Social Survey of Al-Ashraf Street

Executive Summary

Beside the large number of historic buildings and sites, Al Ashraf Street, Al Khalifa district in Fatimid Cairo is rich with diverse crafts, skills and human resources. However, there is empirical underutilization and noticeable threat of destruction of many such resources. This study is a hopeful attempt to observe, analyze and identify a number of areas, where Megawra could act on in its endeavor to conserve heritage sites through community participation.

The study is a rapid ethnographic account that collected knowledge, attitudes and practices of residents and commuters of Al Ashraf Street towards the street, using over 15 in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions to supplement systematic observations over six weeks in August 2015.

The study analyses data according to a simple framework that assumes a mutually reinforcing relationship between dilapidated physical infrastructure and urban poverty. Dilapidation is the condition and state of disrepair or ruin due to aging and neglect. With the exception of few mausoleums under conservation and two newly constructed apartment buildings, most buildings, open spaces, infrastructure networks, and utilities on the main street and its side alleyways are empirically dilapidated.

The study indicated that dilapidation was directly related to the following five dimensions of urban poverty:

1. Inadequate personal capabilities due to poor health, malnutrition, low levels of education, a lack of skills necessary for gainful employment, and an inability to provide education and training for children
2. A lack of opportunity for economic and social advancement, such as access to markets and ownership of assets, educational opportunities, health facilities, training and skills development, and a lack of social networks (relatives, friends, community members) that can provide assistance
3. Disempowerment arising from a lack of opportunity to participate in public and community decision-making, a lack of access to information that can guide personal decisions, unresponsiveness of public officials to the demands of the poor, and a lack of accountability of public officials to the poor.
4. Insecurity and exposure to external shocks, such as sudden loss of income, serious illness, and natural or human-caused calamities and disasters, including fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, strikes, riots, civil disorders, and terrorist acts.
5. A sense of relative poverty arising from the wide gap between the rich and the poor in urban areas, which can cause apathy, hopelessness, despondency, a lack of initiative, dependency, and fatalism as well as aggression, anger, rebellion, and antisocial behavior.

Although there is general sense of apathy among residents towards dilapidation. However, unlike the argument that people's attitudes are behind the dilapidation of utilities, buildings and

infrastructure. This study stresses that the case of Al Ashraf Street is mainly the result of the interaction of four factors:

1. Pressures - from private entrepreneurs to make profits and from local government to 'develop' many areas of Cairo physically - drive competition over space and resources;
2. Lack of practical tools in the hands of community members to improve, let alone, defend their existence
3. A dwindling scope for the community to promote a sense of belonging beyond the 'parochial' family networks and the patron-client relationships that existed during the Mubarak regime
4. Very poor to non-existent planning and management guidance from private or public agencies. This includes lack of instruments for the effective use of open spaces, and lack of guidance for prevention of underuse, neglect, potential danger, and expensive maintenance.

For the street to be salvaged and turned into a vibrant economic machine, Megawra could work on the following areas:

a. Reactivation of master guilds to capture the skills of senior artisans and re-establish the institution of apprenticeship through creating effective training spaces with appropriate infrastructure in open spaces the street

b. Conduct 'skill survey' to identify existing individual and community knowledge, especially among women, and to identify local experiences with infrastructure and building management as well as household and enterprise management skills. The survey would establish a skill database for better community development and integration into Megawara's activities.

c. Target youth through small computer literacy workshops. The goal is to incubate young women and men into innovating smart solutions to community and street problems using extant free computer applications or devising new ones.

d. Target work and labor relations across the range of enterprises on the street. There is an immediate need to address issues of wages and compensations, punishment of mal-practices, division of labor, apprenticeships, workers' safety and dignity as well as peer learning.

Table of Contents

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The Arabic subtitle of this report was a quotation that one of the participants stated and that seemed to sum up much of what this ethnography revealed. However, it also concealed a lot.

The main location of this study is Al Khalifa district, south of Cairo and west of Salah Eddin Citadel. The district hosts more than three hundred mosques and more than a hundred mausoleums and tekkiyas[1] dated between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries. Al Ashraf Street, the focus of this study, is the southern part of Al Khalifa street and the short stretch that links it to El Sayyida Nafissa Mosque. The street is almost three-hundred meters long between Al Saliba Street and El Sayyida Nafissa roundabout.

The street has multiple names. While many residents and commuters know it as Al Khalifa street, others call it Al Ashraf or Al Ashraf Khalil, reference to the Mamluk Sultan Alashraf Khalil, son of Khatoun Hanem, wife of Sultan Ezz El Din Aybak. The street is flanked on both sides with a substantial number of monuments from Fatimid and Mamluk eras and is well known for several 'holy' mausoleums of members of Prophet Muhammed's family (PBUH). It is also the location of diverse heritage and contemporary crafts. Families engaged in heritage crafts, such as rug weaving, known locally as *hasseer* and clog making, *qabaqeeb* took residence in the street hundreds of years ago. Some of those families remain part of the street fabric as residents or as names on alleyways.

Economic and demographic transformations brought changes to the street. A number of contemporary crafts emerged or moved into the street, such as aluminum wielding, carpentry, coal and construction businesses and workshops. Commercial activities such as wholesale and retail shops in addition to several coffee stands and cafeterias also emerged.

Although the street might not seem as busy on any weekday as the rest of Al Khalifa, it remains the visiting place of worshippers of the holy shrines, the traffic junction between Salah Salem Street and Al Khalifa quarter. Its coffee houses remain sites of daily business transactions, and its charity organizations, the place for the destitute to seek a meal.

In addition to its architectural and livelihood importance, the street is part of a congested living quarter, in one of Cairo's highly populated neighborhoods, with around 140,666 persons as on 01/07/2014. As such, it carries a considerable electoral weight at times of elections. Hosting a substantial electoral constituency, the street has been site of patron-client political dynamics between candidates and families living and running businesses on the street, during consecutive parliamentary elections prior to January 2011 uprising.

---

[1] http://www.cairo.gov.eg/areas/DistDetails.aspx?DID=%D8%AD%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9 accessed on 10/11/2015

As many of Cairo's Fatimid streetscapes, Al Ashraf is a space of happening and change, at the same time that it is a site of urban blight. Many buildings are dilapidated, and locked up in ever-present stalemates between the Ministries of Antiquities and Endowments. A stroll down the street from Sayyida Nafissa Mosque reveals a palimpsest of successive yet contradictory, renovations by consecutive governmental and development agencies. Physical infrastructure networks are also blighted and ill maintained.

Nevertheless, the street hosts Megawra, a sprouting community development initiative seeking participatory engagement of residents and local artisans and young people in conservation activities. Unlike the majority of community development initiative, Megawra seeks continuous participation in the conceptualization, design and implementation of architectural conservation.

This study examines the ways residents and commuters relate to and interact with Al Ashraf Street. It distinguishes between three main aspects of interactions: a Peoples' knowledge of the street in terms of its physical features, sites, open spaces, administrative boundaries, legal regulations, gathering/public sites, b Peoples' attitudes towards the streets' abovementioned aspects, and c Peoples' behaviors as evident in their daily use of and interactions with and within the street. The study then observes how knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (KAP) inform participants' interactions over six substantive areas, namely, garbage and waste, safety and security, comfort and freedom of movement, homelessness, and hygiene, in addition to historical/heritage sites.

The purpose is not only to describe daily life through those interactions, but also to examine participants' ideas and suggestions to improve the overall salubrity and sustainability of the streetscape.

Study Methods

This is a quick ethnographic account of the street. A lead researcher and an experienced support used multiple methods in order to validate findings.

- Casual systematic observations of activities on the street, repeated over two weeks at three time slots: mornings between 7 – 9, mid-days between 1 – 4 and evenings around 6 – 9.

- Casual conversations with commuters asking about directions from the street to areas surrounding the neighborhood or places to have a meal or coffee.

- Keeping journals of sporadic events or occurrences such as a social event (e.g. wedding) or a visit by a government official.

- Fifteen in-depth interviews with residents, shop keepers, workshop and factory owners, community development officers as well as visitors using snowball technique to facilitate access to pools of participants

- Four focus group discussions with female residents (2), young people, and senior citizens

The Analytical Framework

This study follows a simple framework for the analysis of the collected ethnographic data. The main variable analyzed is access of urban dwellers to physical infrastructure, social support networks and open spaces. The study examines the factors that affect such access. It argues that access is a function of the health and wealth capacities of residents. Numerous statistical databases on access to infrastructure in Cairo exist, which often give us a static picture of urban conditions. Notwithstanding their importance, this study focuses on the dynamics of access and the factors that affect it through gathering and analyzing qualitative, experiential and interpretive data.

The operational definition of access to physical infrastructure is individual and household's access to rented or owned utilities (dwelling space, productive job, open public spaces, and social support networks) – regardless of the condition of infrastructure or the security of the job or the effectiveness of social support. What matters is access of each participant to those four elements of urban survival.

Health and wealth statuses are defined operationally as:

a. Inadequate personal capabilities due to poor health, malnutrition, low levels of education, a lack of skills necessary for gainful employment, and an inability to provide education and training for children
b. A lack of opportunity for economic and social advancement, such as access to markets and ownership of assets, educational opportunities, health facilities, training and skills development, and a lack of social networks (relatives, friends, community members) that can provide assistance
c. Disempowerment arising from a lack of opportunity to participate in public and community decision-making, a lack of access to information that can guide personal decisions, unresponsiveness of public officials to the demands of the poor, and a lack of accountability of public officials to the poor.
d. Insecurity and exposure to external shocks, such as sudden loss of income, serious illness, and natural or human-caused calamities and disasters, including fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, strikes, riots, civil disorders, and terrorist acts.
e. A sense of relative poverty arising from the wide gap between the rich and the poor in urban areas, which can cause apathy, hopelessness, despondency, a lack of initiative, dependency, and fatalism as well as aggression, anger, rebellion, and antisocial behavior.

The above indicators complement statistical indicators of poverty, namely, lack of sufficient income to access and satisfy basic needs and lack of the recommended daily allowance of nutritional and calorific intake.

Beside the above aspects of the social dynamics of the street, this study examined the concept of 'work' as part of the broader concept of salubrity, and as experienced by participants. In its approach to work, this study examined four aspects:

1. The location of the street relative to main transport arteries
2. Entrances to the street and the types of commuters and vehicles
3. Dilapidation and the condition of infrastructure
4. Work relations and the meanings attached to work.

The main assumption of this study is that access to dwelling space, productive job, open public spaces, and social support networks determines participants' worldviews of their present and their futures. Similarly, access to those livelihood necessities is organic to shaping their wills to improve and develop the street and their existence within it.

The study would synthesize findings about the abovementioned dynamic indicators in order to represent an ethnographic account of the knowledges, attitudes and behaviors of residents and commuters regarding the five substantive themes of the study namely, garbage and waste, safety and security, comfort and freedom of movement, homelessness, hygiene, and historical/heritage.

Findings

Dilapidation and Physical Health

The physical state of buildings is the subject of a survey of buildings that ran parallel to this social survey. However, the pictures below depict the empirical dilapidation and hazardous state of infrastructure and buildings – some with limited to no maintenance.

منظفات مكة

الرماح الطير مجمع الرماح الطير

عيادات جميع التخصصات

باطنة - أطفال - جراحة - عظام
علاج طبيعي - نساء وتوليد
وحدة أسنان متكاملة
جلدية و تناسلية - أنف وأذن وحنجرة
معمل تحاليل
غرفة عمليات مجهزة
غرف اقامة فردية
أشعة تلفزيونية - رسم قلب

١١١٢٧٠٠٥٧٠ - ٠١٠١٢١٩٣٠٨٠

In terms of the analytical framework, **inadequate and hazardous physical infrastructure has direct detrimental effects on health of residents and commuters alike**.

> *Um Nader is 43 years old, born and raised in Al Ashraf and lives in a dilapidated house on Sayyida Nafissa Street. Her father built the house around 200 years ago and her brother inherited it upon their father's death. The brother brought-in his wife and family before engaging in drug trade and subsequent imprisonment, leaving them without a 'decent' source of income or livelihood. Meanwhile, Um Nader struggled with a husband who deserted her for another wife, leaving her with the priority to fend for two sons and brother's family. House maintenance took the back seat and the situation worsened with the 1992 earthquake, leaving the house in a dilapidated condition. In her words, the balcony was severely damaged that one day her elder son fell off and incurred permanent physical impairment that made him ineligible for gainful employment.*
>
> *Once out of prison, Um Nader's brother was able to build and start a kiosk, as a physical extension to their father's house entrance. However, due to bullying by police and strongmen on the street, the brother was currently unable to run the business. Um Nader took over. Constant bullying and threats to demolish the kiosk however, compelled her to sleep in the kiosk to protect it. Few years ago, she was diagnosed with a chronic neuromuscular disease that several doctors associated with living in a humid, badly ventilated space. With limited means of livelihood and precarious social support, she remained unable to fix the house, protect the kiosk and get effective medical intervention. On a positive note, spending the nights inside the kiosk made her privy to 'night happenings' on the street and contributed to her knowledge of the neighborhood.*
>
> *Whereas, physical deterioration and dilapidation were responsible for her chronic poor health, her meagre income exacerbated her condition. Low, inconsistent earnings limited her capacity to eat well and resulted in lack of proper nutrition. Nonetheless, Um Nader was instrumental in explaining the dynamics whereby inadequate infrastructure contributed to bad physical health on the street. She introduced us to three women who rented small apartments in her house. All three had chronic joint ailments due to bad ventilation and humidity. Parasitic insects thriving on humidity and dilapidated wooden panels were equally hazardous to the health of children and adults living in the house.*

Dilapidation also indirectly contributed to bad health by diverting household expenditures away from adequate food and clothing towards the repair of repeated cracks and breakages of drinking water pipelines, electric connections, and drainage networks.

Dilapidation and Bad Governance

Particularly in the aftermath of the 1992 earthquake, government agencies declared several buildings as hazardous and issued demolition warrants. **Many such dilapidated buildings got deserted and served as 'loci of evil'.** There were anecdotal evidence concerning their owners – informants hinted that a number of those buildings belonged to 'powerful families' in the neighborhood. According to several participants, those buildings could collapse anytime and cause irreparable damage to the street, to people and to nearby buildings. Similarly, they developed into meeting spots for drug addicts and hoodlums, thus contributed to the rising levels of *baltaga* on the street.

The architectural designs and building materials of many buildings on the street are outdated or expensive to repair or substitute. They required special maintenance and conservation skills that were no longer available on the street or at engineering departments of governmental agencies. This deficiency was behind many participants' despair concerning the improvement of physical infrastructure and buildings' conditions. While this deficiency had its origins in several political and economic forces. However, one participant stressed that migration of skilled artisans and engineers out of Egypt in the early seventies combined with the substitution of locally manufactured building materials with cheaper and less durable Chinese versions in the nineties sealed the fate of Fatimid Cairo's architectural designs and the maintenance of its buildings into oblivion.

Poor and inconsistent governance was another important factor in dilapidation. There were several cases of demolition warrants issued for ground floors and basements of buildings. Participants claimed that those warrants were not based on 'engineering wisdom' and that those sections under demolition were 'repairable.' Combined with lack of appropriate building materials or skills and expertise, the lack of sensible governance exacerbates dilapidation's impact on collective social health.

Lack of engineering wisdom exasperates efforts to maintain existing networks of water and drainage and does not solve the incipient impacts of groundwater. One informant, who moved to Al Ashraf in the early 1990s, invited the researchers to visit the street at midnight one day. He uncovered two cases of ad hoc interception of draining pipelines carried out by unskilled engineers from the local government agency, in collaboration with few residents in one of Al Ashraf's alleyways. In his account, those and similar incidents help deteriorate already precarious old networks. Similarly, the problem of underground water endemic to the street was rarely, if ever addressed, and contributed to dilapidation of several buildings and residential apartment houses.

Another governance-related factor was **inconsistency of fare collection by government bodies**. Women who participated in focus group discussions explained how government collectors often skipped months before collecting metered electric usage. This inconsistency made it difficult for householders to manage budgets systematically and contributed to precarious household finances.

Maintenance and reconstruction efforts were regime-dependent and inconsistent. Many senior participants recalled how specific renovation and maintenance activities were undertaken during parliamentary election times, such as maintenance of Khalil Al Ashraf building on 45 Sayyida Nafissa Street and Sheikha Nabila house during Fathy Sorrour parliamentary stint.

One of the participants spoke about an attempt by a group of 'keen' citizens to buy a famous house on the street with the intention to renovate and conserve it. "They paid around thirty million pounds, but then it remains deserted and has even worsened in condition."

Fragmentation of Cognitive Safety Networks and Personal Inadequacy

While Um Nader and almost all participants expressed how physical dilapidation of their houses contributed to their poor health and malnutrition, they also stressed that other factors were equally responsible for individual inadequacy. Literature on dilapidated neighborhoods, in old cities of the South, stressed how exposure to external shocks - such as sudden loss of income, serious illness, and natural or human-caused disasters (fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, strikes, riots, civil disorders, and terrorist acts) results in fragmentation of residents' cognitive social safety networks, and leads to insecurity and a heightened sense of personal inadequacies.

In the aftermath of the 1992 earthquake, many families left their houses on the street. While senior members of several such families remained, many apartments were left vacant. Participants explained how several buildings, deserted after the earthquake were illegally passed-on to strongmen, supported by high-ranking police officers and/or members of parliament under the deposed Mubarak regime. In their turn, the new landlords rented apartments to young men seeking employment in the street's workshops and in surrounding neighborhoods. Those young men were not fully integrated into the social solidarity networks that developed in the street over hundreds of years. **Those young men were not accountable to senior street figures; they were constantly on the move in and out of the street and consequently posed a threat to the safety of the street's residents.**

Some famous and 'powerful' families on the street managed to demolish old houses and build high-rise apartment houses on the street. Meanwhile, several 'new comers' rented workshops and retail shops. **The influx of migrant laborers as well as new residents had an impact on the perceived trust mechanisms of the street**. One middle-aged participants captured this in few words of wisdom, "*when I was born the street was full of friends to share food with. Over time, it was full of friends-over-coffee and now, it has business-friends only*"

Nevertheless, according to several senior participants in the study, many families who left after the earthquake retained their workshops in the street. Many of their members visited the street daily in order to run their workshops, visit the holy shrines and sustain relations with friends. Over time, they emerged as mediators of disputes on the street. The community bestowed upon them a kind of cognitive legitimacy. Senior citizens such as Mr. Mohammed El Shishayi (86 years old) who owns a workshop on the street considered themselves the 'genuine witnesses to the streets' history and its transformations. They continued to perform community social

functions such as resolution of conflicts, protection of tenants' rights, guarantors of loans, arbitration over money lending and sometime paying debts on behalf of defaulters in difficult times. Those community figures represent 'traditional' community solidarities, associated with similar neighborhoods of Fatimid Cairo

In addition to those figures, there were also patron families who liaised with government agencies and politicians to secure favors among 'weaker' residents of the street. Those families also ran businesses on the street or were associated with particular enterprises. In-depth interviews identified ten such families, who seemed to enjoy socially accepted authority. There was the Arbagiya, whose members worked in house rentals, money lending and construction businesses. Maida family worked in construction businesses and enjoyed substantial sway over other businesses and residents on the street. Salem Sedeeqq family also worked in construction businesses, while Abbass Awad and Siyam families worked in gypsum manufacturing. Al Bagoury family owned and ran lucrative coffee houses across from Sayyida Nafissa Mosque. Al Omda worked in trade and carpentry, while Al Sunni were backers. Abul Rokab, Al Omda, Maida and Al Arbagia were powerful mainly because of their political ties to the now dissolved National Democratic Party under the deposed regime.

Solidarity mechanisms have implications on equity, personal adequacy and thus urban poverty. The literature on urbanization in several cities of the South indicated that **the erosion of primordial loyalties and the creation of new groupings and factions did not promote inclusive urban spaces. Instead, it promoted exclusivity**. The families mentioned above extended patron-client relationships to non-member residents of the street, including widows, divorcees, persons with differential capabilities, the homeless, religious figures, caretakers of charitable organizations and wage laborers. In the process, they could occasionally deploy strongmen, thugs and informers to control their clientele and regulate access to market and skill acquisition opportunities. In-depth interviews indicated how research participants bestowed a large degree of cognitive legitimacy to those families as gatekeepers to accessing seed capital, wage work and even school admissions.

It was through connecting to members of those families that many shopkeepers secured goods at 'reasonable' prices for their retail outlets, old widows received permanent stays in old-rental apartments and small government employee got school admissions for their children. Since most of those services/favors could not be easily accessed through formal channels, a trade-off was struck among participants. Access in return for families' control over the distribution of inequitable opportunities to markets, educational opportunities, health facilities, training and skills development, and support from social networks (relatives, friends, community members). This study could not draw an accurate map of those patron-client networks due to the sensitivity of the issues under investigation especially with the researcher's association with Megawra. However, social network mapping would be a useful exercise for community development activities.

Although many participants did not refer to personal favors as corruption. They were definite about **corruption in the public food distribution system as endemic to the street**. The resurgence of patron-client regimes across the newly established distribution outlets on the street was a recurrent theme in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Bread Kiosks would

not distribute rations equitably, and they were in cahoots with restaurants on the street. On the other hand, many participants received their due rations even without issuing ration cards. A number of participants expressed their dismay and disappointment in the new system because of its resemblance to the old regime.

Inequities, Common Sense and Apathy

As indicated in the analytical framework above, urban poverty was not only lack of adequate income and nutrition. It involved a sense of relative poverty as well. That sense arises from the wide gap between the rich and the poor in urban areas, which can cause apathy, hopelessness, despondency, lack of initiative, dependency, and fatalism as well as aggression, anger, rebellion, and antisocial behavior. Did the study identify any such dispositions?

Yes! Explicit discussions of wealth gaps did not arise in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. However, several participants had taken such gaps for granted. This study stresses that the systematically increasing gap between powerful and connected families and the 'rest' of residents, will systematically reduce the chances for improvement of poverty conditions. It will decrease the opportunities for education, social and healthcare services, security and community building as well as reduce accessibility to resources and information to the elite minority. **The taken-for-granted nature of participants' perceptions of wealth gaps would result in apathy and loss of hope for empowerment. Wealth gaps-as common sense is a dangerous social disposition that occludes any participatory attempts for community development**.

Similarly, **the patron-client relationships generated a sense of complacency especially among female participants in this study**. The majority of them claimed that they felt safe on the street and its alleyways due to the sense of intimacy created by family-patrons and the physical protection they provide for the 'weaker' sections of residents. Those feelings contradict with their statements regarding the dangers of repeated outbreaks of weapons and arms' violence, the verbal aggressions and the spread of drug trade and consumption among many youths on the street.

"I live in Darb El Masdood and my neighbor here is from Atfet Abou Kila. Sometimes we go out at midnight to buy dinner for our kids. We feel safe because most men on the street know us personally and we also know them personally. If any woman steps out in the night, all men would ask her whereabouts and offer to run the errand on her behalf" A female group participant

Several factors contributed to their sense of safety. Besides the intimacy borne out of familiarity, women and young men who participated in this study believed that **proximity to holy shrines deterred potential offenders**. The study did not attempt to examine the validity of this association, but observations contradicted it. Many participants stated how **drug consumption and illicit trafficking took place within the dilapidated buildings next to holy shrines and in the vicinity of mausoleums and graveyards**.

Community Decision-Making, Access to Information and Powerlessness

Physical dilapidation and organic patron-client relations were not the only causes of apathy and complacency among participants. Participants' statements pointed at other factors.

Although drug addiction among youths came first, **participants were unequivocal about their sense of despair and disempowerment associated with a lack of opportunity to participate in public and community decision-making.** This was the case with the majority of participants, but particularly true in the case of female and young respondents. The latter felt complete isolation with regards to use of open spaces and resolution of disputes in the street.

All adult participants recalled a single incident of community collaboration and consultation. They referred to household garbage collection and disposal. The latter emerged as a serious problem few years back. Garbage compiled at multiple spots on the street causing stench and gathering insects. Residents came together from Al Ashraf and Sayyida Nafissa streets and organized funds and liaised with district authority and private garbage collectors. Participants remained proud of that community collaborative initiative but lamented the present complacency towards other physical and social ills on the street.

A lack of access to information that could guide personal decisions, and the unresponsiveness of public officials to their demands, in addition to a lack of accountability of public officials were other pathologies.

There was a consensus about the prevalence of the following social ills combined with a pervasive sense of powerlessness to deal with them:

- Violence on the street and alleyways, including verbal aggression and use of obscenities among young people in public. Disrespect to elders was a 'daily normalcy.' Some elderly participants explained disrespect as an outcome of income independence, while others related it to drug consumption.

"العيل رجله شالته خلاص مبقاش يحترم الكبير"

"المخدرات أكلت دماغهم وخلت الواد من دول يحس انه بطل"

- The feeling of vulnerability when fights break out on the street and when retailer hoard and exploit consumers. There was a consensus among senior participants that the street

had undergone several transformations. One such transformations concerned the types of new comers. The influx of migrant laborers and wage earners, who conducted their businesses at several coffee shops on the street, decreased familiarity and the cognitive intimacy associated with it. For many participants, the nature of the people determined the nature of the street.

الشارع هو الناس والناس هي الشارع

- Disrespect of common, open spaces. Shop keepers taking over pavements illegally, oblivious of the rights of others to the same spaces.

- Absence of police security 'around the clock.' Participants indicated that police presence was not regular. Instead, the patterns of police patrols reflected incidents of "VIP" visitors to holy shrines, during religious functions, as well as ad hoc security measures in Al Khalifa district. Due to a lack of access to information, participants claimed that they had no control over police presence on the street.

- Complaints to district authorities were rarely heeded; complainers usually received no response. Several participants recalled multiple incidents in the past where they personally filed complaints with police units and district local government units received no response. This was a major factor behind the pervasive sense of despair and helplessness among participants.

- The sense of helplessness manifested in how participants behaved regarding the phenomenon of careless driving and irrational use of motor-bikes up and down the street, which was hazardous to pedestrians, especially children.

- Similarly, participants were paralyzed regarding the emergence of '*dawaleeb*' or drug distributors at specific spots along the street, especially after the arrest of Taha El Harami - a famous drug dealer in Sayyida Aisha neighborhood of Al Khalifa Street. Some participants knew drug distributors by name, yet they would not dare report to police or to powerful families on the street, due to fear of retaliation and in order to preserve the patron-client relationships.

Work, Leisure, Charity and Self-worth!

At the time of this study, Al Ashraf Street hosted diverse crafts and artisanal workshops in addition to coffee houses, restaurants, cafeterias, charity organizations and factories. It looked as if it was 'self-sufficient'! This observation compelled the study to add 'work' to the gamut of social dynamics of the street. Hence, in its approach to work, this study examined four factors:

1. The location of the street relative to main transport arteries
2. Entrances to the street and the types of commuters and vehicles
3. Dilapidation and the condition of infrastructure
4. Work relations and the meanings attached to work.

Pros and Cons of Location and Access

The street is an axial link between Salah Salem road and the 'inner' quarters of Fatimid Cairo. As such, it hosts considerable traffic around the week. Automobiles, motorbikes, *tuk tuks*, and non-motorized vehicles ply constantly on the street. This poses serious hazards to pedestrians and the already shaky and dilapidated state of heritage sites and other buildings on both sides of the street. Not to mention, air and noise pollution. **No records of traffic, vehicle-related traumas and accidents or of pollution have come to the knowledge of this study. Ditto, any studies testing the impacts of traffic on buildings.**

While several participants complained about the hazards to pedestrians, they suggested widening of the street! They associated traffic density to increased work opportunities: more traffic meant more work coming to workshops and enterprises on the street.

The axial location of the street also contributed to ease of access to job opportunities in and around the street. Many wage laborers interviewed stated that the street was easily accessible from multiple locations and through diverse means of transport. While some residents claimed that the street's multiple entry points jeopardized safety, many stressed that it was positive for business enterprises. Nevertheless, no reliable study exists to validate such claims.

The valid observation however, concerned the fact that the street seemed to offer multiple employment opportunities in diverse enterprises from aluminum and oxygen wielding, to wood works and carpentry, hairdressing, street vending, coal workshops, bakeries and fortune telling.

Extant Work Relations and Demeaning Self-worth

Enterprise owners and managers complained that many of them had to divert their efforts away from their 'passion-talents'. For instance, a number of iron and copper masons had to shift their businesses and started coffee shops on the street in the 1990s due to the influx of Chinese copper and iron products that 'killed' their market.

Workshop owners and managers also complained about the deterioration of skill levels among old artisans and the lack of skilled labor. Most of the latter had migrated in the seventies and eighties of the past century to the Gulf States and even to the West.

The increasing costs of operating workshops compelled many participants to reduce power consumption, which in turn reduced the time spent training young apprentice inside workshops and hence contributed to skill-level deterioration.

Many master artisans spent their time away from their workshops, seeking clients or doing work-on-site in new settlements around Cairo and Giza. Meanwhile, they cut expenses by closing down their workshops on the street.

There were several complaints about lack of interest among youths to work hard, or invest patiently in the acquisition of manual skills. Most young men sought easy occupations in mass and goods transit. Many sought loans to partner-in or buy *tuk tuks* and motor bikes. Jobs in goods and mass transit required no skills.

The deterioration of job opportunities on a national scale also contributed to the condition of work on the street. Several young men who participated in the study claimed that the last work assignment they received was at least a month ago. This had negative implications on wages, and expenditures on food and basic needs. Interviewees mentioned that over three months, they received only one meal a day. That was also mainly carbohydrate-loaded meals. Drug consumed a large chunk of their wages. However, drugs were crucial to self-worth.

To understand the importance of drugs in the daily lives of young wage-laborers, this study examined the meanings they attached to work. Work as participants perceived it, was a necessity to care for dependent family members. There was no mention of the modern concepts of man-hour productivity, efficiency or innovation. Instead, there were negative denominations as appears in this quotation:

"المنطقة هنا منطقة ظلم و غلب و شقا. ضيق الحال و ظلم أصحاب الشغل و الاسطوات و الأتاوات و العوض. يا أبله لولا الإصطباحه عليا النعمه كنت صورت قتيل هنا"

Probing revealed serious damaging work relations. Several cases of abuse were stated. Masters treated novice wage laborer badly and often times would cut their wages in reaction to minimal mal-practices. Delayed payments was rampant. There were no means of redressal, except to affiliate oneself with one of the powerful families on the street.

There was also social stereotyping particularly targeting young men from Upper Egypt as well as people with differential capabilities. Besides its material consequences in terms of access to work and accommodation on the street, negative stereotyped caused severe psychological damage to many such residents and wage-seekers who participated in this study.

Incidentally, while there was a noticeable tolerance to homeless individuals and an implicit understanding that Life's Harsh Circumstances drove them into homelessness. There was an equally noticeable sarcasm in how many participants interacted with people with differential capabilities. Mothers of children with differential capabilities – both mental and physical, who participated in focus group discussions, expressed their embarrassment and distress over how people on the street treat their children.

Suggestions for Further Research and Intervention

For the street to be salvaged and turned into a vibrant economic machine, Megawra could work on the following areas:

a. Reactivation of master guilds to capture the skills of senior artisans and re-establish the institution of apprenticeship through creating effective training spaces with appropriate infrastructure in open spaces the street

b. Conduct 'skill survey' to identify existing individual and community knowledge, especially among women, and to identify local experiences with infrastructure and building management as well as household and enterprise management skills. The survey would establish a skill database for better community development and integration into Megawara's activities.

c. Target youth through small computer literacy workshops. The goal is to incubate young women and men into innovating smart solutions to community and street problems using extant free computer applications or devising new ones.

Target work and labor relations across the range of enterprises on the street. There is an immediate need to address issues of wages and compensations, punishment of mal-practices, division of labor, apprenticeships, workers' safety and dignity as well as peer learning.