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Dolna 17, Warsaw,  
Poland 00-773  
+48 226 0 227 03  
editorial\_office@rsglobal.pl

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# LEVELS OF CLASS AWARENESS AND WEALTH REPRESENTATIONS AMONG A SAMPLE OF ALGERIAN UNIVERSITY YOUTH

**Radhouane Moumene** (Corresponding Author, Email: [radhouane.moumene@univ-bba.dz](mailto:radhouane.moumene@univ-bba.dz))  
Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahim University of Bordj Bou Arreridj - Algeria

**Fatima Drouche**  
University Center of Tipaza -Algeria

**Djamila Charif**  
University of Algiers 2 Abou El Kacem Saâdallah

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## ABSTRACT

The study of consciousness has represented a central issue in sociological research aimed at understanding societies, as consciousness forms the foundation of group affiliation, the adoption of its roles and functions, and even the shared representations of various societal issues. Researchers have consistently emphasized the significant role of value-based and social representations in shaping collective imaginaries and crafting perspectives on different issues among members of a single group. Based on this premise, the present study examines the levels of awareness of class affiliation in Algerian society and representations of wealth among a sample of university youth. It provides a detailed description of the degrees of awareness concerning class stratification and affiliation, along with an overview of some representations of wealth as a crucial societal issue affecting this demographic. The study also reveals certain contradictions related to the values shaping social representations of wealth among this group, opening avenues for further research in this field.

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## KEYWORDS

Class Consciousness, Social Representations, Wealth Perception, University Youth, Value Contradictions

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## Introduction

In sociology, the concept of consciousness of belonging to a social class aligns with the Marxist approach, which considers consciousness a fundamental condition for the very existence of a class (Holt, 1914). From a contemporary sociological perspective, the concept of class refers to a group of individuals who share similarities across various dimensions, such as income, wealth, occupation, social status, cultural and educational levels, as well as common attitudes and values (Kantzara, 2012).

Conversely, it also highlights the differences between each group and others within the same society. Based on these differences, the group develops a sense of belonging to a specific category, sharing traits, goals, and even similar types of challenges. This sense of belonging fosters a feeling of uniqueness and distinction from other groups, relying on a set of accumulated representations that manifest as mental images in the collective social imaginary. These images are primarily shaped by widely recognized and accepted descriptions among the general public.

In our view, both ancient and contemporary societies exhibit a certain type of class stratification based on the differences inherent in people's roles and positions in social life. This approach aligns with the

perspective of sociologist Thomas Bottomore, who highlighted that systems of class stratification in human societies do not follow a single pattern. Each society has its own unique system, determined by its level of material and cultural development, the historical stage it is undergoing, and its environmental, value-based, intellectual, political, and legal conditions (Bottomore, 1966).

Class stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of groups or individuals in a progressive series of distinct social positions or statuses, based on several foundations, such as educational and cultural levels, social differences, and affiliations with specific economic groups. One of the most significant bases for differentiation in positions, roles, and social statuses is the material aspect, rooted in the ownership of wealth and money. Throughout history, this has served as a constant criterion for determining social differentiation and the division between the classes within a society. (Marx, 1867)

Social stratification or class stratification has long been a key issue addressed by research and studies focused on society in order to understand social differentiation. It aims to explore how societies are structured, the foundations of social interaction, and the determinants of relationships between individuals and groups, as well as the nature of relationships among different classes. However, the vision remains unclear for some modern societies, particularly those that experienced long periods of colonization. In this context, some researchers studying modern African countries argue that class differentiation is still in its early stages, as social classes and groups have not yet fully developed. This is attributed to the unique historical development of the continent and its prolonged colonial ties, which have, in many cases, had a profound impact on local cultures and their social organization.

The tribal and clan-based organization in most African societies played a significant role in social organization and the differentiation between social classes, with a strict allocation of roles and positions for each social class and individual within the society. These roles were governed by a set of traditional norms developed over a long history in these communities. However, with the waves of colonization and prolonged settlement, this organization underwent substantial changes, particularly affecting the upper echelons of the tribe and clan. These changes transformed their roles, social positions, and even the functions they performed according to those roles and positions. A significant shift occurred in the nature, status, and functions of these groups.

In the same context, Algerian society represents a model for African societies that experienced some of the harshest forms of colonization, accompanied by a prolonged period of settlement by foreign ethnic groups, one of the longest in modern history. This colonization, which differs in social and cultural aspects from the unique characteristics of Algerian society, impacted various elements such as social stratification, class differentiation, the determinants of class affiliation, and the roles and positions of each class. It also affected the role of wealth within these determinants.

Researchers on the Algerian context emphasize that the social and cultural repercussions of French colonization had a profound impact on Algerian society. The colonizers worked to dismantle the traditional social structure of society, which was the fundamental pillar for social organization and unity. They also sought to break the normative rules that governed social organization, which precisely defined the roles, positions, and functions of individuals and groups.

Despite the fierce resistance displayed by Algerian society in preserving everything related to its core values and national identity—resistance in which it succeeded remarkably—the effects of the social upheaval imposed by colonization for decades continued to cast a shadow over Algerian social history. This struggle for national identity was reinforced in the post-independence Algerian state, starting from the very first day of independence.

Additionally, with Algeria regaining its independence in the second half of the 20th century (Ammour, 2022), coinciding with a wave of global transformations on economic levels, many social and cultural effects were highlighted, especially with the world's shift towards the globalization of social, cultural, and economic life due to the ongoing advancements in human communication technologies. This facilitated increasing global interaction, which in turn resulted in a continuous and accelerating social movement that impacted all aspects of social, cultural, and economic life in societies worldwide.

Due to cultural interaction, this led to the continuation of social mobility, which had effects on individuals and groups. These effects also impacted the set of social and class-based determinants that had, for decades, regulated positions and roles within groups and society.

For this purpose, it is essential to continue sociological research aimed at determining the levels of stratification and class formation within the framework of the dialectic of social structure and mobility, particularly in emerging and developing societies, and more specifically in Algerian society. This research helps in understanding the social and cultural impacts on society.

Sociologists have continued their work on transferring the concept of consciousness from its philosophical definition to an operational one, allowing its dimensions and indicators to be measured. This involves studying the role of consciousness in belonging to a particular group, which forms a solid foundation for individuals' conviction to perform the roles assigned to them within their social affiliations, leading to the regulation of general interaction patterns and relationships within society.

Moreover, consciousness of belonging involves an individual or group's awareness of the traits or characteristics that make them belong to one group rather than another (Moscovici, 1961). Therefore, any desire to change affiliation to a particular group requires acquiring a set of traits and characteristics that allow for a smooth class transition from one group to another. This can only be achieved through an in-depth study of social representations, with the concept of social representations being of utmost importance in contemporary research (Jodelet, 1989). It provides an operational definition that gives us a true vision of societal processes and social issues (Moscovici, 2015).

Based on this approach, and considering the role of wealth and the ownership of means to acquire it—factors that are often a determining variable in many cases, particularly for individuals in society in defining class affiliation (Bourdieu, 1979), along with other factors—we aim to identify the representations and levels of class consciousness among university students in various scientific disciplines. This will be achieved through a field study conducted on a sample of Algerian university youth.

Thus, This study begins with the following research questions: What is the level of class dominance over the consciousness of university youth in Algeria, and how is it related to wealth distribution? How do university students' perceptions of values that contribute to achieving wealth reflect the effects of social mobility on their consciousness?

Social stratification can be considered one of the most important factors in achieving social organization by regulating the positions, roles, and functions of each individual or group, and determining their affiliations (Bourdieu, 1979). Given the significant role that studies related to social consciousness play in contemporary sociological research—particularly in shaping public perceptions of important issues to strengthen social bonds and enhance shared cultural belonging, as well as addressing societal problems that could affect the social interaction system—it is evident that these studies are crucial (Moscovici, 2015). These goals are only achieved through regulated and well-defined roles and positions for individuals and groups (Durkheim, 1893).

The issue of social differentiation and its foundations has always been an important variable in studies related to society, with the significance of class stratification in determining the basis of difference and distinction between social classes to ensure the continuity of social life (Tilly, 1998). This is achieved through ensuring a well-regulated and controlled interaction between the elements of the social system, which is based on the conviction of individuals and groups regarding the positions and social roles assigned to them (Giddens & Griffiths, 2006). Social differentiation is manifested in a series of accumulated representations and perceptions that shape the collective imagination of various segments of society (Jodelet, 1989).

Based on this, the importance of our study lies in measuring the level of class consciousness and its impact, as well as its interaction with the representations related to wealth among Algerian university youth. This study takes place in an era characterized by intense influences that have disrupted societal representations of many issues, most notably the ownership of wealth, methods of acquiring it, and its role in determining an individual's social role and position. This includes the possibility of transitioning from one social class to another. Wealth is considered a key factor and a constant variable in distinguishing between social classes based on roles and positions.

The study aims to provide a sociological perspective to understand social organization and analyze the development of Algerian society by exploring representations of some key issues within societal views. It seeks to examine class consciousness, focusing on university students' perceptions of wealth and its social role. Additionally, the study aims to diagnose the reality of social mobility resulting from rapid social and cultural developments in modern Algerian society, in order to understand the sources of contemporary societal culture related to fundamental issues such as roles and social conflict.

Furthermore, the study seeks to highlight the modern perceptions of youth regarding class affiliations and the role of wealth in defining these affiliations, while examining representations of wealth and the wealthy, and their impact on the division of social classes, the criteria for separating them, and the conflicts that arise as a result. The study also aims to analyze university students' attitudes toward class stratification in the context of modern developments and societal transformations, and to investigate the role of representations shaped by historical trajectories in forming the value system associated with wealth.

## **1- Theoretical Framework for Studying the Determinants of Representations and Measuring Class Belonging Awareness**

Based on an approach suggesting that consciousness in sociology is determined by the variables of the social structure of society or the group, the historical phase they are going through, and the relationships and specific conditions prevailing within it. Additionally, it includes the distribution of social, economic, and political opportunities within the general social or environmental context. In this study, we aim to determine the representations and levels of class belonging awareness among university-level youth from various academic disciplines, relying on a non-random sample.

In sociology, consciousness is defined as a mental orientation derived from reality, enabling individuals to perceive themselves, their environment, and society (Kantzara, 2012). Consciousness is determined by the social structure of society or the group, the historical phase it is undergoing, the relationships and specific conditions prevailing within it, and the distribution of social, economic, and political opportunities within that environment.

This is where the concept of representations and consciousness intersect or align. Sociologist J.C. Abric suggests that representations are an organized set of information, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular subject or thing. As a social and ideological product, these representations do not deviate from the historical context of the group that produces them. They are seen as a worldview for the group, and every representation consists of two elements: content and structure (Abric, 2005). Abric adds that representations form a system for interpreting reality, guiding the relationships of individuals in their physical and social surroundings, determining their behaviors and practices, and directing social actions and relationships.

One of the prominent figures who focused on defining representations in social psychology is Moscovici, who defines them as a system of values and ideas related to specific subjects and aspects of the social environment. These representations not only allow for the stability of the lives of individuals and groups but also serve as a tool to guide the perception of situations and prepare responses (Blanc, 2006, p. 17).

Thus, both the concepts of consciousness and representations intersect in the way individuals perceive a set of specific conditions that make them feel they belong to groups with particular characteristics, and they act based on this perception.

Among the contemporary and long-term Western research on the concept of class consciousness, we selected a study conducted in France regarding the evolution of the feeling of belonging to a social class. The study relied on a sample of 1504 units, selected based on precise criteria. The results of the investigations revealed that the feeling of class belonging had not faded but had increased, albeit by a small percentage, from 1982 to 2010. Additionally, the middle class continued to exist at the level of feeling and consciousness, and even expanded compared to a slight withdrawal of the working class (Peugny, 2009).

In fact, these meanings confirmed the continued awareness of class stratification in French society, as a model for contemporary Western societies that have experienced the spread of globalized norms and new formations that managed to dominate and assert control through media and digital technology. Some of their scholars even declared the death of class structures in society.

The significance of such research, which relied on field investigations, can be found in the study that elevated the awareness of belonging to the municipality from the level of feeling to the level of action through the voting process. It highlighted the role of media in urban environments in establishing a sense of belonging. The study concluded that the feeling of belonging to the municipality leads to an increase in electoral participation rates (Demers, 1994).

At the level of factors determining class stratification, biological determinism is no longer widespread, but it has not completely disappeared. An example of this is found in an American book titled "The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life", where the authors assert that economic inequality is a result of genetic decline, which leads to the failure of certain social groups (Herrnstein & Murray, 2010).

In the Arab world, there is a notable lack of comprehensive field studies on the topic. This is due to the lack of clear features in the human map and the absence of distinct divisions between different social strata, despite the growing disparities based on wealth and capital. Additionally, there is a shortage of laboratories and research centers engaged in sociological topics through long-term investigations.

Here, we recall some research models that have concluded a strange contradiction in the general trends of Arab countries, based on the dual directions shown by statistics. These studies reveal the accumulation of wealth on one hand, and the widening poverty gap on the other. "ALECSO" in its research focused on the Egyptian case, which witnessed an increase in poverty rates from 16.7% in 2000 to 21.6% in 2008 (based on the local poverty line), while simultaneously experiencing a rapid increase in per capita GDP. This approach

views the accumulation of wealth and the widening marginalization as contradictory to the expected outcomes of market-driven growth policies (Sabry, 2021).

In this context, the current study comes, on a narrow level, as a beginning to examine awareness and representations within an important social group in Algerian society. The scope of this study is confined to one segment of the social strata, specifically university students, in order to measure the levels of awareness regarding class distinctions and differences within the consciousness of this group, and the role of wealth among the values that contribute to social differentiation. Additionally, the study aims to measure the effects of social mobility on the awareness and values that facilitate wealth accumulation.

**Concept of Awareness:** Awareness can be defined as a mental state of alertness, wakefulness, and perception, in which an individual becomes aware of themselves and their relationships with the surrounding environment, including time, place, and people. Through this awareness, a person recognizes their position, status, and roles in society. Studies focused on social awareness and its various forms generally agree that awareness has three main dimensions:

- **Psychosocial dimension of awareness:** The existence of a positive or negative attitude or stance toward a particular issue or topic that is being explored.
- **Scientific dimension of awareness:** The ability to understand the issue or topic by interpreting it and highlighting its positives and negatives.
- **Ideological dimension of awareness:** The offering of an alternative view of the current state of the issue or topic being examined, which represents a change in perspective or a proposed solution.

**Concept of Representations:** Representations are defined in the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* as a collection of ideas, beliefs, and values shaped by a group, which can be reduced to individual components. In the *Dictionary of Social Sciences*, they are described as a reality that reflects the persistence and hierarchical nature of collective consciousness (Scott & Marshall, 2009). They are also seen as a means of classifying behaviors or as a mediating claim between what is ideological and what is practical, or a particular form of knowledge or symbolic thought with its own set of rules. This concept refers to the set of mental images formed in the collective imagination around a specific topic, which are shaped according to specific descriptions held by the general public.

**Concept of Class Belonging:** Class belonging refers to the affiliation of individuals or groups to a specific social class with characteristics that align with those of the individual in several aspects, such as living standards, wealth level, occupation, educational background, and other variables. Class belonging is determined by shared conditions and attributes among members of the same class, along with the conviction of occupying similar social roles and positions (Peter et al., 2015).

**Concept of Social Mobility:** The concept of social mobility refers to the continuous movement within society, which involves the change or transition of individuals or groups in terms of their social conditions, positions, roles, functions, and class affiliation. Social mobility can occur on various levels, such as income level, education level, profession, or occupation. Generally, social mobility occurs in two directions: vertical mobility, which involves moving from a lower class to a higher class, or vice versa; and horizontal mobility, which involves movement without a significant change in the individual's or group's overall position regarding the class they belong to (Fields, 2019).

## 2- The Methodological Framework of the Study

The methodological framework of the study is based on a descriptive-analytical approach, which was adopted to analyze the phenomenon under investigation. The study's geographical scope covered the Algerian society, while the fieldwork was conducted during a specific period, which coincided with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including lockdown periods and restrictions on movement and social interaction. The study commenced in December 2021 and continued until March 2022. As for the human scope, the focus was on a non-probability sample of Algerian university students, with the only condition being that the respondent had to be an Algerian university student.

The sample was selected non-randomly through social media platforms, where questionnaires were electronically distributed to digital groups dedicated to university students. After sorting, 81 questionnaires out of 100 distributed were retained. Although the sample studied is not representative of all Algerian university students and its results cannot be generalized, it provides a model through which the perceptions and representations of some Algerian university students can be inferred.

A questionnaire form was used as the data collection tool, which included sections aimed at understanding the representations of youth regarding money, social status, and values related to wealth, in addition to questions that categorize the levels of awareness of class affiliation, if present.

### 3- Results

#### 3-1 Social and Cultural Characteristics of the Sample Members

In an initial reading of the data, the characteristics related to the surveyed students provide several descriptive indications that can later be relied upon to interpret the data obtained from the field of study. It is worth noting that the questionnaires were distributed indirectly through electronic groups, with their members spread across various universities in the country. The percentages related to the characteristics of the surveyed sample revealed the following:

Regarding the gender of the respondents: The percentages of respondents by gender were 50.61% for females and 49.38% for males. These numerical data in the table show that the proportions of male and female respondents are almost equal, with a slight advantage for the female group. From a sociological perspective, it is important to note that this equality in proportions indicates the widespread education of females, if not their numerical superiority over males in some scientific disciplines at Algerian universities. This is confirmed by statistics issued by official institutions. These findings reflect one of the positive outcomes of the general trend in social mobility aimed at eliminating gender inequalities in rights, such as the right to education, the continuation of studies, the right to work, as well as equality in the right to express opinions and choose life directions in relation to various existential issues.

As for the age variable: Given that the respondents are mostly university students, a young demographic, the percentages are as follows: 61.72% belong to the age group (20 to 25 years), which is the dominant group. This is followed by the age group (26 to 30 years) with a notable percentage of 24.69%, and finally, the age group (over 31 years) with a percentage of 13.58%.

Based on the average age that allows entry into university after completing pre-university education, which ranges between 18 to 20 years and is lower in rare exceptional cases, and in light of the Algerian government's effort to spread universities across the country, bringing them closer to citizens and achieving social justice and equality in access to education, completing higher education has become accessible to the majority of children from different social classes, without significant delays in their academic trajectory.

In terms of measuring awareness levels and orientations, this group is considered to be an active, capable, and job-seeking category, given that work serves as a means of achieving social status through the role an individual plays for the benefit of the group and the public structure. Moreover, work is a source of wealth, which has significant social roles, especially in shaping social status and determining class affiliation based on differences in occupations and the incomes they generate. Furthermore, work is considered one of the most important means and tools for changing social and material conditions, especially for those individuals who reject their current social status or wish to change it.

**Regarding the employment status of the respondents:** It was found that the majority of respondents do not work and have no individual sources of income, accounting for 70.37%, while the percentage of working students was 29.62%. Despite the fact that the percentage of respondents over the age of 26 was 38.27%, a significant proportion, which theoretically is the age at which most Algerian youth complete their academic commitments and begin seeking employment, this indicates a high rate of non-participation of university students in the labor market. In our opinion, this relatively high percentage can be attributed to several factors:

- The significant percentage of females in the sample: In Algerian local culture, derived from customs, traditions, and social and religious values, girls remain under parental care until they separate from the family through marriage in Algerian society. Recently, as a result of social mobility, some families have allowed girls to enter the labor market, but this perspective cannot be generalized.

- Regarding young males: A young man remains under parental care throughout his academic journey until graduation from university, at which point he is expected to work, in accordance with the cultural and social peculiarities of Algerian society.

- This percentage also points to the continued role of the family in caring for children even after they have reached adulthood and the legal working age, a role that is rooted in the characteristics of Algerian society. Regarding awareness and representations, considering that the respondents are university students distributed across three levels: Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate, this group undoubtedly carries a certain level of foundational awareness. They have developed representations concerning life and existential issues, and this process of formation will continue as they experience new challenges. However, the representations of this

homogenous group also have significance in unraveling certain codes that help understand and define the features of the new society.

Regarding the level of study or training: Master's students represented the majority of the respondents, accounting for 51.85%, followed by Bachelor's students at 35.80%, and finally, Doctoral students at 12.34%. In terms of analysis, the Master's phase is considered the final stage of study for many university students, given that the opportunity to pursue a Ph.D. is not available to everyone. This phase is characterized by selecting outstanding students through competitive exams.

Regarding the type of housing: All of the respondents live in family housing, accounting for 100%. As for university life, 20.14% of the respondents reported living in university residences during study periods. As previously mentioned, this is a strong indicator of the resilience and continuity of the Algerian family's role in caring for children until they achieve financial and familial independence, regardless of legal criteria (age of adulthood, working age, age of responsibility, etc.). Even those who separate to live in university residences do so temporarily for the duration of their studies, returning to live with their families during breaks or after completing their studies. This reflects the stability of the Algerian family in the face of continuous social and cultural changes, influenced by the globalization of social life resulting from modern human connectivity. This is a variable that warrants a separate study to measure its degree of stability.

Regarding the nature of ownership of family housing: The vast majority of respondents stated that they live in homes owned by their families, accounting for 86.41%, while 13.58% live in rented homes. This percentage reflects the general societal attitude toward homeownership, where owning a home is considered one of the top priorities for the Algerian individual. This priority has been reflected in the Algerian state's efforts to provide independent housing for every citizen, with a focus on homeownership. It highlights the social value of owning a home within the cultural framework and collective imagination of Algerian society.

The second aspect, which typically shows a dominant trend, concerns the nature of housing. As is evident, the majority live with their families in privately owned homes, whether in affluent or popular neighborhoods. Homeownership is also linked to the Algerian state's policy of regulating the purchase of social and economic development housing, with significant facilitation measures. All of these measures were introduced as solutions to address the severe housing crisis that society faced in recent years, and to prevent its future complexities, given the demographic growth and the ongoing migration towards cities since national independence. This migration has been driven by both economic and social factors and was exacerbated during the Black Decade due to the insecurity and terrorism experienced by the inhabitants of mountainous areas and remote villages.

**Regarding the type of neighborhood where the respondents live:** The majority reside in popular neighborhoods, with a percentage of 59.25%, followed by those living in affluent neighborhoods at 27.16%, while other types of neighborhoods collectively account for 13.58%.

Given the importance of housing in Algerian popular culture and its representations in the collective imagination, this distribution can help explain the material conditions of the respondents. It suggests that most respondents belong to the middle class from an economic perspective, as they predominantly reside in popular neighborhoods, with a smaller proportion living in more affluent areas. This pattern aligns with the broader societal trend of class differentiation based on housing and its role in shaping one's social identity.

Regarding the geographical area of residence: The majority of the respondents live in cities, with 59.25% residing in urban areas, followed by 24.69% living on the outskirts (suburbs), and 16.04% living in rural villages.

From a sociological perspective, these figures reflect the ongoing trend of urbanization in Algeria, which has reached significant levels, classifying it among the fastest urbanizing societies. This urbanization process involves migration from rural areas, leading to the decline of traditional rural occupations, especially in agriculture and farming.

The continuous migration towards urban centers is influenced by several factors, including the inadequate infrastructure in rural areas and their distance from essential services. Moreover, the expansion of educational opportunities for children has contributed to the shift toward urban living, where job opportunities are more abundant, thus allowing for social mobility and a change in roles for both men and women. In rural areas, work opportunities are limited and primarily tied to the agricultural sector, which does not generate wealth. In contrast, cities offer a broader range of opportunities in work, education, and professions, including those for women, which represents a significant cultural and social shift. The increased participation of women in higher education is a notable indicator of this shift towards urban life and professional work.

In conclusion, the data from the respondents suggest a trend toward homogeneity in several aspects studied, aligning with the broader trends in Algerian society, such as the gender distribution, age categories,



and the continuous rise in the educational level of the population. Additionally, the ongoing increase in urbanization rates in Algeria is evident. Despite these changes, certain social peculiarities persist, especially regarding the social roles of the family and the cultural importance of home ownership in the collective imagination of Algerian society.

### **3-2 Representations of Wealth and Levels of Class Belonging among University Students**

Regarding the classification of social classes in Algerian society: In our question about how social classes are classified in Algerian society or how the respondents perceive the ideal class hierarchy, the category that uses the classification (educated vs. uneducated) accounted for 46.17%, while the category using wealth and poverty as a classification accounted for 31.96%. The category using occupation (high-status professions vs. regular professions) accounted for 16.1%, while 5.76% of respondents did not provide an answer.

Regarding the assessment of personal and family living standards: 59.25% of the sample consider their living standard to be average, and 14.81% rate it as above average. This allows us to say that the feeling of belonging to the middle class represents the majority, even if at an initial or superficial level. Meanwhile, 1.23% feel they belong to the wealthy class, or rather find their living standard aligns with the wealthy. About 7.40% see themselves as poor or very poor, and 17.28%, which is a considerable percentage that cannot be ignored, do not know which class they belong to.

These percentages confirm our belief in the dominance of the middle class in society, as they also highlight the existence of poverty and the feeling of poverty among a significant proportion, despite the social policies of the Algerian state aimed at care and support. On the other hand, the presence of a single case declaring its wealth does not suggest the existence of a significant wealthy class in society, nor does it deny its existence.

The classification of the majority in the social structure as being average, regardless of the nature of this classification, allows us to assert the presence of the first dimension of awareness, namely the psychosocial dimension, which is reflected in the existence of a positive or negative attitude toward the issue or topic being investigated in terms of awareness.

Regarding the ranking of factors determining an individual's status in the social environment of the respondents: the factor of ethics ranked first among the factors determining people's social status with a significant percentage of 27.16%, followed by wealth and money at 24.69%. Then came the combined factor of knowledge and ethics at 19.75%, with knowledge alone ranking at 6.17%. The cultural level factor accounted for 4.93%, and the position factor ranked the lowest at 2.46%. It is also notable that a significant proportion, 14.81%, preferred not to answer.

The respondents give more importance to ethics than other factors that define an individual's status. When ethics are combined with knowledge, they become the most important factor determining an individual's social status. However, the wealth factor is still significant, coming in second. The surprising factor is the low importance given to the position factor, which is ranked lower than the cultural level. The reason behind this may lie in the career paths leading to promotions and positions in Algeria, which some respondents with experience have encountered, especially since a considerable proportion of respondents have surpassed the age of thirty and are preparing for their doctoral degrees.

Regarding the nature of money according to the respondents: Among the university students in the sample, the majority consider money as merely a means, with a percentage of 51.85%. 24.69% view it as the foundation of life, while 11.11% regard it as a cause of conflicts. 7.40% consider money both a goal and a means, and 4.93% view it as a goal, a means, and a cause of conflicts.

For the majority, money is seen as a means rather than an end. This perception reflects awareness and understanding of the true nature of things, separate from the lived and complex reality. The institutions that have shaped and reinforced these perceptions have led to a general belief that money is the foundation of modern life, but this does not elevate it to the status of an ultimate goal, as described by George Simmel. This shows the third dimension of forming consciousness, which involves offering an alternative perspective on the current reality of the issue or topic being explored, also referred to as the ideological dimension. We can observe this ideological dimension in how the respondents express their views on the nature of money.

Regarding the professions and jobs that create wealth: When we asked about the professions that generate wealth, the responses from the participants were as follows: Trade (40.74%), entrepreneurship and construction (12.34%), high-ranking positions in private companies (12.34%), followed by politics, inheritance, and immigration, each with 6.17%. Finally, work in security and defense was mentioned by 4.93%, while 2.46% did not answer.

Regarding the ranking of professions according to their importance in society: When we asked about the ranking of professions by importance in society, free professions topped the list with 39.50%, followed by education in second place with 20.98%. It is important to consider the influence of women's responses, given that females represent a significant portion of the sample, as women's perspectives may have an impact, particularly with the unique role and status of women in Algerian society. Following education, the military engagement category came in third with 9.87%, then government jobs, legal professions (lawyers, judges), and medicine with 8.64%. Agriculture and skilled manual labor both accounted for 4.93% each, while the police and gendarmerie came at the bottom of the ranking.

Trade is the leading factor in wealth accumulation according to the responses of the participants. This view aligns with the religious perspective that states "nine-tenths of livelihood comes from trade," and is also reinforced by daily observation and artistic productions (TV shows and movies) where traders and contractors are depicted as wealthy. Based on this, trade, free professions, and businesses are ranked as the top professions for creating material wealth according to the participants' perceptions. This representation is not arbitrary but stems from an awareness of the broader environment, shaped by observation and socialization. Public sector employees' children understand that their parents are likely to remain within the boundaries of sufficiency, although the education sector is an exception, as it has become a profession that can generate additional income outside of the official work, such as through private tutoring, which has allowed some educators to improve their financial conditions.

Other factors, such as working in the defense and security sectors, immigration, and political work, are considered equally important determinants for wealth creation according to the participants' perceptions. The following table supports this view, as free professions are ranked as the most socially important, while agricultural work is no longer seen as a desirable profession according to the participants, with education attracting more attention than other administrative jobs.

Regarding the values that contribute to wealth accumulation: seriousness topped the results in our question about the values that help accumulate wealth, with 34.56%, followed by saving values at 19.75%, and cleverness (or resourcefulness) at 18.51%. Additionally, the combination of seriousness, saving, and cleverness received 17.28%, while trickery and plundering accounted for 9.87%.

The participants recognize that seriousness in work and performance leads to achieving goals and accumulating capital. They also give importance to saving, meaning good management and avoiding waste, contrary to what is often seen in popular knowledge, where trickery and plundering are perceived as the main ways to wealth. However, only a small group consider these negative traits as determinants or contributors to wealth accumulation. This awareness of the importance of positive values suggests that the participants hold strong convictions that are not easily swayed by passing events. These convictions are deeply rooted and continue to persist due to education and the reproduction of inherited value systems.

This belief points to the second dimension of consciousness, known as the scientific dimension, which involves understanding an issue or topic through its interpretation and by highlighting both its positive and negative aspects. The data from the following table confirms this awareness, as the participants give more importance to some values over others.

Regarding the presence of the wealthy in the respondents' environment: The respondents reveal that there are wealthy individuals in their social environment at a rate of 62.29%, while 37.70% deny this. This contradicts our initial assumption that the wealthy group is very small compared to those who consider themselves middle class. This leads us to lean towards the hypothesis of the emergence of different segments of the wealthy, distinct from the group of wealthy families we previously investigated. The respondents identified their wealthy relatives in the following order: uncles, aunt, cousins, neighbors, siblings, and paternal uncles. As seen, these are family members, but the levels of affiliation in the respondents' consciousness vary.

However, other indicators have shown that this group of wealthy individuals in the respondents' environment is not detached from the general middle-class trend. Instead, they are fully integrated into it, sharing in its joys, suggestions, and helping when needed. It is certain that the selected sample is not fully representative of the wider community, but it undeniably offers insight into the representations of wealth among young people. Furthermore, their university level enables them to distinguish between different levels of wealth. When a respondent states that their aunt, uncle, or neighbors are wealthy, this assessment is not random but rather a result of observing material wealth and recognizing the difference in living standards compared to their family or what their parents provide for their existence.

#### 4- Discussion

The data from this modest investigation allowed us to draw some conclusions that could contribute to the formulation of new, productive hypotheses suitable for broader, more representative work within Algerian society.

Through the general trend toward identifying as part of the middle class, or more accurately, defining one's living standards as "average" rather than categorizing them as poverty or wealth, it suggests an awareness of disparities based on wealth and an acceptance of this difference. Additionally, we observe certain indicators that reflect positive values towards material wealth, such as viewing it as a means rather than an end, as well as an awareness of the methods by which wealth is acquired. Furthermore, material wealth is ranked second, and in some cases, even higher, within the criteria for social stratification, with education and ethics being explicitly mentioned as the foundations of life.

We note, based on this awareness or direction, that there is a similarity with the content of traditional representations found in Algerian proverbs and folk tales, which view wealth as fleeting and consider a person's social status as transient, depending on the fortune that accompanies them. This similarity is undoubtedly attributed to socialization and the reproduction of values and norms that shape representations and build social awareness. This allows us to assert that the Algerian family has been successful in reproducing inherited cultural values. Therefore, we conclude that there is a form of harmony and alignment between the youth's representations of wealth and material possessions and the popular culture. However, this does not contradict the inevitability of social change; on the contrary, it supports it. It also does not imply the isolation of Algerian society from the global trend, where wealth is increasingly dominant, often at the expense of ethical values, regardless of the means or legitimacy of its acquisition.

It should also be noted that the awareness of belonging among a group of university students does not necessarily imply the same awareness for a different group. Moving beyond this particular group could provide us with other orientations and dimensions that are completely contradictory to the findings of the studied group, especially considering that the context of the field study and its specificity do not allow for the generalization of the results. The data from this study supports the sociological approach that argues change begins with the infiltration of new values shaped by the material conditions of existence. We can add to this the coercive and attractive force of global cultural dominance that permeates even the most remote corners of the world.

The studied group consists of young people with a university education, open to the world, and using technology... These characteristics have an impact on the formation of awareness and social representations. The challenges and stakes imposed by cultural globalization, which aims to standardize societies, have contributed to changing mentalities among the new generation of youth, who now demand the right to quality of life and well-being and recognize the importance of wealth in achieving these goals. However, this study has shown that the core values, such as the veneration of knowledge and ethics, remain at the forefront in evaluating individuals for some young people.

One might argue, anyone concerned with current issues in Algerian society might ask, why do young people emigrate illegally, preferring to risk death at any moment rather than staying in a homeland that guarantees them dignity in life? Perhaps the initial answer lies in the nature of the studied group, which consists of university students who possess a student identity and some rights that allow them to settle and look optimistically towards the future and balance.

As for the implications of the feeling of belonging to the middle class, it can also be attributed to the nature of the middle class in the collective social imagination of society, which symbolizes sufficiency or the ability to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, and education, thus creating a sense of satisfaction.

Additionally, based on media campaigns about local corruption issues, we might have expected the factors of plundering and fraud to top the list of sources of wealth in the representations of the respondents. However, despite the presence of this condition, it does not form the dominant trend and is instead present at a lower percentage than expected.

Then, does the disclosure of the existence of rich individuals in the respondents' surroundings, such as neighbors and relatives, imply acceptance of differentiation? This is something that the boundaries of the study do not allow for conclusive answers, but the ranking and direction suggest an acceptance of differences and disparities in living standards. Here, the first signs of the establishment of a new culture, distinct from the culture of the independence generation, begin to emerge. The latter believed in and valued equality in rights, including the right to benefit equally from state assets, considering them as the achievements of the revolution.

At the institutional level, there is another factor we hypothesize will contribute to creating differences and increasing awareness of differentiation, namely the phenomenon of private schools and universities, which are

growing rapidly in most cities, especially in the capital. These institutions are attended by those who can afford to pay their fees. Parents now enroll their children not so much for the educational curricula but for the services offered, such as transportation, catering, and security. They are aware that those who are able to attend are not from the general public but belong to the same social strata as themselves, ensuring their children do not come into contact with those who are less fortunate in terms of resources and parental ambitions. These paths will inevitably create a new culture resulting from different educational trajectories for the new generations.

All these factors lead us to expect the emergence of a new human map based on the emergence of different classes that are not completely separate due to the continuity of traditional society (family relationships and solidarity). However, the gap will likely increase in the future due to the growth of new institutions such as private schools and universities, and other factors such as migration, the growth of cities and urban housing clusters, the spread of technology, and modern communication tools facilitating global cultural exchange.

Regarding the importance of values in shaping awareness and representations, we all wonder whether the philosophy of technology and artificial intelligence will become the source of human values and legislation, after communication technologies have laid the foundation for a new value system.

### Conclusions

Institutions responsible for media, communication, digitization, and technology compete to shape and reshape societal awareness towards a consumer-driven and standardized society, one that can be controlled and manipulated through buttons instead of costly tanks and deadly weapons. This upward trajectory of cultural policy, embedded in artificial intelligence, is being adopted by global powers and multinational corporations to complete the process of globalization and redraw the map of the world and societies. In contrast, traditional social institutions such as the family, school, and popular culture resist and work to reproduce the inherited traditional society.

After analyzing the data from the field investigation, we identified the presence of the first dimension of awareness, the psychosocial dimension, which represents the existence of a positive or negative attitude towards money and its pathways, as well as the second dimension of awareness, also called the scientific dimension, based on understanding the issue or subject through its interpretation, highlighting its positives and negatives.

While the contradiction within the dialectic of inevitable social change and transformation unfolds, this modest study reveals some of these contradictions. The findings show a form of awareness based on the belief that money is a means, not an end, and that ethics differentiate humans. Furthermore, seriousness and saving are values that facilitate the establishment of wealth. The representations of the respondents regarding the subject suggest the presence of a mental harmony, which resulted from specific social conditions that shaped these representations, influenced by state policies in education and official culture to preserve certain characteristics distinguishing the local society—especially the preservation of identity elements. These homogeneous representations also carry significance in decoding some of the codes that help understand and define the contours of the new society.

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