite a difference in the surfaces. All the accommodations grouped together at the level of the entrance area. They are equipped with a loggia and benefit from two orientations (except semi-underground accommodation). Floor plans reveal considerable variation. For example, an apartment in the

European section had an entrance hall, a living room opening onto a large patio and an independent kitchen. On the other hand, simple comfort accommodation has an interior patio and a living room with kitchenette in a corner.

Thus, in this research we have chosen to analyse three samples of apartments F1, F2 and F3. Our choice guided by the availability of information in the two districts, in order to compare their architectural characteristics.

One-room apartment (F1):

Spaces	High comfort (European)	Medium comfort (Muslims)
Habitation room	12,60 m ²	4,89 m ²
Kitchen	13,68 m ² (with stay)	2,14 m ²
Bathroom	3,24 m ²	1,34
TOILET	2,16 m ²	/
Distribution space	7,56 m ²	/
TOTAL	39,24 m²	08,37 m²

Figure 06. Table one-room apartment (F1), city Diar El Mahçoul. Spring : Author, 2023.

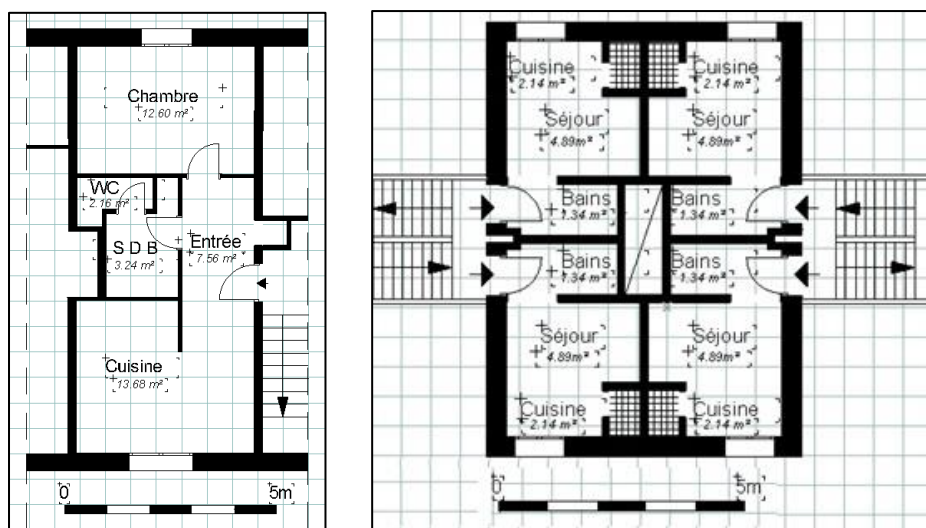


Figure 07. Plan one-room apartment (F1), city Diar El Mahçoul. (On the right four medium comfort apartment, on the left a high comfort apartment). Spring: Reproduction author, 2023.

Two bedroom apartment: (F2)

Appartement deux pièces: See below two housing models.

Model 1 two-room apartment (F2)

Model 1 two-room apartment (F2)		
Spaces	High comfort (European)	Medium comfort (Muslims)
Room	12,60 m ²	04,55 m ²
Stay	22,68 m ² (with entrance)	07,47 m ²
Kitchen	02,60 m ²	02,85 m ²
Bathroom	03,42 m ²	01,34 m ²
TOILET	02,16	/
Distribution space	Included in the stay	03,16 m ²
TOTAL	43,46	19,37 m²

Figure 08: Table model 1 two-room apartment (F2), city Diar El Mahçoul. Spring: Author, 2023.

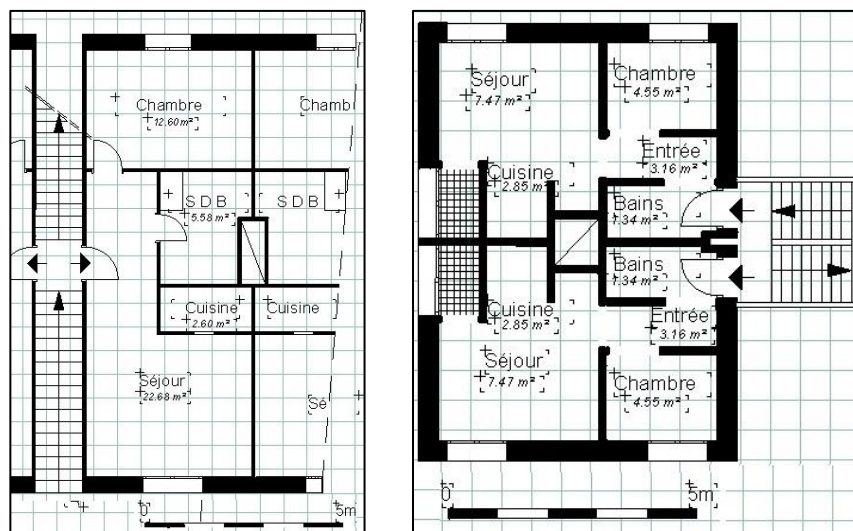


Figure 09. Plan model 1 two-room apartment (F2), city Diar El Mahçoul, (On the right two medium comfort apartment, on the left a high comfort apartment). Spring: Reproduction author, 2023.

Model 2 two-room apartment (F2)

Model 2 two-room apartment (F2)		
Spaces	High comfort (European)	Medium comfort (Muslims)
Room	11,52 m ²	06,02 m ²
Stay	13,97 m ²	07,25 m ²
Dining room	10,06 m ²	/
Kitchen	05,01 m ²	02,14 m ²
Bathroom	03,32 m ²	01,34 m ²
TOILET	01,24 m ²	/
Distribution space	08,87 m ²	1,80 m ²
TOTAL	55,00 m²	18,73 m²

Figure 10: Table model 2 two-room apartment (F2), city Diar El Mahçoul. Spring: Author, 2023.

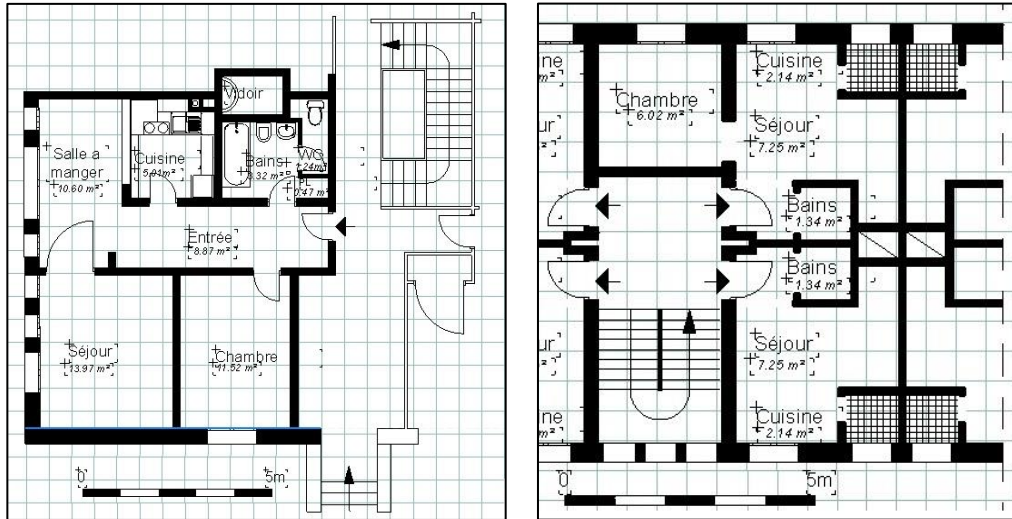


Figure 11. Plan model 2 two-room apartment (F2), city Diar El Mahçoul, (On the right two medium comfort apartment, on the left a high comfort apartment). Spring: Reproduction author, 2023.

Three-room apartment (F3) :

Spaces	High comfort (European)	Medium comfort (Muslims)
Room 1	15,12m ²	10,08 m ²
Room 2	12,60 m ²	10,11 m ²
Stay	17,64 m ²	10,23m ²
Dining room	07,56 m ²	/
Kitchen	07,56 m ²	04,84 m ²
Bathroom	03,78 m ²	02,34 m ²
Toilet	02,16 m ²	/
Distribution space	11,88 m ²	/
TOTAL	78,30 m²	37,60m²

Figure 12: Table three-room apartment (F3), city Diar El Mahçoul. Spring: Author, 2023.

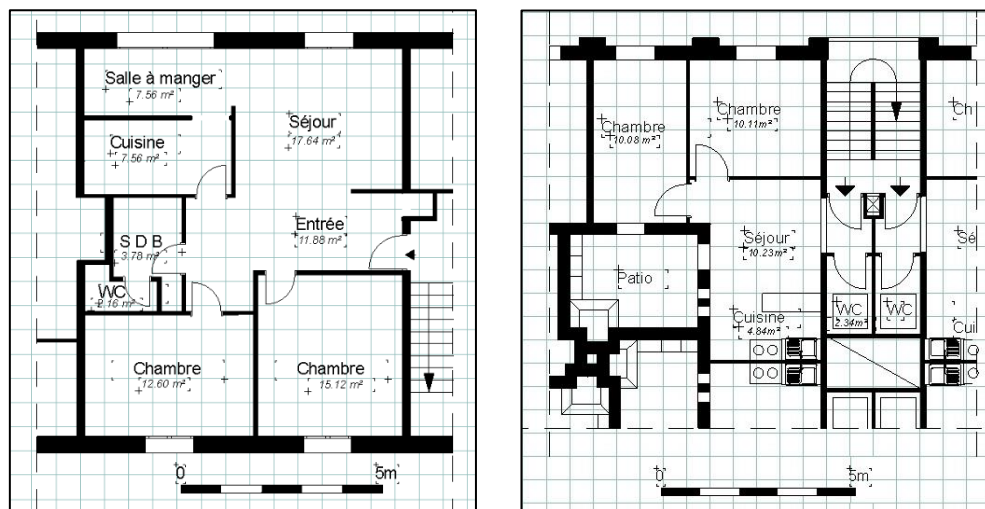


Figure 13. Plan three-room apartment (F3), city Diar El Mahçoul, (On the right a medium comfort apartment, on the left a high comfort apartment). Spring: Author, 2023.

Results and discussion

The two districts of the diar el mahcoul city, built next to each other and separated by a boulevard, have undeniable differences in their architectural and urban designs. In view of our problem and the results of the case study, we find a real inequality accentuated by spatial segregation.

The morphological reading of the two neighborhoods allows us to understand the presence of a conceptual approach. This approach that F. Pouillon uses in the two neighborhood categories (simple and high comfort) but on different scales. Especially since the segregation of the two neighborhoods manifests itself at different points:

The establishment of the two districts does not have the same location, in the European part located in the North on the ridge, facing the sea and benefiting from an excellent perspective towards the city of Algiers. As for the Muslim part, it is located to the south in a ravine and facing the highway.

The public space is materialized by the concept of centrality, one of the concepts of composition of F. Pouillon's projects (Merzelkad-Burgel, 2011). In Diar el Mahçoul this concept is visible in the high comfort district by the existence of two squares (a large one defined by the market and a secondary one overlooking the sea) which are connected by a small portico under the building. In the average comfort district, centrality is represented by a central courtyard which plays the role of a market for the inhabitants.

The configuration of the accommodation varies from one apartment to another, the comparison study of the two neighborhoods clearly shows a disparity in design. A one-room apartment (F1) in the European section with an area of 39,24 m², had an independent room, an open kitchen/living room, a separate bathroom/WC and entrance hallway. On the other hand, in the medium-comfort apartment (F1) with a surface area of 08,37 m², it had an open bedroom/living room, a kitchen, bathroom with toilet.

In the apartments (F2), we focused on two housing models. The model 1 is more modest in surface than the model 2, so we notice that the difference in surface area in the two

neighborhoods is still present, despite a change in the apartment model.

The apartment (F2), model 1 in the European section with a surface of 43.46 m², had a bedroom, a living room/entrance, an independent kitchen and a bathroom separate from the toilet. On the other hand, in the medium comfort apartment with a surface of 19.37 m², it had a small bedroom, a living room with a kitchenette and bathroom / toilet.

The apartment (F2), model 2 in the European section with a surface of 55 m², had a bedroom, a living/dining room, an independent kitchen and a bathroom separate from the toilet and an entrance hallway. On the other hand, in the medium comfort apartment with a surface of 18.73 m², it had a small bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, bathroom / toilet and a small entrance.

The three-room apartment in the European part with an area of 78,30 m², is accessible via a corridor. It has two bedrooms, a living room with a small integrated but independent kitchen. The bathroom and toilet are in continuity and form two spaces separated by a partition (a space in another space). The three-room apartment in the Muslim part with an area of 37,60 m², is grouped around a patio, which distributes the living areas, bedrooms, kitchen and water point (bathroom and WC) to the entrance. In this apartment the kitchen is not independent, it is integrated with the living room which implies a loss of surface for the living room.

The results of the confrontation of the two social districts (medium and high comfort), are indeed convincing and clearly demonstrate the presence of an inequality in the architectural and urban design. This discrimination is strongly accentuated by the arrangement of the two neighbourhoods (top-bottom) which concretizes the existence of a voluntary spatial segregation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of the Diar El Mahçoul city allowed us to affirm that spatial segregation clearly contributed to the concretization of a colonial ideology. The objective of this discriminatory policy was to favour the

European population to the detriment of the Muslim population through social housing.

This is how the cohabitation between these two populations, created a gap in architectural and urban composition, resulting in the establishment of a social hierarchy that continues to condition the evolution of this city to this day.

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