

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

ECONOMY AND BELIEFS AMONG THE CAIRO POOR

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by

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ABSTRACTECONOMY AND BELIEFS AMONG THE CAIRO POOR

by

Marlene Michel Kanawati (Anawati)

Through a phenomenological approach and the adoption of an ethnographic methodology, this thesis is a study of a poor community in a residential slum quarter of Cairo. Both objective and subjective aspects of the poor's everyday life were studied with a view to giving a rounded picture of their life-world, life-style, problems, coping responses and the social construction of their reality. In the process, slum daily life, occupation structure, housing, diet, clothing, education, health and recreation were described and the economic problems and budgets related to them were examined and described. Models were drawn wherever possible. Institutions used by the poor to cope with their economic problems were revealed and distinguished into formal and informal institutions. The former were largely established through government policy, while the latter were either devised by the poor, or devised by others to service them.

In the process of this study, non-economic mechanisms were revealed, mainly cultural ones, among which religion was by far the most important. It was supported and reinforced by the Egyptian cultural heritage in the form of various aspects of folklore, and cultural beliefs and typifications. Part of the Aims of this study was to obtain a definition by the poor of their own situation. Thus, the study reveals the poor's own definition of their poverty in their own terms. This allowed typifications of themselves as poor and of their life-style to emerge. These typifications formed the conceptual tools with which their reality was socially constructed. In the process of their definition, important aspects of their world-view

## Abstract (continued)

were revealed, which acted as psychological coping mechanisms in preserving a dignified self-image, in conditions which contributed to impose on them serious limitations and humiliations.

Research in six other areas of Cairo confirmed these findings. Both Moslems and Christians were found to share this view of the poor's life-world, which led to the conclusion that their view was deeply anchored not only in notions embedded in the Heavenly religions, but also in the Ancient Egyptian cultural heritage. Two long accounts of these views by a poor woman and man illustrated the use of these conceptions and typifications through their elaboration of a philosophy of life that was used as a rationale and a coping mechanism to accept their harsh reality.

Major factors that affect this social construction of poverty were examined and their relative influence evaluated. The conclusions drawn define a tentative model of the "levels of poverty" and "characteristics of the poor". The findings of this research are related to the body of literature on poverty both in Western countries and in Egypt. They also help show the relationship between policy and economies at the macro level to the micro level of individuals and group. Finally, recommendations for policy and reform are drawn and suggestions for future research on poverty are advanced.

## DEDICATION

To the poor of Egypt who have  
suffered long and patiently  
yet maintained both faith in  
God and hope for a better  
world, I dedicate this work.



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I would like to thank all those who have helped me bring this work into existence. First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Ray Francis, for his efficient help and guidance during the period of study and residence in Hull. He gave generously and without measure of his time and effort, and tried to help me in various ways. His solid knowledge of the field and his quick perception of the main points in any argument have been a great help. To Professor Valdo Pons goes my deep appreciation and thanks for the precious advice and help he gave, particularly at critical moments during these seven years. I always knew I could rely on his understanding, and he never failed to extend his help, in spite of his numerous occupations and responsibilities. He has been a true and perceptive friend all through. Dr. Tania and Dr. Talal Asad have been my family and support during all my stay here. It is thanks to their kindness, considerateness, multi-varied help and interesting company that my period of study in Hull was made intellectually enriching and fruitful. I could never express the measure of my gratitude except to say that I shall always consider them my family. I am deeply indebted to the University of Hull for their kind and generous financial assistance provided through the Hull University studentship, without which, this thesis would not have been possible.

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in England. Without this help, it would have been impossible for me to devote to this work all the time it needed. To my daughter, I owe the confidence that her mum could really make it. Her understanding for years of study, since her youngest age, is far beyond what is normally forthcoming.

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### III

of their condition, and at best, the interest and concern of policy-makers and generous donors - enough to see effective programs being made and implemented towards achieving a 'relief' or 'farag' for which they, the poor, have been patiently and hopefully waiting.

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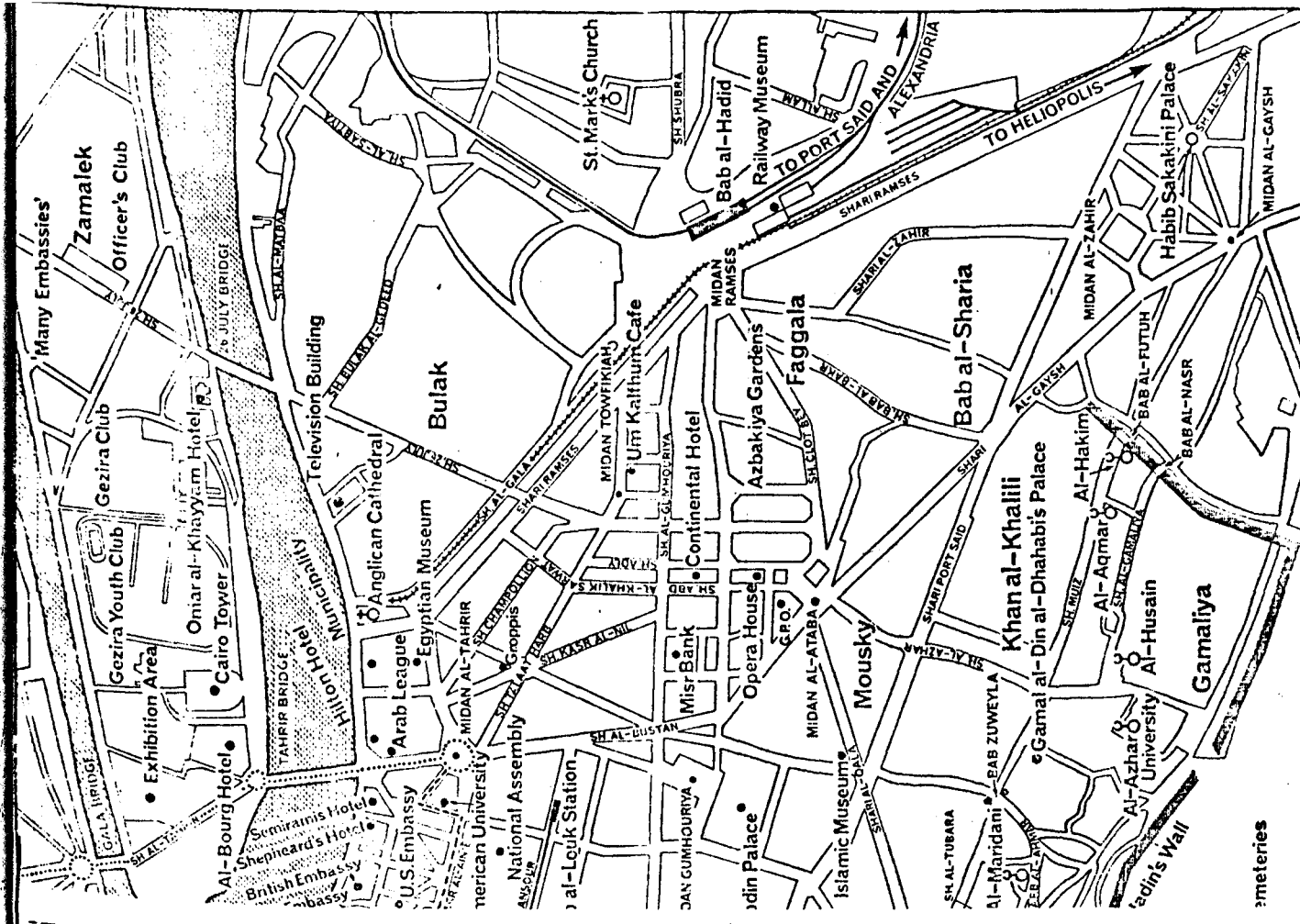
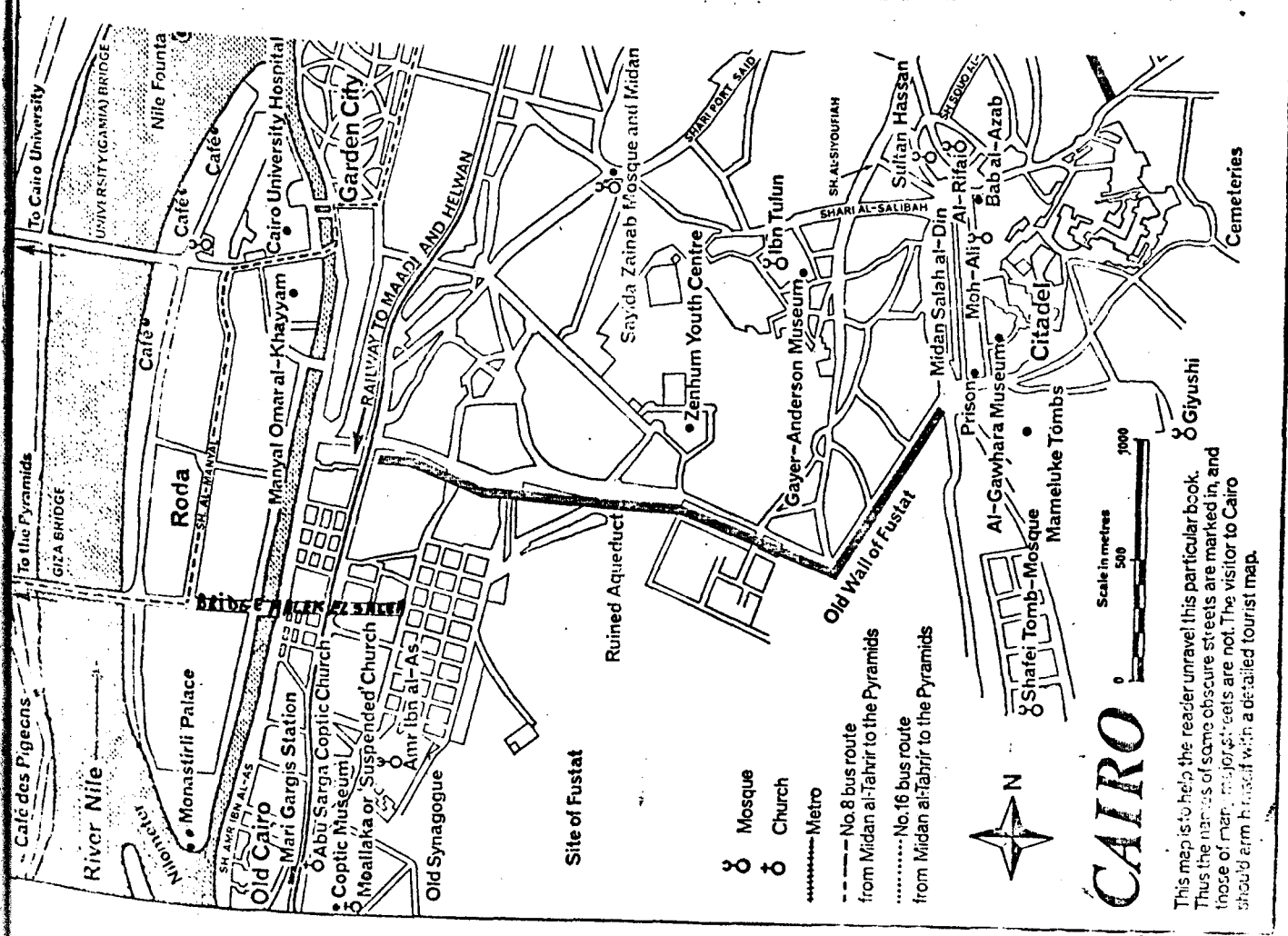
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# CAIRO

This map is to help the reader unravel this particular book. Thus the names of some obscure streets are marked in, and those of major streets are not. The visitor to Cairo should arm himself with a detailed tourist map.



## INTRODUCTION

That God sends the winds is a mystery, and the mountain is a mystery, but God said: 'Search in order that you may bring knowledge to yourself and to all people.'

Rashād: A rich poor man.

Egypt is a poor country, even by conservative estimates more than half the total population is considered poor. However, there are very few studies which attempt to describe how the poor actually live. The majority of studies of Egyptian poverty have been conducted at the macro-economic level, and these have been more concerned with "rural poverty" than with "urban poverty".

By and large, the image of the poor in Egyptian society is biased and degrading. The poor are looked upon with condescension (i.e. one to whom people feel they must give alms), otherwise they are often badly treated. Even among social workers the poor are sometimes seen as "lacking in dignity", "shiftless", "lazy" or "liars". Such an image calls for critical examination and modification, since the facts do not seem to fit the image.

No study of the Egyptian poor has attempted to identify the range of economic and cultural institutions, formal and informal, used by the poor as resources for coping with poverty. Nor has any study of the Egyptian poor attempted to describe the poor's own construction of the reality of their situation. The urban scene in general, and urban poverty in particular, has attracted little systematic attention.

This is no doubt due to the complexity of urban settings. However, it is also due to the lack of readily available theoretical frameworks.

The apparent complexity of social phenomena frequently bespeaks a lack of theoretical concepts available for their analysis.....  
..It is possible that the apparent complexity of social phenomena in African urban areas is

due simply to the fact that we do not as yet have the perspective with which to view these phenomena and bring them into focus. This perspective can only come when we have both the accumulation of data on urban population and the analytical effort applied to these to produce the simplification which is the characteristic of good theory.

(Mitchell, 1969)

The fieldwork which forms the core of this thesis involved a study of the everyday life of the poor in Cairo. The fieldwork was concerned to describe their material conditions of existence, their life-styles and their definitions and experiences of poverty. More specifically, the fieldwork was designed (a) to describe the range of economic and cultural institutions, formal and informal, used by the poor as resources for coping in their everyday life, and (b) to describe poverty through the eyes of the poor themselves.

The fieldwork took the form of an ethnographic study. Only such a methodology allowed for the period of intensive study and the detailed information demanded. Such a research strategy makes special allowance for indigenous concepts, meanings and interpretations to emerge and to be incorporated in the research process itself as it progresses. In the case of this study, the commitment to a phenomenologically informed ethnographic account reinforced this concern with indigenous concepts, meanings, descriptions and interpretations. The attention given to describing and explaining social phenomena in indigenous terms helps to combat the distortion of Egyptian social phenomena which results from the application of concepts derived from studies of British and American society.

It is important to note that ethnographic research is a very personally demanding, time-consuming and relatively expensive form of social research. This means that while ethnographic study provides important and relevant detailed information, it is a form of social research that policy-makers, planners and administrators find difficult

to implement themselves. This study seeks to contribute the kind of data which is only obtainable through such a methodology.

To observe Zeinab, the street-peddler, sitting at her trade in the hara or street, is not the same thing as sitting beside her on a stone—sitting for hours without moving, whether in the dry cold of January that penetrates one's bones, or in the full heat of summer's 40° C or more. As Zeinab sat there for hours, rubbing her aching legs to prevent them from going numb, amidst the dust, flies and crawling insects, the everyday experience of being a street-peddler is dramatically demonstrated. To go with Dawlat, another peddler, to the food co-operative, where we queued for hours amidst the heat and thirst of a July Ramadan day of fasting, only to return home empty handed because all the cheap meat she had gone to buy was sold, is an intensely personal and salutary experience.

It is not uncommon, in Cairo, to hear people say that, with regard to people like Zeinab and Dawlat, "the poor are used to it". However, the signs of physical discomfort, exhaustion, frustration and misery were clear for all to see. During these periods of sharing, Zeinab and Dawlat would discuss their thoughts, feelings and experiences. This provided a unique opportunity to share in the immediacy of their everyday lives. Moreover, this kind of sharing creates a bond that is denied in other forms of social research, providing information and insights that would otherwise not be attainable. The whole process involves a long and personal involvement with the people studied and a sharing of their daily round of activities.

CHAPTER ONE    A GENERAL PICTURE OF POVERTY IN EGYPT

"If poverty were a man, I would have killed him".  
An Arab General

The Scale of Poverty in Egypt

Whether it be according to the Goldthorpe model, or Samir Amin's categorization of the Arab World, or the United Nations, Egypt is a 'poor' country (El-Kordi, 1979:196-197; Amin, 1980:63). Its average per capita income is \$150 and its various services have quite a low ratio (El-Kordi, 1979:197-205).

The scale of poverty is always a problem to assess in terms of numbers or proportions, largely because some poverty line needs to be established, which often has to change with time, conditions and in accordance with standards of living. The latest estimates are given for rural and urban poverty separately. For rural poverty, Samir Radwan has established a poverty line of LE270 for a household of five persons, assumed to be 'the average Egyptian family'. Based on the 1974-1975 Household Budget Survey, there are 5,832,400 poor rural individuals, the percentage of poor households being 44% (IICPSR Report,<sup>1</sup> 1979:80-81; Hansen and Radwan, 1982:98-99). The per capita income is set at LE54 per year. The Report's per capita poverty line is LE50 and finds 9,165,000 poor individuals and 39% of poor rural households.<sup>2</sup> Abdel-Mooti (1979:49-50) finds that poor peasants form 88.9% of those working in agriculture according to a poverty line based on land-ownership of 3 feddans, since their income would set them in that bracket.

1. This is an unpublished report by the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research and the Rural Development Committee, Cornell University, "Socio-Economic Profile of Rural Egypt" (1979). It will be referred to from now on as IICPSR. Iliya Harik was the principal investigator. The report uses Radwan's "Agrarian Reform and Rural Poverty: Egypt 1952-1975" (1977), ILO, Geneva.
2. The report's total number of households is less than Radwan's.

Table 1    Comparison of Estimates of the Number of Rural Poor Households and Rural Poor Individuals

| Indicator                                      | Radwan's Estimate | Estimate of Report for Combined Sample |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Percent of rural households below poverty line | 44                | 39                                     |
| Number of households below poverty line        | 1,833,000         | 1,428,000                              |
| Percent rural population below poverty line    | 28                | 44                                     |
| Number individuals below poverty line          | 5,832,400         | 9,165,000                              |
| Per capita poverty line used                   | LE54              | LE50                                   |

Note: In the report's estimate the percentages are rounded to the nearest percent and the number of households and individuals are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research and Rural Development Committee, Cornell University, "Socio-Economic Profile of Rural Egypt", 1979.

As for the scale of urban poverty, even fewer data on its scope seem available. One of the more recent, based on the 1974-75 Urban Household Expenditure Survey by CAPMAS, reveals that those whose income is LE170 or below together with 'part-time workers' constitute 37 per cent of the urban population (AID Report, 1977:8). The latest study (Hansen and Radwan, 1982) takes two poverty lines based on two levels of income: LE250 and LE400 per annum respectively, for two levels of poverty. Their table, based on the CAPMAS Labour Force Sample Survey, indicates that in Cairo 29.6 per cent of households fall below the LE250 line; that is, LE20.83 per month, while 60.8 per cent of Cairene households fall below the LE400 poverty line, i.e. LE33.33 per month (Hansen and Radwan, 1982:130). For urban life, LE250 falls even below the poverty line calculated for rural areas by Radwan, which means even

greater poverty. The second line puts even more households in the poverty bracket than the AID Report's estimate. For urban areas in Egypt, as a whole, 32.5 per cent of households come within the LE250 line, while the LE400 line brings them up to 64.8 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

If such is the case, by a simple calculation we can roughly estimate that the urban poor range between 6.5 million and 12.96 million, depending on whether we take the LE250 or LE400 poverty line. This gives us an estimate of the total number of poor in both rural and urban areas, which would range between a minimum of 12,332,400 (if we take the Radwan estimate and the lower urban poverty line) and a maximum of 22,125,000 (if we take the two higher estimates for rural and urban areas). The latter estimate would put more than half the population within a wider poverty bracket, which would be no exaggeration. As the Household Survey was a sample survey and, according to the AID Report, was biased towards the higher income groups, it might well be that poverty was unintentionally under reported (AID Report, 1977:9).

### Causes of Poverty

Egypt's land is scarce and its mineral resources limited and not yet fully explored or exploited. Only recently, petroleum has begun to gain importance and could come to constitute a real wealth. The Suez Canal is another source of income on which the government relies for public spending.

Egypt's total area is about 386,900 square miles, but only about 3 per cent of its land is arable, though very fertile. Agriculture

1. The calculation made here is that if 9 million form 44 per cent of the rural population, then the total rural population is about 20 million. If the total Egyptian population were about 40 million at the time, then the urban population would be 20 million, and 32.5 per cent of them would be 6.5 million, while 64.8 per cent of them would be 12.96 million.

has been the most important sector of the Egyptian economy, contributing one-third of its product, and employing more than half of its labour force. Moreover, it has been the main source of foreign exchange through export, mainly of cotton.

It was in 1820 that long staple cotton was introduced to Egyptian agriculture by Mohamed Ali, bringing Egypt into the world market. This was to bring about a series of developments. First, more land was planted through more irrigation of both an "extensive" and "intensive" nature (Mabro, 1974:9). It was a time when labour was still short. Instead of being a subsistence economy, Egypt became an export-oriented economy. Investment went to fulfil the needs of the cotton trade, thus a cotton industry began. The transport sector was developed, banks and commercial firms were established and development in public utilities and construction was carried to serve the needs of a class that thrived on the cotton trade (Mabro, 1974:10). However, the peasant remained poor. Irrigation had brought to him bilharzia and other parasitic diseases which debilitated him.

In 1890, the institution of private landownership began. This system established inequality since some were given "very large holdings", while others remained landless (Mabro, 1974:10). The lot of the peasant did not improve much though he was freed from his ties to the land. Wages to the agricultural labourer were very low. Whenever the peasant could not pay his tax on the loans he had incurred to plant cotton, the land was taken away from him. There is evidence that for many years the peasant was oppressed (Mabro, 1974).

Meanwhile, after 1858, and under the two Khedives, first Saïd and then Ismaïl, Egypt incurred a foreign debt, which was to become the pretext for British occupation. Both the debt and colonial policy had a role in contributing to the impoverishment of the nation. The debt

meant a lack of funds for investment since the benefits of export had to go towards its payment, as well as to pay tribute to the Ottoman Porte (Mabro, 1974:14). The occupation meant immigration into Egypt of a large foreign community who profited from the "land, trade and finance" of the country, and yet were not taxed, since they themselves went to form part of the power structure. At that time a wealthy class of local people was formed who also dealt in trade and money-lending adding to the inequality (Mabro, 1974:22-23).

Colonial policy provided neither education nor industrial training, but limited its efforts to a foreign education to serve the foreign community and the élite. Only the ancient Islamic institution of Al-Azhar provided education, but it was so limited in scope that it left 92 per cent of the population illiterate. Colonial policy did not develop a modern industrial economy, and even imposed a tax on domestic textile production, thus also preventing diversification (Mabro, 1974:23-24).

Between 1900 and 1945, per capita income even fell, due mainly to a decline 'in the terms of trade' and to a 'fall in per capita production' (Mabro, 1974:14). However, between 1930 and 1939, there was investment both in agriculture and industrialization, and local industry thrived during World War II as imports were greatly reduced. But already Egypt had a population problem, and however productive the land may be, the ratio of land to men was low and labour-surplus in agricultural areas already meant unemployment and underemployment, as well as low productivity per person; this could only lower average incomes. Mabro believes that what was needed, then, was to modernize quickly the economy, but this was not possible due to lack of funds, skills and organizational abilities which the largely illiterate population did not have (Mabro, 1974).



On the eve of the revolution, in 1952, there were 1.3 million landless families. Besides, wages were low while land rents were high, and incomes were unstable due to seasonal labour and fluctuations in price and land yield - all of which made the situation even more difficult for poor peasants (Mabro, 1974:60-64). The country's wealth lay actually in the hands of a few. "Cotton exports which represented more than 80 per cent of the country's export trade were mainly handled by a few large firms dominated by giants" (Mabro, 1974:216). Most of the country's finances was handled by six banks, and most of the capital invested in the modern sector was held by two groups (Mabro, 1974:216). In short, there was great inequality and huge differences in income.

The revolution of 1952 which sought to establish a socialist society, began its work of reform with the Land Reform Law of 1952, then 1961 and 1969 successively, gradually reducing land possession from hundreds of feddans to 200 feddans at first, then 100 feddans and finally 50 feddans per individual<sup>1</sup> (Mabro, 1974:65-66). The idea was to reduce inequality by land re-distribution and by increasing the income of the small peasant. The High Dam was built to widen agricultural land by means of land reclamation which would provide the peasant with both land and employment (Mabro, 1974:83). Though it gave Egypt cheap electricity for industry and enormous irrigation possibilities all the year round, its construction was quite a strain on the economy and needed many capital intensive projects to fulfil its promise (Mabro, 1974:105-106).

The new government proceeded to diversify 'the economic structure, mainly through industrialization'. The State took over planning and created a public sector under whose wing various existing industries

1. 1 feddan = 1.038 acres.

were taken, once they were "egyptianized" or "nationalized", depending on whether they belonged to foreigners or involved nationals. All public utilities and institutions were nationalized (Mabro, 1974:107-109).

Minimum wages were established in the agricultural and industrial sectors, and later in other sectors of the economy. In agricultural areas, the minimum daily wage of a man was set at LEO.18 in 1952, while for women and children it was set at LEO.10.<sup>1</sup> However, this wage was not enforced until the mid-1960s (Mabro, 1974:65). For industrial workers, in 1953, it was fixed at LEO.25 plus 25 per cent of the net profits going to workers and employees, of which workers cashed only two-fifths while the rest went into welfare and insurance funds. They were given paid holidays, sick leave rights, and so on. However, after 1964, no more improvements came and inflation appears to have reduced the benefits (Mabro, 1974:153-154). Generally speaking, the revolution improved the conditions of peasants and workers relatively more than any other groups in society. As a result of nationalization, the percentage of income 'going to labour increased and correspondingly, the share of income going to capital decreased'. By 1969/70, a reversal had occurred and the percentage going to labour fell to 42.8 per cent while that of capital rose to 57.2 per cent (Abdel-Khalek, 1979:84). This was interpreted as the failure of socialist policy and a return to "private property and wealth" but "with no legal title" (Abdel-Khalek, 1979:84-85).

The revolutionary government had adopted a policy of price control which was meant both to improve income distribution and impose an indirect tax. This was economically defective, since it allowed

1. Mabro mentions in the notes that at that time, September 1949-June 1962, the Egyptian pound was equivalent to US dollars 2.872. Now, the Egyptian pound is equivalent to less than one dollar on the black market and officially US\$1 = LEO.84.

poorly produced commodities to be fixed at a higher price than deserved, while certain prices included indirect taxes even on everyday food items or textiles, which affected the poor. Another negative economic consequence was that some commodities were immediately bought and disappeared from the market, while others remained unsold. As government had to replace the former immediately, they had to be imported at high prices (Mabro, 1974:138).

Over-population meant that public spending had to be high, particularly since socialist policy promised equality. Expansion of education took a large part of investment and gave rise to higher expectations. It also gave impetus to migration to cities. These investments were not matched by increases in output. Fear of unemployment among the educated led to employment policies which led to further increase in education and government employment, and consequently to increase in consumption which could not be checked. Thus, there was a double drain on the economy (Mabro, 1974:230).

Increased consumption also led to more import demands for all types of goods, so that there was an export-import gap, resulting in a deficit in the balance of payments. Local industry could not compete with the world market, and aid had stopped coming in to finance the deficit. To make matters worse, the wars in which the country engaged needed arms purchases and other defence requirements (Mabro, 1974:231). These formed a serious drain on the economy and went further to impoverish the country. The revolution's commitment to "development programmes" in both rural and urban areas demanded further spending. In fact, among other things, health services and social welfare were developed and grew "faster than national income" (Mabro, 1974:36).

Mabro notes the overdevelopment of the tertiary sector which

absorbed 68 per cent of the increase in labour. As the government employed more and more of the educated, underemployment resulted, and investment went to create new jobs instead of being directed to more productive sectors of the economy, like agriculture or industry (Mabro, 1974:205-208). Such conditions are conducive to poverty.

Some important changes have occurred since 1971. With the 1973 war, domestic resources had been further exhausted. By 1974, there was an attempt both to make internal economic changes, and <sup>to</sup> restructure international economic relations (Abdel-Khalek, 1979), a trend which had already begun in 1971.<sup>1</sup> Restrictions on foreign investment and trade were removed, and all possible measures were taken to encourage it. It has come to be known as "the open-door economic policy" or "infatih". Egyptian economists have criticized this as leaving "no sanctuary for genuine national investment" (Abdel-Khalek, 1979:86). Another aspect of the opening to foreign investment is the fear of promoting "control by multinationals" leading to a "dependent development" which may endanger once more the country's political independence, drain its surplus and "establish and perpetuate a pattern of extraverted development" (Abdel-Khalek, 1979:87). This point has been raised by various Egyptian social scientists, amongst whom are Fouad Morsi in his "This Economic Open-door", Galal Amin (in an article in L'Egypte Contemporaine, 1980), Samir Amin (1980) and many others.

As Abdel-Khalek puts it, free import being determined "by the profit motive only", this would lead to consumer goods being imported, rather than "intermediate and capital goods", which could only be detrimental to economic growth (Abdel-Khalek, 1979:90). In fact, prices have soared since, and some individuals in the import-export trade and

1. Abdel-Khalek gives a detailed account of the various laws passed to achieve it between 1974 and 1977.

some other free sectors have become greatly enriched, while those on fixed incomes or wages are further impoverished. More seriously, the yearly deficit which runs into more than 1,000 million is accumulating. Increased "sources of exchange revenues" are needed otherwise problems of lack of investments and food-supplies will appear (Hansen and Radwan, 1982:34).

Meanwhile, the limitation of resources is even more acutely felt, yet possibilities of exploiting some of the untapped resources are open, while others that are known to exist just need capital intensive projects. This is seen by some as possible, but economists were complaining in 1979 that loans received "are not being used" (Abdel-Khalek, 1979:96). Two resources which did receive attention, and in which investments were made between 1975 and 1979, are yielding important revenues in foreign currency: the Suez Canal and the oil industry. Revenues from tourism and remittances from Egyptian emigrants are additional sources of foreign exchange. If these are properly invested, the situation could be improved (Hansen and Radwan, 1982:7-8). However, all of these are dependant on conditions in the area continuing to be stable.

Until recently, price control was practiced. But with the open-door policy, many items have been released and prices have soared. Subsidies are seen as a great burden on the faltering economy, and are being waved aside, resulting in the doubling of prices even of such basic foods as bread. Whatever the consequence for the economy, it is the poor at present who suffer and pay the price.

In short, poverty is certainly not decreasing, though the standard of living has definitely risen since the 1952 revolution. The challenge of the future appears to be more serious than ever. The problems are so numerous that they will possibly defy solution for a long time to

come.

Poverty in the absolute sense continues to be a problem both in rural and urban areas. Taken as a relative concept, poverty is a problem the country will never rid itself of, no matter how much progress and growth is achieved. The need for policies favouring the lower end of the income distribution will always exist.

(Hansen and Radwan, 1982:9)

For the moment poverty is a fact of everyday life, and if policies are needed, there is certainly the need for studies of poverty and the poor to inform such policies, and make them more relevant, effective and applicable.

### Social Stratification

Close knowledge of Egyptian society brings home to the social scientist the difficulty of stratifying Egyptian society according to the Western frameworks. One problem is that official statistics for the various years are not comparable and the details incomplete - a fact many scholars recognize. Second, is the lack of an appropriate conceptual tool for an Egyptian classification. Third, there is an empirical problem of classification where various historical, traditional, educational and socio-economic factors are involved, adding to the complexity of its structure. This is true for urban even more than for rural stratification. This is expressed in one of the latest works attempting such a classification:

Since we acknowledge the multiplicity of socio-economic groups that form a specific social class, analysis of concrete situations is liable to be complex. Many practical problems are posed as how best to pigeon-hole different social and occupational groups. In fact, there are numerous 'class boundary' problems, as some positions occupy objectively contradictory locations between broad classes.

(Abdel-Fadil, 1980:93)

Perhaps one solution lies in first identifying the various groups in society, before finding a suitable conceptual frame for them. This section will summarize some of these classifications: (1) to give a general view of the social structure, (2) to identify the poor Egyptian groups for the student of poverty, for planners and aid groups.

(a) Social stratification in rural areas

Egyptian society is stratified by almost all sociologists according to a rural-urban division. Rural stratification is mainly based on agricultural categories. Thus, generally, the rural population is stratified according to five classes: first, the large landowners, second the farmers or peasants who are divided according to three classes - the rich, the middle and the 'small' or 'poor' farmers. Finally, the fifth formed of the wage workers and destitute class.

Qualifications of 'large landowners' vary. For Riad, they are the 'great aristocracy', eliminated by the revolution, leaving only the 'rural capitalists' who exploit 20 to 50 feddans, and the 'rich farmers' who exploit 5 to 20 feddans as tenants. These three categories are the 'privileged classes' who form 5 per cent of the rural population, but obtain 65 per cent of the income (Riad, 1964:10-11). Gamel M Hassanein (Abdel-Nabi, 1981) and Fathi Abdel-Fattah (1973) label them 'feudal lords'. However, while the first refers to those who own from 20 to 50 feddans after the revolution, Abdel-Fattah refers to the non-Egyptian absentee landlords who wielded political power and were the large magnets of commerce and industry before the revolution. Abdel-Nabi's large landowners form two groups: an 'agricultural bourgeoisie' who exploit the land in a capitalist way, and 'feudal style

landlords' who use the land according to the feudal system, even after the revolution (Abdel-Nabi, 1981:147). Abdel-Fadil's top class are the post-revolution 'rich-farmers', while Mohie El-Din's are the 'absentee landlords' who rented their land to farmers (Abdel-Nabi, 1981:147).

The three middle classes of farmers - rich, middle and poor - are identified with variations, depending on size of ownership or tenancy of land, use of wage labourers and machinery. All of them agree that the 'rich farmers' category can afford to use wage labourers, often use agricultural machinery and supervise the land themselves, thus achieving a real 'surplus' (Abdel-Nabi, 1981:133-150).

The 'middle' farmers are those who farm the land themselves with the help of their families, using sometimes wage labourers seasonally. Sociologists' estimates of their land ownership vary between 20 and 5 feddans. The minimum ownership differs depending on the date of the writing or the period considered, which takes inflation into account. Earlier writers, like Riad, put it at 5 feddans while the later ones put it at 8 to 10 feddans. The type of plantation is also important, as vegetables and fruits bring in a real surplus, but often laws fixed a minimum of grain plantation after which these were allowed. Thus, the 'middle' farmer planting 10 feddans could achieve a 'surplus' with which he could acquire status. He could also own cattle, but not machinery.

The 'poor' farmers own between 2 and 7 feddans, so never use wage labourers. Abdel-Fattah's minimum is one feddan while El-Gohary's is 5 feddans. The latter calls them 'small' rather than 'poor' farmers and so does Abdel-Mooti who has a 3 to 7 feddans range (Abdel-Nabi, 1981). What makes the plight of the 'small' farmer worse is that he is not allowed to plant vegetables and fruits. Thus, he works as a seasonal



labourer to supplement his income, as he lives at subsistence level. He may rent additional land and plant it, as a 'tenant cultivator'. These 'small landowners' and 'small tenants' form the 'intermediary levels' of Riad's classification and form 15 per cent of the rural population obtaining 20 per cent of the income, according to the 1958-1959 census (Riad, 1964:9-10). Some sociologists believe that it is the small farmer who becomes impoverished and eventually has to sell his land, while others, like Abdel-Nabi, calculate that by owning cattle and producing dairy products, he may actually achieve a gain, at least enough to subsist (Abdel-Nabi, 1981).

#### Poor Groups in Rural Areas

To some sociologists, this fourth 'small farmers' class already constitutes the poor of the village, like Abdel-Mooti (1979) whose poverty line is set at 3 feddans or less, according to 1976 surveys. However, the fifth class of the landless or destitute are the 'poor' according to all sociologists. They are the wage labourers, who are divided into: 'permanent', 'seasonal' and 'migrant' labourers. The latter, known as the tarahil, are unanimously recognized as the 'poorest of the poor of the village', as well as the most exploited and miserable because of the harsh and dehumanizing conditions of their life (Riad, 1964; Radwan, 1977; Abdel-Mooti, 1979; IICPSR, 1979; Abdel-Nabi, 1981).

According to the 1976 census, the agricultural labourer's wage per day was LEO.615 on average, while that of a child was LEO.28 (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:66). According to the 1978-1982 Five Year Plan, the labourer's average income would be LE140 per annum. As they work 227 days per year, there is no contradiction with the LEO.615 per day, not counting non-working days, working 10 to 11 hours per day. As it is commonly

believed that labourers now take high wages, he asserts that the latter occurs only during the full agricultural season. The working life of these labourers is estimated to be just 20 years, between the ages of 20 and 40 years, since, by then, they are exhausted and often affected by parasitic diseases (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:67-68).

Of the eight social scientists reviewed here only two mention non-agricultural groups in their stratification, though in 1960 this group constituted 20.7 per cent of the rural labour force (IICPSR, 1979:45). El-Gohari has two of these; mainly 'government workers' and 'workers in workshops and craftsmen', but he admits they have not been studied (Abdel-Nabi, 1981). Abdel-Mooti (1979:25) specifies 'service workers' who include domestic servants, 'workers in workshops and craftsmen', and finally 'peddlers'. Government workers have improved their conditions by working part-time in agriculture or trade, in addition to their employment (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:76).

Abdel-Nabi (1981:154-157) states that all categories of workers and labourers' positions have recently improved, even the tarahil, due to the rising demand for them provoked by the large numbers who left to work in Arab countries. Abu Lughod estimated emigrant labour to range between "one and two million" (Abu Lughod, 1981:6). Though wages are higher than ever before, yet conditions in the village are not as good as they are in Cairo, and rising wages are more than balanced by inflation. Besides, specializations of the villages' skilled workers are largely different from those of the cities, and are poorly paid, being affected by the poor condition of the majority of their inhabitants (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:75). As for peddlers, they usually sell goods to the poor masses in the village, like bread, spices, fruits, vegetables, grains, kerosene, while rich villagers go to the closest urban centre for their needs (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:75).

Two groups of rural poor remain to be mentioned here. One group still get their wages 'in kind', and form 24.9 per cent of the labour force, amounting to 1,297,612 according to the 1966 census, the latest detailed one available (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:43-44). The other group consists of 'unemployed who were estimated at 0.1% in 1971 by Mohie-El-Din; but then, as Mabro says, the concept of unemployment does not make much sense in such a context, the problem is rather one of underemployment. Mohie-El-Din specifies one such group, the 'small' family farm sector (IICPSR Report, 1979:62-63).

Finally, it might be significant to note that some areas are poorer than others.<sup>1</sup> The poorest are in Central Egypt, mainly Assiut and Sohag, in which more than 70 per cent of the population is 'very poor'. Next come some of the Northern Governorates in which 60 to 70 per cent of the population are 'poor', mainly Beheira, Dakahlia, Kafr-El-Sheikh and Menufia. South of Cairo, two Governorates belong to this group: Beni-Sweif and El-Fayūm, and further south are Minia and Qena. The rest of the better-off governorates have a poor population that ranges from 40 per cent to 60 per cent (Abdel-Mooti, 1979:50).

Today conditions are not very different to those described by Riad two decades ago; 80 per cent of the rural population have just 15 per cent of the income. Research on non-agricultural groups is needed in rural Egypt in order to understand its structure and to identify poor groups.

#### (b) Social stratification in urban areas

If rural stratification presents difficulties, the urban one is much more complex, since even more processes and factors operate.

1. Information taken from table of governorates in Abdel-Mooti's rural poverty study.

Thus, fewer sociologists have attempted an urban class stratification.

In the early 1970s, Gabriel Baer (1973) attempted a "Social Stratification in the Middle East" based on a classification in terms of upper, middle and lower classes. The "upper" included large landowners, merchants, entrepreneurs and industrialists, and those groups who hold political power. The "lower" were the property-less wage labourers and small peasants, while the middle were simply all the rest, like the peasant of "limited means, professionals, small merchants, army officers" (Baer, 1973:174-175). Though not in error, it does not say much, and to have one classification for the whole Middle East is in itself misleading.

Riad had stratified urban society according to a Marxist frame, which is by far the most complete to date. He made full use of the available statistics of the 1958-59 census on the various branches of production (Riad, 1964). All subsequent stratifications have been influenced by this study. Riad's classification has the popular masses, then the proletariat, the small bourgeoisie, and the Bourgeoisie and aristocracy. These large classes are subdivided into categories according to the statistical data.

#### The Urban Bourgeoisie:

Before the revolution, the 'urban bourgeoisie' had consisted of the large landowners who had used a large part of their land income in urban investments in industry, trade and finance, often in partnership with others. Hussein (1973) divides them into two categories: one was of foreign origin, Turkish and other, and who were a "business élite". The other was the new group of "strictly Egyptian commercial bourgeoisie", who originally came from rural areas, joined later by urban groups. These all worked with the foreign occupiers. With the revolution, foreign elements and large landowners were gradually

eliminated while activities of the others became more limited.

Basing himself on the 1958-59 census, Riad estimated the "bourgeois and aristocratic" classes to form 3 per cent of the urban population. He counted among them various groups: "capitalist entrepreneurs", "superior state employees in social administration" and "modern economy managers", favoured or wealthy professionals, and "owners of buildings and rentiers" (Riad, 1964:39). He estimated their <sup>yearly</sup> per capita income at LE850 which was much higher than the "privileged" classes in rural areas. By 1966, nationalization had eliminated many of these groups, a ceiling having been set on various items of wealth and land ownership. Many changes had occurred including widespread university education, which brought many groups and individuals to managerial and professional positions. Many of these were to form the "new technocracy" that was to become a large part of the ruling élite (Abdel-Malek, 1968:174). Thus, the structure of the bourgeoisie changed further. Abdel-Fadil (1980) depicts the following structure, based upon the various surveys and State Budget data of 1970-72. The top class in this new hierarchy are the top "bureaucratic and managerial élite", who include ministerial to first grade positions. Next come the businessmen, like "wholesale traders" and "capitalist entrepreneurs and contractors". Third, come top professionals like "doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, etc....." and finally, the middle managerial class who control "part of the authority hierarchy" who include government "special cadres" categories (Abdel-Fadil, 1980:92).

#### The Petty Bourgeoisie:

According to the 1958-59 census, Riad's petty bourgeoisie class formed 30 per cent of the urban population. It was formed mainly by three categories: small state functionaries who included employees in

trade and services and formed 14 per cent of the urban population; traditional entrepreneurs, i.e. directors of artisan enterprises who formed 9 per cent; and middle range employees in the economy and state, who also included the less favoured professionals in civil administration, who formed 8 per cent of the urban population (Riad, 1964:39-45).

According to the State surveys during the period 1970 to 1972, Abdel-Fadil (1980:92-93) divides this class into two main categories labelling them the "traditional" and the "new" petty bourgeoisie. The "traditional" petty bourgeoisie is seen <sup>as made up of</sup> as non-governmental groups, either self-employed or employees in private enterprises. One of these corresponds to Riad's "traditional entrepreneurs" whom Abdel-Fadil labels "self-employed artisans". His "new petty bourgeoisie" include mainly governmental or organized groups in industry and services. They are mostly categories that were created by the revolutionary government's policy. This class is formed by three categories: government employees on "special cadres" who enjoy certain privileges; government employees in the "general cadre" who follow ordinary laws and regulations; and finally the technocrats in organized industry and services. These categories are actually included in Riad's two categories of small and middle range employees. These categories of Abdel-Fadil are seen as occupying "contradictory locations" in class relations. He is aware that they cannot all be lumped together as petty bourgeoisie, since they are different in many ways to the connotations implied in the label of "petty bourgeoisie" in terms of class relations or struggle. Thus, he sees manual groups like the self-employed artisans and line supervisors as being in a "contradictory location" between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. The small employers and the technocrats are seen to be in "contradictory location" between the bourgeoisie and the petty

bourgeoisie. Finally, the lumpenproletariat are seen to be in "contradictory location" between the organized working class and the lower groups of the petty bourgeoisie (Abdel-Fadil, 1980:94).

The Egyptian petty bourgeoisie is seen as the one that breeds intellectuals of revolutionary potential, as it is from this class that rose the Free Officers group who led the revolution of 1952, the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as left-wing students (Hussein, 1973: 30).

#### The Working Class:

Riad's real "proletariat" are the workers in modern types of industries like factory and modern transport enterprises. They formed, in the 1960s, 10 per cent of the urban population (Riad, 1964: 45; Hussein, 1973:42). Abdel-Fadil's "proletarian workers" are also those in industries and transport, but he divides them into two categories: "production workers" who are in manufacture, transport and construction, and the category of "workers in the civil service" who work in "public utilities and services" in grades 11 and 12 (Abdel-Fadil, 1980:93-98). According to both, these are a "privileged class" compared to the popular masses, for they have both a stable job and a stable income. One may add that they are also a group who continue to be represented in the People's Assembly, ever since it began first as the First National Congress in 1961.<sup>1</sup> At that time, workers were given a 20 per cent representation, more than any group except the peasants who had 25 per cent of the seats (Abdel-Malek, 1968:184-185).

#### The Poor Masses:

In his social stratification, Riad's analysis revealed that only 63 per cent of the urban population was covered, even with the usual dependent elements of the population being taken into consideration.

1. Abdel-Malek in "Egypt: Military Society" (1968) gives a detailed account of the represented categories and the bases on which they were formed (pp. 180-185).

He concluded that 37 per cent of the total population had not figured in the census, and he had to include it as No. 0 in his classification of the popular masses (Riad, 1964:38-40).

This thesis deals mainly with this particular section of the population who survive on any casual work and consequently do not get censused, those that are labelled "the disinherited". They are the masses who figure in no category in the National Congress of Popular Forces established by the Revolution in 1961. In defining them among his "semi-proletarian", Hussein said of them: "They are incapable—unaided— of organizing themselves on a national scale; their uncertain and shifting mode of existence, divorced from stable social production is not conducive to unity, but rather to their dispersal as isolated individuals, family groups or clans - in brief, to their disorganization". Then he adds that they "are not organically related ... to the processes of production and distribution" (Hussein, 1973:41-42) and both Riad (1964) and Abdel-Fadil (1980) whose stratification is one of the most recent share this opinion.

These uncensused individuals go to form the peddlars, casual guardians in car parks, beggars and thieves (Riad, 1964:40). Hussein emphasizes that they are the ones who are given the lowliest jobs and take up illegal activities, work as temporary construction labourers, or take the odd jobs in barbers' shops, small stores, etc. He estimates that they form more than half of the urban population (Hussein, 1973:38-40). The "popular masses" form 55 per cent of the urban population, for in addition to the 37 per cent uncensused, servants form 12 per cent and the sub-proletariat who are daily-wage unskilled and unstable workers form 2 per cent. Finally, the fourth category are those employed in traditional crafts who form 5 per cent of the urban population. These are to be distinguished from the master artisans or directors of artisan



enterprises whom he sets among the small bourgeoisie (Riad, 1964:41-44). Abdel-Fadil's lumpenproletariat also groups the "occasional labourers, street vendors, peddlars, domestic servants, porters, the unemployed, etc...." (Abdel-Fadil, 1980:93). Some "domestic servants and care-takers have regular income and a stable position", which has in fact become the case recently, but was not so when Riad was writing. Abdel-Fadil agrees with both Riad and Hussein that this is the class who have unstable jobs and <sup>are</sup> recruited for "shady and illegal activities" (Abdel-Fadil, 1980:93). Riad emphasizes the fact that these are temporary workers, who work only 33 per cent of their full capacity with a great rotation in jobs which allows each of them to work part of the time and thus survive. He puts their average income at that time (1958-59) at LE9 per year per head, which makes urbans worse off than rurals in this respect (Riad, 1964:42). But Hussein believes that the oppression found in rural areas does not exist in urban areas; besides marginal employments exist more in the city and allow survival. The latter statements are still true today. But it is equally true that cost of living in the city is higher and reduces real wages, though wages in the city are indeed higher.

### Studies Identifying Poor Groups

Apart from looking at social stratification, it is necessary to look at some of the other studies that locate or identify poor groups. Egyptian studies of urbanization point out some of these groups, particularly urban migrants. According to the 1960 statistics, migrants form 36 per cent of Cairo's inhabitants. These studies point to poor areas, where poor migrants usually go to settle, since such areas are cheaper and consequently lie within their means.

Hegazi (1971) points out these areas. Poor migrants from the Delta, i.e. Northern Governorates, usually go to Northern and North-

Eastern parts of Cairo while those from Southern governorates live more often in Southern parts of Cairo. Abu-Lughod explained this phenomenon in terms of the train stations' locations. Hegazi gives percentages of migrants that go to each area: for Northern Governorates Shubrah has 12.9 per cent, Sahel 11.3 per cent, Waili 10.2 per cent, Rod El-Faraq 9.7 per cent, Bulaq 5.4 per cent, Mattariah 4.7 per cent. The poor of Upper Egypt settle mostly in the area of Old Cairo at 6.6 per cent, the highest percentage for southern areas. The totally destitute migrants chose to live on the fringes of the city, like Ghamra that has tin houses and for which area there is no census. Some live on the fringes of industrial or good areas like Helwan at 1.7 per cent or Maadi at 1.3 per cent. Hegazi reports briefly that, "In such areas, people get their water needs from the river, or through the hoses of some villa's gardens or garages. They live in darkness using low kerosene lamps and get rid of residues anywhere and everywhere" (Hegazi, 1971:42). Their daily life revolves around rural groupings of family and neighbours, while voluntary organizations like clubs or occupational groups are almost unknown to them. While some take up occupations as servants, others cut off from their kin, get "lost" and turn to crime or end up as prostitutes (Hegazi, 1971:54-59). Of course, not all rural migrants are poor or remain poor, but the better-off usually move off to other areas, or live in the better parts of these areas.

Areas of Cairo that are seen as slums and house a largely poor population are: Old Cairo, Bulaq, Medieval Cairo and the city of the dead (Abu-Lughod, 1971).<sup>1</sup> These areas have been studied for different purposes. One series of studies by the Ministry of Social Affairs in the late 1950s includes a study of Old Cairo, Darb-El-Ahmar,

1. Description of Cairene slums is given elsewhere. This is just an effort to group together all areas where the poor are found and have been identified.

Bulaq, Sayedah Zeinab and others. Twenty years later, a study by the National Center for Social and Criminological Research (1979) points to areas where help to the poor is given, thus locating poverty pockets, and these are: Old Cairo, Sayedah Zeinab, El-Khalifah Rabei and Ain-El-Sirah, which is close to Sayedah Zeinab. Occupations of those helped are also indicative of jobs that leave those who work at them destitute: daily wage earners, agricultural workers, technical workers, workers in domestic service, peddlars, beggars and unemployed. Half of those helped were poor widowed women with children, left without any resource, and elderly men and women (NCSCR Report, 1979:44). Two areas of Old Cairo were particularly poor: Al-Anwar and Eish-El-Barūd<sup>1</sup> (Ghamri: n.d.) My own research confirmed the large number of poor in Old Cairo, and this was one main reason for choosing it for the ethnography. It must be noted that most areas of Cairo have their own little poverty pocket, where the domestic servants and other groups servicing a rich area live. Workers are often badly paid, and are quite poor, as in Athar-El-Nabi, south of Cairo, where they work in the lime quarries, and get 65 PT for eight hours' work.<sup>2</sup> The same conditions prevail in all those fringe areas of Cairo where small private industries operate, paying as low as 50 PT for women, for example, in the thread industry, or for bottling drinks, as my own research indicated. In particular, the izzab in Cairo's rural fringes house many poor migrants who merely subsist. Some of these izzab lie on rural fringes of Ain Shamss, Mattariah, and Dar-El-Malak.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Described elsewhere.
  2. This is one of the areas studied in this thesis. See the chapter on "The Local Setting" and also in main chapters on findings of the thesis.
  3. See the case studies in this thesis in the section on "Other Areas" in the chapter on "The Social Construction of Poverty".

Among the poorest groups in Cairo are the garbage collectors, whose conditions of life are perhaps the worst. One such area is Mattariah, North Cairo (Cinquin, 1977). Another is in Manshiet Nasser, on the Mokattam, east of Cairo (see Environmental Quality International, 1981). Two groups of poor fishermen have been studied: the Mediterranean fishermen living on the outskirts of Alexandria (Ghamri, 1980), and the fishermen of Lake Nasser in the extreme south of Egypt, at Aswan. The problem of the sea fishermen is the seasonality of fishing, which leaves them during part of the year unemployed. They are exploited by the entrepreneurs who pay them low wages, or buy the fish cheap to sell it on the market at high cost.

In Alexandria, areas like Anfoushi, Mex in the west, and again eastern borders in the sandy patches between Sidi-Bishr and Abou-Kir, the inner areas far from the sea, many poor people live.

Suez is one of the urban centres that has a large number of poor. Suez had suffered through all the wars with Israel. It does not have the trade opportunities found in Port Said and the economic conditions of its remaining inhabitants is appalling. Most of its wealthy or middle-income inhabitants had fled or had been evacuated, leaving the poor poorer. A governmental Anglo-Egyptian project of 1977, "The Suez Demonstration Project", having the purpose of rehabilitating the city services and housing which were almost totally destroyed, found conditions to be so bad that various UN organizations had to be called in for immediate relief. While the poor in Cairo eat, however badly, in Suez poverty reached the point of hunger, and children had barely anything to cover them; most went barefooted. If much has been done since to rehabilitate the city and its housing, the possibilities of work are still very small and poverty certainly absolute.<sup>1</sup>

1. I myself participated in this project and in the drafting of parts of the report. It is not possible to include more information without special permission.

All these areas were revealed through research. Certainly, there are other areas, and other groups who suffer from poverty throughout the country, but these remain to be described. Poverty research in Egypt has begun only very recently, and the field is largely untapped, crying out for study. This chapter has attempted to define the causes of poverty in Egypt, as well as its scale, and the various areas and groups that are poor, as a background to an ethnographic study of poverty.

CHAPTER TWO    APPROACHING POVERTY

"In the end, poverty is not a concept  
It is something happening to a person."<sup>1</sup>  
(Phil Madden)

British and American approaches to poverty have changed over the last 80 years. The early work of Booth, Mayhew and Rowntree sought to depict the plight of the urban poor as worthy of understanding and assistance (Holman, 1978). Later work followed Rowntree's work on "the immediate causes of poverty", "cycles of deprivation", "poverty lines" and "minimum subsistence levels" (Townsend, 1962). For the next thirty years it was assumed that poverty was a transitory and shrinking phenomenon that would disappear as living standards in general rose, except for a few unfortunate and "inadequate" individuals (Roach and Roach, 1972). In the 1960s the rediscovery of relatively permanent pockets of poverty in the affluent societies shifted the focus to the life-styles of the poor themselves. The poor were seen to possess life-styles and values, a "culture of poverty", which perpetuated their condition (Valentine, 1969). In opposition to this approach, a new wave of research saw poverty as a product of social inequality and the maldistribution of resources and opportunities (Rein, 1971). Poverty in affluent societies was defined as a condition of "relative deprivation" (Runciman, 1966), requiring new and more efficient social welfare provisions. Some Marxist writers (e.g. Wedderburn, 1974) have extended these points to argue that "relative deprivation" is a normal condition in capitalist societies. A condition of exploitation and repression, such that welfare and social security provisions serve to preserve the status quo. Current work seems to accept the general line of the Marxist argument,

1. P Madden, "Poverty is not the Privilege of Saints" (The Guardian, 19 March 1983, p. 18).

that poverty cannot be eradicated in the context of capitalist society, however it remains committed to the need for welfare provisions (see, for example, Townsend, 1979). In the long run, what is needed is a redistribution of resources, opportunities and power.

Over the years, a number of different types of poverty have been defined and employed in social policies and welfare provisions (SSRC, 1968):

- "crisis poverty", refers to the hardships due to bereavement, illness, injury, unemployment, and other disasters;
- "long-term dependency", refers to those who will never recover from their disabilities (physical or mental) or personal crises;
- "life-cycle poverty", refers to the deprivation which afflicts people during different periods in their lives, e.g. childhood, old age;
- "depressed-area poverty", refers to areas which have been "left behind" by social and economic developments;
- "down-town poverty", refers to the kind of "depressed-area poverty" found in inner city areas; and,
- "the culture of poverty", refers to a combination of financial hardship, squalid environments, family structure, personal capacities and patterns of behaviour which excluded the poor from improving their own position.

British and American approaches to, and definitions of, poverty are all premised on a basic set of conditions. Firstly, the poor constitute a very small proportion of an essentially affluent society. Secondly, the poor are socially and geographically concentrated in a few small areas. Thirdly, while the causes of poverty may be structural,

"crisis poverty" and "life-cycle poverty" are the most prevalent forms encountered. Fourthly, there is an elaborate set of welfare and social security provisions which, however inadequate, are specifically designed to tackle the whole cluster of problems associated with "relative deprivation" (Roach and Roach, 1972; Wedderburn, 1974; Townsend, 1979).

It is important to recognize the importance of these conditional factors. However interesting or insightful British and American approaches to poverty may be, their relevance for other societies is limited to the very conditions within which they were developed. Any discussion of poverty in the Third World must recognize that the conditions which underly British and American approaches do not hold. Firstly, in Third World societies, the poor constitute a very large proportion of an essentially poor society. Secondly, in Third World societies, the poor are not socially and geographically concentrated in a few small areas. Thirdly, in Third World societies, the causes of poverty are quite clearly structural and a permanent feature of existing social and economic organization. Fourthly, there is no elaborate set of welfare or social security provisions in operation (Smith, 1979).

On most indices of well-being, the situation of the poor in underdeveloped countries is appalling. There are inadequate supplies of water and health and education facilities, adult and infant mortality rates are high, overcrowding and illiteracy are endemic, incomes are insecure and insufficient for adequate levels of food and shelter, malnutrition is widespread (Roberts, 1978; Hoogvelt, 1982). Leeds (1974:84) observes that the condition of the poor in underdeveloped societies:

"... is even more strongly delineated, less alleviated by 'affluence', less ameliorated by great masses of



better-paid, highly skilled wage earners, less softened by opportunities for upward mobility, less responsive to political protest and electoral expression, and generally more repressive in the 'underdeveloped' dependent societies than in the metropolises like Great Britain and the United States."

The poverty found in Britain and North America cannot be seen as poverty when compared to that found in Latin America or the Middle East. This is an important point, because it means that approaches, definitions and concepts developed in Britain and North America are not directly applicable to other societies, where the nature, scale and consequences of poverty are very different (Eames and Goode, 1973).

One approach to poverty is worthy of special attention here. The "Culture of Poverty" is an approach to, and definition of, poverty that has been widely used in North America, Britain and a variety of underdeveloped countries. It is an approach that, while it has been widely challenged, seems to hold a particular fascination for students of poverty (Valentine, 1969).

The "Culture of Poverty" approach was developed by Oscar Lewis (1959, 1961, 1966) out of his fieldwork in the slums of Mexico City, San Juan, Puerto Rico and New York. For Lewis, poverty is a product of social inequality, slums are concentrations of the poor, the repressed, the rejected and the alienated. The social life, attitudes and values, of the urban poor are responses to the material deprivation of their circumstances. These display such uniformity, over time and in different cities, that they can be described as a "culture of poverty" - a shared and learned "design for living" which is relatively distinct from that of the mainstream culture. The "culture of poverty" serves to perpetuate and reinforce the poor's position in society.

Among the traits identified by Lewis as part of the "culture of

poverty" are living in crowded quarters with lack of privacy, gregariousness, rooted in the present, high incidence of alcoholism, frequent resort to violence to settle quarrels and in training children, wife beating, consensual marriages, a high incidence of broken families, a trend toward mother-centred families, lack of community organization, strong feelings of marginality, helplessness, dependency and alienation coupled with apathy, withdrawal, and fatalism (Lewis, 1961:xxvi-xxvii).

Lewis' work became very influential, due largely to the fact that its publication coincided with the rediscovery of poverty amidst the affluence of US society (e.g. Harrington, 1962) and with similar approaches which focused on the culture of American "lower classes" as a source of social problems (e.g. Miller, 1964). In the process, Lewis's work was modified and over-extended.

Critics of the "culture of poverty" have attacked it on theoretical, methodological and empirical grounds.

1. It is a "blanket approach" which unsystematically combines social, economic, psychological and cultural elements in ways that make it an impossible tool to use (Leeds, 1971).
2. It obscures the relationship between the poor and the rest of society. It reduces the importance of material factors and separates the poor from the structures which produce and condition their situation (Valentine, 1969).
3. The poor are not isolated from mainstream society or culture, their life-styles are due more to situational constraints than to culture (Leacock, 1971). Poverty is a condition of structured inequality, reinforced by situational constraints (Gans, 1971).
4. The concept has lent itself to "blaming the poor for their own condition and future" and as a thin veil for vulgar stereotypes (Valentine, 1969).

5. The fundamental error of most policies and programmes based on "the culture of poverty" is that they assume that the causes of poverty can be derived from the characteristics of the poor themselves. (Rein, 1971).

Indeed, Lewis himself was led to comment:

"The crucial question from both the scientific and the political point of view is: How much weight is to be given to the internal, self-perpetuating factors in the subculture of poverty as compared to the external, social factors? My own position is that in the long run the self-perpetuating factors are relatively minor and unimportant as compared to the basic structure of the larger society."

(Lewis, 1968:192)

Against the background of these debates, the critics of Lewis' work have been instrumental in developing approaches which seek to combine a concern with structural, situational and cultural components (e.g. Valentine, 1969; Leeds, 1971). Gans (1971), in particular, has been concerned to find a "middle way" between the competing approaches. All the critics advocate the need for in-depth, ethnographic research as the best methodology capable of yielding the facts regarding the poor's life-styles and their ability, or potential, to react to more favourable circumstances.

In the context of Latin American studies of underdevelopment and the urban poor a strikingly similar approach to that of "the culture of poverty" has been hotly debated. This is the view that the urban poor are "marginal" to the mainstream of social, economic, political and cultural life.

"In Latin America, the growing numbers of unskilled, semi-employed and abysmally poor urbanites are often called the 'marginals'. The term is apt. The people to whom it is applied are economically marginal, in that they contribute little to and benefit little from production and economic growth. Their social status is low, and they are excluded from the formal organizations and associations

and the informal and private webs of contacts which constitute the urban social structure. To the extent that they are rural in origin, they may also be culturally marginal, clinging to customs, manners, dress, speech and values which contrast with accepted urban patterns. They lack ties to or influence on the established political institutions. Many are marginal in a literal geographic sense, living in squatter settlements on the fringes of the cities."

(Nelson, 1969, cited in Peattie, 1974:116)

Critics have argued that the urban poor are not socially, economically, politically and culturally "marginal" or isolated. The urban poor develop complex patterns of social relationships that extend throughout the city (Roberts, 1978). The idea of "marginality" pays too little attention to the workings of the urban economy and to the way the urban poor actively attempt to cope with day-to-day living (Peattie, 1974). While they may be excluded, on many fronts, from the benefits of urban life, they are skilful participants in the patron-client nature of localized politics (Portes, 1972).

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in the nature and role of the "informal economy", or "subsidiary economy" of the poor in Third World cities (Bromley, 1978). The concern is to situate the urban poor in the broader context of the division of labour and the socio-economic system at the urban, national and international levels, and to explore the way the diversity of income opportunities used by the urban poor are related to the prevalence of instability and insecurity in their working conditions and earnings. (Bromley and Gerry, 1979; Marris, 1979).

#### Ethnographic Research and the Urban Poor

Studies by Whyte (1943), Gans (1962), Liebow (1967), Suttles (1968) and Hannerz (1969) have significantly influenced our understanding

of the life of the urban poor in affluent, industrial capitalist societies.

- (1) The poor must not be studied in isolation from the wider society of which they are an integral part: class structures and inequality (especially race and ethnicity) must be central to any analysis. Poverty is a product of the overall organization of social, economic and political structures - its eradication necessitates a large-scale redistribution of resources in favour of the most materially deprived sections of society.
- (2) The social life of the poor is organized in subtle and complex ways. Their social relationships, institutions and life-styles are best viewed as adaptive responses to material deprivation in specific situations, rather than a product of some "culture of poverty".
- (3) While the lives of the poor are desperate and narrowly circumscribed, they are not alienated or fatalistic "social dregs" and "deviants". On the contrary, the poor share many of the values and aspirations as the rest of society, they are active, pragmatic and socially quite conservative.

Portes (1972) makes the same points in order to combat simplistic views of the urban poor in Latin America. For Portes, the urban poor have been unjustly portrayed as "alienated radicals", or as passive carriers of a "culture of poverty", or as "marginal" to the mainstream of urban-industrial society.

"... the consistent results of empirical research suggest that the problems of peripheral slums and their causation are of an essentially structural nature. These problems have nothing to do with a unique 'way of being' or a deviant subculture of irrationality. Ways of acting in the slum are structurally determined to the extent that individuals continuously look for the most efficient way of improving their positions within the limits and the barriers created by the existing social and economic organization. Distortions, contradictions, irrationalities are, to be sure, abundant. But they inhere in the broader collective structures of

production and distribution. The grave mistake of theories on the urban slum has been to transform sociological conditions into psychological traits and to impute to the victims the distorted characteristics of their victimizers."

(Portes, 1972:286)

Ethnographic research on the urban poor in Latin America is particularly interesting and relevant to a study of the urban poor in Cairo. Firstly, it is firmly located within the framework of "underdevelopment". Secondly, the poverty studied is different in nature and scale to that found in Europe and North America. Thirdly, it has specifically sought to evaluate the validity of such notions as "the culture of poverty" and "marginality".

Three studies of the urban poor are of special interest here: Peattie's (1968) work in Venezuela, Perlman's (1976) work in Brazil, and Lomnitz's (1977) work in Mexico. While living in appalling conditions, lacking education, skills and opportunities for secure employment, the urban poor are not fatalistic or alienated. (a) They recurrently engage in fast and efficient ways of securing socio-economic rewards, e.g. as street-peddlers, "penny capitalists", casual labourers and as providers of a vast range of services. Much use is made of localized social networks and patronage to secure shelter, food, support and security. Based on these networks of mutual help, a "secondary economy" operates, within which goods and services are exchanged. This "subsidiary economy" is linked to, and dependent upon, the flow of money from those employed in the "modern sector". (b) The general orientation of these people to life, their interests and values, do not differ significantly from those of the more established urban middle classes. They aspire to have a steady income, a house of their own, and their children in school. (c) Though the frustrations of slum life are numerous, the strength and flexibility of individuals in these areas have often been underestimated. Political radicalism is looked upon

as both "illegitimate" and too costly. The urban poor are rational, calculating, individualistic, pragmatic and not resistant to change: they are willing to make use of whatever resources are at hand, or whatever new opportunities arise.

"... they have the aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the perseverance of pioneers, and the values of patriots."

(Perlman, 1976:243)

Together, Portes, Peattie, Perlman and Lomnitz are concerned to promote the view that the activities of the urban poor in Latin America are positive attempts at social reconstruction through individual and group initiatives. They argue that the urban poor are not a distinctive breed, to be pitied, despised and feared. Rather, they should be understood and assisted in every way possible.

Our data indicate that the presuppositions and predictions of marginality theory are almost universally untrue. Brazillian society may well be divided into two sectors but...characterizing these as "marginal" and "integrated" is deeply deceptive. It allows analysts to avoid the recognition that both sectors are integrated into society, but on very different terms. Favelados are not marginal to Brazillian society, but integrated into it in a manner detrimental to their interests. They are not socially marginal but rejected, not economically marginal but exploited, and not politically marginal but repressed.

(Perlman in Peattie, 1974:108; emphasis in original)

### Research on Egyptian Poverty

Egyptian studies which focus specifically on the nature and consequences of poverty are a comparatively recent phenomenon. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s a number of works discussed the three great social problems confronting Egyptian society: poverty, ignorance and illness (e.g. Ghalab, 1952). No fieldwork was carried out, where quantitative data was used it was drawn from official sources. Peasants

and workers were seen as the main groups of poor, however, the emphasis was very much on rural poverty (e.g. Radwan, 1946). In most cases education was proposed as a general solution to the problems of poverty, ignorance and illness, e.g. free education as a means to a job and improved hygiene.

Studies in the 1950s were primarily concerned with historical and ecological approaches to overpopulation, internal migration and urbanization. Poverty in the period 1950 to 1970 seemed to be the concern of social workers rather than social scientists. Much of this work was concerned with other social problems and deviance that was seen as related to low income. Poverty, or low income, was taken as a common denominator for crime and delinquency (e.g. Sayed Eweiss, 1958).

The Bibliographic Index of University Theses in Egypt, the records of Alexandria and Cairo universities, the Catalogue Alphabetique and the Abstract for Scientific Theses, were all examined for the years 1922-1980. These reveal that a number of studies of poor groups were the focus of small-scale studies conducted as part of undergraduate courses. Most of these came from the Institute of Social Work at the University of Alexandria. These small-scale studies consisted overwhelmingly of small quick surveys of poor peasants and migrant labourers in rural areas. Many of these works rehash earlier works and approaches from the United States (Abu-Ahmed, 1951; El-Far, 1959; Gohar, 1964).

One of the rare available studies which focus<sup>es</sup> on poverty in urban communities is that by Hussein Mohamed Lutfi (1957) of fishermen in Alexandria. The fishermen were seasonal workers, unemployed and accruing debts during the winter months. The study describes the community's poverty and evaluates the range of social services offered in the area. Among these unpublished, and difficult to obtain, works,



that by Ghamri is an interesting study of a family survey of a poor area of Cairo. Ghamri's study (1960s?) looks at 200 families in terms of demographic and qualitative data. This work was the precursor of a later major study, and this is discussed later in this chapter.

Two published studies are worth special note. The first is that of Yousseff El Kerdawi (1975) which looks at poverty from an Islamic point of view, contrasting it with attitudes towards poverty in other religious and political parties. He examines the way Islam sees poverty as a danger to morality, thought and society, concluding with a discussion of the various economic solutions offered by Islam. Breasted's (1972) work includes a particularly interesting study of attitudes towards the poor and charity found in ancient Egypt. They display a striking similarity to those common in Egypt today.

From the mid-1970s, research on Egyptian poverty began in earnest. Pressures from various international aid institutions instigated a surge of government research into poverty. The bulk of this research is conducted at the macro-economic level and is carried out within a framework of Egyptian underdevelopment.

### Work on Rural Poverty

Abdel Mooti's (1979) study is concerned to (a) identify the poor classes in Egyptian villages, (b) describe their geographical distribution, and (c) describe their socio-economic characteristics. The causes of poverty are seen as exploitation and private property. His solution involves "development for the majority" and a change of attitude towards the poor. Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil (1978) is also concerned with social stratification in the Egyptian village. He defines the poor, not only in terms of their property as others do, but also according to the relative weight of the rented labourer, the intensity

of use of agricultural technology, and the variety of production. Both studies are less concerned with individual poverty than with the total structure of society in the village: property and wages, the structure of production and trade cycles. However, they provide good background information for ethnographic research.

Galal Amin (1974) is concerned with poverty at the macro-level. The focus falls on Egypt's slow development as compared to the rapid growth of its urban populations. He emphasises the deteriorating conditions in rural areas which lead to overurbanization. Amin stresses the effects of inequality, favouring redistribution and increased production. Efforts to 'modernize' are condemned as facades by which to hide poverty.

#### Official Documents and Reports

By special permission, it was possible to gain access to a number of sources that are not generally available. These proved useful, not only as background information, but also as points of comparison. The ARE Ministry of Manpower's Wages and Cost of Living (1973) yielded data on average and minimum wages over a number of years, as well as cost of living. Information on the number of families in receipt of government aid, and the amounts provided, were available through the ARE Ministry of Social Affairs' Social Statistical Yearbook (1973). The Household Budget Survey 1974-75 from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (1976) was useful as a point of comparison for the household budgets examined in the fieldwork. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics' Preliminary Results of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing (1977) was useful for the study of the everyday economic life of the poor.

## Urbanization and Ecological Studies

Among the numerous studies of Cairo, those of Janet Abu-Lughod (1964, 1969, 1971) provide an excellent background. Her work ranges across historical, comparative and ecological studies of Cairo's growth, problems and demographic composition. She points to the way over-urbanization and the over-concentration of population in cities like Cairo, leads to the problems of unemployment and underemployment. Population growth, over-urbanization, unemployment, and underemployment and their effects on urban dwellers with low standards of living, were studied by Galal Amin, Saad El-Din Ibrahim (1974) and Waterbury (1973). Waterbury sees urban living standards falling to unprecedentedly low levels by the year 2000. For Waterbury, hardly a third of Cairo's total population can be said to comprise its "working population". Echoing Riad's (1964) finding on the number of people of working-age without declared employment, he sees the survival of people living on extremely low income levels to be a major problem in the future. In later works (1974, 1975), Waterbury links the problems of over-population with the supply of food, and looks at the way governments have tried to assist the urban poor through heavily subsidised food items.

## Egyptian Ethnographies

When the research reported here began, there were no published ethnographic accounts of life among the Egyptian poor. Three studies have been published recently, and these require comment in the context of this discussion.

Rugh (1979) studied the physical environment, living conditions, problems and coping mechanisms, of the poor in one area of Cairo, comparing them to the middle classes. The research is based on families

drawn from the cases of volunteer social workers attached to a Christian church. The life of the poor is viewed in terms of "cycles of deprivation", such that certain periods of their lives are marked by more deprivation and stress than others, e.g. due to illness, aging, death of spouse, etc. While the importance of class and social inequality is noted, the perpetuation of poverty is seen primarily in terms of such cycles.

All the families studied received help and support from the social workers and the church. This focus on families coping with church assistance, means that the coping activities of the poor, in general, were excluded from systematic consideration. Little attention is given to how the poor see themselves or the middle classes, nor is there any attempt to locate the coping mechanisms within a wider study of life-styles and social and cultural institutions. The way the poor obtained material help from kin, neighbours or charities, are discussed without regard for the day-to-day activities of the people studied.

In a study based on research conducted some ten years earlier in Cairo, Wikan (1980) describes the social relationships which characterise the baladi people in general, rather than the problems peculiar to the poor. Attention focuses on sex roles and men-women relationships in the face of conflicts arising from a lack of money. The external manifestations of poverty are described and some attempt is made to examine household incomes and budgets. Wikan concludes that the overwhelming majority of the poor families she studied were "divided", "fearful", "suspicious" and "non-aspiring".

Wikan's study deals with a period in Egyptian history marked by the peculiarly tense atmosphere which followed the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. The daily political and economic crises were reflected in

the life of all Egyptians. Wikan takes no account of these factors. Consequently, she seems to misinterpret the suspicion and fear she experienced as "a foreigner doing research" as characteristic of the poor alone, rather than as part of a more general response to a particular historical situation.

The study makes little attempt to really come to grips with the nature of poverty itself. The information on household incomes and budgets is superficial and incomplete. Household spending on food is not included in the budgets! Either these people are constantly in debt regarding spending on food, or the information is deficient. The usual practice seems to involve using whatever income is available first for rent and food, then for repayment of debts, and only then on the items discussed by Wikan. While Wikan makes some attempt to distance her work from "the culture of poverty" approach, she seems to accept uncritically its most general point, that the majority of the poor are "non-aspiring". She may be concerned to arouse sympathy for the poor, but she succeeds only in presenting a stereotyped and distorted image of their lives and attitudes.

Ghamri (1980) uses a cognitive approach to "the culture of poverty" in a study of a poor area in Alexandria. As an Egyptian, Ghamri displays a deep understanding of both culture and the lives of the poor. The study provides a wealth of detailed information on the network of social relationships found among the poor - the importance of reciprocity in exchanges between kin and neighbours; the grading of relationships by physical proximity; the degree of domination of households by either husband or wife. There is a richness of detail that is difficult to find elsewhere, e.g. the data on items of clothing possessed by individuals, or the possessions related to sleeping habits and hygiene. Unlike the other two studies, particular attention is given to Egyptian interpretations of the words and behaviour associated

with poverty itself.

Unfortunately, the richness and detail of the study are not used to good effect. Many interesting and relevant aspects of poverty are commented upon but not pursued, e.g. the issue of a "poverty line" comprises one short paragraph. The definitions of poverty provided by the poor themselves are treated too briefly and casually. Many vital comments made by the poor are reported, yet only when the point made is related to interpersonal processes are they given any importance.

From the outset, Ghamri accepts the validity of "the culture of poverty", seemingly unaware of the full significance of the criticisms raised against it. Every attempt is made to show that the poor have a "different" and "marginal" culture, as contrasted with the culture of urban areas. Actually the culture described is a rural one, with "rural values and social relationships". Hence, he either cancels out his own thesis of the existence of "a culture of poverty" by concluding that it is merely "a rural culture", or he stands guilty of arguing that "rural culture" is "a culture of poverty".

Collectively, these studies provide a good deal of information on, and insights into, the life of the Egyptian urban poor. However, none of them provide a rounded picture of how the poor live, or the problems they face, or of the means and institutions by which they cope with their situation. In particular, little attention is paid to (a) the formal and informal social institutions which structure the everyday life of the poor, and (b) the way cultural or religious beliefs are used as resources to grapple with the problems and stresses to which the poor are continually subjected.

## Some Conclusions

Poverty is best viewed as a product of social inequalities generated by social, economic, political and cultural structures. In turn, the life-styles, attitudes and values, of the poor are best viewed as products of structural, situational and cultural components.

While approaches to poverty in the developed societies are full of insights, they cannot be directly applied to underdeveloped societies where the nature, scale and consequences of poverty are very different. The ethnographic studies from North and Latin America raise a number of important issues, particularly those which criticize "the culture of poverty" and "marginality", and which highlight the importance of the "informal" or "subsidiary economy". However, these ethnographic studies are best viewed as suggesting guidelines rather than providing ready-made frameworks.

Egyptian research which focuses specifically on poverty is comparatively rare. Most <sup>studies</sup> have focused on macro-economics and rural poverty. Government reports yield general information on average and minimum wages, costs of living and household budgets. Similarly, ecological studies of urbanization provide information of general background importance. The three recently published micro-studies, while grappling with important issues, all have important limitations.

A comprehensive framework for the study of urban poverty in Egypt would need to cover (a) historical events and process, (b) macro-studies of the nature of Egypt's political economy in the context of underdevelopment, (c) macro-studies of patterns of urbanization, (d) micro-studies of the life-styles of the urban poor, and (e) evaluative studies of policies and programmes. Clearly, such an approach is far beyond the resources of a single researcher. The study reported here takes the form of an ethnography because such studies are rare in Egypt

and because the work done in North and Latin America has demonstrated their relevance.

All poverty studies have implications for government policy and action. The kinds of answers required to guide policy have implications for methodology. The strict study of life-styles, simply in terms of behavioural patterns, ignoring the views and aspirations of the poor, have led to an impasse (Gans, 1970). Behaviour, aspirations, values and interests should all be studied together in order to identify the situational responses that may occur if the poor's conditions were improved. In this sense, ethnographic studies are important because they allow us to explore the ways in which the necessities of coping with urban poverty sets social forces in motion that may affect the path of economic and political development.



CHAPTER THREE    METHODOLOGY

"We must find our way about in the life-world and while acting and being acted upon, must come to terms with the data imposed on us by nature and society".

(Schutz and Luckmann, 1974:18)

I    The Phenomenological Perspective in the Ethnographic Study of the Poor

The general principles which guide this investigation are derived from a commitment to ethnographic research, informed by perspectives drawn from Phenomenology. Ethnography is a broad approach which is well-suited to the study of social life in all its complexity, in that it allows for the inclusion of more specific methodologies to be used within it (Denzin, 1970). The intent is to describe and analyse the conditions, activities and experiences of those under study, by sharing in their day-to-day experiences. Phenomenology not only provides a philosophical justification for ethnographic research, it also suggests particular issues for study (Bruyn, 1966). From the perspective of Phenomenology, sociology is concerned particularly with understanding action. Action arises out of meaning which defines social reality. While society defines man, man in turn defines society. Particular constellations of meaning are only sustained by continual reaffirmation in everyday activities, hence they are subject to change and modification. Explanations of human actions must take account of the meanings which those concerned apply to their lives and acts. The manner in which the everyday world is socially constructed yet perceived as real and routine is a crucial concern of sociological analysis (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

The Phenomenological literature directs attention to the importance of grasping the nature of the "Life-World", the world of everyday

commonsense life (Schutz, 1967). This is the sphere of physical and social objects within which people live, work, communicate and pursue their day-to-day activities. The "Life-World" is perceived, interpreted and acted upon, within a framework of socio-cultural, historical, biographical and situational elements (Gurvitsch, 1970). Towards the "Life-World" individuals adopt "the natural attitude", it is largely taken for granted; individuals are pragmatically concerned to make their way within it, rather than to interpret or subject it to examination in depth. The social world is experienced as a massive fact, an arena for action, already organized and largely beyond the individual's control. Most of the knowledge individuals have of the social world is handed down to them, it is therefore experienced as being detached from them, as having an objective truth and basically the same for everyone (Schutz, 1967).

For Schutz (1963; Schutz and Luckmann, 1974) the everyday commonsense world is the "paramount reality", based as it is around the "here and now" of all experience, fundamental to all understanding. From the point of view of everyday commonsense life, there appear to exist relative "finite provinces of meaning" or particular "reference schemata" which can be drawn upon and used in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Among the most important of these provinces are those of "religion" and "science" (Schutz, 1967).

While each individual has a unique biographical situation and set of experiences, through their membership in society they come to share "stocks of knowledge". "Stocks of knowledge" are socially learned and handed down in the form of typifications (Schutz, 1967). Typifications are classifications, categories, constructs, "personal types" and "courses of action" which operate as a kind of "reference

schemata" to which particular objects, people, conditions and events are referred. Such knowledge also includes "efficient recipes for the use of typical means of bringing about typical ends in typical situations" (Schutz, 1964:14). For some situations the "stock of knowledge" at hand may be adequate, for others individuals have to improvise. New knowledge is either assimilated into old typifications or used to form the nucleus of new ones. The schemata are not rigid, they are open to modification through experience and "situationally relevant" factors.

Every new situation may have ontologically, biographically, and socially determined aspects which let the hitherto typification appear insufficient to me as regards some actual experience and motivate me to advance by means of the actual experience, to new explication.  
(Schutz and Luckmann, 1974:13)

Thus, the basic, inherited, socio-cultural stock of typifications is kept only as long as it satisfies the practicalities of experience and situations. Faced with a problem, a person tries to recall from his stock of knowledge any existing prescribed traditional solutions for handling problems of certain types, solutions which have proven themselves to be successful before (Gurvitsch, 1970:50). In this sense, "the course of life is a series of situations" (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974:113) which are limited by social, economic, political and cultural arrangements but which are "open" in that they can be defined and mastered using the stock of knowledge at hand (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974:100).

The typifications, or "commonsense constructs", are not simple sense presentations. They are of a highly complicated nature, involving complex interpretations related to a person's experiences, consciousness, and the inherited stock of knowledge.

All our knowledge of the world, in common-sense as well as in scientific thinking, involves

constructs, i.e. a set of abstractions, generalizations, formalizations, idealizations specific to the respective level of thought organization.  
(Schutz, 1963:304)

These constructs largely determine the behaviour, or course of action, of actors, as well as their purposes and the means available to achieve those purposes or plans. These constructs are very important for sociological studies, for it is through these constructs that we are able to find out the particular meaning that the "Life-World" has for those who live in it. Not all the constructs are important for all sociological investigations, rather it is those constructs which appear to be "relevant" to the particular aspects of the particular problem under study which require careful attention (Schutz, 1963:305).

Ethnographic research, as the study of people in situ, is basically a process of discovery and learning (Denzin, 1970; Bruyn, 1966). Since a major part of such an investigation is provided by people in their own terms, one must find out about those terms, rather than impose upon them a preconceived scheme of what they are about. A Phenomenologically informed approach reinforces this intention. Awareness of the fact that commonsense constructs form part of everyday life, sensitizes the researcher to the ready-made typifications as they emerge and helps one to recognize and identify them, rather than taking them for granted. Questioning every typification and their meanings in practical terms allows us to see how they give direction to behaviour. Such a focus allows us to observe the interaction between the cultural heritage, the socially inherited typifications, and the pragmatically devised constructs developed to suit the situation at hand. This is particularly important when the researcher is part of the same society.

An ethnography, informed by Phenomenological perspectives, alerts us to the need to avoid accounts given in solely cultural, behavioural

or situational terms. It is the combination of such factors that is crucial to grasp. More specifically, in the context of this project, particular attention is directed towards:

- (a) grounding a study of poverty in the everyday life of the poor themselves;
- (b) the social construction of the reality which confronts the poor, e.g. not only the commonsense constructs used in everyday life but also the "reference schemata" of tradition and culture; and,
- (c) the typical ways of behaving, "courses of action", and styles of life developed and used by the poor in the face of desperate material deprivation.

Ethnography allows the researcher to look at the "situation of poverty" as it is in both objective and subjective "reality" by first-hand observation and to come into a face-to-face encounter with those who live it in their everyday life, observe their action, ask them to account for it and interpret it, with as little disturbance as possible, within the boundaries that form the "setting" for their daily life. No other methodology can equal ethnographic research in this respect, given that other techniques go to complement it, like taking case studies, life-histories, depth interviewing, etc. In an ethnography, the researcher uses himself as an instrument to grasp the reality in which he plunges. The various sources interested in epistemology have agreed on the value of the experiential in obtaining knowledge, and that it is an agreed fact among field-workers that the data of social science dealing with human experience and behaviour termed, mainly, "qualitative" cannot be obtained by quantitative techniques, and that the method, par excellence, for obtaining it is participant-observation. Moreover, in opposition to the "Natural Sciences", the object of study of the human sciences

will not yield data against their will, as it were, but need to be convinced. As in any process of human relations, the encounter is essential, the understanding is not merely obtained through "words", but through a variety of direct and indirect observations, impressions, sensitivity to moods, empathy, and all these metaphysical epithets that one dreads so much to use in a "scientific context" yet that the researcher, and any human being, uses in his everyday life to understand people and situations. To avoid mentioning them merely means hiding from certain others what is recognized as being a characteristic of our consciousness in the grasp of knowledge.

## II Methodological Procedure

### 1. The Exploratory Phase:

The origins of this research are to be found in a pilot study on "Life-styles, characteristics and values of urban Cairenes", done in 1973 at the American University in Cairo and discontinued, which gave rise to an interest in the poor; and in an exploration of Cairo slums, in 1977, when this research began, which confirmed this interest.

Both of these initial explorations were instrumental in determining: (a) the choice of area, (b) the choice of informants, (c) the particular foci of the study. This exploratory phase helped to raise the relevant questions.

The Egyptian government had been following a socialist policy devised to help the masses, various institutions having been established for that purpose, in what ways did these institutions help the poor survive? Were they effective? In what ways were the poor using them? That is, the concern was primarily with the poor's experience of these institutions. Other questions were: What does it mean to be poor? How does such a condition influence views of self and others?

How do the poor view their reality? How do they construct this reality? Thus, this research deals with:

- (a) The everyday economic life of the poor and how they cope.
- (b) Their social construction of their reality, namely poverty.

Location of the Research:

This study of the poor consists mainly of an ethnography of a poor area, but also of case studies in "other" areas of Cairo to find out if the findings are corroborated in other slums. The ethnography was carried out in an urban area of Old Cairo which will be called Der-El-Sabbakin, the name having been slightly modified to preserve the anonymity of its inhabitants. For the other areas in Cairo, please see the details in Tables II and III which summarize the information required. Study of these other areas alternated with the ethnography, specially since 1980. The choice of other areas was conditioned by personal factors, like personal references and suggestions, and through personal involvement and experience of the researcher. Contact with Christian cases in Ain Shams, Demerdash and the village came through different church social workers introduced by friends.

In total, 31 family cases were studied in seven Cairo slums, as shown in Table II, in addition to the number of people involved in the general ethnography, and as hosts, or guides, or informants for certain areas, and in institutions visited (detailed in Table III).

An exploratory research was undertaken in a village of Upper Egypt, in Fayum Governorate, involving seventeen case studies (Table III). Though this was not finally integrated in the study because of various considerations, including time and space, yet it helped considerably in giving a good idea of rural poverty, confirming certain conclusions on the rural-urban dimension, as well as the poor's social

construction of their reality, particularly where beliefs were involved.

Research work undertaken for certain institutions in both Cairo and a poor area of Suez (Hay-El-Arbain) were not integrated in the study, but helped give an even broader perspective on the poor (details in Table III).

### Choice of the Area for Ethnographic Research

In 1973, for the "Life-styles" study which was to be done in the more traditional sector of the urban population, labelled baladi<sup>1</sup> area, Nema, a baladi woman, well-known to the researcher, was contacted to help in finding someone who would act as an informant. As a janitor in a club, she had many contacts, as she helped baladi men and women find jobs in the services. However, Nema offered to act as her guide and became her first informant.

As Nema knew a <sup>particular</sup> quarter of Old Cairo, she offered to take the researcher to her area and introduced her to four families. However, she insisted on presenting the researcher as a social worker, believing it would justify the visit and allow asking questions, without antagonizing people against herself. There was no way of convincing her that this was not the ideal way of making research. But Nema had poor families in mind, hence the justification. Among these, she introduced the researcher to Fateh, her brother, who was now a refugee from Ismailia, but originally a Cairene who, like Nema, had been born and bred in a quarter of Old Cairo, Der-El-Sabbakin, and in which he had returned to live. It was only later that Fateh was to become the researcher's second informant.

1. Baladi: literally means 'of the folk' or 'indigenous' in contrast to 'Westernized'. It refers to the traditional urbanite style of life, behaviour and way of being, in contrast to the 'modern' which adopts a Westernized style (Abu-Lughod, 1971:191).



When the "Life-styles" study was discontinued, contact was maintained with Nema and the four families. Nema's husband had started working at the age of six, as he lost his father as an infant and his mother was very poor. Nema had worked since she was a young girl to help her family. Thus, discussions with them on poverty and the poor were valuable. They also explained baladi customs, relationships, expressions and sayings whenever needed.

In 1977, the exploratory research to define the area for the ethnography took place in three main areas: Old Cairo, Medieval Cairo and Bulaq. According to Abu-Lughod's analysis of official statistics, these were Cairo's main slums, Old Cairo being the worst. This exploration confirmed this finding, and indicated that whatever the area chosen, what was important was to get to know the poor in it. There was nothing to do but to make an arbitrary choice, perhaps a practical one that would make it possible for the researcher to go through the research to the end. Old Cairo presented several practical advantages:

1. It was familiar to the researcher. She had already two informants in this area, and the few cases whom she had known for the past three years.
2. It was the worst of the three slums, <sup>according</sup> to Abu-Lughod.
3. It was the slum closest to the <sup>researcher's</sup> home, about 10 miles distance. The other areas were much farther.
4. Easy communication was available. A metro line provided continual transport, distance being covered in 15 minutes.

Old Cairo is a huge district occupying more than ten square kilometres and densely populated. A smaller area had to be defined for the ethnographic study to make it possible. The area in which Nema lived was an open one which presented problems of delimitation, while Der-El-

TABLE II CAIRO STUDY OF THE POOR

| <u>Location of Research</u>                                       | <u>Informants or Contact</u>                           | <u>No. of Case Studies</u>                      | <u>Time</u>                        | <u>Techniques used</u>   | <u>Recording of data</u>   |
|---|--|---|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Der-El-Sabbakin<br>(Area of Ethnography<br>in Old Cairo)          | Nema<br>) Informants<br>(Fateh & wife)                 | 8 families<br>2 singles<br>(54 persons)         | 5 cases:1974-81<br>5 cases:1977-81 | -Pilot study<br>-Participant observation<br>-Life-histories<br>-Unstructured interviews              | -Taping<br>-Verbatim<br>-Short-notes, later field-notes<br>-Schematic drawings<br>-Photographs<br>-Field-notes incorporating all the above |
| Al-Anwar (Old Cairo)  | Nema   | 4 families<br>(22 persons)                      | 2 from 1974-77<br>2 from 1974-81   | -Pilot study<br>-Observation<br>-Participant observm.<br>-Life-histories<br>-Unstructured interviews | -Verbatim<br>-Schematic drawings<br>-Field-notes   |
| Athar-El-Nabi<br>(south of Cairo)                                 | Aida   | 3 families (1<br>working-class)<br>(13 persons) | 1977                               | -Observation<br>-Conversing<br>-Unstructured i'views   | -Verbatim<br>-Schematic drawings<br>-Field-notes   |
| Dar-El-Salam<br>(south of Cairo)                                  | None   | 3 families (2<br>working-class)<br>(22 persons) | 1979                               | -Exploration of area<br>-Unstructured i'views<br>-Observation  | -Verbatim<br>-Schematic drawings<br>-Field-notes   |
| Rod-El-Farag<br>(north of Cairo)                                  | YWCA   | 1 family (working<br>class)<br>(5 persons)      | 1980                               | -Unstructured i'view<br>-Observation   | -Verbatim<br>-Schematic drawings<br>-Field-notes   |
| Embābah<br>(north-west of Cairo)                                  | None   | 1 family (working<br>class)<br>(6 persons)      | 1980                               | -Unstructured i'view<br>-Observation   | -Verbatim<br>-Schematic drawings<br>-Field-notes   |
| Ezbet Atef at Ain<br>Shams<br>(north-east Cairo,<br>rural fringe) | 2 Church social<br>workers (themselves<br>interviewed) | 8 families (on<br>Church help)<br>(37 persons)  | 1980                               | -Observation<br>-Unstructured i'views<br>-Conversing   | -Verbatim<br>-Short-notes, later<br>taping account<br>-Schematic drawing<br>-Field notes   |
| Der-El-Malak at<br>Dimirdash<br>(north-east Cairo)                | 1 Church social<br>worker                              | 1 family (Church<br>help)<br>(7 persons)        | 1980                               | -Observation<br>-Unstructured i'view   | -Verbatim<br>-Short-notes<br>-Field-notes  |
| From Ain Shams,<br>Dimirdash<br>Matariah and Zeitun               | Contact: friends                                       | 10 Church social<br>workers inter-<br>viewed    | 1980                               | -Interviewing on<br>Christian poor's<br>economy and beliefs  | -Verbatim<br>-Short-notes<br>-Field-notes  |

TABLE III STUDIES IN EGYPT NOT REPORTED HERE, BUT HELPING IN GIVING GOOD PERSPECTIVE AND INFORMATION

| <u>Location of Research</u>                      | <u>Informants or Contacts</u>  | <u>No. of Case Studies</u>  | <u>Time</u>                     | <u>Techniques used</u>   | <u>Recording of data</u>   |
|--|--|---|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Village in Fayūm Governorate                     | Friend from Cairo for contact<br>Two informants from village<br>(Own research)   | 17 Christian families (from poor Church list)<br>(44 persons)   | July & Aug. 1980, and Jan. 1981 | -Observation<br>-Unstructured interviews   | -Verbatim<br>-Short-notes, then taping self<br>-Field-notes<br>-Photographs                          |
| Zeitun (north-east Cairo)                        | 1 Church social worker   | Coptic Orphanage for children (birth-10 yrs)  | 1980                            | -Observation<br>-Conversing  | -Verbatim<br>-Notes<br>-Field-notes  |
| Ezbet Atef at Ain Shams<br>Embabah               | 1 Church social worker<br>Participation in Toy committee   | Church's Social Club for poor children<br>Government social club for poor   |                                 |  |  |
| Old Cairo  | Tip from friend in social work<br>Personal contact   | Islamic Institution "Al-Shafaqa"<br>YWCA Vocational Training Centre for Girls<br>Government Vocational Training Centre for Boys | 1981<br>1980-81                 | -Observation<br>-Conversing  | -Notes<br>-Field-notes   |
| Shubrah (N Cairo)                                |  |   |                                 |  |  |
| Guizeh (W Cairo)                                 | Friend   |   | 1980                            |  |  |
| Hay-Al-Arbain, in Suez (a poor area)             | Egyptian-UK Research: "Suez Demonstration Project" for rehabilitation of the city's housing and infrastructure & services. | About 40 cases by researcher  | June & July 1977                | -Structured interview schedule on systematic random sample<br>-Analysis of data by hand computation<br>-Interpretation and Writing of Report | -On Interview schedule (not available)   |
| Kafr-el-Zahraa & Kafr Farouk in Ain Shams, Cairo | USAID Research on Housing for Low-income groups  | 12 cases (done by researcher)   | Nov. 1977                       | -Structured interview<br>Schedule on systematic random sample  | -On interview schedule (not available)<br>-Notes taken with some observations on poor, by researcher |

Sabbakin was delimited by certain physical boundaries, with dead-end alleys or atfa - a pattern typical of many haras of Old Cairo.

### Choice of Informant

When Nema knew of the researcher's decision, she was very annoyed and tried to dissuade her, since this area had been her birthplace, and it was humiliating for her to see the area defined as 'poor', particularly since her brother still lived in it. The situation became problematic. As Aida, the niece of Nema, had suggested another area, called Athār-El-Nabi, the researcher accepted to investigate it as an alternative choice, or at least as an area to compare with Der. It was explored and three cases were taken from it. However, this was not an urban area, but a southern urban-rural fringe. For this and other reasons, Der was finally preferred for the ethnography.

Nema's reluctance and her being free only one day a week, in contrast to her brother Fateh's constant presence in Der, led the researcher gradually to taking him and his wife as the main informants on this area. They knew just every person in Der, as Fateh worked as an ironer, using the staircase as his shop. Fateh and his family, a wife-Amal- and two little girls, had suffered from poverty, particularly since 1967 when they left their shop and home in Ismailia as war refugees. Both proved to be excellent informants. They had another important advantage over Nema; they became convinced not to present the researcher as a social worker.

## 2. The Ethnography

### Getting a room in the area:

Finding a room to live in the area showed some important aspects of ethnographic research. Nema was shocked to hear that the researcher

wanted to live in the area and declared that she could 'never live there', and besides, one could never find a room because none was available. The researcher suggested that she may be able to use the room of someone who was away all day working and did not need it then. This brought a great deal of astonished laughter from Nema, her niece and a friend of hers who happened to be there. Finally, Nema suggested using Islah's room, one of the poor cases. This was a 'safe' place and they were nice people who would introduce her to other poor people. Unfortunately, while this family were very receptive, the room proved too noisy and family life too disruptive to interviews and to maintain relationships with all the cases (the brother's carpentry knocking and the movement of sixteen family members, plus neighbours, in a tiny space). So it was decided to live with each family in turn where possible. This arrangement allowed the researcher to observe people's daily activities, their way of life, food, clothes, recreations, and facilitated discussing with them various things. At no time was the researcher able to spend the night in Der, because all the rooms, beds, sofas and floor were used by them to sleep at night, and they were always at least two to three in a room, and in some cases seven to eight. Like most poor areas, Der is overcrowded, and during all the period of the ethnographic research, which amounted to four years, no one moved and there were no vacancies. Besides, there are many restrictions on a single woman taking a room in a baladi quarter, hence the astonishment of these baladi people at the researcher's request.

#### Introducing the researcher and the research:

Because of the nature of ethnographic research, cases were not pre-defined, but the researcher had agreed with Fateh and Amal to introduce her to families known in the area as 'poor'. When the

ethnography began, Amal would take the researcher with her to the house of a poor family and call the wife, 'Om Fatma!' The person would call back, 'Who? Om Amala! Come in'. Both would go in. Om Amala would say, 'This is a dear friend of ours (habibetnah) and an old acquaintance of Ameti Nema who came with me'. Om Fatma would exclaim, 'Welcome! welcome! Sit down'. A conversation would follow. Then at some point Om Amala would say, 'This lady is studying baladi areas, she wants to learn about the problems of families. Tell her about them'. The women would say, 'What do you want to know?' or 'And why not? Let her ask'.

After the first two or three families, the researcher herself began to introduce the research. At some point in the conversation she would say, 'I am a university student and am doing a study on the problems of families'. The reaction often was 'Who does not have problems?' or 'What kinds of problems?' Eventually this point was reached and she would answer, 'The problems of livelihood, or maishah'. Inevitably, this led to the respondent making some pertinent comment about the problems of coping with everyday life. It would start either with a comment on the soaring price of tomatoes, or disappearance of some vegetable due to imposition of a price-control, and so on. These comments led directly to the crux of the research.

#### Attitude of the inhabitants in the various phases of the research:

Later, Amal began working and Fateh undertook to introduce her. He would call mainly on the men in the family, but sometimes the women, if widowed or divorced. Soon the inhabitants knew why the researcher was there by hearsay. Since she was Nema's and Fateh's friend and known to them for so long, they had nothing to fear. To most, she was 'Abla', a label given to a teacher or an older sister. Later, many called her 'Hagga', because she always covered her hair and wore long-

sleeves and clothes defined as peculiar to a woman who has gone on pilgrimage. When asked her name, she would say Om S (mother of S, the name of her daughter). Soon she became a familiar figure with her notebook and pencil. Gradually one family introduced her to another, enlarging the circle of her acquaintance and revealing the ties between them.

After the first two years, the third phase of the research began which focussed on the poor's social construction of their reality. By that time, the researcher knew well enough each individual to ask those more subjective questions in the way most acceptable to each. By that time too, these families just carried on their daily activities and talked freely of anything among each other in her presence. Many confided in her about their own misery, and spoke of their personal thoughts and feelings.

When the ethnographic research came to an end and the fourth phase of the research in 'other' areas began, visits to Der became less frequent and concentrated on keeping up with the developments in the life of each family member. The researcher was received as an old friend, and concern expressed at her absence.

#### Techniques of research:

Ethnography is based on the same relationships and human bonds as everyday life, and hence the same conditions operate, in contrast to the questionnaire or interview situation in which the encounter is typical of that between two strangers, with its various barriers. Still, various techniques were used.

#### Participant observation:

Basic to an ethnographic approach is participant observation, the method par excellence, as it allows the researcher not only to

observe, but by plunging in the activity taking place, to realize the meaning of the experiences of the group and individuals involved. In Der, this method was used in three main situations forming the main part of the inhabitants' daily life: (a) in the streets or haras, (b) in their homes, (c) participating in events outside the hara.

(a) Hara life was observed from two main vantage points: one was near the main hara which led to all the other dead-end haras (please see chart of Der in Appendix), and one in Fateh's staircase where he stood ironing. In the first, the researcher spent days sitting beside Zeinab, the street peddler, at the spot where she would not miss anyone leaving or entering Der. There, she watched the adults and children, their action and behaviour and the services that were provided to them. Zeinab knew each by name, character, activities, and life-history, so any inquiry could be obtained, then checked by the main informants, and later confirmed through personal contact. Sitting there made the researcher familiar to just everyone in Der, who, at first, were very astonished, but gradually took it for granted. Last but not least, it allowed her to understand Zeinab's and the lives of the other street peddlars. The other observation point was more limited in one sense, but yielded a different kind of data and consequences. While Fateh ironed near the staircase door, inhabitants invariably came to talk to him, some for advice as he was considered a ponderant man, others for work, some to complain of life's problems, some to comment on news heard, and some just for a light chat and to tell the latest joke. People trusted him and whenever they stopped and looked in her direction, to indicate to him that they could not 'tell' in front of her, he would say calmly and firmly, 'Don't be afraid. Talk'. This sort of moral guarantee by Fateh was crucial in making her the object of trust, facilitating rapport, as well as giving her the chance to listen to their problems and opinions openly. Later, she could inquire about



their background. This was very important in understanding the spirit with which they interpreted events, behaviour, meanings, i.e. their moral judgment, and various typifications.

(b) It is through participant observation in their homes that close rapport was created. Living their day with them, sharing in their daily round of activities rather than interrupting them to hold an interview, observing the way they coped, revealed both their life-style and the institutions they used to cope. It is the level of rapport achieved which led to their intimation of thought and feeling, revealing their subjective experience and interpretation of poverty.

(c) Participation in events outside the hara, showed another dimension of the scope of their life. One main reason for women going outside the hara was shopping, whether for food, or for goods, which, as peddlars, they would sell later. The other was attending ceremonies, like weddings, funerals, circumcisions or zar (see the section on Health). Such participation deepened rapport, increasing the sharing, and allowed for comments later that involved both interpretation of the events, as well as recall of such events in the person's life, leading to knowledge of their life-histories in a 'natural' situation.

#### Life-histories:

Within the ethnographic situation, six complete life histories were obtained, apart from the life-histories that were reconstructed here and there through conversation or unstructured interviewing. Life-histories revealed socialization patterns, work careers, marriage conditions, crises lived, traditional beliefs, values, and customs, and definitions of self and the situation. As these histories were usually sought after years of rapport, they allowed the checking of information obtained at first, allowing verification.

### Case studies:

Within the ethnographic study, certain cases were taken for more intensive study: (1) Care was taken to take those considered poor by most of the inhabitants of Der. Some were poorer than others, presenting qualitative differences and various circumstances. (2) Cases with whom better rapport was established were preferred to others. (3) Cases with whom it was possible to pass the day were preferred to those whose jobs took them away all day, for obvious reasons. It was mainly among these that the researcher took rooms. She would come sometimes before 8 a.m. to observe their activities. With some, she would stay on as late as 11 p.m. if they stayed up late. Every member of the family was talked to. Case studies were important to obtain life-styles, budgets, coping patterns and the entire range of their social construction of poverty.

A distinction must be made between case studies made in Der, and those taken in other areas of Cairo. Those in Der covered every possible aspect of their life, which, unfortunately, cannot all be covered in this thesis, while the cases in other areas related more to the two main foci in this study. Again, even in other areas, some cases were studied more intensively than others. This depended very much on: (1) the availability of an informant and the amount of trust people had in him or her; (2) the time spent with each case; (3) the nature of the rapport; (4) the circumstances of the study. Actually much could be said on each of these points if space allowed. In such cases, the informant had an even more important role to play, since he would have to provide all the background information, which there was no time, nor sufficient rapport, to obtain from the cases themselves. The informant would also verify and clarify the information. Thus, for the Christian cases, different Church social workers introduced

by friends acted as informants. Only in four cases, who were Moslem (see Table II), was it impossible to find one, and the researcher just walked in. In these cases, it was impossible to obtain verification, except in one case which all the shopkeepers around declared to be destitute as they lived in a shack. The three other cases were mainly working class families.

### Unstructured interviews:

Where members of a family were rarely present in Der, interviewing was used when they appeared, as it was not possible to observe their behaviour. Where information did not come naturally, questions were asked casually in the conversation to complete the data. In 'other' areas where time was limited, interviews became more crucial to make up for the lack of observation possibilities. Still, even then, it was important to ask the questions as casually as possible, yet bring the interviewee back to the topic whenever one of them drifted. Questions centred mainly on basic needs of everyday living, ways of coping and institutions used to cope, as well as definitions of their condition and in what way they believed that these affected them. The latter was not easy to obtain in the interview situation, however, surprisingly and in almost all instances, religious belief emerged naturally, as it formed part of their definition of their condition.

### 3. Recording Data

(a) Field-notes: Conversations, interviews and life-histories were most often recorded verbatim or on tape, and put into field-notes. The researcher kept a daily record of the field-experience, the observations, and the various events that occurred as well as the respondents' interpretations of them. Even expressions of happiness, or boredom, or frustration were noted, and the circumstances that aroused them were

described, as well as the explanations given by the respondents. Often, even if the information appeared repeated, it was noted. Such recording in itself was esteemed important as a verification process.

(b) Tapes: were used whenever respondents accepted. Only in one or two instances did the researcher tape respondents without their knowledge. Such tapes were then put in the field-notes verbatim to facilitate the analysis later. Sometimes, when a day was particularly rich in data and the researcher feared that it might be impossible to write it all down on the same day, or where note-taking had been incomplete, as when participation in events occurred, she taped her own account, for later writing.

(c) Budgets: were noted, calculated, reconstructed and cross-checked, since the poor do not have a budget in a strict sense.

(d) Listing of occupations and demographic data: was also made with a drawing of the area, taking it house by house, naming its owner as well as the inhabitants, identifying them and obtaining data on their occupations. Details on number of rooms and facilities and amenities were obtained. The data were put in tables (see the Local Setting).

(e) Schematic drawings: of house and furniture were used as part of the field-notes. It helped keep an image of the house structure, furniture items and the way they were set.

(f) Photographs: were taken whenever possible, but had to be justified to the inhabitants. They were taken during the exploratory study of slums, the ethnography, and the village study. The second-hand Sunday market or sūk-el-ahad of Shubrah-El-Khemah was photographed.

#### 4. The Analysis and Presentation of the Data

By keeping an index of the field-notes, the analysis was facilitated. Generally, the focus was on the patterns of behaviour that

emerged from the data, and the various themes, concepts and typifications that were common to the poor. The analysis focussed on the following main points:

1. Basic facts on the area: their housing characteristics, available amenities, occupations, family types and organization of households.
2. The everyday economic life of the poor: this covered all sources of income and patterns of spending. By taking each item of budget, the various formal and informal institutions used to cope were identified, and their mode of use both as observed and as respondents reported it was analyzed to discover common patterns. Where real consensus was reached, an ideal model was constructed as close as possible to the actual pattern. This model was compared to the information gathered from 'other' areas to see if it applied there. In presenting the data, four poor family cases were taken to illustrate the variations on a common pattern of daily life that emerged, based on the ethnography.
3. The social construction of poverty: this data was analyzed in terms of themes and typifications, and related both to the cultural material used in the social construction of reality, and to their style of life. Analysis involved how various factors affected this construction. The data on 'other' areas was analyzed to find out if the themes and typifications that emerged in the ethnographic area were operative in other areas of Cairo. In presenting this subjective aspect, two accounts were taken to illustrate how these typifications and the social construction of poverty were expressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: CAIRO SLUMS AND THE SETTING OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

Cairo has always been the economic and administrative centre of Egyptian life. The history of the city extends some 5000 years. Few capitals have had this overwhelming geographical, demographic, economic and administrative importance (Baer, 1969). Its location and land, river and now air routes have made Cairo an appropriate site for the administration of the country. Consequently, it has attracted merchants and industries from all over Egypt, encouraging migration. Today, Cairo has about ten million inhabitants, and is the largest metropolis in Africa and the Middle East. Just catering for these millions is a guarantee of gain which adds to Cairo's attraction for migrants, whether poor or well-off.

Ecologically speaking, neither Burgess' Concentric Zones model nor Hoyt's Sector Model could apply to Cairo, as these are spatial models which could not apply to a city that has grown on all sides in what appears to be a disorderly manner. Western ecological models have been found mostly inapplicable to Middle Eastern cities in general, and to Cairo in particular (see Abu-Lughod 1963 and 1971; Lapidus, 1969; Iffih, 1975). Various historical, religious and even demographic differences have resulted in ecological differences and differences in the urbanization process, which call for new theories and new models to conceptualize and understand it (Abu-Lughod, 1964; Amin, G., 1974). Even Shevsky and Bell's (Abu-Lughod, 1969) model of 'social areas' for pre-industrial cities was found to be inadequate where systematic census-taking was needed. Finally, Abu-Lughod (1971) computed different indices and used factor analysis, mainly 'style of life' to differentiate 'social areas' which were quite different from any of the previous Western

ecological models. Most of her results correspond very closely to the common-sense knowledge that the Cairene has of these different areas, and confirm the popular saying: 'Cairo is several cities within the city' (masr bilād fi alb baādaha).

This chapter presents two related aspects of this study:

- 1.] A general view of Cairo's main slums based on the field data of the exploratory research and documented by other research.
- 2.] The research findings on the particular slum, scene of the ethnographic research, tracing its history in the literature.

### 1. Slums: The Residence of the Poor

The areas which form Ancient Fustat or Old Cairo, in the South, the Al-Qahira of Medieval Cairo in the midland East, and the more recent Bulaq built after Salah-El-Din in the North, were found to form each a separate 'social area' different from the newer areas surrounding them (Abu-Lughod, 1971). They also form Cairo's major urban slums; as the condition of the areas deteriorated, they came to be inhabited by the poorer elements of the city and by a worker class. They are also the areas where small local industries are centred. Brasswork, ironwork, leather and gold industries are centred in Medieval Cairo. Leather and pottery as well as minor metal industries are found in Old Cairo, and car repair, 'wholesale warehouses and open storage yards' are found in Bulaq (Abu-Lughod, 1971).

An exploratory study in the slums indicated that neglect is their most outstanding characteristic. Houses are often two to five storeys high, stuck to one another and are in a very bad condition, as inhabitants cannot afford any maintenance whatsoever. Often small leaks are neglected until they grow and the house actually crumbles down. The

services in these areas are totally neglected by both authorities and inhabitants, so that the streets are often full of holes, garbage, sewage, dust and stones, flies, mosquitoes and increasingly, rats. These penetrate the houses and cause a high rate of infectious diseases which spread quickly due to the crowding. Only with the outbreak of epidemics are campaigns organized by the health authorities to clean and spray these areas.

Density in slums is very high, often several households share one apartment and often a whole family lives in one room. In some areas, like Bulaq, density reaches 66,000 persons per square kilometre (AID Report, 1977: 13; see Appendix). Housing shortages are so serious that governments have taken all the measures advised by experts to increase and speed construction. Laws have been changed to allow any kind of building to rise, and to forbid any destruction of buildings even illegal ones. Inhabitants pathetically allow the buildings to fall and bury them rather than leave them because they know they cannot find housing. Poor people may live in a shack on a roof, or build shacks in a light-well or staircase, or between two buildings that have left the three metres between them, as witnessed in the research.

Inner slums are generally inhabited by a traditional urban population who, in most cases, are second, third or even fourth generation migrants. In some of the fringe areas of Shubrah, Rod el Farag, Wayli, Jiza, Embabah, inhabitants are migrants that have kept a more rural 'style of life', as they constitute 'migrant reception areas' continually fed by new arrivals (AID Report, 1977: 21). In general, the majority of slum residents are either workers, or itinerant pedlars, or engaged in the services, whether public or private. Most are semi-skilled or unskilled as few technical schools exist and these require at least a Preparatory Certificate to accept



them. As most of them barely complete the compulsory primary education, often failing in the Primary Certificate exams, they are not eligible for such schools. Hence, there is a concentration of illiterate or semi-literate people. So, many learn their small crafts at an early age, by becoming apprentice boys in a car mechanic's, or electrician's or plumber's workshop. They are given 30 P.T. to 50 P.T. per week (i.e. about 20 to 33 pence per week). Some of the older boys are paid 10 P.T. per day (about 6 to 7 pence). Frequently, the child's pay goes to help a widowed mother or a poor father, contributing to food expenses (1977-78 figures). For the unskilled, odd jobs exist, like work in the abattoirs where water is thrown on the butchered animal to wash it, or carrying it to the cart or lorry.<sup>1</sup>

These levels are common to other poor areas, as the researcher's exploratory study in most of Cairo's slums revealed. Athar-El-Nabi is a partly rural poor area, South of Old Cairo. It used to be a port on the Nile. It has some minor industries, both governmental and private, most of which are derived from lime quarries e.g. powder, tiles, cement. A small village-formation lives on these industries. The inhabitants are mostly illiterate, unskilled and badly paid. Their poverty and health conditions are strikingly bad, as they breathe the lime dust all day and get bad chest conditions. The majority of the workers in this area earn 65 P.T. to 85 P.T. per day, depending on whether they work eight hours or eleven hours. The rest of the village work by providing services. A few work in bigger firms in the Southern industrial area of Helwan. Athar-El-Nabi has a mosque, a grocer, a few odd shops and vegetable and fruit peddlars who provide only urgent needs. There is a primary school not far from the area, along the main Agricultural Road (as it is called because

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1. This information on education, apprenticeship and odd jobs comes from the case studies investigated in depth.

it passes within the fields). But to go to a Preparatory School, children must either walk about 5 kilometres, or take a bus or train. There is a bus station close by, on the main road, and the train station of the Cairo-Helwan railway is about 15 minutes walk. The inner haras or alleys of this settlement are all narrow and unpaved. Most houses are made of red-bricks and cement and are self-made, so that the buildings are odd, since rooms are added as the head of household is able to save the amount necessary for building cost.

Slums are the areas where most of the destitute and the disabled poor are concentrated. As social security is only given under very limited condition, many of these who have no family to help turn to begging. Were it not for regular government campaigns to check beggars, more would be visible. Medieval Cairo attracts both beggars and pick-pockets, due to the number of tourists that visit it (Abu-Lughod, 1971). They often sit at the doors of the Old mosques. In Old Cairo where churches are numerous, they sit at the doors of churches and mosques, in stations, and street corners. In Medieval Cairo where public baths still exist "illegitimate professions" are concentrated (Abu-Lughod, 1971). In Medieval as well as in Old Cairo and Bulaq, the drug business flourishes. As all forms of drug addiction are very severely punished by the law, in Egypt, sale of drugs remains carefully hidden. But it is public knowledge that hashish is most often sold in the traditional coffee-houses where only men sit. Police are said to know drug pockets and make regular descents, but they cannot enter certain haras where drug gangs are very powerful.

A most peculiar kind of slum forms part of the Cairo scene, and this is the "City of the Dead" where the tomb-squatters live. In 1960, (Abu Lughod, 1971) they amounted to 100,000 inhabitants. As the housing

problem is worse now, they are said to have become half a million. The inhabitants of the tombs lack the proper services and have to go for their water to a public tap (Abu-Lughod, 1971). Doubtlessly, the tombs form an unhealthy place to live, however, if compared to some of the quarters in the inner urban slums, the City of the Dead is cleaner and better aired. It is a living example of the problems of housing and poverty in Cairo.

## 2. The Slum of Old Cairo

The quarter chosen for the ethnography forms part of the larger area of Misr al Qadimah or Old Cairo. In 1800, Old Cairo formed a separate 'suburb'. Of its 10,000 residents, many were Egyptian Christians and Jews. In fact, the area abounded in churches and synagogues (Staffa, 1977). It had industries like the 'abbatoirs' or slaughter-houses and 'pottery kilns'. Thus, the area was segregated and considered inferior, providing menial jobs (Abu-Lughod, 1977; Baer, 1964). These industries survive today, and the leather industry has been conveniently placed close to the slaughter-house.

At present, Old Cairo covers an area of 10.1 square kilometres, and includes eight 'census districts' which number, 273,670 inhabitants according to the 1976 census. It has 56,588 households which average 4.8 per household. Its density is 27,000 per square kilometre. Jews and foreign communities have departed from it, and even Christians whose conditions improved, moved out and were replaced by Moslems of 'lower educational and social levels' (Abu-Lughod, 1971: 201). The latter form a majority, with non-Moslems accounting for only 6% in 1960, mainly Christian copts. The rural population is "in a minority, and most residents are old-time urbanites who occupy dwellings that are of urban design, albeit

of marginal quality" (Abu-Lughod, 1977: 201). Abu-Lughod (1971) found it the most depressed of the three urban slum districts of Cairo, according to her Factor analysis, which gave it -0.54. This is very significant since the variables on her factor I which refers to 'style of life' is low, indicating that the degree of literacy is low, while the fertility ratio, percentage of unemployed males, percentage of divorced women and number of handicapped are all high. Finally, density and number of persons per room is high, with early marriage being the rule.

While Abu-Lughod's findings are based on official statistics, unpublished research carried by Ghamri in two of the census districts of Old Cairo: Al-Anwar and Esh-El-Barud, on 200 families, reveals that these areas have a high rate of illiteracy, 53% for men and 83% for women. Most of the population is found to be of the working class, with a level of unemployment that goes up to 12%. Only 43.5% seem to have a semi-skilled job so that they can work in industrial firms, while 38.5% are engaged in some trade, and 6% in transport. Heads of household were found to work more than 8 hours per day; 51% work 12 hours per day, 43% work 8 hours per day, 2% work 6 hours per day, while 3.5% work more than 12 hours per day. As Ghamri's research was conducted between 1966 and 1968, the wages were relatively lower than today. However, the figures are astounding even for that time. About half of them, 49.5%, were getting the lowest pay, i.e. between L.E.1 to L.E.4 per month, 36.5% were getting L.E.5 to L.E.9 and 11% were getting L.E.10 to L.E.14. Only 3% were getting more than L.E.14. About half of them were in debt.

Exploration of the area shows that conditions have not improved though worker's wages have risen tremendously. However, as inflation shot up at a relatively higher rate, conditions are not much better. Only certain occupations have kept up with the inflation, due to the scarcity

of skilled and semi-skilled workers resulting from migration to the Arab oil countries.

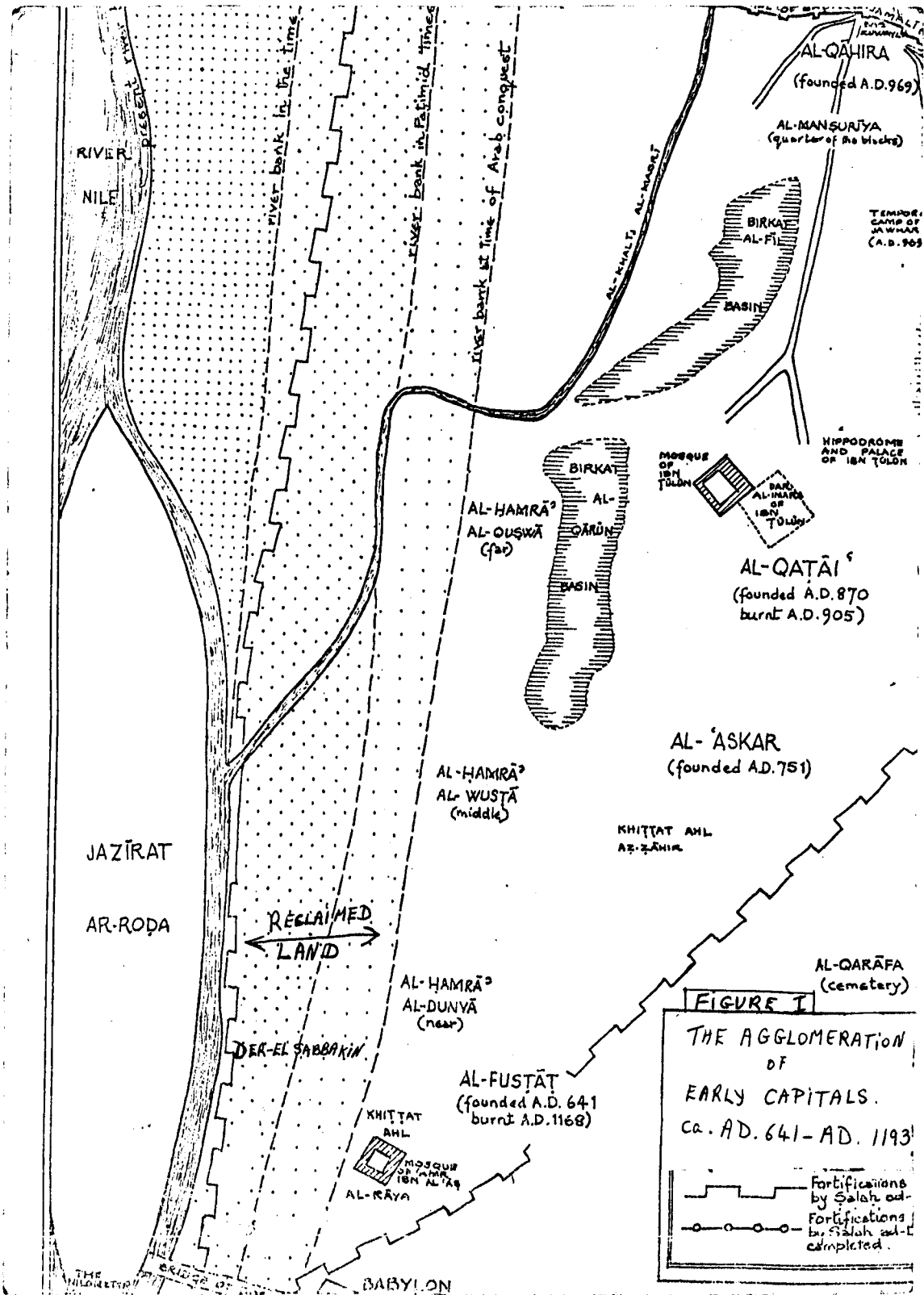
A tour of the area and some home visits showed the houses to be in a bad condition. Compared to other areas, there are very few new constructions, mostly because there is no empty land and as long as the building does not literally fall down, it is not pulled down and rebuilt. The only relatively new constructions are the public housing which dates back to the 60's, during the Nasser regime and which have taken on the appearance of slums. People are too poor to repaint their houses or make major repairs. Within every main gate, one observes a dark and dirty passage which looks sordid, i.e. smears on the walls, falling or long fallen paint, large bits of fallen mortar making deep holes, piles of garbage, flies, dust and unpleasant smells. The whole area appears dirty, noisy and very crowded with all kinds of humans, animals and vehicles moving about.

### 3. The Setting of the Ethnography

#### Its History

Der-El-Sabbakin is a quarter of Old Cairo. It lies South of Cairo between the Kharab or ruins that was Fustāt and the Nile, opposite the island of Rodah. It is one of the port suburbs of Cairo. Der-El-Sabbakin formed part of the Nile bed, before the Nile waters receded sometime in the early twelfth century. It was during the reign of Salah-El-Din that the Nile waters seemed to have definitely receded far enough to allow this narrow border to be built and inhabited (Staffa, 1978). The quarter thus falls on this strip close to the Nile, between the old Fustāt and the river (see Figure I).

This strip faces Rodah island where the grand-nephew of Salah-El-Din:



As-Saleh had installed his slaves. So the history of the area must have begun then. In fact today, the train station, in the vicinity is called Malik-As-Saleh which means the King As-Saleh. The land uncovered by the Nile is said to have been "granted to various individuals who built houses upon it". These had obviously gained some favour with the ruler. Apparently it became a quarter of "fashionable residence", which means that inhabitants belonged at least, to a middle class, as did Fustāt a few centuries earlier (Staffa, 1977: 113). It gradually deteriorated, its inhabitants left, and poorer elements replaced them who were mostly unable to make improvements.

The term "Der" means "monastery", but there is no evidence of its having been one. It is also interesting to note that just a few years ago the name was changed to Dar-El-Sabbakin which means "House of Plumbers", but both names figure on the plaque of the street name, and everyone continues to call it Der. The rest of the name indicates that some metal was worked there. Today, the entrance is occupied by a wire factory, and the perpendicular alley that goes to the railway is occupied by several ironmongers shops. Whether the area was in fact occupied by workers in metal during the 19th century is an open question. The point is that in earlier history, communities were often segregated according to occupation (Baer, 1964; Staffa, 1977).

### Physical Boundaries

Der-El-Sabbakin is a Moslem residence quarter with urban dwellings, though most are old and in bad condition. It has definite boundaries (please see Figure II). On the West lies the Nile with the main Nile Cornishe Road. A line of houses hide the quarter from view. On the quarter's East side lies the railway of Bab-El-Luk-Helwan line, which

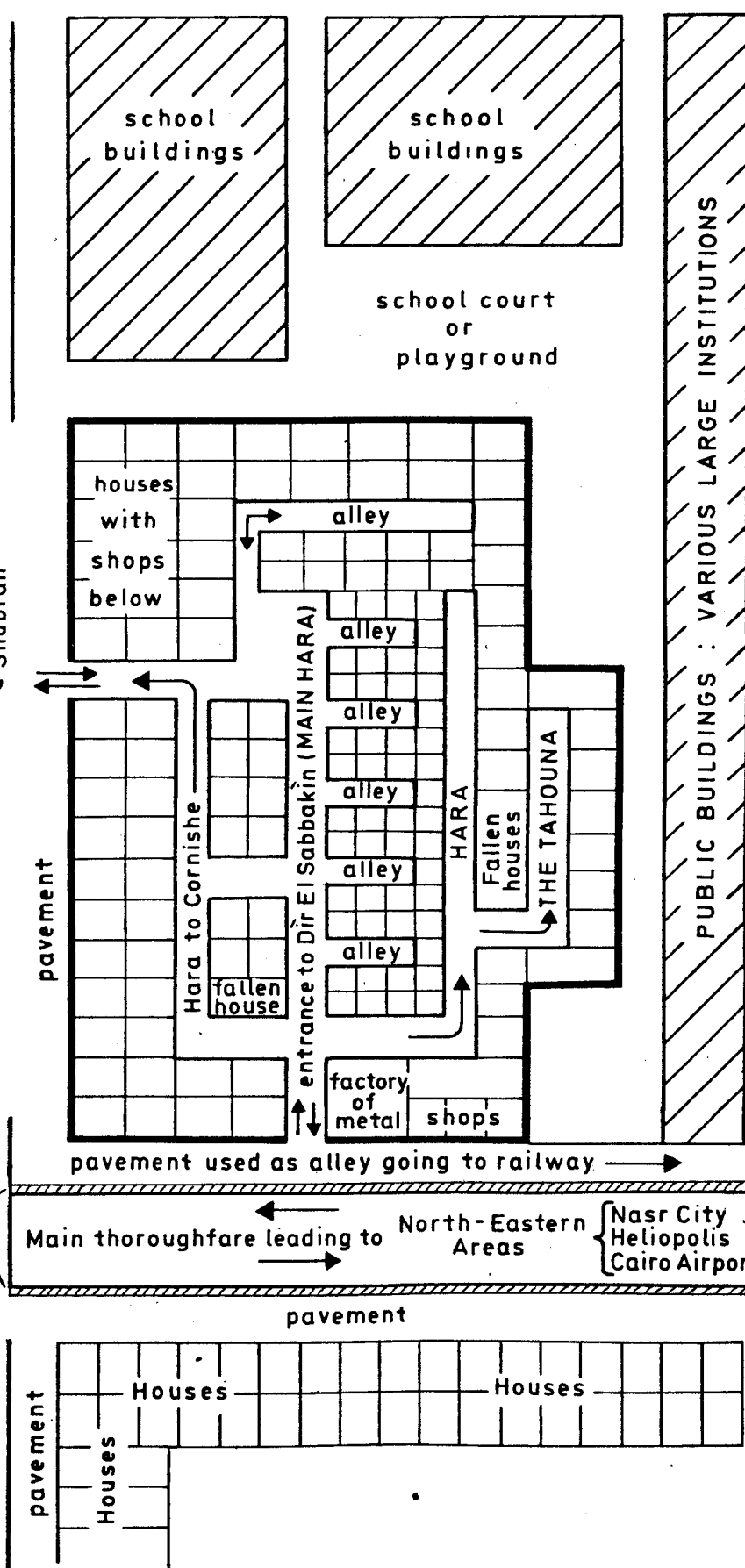
RODA ISLAND

River Nile

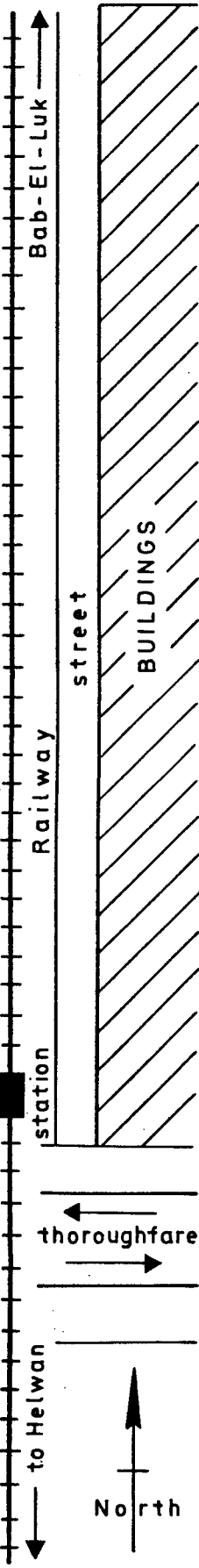
Zamalek - and all the North-West area  
Gasr El-Nil - garden city (gold coast)  
Bulaq - Bab-El-Hadid (North-East area)  
Shubrah

Cornishe leading to Town

Cornishe road going to South of Cairo



PUBLIC BUILDINGS : VARIOUS LARGE INSTITUTIONS



Bab-El-Luk

Railway

station

thoroughfare

to Helwan

North



connects it to both Cairo town and the South. On that side too, the quarter is hidden by a row of public buildings, the printing press and store-room of a major government newspaper. There is no direct outlet from the quarter to the railway. On its North, lies a government school which belongs to another quarter. The houses of Der-El-Sabbakin back on to the school and have their entrances on the inner alley of Der, so that here too the quarter is closed to the North. On the South, lies a main thoroughfare that links the Cornishe and this quarter of Cairo to the North-East, where lies Heliopolis, Nasr City and Cairo's main airport. Here too, the quarter is not directly connected to the thoroughfare but overlooks it. This is because the thoroughfare was dug on a lower level than the quarter, with a fence running along the pavement to protect the passer-by. The pavement forms a sort of alley that passes by Der-El-Sabbakin's main entrance. Thus, one must either walk through that alley to reach the Cornishe to the West, or towards the railway to the East, in order to join the thoroughfare. A bridge from the Cornishe opposite the thoroughfare connects the main land to Roda Island. There are actually two entrances to the area, one from the Cornishe into one of its small alleys, and the other from the alley that overlooks the main thoroughfare.

This means that the area is within the mainstream of Cairo life, yet, in a way, is isolated from its hustle and bustle. It is to be noted here that inhabitants of that quarter have to cross the railway to buy most of their food, in the quarter of Al-Anwar, investigated by Ghamri, where the main marketplace is found. However, some vegetable peddlars often stand in the alley along the thoroughfare, at times, known to the inhabitants of Der.

### The Physical Structure

Through oral history, the researcher was able to learn that, in the past, the quarter had a gate that used to be closed at night to prevent strangers from entering. This is reminiscent of Medieval Cairo when quarters had gates or doors that had bawabbins or hall-porters to protect the entrance (Staffa,1977). The gate to this quarter used to stand at the main entrance to the quarter, on the South. Today, the entrance narrows slightly, but no remains of a gate are visible.

The quarter's streets can only be called lanes, or alleys, or hara, as they are called in Cairo and have been called for centuries. A main hara runs through the length of the quarter from its entrance on the South to its extreme North. It has embranchments or atfat going East and West that always terminate in a dead end, except for the embranchment which eventually leads to the Cornishe road. The quarter has several atfat which inhabitants call hara, each one having its name. It is the fact that all the haras lead to a dead-end which keeps the quarter closed (see Figure II).

The haras are quite narrow, some being slightly narrower than others, and are very similar to those described in Medieval documents by travellers. Apparently, the width of the hara had to allow the passage of two camels with their loads. No cars ever come into the quarter, except for an occasional horse-driven cart, like the petrol cart. The streets are unpaved and uneven, but there are remnants of old pavement in places. Moreover, as most of it is just earth, it is dusty all the year around, except when a rainfall fills its crevices with water.

In the haras, there are piles of garbage and remains of vegetables strewn about. The main hara is usually cleaner than the side-alleys. One day the researcher sat in the street observing it and saw a man with

a garbage cart come and collect it, but he was only collecting garbage, not sweeping it. Occasionally a street sweeper comes to sweep the main hara but will only sweep side-alleys if expressly asked and given a tip. Inhabitants vary in their cleanliness. Some doorsteps are cleaner than others. Usually, swarms of flies stand on the garbage, and mice run about attacking the poultry.

The main hara is usually lighted at night, but not all the alleys are. Not all the houses have electricity, though the majority do. Some of the older houses have no water connection and have to buy water by the tank from proprietors who have taps in the ground floor of the building.

### Housing

The buildings are a mixture of old and new crammed close together, some appearing to lean on others, so that when one falls, it drags the two others beside it. This, in fact, happened in one of the inner haras of the area, and the ruins of the three houses still stand as evidence. The sight of goats climbing on the ruins is a common one. Most of the buildings are two to four storeys high; 36% of them are two storeys high, another 36% have three storeys and 28% have four storeys (Please see Table IV). None have a garden or space, except that of the alley or staircase. The houses are mostly built out of red bricks, frequently without cement pillars, ceilings are supported by the walls or helped by a couple of pieces of wood.

Table IV A

|                            |   |     |     |     |   |              |
|----------------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|---|--------------|
| No. of floors per building | 1 | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5 | Total        |
| No. of buildings each      | 0 | 9   | 9   | 7   | 0 | 25 buildings |
| % of Total                 | 0 | 36% | 36% | 28% | 0 |              |

Most have tiny rooms, not more than three metres by three metres, sometimes less. Only a few of the old houses show remains of a better past, and have halls that may be about five metres by four metres, and rooms about four metres by three metres.

Three types of houses seem to exist: 1.] good old houses that appear to date back to the first quarter of the 20th century, 2.] badly built red brick houses that are about 40 to 50 years old and that are in such bad condition that they may fall anytime, and 3.] newer houses about 6 to 10 years old which are built with cement concrete pillars and appear more like middle-class houses. Some of the red brick houses had been covered with mortar which has now fallen in parts while others were never covered with mortar. The brick houses are badly built as most were built by the owner himself with the help of his family or friends.

Houses in Egypt are always built with a flat roof on top. In this quarter, the roof is often turned into a place for keeping poultry, goats or sheep, hanging the washing and for storing broken furniture, or gathered piles of wooden branches for the oven. Frequently the roof cannot be reached except by a ladder. If the roof has no border or fence, the poultry are kept in a cage or shack made of odd pieces of tin, remains of vegetable or fruit baskets, pieces of cardboard, etc. .. and the roof of the cage is covered with straw, pieces of old clothes to protect the poultry from the heat.

### The Inhabitants

The quarter is mainly a depressed area, though some families are better-off than others. However, their style of life remains one peculiar to the lower-income groups and baladi, or the traditional urban. Most of them are second or third generation migrants, more are from Upper

than Lower Egypt. Some have retained certain rural traits and habits, but often the margin between rural and traditional urban becomes blurred, particularly when the habitation is more urban than rural, as is the case here.

Indeed some of them retain the garb of the fellahin or peasants; the women wearing the flowing black galabiyeh dress, and the men wearing the kaftan or gebbeh flowing robe. This is also shared by some of the traditional urban population, with subtle variations like shortening the galabiyeh, or wearing the melayyeh hef, which is a black sheet that envelopes the body, but keeps the face and arms partly uncovered. Others may wear an ordinary modern dress with a kerchief covering the head, plus a black transparent veil covering both head and shoulders. Young girls may wear modern clothes, or trousers and a shirt, or trousers with a dress on top that covers the hips, depending on the degree of permissiveness of parents. They all wear plastic slippers with an occasional working woman or better-off one wearing leather shoes. School-children must wear shoes. According to their job, men either wear the galabiyeh, or, more often only at home, and wear a shirt or sweater and trousers with either shoes or plastic slippers without stockings, depending on their material conditions. Some of the better-off men would wear leather sandals or slippers, finding it uncomfortable to adapt to the closed shoes. Only men who work as employees in an office job would wear regular closed shoes.

#### 4. Households and Living Conditions

A general investigation of the quarter provides some basic facts on the structure of the households and basic conditions of living in the home where housing is concerned.

Most of the households in Der-El-Sabbakin are nuclear families,

76.5%; 5.19% are single, 3.19% being widowed, 1% divorced, 1% separated, 2.02% are single, brothers or/and sisters living together, 1% unknown.

The extended family (13.8%) usually consist of a nuclear family living with a widowed or divorced father or mother, and younger brothers and/or sisters. Usually, the members of a nuclear family sleep in one room, while the parent would sleep in one room with his or her older sons or daughters or both; or with older grandchildren (Table IVB). Usually, it is the son or daughter who, upon marrying, will bring their spouse into the house to live in with the parent if he or she is single. Three main reasons may lead to such an arrangement. [1] It is believed that the parent should not be left alone, if he or she has no other unmarried children living with them in the home; particularly if the home consists of more than one room, and so the couple may have one to themselves; [2] If the couple do not have the means to rent a room or pay its key money; [3] If the couple cannot find a room or apartment.

It is unusual for a new couple to live with a parent whose home consists of one room. In such a case, if the parent has no other children, they will rent a two roomed apartment or any two rooms and will bring the parent to live with them. They would take key money for the old room and use it to pay all or part of the "key money" for the new rooms. As sons are responsible for their old parents, it is more usual for them to live with the parent than for the wife to move in with hers. However, due to the problem of finding houses, couples now adopt a more practical view, and move in with the parent who has more space, if even temporarily. Often marriages are delayed, where couples insist on their independence, but more often because of the overcrowding in their parental home which forces them to move out and find room for themselves. The latter is often the case.

TABLE IVB

Structure of Households

| Type of family    | Nuclear | Extended | Single Widowed | Divorced | Separated | Brothers or Sisters Together Single | Unknown | Total |
|-------------------|---------|----------|----------------|----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|---------|-------|
| No. of households | 72      | 13       | 3              | 1        | 1         | 2                                   | 1       | 93    |
| % of Total        | 76.5%   | 13.8%    | 3.19%          | 1%       | 1%        | 2.02%                               | 1%      |       |

Thus, the preponderance of nuclear families over extended families in Der-El-Sabbakin is due to: [1] Overcrowding where it is impossible for children to marry and remain within the parental home, because it is often small, specially since most want enough space to have children of their own. [2] The small income of the young wage-earner where he believes that living with his parents, or his wife's, and brothers and sisters, may put him under the obligation to share in more than food expenses, leaving him totally destitute, when he has barely enough to cover his own families' expenses; or if he gains more, he hopes to save in order to have a proper home and comforts. [3] The desire for independence and the belief that co-living with in-laws will create family conflicts that would cause some break with the family, or cause unhappiness to the spouse moving in with the in-laws. As most often, spouses believe it to be a duty to side with their own parents, as disobedience to parents is condemned and the blessing of parents is believed to be essential to a person's happiness, both spouses know the result in advance and hence have a firm desire to avoid such a conflict altogether.

Most of the apartments in the area fall into three categories almost

TABLE V

Number of Persons per Room

|                            | 0.5   | 1     | 1.5    | 2      | 2.5    | 3    | 3.5    | 4    | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8  | Total  |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|------|-------|-------|-------|----|--------|
| Number of persons per room |       |       |        |        |        |      |        |      |       |       |       |    |        |
| Number of Households       | 6     | 8     | 18     | 16     | 13     | 9    | 3      | 7    | 4     | 2     | 5     | 1  | 92     |
| % of Total                 | 6.52% | 8.69% | 19.56% | 17.39% | 14.13% | 9.2% | 3.26%  | 7.6% | 4.34% | 2.17% | 5.43% | 1% |        |
|                            |       |       | 36.95% |        | 23.33% |      | 10.86% |      |       |       |       |    | 12.94% |

Average number of persons per room  $\frac{435 \text{ persons}}{195 \text{ rooms}} = 2.23 \text{ persons}$

Average number of persons per household  $\frac{435 \text{ persons}}{92 \text{ households}} = 4.72 \text{ persons}$

N.B. Unknown in Table IV is not computed here.

TABLE VI

Number of Rooms per Apartment

|                               | 1   | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|---|---|
| Number of rooms per apartment |     |       |       |       |   |   |
| Number of Households          | 32  | 30    | 29    | 4     | 0 | 0 |
| % of Total                    | 34% | 31.9% | 30.8% | 4.25% | 0 | 0 |

N.B. One household had two apartments where the man had children of another wife established in the second apartment, though they are materially dependents, but as it was not clear whether they lived as one household, they were computed as two households living in three rooms each, adding one household to total. The Unknown case in Table IV is computed here because number of rooms is known.



equally divided; 34% have one room, 31.9% have two rooms, and 30.8% have three rooms. Only 4.25% have four rooms (see Table VI).

The number of persons per room ranges from one person for two rooms to eight persons per room, though only one case of the latter in this quarter. The average number of persons per room is 2.23 persons, but this average when analyzed gives a different picture (Table V). It reveals that whereas 36.95% have two persons per room, there are 47.13% that have more than two persons; of whom 23.33% have three persons per room, 10.86% have four per room, 12.94 have more than four per room. The latter comprises 4.34% with fives persons per room, 2.17% have six per room, 5.43 have seven persons and 1% have eight. Those households with one person per room are 8.69% and those with two rooms per person are 6.52%. Further analysis of the data indicates that, frequently, when statistics indicate an average of four per room for a two-room apartment, the parents would be using one room, while five or six of the children would be using the other, and therefore, statistically hidden over-crowding exists.

The point here is that over-crowding is more often the case than not. In a double bed, one may find from two to five persons sleeping. This was witnessed by the researcher in a household where a mother slept with four of the younger children in one bed, while the two sofas in the room were used each by one of the older sons. In three other cases, four slept on the bed, while two to four persons slept under the bed, on a rug, as other beds or sofas were lacking. Occasionally, a family would be visited by relatives from the village or another area of Cairo. A married sister or brother would come to spend the three or four days of the Bairam feast with them, and the numbers would go up tremendously. This results in all the floor space used for sleeping. It is also to be noted that the rooms are generally small to average. Few are really large.

Some apartments are rented per room, so that each family would rent one room, occasionally two, and use it for all their activities combining eating, sleeping, washing, bathing, studying etc. Thus in two thirds of the households, family possessions are crammed in one to two rooms, leaving little space for movement.

About 33% share their apartment with another household, and hence must share amenities like the w.c. or/and kitchen (Table VII). In 24.46% of the cases, the w.c. is shared, so that from 7 to 15 persons may be using one w.c. Less frequently a kitchen is shared, only in 8.5% of cases. The reason is that in these apartments rented per room, often there is no kitchen. The kitchen proper is often absent from apartments. Only 35% have a kitchen; while the rest have made other arrangements (Table VIII). In 24.4% of cases, there is no kitchen at all, and cooking is carried on either in the corridor, the bedroom, or the staircase. In some cases, a part of a large w.c. has been turned into a kitchenette by the use of some kind of a separation, like a curtain. This occurs in 25.5% of cases. Thus, 61.7% have some kind of kitchen, either separate or within the w.c. In the 35% of cases where a kitchen exists, it is merely a small room with or without a tap and sink. Sometimes a tap exists and a copper or plastic basin container is used as a sink.

In no instance do these buildings have a proper bathroom, though the combined w.c. - kitchenette may have a shower added when inhabitant's condition improves. Most often, the w.c. has a water tap set low beside the w.c. It rarely has a tiny sink and tap. If it does, then the sink would also be used for washing dishes. In 92.5% of cases, there is a w.c. in the apartment, but only 65.9% have a separate w.c. It is important to note that the w.c. consists mainly of a hole in the floor, leading directly into the main drains, often with no flush.

TABLE VII

Sharing Amenities with Other Households

| Shared Amenities     | Don't share Independent in all Amenities | Share w.c. with others | Share kitchen | Share Water | Share Electricity |
|----------------------|--|------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Number of Households | 63                                       | 23                     | 8             | 14          | 12                |
| % of Total           | 67%                                      | 24.46%                 | 8.5%          | 14.89%      | 12.76%            |
|                      |  | 32.96%                 |               |             |                   |

- All computation is based on Total of 96 Households.

- One quarter of the sample share the w.c. with other households.

- Sharing water and electricity means also sharing the bill.

N.B. - Five households are unknown: don't have information on them.

Four households have no information on water and electricity availability.

Three households are unknown as to having a kitchen.

TABLE VIII

| Amenities Available | Have w.c. and Kitchen in one | Separate w.c. | Separate Kitchen | No Kitchen Cook in Corridor or bedroom | No water | No electricity |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------|------------------|--|----------|----------------|
| No. of Households   | 25                           | 62            | 33               | 23                                     | 6        | 5              |
| % of Total          | 26.59%                       | 65.9%         | 35.1%            | 24.4%                                  | 6.38%    | 5.3%           |

- Above calculations made on basis of 94 households.
- Only 35% have separate kitchen, while the rest use w.c. space or a corridor or bedroom for kitchen.
- 61.7% have some kind of kitchen, whether separate or within the w.c.
- 24.4% have no kitchen and cook in corridor or bedroom.
- 92.5% have a w.c., but only 65.9% have a separate w.c.
- All households have water except 6, i.e. 6.38% have no water.
- All households have electricity except 5, i.e. 5.3% have no electricity.

N.B. - Five households are unknown: don't have information on them.  
 Four households have no information on water and electricity availability.  
 Three households are unknown as to having a kitchen.

Most houses have a water connection, but in 6.38% of cases, there is no water at all and the household must buy the water from a neighbour or go far to get it from a public tap (Table VIII). This is a good average as compared to Cairo as a whole, where 19.3% of households have no water connection (AID Report, 1977: 28; See Appendix).

In 5.3% of households, there is no electricity, whereas in Cairo as a whole 17.9% have no electricity (AID Report, 1977: 29 of Appendix). A kerosene lamp is used. Lack of water and electricity are frequent in fringe areas where services have not been connected, especially where inhabitants are poor and land cheap. But Der is part of the city and has all services connected. All renters of rooms in an apartment share one water tap and the ensuing bill. This happens in 14.89% of cases. They may also share the electricity bill as occurs in 12.76% of cases. The bill may also be shared by a whole building that has just one meter counter (Table VII).

Generally speaking, any one place is used for multiple activities. The corridor is often used not only for cooking, but also for washing. If a small w.c. allows even a little space, it is used for bathing. If it is too small, baths are taken in a washing basin in the bedroom, or the room used as the kitchen. Families who live on the ground floor use the staircase for cooking and washing, as ground floors usually have no corridor. Some may even use the alley or hara for washing or cooking, but though this latter is common in many poverty pockets, it is not so frequent in Der-El-Sabbakin, except where cleaning vegetables or picking rice may take place.

Thus, it becomes evident from this general description that there is overcrowding among the less fortunate, that sharing apartments with others occurs in one third of the cases, that conditions of housing are not quite

comfortable since only about a third of the inhabitants have some crude kind of a kitchen which is often more in the nature of a room used for cooking while the rest have to cook in their bedrooms or a corridor or a part of the w.c. Houses have no bathroom proper, but just a w.c. which may or may not be used for bathing depending on its size. About two-thirds only have a separate w.c. Most houses have no showers and often have just one tap in the house used to get water for all purposes. While most houses do have this one tap, 6.38% of the cases have to get water elsewhere. The majority have electricity which is shared by some. Space is used for multiple activities and the most is got out of the little available.

##### 5. Property Ownerships in Der-El-Sabbakin

Generally speaking, about 18% of the inhabitants of the hara live in their own houses, while the remaining 88% are renters. There are various others who own just one house. Some live in their property while others have left the quarter and live outside of it. Other owners are complete strangers to this quarter, but not necessarily to the area of Old Cairo. Some live in areas next to Old Cairo, like Dar-El-Salam. As no empty land exists in Der-El-Sabbakin except for four houses that have fallen and form a heap of ruins, all owned land is built, and the owners own both the plot and the house standing on it.

It must be remembered that two-thirds of the houses are badly built and literally falling down. They cover a tiny surface with one to two rooms per floor with a w.c. in the staircase. So they do not constitute in themselves an asset to their owners. Rents vary from L.E. 1 to L.E. 5.5 per room per month, for the few large rooms. It is the land on which they stand that has value. The square metre of empty land is estimated at L.E.50

by the inhabitants, but whereas most of the inhabitants cannot afford that price, the rich outside of Der do not want to invest in a poor quarter.

The biggest land-owner or property owner in the area was a woman, known as Om Fayez (i.e. mother of Fayez). This person owned seven plots with their houses. She was originally a villager from the now rural fringes of greater Cairo; from a village called Marazik, southwest of Cairo on the west bank of the Nile, on the way to Hawamdiyah, where the sugar industry is now established. She had inherited agricultural land with palm trees. Apparently her profits from the land, or sale of the land, allowed her to acquire the seven houses. Six of the houses were built close to one another with an internal alley dividing them. The alley has an arched gate that used to be closed at night and not allow strangers in. Now it is no more the case as some of the houses were sold to strangers. This alley with its houses came to be called "The Tahuneh" or "Mill" because, "it has one gate which allows all the inhabitants to 'mill through' " explained one informant.

Om Fayez had married a carpenter and came to live in Der-El-Sabbakin. She had had two sons and a daughter. She was so rich and "stingy" that at her death tin boxes stacked with L.Eg.100 - hundred pound notes were found, which she had been afraid to produce or change at the bank, when Abdel-Nasser had cancelled them, lest he put her under sequester as he did with the rich owners in general. Her behaviour was also explained as being a way of avoiding letting her children know about her great wealth lest they become greedy or make demands on her. Apparently, she lived to a ripe old age, and used "to go around picking glass and stones from the streets", and used to walk in the gardens of the quarter next to them, which used to belong to a dignitary or Pasha (a titled man). She did not trust her

sons, one of whom once threatened to electrocute her with an uncovered electric wire because she had refused to give him P.10. So she had made her son-in-law her delegate giving him a power of attorney. But he was dishonest and took all the money. Her daughter who had taken all the copper (traditional kitchen and washing utensils), died soon after of a "bad illness". Her husband, now a rich man, married a girl of 14 years and now lives in the area of the Pasha's garden, which has now been turned into a residential area. Of the daughter's three sons, one became a physician, one an officer and one a lawyer. The story of Om Fayez is important because she is often mentioned in the area as an example of a rich person, against whom the "philosophy" of the poor stands.

Part of the property of Om Fayez was sold by her sons. One of the buildings was bought by a man who owned vehicles which clean cess-pits. He was originally a cart-driver. Having died, his wife, who does not live in the area, now comes on the fourth of every month to collect the rent. The whole building provides her with an income of L.Eg. 20 to L.Eg. 23. Most of the better houses in the area provide an average rent of about the same. One other house was sold recently, the one that Om Fayez used to inhabit and which remained empty and non-rented for years. The new owner let out only the ground floor. These houses have no water installation or connection, they are old and in quite a deteriorated condition. But some of them show vestiges of a better past. One of the poor family cases taken for deeper study lives in two rooms in this property.

The next big owner in the area is also a woman, Zeinab Toghana, who owns three houses in Atfet Darwish, one of the dead-end alleys. She is one of the ancient inhabitants of the quarter. She is now half-paralyzed, living in a room on the ground-floor of one of her houses. She often sits



on a stone, outside her door, in the alley. She has five sons and two daughters who do not all live in this quarter. Two of her sons are partners in the ownership of a house, one of whom has been employed in a cigarette factory for 40 years, while the other now has a boutique for clothes and a bookshop. A third son who works in a printing house has gone to live in Dar-El-Salam, which is about 5 or 6 kilometres from this quarter, where he has built a house. Again Dar-El-Salam is a low-income quarter. She has a son who works as a carpenter in Kuwait, Zeinab herself is a partner with her daughters in another house. Thus, they still own three houses which are in a very bad condition. These houses are never repainted or repaired except if things actually break down and threaten the household itself.

Zubah el-Gamalah is another of the ancients of the quarter since her family has lived in it for a long time. She was a midwife or dayah practicing in the hara. Her husband was employed as an office boy. She owns a house and her sister owns one. She has two daughters and a son who works now in Saudi Arabia with his mother's sister, after having taken a Secondary Diploma in Commerce.

Two of the old owners of the quarter were male government employees. El-Zabadani was an employee in the Ministry of Finances. He owned two of the better houses, one was a four-storey building, each floor having two apartments. He sold it to an entrepreneur of constructions, and built a new house. The entrepreneur's wife and children still live in it. The latter has now two houses in the quarter. Orani was an employee in the Railways. He is another ancient of the quarter. At first he owned a house in partnership with his brother, then he bought his brother's share and later built a second house. He died and his daughter who was an only child inherited both. His daughter's husband was also a government

employee and died. The daughter is considered well-off as she owns the two houses, <sup>receives</sup> her husband's pension, and has sons who are government employees.

Two other owners were entrepreneurs. Abedl-Ghani was an entrepreneur of wood who owned two houses. He sold one of them to Kassem who works on a commission basis, a sort of middleman or broker engaged in the sale of buildings, cars or anything that needs his intervention. The second house was sold to a stranger to the quarter. The other entrepreneur owner was a Moalem (term for a rich traditional businessman) or entrepreneur of constructions who owned two of the larger houses, in the main hara, which he later sold.

It appears that several among the older property owners of Der-El-Sabbakin were government employees of lower status, but whose regular income allowed an amount of saving, at a time when life was relatively much cheaper, particularly in areas like Old Cairo. Others were entrepreneurs of the traditional or moalem type who were uneducated but undertook to provide building materials, or men for constructions, and thus had the chance to make a good profit and acquire some wealth. Still others had inherited or owned agricultural land that they sold to buy a house in the quarter.

The fact remains that what is common to all of those who remained in the quarter is that they are members <sup>of</sup> the lower-status groups who may be relatively wealthy, but are still half-literate or illiterate and of a traditional style of life, <sup>and</sup> whose children move out of the area, as soon as they get a university education and acquire a good job, in order to improve their status.

PART II

THE EVERYDAY ECONOMY OF THE URBAN POOR

Introduction

Everyday life in developing countries confronts individuals with a *longer* series of basic problems than confronts individuals in developed countries. In such societies, the urban poor's everyday life is further complicated by economic problems that dominate each and every day. The complexity of the economic problems is increased by various other accompanying problems. These other problems range from problems common to the individual poor, such as lack of education and skill, to problems which relate to widespread attitudes towards the poor that create scorn and derision when providing the poor with services which are offered to the general population.

This part examines the objective nature of urban poverty within a slum of Old Cairo. The purpose is to describe and analyse the external manifestations of poverty, the nature of some of the main economic problems that the poor face, and the ways they cope with them in their daily life, e.g., the occupations of inhabitants, sources of income of some selected cases, their difficulties in budgeting for food, clothing, schooling, housing, health, transport and recreation. Moreover, it examines the way the formally established institutions that are provided by the state to help the masses, function at this level, as seen by the poor themselves. How do these institutions actually help the poor to cope with their everyday life? It also examines some of the informal institutions that are devised by the poor or by others to help them cope with their difficulties. Coping with life through these institutions engenders a way of life,

creates certain responses common to the poor, at least the poor of Der-El-Sabbakin. A certain quality of life is gradually revealed as the various aspects of daily life are examined, problems are brought into the open, ways of coping with them are analyzed and finally the feelings that accompany such conditions are expressed here and there, or are observed, that give insights into an image of what it could mean to be poor. The latter aspects show through some of the material problems of the poor analyzed here, but will be treated in depth in Part III.

A question arises as to the relevance of such findings to other areas of Cairo, and perhaps other Egyptian cities. No single piece of research can generalize, nor should it commit itself to generalize to that extent. Varieties of urban experience are a fact, and have been examined on a survey level by such sociologists as Janet Abu-Lughod and Karen Petersen (Abu-Lughod, 1969, 1971; Petersen, 1971). However, the researcher has had the chance to do research in six other areas of Cairo, and in the poorest area of the city of Suez. As a check and to see if findings are supported, case studies and observations were collected from these other areas. Taking into account certain subcultural differences in life style peculiar to different areas and historical conditions, it may be stated with a certain degree of confidence that, in urban centres there are important similarities, particularly in terms of life-conditions and coping mechanisms. The quality of life and responses are similar in the various areas of poverty in the capital and even in Suez.

TABLE IX

1. HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS OF 94 HOUSEHOLDS

| <u>Occupation</u>  | <u>Frequency</u> |
|--|------------------|
| - Employed in a small local production (leather, mechanic, rugs, wire, baskets). | 8                |
| - Chief of workers   | 1                |
| - Have cigarette kiosk   | 5                |
| - Tailor of costumes (for men)   | 1                |
| - Merchant of Maize (on pension)   | 1                |
| - Cart driver and owner of the transport   | 2                |
| - Works in carpentry (different kinds of specialization)                         | 8                |
| - In army infantry   | 8                |
| - In army aviation   | 1                |
| - Janitor in a school, or press, or office boy                                   | 11               |
| - Has taxi (one has a lorry too)   | 4                |
| - Ironmonger   | 1                |
| - Teacher  | 2                |
| - Salesgirl  | 2                |
| - Employee (not known in what)   | 5                |
| - Farrash (provides carpets, tent and chairs for weddings and funerals)          | 3                |
| - Pedlar of cooked beans and Taamia  | 2                |
| - Man's hairdresser  | 2                |
| - Policeman (1 in prisons)   | 3                |
| - Ticket seller in tramway   | 1                |
| - Employee in big industrial firm (arms factory, petroleum, cigarettes)          | 4                |
| - Driver (for privates)  | 2                |
| - Driver in public transport   | 3                |
| - Works in army factory as shoemaker   | 1                |
| - Ironer   | 1                |
| - Higher government employee   | 2                |
| - Menial worker in gov. institution (sweeper, sprayer)                           | 3                |
| - Works on Commission (for medicines)  | 1                |
| - Peasant  | 1                |
| - Engineer (but not sure)  | 1                |
| - Has shop (one is carpenter; one has coffee shop)                               | 3                |
| - Carpenter for buildings (3 in Kuwait, 1 in Libya)                              | 4                |
| Employee (Saudi Arabia)  | 2                |
| Colouring clothes (Saudi Arabia)   | 1                |
| ] Works  | 4                |
| ] abroad   | 2                |
| ]  | 1                |

CHAPTER FIVE

OCCUPATIONS, BUDGETS AND COPING WITH FOOD

CLOTHES AND SHELTER

I Occupation Structure of Der-El-Sabbakin

1. Major occupations in the quarter

The quarter as a whole holds roughly about 180 to 200 households. A sample numbering about half of this number was taken. It was obtained through an informant who had personal contacts and access to their homes. Later, acquaintance with other respondents confirmed the information. Some households had more than one wage earner, mostly sons of the heads of households, but sometimes wives or daughters. Hence, 109 individuals were computed for 94 households, apart from 7 persons working abroad. This study reveals that the majority of the heads of households are workers 43% (see Table X). Those who work in some kind of commerce, including pedlars total 21%, while those engaged in menial jobs, like janitors and errand boys, form 12.8%.

Two groups hold positions that require a certain level of education, and these are professionals who form 8.2% and who are formed mainly of three teachers, four government officials, an engineer and a Koran reader. Army and police officers form 11.9% of the group. These have an education, at least a secondary certificate. Five persons were said to be employees, but their exact qualifications or position was unknown, and could range from a janitor to any upper level office. However, the holder of an upper level office is unlikely to continue to live in this quarter. The teachers are probably working in primary schools where their pay does not exceed L.E. 35 - Egyptian pounds per month, unless they have been working for more than 10 years, and that they do hold a university

TABLE X

CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION CLASS

|            | Professional Class | Workers | Army and Police | Commerce | Menial Jobs | Unspecified Employees |
|------------|--------------------|---------|-----------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Numbers    | 9                  | 47      | 13              | 23       | 14          | 5                     |
| Percentage | 8.2%               | 43.1%   | 11.9%           | 21%      | 12.8%       | 4.5%                  |

N.B. Computation is made on the basis of 109 individuals only, as the category "working abroad" has not been added to the total.

degree.<sup>1</sup> A Koran reader may be quite poor, as he has to wait for a feast or funeral to be invited to read the Koran. However, he is paid a certain stipend by the government which rarely exceeds L.E. 15.-. Police officers have a pay range between L.E. 25-35 unless they reach a very high post. Insurance is usually deducted so that the final pay does not exceed L.E.22-32 per month. All the army officers were Sols receiving about L.E. 40 per month. Janitors occupying "menial jobs" are usually paid between L.E. 15-20 with deductions made for insurance. They have been entered in the category of unskilled in Table XI.

There are two groups who are better off. Firstly, those in lucrative commerce, like those who own shops or kiosks (e.g. cigarettes and drinks) and who are said to gain L.E. 3-5 per day. Secondly, those who own taxis and drive them themselves and who may get anything from L.E. 10-30 per day. Others who work in commerce can be very poor, e.g. persons who buy a couple of kilos of vegetables per day, and sell them per piece making a gain of P.T.25 to P.T.30 per day maximum. Some of the poorest people in the area gain income in this way.

Among the workers, carpenters are usually better paid, but only the real osttas or skilled ones. A carpenter who owns his shop or is engaged with a building entrepreneur is most likely to be better-off than otherwise. Still, they are better paid than other workers; from L.E.1.50-3.50 a day for the really skilled. Worker's pay has gone up tremendously in the last six to seven years, due to the fact that there is a great demand for them in other Arab countries. Many have left, so that workers in any sort of construction work are well-paid.

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1. The data on salaries, wages, costs and budgets presented here was collected during 1977 and 1978, and represents prices at that period. Prices have gone up since, but so have salaries and wages, though not in the same proportions.



TABLE XI

CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO SKILLS

|            | Army or<br>Police | Skilled | Semi-Skilled | Unskilled | Educated | Possess<br>Capital | Unknown |
|------------|-------------------|---------|--------------|-----------|----------|--------------------|---------|
| Numbers    | 13                | 20      | 19           | 32        | 14       | 15                 | 6       |
| Percentage | 11.9%             | 18.3%   | 17.4%        | 29.3%     | 12.8%    | 13.7%              | 5.5%    |

N.B. Computation is based on 109 individuals

In this quarter, workers form a majority. However, not all are skilled enough to earn good wages. The really skilled form only 18.3% and are mainly carpenters, or workers in large industrial firms like heavy industry, cigarette factories or petroleum; 17.4% are semi-skilled and work in small private firms producing wire, leather or rugs, or as a car mechanic (see Table IX). Most of the rest are unskilled, forming 29.3%. The semi-skilled may get anything from 50 P.T. to L.E.1.25 per day, their wages being always calculated on a daily basis, and usually paid weekly. The unskilled work as office cleaners, as janitors, or office boys. These are usually paid per month.

## 2. Occupations and sources of income of some selected cases

Among the poorest in the quarter are the unskilled workers engaged in menial jobs, like janitors and errand boys, those who operate as small peddlars and some of the self-employed workers. Daily workers who rely on a daily income whether a low wage or one that comes through self-employment of an insecure nature are called Irza'i. Irza'i is an indigenous concept which is based on the Arabic root of the term rizk. Rizk refers to that which is sent by God in terms of income or benefit. It has an unpredictable element, but it is also a predestined one which only God knows. According to popular belief rizk can come from any source, even the most unexpected. It is a belief grounded in religion and is often referred to in the Qor'an. Every human being is born with his rizk. Some people have a broad rizk, meaning a plentiful one, and some have a narrow rizk, but everyone has his rizk. This notion is different from that of 'luck', known as haz in Arabic, since it is seen as planned and bearing a divine intention which remains unknown to man. People of Baladi areas use irza'i in a special sense: he is someone

dependent on his daily rizk, i.e. he holds a day-to-day job subject to variation in gains, whether semi-skilled or unskilled, self-employed or <sup>as</sup> a wage worker. It is understood that the job is insecure, its gain hazardous and often small. To say that someone is an irza'i implies immediately that he is poor or exposed to poverty, i.e. he is threatened and may at any time find himself without work or income. It means that the day that he does not work, he will not eat. Illness becomes a grave threat to him and his family. An irza'i's hope is that his children will one day hold either a regular job or become government employees: a regular employment that provides regular and sure income with social security and ensured medical care. Even low paid employment is seen as better than that of an irza'i's. More recently, skilled worker's wages have gone up so much that many prefer to send their children to learn a skill as apprentices in a workshop, later to have their own shops, or get regular employment. Thus, the majority of the poor are irza'is, though there are many poor who are employed as janitors or in the services.

The annual maximum wage in Egypt in 1978-79, was L.E.144.-. However, on the basis of the 1972 prices which were much lower than those studied here, the Ministry of Manpower estimated that an individual's basic needs could not be provided for less than "L.E.11 per month for industrial workers and L.E.9 per month for agricultural labourers" (Kamel, 1976: 22). Yet entire families had to live on incomes that were to cover one person's basic needs (according to 1978-79 prices) at such a low standard of living that it was barely subsistence level, i.e. on incomes that ranged from the minimum wage of L.E.12 to L.E.20 per month. Some had to live on less. Among the lowly paid, even with almost all the members of the family working, they were hardly able to manage.

With regard to the irza'is, the following questions arise: Who are

these irza'is? What do they do for a job? How do they manage in practice? What are their sources of income? Who are their clients? What hopes are there for their improvement? The answer to these questions can only come from empirical data. Some cases were selected among irza'is in the quarter of Der-El-Sabbakin. These represent different conditions of poverty, as well as different levels of poverty. The findings were borne out by the case studies in the 'other' areas of Cairo.

[a] Zeinab, the Sweets Peddler - The Poorest Case in the Quarter

Zeinab has been labelled the poorest person in Der-El-Sabbakin by all the persons interviewed. She was born in the quarter of parents whose origins are in Minia, in Upper Egypt. Her father was a poor man, a maize peddler, selling his merchandise on Roda Island, right across the Nile from Der-El-Sabbakin. Her mother is still living, and she has two brothers and two sisters. One brother is a maize peddler working for a woman who trades in maize. He works on a daily-wage basis, i.e. he is an irza'i. The other brother works for a coal merchant. As for her sisters, they are both married; one lives in his village<sup>of origin</sup> and the other lives in Helwan, South of Cairo. A third sister who was married died a few years ago.

Zeinab is illiterate, unskilled and does not have a birth certificate, nor is she sure of her age. She said, "Say I am about 45 years old". She looks older. She is divorced and childless. She lives in a room on the terrace of a three floor house, at the dead-end of the last house on the last hara in Der-El-Sabbakin. She shares the room with her mother, her two nieces and nephew (five in this one room). The house has no electricity and is in a very poor condition. As she has no source of income and no possessions, and her mother to support, she had to find a

way to subsist. So she became a peddler.

Apparently, Zeinab used to sell grilled maize in the street. But she found it inconvenient "because it used to burn my clothes, and so on". So in 1975, she turned to selling sweets or arwah as they are called in this traditional quarter. Zeinab has no shop, but she does not walk about. She has just chosen a spot in the main hara or street, three blocks away from its entrance, where she sits, whether it is cold or hot. Two large white stones mark the place she has chosen. She lays down her large black iron tray on an old vegetable basket which she uses as a table, and sits on one of the stones, having put on it a small heap of clothes in lieu of a cushion. As the sun turns, she moves into the shade on the other side of the alley which is about 4 to 5 metres wide, has no pavement, and is not asphalted, i.e. the ground is earth (see photo, p. 101 b)

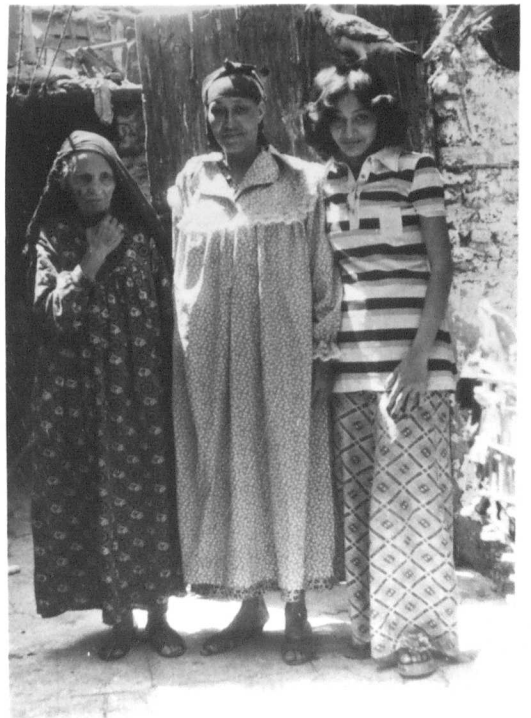
Zeinab does not take up her position before noon. At five minutes to twelve, she leaves her house to go to her spot where she stays till sunset, leaving before it gets dark. She has to sit in this street, in which the slightest breeze raises the heavy dust of the dry earth into her one remaining good eye, her nostrils and mouth. The street gets uncomfortably hot during the long eight months of summer, when garbage and flies increase. Zeinab sits there during the hottest hours of the day when most people avoid being on the street. During the short winter and autumn, conditions are slightly better, except on cold days when the street gets very drafty as the wind sweeps up the long, narrow hara. Occasionally, when it rains, pools of water form in the ditches which fill the hara. Zeinab has nothing to protect her from the elements. Her clothes are all made of cheap cotton (the material used by the poor all year round). So, she wears two dresses, one on top of the other, to keep warm, as all poor women do.

Zeinab sitting in the hara with her merchandise before her. Her favourite grand-niece is squatting (extreme right) (1979).

A closer view of Zeinab and her merchandise. These are hara children and her grand-niece. (1979).

Zeinab in her living quarters. She stands here in the open air corridor (April 1979).

Zeinab's sister-in-law Dawlat stands in the center between her daughter and her mother-in-law. She stands in front of her room, in the corridor, wearing her newest galabiyah on top of another. (April 1978).



Zeinab gets her merchandise on credit, then pays the dealer after she sells it, her profit amounts to P.T.5 to P.T.7 per day.<sup>1</sup> She says that she sells far more on Thursdays and Fridays and feast days. This means that she hardly make L.E.3 per month on which she and her mother must subsist. When asked why she does not enlarge her trade to include other than sweets, she said, "I don't have the capacity to buy other things and sell them", meaning she has no capital. Her clients are mostly children and occasional teenagers. Her tray contains cardboard boxes each with one kind of sweet. They consist of coloured bonbons in paper wrapping, lolly-pops of a shocking pink with no wrapping, chewing-gum, packs of biscuits, halawa semsemeyah or the traditional sweets made of white sugar with nuts or sesame stuck on its surface, and other odd sweets. All are of poor quality, non-covered, dusty and not exactly clean, yet they are the price of better quality sweets. Coloured ones have a bitter taste due to the colouring material, even the bonbons taste bitter. Each two bonbons sell for P.T.1. Most of the sweets sell for P.T.1 per piece, except for the traditional sweets which cost P.T.2 or P.T.3 per piece. Her gain depends very much on a good turnover and consists of a few millimes (fraction of a piastre). Zeinab has no paper to wrap her merchandise. Most children buy the sweet for P.T.1 or  $\frac{1}{2}$  P.T., rarely does anyone buy those for P.T.2. It is to be remembered that most of these children are poor. Those who have no money to buy just stand there and beg for one, saying, "Give me one". She would pick on the cheapest quality and give it to the child, he or she would turn away and go without another word. Once, one of the children said, "No, not this!

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1. One Egyptian pound equals 100 piastres. P.T. stands for 'piastre tarif'.



I want this", and she pointed a dusty finger to the pink cylinder of a lollypop. Zeinab said, in a bad mood, "Alright, take it!" and throwing back the rejected sweet in its box, she handed her the lollypop. The child took it and left silently. None of the children who beg for sweets say a word of thanks, and she does not seem to expect any. Once, a child came to beg a second time, but she rebuked him gruffly, "No! you took one already, it is finished". Once the rush is over, she keeps the sweets covered. Usually, she asks the child what he wants. Most of them seem to know what she has, and would ask right away for what they want. Only a few ask to see the merchandise.

Zeinab's hours of work are well-timed. At noon, there are two movements that occur; children who attend the morning class leave at 11.30 a.m. and by 12.00 are back in the hara; while those who attend the 12.00 to 4.00 p.m. classes are on their way to school. So both groups can buy. As she sits till 5 p.m., children of the afternoon class can buy sweets on their way back from school. Moreover, most pre-school children and non-working persons rise late, and it is not until noon that most start moving about in the hara. The older boys also play football in the early afternoon and so may buy. Her spot, close to the entrance of the main hara, means that none of the inhabitants going in or out can pass by without seeing her.

It is clear from participant-observation that Zeinab's trade does not get her much more than she has intimated. She does not sell more than P.T.40 or P.T.50 per day, and even if her gain were one third of this amount, which it could not be, it is not much, since it would give her about P.T.15 per day, i.e. L.E.4.50 per month. It is obvious that people in the area are right in labelling her as the poorest. Her clients are limited to the inhabitants of the hara, as her merchandise is very limited

in quality and quantity. Only if she goes out of the quarter can she enlarge her clientele, but her merchandise would have to change, and she would have to compete with several kiosks on the main road. Besides, as she has no birth certificate, she cannot obtain an identity card. As a peddler outside of the hara she would expose herself to being caught by the police and be fined or imprisoned for lack of an identity card. She also has no permit for itinerant trade. Her possibilities for improvement are nil unless she does these things, beginning with the birth certificate. However, she says she cannot afford to do this as she would have to go to her father's village, engage in procedures to have her age estimated, get a birth certificate, then get an identity card and then get the peddler's permit. To find some 'kiosk' for her trade would cost her a "fortune". At present, Zeinab cannot afford to be one day without work. No work would simply mean no food. Her main hope is to be able to continue working, and to do so, she prays that her health does not deteriorate with age.

[b] Dawlat, the Peddler; The Family of an Irza'i

Dawlat is Zeinab's sister-in-law. Her family is made up of five members; her husband and three children, apart from herself (two daughters married and left home). She lives in the room opposite Zeinab's on the terrace. Her room is one that they built themselves out of old pieces of wood, and so is in worse condition than Zeinab's. Her husband, who is Zeinab's brother, works for a woman who trades in maize. He peddles for her, and when she needs the merchandise, he travels to the village to get it. He works on a daily basis, working sometimes every other day, according to whether the maize has arrived from the village or not and whether it is the season for it or not. So sometimes he gets wages for three days a week instead of six days. Usually his wage is P.T.30 per

day, but if he travels or goes out to sell the maize, he gets P.T.40. He gives his wife P.T.10 per day and drinks with the rest. The low and irregular wages were never enough for food, shelter, clothes and school for their two daughters (who go to a paying school because they failed in the free education schools). Even before the children reached school age, Dawlat already had to help by working. She says, "Since I gave them birth, I have had to work for their sake because money is not enough". Illiterate and not qualified to do anything else, she decided she would go out and sell anything to make a few piastres. Even then, money was short, and the two eldest daughters who are married were not sent to school, partly due to their poverty. The two youngest were sent to school after the two eldest daughters married and there were two less mouths to feed. The father gradually saw others in the area sending their children to school, improving their condition through employment, and boasting of their children's education.

Dawlat now sells either vegetables or fruits, depending on what she finds in the market. She buys the merchandise for her trade from the market of Bab-El-Luk, which is one of the important food markets in Cairo. It is two stations away by metro from Der-El-Sabbakin. Dawlat has to go daily to get it so that it will be fresh, particularly since she has no refrigerator to store it, and it gets completely withered by the end of the day. She usually gets about 1½ to 2 kilograms of vegetables or fruits. If it is a more resistant vegetable like cucumbers, she buys about 5 kilos. She says, "I sell for P.T.30 per day either cucumbers or tomatoes, or as you see horonkesh (a berry)". She squats in the hara, against the wall of a house, with a straw basket in front of her in which she puts the merchandise for sale. She sells every 4 or 5 grains of berries for P.T.1. Most of her clients are children. On one observed day she made a net

profit of P.T.13. The kilo of horonkesh cost P.T.30, and she sold it per piece, for P.T.40 the kilo, thus getting P.T.10 per kilo. That day, she had bought 1½ kilos so she made a profit of P.T.15. She paid P.T.2 for the return ticket in the metro, thus getting a net profit of P.T.13. She says that she does not have the capital needed to buy a larger amount of vegetables and the merchants are not ready to give her credit. Dawlat sits in the street until she sells all that she has. She usually sits beside Zeinab or a small distance away. If a child stands by looking at the berries but cannot afford to buy them, she calls him and gives him two or three.

This is not Dawlat's only trade. In her open-air corridor-like terrace, Dawlat has five cages for pigeons and chickens hanging on the fence. She buys new-born chicks by the dozen and feeds them until they grow and then sells them. She does the same with pigeons. However, as their number is small and many die, and as the grains to feed them are relatively expensive (P.T.12 per kilo of wheat) her benefit is small and occasional, i.e. limited to the time when she can sell. If she sells a pair of chickens or pigeons per week, she may get between L.E.1.50 and L.E.1 of gain, i.e. L.E.4 to L.E.6 per month. Rats seem to cause many casualties among the poultry, though she keeps a thin, hungry-looking dog, presumably to protect them from theft. One day she bought chicks for L.E.5 from a woman trader. She had actually paid L.E.1 and still owed her L.E.4 which she hoped to pay once she sold some chickens. The next day, a rat ate a chicken and killed one of her grown pigeons. Upon discovering her loss, Dawlat had a bad shock and almost collapsed. The next day, she cooked the dead pigeon and used it to trap the rat. She kept the dead rat which she insisted on showing to the researcher with great satisfaction. However, she now had the problem of paying the woman her L.E.4. It is to

be noted here, that the pigeon would have sold for P.T.50 in this poor area, and had been fed for a time. A kilo of chicken there sold then for P.T.70 while in better areas it may sell for between P.T.120 and P.T.150.

Dawlat has a son who is epileptic and gets fits of fainting. He worked first as a car mechanic, and she would not say how much he contributed to the family, if he did. However, as he was an apprentice in a shop, he could not get much, particularly since he was getting frequent fits and would be carried back home. He was 20 years old. Dawlat reported that their income was insufficient and they sometimes felt hungry. Her hope was that when her two daughters finished school, they would work and help the family. The daughters at the time also expressed their hope along these lines.<sup>1</sup> They believed that their brother was hopeless.

However, by 1979, he left that job which apparently caused him serious strains, and took up employment in a government banking institution known as Bank Nasser. It gives small loans to the poor for buying gadgets on instalments, with the gadget itself being the guarantee. It was then that the researcher was finally able to see and interview him. His salary was L.E.16 per month. As office boy, he was in charge of transporting thousands of pounds in a bag from one branch of the bank to the other, with secret police protecting him. He gives his mother L.E.3 as a contribution and keeps the rest for eating, communications and clothes. The family appeared to have given him up as a source of income. As I asked why he is not asked to contribute more, his sister said, "because they don't want to hurt or anger him. Since he had an accident when he was a child,

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1. In the Chapter on "The Social Construction of Poverty", an account will be given of the changes that occurred in their hopes and aspirations, and the ensuing circumstances in 1981.

when he gets angry, he faints". His mother considered him a disabled person and often referred to him as not being "right in his mind", because of his increasing fits. Yet he appeared to be doing well in his job, of which he was very proud, and spoke quite rationally of his hope of continuing with it, and being very bored on holidays.

[c] Narguess: A non-working widow with children

Narguess' conditions are quite different. She is a widow who has five children between the ages of 10 and 17. Her husband had died five years earlier. He had different jobs: a car mechanic, taxi driver and worked in the leather industry. The latter job is what finally benefited his family most, since it gave his widow a monthly pension of L.E.8.80. She cashes this pension on the 25th of each month and showed the researcher her pension-card which is called a "Sirke". Narguess is illiterate and unskilled, has never worked outside her home. The two older boys have only a primary education since they failed in their Primary School Certificate. Her eldest son was doing his military service and got L.E.3, a nominal sum which is supposed to cover just his communication expenses and pocket money, and which is actually insufficient, so that he asked his mother for money when he came home on a holiday. He also asked her to give him a meat meal which apparently, he did not get in the services. The younger son who had been recently placed as an apprentice in a mechanic's shop asked her for P.T.10 daily for his meals, as he worked from early morning till late at night. Of the two youngest boys, one was in Preparatory School and one in Primary School. The boy in Preparatory School suffered from rheumatism. Her daughter failed in her Primary School Certificate and stayed home helping with the house work.

During the summer holidays, she made the two young boys work in a

mechanics' workshops in order to pay T.V. instalments. Each one got L.E.1 to L.E.1.50 a week for a morning till night's work. It made a difference to the family, since it provided them with an additional L.E.8 to L.E.12 of income. After the holidays, only one boy worked and his wages had not yet been fixed, as it was his first month of work in this new job. At most, he may get L.E.8 a month, so that they would get in about L.E.17 per month, including the pension. This amount had to cover all expenses, including the L.E.6 instalment on the T.V. The family was often short of money and could not even cover their food expenses and had particular difficulty at the end of each month when they often went hungry.

The children's father's brother, who is married to Narguess' sister visited every Thursday and gave Narguess P.T.50, her daughter P.T.10 and each of the younger boys P.T.5. If he came more often, he gave her P.T.25 or P.T.30. These amounts helped the family at difficult end of month periods. Narguess would collect the money from the children and use it to provide a good meal. Sometimes, Narguess' uncle visited, and gave the eldest boy P.T.25, the two others P.T.10 and P.T.5 to the younger boys. Again, after he left, the money was collected and used to buy food. Of course this income is unreliable and there is always the threat of the uncles not turning up or helping out. Narguess says that since her income does not even cover their food expenses, she wishes she or her daughter could work, but as they are unskilled, they can only be maids in a house. The girl's uncle refused to allow her to work as he believed this may expose or threaten her chastity and "corrupt" her. He is all the more concerned because he wants to marry her to his son. Narguess is also afraid for herself. She believed that she was still young and pretty, working as a maid may provoke a wife's jealousy or expose her to male

advances. She also thinks that because she likes to dress cleanly, an eventual lady employer may wonder why such a person wants to work at all and may refuse her. This is how she views a maid's position, though these things may not happen. Her reluctance seems to be partly a fear of the unknown and ignorance of how to go about obtaining such a job. So rather than work, she prefers to suffer occasionally from hunger and was often reduced to one meal a day. Indeed, Narguess and her daughter had often to sleep through the morning because they could not afford breakfast. The eggs from their chickens were given to the boys because they had to go to work or schools. Narguess cooks lunch and the remains are eaten for dinner. If the remains are too little, Narguess does not eat and leaves them to the children.

As her second son, who had begun work, was due for military service in the next year, Narguess faced even worse conditions than those she faced in 1978. However, three years later, her brother-in-law began to give her P.T.50 a day, as his conditions improved. The two older boys were doing their military service so could not contribute, while the two others continued their schooling. The T.V. had gone since they could not keep up the instalments. Inflation had risen making the P.T.50 per day plus her pension hardly sufficient. Narguess still faces several years before the boys can really support the family, so until then, she must continue being dependent on her brother-in-law.

[d] Rashad and Nefissah: the case of a disabled head of household

Rashad and Nefissah present a different case. Rashad was a beans and belilah peddler. He sold ful medames, a sort of cooked horse-bean, which is a national dish and the cheapest food for the poor. He also sold belilah which is a cooked mixture of wheat with a little rice, used for breakfast, like porridge. He had a small handcart in which he put the



two kedrahs or pots of ful and belilah (that have a peculiar shape) that contained his merchandise. Three years earlier in 1974, the researcher had visited and held conversations with them. They had divided their labor so that Nefissah helped her husband prepare his trade. She would spend the morning picking the beans and rice of any foreign matter, wash them, and put the beans in one pot and the wheat and rice in the other. In the afternoon Rashad would take the kedrahs to a special oven where they were put on a small fire all night to cook or bake. At dawn Rashad, who is literate, would rise, wash to say his prayers according to Islamic faith, and go to the oven, put the kedrahs into his cart and peddle his merchandise early for people's breakfast until it was finished. He would then return home about noon. Rashad had some regular clients among the well-off on Roda Island. He made between P.T.70 and P.T.80 a day profit. It was enough to provide for his family and pay his four children's schooling, since they went to government schools. Food was cheaper and inflation had not yet set in. Still, Rashad was an irza'i and the day that he stopped working he had nothing on which to live.

This day came in 1976. Rashad suffered a stroke and his right side and tongue were paralyzed. He had to be hospitalized in a government free service hospital until he was out of danger, then was sent home and had to follow some kind of physiotherapy. However, after a few months, he could not afford to continue the treatment which had to be paid for. He applied to Social Affairs for help, but was refused because he told them that he had a son who worked - this institution works on the traditional belief that children must help their parents. He reached the point where he could drag his foot to walk and could make himself understood though his arm remained limp. Meanwhile, his eldest son had obtained a

Secondary School Diploma of Commerce and began work as an accountant in the Government Agency for Pensions. He is paid L.E.22 per month. This son paid for the treatment and supported the whole family during his father's illness. As they had been living five in one room, when the son began work he rented a second room which had become vacant. He paid L.E.5.50 for it, and contributed to the electricity bill and the cost of water. The boy decided to give his parents L.E.7.50 and keep the rest, which was hardly sufficient for his communications and clothes. As this amount had to cover their food and rent, Nefissah decided that the only way to survive was to continue her husband's job, but on a smaller scale and with modifications. She could not do more, being herself about 55 years old, she had to look after the disabled man, in addition to her children. Where he used to cook 4 kilos of beans, she cooked only 2 or 3 kilos. Instead of sending them to be baked in the oven, to save the trip and the cost, she began to put them in a smaller pot and cook them on the stove at home from the evening till 2 or 3 a.m. She would stay awake till then, then put out the fire and go to bed, wake up about 5 a.m. and put them on the fire to boil and keep them hot for her clients. Instead of going about selling, as he used to do, she let it be known in the quarter that she is selling ful and belilah, so that people would come to her house. She kept the apartment door open and sat in the hall, on the floor, with the two pots before her.

Observing how she carried on her trade, it was noted that her clients sent their children with some kind of container and the required change. Usually, the exchange is very curt. The child says, "Give me for P.T.1 of beans (or belilah)", or he or she gives the money and says "I want beans (or belilah)". Nefissah always takes the money first and gets it close to her eyes to see it, holding it in the palm of her hand, then she puts

it in a transparent nylon sack which she would then put in her lap. Then she poured a soup-spoonful into a container and added a little bit more on top. She would then give it back to the child making sure he held it upright. Without another word, the child would turn and go.

Nefissah makes P.T.20 a day on a job that takes all this preparation. Asked how she calculates it, Nefissah who is illiterate, said, "I cook 3 kilos of beans, for P.T.18 the kilo", which makes it P.T.54, then she said "And P.T.7½ for petrol equals P.T.61.5, plus wheat for P.T.6, plus rice for P.T.5, makes it P.T.11 for the belilah", i.e.  $61.5 + 11 = 72.50$  P.T. which is the total expenses. That morning, she had sold P.T.92.50 worth, thus making P.T.20 net profit. It is to be noted that on this particular morning, some of the belilah was not sold. When asked what she would do with it, she replied that she would boil it, cook some fresh belilah and add it to the old one, and sell it the next day. If they have nothing else to eat or if she has no money they ate it. That day, she poured what remained into a smaller pot and put it on the lower crossed wood legs of the table, placing it near the window, as it was a cooler place, in order to preserve it.

Nefissah buys the needs of her trade daily. She does not have the necessary money to buy large quantities at a time. Compared to the small gain she makes, the time and effort she spends on her trade is tremendous. She makes about L.E.6 a month, and she works every day non-stop with no holidays and no one to relieve her. Nefissah suffers from painful rheumatism, fatigue and lack of sleep. She also has to clean, cook and do the washing with rudimentary tools as she has no appliances. A year after this rearrangement took place, her daughter graduated from the School of Commerce, (in July 1977) taking a diploma like her brother,

and was waiting to be appointed by the Government's "Work Office" Maktab-El-Amal<sup>c</sup> to a Government job. After waiting for several months to no avail, and seeing how short of money they were, she accepted a temporary job as a salesgirl in a boutique on Roda Island for a monthly pay of L.E.10. She works from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., with a lunch break from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. during which she comes home for a meal and goes to get water from another house. She has to make four or five trips carrying the large bastilla or water container in order to have the provision for 24 hours. The girl contributed L.E.7.50 a month, to the household expenses, keeping L.E.2.50 to buy her own clothes and sundry expenses.

Thus, the parents get L.E.15 from their two children plus the L.E.6 which Nefissah makes out of her trade, a total income of L.E.21 per month, which has to cover the expenses of a family of five, including their share of the rent, electricity and water.<sup>1</sup>

[e] Fateh and Amal: Case of a low-income self-employed man

Fateh and Amal who were the main informants, are a young couple who have two daughters about 11 and 9 years old. Fateh presses clothes for people in the quarter. As the inhabitants are poor they do not have many clothes pressed, he often worked for an ironer who had a shop in Roda Island for a daily wage. This happens once or twice a week, depending on whether the man has much work and needs him or not. Summer is usually a better season for him, as people wash and iron their clothes more frequently due to the heat and dust.

Fateh used to have an ironing shop in Ismailia, one of the Suez Canal cities. He used to iron for the army officers and their families. So he

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1. In the "Social Construction of Poverty" chapter, an account of the ensuing changes are given.

did fairly good business then. However, with the 1967 war, all non-army people and the officers' families were evacuated, and were told to go anywhere else where they had parents or relatives. The Government provided some form of shelter for those who had no one, mainly in mosques and old abandoned monuments. It also gave the evacuees, who had to leave their jobs, a monthly pension. Fateh was given L.E.9 per month for four persons. As he is originally from Der-El-Sabbakin, and he and his sister are partners in the ownership of a house there, he went back to his quarter. The house consists of three floors, with one tiny room on each floor, and one cell which has no windows and is usually used to store things, but was later rented to a construction worker. The house is in a very deteriorated condition. Fateh took the ground-floor room and the first-floor room, with one w.c. which they divided into a kitchenette and w.c. all in one. The top room is rented to a couple and their baby for L.E.1. The cell was rented recently for less. This income of L.E.1.50 is divided between Fateh and his sister. Fateh was living fairly poorly, but still managed to cover his food expenses and send the girls to school. Their living-room consisted of an old baladi sofa and his ironing table, while the room upstairs contained their bed, cupboard and another baladi sofa.

In 1974, after the October 1973 war, and with the first peace agreements, the government decreed that all evacuated families could return to the Canal cities. They were given a certain period to find accommodation, after which their pensions would stop. Believing that his shop was bombed with everything else in the city, and being afraid that another war may break out, Fateh refused to return. Meanwhile, he was now without the L.E.9 pension, and found it impossible to survive on his work income. To make matters worse, inflation had begun to set in. Government subsidies were reduced on several items as the war had completely drained the

country's economy. Fateh decided to go to Libya where, he heard, many workers had gone and were making good money. He borrowed L.E.100 from his sister, Nema, the first informant, and went. Three months later, he returned having failed to cover his expenses, and having even incurred a debt. The Fatehs were now plunged into dire poverty. Here is Amal's account of what happened next:

I told Fateh, "Give me L.E.20 at the beginning of every month and I'll even be able to save. You won't have to worry about anything". But he was silent, then said to me, "The truth is I don't have those L.E.20, shall I lie to you? It all depends on what I get per day". So I told him, "Then I am going out to work". On some days he gains more than on others, and then, he has expenses, so he can't save an amount to give me at the beginning of every month.

Fateh is an irza'i, he gets an average of about P.T.50 per day. On Mondays he takes his holiday, so he gets no income. If he has work every day, he gets about L.E.14 a month, but in winter his income shrinks.

So, Amal asked his sister to get her a job, since the latter worked in a club. She found her a similar job to her own in a women's bath-house, in another annex of the same club. She works from 8.30 a.m. to 3.p.m. and gets about L.E.12 a month. However, she gets some tips from the ladies who use the showers or ask her for various services. So, her extra income varies with circumstances. She had taken this job for only a few months when her health suffered. Amal already suffered from kidney trouble before getting the job, with the extra cleaning she has to do in the baths, in addition to travelling a good distance by metro, standing in the crowds of the rush hours and the heat, her condition worsened. It is also complicated by liver or bile trouble. Moreover, Fateh's dignity has been affected by her work. He felt demeaned by not being able to provide for his household, and sometimes resorted to hashish.

The rooftops of Der El Sabbakin. Roof of Zeinab and Dawlat's living quarters. They make small cages for poultry out of tin and old baskets.  
(1978).

Fateh and his two daughters and Zeinab's grand-niece. They stand in the main hara which goes deep into Der. A food-cart stands by.  
(1979).





Still, with their new income, Amal has been able to make many improvements in the house. She bought a butagaz stove and oven, and a T.V. on credit. She bought a bed for the girls, a table for the living room, changed their bedroom cupboard and bought a kitchen cupboard and some kitchen-ware. She also repainted their rooms. Lastly she bought a refrigerator on credit, continuing to live on very little in order to afford these improvements. As their living room became crowded with furniture, Fateh's ironing table had to be put in the staircase at the entrance of the gate. This saves him the rent of a shop, even though there are no empty shops available. The staircase is quite dark, narrow and in bad condition. Fateh's table is high and long, made of odd pieces of wood. It has a lower shelf where he put the bundles of clothes coming in to be pressed. He used a primus stove to heat the iron, keeping it beside him, on the floor. When he takes any item to be pressed he spreads it, then takes a sip of water from a glass keeping it in his mouth, then sprays the item with his mouthful of water, as is usual with professional ironers. He lifts the hot iron from the primus stove and hits the garment with force to press it. Fateh is good at his job. When this data was collected, he was taking 3 to 5 P.T. to iron a shirt, depending on its quality and amount of work it takes, 6 to 8 P.T. for trousers, 5 to 6 P.T. for an adult's dress or galabiyah, taking usually more for woolies than cotton. Generally, he finished his work in the morning. If he had any more to press he only did it in the afternoon if the person wanted it urgently.

Fateh had time for another job, however, there were several obstacles in his way. One of them is that he never did his military service, so no one can hire him officially. He is also illiterate and unskilled in any job but ironing. Thus, Fateh and Amal are better off than the other

cases and have improved their condition. Provided, however, Amal can continue working and does not become handicapped by health problems. She is particularly clever in her home economy, managing it much better than the average person. The only real drain is Fateh's heavy smoking and hashish, which expense he keeps secret.

It is evident that we have here various levels of poverty; with Zeinab, the sweets pedlar getting just a few piastres on which she has to survive with her old mother and possessing nothing but her bed; Dawlat, her sister-in-law who has a husband who makes very little, gives her even less and drinks the rest, whose son helps them a bit, but who often do not eat well and who had to beg for her children's schooling; Narguess who has such a small pension that she has to rely on her son's wage and the generosity of her relatives to survive the ends of months and who has often to sleep through the morning to forget about her hunger; Nefissah who has to run around for more than 20 hours a day to manage her budget, and who hopes that her children's condition will improve and thus give more help; finally, Fateh and Amal who both have to work in order to manage their livelihood, improve their home conditions and provide their daughter with a better future.

Often there is more than one wage-earner in the family, and every one does what he can to contribute to its survival. They all have low-income and unstable jobs that are based on daily effort and challenges, which can be interrupted dramatically by illness or death, leaving them with no provision for the next day. All of which means that they have no economic security. Moreover, their chances of improvement are nil, since they are often illiterate, unskilled and without any gainful property that could provide income in case of illness or old age. Their only hope in the future is that their children may get education and/or

a good job and grow out of poverty. Their children are their only security for the future, but not always a reliable one. The system of social security works only for persons regularly employed in stable jobs, particularly those employed in institutions, whether in the public or private sector.

There is no "unemployment" in the quarter. As one informant put it, "they can't afford to remain unemployed, or else, how will they live? They will work as carriers in construction works, or in ports, or buy anything and sell it". Thus, most of the poor have irregular employment, or are self-employed or government employed in menial jobs, or as small clerks, and who get the minimal wage between L.E.14 to L.E.20 (minimal wages have become L.E.24 instead of L.E.12 when this research began).

### 3. Occupations of Working Individuals in the Cases Studied

If we look at the occupations of the cases taken in both the area of Der-El-Sabbakin and the six other areas of Cairo (Please see Table XII), we find that Groups A,B,C,D,G,H, and I are all poor. Only groups E and F get incomes that put them in a "working class" category, but they are not workers who have become well-off, since they have fixed salaries. Among group E, the baker was poor, exploited, and finally went to Libya where his situation improved. Among group A, only the agriculturer was not poor as he possessed some land, and his condition improved when two of his sons became skilled workers.

A qualitative analysis of the data reveals that for the self-employed and the peddlars, the role played by the socio-economic conditions of the areas where they practiced their trade was critical. For example, the ironers in rich areas make a good income, while the two ironer cases here, make little gain because of the condition of the areas where they

TABLE XII OCCUPATIONS OF WORKING INDIVIDUALS TAKEN IN CASE STUDIES IN SIX AREAS OF CAIRO

| A                             | B  | C   | D                                       | E  | F                                  | G  | H  | I  |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---|--|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Self-employed                 | Self-employed peddlars                                 | Employed in menial jobs   | Privately Employed in Semi-skilled jobs | Employed Skilled Workers                           | Workers in Heavy Industry          | Blue Collar Employment                     | Unemployed men                                 | Dependent women as Heads of Households                   |
| 2 ironers (a man and a woman) | 1 vegetable peddler                                    | 2 janitors in clubs (women)   | 1 mechanics apprentice                  | 1 carpenter (weaving Machine)                      | 3 workers in Helwan                | Junior clerk in Ministry of Social Affairs | 2 old & paralyzed                              | 2 young widows with young children living on family help |
| 2 cart drivers in transport   | 1 beans peddler  | 2 janitors in schools (women)   | 2 apprentices in leather colouring      | 4 construction workers (working class)             |                                    |  | 1 a cancer victim                              |  |
| 1 basket maker                | 3 street peddlars (sweets, fruit, vegetables)          | 1 house-maid  | 2 girls in small factories              | 1 baker in oven was poor then went to Libya        |                                    |  | 1 rheumatic middle-aged (construction carrier) |  |
| 1 agriculturer                | 2 street peddlars in shop-like shack used also as home | errand boy in cheap foods carry-away pouring water on butchered animals | salesman and errand boy in maize trade  | 1 professional cook in institution (working class) |                                    |  |  |  |
|                               | 1 itinerant peddler goes to villages                   | Office boy in banking institution                                       | salesgirl in small shop                 | 1 girl in weaving factory (working class)          |                                    |  |  |  |
|                               |  | In ferrashah for weddings & funerals                                    |   |  |                                    |  |  |  |
| TOTAL: 6<br>(5 men, 1 woman)  | TOTAL: 8<br>(6 men 2 women)                            | TOTAL: 10<br>(5 men 5 women)  | TOTAL: 7<br>(4 men 3 women)             | TOTAL: 8<br>(7 men, 1 woman)                       | TOTAL: 3<br>(men of working class) | TOTAL: 1<br>(man in poor employment)       | TOTAL: 4<br>(men both old & ill)               | TOTAL: 3<br>(widows)                                     |

TABLE XIII

OCCUPATIONS OF INDIVIDUALS IN CASE STUDIES ACCORDING TO SKILL

| Skilled                          | Semi-skilled                          | Unskilled                           | Educated<br>(Secondary) | Unemployed                         | Their Old<br>Jobs                                      | Beggars             |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 3 in industry                    | 6 self-employed                       | 10 in menial<br>jobs                | 1 junior clerk          | 4 sick & old<br>men                | ironer<br>porter<br>peddler<br>construction<br>carrier | 1 old<br>woman      |
| 4 in construction                | 7 private employment                  | 8 itinerant<br>peddlars             |                         | 3 widows                           |  |                     |
| 4 varied                         |                                       |                                     |                         |                                    |  |                     |
| 11 skilled<br>(10 men<br>1 girl) | 13 semi-skilled<br>(9 men<br>4 women) | 18 unskilled<br>(11 men<br>7 women) | 1 educated man          | 7 unemployed<br>(4 men<br>3 women) |  | 1 beggar<br>(woman) |

practised. The same holds for the cart-drivers. Most big businesses now use motor transport, so these cart-drivers only get transport required by the poor who cannot pay much. They are paid for an average of L.E.2, but sometimes they go for three or four days without work. Rarely do they get two jobs a day. Yet the horse or donkey has to eat everyday, and its fodder at that time cost L.E.1.40 per day, while the family ate for half that amount. The basket-maker was so poor that he lived in a shack and could not afford rent. His baskets are used to hold vegetables and fruit. In principle, he should have worked well, but in practice, big business will go to a large institution that has several workers capable of providing the large quantities they need. Peddlars' gains are quite limited since: 1.] Their capital is very limited. 2.] Price control sets serious limits to their gain. 3.] They have no shop, so they can only sell one to three kinds of vegetables or fruit, with a consequently small turn-over. 4.] They work in poor areas where people are not ready to pay more and where they bargain. Even the two peddlars who had a shack, used it as both shop and home, and, holding more merchandise, made a small gain and were among the poorest cases. 5.] They are more likely to be exploited by the wholesalers who usually give them their worst merchandise at high prices, and cheat them, confident that they cannot afford to report them to the police or court (One case tried to do so and only lost, because the wholesaler used his money and power to get the better of him, leaving him even worse off than before).

The four janitors in group C who work in institutions are much more badly paid than any housemaid. Their wages, at the time, reached a low minimum of L.E.5 to L.E.12 a month. The rest were daily wage earners. So groups A, B and C are irza'is, except for the janitors. The apprentices and maize salesmen in group D and the construction workers and the bakers

were all irza'is on a daily wage. This means that at any time they could be dispensed with, and get neither pensions nor benefits. Therefore, we have here 30 irza'is out of the 43 working people in these cases. Group I is formed of widows who are non-working and represent cases of total destitution and dependence on family help, usually a brother, or brother-in-law. One case was almost totally dependent on the Church, with one daughter who recently (1981) began work in a private thread factory at L.E.10. The only four 'unemployed' persons were very ill people who are actually disabled. They were all irza'is and hence, are now destitute. Three of them are supported by the Church. The fourth, Rashad, whose wife took over his trade.

<sup>cases from</sup>  
If <sup>^</sup> both poor and working class groups are considered together, more than half of them are found to have more than one working person per family (see Table XIV). If the poor cases are taken alone, less than half of them have more than one wage earner in the family. One cannot generalize to the population, but ~~this suggests~~ that about half of the lower-income groups have more than one wage-earner per family or household. Qualitative analysis of these cases indicates that some of the poorest have only one wage earner or none at all. Yet, again, this cannot be generalized since some cases have up to four or even five wage earners, but are still living poorly. This is due to two main factors: the income level and the household number. 1.] The wage or gain obtained may be very small. 2.] The number of persons in a household may be very large. For example, in one case where there were four wage-earners, the household consisted of 10 persons (one nuclear family). Each working person got P.T.25 to P.T.30 per day, which, at best, gives them L.E.120 to cover all expenses. There are days when they do not work, or sell. But they still need P.T.30 for bread only, let alone food or ghumuss.

The problem of coping with a total budget becomes evident. The following section deals with budgets.

Table XIV

Number of Wage Earners per Household in the Case Studies of Seven Areas in Cairo

| Number of wage earners.  | 0 | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | TOTAL |
|--------------------------|---|----|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Number of households     | 3 | 11 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 31    |
| Poor households          | 3 | 11 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 25    |
| Working class households |   |    | 2 | 2 | 2 |   | 6     |

"The satisfied is not aware of the hungry"

Rashad.

## II. Budgets and Coping Mechanisms in Everyday Life

### A: Diet and food budget of the poor

In coping with their everyday life, the poor have recourse to any available institutions which may help them acquire their needs in the cheapest possible way, and in a way that would make the little they have stretch to its maximum.

The following tables XV, XVI and XVII summarize, in schematic form, the main formal and informal institutions that are used as coping mechanisms by the poor in dealing with the major aspects of their everyday life.

#### i. Formal Institutions as coping mechanisms

As part of a Socialist policy established after the revolution of



TABLE X V

COPING MECHANISMS IN EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE POOR

A. Food: diet, source, budget.

Formal Institutions

1. Government subsidies
2. Price control
3. Ration card
4. Government cooperative  
(gamia taawonia)

Informal Institutions

1. Those who have no card buy from those who have
2. Borrowing food and returning it
3. Bargaining to reduce cost
4. Eating left-over merchandise or remaining food
5. Raising poultry, rabbits, goats
6. Help from relatives or neighbours
7. Sleeping off a meal

B. Clothes: quality, source, cost.

Formal Institutions

1. Public Sector Store  
(popular materials)
2. The Ration Card

Informal Institutions

1. The Suk or second-hand market
2. The Gamia: a credit system
3. The dalalah: buying on credit
4. The traditional black dress for all occasions
5. Borrowing clothes
6. Presents
7. Charity

C. Housing and Material Belongings: quality, source, cost, ideal model

Formal Institution

1. Order furniture at a cheap carpenter
2. Buy stove, T.V. on credit in Public Sector stores
3. Ration card for upholstery material

Informal Institution

1. Sharing apartment with others
2. Sharing electricity and water bills with others
3. Minimal furniture with maximal use
4. Buying second-hand furniture
5. Make Gamia to pay instalments of above, oven, T.V.
6. Borrow utensils from neighbour or relatives
7. Sell jewelry to buy furniture for trousseau
8. The Samsar or broker for second-hand furniture
9. The dalalah as middleman
10. Gossip to know about a sale

TABLE XVI

COPING MECHANISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE POOR

D. Schooling: System, Quality, Cost

Formal Institutions

1. Free government schools
2. Al-Azhar free schools and university
3. ASU schools, part-payment
4. Universities' nominal fee
5. Group classes for reduced prices

Informal Institutions

1. Neighbour or relative gives free or partly paid special lessons
2. Charity from neighbours to pay school fees
3. Recommendations from neighbour or friend to reduce ASU school fee
4. Gamia for beginning of school year to pay uniform, shoes, stationery

E. Transport

Formal Institutions

1. Public transport is kept at a relatively low price

Informal Institutions

1. Hanging outside or sitting on roof of the vehicle to escape payment of ticket
2. Finding schools or jobs at walking distance to avoid expenses

F. Health

Formal Institutions

1. Maternal and child health centres
2. Health offices (immunization, food inspection)
3. School health units and hospitals
4. Public clinics or mustawssaf
5. Public general and specialized hospitals
6. Private physicians
7. Pharmacies

Informal Institutions

1. Folk medicine
2. Belief in Sheikhs and counter-magic
3. Zar ceremonies
4. Gamia to face unexpected health expense
5. Sale of jewelry for health expense
6. Borrowing of an amount

TABLE XVII

COPING MECHANISMS IN EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE POOR

G. Recreation

Formal Institutions

1. Coffee House
2. The Television
3. The cinema
4. The transistor
5. Feasts and mawalid

Informal Institutions

1. The hara
2. Hashish
3. Visiting
4. Joking
5. Picnics
6. Gamia and dalalah to provide for the feasts

Institutions of Help for the Poor

Formal Institutions

1. Ministry of Social Affairs
2. Religious institutions

Churches  
Mosques  
Waqfs

Informal Institutions

1. Charity from Private Institutions:  
The zakat and ushur
2. Charity from neighbours for zakat or Sawab

1952, three basic institutions were established to ensure that the masses would get basic food items at minimum or at reduced prices:

- a.] Direct government subsidies and price control
- b.] A ration card system
- c.] Government Cooperative Societies known as "Gamia Taawonia".

a.] Government subsidies and price control

There is a saying that, "In Egypt, no one dies of hunger", this is because however poor a person may be, he can always afford a loaf of dark baladi bread which costs half a piastre. Bread was sold at this price for years, but as world prices rose (large proportion of the wheat is imported), bread had to be subsidized if its price was to be maintained. Bread is a staple food in Egypt and forms the basic diet of the poor and the destitute. Any increase in the price of bread could cause real hunger among the destitute and crises among the poverty-stricken masses. At first, subsidies covered a mass of food and non-food items, among which were included bread, sugar, tea, oil, rice, spices like black pepper, soap, cooking butter, wheat which enters into the making of macaroni and sweets, and a few other foods, not to mention non-food items which will be discussed elsewhere. This state of affairs continued with Sadat's regime until January 1977.

After the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, and due to the war economy, the national economy experienced increasing difficulties in making interest payments on debts. Certain sections of the population made great gains due to the new open-market policy. This state of affairs continued until the economic problems became critical. Following the establishment of an "Economic Committee" a governmental decree (18th January 1977) announced the withdrawal of subsidies from several food items, except those included

in ration cards. The former included white Afrangi bread (sold for P.T.1 a loaf), white flour, maize, sugar, tea, animal fat, rice, gaz and butagaz. Subsidy was maintained on baladi bread, beans, lentils, and ration card portions only of sugar, tea and oil, second class wheat, non-rationed rice and imported meat and margarine. Increases consisted of P.T.0.5 per loaf for white brea to P.T.1 increase in the kilogram of free sugar and rice, to P.T.5 per kilo for cheap local macaroni which thus doubled in price overnight. Butagaz increased by P.T.30 per bottle, while petrol for transport increased by 1.8 to 2.5 P.T. per litre. Subsidies were reduced on cigarettes and cloth materials. Increase in non-public transport occurred due to increases in petrol. The purpose was to meet the balance of payments and contain inflation, the justification being that only traders benefitted from these subsidies (Al-Ahram Newspaper, 18th January 1977).

The news was hardly out when groups of workers and other unidentified elements gathered and rallied the poor masses to break out into a revolt all over the country. They marched on all government institutions and public transport vehicles, as well as some authority figures' private homes, setting fire to them, including some private cars. Curfews were imposed, universities and schools were closed and the army was called in. As the revolt continued on the next day, the President ordered withdrawal of the rejected decree hardly 36 hours after it had been passed. Bread and other items were back to their prices and a decision was taken to re-examine the economic situation and policy. (Al-Ahram , 20th January, 1977: 1).

Later, revision of the situation and policy resulted in gradual reductions of subsidies on certain items and withdrawal of the subsidy on so-called luxury items, which covered many manufactured items and

foods. Subsidies were kept only on items within the ration card while these same items, sold free, followed the market price. Bread continued to be subsidized except for the white kinds, considered a luxury and made out of non-subsidized wheat, though the latter remained under price control.

b.] The Ration Card System

The ration card policy was based on the idea that with the limited amount of goods, and particularly subsidized goods, it was necessary to apportion to every individual a share in order to prevent storing or abuse in consumption (e.g. the rich, who buy off the shares of the poor before they could buy them). In order to ensure social justice, ration cards were given to rich and poor alike. Subsidized items within the ration card were fixed at a very low price and were distributed to the various areas by a government institution responsible for availability of goods and basic items in the country: the Provisions Ministry (Wazaret Al Tamwin). Distribution was made according to the population in each area, more precisely, according to the number of persons figuring on the ration cards in each area. These ration items were either given to a Government Cooperative or to a grocer who was responsible to the government for distribution according to the ration card only. Any infringement to this regulation was punishable by a heavy fine. The ration card does not include only food items. It includes cotton materials for bed-linen, mattresses, clothes and other items like bed-covers which cannot be obtained without a card. These are particular products sold only in 'public sector stores'.

The ration card played an important role during the various wars that occurred during 1956, 1967 and 1973 and during the various food shortages. For example, during the 1973 Egypt-Israeli war, there was a severe shortage

of sugar and tea, which could only be bought with the ration card. Black markets sold a kilo of sugar for ten times its price while tea was simply unobtainable. Shortage of oil for food was frequent and only the ration card could ensure its availability. At present, as most food subsidies have been withdrawn, only these ration items are government subsidized, that is, apart from bread which is outside the ration card. Whenever a food shortage occurs, a decree is immediately passed putting the missing item on the ration card.

The problem with ration cards is that they are only given to a person who has a birth certificate and/or an identity card. But among the poor, a large majority have no birth certificate, as their births were not registered either to save the few piastres of registration, or out of sheer ignorance, or neglect. This is particularly the case among women villagers as fathers were liable to think that a woman does not need a birth certificate, or would not put the name of their daughter in official registers believing it to be shameful (particularly villagers of Upper Egypt). Nowadays, most see the advantage of the ration card, and hence of birth certificates.

c.] Governmental Cooperative Societies or 'Gamia Taawonia'

Gamias are government cooperatives where food and cleaning items are sold under a system of price-control where profit is reduced to a minimum in order to help the poor. Certain items in the Gamia are only sold by means of the ration card while others are sold free. Again, where shortages exist the ration card needs to be used. As soon as shortages pass, the same items may be sold without the ration card.

These government cooperatives were the product of the 1952 revolution and the socialist policy followed during the Nasser regime. These Gamias have persisted and play a very important role in the life of the poor. A

few examples would give an idea of their importance. For example, meat is sold at the butchers' for L.E.1.80 to L.E.2.40 per kilo, depending on whether it is minced or not, what part or quality. At the Gamia, imported frozen meat is sold for L.E.0.68 the kilo. Fish is sold in the Gamia for P.T.22 per kilo while outside it is sold for at least L.E.1 the kilo. Chicken is sold for P.T.70 per kilo at the Gamia while outside it is sold for L.E.1.50 to L.E.1.80 the kilo. Certain items, particularly oil, can only be found in the Gamia and is sold for P.T.32 the litre, while on the ration-card, it is sold for P.T.16 the litre. When imported American oil came in, it came in cans of 5 or 10 litres and at a very expensive rate, so that it became impossible for lower or even middle-income groups to afford it. Cooking butter and imported cheese are also items that at one time were only found in Gamias. Items not available in other groceries, like soap for example, are sold 1 to 2 P.T. cheaper at the Gamia. Gamias sell canned food, flour, rice bags, jam etc.... Outside the Gamia, all these items would be, at least, 1 or 2 P.T. more per piece, or 10 to 20 P.T. more per kilo. All these differences are important for a strained budget.

There are continuous queues at the Gamias. The problem with these Gamias is that in order to avoid abuse or corruption (i.e. selling items in large numbers to the rich or to grocers by tips which profit the employees of the Gamia), merchandise is often distributed daily or weekly in limited quotas as compared to the number of clients. So, as soon as certain items arrive, they are sold out, often within the hour. As these items are mostly sold without a ration card (though some have to be sold only to ration card carriers, depending on their availability), some retail grocers send several persons to buy large quantities of the cheap merchandise which they can later sell at a much higher price. Some of the richer people buy large quantities and store them, often with the agreement of



some Gamia employees who will get a cut or tip, as it is generally forbidden to sell in large quantities. Hence, a regular black market is fed and perpetuated in spite of efforts to prevent it. The consequence of leakage and quotas means that the items are sold while there is still a long queue. Persons who have queued for more than an hour in the hot sunshine, wasting time and energy, have to go away without the much needed item, only to come back the next day to see the same thing happen again. This creates great anger and frustration which results in frequent quarrels and sometimes fights to get in before the item finishes. Police must sometimes be called to keep the queue. Resentment against the rich who can afford the tips is often expressed. One poor man expressed it saying:

The poor tries to get what is cheap so that he can go on. Fish is for L.E.1 the kilo (outside of the Gamia). The poor stand at the Gamia while the rich send their servant or porter to do so. They get two chicken to put in their refrigerator, when they already have six in it, and boasts, 'I have and I have ...', and the poor can't get even one. So the rich has taken the portion of six poor families. The poor gets the one sold for P.T.68 the kilo, and the rich go, get it and put it in their fridge, when they can buy the expensive type. Why don't they leave it to the poor instead?! Your God is present!

Recently, criticism was directed against these government cooperatives as their prices rose tremendously. It became impossible for the poor to buy, for example, any cheese but the locally made white cheese which rose to P.T.80 the kilo, making it difficult for them to afford it. Items, like lentils which were government subsidized and are used by the poor, rose in price and are often not available. Horse-beans, which are baked or cooked, form a basic item of the poor's staple diet. These are sold for P.T.18 the kilo, and although this price is higher than it used to be,

it is still cheaper than other foods. The importance of the Gamias, ration cards and subsidized food will become more apparent as items of the poor's diet and budgets are described.

## 2. Diet of the Poor

### [a] Breakfast

In general, breakfast for the poor consists of dark baladi bread eaten either with baked horse-beans (or ful medames), or taamia (ground beans mixed with vegetables and made into a paste like a hamburger and fried in oil). It is sold ready-made in the mornings. Each cost P.T.1), or mish (grime of white cheese butter sold in half-liquid form and very salty), or a small piece of white cheese made by someone who may have goats. These may be accompanied by an onion or leeks for P.T.0.5. These items can be obtained for P.T.1 each and can be sufficient for one person, as one or two loaves of bread are eaten with them. A family of five or six may eat for P.T.3 or 4 of beans, with one or two loaves of bread for each. The beans are put into one dish, each persons uses a morsel of bread to dip into the beans. The beans are supposed to be seasoned with lime and oil, but the poor often eat it without seasoning to save on oil. Such a breakfast would cost about P.T.10 for a family of five.

Bread is a staple food and figures in almost all meals, except where rice is cooked. Bread could figure without anything else, except perhaps  $\frac{1}{2}$  P.T. or 1 P.T. of green onions or leeks, eaten raw with bread and salt. Baladi bread is made out of a mixture of whole-wheat flour, maize, barley, some fenugreek and salt. Another basic food is ful medames. It is always sold cooked and hot. People send someone, usually a child, with a container to buy it. All categories of people may eat it in the morning, while the poor may eat it also for lunch and dinner. It is quite a nourishing meal providing vegetable protein. It is the main source of

protein for the poor, since they cannot generally afford meat, milk, and eggs, unless they have chickens. It was found that the calorie intake from grain is about 60% for Egypt as a whole. Breakfast always ends with a glass of hot and very sweet black tea. Tea and sugar are felt to be indispensable by the poor, and are often taken after the other meals too. Often, poor adults go without breakfast taking just very black sweetened tea which blocks their appetite, providing energy for a few hours. The poor cannot afford fruit, desserts or cakes, so this tea also replaces these items. Hence, shortages in tea or sugar are always severely felt by them, and however, much the prices go up, they must buy them, at the cost of reducing other food items. At most, they will reduce tea intake to twice a day. So, the ration card is crucial. Subsidy on bread assumes its great importance when the quantities of bread they eat become evident. Reliance on horse-beans emphasizes the importance of price controls for them.

[b] Lunch and Dinner

Lunch mainly consists of some cooked vegetable, or potatoe with rice, or some macaroni with tomatoe sauce, or lentils, or beans in their various forms. The vegetables chosen are among the cheapest in the market, like marrows which cost P.T.5 per kilo, spiniach or mallow which cost P.T.10 per kilo. Potatoes vary in price according to season dropping to P.T.5 or rising to P.T.25 or more. Other vegetables may be bought when in full season when prices are at their lowest, like green beans, sweet peas or Jew's mallow or carrots. Moreover, usually the poorer buy the cheap vegetable remains, the withered and rotten ones, known as neadah. Rotten tomatoes are known as 'the poor's carry away' or mashal-el-fakir. As rice is relatively cheap in Egypt (it is locally produced), it is basic to their diet. It is also one of the items always on the ration card,

sold within the card for P.T.5 per kilo, and for P.T.10 outside it. When conditions get very hard, they eat rice with tomatoe sauce, or even without it. Tomatoes vary according to season, from P.T.5 a kilo in season and rising up to P.T.70 a kilo out of season. Tomatoes are used profusely in cooking vegetables. Ideally, tabich or cooked food consists of rice and a vegetable cooked with tomatoe to which onion or garlic is added. Sometimes, to get the taste of zafarah or grease of meat, they will buy the grease of animal's intestines, whether sheep's or cow's. Some go to the slaughter-house where any bits from the animals not used by the butchers can be had cheap. These are put on the fire to melt and vegetables, or stuffed cabbages are cooked in it, or Jew's mallow made as a soup. Chicken feet, heads and tails of fish, are bought per bunch in markets, and cooked to replace meat. Bread makes such food stretch so that it can also be eaten at dinner, since any food remains can rarely last beyond the next day, in the heat. Food remains can be used as ghumuss with the bread. Ghumuss is any food in which bread can be dipped or with which it can be eaten. Ghumuss can range from mish (or grime of cheese or butter) to cooked vegetables, or a bit of ful medames, or even some leeks, green onions, pickles, fried potatoes or fried egg-plant. These can be obtained in small quantities for P.T.1 to give a taste to the bread and give the feeling that a meal has been taken. No one above a low-income group would use the term Ghumuss to say that they bought food to go with bread. It is a term peculiar to the poor.

Most families cook for two days, eating the remains the next day. It is acknowledged that the poor cannot have tabich or cooked meals every day. Affording it already means that they are better-off. Usually, they will cook two or three times per week, according to their means. In some areas, they cook only on two specific days that do not change. The

Christian poor will cook on Sundays and Thursdays. The Moslem poor will always cook on Fridays and another day or two in the week. Apart from ful and taamia, ready-made food is avoided as it is too expensive.

Most of the poor breed a few chickens as this is the only way to be able to afford an egg, or eat a chicken on feast days. Even then, they often prefer to sell the eggs, as each is sold for at least P.T.5. Then protein intake is often limited to fish sold at the Gamia. Before they can afford to buy fish, they must first have the price of bread for the day, their breakfast and kerosene. A kilo of cheap quality of Nile fish costs P.T.22 to P.T.40. They must also queue or fight and sweat to get it. Fish is not available every day, they have to keep passing to see when it comes. If it does, usually one of the inhabitants buy it and come and announce it, and soon the word gets around the hara and those who have its price will leave everything and rush to get it, before others know about it.

A family of five or six is usually allowed three kilos of meat a month on the ration card. This is imported frozen meat and can only be obtained from the Gamia. Though it costs P.T.60 per kilo, as compared to L.E.1.80 for free meat, the poor cannot usually afford to buy their three kilos. They often get one to one and a half kilos a month to provide one good meal for the family. Sometimes, they buy this quantity only once every two months and on feast occasions. They prefer to buy their rations of sugar, rice and tea first without which they feel they cannot subsist. Rice gives them two or three cheap meals per week. Oil is also extremely important, as it is used to cook many foods and to season their daily beans.

Meat, sweets and cakes are mainly eaten on feast occasions. The very poor cannot afford the latter even on feasts, but may get them as

a donation from the rich on religious feasts. Milk is bought only when there are infants who are not breastfed in the house, which is rare. As for fruit, the poor cannot afford them. Naima who works as a maid in houses taking P.T.50 per days says:

"Even bananas are for P.T.35 per kilo. One must stand and just look at it. I take photos near the butcher to pretend I go there".

Buying fruit means they have to go without a meal. They sometimes give their children a piastre to get 4 or 5 grains of horonkesh from a peddler like Dawlat, who sells them piece by piece. Fruit and vegetables are usually sold per kilo in Egypt and a vendor is usually reluctant to sell less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  a kilo of anything.

One may conclude from the above account, that about two thirds of the diet of the poor consists of grains and starch. The rest consists mainly of vegetables, occasional fish or mish cheese and rarely meat or fruit, grease of meat replacing meat and butter. They mainly consume vegetable protein and carbohydrates. Their source of vitamins comes primarily from the green vegetables and from the wholemeal bread they eat.

### 3. Food budgets

In the following account of the poor's budget, it is important not to think in terms of a consciously planned budget. It is quite rare and difficult for the poor to engage in this kind of planning. It is not that they are incapable of planning, the difficulty is that frequently their income is irregular, and even if it is regular, it is usually so small that they have to face day-to-day demands as they come. While they eat their fill on one day, they may get a water or electricity bill on the next which must be paid, and so they must go without a decent meal for days surviving on bread and mish or other ghumuss. If not paid, the commodity is cut off after a week, and the fine plus the bill cannot be met to re-install it. If it is not a bill, they must pay for the ration items which have to be purchased all at a time. Rents must be paid. The children may need uniforms, shoes, copy-books and in some cases fees for school. A person falls ill and needs special medical care or food. A pregnancy may occur requiring expenses for mother and baby. For the poor each of these represents a crisis that must be faced, and no sooner is one over, than another appears. All their efforts are directed towards basic survival. When the money is not sufficient, they must simply go without, sleep it off, or wait hopefully for the next day which may bring an unexpected solution.

The monthly budgets described here as examples approximate reality. For the poor, no day is quite like another, and as most of them put it, "We cook according to our circumstances and the money available". Most of them could say, for example, how much they paid for rationed items or how much bread they get a day, as these are the regular items, but none could say how much they spend on food per month. Dawlat said she spends about P.T.60 per day altogether, but could not give more details. Thus,

the researcher had to rely on estimates based on observation and bits of information to reconstruct their daily and monthly budgets.

The examples that follow show that 70 to 72% of the poors' expenditure goes on food. Of this, 25% to 42% is for bread alone, depending on whether they buy the cheap black baladi bread for P.T.½ the loaf, or the white bread which costs P.T.1 per loaf. Ration items which consist of sugar, rice, oil and tea cost between L.E.2.50 and L.E.3. for a family of five, forming about 16% to 20% of their expenditure. Vegetables form 28% to 33% of the total cost of food, and grains about 10%. Protein like meat or fish form only about 3 or 4% of their expenditure, fish occurring much more frequently than meat. Fuel for cooking makes up about 6% to 7% of food expenditure. Two kilos of cooking butter seems to be the average for a family of five or six, about 3% of their food costs.

Rents range from L.E.1 to L.E.5.50 per room. In the example taken, rents form 13% to 27% of total expenditure, depending on the number of rooms, their size and date of the rent (more recent rents are double the old ones). Generally, rents with water and electricity bills form about 21% to 30% of total budgets.

Concerning travel, this depends on whether or not work, trade, or school exist in the area. In case 1, for example, only the son uses a bus to get to his job, which is not far, so that the bus fare is one piastre per trip. The daughter's job is within walking distance. The father is disabled and the mother's life and work centres on the house, all errands appear to be run within walking distance. In case 2, again everyone operates within walking distance, except the son who does his military service and who is given the usual L.E.3 to cover his travel and expenses. In case 3, one of the girls has to take a bus to get to school



and back. She and her sister also take daily pocket-money. Thus, travel may form between 3% to 15% of the budget for those who use them.

As is evident from budgets, various basic items appear like clothes, schooling, health and recreation expenses. Whenever the need for any of these expenses arises, a reduction of some food has to be made to meet that expense, or a gamia has to be formed, which again requires some food reduction to save towards its payment. The alternative is to obtain a particular help or donation, as the following part will indicate. For a family of five, clothing costs a minimum of L.E.28 to L.E.36 a year. On the basis of an average income of L.E.20 a month, this constitutes between 12% and 15% of their income and expenditure. If clothing does not come from some external source or via unexpected additional income, as it sometimes does, then it must come out of the amount set aside for food, which then falls to between 55% and 58%. Education expenses are quite irregular and vary between the cases. In the case of Dawlat reported here, it forms 3% of expenditure as the girls have to pay a fee. In other cases they do not. And if as Rashad says, the poor meet any expense by reducing first the meat because it gives them P.T.68 at one stroke, this means another 3% reduction in the food expenditure.

The point here is that when satisfying one's hunger is the main problem, then everything else is secondary. When anything else becomes urgent and must be paid for, hunger and food deprivation (threatening diet deficiency) again looms larger and becomes the central problem. There is no other way to obtain these secondary items. It is a known fact that general weakness and anaemia are common among the poor. Tuberculosis is more common than generally believed. Within the small population of Der-El-Sabbakin, three cases of T.B. exist.

TABLE XVIII

Comparing Research Findings to Expenditure Patterns 1974-75.

| <u>Research Finding (1977-78)</u> |                         | <u>Expenditure Patterns 1974-75 for the<br/>Median Income Categories</u>                            |                           |      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------------------|------|
|                                   |                         | <u>(median income £33)</u>  |                           |      |
| Food                              | 52-55%                  | { Ration = 16 to 20%<br>Vegetables = 28 to 33%<br>Grains = 10%<br>Proteins = 3 or 4%<br>Butter = 3% | Food                      | 54.3 |
| Fuel                              | 7%                      |   |                           |      |
| Rents alone                       | 13% - 27%               | →   | (Shelter<br>Housing       | 9.6  |
| Electricity &<br>water            | 3%                      | →   | (Fuels                    | 4.1  |
| Transport                         | 3% - 15%                |   | Transport                 | 2.1  |
| Clothing                          | 12% - 15%               |   | Clothing                  | 13.6 |
| Education                         | about 3% maximum if any |   | Education                 | 1.5  |
|                                   |                         |   | Home furnishings          | 2.6  |
|                                   |                         |   | Personal care<br>products | 2.1  |
|                                   |                         |   | Health                    | 1.4  |
|                                   |                         |   | Tobacco, alcohol          | 5.5  |
|                                   |                         |   | Miscellaneous             | 3.2  |
|                                   |                         |   |                           | 100% |

Source: AID Report, 1977.

A Model of a Day's Food Budget

Taking a family of five as a model, which is the average, and within the context of the general information obtained, as well as the cases studied in depth and observed, the following table represents roughly the daily budget of the poor. This is for a day when they eat well, noting again that great variations may occur.

|   | <u>In P.T.</u>      |
|---|---------------------|
| <u>Breakfast:</u> Ten loads of <u>baladi</u> bread with   | 5                   |
| either: <u>ful medames</u> (horse-beans)  |                     |
| or <u>taamia</u> (beans burger)   | 5 to 6              |
| or <u>mish</u> (grime of white cheese with leeks)   |                     |
| or white cheese with leeks or green onions  |                     |
|   | <hr/> 10 to 11 P.T. |
| <br><u>Lunch:</u> Cooked vegetables   |                     |
| 2 kilos of courgettes   |                     |
| or 1 kilo of spinach, mallow or garden beet   |                     |
| or 1 kilo of Jew's mallow   |                     |
| or 2 kilos of peas or   |                     |
| 1 kilo of green beans   |                     |
| or 1 kilo of potatoes etc.  | 10 to 15            |
| With tomatoes for cooking   | 5                   |
| With cooking butter and onions  | 5                   |
| With rice P.T.5 plus bread P.T.5  |                     |
| or without rice, so bread P.T.10  | 10                  |
|   | <hr/> 30 to 35 P.T. |
| <br><u>Dinner:</u> Remains of the above food used as <u>Ghumuss</u>   |                     |
| with bread, or  | 10                  |
| If above food remains is left for next day's lunch then fried potatoes, or beans, or <u>mish</u> or cheese with bread | 5                   |
|   | <hr/> 10 to 15 P.T. |
| <br>Total = 50 P.T. to 61 P.T.  | <br>50 to 61 P.T.   |

With tea and sugar for the day

( $\frac{1}{2}$  a pack for P.T.3 +  $\frac{1}{2}$  a kilo to  $\frac{1}{2}$  kilo  
of sugar from the ration card)

5 to 8 P.T.

GRAND TOTAL = 55 to 69 P.T. per day

The "Model" indicates that, for a family of five, an average breakfast would cost about P.T. 10, while dinner would cost about 10 to 15 P.T. As for lunch, on the day when tabich or cooking is done, a lunch would roughly cost between P.T.30 to P.T.35. But if the remains of that day's lunch are used for the next day's lunch (as Ghumuss with bread) then the next day's lunch will only cost the price of the bread (P.T.10). So, with breakfast and dinner costing the same, we would get a different picture of the expenses for the next day which would be as follows:

Model of Next Day's Food Budget

|                                |       |                      |
|--------------------------------|-------|----------------------|
| Breakfast                      |       | 10 to 11 P.T.        |
| Lunch (price of bread only)    |       | 10 P.T.              |
| Dinner                         | +     | <u>10 to 15 P.T.</u> |
|                                |       | 30 to 35 P.T.        |
| With tea and sugar for the day |       | <u>5 to 8 P.T.</u>   |
|                                | TOTAL | <u>35 to 44 P.T.</u> |

As these alternating models form the pattern more often than not, it is important to see both models as complementary if we want to have a picture of the daily food budget which approximates reality. Taking these models together, a simple calculation indicates that the average daily costs are about P.T.45 to P.T.56 which would be the daily food budget repeated over the month. For the poorest, one or even two meals a day may be taken, tea replacing the meals. Some eat for months a

meal similar to the breakfast described here, and its variations.

The three cases that follow are presented as examples of a monthly household budget, estimated on observation and data. The reservations mentioned earlier, still hold. Meat, fish, or chicken may be added occasionally, bought from the Gamia or bread at home. Spending on other items is reduced to get it. Meat costs P.T.68 a kilo, and is consumed once or twice a month, i.e. roughly 2 kilos per month.

Case 1: Rashad and Nefissah

Household: Disabled father, mother and three children, i.e. five persons.

Monthly Household Budget (1977-78)

| <u>I Income</u>  |               | <u>Household Expenditure</u>                   |               |
|--|---------------|--|---------------|
| <u>Source</u>  | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Source</u>                                  | <u>Amount</u> |
| Son's contribution   | 7.500         | Ration items (sugar, rice, oil, tea)           | 3.00          |
| Daughter's contribution  | 7.500         | Meat 1 kilo                                    | 0.680         |
|  |               | Bread (P.T.13 per day)                         | 3.900         |
|  |               | Cooking butter (2 kilos)                       | 0.500         |
| Mother's trade   | 6.000         | Kerosene (P.T.7 every 2 days)                  | 1.050         |
|  | <u>21.000</u> | Vegetables                                     | 5.000         |
|  |               | Fish, or potatoes, or lentils, or other grains | 2.250         |
|  |               | White cheese (10 times per month)              | <u>0.500</u>  |
|  |               |  | 16.880        |
|  |               | Electricity                                    | 1.280         |
|  |               | Water  | 0.680         |
|  |               | Rent   | <u>2.500</u>  |
|  |               |  | 21.340        |
|  |               | Clothes  | ?             |
| II Son: Net salary<br>(Government employee<br>in Pensions<br>Dept) | 20.000        | <u>Son's Expenses</u>                          |               |
|  |               | Gives mother for food                          | 7.500         |
|  |               | Rent of his room                               | 5.500         |

|  |   |              |
|--|---|--------------|
|  | Water   | 0.600        |
|  | Communications (estimated)                          | 0.600        |
|  | Clothes, Cigarettes, Newspapers,<br>Drinks, Savings | <u>5.800</u> |
|  |   | 20.000       |
| III Daughter: Net Salary               | 10.000 Gives mother for food                        | 7.500        |
| (Sales girl in a shop)                 | Clothes and personal expenses                       | <u>2.500</u> |
|  |   | 10.000       |
| Total Monthly Budget of the Household: |   | L.E. 36.340  |

N.B. Mother is unable to buy clothes, and is waiting for one of her children to buy her some. Father says he would need roughly about L.E.10 for clothes a year, but now does not get them since he has been ill and does not work. (He wears a cotton galabiyah, not modern clothes). Since the father's illness, the youngest son relies on his brother for clothing.

Case 2: Narguess

Family: Widow and five children i.e. six persons.

Monthly Household Budget (1977-78)

| <u>Income</u>                       |                   | <u>Expenditure</u>  |                    |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---|--------------------|
| <u>Source</u>                       | <u>Amount</u>     | <u>Source</u>   | <u>Amount</u>      |
| Pension                             | 8.800             | Ration items (sugar, rice, oil,<br>tea)                               | 2.450              |
| Son's pay (estimated)               | 6.000             | Meat (once per month)   | 0.680              |
| Help from brother-in-law (estimate) | 3.000             | Bread (P.T.20 per day)  | 6.000              |
| Help from her uncle (estimate)      | 1.600             | Cooking Butter (2 kilos)  | 0.500              |
| (irregular, as tips)                |                   | Butagaz 1 bottle  | 0.650              |
|                                     | <u>L.E.19,400</u> | Kerosene for stove (washing)  | 0.280              |
|                                     |                   | Sugar (extra) 1 kilo  | 0.360              |
|                                     |                   | Vegetables or grains  | <u>4.500</u>       |
|                                     |                   |   | L.E.15.060         |
|                                     |                   | Electricity   | 1.000              |
|                                     |                   | Water   | 0.330              |
|                                     |                   | Rent (says L.E.5 but not true,<br>house is her father's or<br>uncles) | 0.000              |
|                                     |                   |   | <u>L.E. 16.390</u> |

|  |              |            |       |
|--|--------------|------------|-------|
| Son takes per day P.T.10<br>for his daily meals at his job   | <u>3.000</u> | L.E.19.390 | Total |
|  |              |            |       |
| T.V.installment which she was<br>paying when son was working,<br>now can't because he went for<br>Military Service | 6.000        |            |       |
| Schooling expenses   | ?            |            |       |
| Clothes  | ?            |            |       |

N.B. No mention of schooling expenses or clothes (of course, there are no school fees really, but there are other items). Part of clothes may come from mother or sister as presents for feasts, as they are well-off. Apart from the L.E.8.800 of the pension, the rest is not regular, and could increase or decrease. This person skips breakfast with daughter to save a few piastres and sometimes dinner.

Case 3: Dawlat

Household: Father is daily worker, mother - peddler and three grown children. Old grandmother and father's old sister i.e. 7 persons.

Monthly Household Budget (1977-78)

| <u>Income</u>                     |               | <u>Expenditure</u>  |               |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---|---------------|
| <u>Source</u>                     | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Source</u>   | <u>Amount</u> |
| Her trade                         | 4.000         | Food (P.T.45 per day)   | 13.500        |
| Chicken or poultry<br>sale        | 4.000         | Rent  | 2.500         |
| Income from husband               | 6.000         | Electricity (don't have)  | 0.000         |
| Son's contribution                | <u>3.000</u>  | Water (estimate)  | 0.400         |
|                                   | L.E.17.000    | Communications and daughter's<br>pocket money (6 days per week) | 4.200         |
| Occasional cooking or<br>cleaning | ?             | Clothes (Gamia)<br>but only occasionally                        | <u>1.000</u>  |
| Occasional help or<br>charity     | ?             |   | L.E. 21.100   |
| Old sister's<br>contribution:     |               | Schooling ? (for 2 girls)<br>L.E.2 per term i.e. per month      | <u>0.660</u>  |
| Monthly food                      | 3.000         |   | L.E. 21.760   |
| ½ rent                            | <u>1.250</u>  |   |               |
|                                   | L.E. 21.250   |   |               |

N.B. The wife said her husband gets P.T.30 to 40 per day, but gives only P.T.10 per day, recently P.T.20, and drinks with the rest. But if so, then how do they cover other expenses. She had two irregular sources [1] occasional cooking and cleaning for a rich lady in Roda [2] charity from a woman in Der. She said she spends P.T.60 per day giving the girls daily pocket and communications expenses P.T.15. Thus, it is assumed that P.T.45 are spent daily on food, which is a reasonable estimate according to findings about the budget in general.

#### 4. Informal institutions as coping mechanisms to manage a strained budget

The widespread belief that no one dies of hunger in Egypt may be true, but to what extent? There is a saying among the poor that, "he who sleeps without dinner, no one feels it but he". Sometimes they have to skip a meal, or at least reduce their food intake. Dawlat reported that, "You know how it is with the cost of food, even when we squeeze very much our belts to eat, the money is still not sufficient for us". Of all their problems and daily worries, the most important problem for the poor remains that of providing sufficient food on their strained budget. Every single case studied reported this concern. All kinds of efforts and tricks are devised to make the money stretch to cover basic needs. The poor have devised various informal institutions as coping mechanisms to achieve subsistence. These are based mainly on cooperation between relatives and neighbours. The term neighbour also covers the inhabitants of the one hara, and even others within the quarter of Der-El-Sabbakin.

With regard to food, four main mechanisms appear: mutual buying and selling of various food items; borrowing; bargaining; and, exchange of help or services. Other mechanisms are used less frequently, like advertising their poverty, lying, eating the remains of left-over merchandise if they are food peddlars, raising poultry and sleeping-off their



hunger. The following examples explain how such mechanisms work.

Oil is expensive and hard to get outside of the ration card. If a family has no card, they look for one of the inhabitants of the hara who may be ready to sell them a cupful for a few piastres. For example, Zeinab reported the following arrangement:

There is a woman in the hara who sells oil in retail, another fries taamia so one could get it from her too. So I would tell her, 'Give me for P.T.5 of oil, and the woman would give me. Gamalat has many children and has a ration card. So she gets her oil, sugar, tea and rice, then she sells it in retail. For example, oil is for P.T.10 with the ration, but is sold for P.T.33 without it.

Paying more than three times the price is inevitable for people who have no ration card, but buying in small quantities for daily consumption is a good arrangement for an Irza'i who has a small daily income. Gamalat, has six children, so she has a right to four litres of oil. As she does not use it all, she is ready to sell to people like Zeinab, though Gamalat is no merchant. But, in order to manage both women are happy to make a deal. Food items may also be borrowed if a family cannot afford to buy it. For example, some people do not find ration quantities sufficient. They may have big growing boys who need a lot of food. By the end of the month, they are short on sugar or oil, but they cannot pay the extra. So they borrow from a neighbour a glass of oil, or sugar. At the beginning of the next month, when they get their usual ration, they return the item borrowed. This may happen every month, but to them, it is no problem because an exchange of services usually takes place. For example, the lender may occasionally need the borrower's primus stove because hers is in bad shape. So when she knows they have finished with it, she will borrow it for a couple of hours to finish her cooking and return it. Sometimes, they will borrow pots and pans because they do not have sufficient <sup>numbers.</sup> Almost anything may be borrowed, any food, cooking

objects, washing basins, soap etc. Sometimes, a woman wants to bake bread for the week, and her neighbour has, on the roof, an old traditional oven heated with old wood remains or branches, or by a primus stove, so she agrees with the owner to bake on the same day, sharing the expense.

These devices are coping mechanisms that keep a household functioning whatever it lacks, and meeting difficult ends of months or gainless days. Needed items, rather than their price, are borrowed due to shortage of cash. The poor know that they cannot repay a loan when already their every day expenses cannot be covered. No one is ready to provide a loan either, as the better-off are hardly able to cover their own expenses. The neighbour may have surplus sugar, oil, or rice, but surplus money rarely occurs in a quarter where most inhabitants live on a day-to-day, hand-to-mouth basis. So the way they manage is either to borrow the necessary food, skip a meal, just eat bread and mish cheese, or any other kind of cheap ghumuss to satisfy their hunger.

Another device to make money stretch is bargaining. This is quite an institution in Egypt, unless one goes into a store or shop of "fixed prices". The poor who buy mish and vegetables from peddlars sitting on the street or standing with their carts, usually bargain to reduce the item by 1 or 2 or 3 P.T. relative to its price. If the peddler refuses to reduce the price, they will try to get more in terms of weight. As peddlars usually want to get rid of their merchandise, since they cannot store it without a refrigerator and as green vegetables usually wither quickly by the afternoon due to the heat, prices are often reduced, but not before an argument has taken place.

Another important device is for the poor person to advertise their poverty. They keep repeating that they cannot afford to pay the price.

They must usually explain the reasons for their poverty, like saying they are widowed and have a very small pension, or no pension, or saying that the husband is disabled, or is a low paid daily worker, etc. i.e. they try to arouse pity. Peddlars who soon get to know their clients will give lower prices to some or will give more merchandise to the poorer. This again forms part of the belief that the poor should be helped and not taken advantage of. Some of the poor will even resort to what they consider as a "white lie". For example, Dawlat the fruit and vegetable peddler gave the following account of her device to reduce prices, in addition to bargaining.

I tell them, 'the man is dead and I have girls to support'. They have compassion on me, and so instead of asking me for P.T.20, they would give me the kilogram for P.T.15. If I am dealing with a vendor who is a friend, I tell her, 'Reduce it by another P.T.2'.

Dawlat's husband is alive and is a daily worker, but by pretending that he had died, she gets the merchandise at a cheaper price. According to cultural belief, helping a widow and orphans is considered a "good deed" in the eyes of God.

When the poor person is also a peddler, one way of disposing of the left-overs of trade is to eat them before they spoil. Nefissah did this with her beans and belilah. She always kept a plateful of beans for her children's breakfast. If more beans remain from her trade, then they will eat them for lunch and dinner along with a piece of white cheese or leeks. The same goes for the cooked wheat or belilah. Dawlat does the same with her vegetables. However, both of them are very annoyed when this happens. They think the money is more important to get, and consider it a loss if they have to eat their goods. It means they have achieved no gain though they saved their capital. Some remains are used to feed cattle or poultry. For example, Nefissah used remaining beans,

water and bread to feed a goat. She also sent some of the water to one of her clients to feed her goats.

Still another mechanism used is to render a service in exchange for a reduced price. Nefissah usually buys rice in larger quantities because she used to mix it with wheat when cooking her belilah or porridge. She got the rice from a grocer who only sold it through the ration card. But occasionally, he made a deal with her. He sold her all the rice remaining in the bags. For this, she cleaned his shop. All the rice that fell on the ground was passed through a sieve, weighed and sold to her for a cheaper price. Nefissah suffers from painful rheumatisms, yet she went through this procedure in exchange for a reduction of a few piastres. To the researcher, the merchant appeared to exploit her, since he got rid of material he might have otherwise thrown out, as well as getting his shop cleaned for nothing. But to Nefissah, it represents a gain which she has no means of achieving otherwise.

Raising poultry or cattle is another mechanism. Poultry is more common, as cattle is beyond a poor man's means. In almost every house, chickens or pigeons are raised. It is a way of obtaining eggs to eat or sell, and eventually a meat meal, at least on feast occasions. Almost all the cases, except those living in shacks, had chickens. For example, Narguess relies almost completely on her five chickens for her children's breakfast. She gets 5 eggs a day which the boys eat, while she goes without breakfast or if she has money, gets some beans and shares with them the eggs and beans. She says:

"When we do not have money, we sleep till 11 a.m. or 12 a.m. The children get up and go to school. I have five chickens upstairs that lay eggs, boil them, eat them and go to school, while we [her daughter and she] keep sleeping all day, for we have no money. So we wait, for example, until the uncle of the children comes and gives us a quarter of a pound or P.T.15 with which we get

food, bread, anything. That's all. I take L.E.8 of pension, which are hardly enough for daily expenses, it makes it P.T.25 per day, and just the bread we eat daily is for P.T.20 or for a quarter of a pound".

So another device the poor can resort to, is to get help from better off relatives. The money given by the uncle is supposed to be a sort of present to the children to buy sweets. It is a custom to give children money; a person visiting must bring some kind of food as a present, but if they think it is easier or better to give money, they do. The uncle gives every child an amount of money which increases as the child grows. These may be used by the poor to get food after the guest leaves. He must not be allowed to see their condition, as this may cause him embarrassment. These presents are also made in anticipation of the hospitality offered by the host. This hospitality can be quite burdensome for the poor, as nothing could excuse them from its absence. Thus many poor stop visiting, to avoid receiving visits, and having to either take presents or have to offer hospitality. For women, it is easier to do, as they can say that they do not go out. Narguess who does not work has resorted to this excuse. She says she never visits anyone. But then, some neighbours who have nothing else to do would drop in. That means a glass or more of tea with three or four spoonfuls of sugar. The host must also keep the guest company, taking a glassful themselves, careful not to show that they find the hospitality materially burdensome. For a person who is short of sugar or has just enough to complete the month, frequent visits can be quite inconvenient. Yet the poor have developed ways of counteracting such a situation. Here is Narguess' account of her device, "When we don't have money, I tell my daughter, 'close the door on me [her bedroom door has a latch from the outside] and if any one comes, say: my mother is not here'. This is because I can't offer the guest anything".

Thus, the guest leaves and the daughter who is about 15 cannot be blamed in the absence of her mother.

When inhabitants of the hara know that someone is completely destitute, to the point of not being able even to afford food, they take turns in providing them with at least one good meal a day. This happened in the case of <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein. This was an old man who used to do a variety of odd jobs but had become too old to work. It was said that he was past his eighties. Once he was able to obtain L.E.1 help per month for six months from the Ministry of Social Affairs. The procedure had been so long and tedious that he felt he could not go through it a second time and for so little an amount. <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein had married three times but had no children and he had divorced all three wives years before. All members of his family had died. One couple offered him a cell in their staircase, where he could sleep. The cell had no windows and he could not stand up in it, but it cost nothing and he could not afford better. He used old clothes on its cement floor to form a bed, and an old kerosene lamp for a night light. The couple provided him with a meal when they had cooked any tabich. Others in the hara would help him in various ways. Peddlars would give him a few vegetables for nothing. The coffee-house owner would offer him tea for nothing, where he would often sit to pass the time. The researcher saw <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein on several occasions and observed how he was treated with respect for his old age, and with care so as not to humiliate him or make him conscious of his destitution. All the people in the hara believed that whoever helps <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein would gain a Sawab or grace with God, for it was a "good deed". When he died all the inhabitants gave, according to what they could afford, to provide him with a funeral. They attended it as though they were members of his family. The story of <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein is an example of the kind of cooperation that

exists in the hara, when it is felt to be necessary, and the nature and quality of the help that may be offered. Thus, both neighbours and kin are important coping mechanisms in the life of the poor. Research in other areas confirms this role. Several widows rely mainly on kin for survival when they have young children and cannot work. Poor old parents rely on their children. It may be important to note that the law itself makes children responsible for old parents, and uncles responsible for orphaned nephews and nieces, thus institutionalizing formally kin support.

Rashad, the wise man of the quarter, says, "The poor knows how to manage, he gets a bit of beans with which he has breakfast and lunch". And Fateh says, "The poor has to manage, what else can he do?". There is no doubt that somehow, they manage, devising various means and ways as they go, forced to cope with their situation for mere survival. To them, it is a daily struggle full of the unknowns. They deal with their problems as they arise, using one mechanism or other, depending on the situation they face. The major problems relate to being able to eat and obtain food. As other demands become more urgent, they have to eat less, or resort to cheaper foods, e.g. as items like clothes or schooling have to be covered, depending on the time of the year. To be able to go on they have to be resourceful at all times. The following section reveals some of the ways by which they try to provide themselves with clothes.

## B. Clothes Budget

I. Introduction Whenever the researcher visited Nefissah, she wore her galabiyah dress upside down, and at first, the researcher thought that she was short-sighted. But when it was repeated, and her children did not seem to say anything and days passed and Nefissah never changed her

galabiyah, it became evident that she was doing it on purpose. Her disabled husband had gone to his village to spend a few days with his sister where he could get "some nourishing food, as food in the village is cheaper", explained Nefissah. On his return, she wore the galabiyah right side up and it looked clean. Nefissah explained that she had no other galabiyah to change, and she kept asking her children for one, but they kept postponing it. So Nefissah had invented this device to appear clean whenever it was needed (e.g. when she had to go down to buy something for her trade). She kept moaning, "I need to wash this galabiyah and have a bath, but I have nothing to change, and I feel so tired at the end of the day!" In her case, the problem was even more acute as they have no running water at home. All the poor have problems in finding the cash to buy clothes. Some, like Nefissah, are unable to save to buy for themselves a dress. They wait for one of their working children to offer it to them, out of their own pay and out of what they were saving to get clothes for themselves. The poor cannot afford nightgowns or pyjamas, but use old garments, or even their day clothes, or when it is hot, their underclothes which are made out of hand-sewn cheap cottons. As for children, young boys usually wear day-pyjamas in lieu of suits, and again sleep in them or without them when it is hot. Girls have a pyjama trouser, with a dress on top, or just a galabiyah like their mother's, again used day and night.

The problem is that it is generally impossible for the poor to produce the price of clothes immediately. Though local cotton materials are quite cheap relative to others, still, to the poor, their price lies beyond their limited budget and they have to resort to some kind of credit system. While the big stores offer credit to their rich customers, neither governmental nor private institutions offer any merchandise on credit to the



poor, as they have no guarantee whatsoever that they would receive their money.

## 2. Formal Institutions

[a] The Public Sector Stores: In this institution, established by the government, materials known as Akmesah Shaābiyah or "Popular Cloths" are sold. These are cloths the cost of which has been reduced to a minimum just to cover expenses, in order to allow the poorer masses to be able to afford buying clothes, i.e. their price is controlled. These cloths are made out of cheap cotton which is not used for export or for more expensive products. Though of a much poorer quality and limited to just a few designs they are quite resistant, nice and cheap, ranging from P.T.17 to P.T.20 a metre (the latter for thicker cottons used for winter clothes). Materials at reduced prices also include those used for bed linen and upholstering mattresses, bought by the metre and cut and sewn by an upholsterer at cheaper prices than the ready-made item.

[b] The Ration Card: Some of these materials are only sold through the ration card. No one person is allowed to have more than five or six metres for one galabiyah, and as the material is usually very narrow, being 70 cm to 80 cm in width, it is hardly sufficient for the galabiyah which is usually long and wide. The material is not pre-shrunk, so it can shrink in a dramatic way. The poor complain that they cannot even have a proper galabiyah sewn, especially men, yet in spite of these disadvantages, this material still represents a better bargain than anything else on the market. Still, the poor irza'is may not be able to buy it because they never have the lump sum.

The ration card is supposed to protect the reduced cloths from falling into the hands of retail merchants, like the dalalahs, who would sell them

on credit to the poor at 60% more than their price, defeating the whole purpose of the reduction. However, these merchants usually find some way to obtain it. They use the ration cards of the poor, who cannot afford to pay the cash price, to buy the material for their own trade, or ask the poor to buy the cloths on their behalf, providing them with the money. They may even bribe the salesman of the store to sell them what they want.

### 3. Informal Institutions

[a] The Sūk: There is one other way open to the poor by which they can get their clothes much cheaper. This is the second-hand sūk or market. These are markets held in the open air, in different areas, on a particular day of the week, where second-hand dealers will turn out the ready-made, second-hand clothes, shoes, kitchen utensils, tools and almost anything one can think of. There is the Sunday market, for example, held each week in the North of Cairo. On market day, objects can be bought, or sold, or exchanged, given that the merchant will always profit from the exchange, but it still serves the purpose of the poor (please see photographs). The clothes in this market are sold for a few piastres. These are spread on the ground and are bought without trying them on. The poor, thus, always wear ill-fitting clothes that are either too big or too small. However, what seems to be of prime importance is their price. A blouse or shirt may be bought for P.T.30 or 40, trousers for P.T.40 to 50, a child's dress for P.T.20 or 25, a pair of slippers for P.T.10, a pair of shoes for P.T.40 and so on, even items like cutlery or bed-sheets are sold, shoes repaired and plastic slippers welded. But even these amounts are sometimes beyond the means of the poor. For example, Dawlat recounts that in order to buy second-hand clothes for her two daughters, she had

Women picking second-hand  
clothes at the  
Suk-El-Ahad.

At the Suk

Welding plastic shoes and  
slippers. This craftsman  
heats a knife on the primus  
stove at his feet and putting  
the torn bits close welds  
them. His client is squatting  
beside him.

At the Suk, the second-hand  
cheap plastic shoes are  
laid on the ground.



to make a Gamia for L.E.5 as she needed to get them a complete set of clothes urgently.

[b] The Gamia: This is an informal credit system which is formed by a group of persons that are known and trusted, mainly relatives, friends or neighbours. One of the group acts as a treasurer. In Dawlat's instance, for example, the Gamia (or cooperative group) was made up of five persons who were to get L.E.5 each in turn. The Gamia went on for five months. Each person had to pay L.E.1 per month to the treasurer. It was agreed beforehand who would cash the L.E.5 first and who next, each according to the urgency of his need. As Dawlat was the one who needed it most urgently, she was the first one to be paid. So the first month, each person paid his pound and she was the one who got the L.E.5 and she had to go on paying L.E.1 each month for the next four months, while some one else took the L.E.5 the next month and so on. Having obtained her L.E.5, she gave the money to her daughters, who were taken to Port-Said by a lady for whom she works and who owns a car. Apparently, there is a clothes market there for "returned clothes". Both daughters bought a complete set of clothes. One of her daughters was wearing a blouse and trousers which Dawlat said had cost them P.T.30 for the shirt and P.T.50 for the trousers. With the Gamia, she was able to obtain a credit of L.E.5 to buy the urgently needed clothes, and she had five months to save a few piastres every day and <sup>have</sup> her pound at the end of the month to repay the money. These few piastres had to be obtained by reducing their food expenses, sale of poultry, or extra work for some household. Whenever such a reduction must be made, the poor cut on meat first, this immediately gives them P.T.68 or more, otherwise they may have to go days without tabich or cooked food. One poor man, Rashad, said, "We eat bad food, black bread and beans, and so on, what do we eat?! We take off from the price

of meat to pay other things".<sup>1</sup>

Though the Gamia is a practical and important credit mechanism that helps them cope with urgent situations, several of the poorer persons said that they cannot even afford a Gamia because it means saving and paying regularly. For example, Tawhida, a destitute woman living in Athar-El-Nabi, said, "If today I don't have money, and I participate in a Gamia and can't pay it, she [the treasurer of the Gamia] would come and make me a scandal". Instead, she had recourse to another mechanism which she and others consider more appropriate for the very poor, who cannot pay back their due in a regular manner: the dalalah.

[c] The Dalalah: is a woman merchant or peddler who buys materials and sells them to the poor on credit for a percentage of gain. She usually comes every week to collect instalments which the client can name. If the client cannot pay, she will not push for it. For the poor, this is seen as an ideal situation, although they may pay up to 60% more for the item. What is important is that the system involves no penalty and no time limit, thus reducing the tension and fear attached to dead-line payments.

It was observed that most of the poor in the hara resort to the dalalah. When Zeinab, the sweets peddler, was asked how she manages to get herself a dress when she makes a profit of just P.T.7 or P.T.8 per day, she explained that she either saves P.T.2 or 3 per day until she can pay for it. If she needs it urgently and cannot pay, then she gets it on credit or shokok from a dalalah, then pays her something every month. My informant who had acted as host that day explained, "She pays her P.T.10 or 15 per month". Zeinab then explained, "The dalalah comes from the Al-Gayarah near the Mobarrah hospital. She sells bed-sheets and material and is not

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1. Actually, it is the beans and black bread which saves them from more diet insufficiency, but this bread is not well done, and they are tired of eating beans all the time.

particular in taking her money immediately. She is supposed to take 25% interest, but she actually takes 50% to 60%." Clearly, Zeinab knew the actual prices of the materials. This was confirmed in other areas of Cairo where the dalalah takes up to 60% on the prices of materials.

Amal then explained how she does it,

"She has a copy-book where she writes the names [of her clients], and she comes and sits on the stone [in the hara] and calls then "Om X and each one of her clients comes and pays her something of what she owes her, P.T.25 or P.T.10 or so".

The Researcher: "And how often and when does she come?"  
Amal, "She comes every Sunday. They [the women] order pillow-cases or a galabiyah. Another would order Mufata'ah (a traditional food), and we used to buy from her too".

The dalalah comes every week to get her money and to sell more. She collects whatever they have saved that week while they have it, for if they do not pay immediately, it is spent on the next urgent thing. So the poor and the dalalah have devised this weekly system to cope with the situation. In another area, at Dar-El-Salam, the dalalah comes every Thursday, because this is the workers' pay day and this helps both parties, otherwise both are in trouble. The Western saying "the poor pay more" appears to apply in this situation. They actually pay 50% to 60% more to get their clothes. But this is the only institution that offers them clothes on credit.

[d] One Dress for All Occasions: The official dress for traditional women is usually a black dress which can be either of a flimsy transparent material like muslin, or of a black velvet. It is usually worn over another dress and used only for visiting, weddings or funerals, or for going out good appearances are to be kept. This dress usually lasts a long time since it is not used while working, and however short of clothes they are, they always have that black dress. This enables them to save on clothes, and if they have just two galabiyas, in addition to the black one,

it is sufficient.

[e] Borrowing and Presents: When a person faces an emergency and desperately needs a good galabiyah, she may borrow that of a neighbour or relative. If she has more time, she may sell some of her poultry to buy the necessary clothes. Presents constitute a source of clothing, though perhaps not one on which they can rely. But at present, it happens more frequently than one would expect. In most of these families, someone would have gone to work in one of the Arab oil countries. On his return, he brings presents for members of his family and sometimes close neighbours and friends, as custom warrants. Clothes traditionally are acceptable presents and the most appreciated, so materials are often brought back. For example, one day as Dawlat sat in the street selling her vegetables, she was sent for by one of her friends who had just returned from Jordan (where her husband works) for a visit. Dawlat immediately guessed that her friend may have brought her material for a galabiyah as a present. Upon returning, she reported that her friend did get her material for a galabiyah which she needed badly.

Sometimes these presents are resold to buy other much needed things. They are usually sold at a low price to someone in the hara. For example, a woman whose sons had gone to work in an Arab country had brought back various objects and materials. After a few months, they ran out of money and the family needed money for food. The woman sold the expensive materials, sometimes for the price of two kilos of meat. This money would last for a couple of days, then she would sell another and so on, until she had sold all the materials, the machines and home utensils they had brought back. These items constitute capital that can be used in time of need.

[f] Charity: Clothing can be obtained through charity or donations. Women who work as maids are usually given clothes by the lady who employs



them. These are often envied by other women in the quarter. At feast times, some institutions and individuals distribute clothes as a form of charity. For example, there is a factory producing cotton material, called damur, at the entrance of the hara, which distributes galabiyas to the poor at the Ramadan feast.

This account shows why it is difficult for the poor to talk in terms of a clothes budget. They face situations or crises when they come up, and resort [a] to formal institutions like the Public Sector Stores that sell the Akmesah Shaabiyah or cheap popular clothes with the ration card, or more often [b] to the dalalah who is willing to be repaid in small instalments over a long time. If they can afford it, they form a Gamia. If they have no means of paying, they will sell poultry, a kitchen utensil, a cloth, or wait for something to "drop from heaven" like a present from a friend, a donation from a son, daughter or an institution. If they happen to run into some money, they can go to the second-hand suk or market. Meanwhile, they manage to face outsiders wearing their black galabiyah and wear their old clothes upside down at home while working.

### C. Housing and Material Belongings of the Poor

#### 1. Ideal Model of a Poor's House:

The basic furniture in a poor household consists of a traditional four-poster bed, which forms part of the trousseau, though now a modern wooden bed occasionally replaces it, if a second-hand one may be found. There are always one or more wooden baladi sofas<sup>1</sup> which the children

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1. A baladi sofa is like a slightly wide wooden bench with no back nor sides. A thin straw or cotton mattress may be laid on it with a sheet to cover it. Sometimes the mattress is upholstered and cushions provided for a back. It is always set against a wall to allow back-support.

Model of a Poor's Home Furniture

Bedroom or One-room House:

Four-poster bed, or, less frequently, a wooden bed, and a few blankets.  
one wooden baladi sofa, often with no mattress, old clothes piled on it and covered with a coloured sheet.  
Old Cupboard for clothes  
An old table or desk, or an odd chest of drawers, or bed-table  
A worn out cotton rug  
A minimum of bed sheets; old clothes often used as towels; no napkins.

If a second room exists:

One or more sofas, and/or an iron or old wooden bed  
An odd table or buffet  
A cotton rug or none

Kitchen utensils (whether a kitchen exists or not.)

A primus stove  
A couple of aluminium pots  
A frying pan  
Aluminium tea-pot  
A few small glasses  
Very little cutlery  
Several tin cans of various sizes  
A copper or aluminium washing basin, and a bastilla or large size tin container for boiling the washing

If a kitchen exists:

An old table - A shelf  
Sometimes: A sink, or a plastic basin used as a sink

normally use as a bed, specially when they grow up. Most rooms have an old cupboard, one which has seen better days and which has been passed from hand to hand until it reached the poor. It holds all the family's clothes and odd personal belongings. Sometimes an odd chest of drawers or a small self-made cupboard, made of odd pieces of wood is included. An odd table or night-table may exist depending on the available space or the opportunities that arise to buy it.

Where the home consists of just one room, as in one third of the cases, the family uses the room itself, the corridor or a larger w.c. for cooking. A table in the room is used as a kitchen table. Frequently, cooking is done on the floor, using a low stool, any odd pieces of old clothing, or simply squatting. Kitchen utensils consist of a primus stove, some aluminium pots and pans, a tea-pot, very little cutlery, mainly spoons and one or two knives, a few glasses and dishes, and several tin cans of different sizes used for various purposes. Small cans are used for drinking water to save on glasses which are kept for tea or for adults only. Larger cans are used to replace pots occasionally for boiling, buying ful, or as a bucket. They may also be used for holding sugar, rice, or other grains. They may even be used for washing clothes. One can is always kept in the w.c. for toilet purposes, as paper cannot be afforded and is not used. Some cans have holes pierced in the sides and a piece of wire added to act as a handle in order to facilitate its use. Some of the poor buy cans from the roba-vechia man at P.T.1 to 3 each. The roba-vechia man is a peddler who goes around to houses buying and selling any old items including newspapers and clothes for a few piastres.

These conditions hold even for families that have a tiny room used as a kitchen. They may have an additional table or shelf for pots and

pans. A family that was once better-off may have a butagaz stove and oven, all in one. These are made locally and sold at a reasonable price. A poor family improving its condition may also buy a stove on credit. Households always have either a second-hand copper or aluminium washing-basin. Copper was traditionally used for cooking and washing. However, as its price has gone up tremendously and the industry is dying out, aluminium has replaced it.

Where an additional room exists, it is usually used as a livingroom-bedroom in one. Furniture usually consists of one or more sofas used for sitting during the day and as beds at night. An odd table or buffet may complete the picture, with a rug on the floor, usually made from the odd remains of materials. At one time, straw rugs were very common among the poor, but they are less and less used now, as they are usually manufactured in the villages, while cotton ones are manufactured in both villages and town.

Sometimes, a third room exists. Those who possess three rooms are usually better-off, or were once better-off, but due to certain circumstances have become impoverished. In a three-roomed home, more often than not, there is one complete bedroom set. It consists of a double bed, one or two bed-tables, a dressing table with chair, a large cupboard and a smaller cupboard like a chest of drawers. This furniture requires a large room, and as most of the houses have small rooms, the furniture often overcrowds the room. Because of lack of space in one room the dressing table was put on top of the smaller cupboard. Space for moving about is always scarce and only a corridor, a hall, or the hara itself, compensates for it.

Little attention is paid to style or aesthetics. People must buy whatever they can find at the cheapest price. The only care given to placement of furniture appears to be that of being able to cram the most

in a minimum of space. Wall decorations are generally absent, apart from family photographs, presents offered by magazines (e.g. pictures of the President, a Koranic verse in Oriental design, a calendar, or pictures of movie stars) which may be framed or not, depending on the family's circumstances. In poor homes there is no dining-room or large table. These are expensive and are not considered necessary at this level. The family eats on the floor, or sits on the sofa with a tray or plate in their laps. They may sit on the floor and use the sofa as a table. Rarely is the old low tablia<sup>1</sup> used, as wood is expensive and already implies better conditions. They always have a transistor or old radio, bought second-hand or received as a present from someone working abroad. One transistor's batteries were held in place by a piece of elastic.

This is an ideal-typical description of the home of the poor, variations occur according to the family's circumstances and the number of persons living in a household.

## 2. The Structure of the Home of Irza'is

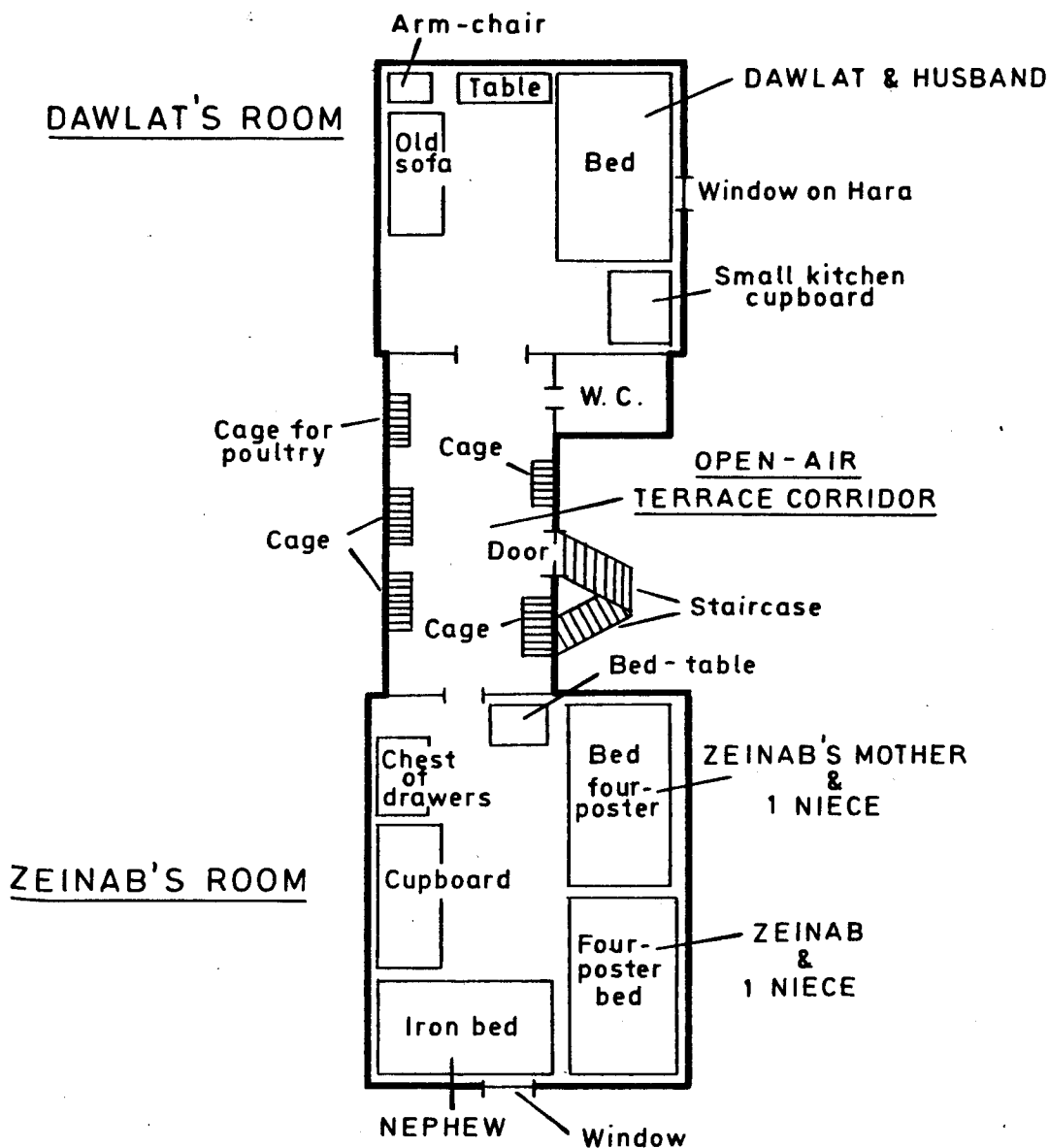
Taking the home of an Irza'i as an example; one shared by two households, each cooking its own food, but sharing other commodities, the following structure and furniture was observed. These indicate a certain style of life and interrelations between seven adults who live, work and study there.

The home consists of two rooms and a corridor. Zeinab shares the room with four other persons, her mother and three nephews (since the house in which she lived fell down in a heap burying her, but she was saved). There are two four-poster beds; one iron bed, a big old cupboard,

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1. A tablia was seen in one home only in another area.

The Structure of the Home of IRZA'IS



N.B. All the bread-winners in these two families except the son, are irza'is relying on a daily wage or gain. It represents just one instance of the home of poor families.

a small chest of drawers, made of old pieces of wood which is also used as a desk by the two nieces who go to school. There is a shelf above it and a sort of old night-table beside one of the beds. Each of the four-poster beds is used by two people. The small iron bed is used by the nephew alone who is 20. The furniture is positioned all around the room with just a small space remaining.

Dawlat's room has one bed, an old and torn black leather set, a sofa and an arm-chair with broken springs, bits of straw and cotton protruding out of large cuts. An old table and a small kitchen cupboard complete the room's furniture. All the furniture looks like junk ready to be disposed of. The structure of the room itself is self-made out of odd pieces of wood and bricks. It has an irregularly shaped window and walls. The walls were once white-washed with lime, but the fumes of the gaz lamp, which replaced electricity, have darkened the walls and ceiling. The window of the room overlooks the dead-end hara, with its roof-tops full of old piles of junk, poultry cages and odd village-like ovens.

The open-air corridor that links the two rooms contained five poultry cages hanging on its walls. The corridor has high walls, on one side formed by the back of a building stuck to theirs, and on the other, a sort of tall brick fence which gives them some privacy. There is a tiny w.c. along the corridor near Dawlat's room, its door made of odd pieces of wood. Only Zeinab's room was part of the original building. The rest was all improvised. This irritated the neighbours who had lost a place where they could hang their washing. On top of Dawlat's room, there is a pile of odd things; broken furniture, pieces of wood, old cages, bits of old materials, etc. On the side, is a big old cage with a metal net which is all torn. The open-air corridor is very useful and provides much needed space. Here the women prepare their vegetables for cooking,

pick the grains, do the washing and hang it to dry. The cages hanging on both sides of the corridor hold pigeons, young and older chickens. Dawlat let out a few at a time. Pigeons or chickens would walk through the corridor and into the rooms. As the sunshine was strong, the cages were all covered by old clothes.

In short, everything in the house is used to the maximum for daily life or for the pursuance of their trade. Beds are used for sleeping, sitting, even studying. In this case, sharing saves additional rent and they can use the same facilities and objects. Dawlat and Zeinab live as one household, sharing their food expenses (please refer to Case 3 in 'Food Budgets').

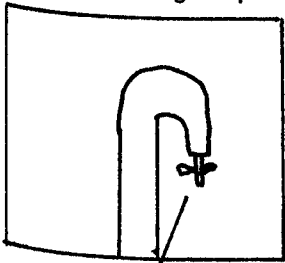
The previous model applies to the poor of various levels, not to the destitute living in a shack. The poorest cannot afford to pay the lump sum that a rent represents, however small. Some had a room once, but were thrown out because they did not pay their rent, others could not find a room because they could not pay key money, or afford new rents (without key money). At first, they use the shack as a momentary abode until the crisis passes, then find themselves living in it for years because it does not pass. They stay on until some public or private authority kicks them out, which may lead them to find some other above or simply build another shack elsewhere (please see 'Model of a Shack').

A shack is built of tin sheets, baskets or odd bits of wood, tin and basket. Bits of cardboard provide coverage, and bits of nylon or old tent cloth cover the roof. Sleeping space is covered by rags, an old rug or old blanket. Possessions consists of a few kitchen utensils, a plastic basin, a primus stove, and vegetable baskets used to hold clothes. Street lights or a gaz lamp serve for lighting. Some extend an electric wire from a neighbouring house and put on it a bulb. Water is fetched from a public



ONE EXAMPLE OF A SHACK AT ATHAR-EL-NABI

wooden kiosk sheltering tap

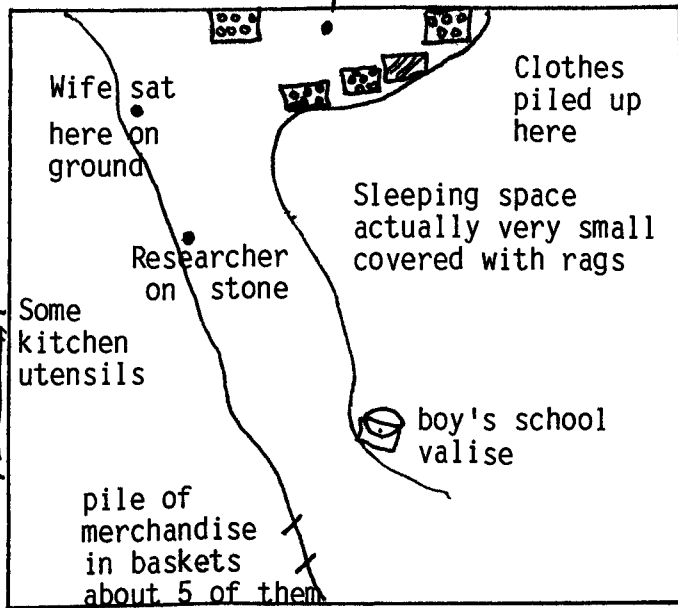


Public tap - many women came to fill water

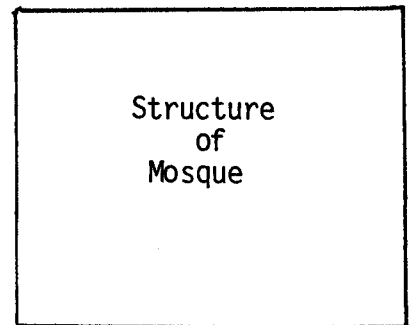
Walls made of old baskets used for vegetables, nylon on top of roof



Head of household sat in midst of merchandise  
Unpaved Alley, Very Windy and Dusty



Wall of Mosque here



Structure of Mosque

tap or neighbouring houses. A mosque's w.c., the fields or the backs of fences are used for a w.c.

### 3. The Traditional Trousseau of the Poor

Among the poor, as soon as a young man begins work, his parents begin to think of his marriage. If he can, he begins to save to this purpose. If his mother has a piece of jewellery left, she will sell it to give him the mahr or bridge-piece necessary for his marriage. He must also buy a piece of jewellery for his engagement. It has to be made of 21 karat gold. Engagement presents belong to the girl. Once it is given, it can be resold in time of need without great loss (the handwork cost in it is minimal, and price of gold is subject to government control, though it follows world-market). When the date of the marriage contract is fixed, the bride-groom must pay a bride-price to the bride's father. This is used to provide the furniture and clothes which form part of her trousseau. This custom applies to all income groups. The bride-price is never actually equal to the costs of the trousseau. Except where the parents are so poor that they cannot afford anything more, but usually they add a little to preserve their dignity.

For the poor, the trousseau usually consists of a bedroom set, in addition to the minimum necessary kitchen utensils and the girl's personal clothing.

Here is an example of how one poor family provided furniture. Dawlat needed a bedroom set for her daughter's trousseau. The money given by the bride-groom was not sufficient, so she went to a goldsmith to sell her bracelet. He found out her reason for wanting to sell it and told her that a woman he knew wanted to sell a bedroom set because she was moving to another house. He told Dawlat that she could buy it for her daughter.

Dawlat went to see it at Istabl Antar (Antar's Stable) (another low-income quarter) and reports, "We offered L.E.60, she refused. Then we increased it to L.E.65 and took it. We gave it to a polisher to have it repolished and lusted for L.E.12. It consists of twelve pieces". This with basic kitchen utensils formed the girl's trousseau, in addition to some new clothes. The girl was married to a "Muwazaf", Dawlat said proudly, which means an employee, usually literate, with a stable job in a government institution.

#### 4. Formal Institutions and Furniture

A public sector does exist where furniture is supposed to be sold at cheaper prices than in shops. But wood is very expensive in Egypt, and is rationed. So, however small the profit made by the public sector, prices are still far beyond the poor. The cheapest furniture available, about L.E.200 - L.E.250, is not made of good strong wood. Frequently, only the main structure is made of wood, while the plain surfaces are made either of thin sheets of wood, or of Hobaybi wood which is a combination of pressed sugar-cane straw and wood-saw which looks like wood when painted, but which may easily break and melts in contact with water. Anyway, it is too expensive for them. In order to obtain the needed furniture, some people order it at a carpenter's, but again, if it is to be cheap, it is badly done, made of old wooden boards roughly stuck together, or it is new but badly made, or it is made out of cheap hobaybi wood that looks good but crumbles quickly. For example, a narrow baladi sofa used as a bed and made of odd pieces of old wood costs from L.E.10 to L.E.15, depending on how badly or how well it is made. One poor woman, Aida, reported that the first night she used it, it fell with her in it. It was so narrow and short that she could not even turn around in her sleep.

When she reproached the carpenter, he said that "its quality is equivalent to its price". The carpenter wanted L.E.15 but she bargained to get it for L.E.12. He had several sofas in his shop, so he gave her this one, which he insisted on picking himself. After a quarrel, the carpenter agreed to change the bed, but she had to pay L.E.2 more.

In Zeinab's room, there was a chest of drawers made of odd pieces of wood that simply did not fit together, and one could see through the gaps. The poor fully realize that this is all that they can afford, if they cannot have it in any other way, they have to accept it.

One public sector institution is the "Ideal" factory which is famous for its iron furniture. Occasionally the poor buy its beds which are more resistant than cheap wood. However, its prices have risen beyond their means, and it is increasingly servicing middle income groups.

The cotton with which mattresses are stuffed are of several qualities. For a trousseau, the poor will usually go down to the old parts of Cairo, and buy the cotton by the kilo. The cotton often costs more than the bed. As cotton prices have gone up, the poor purchase the cheapest and poorest quality. Old cotton may be had cheaply. To save on the price of cotton, it may be mixed with straw. Cotton for the mattress has to be bought with the ration-card, and the upholsterer may provide the straw to minimize costs. The upholsterer works on the mattress on the terrace or wherever there is empty space. If no space is available, he will do it in his shop. He will usually finish the mattress and cushions in one morning.

The public sector is more frequently used when household appliances, like a butagaz stove, oven, or a T.V. are needed. For example, Narguess decided to buy a T.V. a year earlier. She formed a Gamia to obtain a down-payment of the first L.E.50. To pay for it, she got her four sons to work as apprentices in the workshops of various kinds of mechanics over

the summer holidays. The school holidays, in Egypt, last about five months, from May to mid-September. With their small wages, she was able to pay the monthly Gamia, obtain the L.E.50 when it was her turn, and obtained her T.V. She had to pay an instalment of L.E.6 per month to complete its price. Here, the importance of the Gamia in helping provide the poor with material belongings emerges again. In this case, both a formal and an informal institution were used to cope in conditions of very limited means.

##### 5. Informal Institutions

Other alternatives are open to the poor. They know that to obtain good furniture at a cheap price, the best alternative is to buy second or third hand furniture and have it repolished, as Dawlat has done. In order to obtain old furniture, they have recourse to several informal institutions. One is gossip or hear-say. The news will spread that someone needs money urgently and wants to sell a cupboard, a table, or a sofa. They go to this person and try to bargain. As the person needs the money urgently, he will usually sell at a minimum price. Through gossip, they may hear of someone who wants to buy a new set of furniture and wants to sell his old one.

Another informal institution is the semsar or broker. He is a "middleman" who usually knows who wants to sell furniture and who wants to buy, and will introduce persons to each other. He tries to show each side that they are getting a good bargain, and usually takes 2½% on the price. If he is poor or knows that his clients are poor, he will take anything that he is given.

The dalalah is another informal institution, similar to the semsar. She goes from one poor area to the other, and works to get clients for the poor who want to sell - or buy - furniture. She takes one to the

other and helps them to agree, and gets a cut.

However small the cost of second-hand furniture may be, it still involves a sum of money which is very important relative to the conditions of the poor. The money is rarely obtained from wages or income since this is already insufficient. It has to be obtained through the sale of jewellery, poultry, or a combination of other means. For example, Dawlat needed an extra bed for her family. She heard about a person who wanted to sell one because he needed the money urgently. After bargaining, he agreed to sell it for L.E.3 .10. As she had sold her gold bracelet to buy her daughter's trousseau, Dawlat only had L.E.1.70 left and needed L.E.1.40 to complete the sale. Dawlat had been working for her sister-in-law, who was "rich" (cleaning and cooking), she asked her for the needed money and obtained the bed.

Sometimes even second-hand furniture has to be obtained by means of a Gamia especially when the amount needed is large. But again, some source of regular income must be available in order to afford a Gamia, even if temporary work is necessary, as in the case of Narguess' children working during the summer holidays.

## 6. Conclusion

Visiting the houses of the poor, one observes that space, furniture, and household objects are used to the maximum. Every piece of furniture has multiple uses and is utilized until it is completely worn out. In this respect, it is hard to find note of any kind of "waste". A typical model of a poor's home has been described with variations. Later descriptions will make clear other variations. In general, it can be said that variations occur due to differences in, their kind of work, the number of persons in the family, the house's structure. More particularly, differences arise from what they find available on the market, especially in terms of

the second-hand furniture on sale at the time.

They may resort to formal institutions like the Public Sector Stores for items like butagaz stoves, refrigerators or T.V. sets. These items may be obtained on an instalment basis with a first important down-payment which may be obtained through a Gamia. Ordering a bedroom at a carpenter's is less often done, as it means waiting, paying more than half the price in advance, and may mean getting goods of inferior quality. More frequently, they may order a bed or baladi sofa. In order to have a mattress made, they resort to an upholsterer who makes it in one day, and they buy old or low quality cotton and /or mix it with straw to reduce the costs.

Most often they have recourse to informal institutions to obtain their needs; hearing through gossip about a family who want to sell their furniture, telling a semsar that they need furniture in the hope that he would put them in contact with people who want to sell, or sometimes through a dalalah who spreads the word. As the amount needed to buy furniture is considered large, they often have to resort to forming a Gamia. If, however, they have no regular income to afford paying a Gamia, they sell a piece of gold jewellery to provide themselves with the needed cash immediately.

CHAPTER SIX COPING WITH EDUCATION, HEALTH AND RECREATION

Whereas food, clothing and shelter are items which must be paid for, education and health are provided "free" by the State through formal institutions. In the city, as against the village, inhabitants have access to a whole range of government services, and these act as "pull factors" in migration. In principle, these services should not figure in a household budget. However, reality presents a different picture for consideration and, hopefully, modification. Informal institutions still have to be used in order to cope, and these involve costs that the poor have to face. Recreation is needed as much by the poor, adults and children as by anyone else. The poor try to avoid such expenses as much as they can.

I Schooling1. Conditions and System of Education in Egypt

In Egypt, socialist policy has decreed that every one must have an equal opportunity to education at the highest level. Free education is available at all levels of schooling and university, but there are exceptions to this rule, apart from the existence of private schools and one private university.

As the number of pupils and students run into hundreds of thousands (and increase yearly with the population explosion) and as everyone's aim has become to provide their children with education, government expenditure rose. The upkeep of the system became difficult especially regarding the building of new schools and the provision of teachers. Shortages in human and material resources occurred; lack of teachers, schools, desks, books, copy-books, pencils, etc. Classes gradually grew bigger, so that teachers could no longer attend to pupils individually. Added to this, teachers must sometimes handle two shifts



of students and work for low wages. It is understandable then how tired and tense teachers become. The results of shortages on school children has been dramatic. Pupils learn very little in the classroom unless parents help them with their lessons at home. In order to combat this, private lessons have become the rule rather than the exception. Those who cannot afford them or do not get help because of parental illiteracy, can hardly keep up with the class and finally fail in their examinations. As the number of failures increased, requiring them to repeat, the crisis became more acute, classes became over-crowded. So it was decided that government was not obliged to pay for 'failures', and a system was devised to eliminate these from 'free' education.

The system operates from the sixth year of schooling. In general, everyone passes through the primary level. When they reach the sixth year an official public examination is taken, and a certificate of primary education, known as the Ibtidaiyah, is obtained. This is the point where about 40 per cent of pupils fail, and are not allowed to continue in free education. They have to move to fee-paying government schools, known as "Socialist Union" schools. Here expenses are low, much less than those of any private school, but for the poor, they are still a heavy burden.

At the end of the preparatory level, which involves three years of school, another official examination is taken which acts as a second barrier. Pupils may go through the preparatory school on free education, then fail and have to move to a "Socialist Union" school. Fees at this level range from £7 to £2 per term (they vary according to individual cases). If a person can get a registered member of the Socialist Union to vouch that they cannot afford the amount of £7 (quoting their wage or salary and the number of their children) the fee will be reduced by an estimate which, again, is determined by the school board on an

individual basis.<sup>1</sup> One parent gives her account of how she managed to cope:

She failed [i.e. her daughter], so I had to send her to a paying school so that she may continue her studies, but I could not afford it. God sent me a Saidi [Upper Egyptian] who said he would help, and he gave me £6 [as charity], plus one pound that I had to add to it to pay the school term. For the second term, a woman living in No. 12 here helped me. She is in the Socialist Union, and helped reduce the fee to £2. only.

Here, the parent coped by means of two mechanisms: one informal: charity, and one formal: recommendation.

As numbers still remain large, a second device is used to reduce further the non-paying population. If the total average grade of a pupil's results are below a certain level, the pupil will pass, but still has to go to the "Socialist Union" school.

After the Preparatory Certificate or Iidadiyah, pupils enter secondary school, which covers another three years. At this point, a choice of schooling must be made: either the "General Secondary School", necessary for going to university, or the Technical School. The latter can be a "Commercial Secondary School" or "Technical Secondary School". These develop certain practical skills so that the pupil may obtain a job with the diploma.

If a General Secondary School is chosen, here again a rigorous public examination is taken to obtain the Thanawiyah Amah, or GCE, necessary for university entry. Here, too, the barrier does not consist only of pass or failure, but a grading system which works towards eliminating large numbers. In addition to a required minimum,

1. A few months after the gathering of this data, the Socialist Union itself was abolished, though this system continues. But it is not clear which body replaced it, for recommendations, the school-board itself, or the parliamentary representative of the area (the latter intervened in one case in 'another' area).

each specialised University College sets a minimum average grade for entrance. This limits the choice of the student to certain colleges and not to others, depending on his average grade. If the required average is not obtained, students may choose to repeat the year to obtain higher grades; in this case, again they would have to move to a paying school.

The point is that at each level and in every class, the student runs the risk of being eliminated from free education. Ensuring success depends very much on both hard work and special lessons.

At university, an annual fee of about £4.50 is paid by all students regardless of their grade. At this level, no extra is paid by students who fail. More problematic for the poor are books, transport and clothing expenses, since they have to put in a good appearance. Moreover, the nature of their studies may require extra expense, as for students of medicine, engineering, biology and some other sciences. As numbers increased tremendously, special lessons have recently appeared at very high cost, and are now said to be a necessity in colleges like that of medicine where not all the subject matter is covered in the class-room. Thus, it becomes increasingly difficult for the poor to join and succeed in these particular colleges. As in other spheres of education, the poor are systematically disadvantaged.

## 2. Consequences for the Poor

The poor cannot afford the special lessons necessary to succeed at any level in the education system. In fact, it is difficult for the poor to get an education at all, since failure involves the double expense of attending a fee-paying school in addition to paying for special lessons. While this system was meant to eliminate those who fail from free education by making them pay, it operates to eliminate the poor from education at all. So although the system of free education

originally aimed at giving rich and poor an equal chance to obtain education, it actually educates the rich and middle-income groups, eliminating the poor. The poor who do complete their education do so, either because they are particularly brilliant, or because of great sacrifices by their parents - sacrifices that simply mean less nourishing food.

One kind of school and university does not take fees, whatever the individual circumstances, and may even pay the students. This is the Al-Azhar, the Islamic thousand-year old institution, which is subsidised by Moslems from all over the world. Al-Azhar has schools and a major university that includes colleges for all subjects. Studies are heavily weighed with rigorous Koranic learning based on rote memorisation of the whole Korān and its four major interpretations. Al-Azhar will pay a poor student and provide him with frugal meals, and even with sleeping quarters if need be. In a recent development, special lessons may be provided free by volunteers in mosques.

Primary education is compulsory and is the only level where a pupil is allowed to go on to the sixth year without too many obstacles.<sup>1</sup> Although education is free, small payments are required to partly cover the cost of books. For example, Tawhidah, the poor mother of a boy of eight in his third year of primary school, reported that they had to pay 75 PT at the beginning of the school year. Later, they were asked for 15 PT for the school magazine, or some other things. School uniforms, shoes, copy-books and pencils have to be provided by the parents, in addition to private lessons. As the father is a vegetable peddler who gets about 25 PT a day to feed a family of five, school expenses have to be extracted from their daily food.

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1. Until last year, only primary education was compulsory; now it has been extended to the preparatory level.

Private lessons are taken by all income groups, but the poor need them more than others for two reasons: (i) because illiterate parents are unable to help their children, and (ii) the schools in the poor areas often employ teachers of lower standards, who often have not had teacher training, but were appointed by Government because of the shortage of teachers. Sometimes they are persons who rejected the idea of becoming a teacher but are forced, as graduates of a free education system, to teach as part of their year's "Public Service". In both cases, the teachers are badly disposed towards the children. Ideally, it is the school teacher who is supposed to give the lessons. In order to reduce the costs of private lessons, "group lessons" have been devised. The class is divided into groups of ten or less, and once or twice a week they go to the school where the teacher re-explains lessons in more detail. In return, the children pay him £1 per month each. In Dēr-El-Sabbakin and in other areas, this system is followed. Almost all parents reported that the teacher fails those who do not take private lessons. Whether this is true or not, it remains a question for further research.

Some of the poor have devised their own informal arrangements to cope with this situation and to help reduce the expense of group lessons. Frequently, older boys at secondary or university level give special lessons to pupils in the quarter for small amounts. This provides them with pocket money they cannot obtain otherwise. In one case a poor mother explained that her little boy was getting his lessons from one young man,

"who teaches because he is poor. He works in a powder [factory]. He takes 75 PT per month to teach Redah [the little boy] arabic, arithmetic, religion and dictation. The teachers at school want him to take special lessons for £1 per month, paid in advance. But I can't give him the money in advance, as I get it by a cut in my food. So Redah goes to the house of a woman who is a bit well-off and takes his lessons there".

This was necessary as they lived in a shack in a hara. The shack had no table or furniture whatsoever on which he could do his lessons. It was then early April and Redah explained that he had not had one lesson in Science until that day, though he had a Science book. In May, the school for Primary school children ends. When would they cover their Science course? It soon became apparent that in poor areas, there are bad teachers who are not doing what they are supposed to do, even though their excuses may have some validity. In this instance, one may advance the view that Redah and his class are likely to be very weak in Science and thus have a much higher than average chance of failing their Primary School Certificate. Those who have relatives who have gone to school resort to cheaper ways of dealing with the situation. One person asked his student nephew to give his small daughter one lesson of arithmetic per week. The nephew would not accept payment, the uncle would get him a present at feasts and render him and his parents certain services. Sometimes, a more advanced brother or sister explained lessons to younger siblings.

Though the poor attempt to cope with the problem of special lessons in various ways, the fact remains that this is possible if only one of the children needs them. But if they have more children, as many do, they cannot afford to pay for schools and special lessons for them all. In most families, only one or two children out of four or six complete their schooling. The rest fail at the sixth primary and stop attending school. These are a problem, they cannot enter any technical school nor can they continue school. It is a curious phenomenon that a child who fails once will often fail a second time, and often in another subject. For them, the only solution is to put the child to work as an apprentice in a workshop. For example, Narguess has five children: two sons and a daughter who stopped their education at the sixth primary level because they failed and would not repeat the year. The two boys

were put into mechanics' shops while the girl stayed at home, cooking and cleaning. The two youngest sons remained in school; one is now in Preparatory School while the youngest is still in the third year of Primary. Another example is Islah, who has four sons and three daughters. The two eldest sons both stopped at the sixth year and were already running away from school because they said the teachers hated them. They kept losing their copy-books and the parents could not replace them quickly enough, which added to the teachers' despair. At the end of the school year, one of them refused to enter the examination, while the other entered and failed. They are both now apprenticed in a leather tannery. The third son failed his sixth Primary Certificate, but as he liked school and the others were already working, he was sent to a paying Socialist Union school. The fourth is only two years old. A third example is Dawlat's five children. The eldest son failed and was sent to work in a mechanic's shop. The two older girls were sent to school, each for two years only. As they did not show any disposition for learning, they were kept at home until they married. The two younger girls continued their education since now the family's expenses had been reduced by the marriage of two daughters and work of the eldest son. One girl goes to a Secondary Commercial School, while the youngest still goes to Preparatory School. The latter dislikes school and takes group lessons in order to keep up with her studies, yet failed this year. The older, who is the only one who likes study, says: "I am not in a group lesson. I rely on myself because there is no money". She failed in two subjects, one a foreign language. The family can only afford to pay for one girl's special group lessons. For the poor, the solution for daughters is to get them married off, and reduce the load on the budget as soon as possible. However, the belief exists that education will get daughters a better husband. For example, Amal encouraged her eleven year old daughter to

study harder, threatening, "If you have no diploma and you get a garbage collector as a suitor, I shall have to accept him. But if you have a diploma, I shall refuse him".

A common reason for educational failure among poor children is the low level of foreign language instruction in their schools. Usually, the Education Government Board appoints the better teachers to fee-paying or private schools in 'good' areas. Thus, mediocre language teachers are left to teach in non-paying schools in poor areas. Since they themselves have often been badly taught, they often cannot read correctly, and are weak in grammar and translation. When pupils reach an official certificate level, they often succeed in all but the language subjects, failing because the standard required ignores their problems. As success in all subjects is necessary for a pass, they fail their certificate. Special lessons may help a little, but not enough to increase the percentage of successes.

Several of the poor children who had refused to go to school told of humiliations suffered at the hands of teachers, e.g. insults, slapping, or ironical criticisms of their appearance. One told of how her father's job had been made fun of publicly in the class-room by the teacher. They all complained that, "The teacher does not explain in the class, so that you are obliged to take lessons with him", or "The teacher will only make you succeed in the examination if you take special lessons with him". The fact that these are such general complaints is significant. Frequently, the teachers themselves are poor, or at least poorly paid, so their attitude could be due partly to frustration and partly to need. Indeed, school teachers are paid, as beginners, between £18 and £22 a month, depending on their qualifications, and can never hope to make more than £50 even after years of teaching, so additional income is naturally welcomed. The more experienced and better teachers are in great demand and usually work in private language-



schools that pay better, and usually in the better areas. In terms of education, the poor get the worst of the deal, yet most of their hopes hang on educating their children in order that they may increase their potential for improving their lot.

### 3. Conclusion

On the basis of this account, there are evidently five ways by which the education system eliminates the poor: (i) by refusing to accept a child who has no birth certificate as mentioned earlier, (ii) by inadequate teaching, obliging them to provide their children with special lessons, otherwise they risk failure; (iii) by providing very weak language instruction in poor areas by teachers who are themselves weak in language. Then by setting a difficult examination for official certificates, which leads to their failure; (iv) by obliging the poor to pay school fees if the children fail; (v) by the attitude of the teachers who treat the pupils so badly that they hate school enough to run away from them.

The above analysis shows the flaws in a supposedly free education system from which the lower-income groups are supposed to benefit. It also shows how one of the main hopes for improvement, education, is crushed. It shows that although many poor parents do not have a proper budget which allows for education, these expenses do exist, whether it be to cover school fees, special lessons, group lessons, school clothes, copy-books, books, or transport to school. The expenses differ with regard to these various possibilities and with the level of education reached by the child (e.g. from 75 PT per month to about £7 per month in a paying school, per child). These expenses must be extracted from their monthly budget, which again means a cut in the only item that allows a cut, and that is food. Rent, electricity and water must be paid whatever else happens.

## II Transport

### 1. Transport Services to Dēr-El-Sabbakin

The inhabitants of Dēr-El-Sabbakin live in an area which is well served by transport; buses and a metro pass close by. The buses on the Cornishe Road along the Nile may take them north, north-west and south of Cairo, while the metro connects them to the centre of town and south until Helwān. On the other side of the railway, buses transport them deeper into the area of Old Cairo and the adjacent areas of Sayeda Zeinab and Abdine.

The quarter is served by a nearby primary school, the Preparatory and Secondary Schools require transport for those not ready to walk long distances. Actually, the heat and glaring sunshine are a real deterrent to walking long distances and can result in a heat- or sun-stroke. The heavy traffic jams, crowded streets and the various shops and peddlars occupying the pavements further discourage walking by slowing the whole process.

### 2. Expenses for Students

The students of Dēr-El-Sabbakin must take transport to get to school on time, before the doors are closed. The second class bus fare is 1 PT per journey to the school. They could obtain a season ticket for three months, and for students it would be for half price, but this requires a certificate from the school and the cash for a three-month ticket. Because the poor never have this amount at any one time, they settle for daily payment. The only other alternative is to walk, or to hang dangerously on a bus, tram or metro, to escape paying for a ticket.

### 3. Expenses for Workers

Working persons are another group who may have to travel. But

most of them appear to have jobs nearby, either in the area of Old Cairo or in Roda Island. However, quite a few have jobs in areas south of Cairo, where most of the heavy industry lies, or in the business district in Cairo's centre, where most of the offices lie and need servicing. They appear to be reluctant to take jobs that are too distant and require more than one trip. Having a job close to home is extremely important in Cairo. Transport is so crowded that one can stand for hours waiting to be able to put a foot in some transport vehicle. The degree of crowdedness reaches a point where the doors of vehicles never close with people hanging on like grapes. All hours appear to be "rush hours". Consequently, no queues are to be seen, but rather crowds, each trying desperately to reach their destinations and escape from the endless daily waiting. The importance of having a job nearby is critical for low-income people, as paying for travel may become quite a burden. For example, for an inhabitant who works in the Helwān factories, the cost is 6 PT per day for second-class return trips, which is about £1.80 per month. If a worker in a factory gets relatively good wages, a janitor in an institution gets less. For example, one such person gets LE15 per month. He lives in a tiny room with his wife and baby. His neighbour and owner of the house, who is among the main informants, gave the following account of the man's budget:

He pays £4 for communications and 90 PT for rent for his room. That leaves him with £10. This means 30 PT per day for his living. What can you do with 30 PT per day? If he buys a kilogram of fruits one day, it means he has to go without a meal.

This couple had to go to the man's father's house when they want to have a good meal. As is evident, travel expenses in this case form 26.6 per cent of wages. This is not very common, and the range is usually between 3 and 15 per cent of income paid on communications, an

average of about 9 per cent.

As a result of the study of some of the cases in Dēr-El-Sabbakin, in addition to the information obtained from informants, one may conclude that travel expenses form an average of about 15 per cent of the total household budget. The range varies between 3 and 27 per cent, depending on the person's income, the distance covered and the number of persons in the family commuting to work or school.

### III Health

#### 1. Conditions of Free Health Service for the Poor

In Egypt, there is no free health service in the sense that it exists in Britain, for example. There is free health service provided by certain government hospitals, general clinics known as Mustawssaf, Maternal and Child Care Centres, and Family Planning clinics. In some, a nominal fee of 5 to 10 PT may have to be paid. Certain institutions provide free health service for their employees, e.g. schools and universities. Most of the free health services offered are beset by problems of inadequate nursing, medication and hygiene. The services operate on inadequate funds, so that medication is insufficient, basic items like anaesthetics are often missing and minor operations carried on without them. The wages of nurses and cleaning personnel are very low, hence the low standard of upkeep and treatment. Hence, those who can afford a private doctor or hospital will not hesitate. The inadequacies present real dangers to health, and people may find themselves worse off than before. The poor have a saying which sums up the situation: "He who enters it is lost, and he who leaves it is reborn". (al-dakhel mafkūd, wal talee mawlud). This applies particularly to the largest hospital where medical students practice. The idea seems to be that if a service is not paid for, then one should not expect it

to be good. As only poor patients turn up, no further effort is made, the poor must accept what is available. The problems are sometimes discussed in mass media, the blame is always thrown back on to the "budget". The reasoning runs that one cannot expect better nursing from nurses who get low wages, who serve people who have no notion of cleanliness anyway, and who are so ignorant that they will do the wrong thing behind the nurse's back. Reformers contest that even though the poor are ignorant and have no notion of hygiene, it is a fact that patients may have to wait four or five days before they are attended to. The patient's family must bring food and attend to his needs to the best of their knowledge and ability. A patient may even die, because of having been left unattended, lying in a corridor, on the floor or in a hospital bed. To examine the extent to which these events occur, another study is required. However, there is enough evidence to show that they happen often enough to be reported and denounced repeatedly in media, e.g. that hospitals are tremendously understaffed, the staff are overworked, exhausted and have become callous. To a lesser extent, the same conditions exist in private hospitals and fee-paying government hospitals. Nurses only respond if tipped frequently, and their notions of cleanliness and hygiene are often neglected. Doctors argue that the reasons lie in the nurses' own deprived backgrounds. Their wages are so low, even in private hospitals, that their profession lacks prestige. Consequently, only the poor are attracted to a job which is badly paid and involves unpleasant training. Coming from deprived and poor families, they are used to inadequate hygiene, the nurses' training does little to change the bad "habits" of a life-time. It must be remembered that at the end of the day, they go back again to their "dirty" quarters and homes. Thus goes the doctors' argument.

Doctors are unable to admonish or supervise the nursing staff as they are over-worked and have no time for details. Besides, an

administrator deals with the nurses. In fact, the number of hospitals is insufficient for the population. A recent report on health services says that there is "one general clinic for every 180,000 persons, one child care centre for every 166,000 persons, and 3.29 hospital beds per 1,000 population" (AID Report, 1977:8). Whatever the concern of the doctors, administrators, or even the mass media, it is important to note how these hospitals serve the poor. Not only are the poor the focus of this study, they are the group which has most recourse to the "free" health services. The poor really cannot afford a private doctor, they go to them only when no results are obtained at the general clinics or hospitals.

## 2. Customs Related to Patient Care

The quarter of Dēr-El-Sabbakin is actually quite well serviced by hospitals. It lies in the old part of the city and is quite near to its centre. It has the Harmal Hospital, the El-Nabawi Hospital, the Mobarrat Mohamed Ali, the Old Kasr-El-Aini and the New Kasr-El-Aini. In the last two hospitals medical students are trained. There is also a hospital attached to the Institute of Cancer. The chain of Kasr-El-Aini hospitals are non-paying, and the largest, providing a range of specialisations. All these hospitals have external clinics on fixed days and hours, and suffer from incredible overcrowding.

While there are visiting hours, parents can, if they wish, usually stay with a patient in the ward, particularly if he or she needs special attendance. This is an acknowledgement of the lack of nursing provisions. Moreover, traditions are still too strong and primary relations too valued to stick to rules, and hospitals have to allow attendance. A family is seen as "abandoning" its member if someone does not stay with the patient all the time. It is taken for granted that by "neglecting" a sick member, the family exposes them to danger and is morally

equated with crime, particularly if the patient happens to die. For example, Narguess' husband had a history of heart disease over 7 years during which he kept going into and out of various hospitals depending on his condition. Narguess tells her story,

"He used to be jealous of me /she said it with pride/. When he fell ill, I stayed with him at the Kasr-El-Aini".

As his illness dragged on, they changed hospitals, hoping that the cure would lie with some other doctor. They sometimes went to Ain Shams or Damerdash Hospital in the North-East of Cairo, which are quite a long way from their home. She says that,

"At first, I used to go daily to see him. At the end, he stayed for one year at the Kasr and I stayed with him there. I used to come once a week for the children".

She stayed with him even though she had five children at home. She confessed that they

"suffered from neglect. No one bathed them and my daughter stayed for great lengths of time not bathing, and no one combed her. So she got lice in her hair. She was in her sixth year /of schooling/ then, and I used to say, 'Let that man just live and the children die, I can beget others'".

The visiting pattern includes relatives, friends and neighbours who have to take, preferably, fruits or sweets as a present. Food in these hospitals is supposed to be bad. Often it is not provided due to overcrowding or neglect. Relatives often cook daily to provide patients with food. They come carrying large straw baskets on their heads, often spending their last piastre to provide the patient with a choice of food.

One day, the researcher found Dawlet cooking a rabbit and Jew's mallow "for a very sick man" whose family believed it would revive him. They asked her to cook it while she believed the man would die. They

were to take the pot to hospital and eat it all together.

In general, they believe that they have to provide the patient with fruit, cheese and bread in case they feel hungry during the night, or in case service is lacking. Hence there are complaints that relatives often give patients food they should not eat. Such complaints have some truth in them, but the problem is to choose between no food at all or food of any kind. Provision of food is obviously a great material strain on poor families. Were proper food provided, they would be only too glad to save up and not pay for it.

### 3. Problems of Health Expenses for the Poor

While treatment in these hospitals is supposed to be free, expenses are involved: (i) tipping is important, not only to get service, but frequently to get the medicine itself (nurses may keep it only for those who tip them); (ii) medicine is often in short supply and relatives of a patient may be asked to buy it from outside; (iii) as soon as the patients are able to move, they are discharged (sometimes too soon) in order to make way for more urgent cases. Once out, the patient has to buy his own medicine, travel to the hospital for occasional check-ups and follow a diet which may involve special and expensive food.

Nefissah gave an account of her husband's stroke. She said that at first he was ill then got better.

"Then a second time he fell ill. He began the day saying he felt unwell, then began to feel a heaviness in his arm, then in his leg and tongue. He felt he could not walk. So in the evening we took him to the Kasr-El-Aini hospital. It was washing day and we were busy, so we could not take him earlier".

One should note here that there was a whole day's delay which may have saved the man from having such a severe stroke which left him an invalid.



Nefissah went on to say that once they arrived at the hospital:

"There was no concern. They kept him there for 13 days, and we spent a lot on him. His son is the one who spent on him, but there was nothing doing. He got him injections and medicines [from an external source], but it was of no avail... So we left him. From where shall we get him money?"

She explained that the hospital said he had to leave because his was a long-term illness and there was no use hospitalising him.

Nefissah's husband needed physiotherapy. They had to pay for his treatment over several months. They had to stop because they could not afford it any longer. The sick man needed good food like meat or chicken which they could not afford. Finally they thought of sending him to the village for a few days, where he has a sister who has some land, and where he would be able to eat chicken, milk and eggs. But this was only a temporary arrangement. Eventually, he had to return and eat their usual food. He had a second stroke and died. Clearly, the "free health service" is not quite free, medicines must be bought, physiotherapy paid for and diets coped with, all on LE22 a month. In order to cope, the poor have recourse to kin, temporarily. Finally, they had to stop all treatment. This is one illustration of similar reports from other areas.

#### Conditions of Mental Hospitals for the Poor

Mental hospitals follow much the same system. They have an external clinic and only keep cases who are dangerous or need intensive treatment. There are wards for paying and non-paying patients. Conditions for the latter are appalling and a scandal broke out in the media concerning them. The researcher visited particular wards and observed that patients were not cleaned or groomed, and were left to wander in the noon-day heat, in summer, in the hospital's empty backyard. There was no shade and heaps of stones and garbage covered the

grounds. A woman patient had a child of two who had stayed with her since birth, among persons considered "hopeless", and for whom the hospital had become a sort of prison rather than a place of treatment. The children's ward is reported to be even worse, and unexplained deaths have occurred.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, in a fee-paying mental hospital, the grounds had well-kept gardens, patients were closely observed and treated. Patients here were kept for no more than three months, at least in principle. The idea was to help them adapt as quickly as possible to their environment. Only cases of schizophrenia were kept for longer periods and very reluctantly so, under pressure from kin. Psychoanalysis, in addition to drugs, were used unlike the non-paying hospitals.

Here is one example of a poor woman from the area of Old Cairo who suffered from a case of hysteria which shows how one hospital treats the poor. The account was provided by the patient.

Om Saleha's symptoms first appeared when her oldest son got married. He had brought his wife to live with them, sharing one of the two rooms that formed their home.<sup>2</sup> She began to have fits, during which she felt that her "body is on fire", tore her clothes, and screamed that her body was burning. They threw water on her, but she would run out in the street naked, as in a trance. The family took her in and covered her with hot water and she would fall unconscious. When she woke she had forgotten what had happened. Doctors said that it was a "nervous condition" and she had been taken to a mental hospital. However, she made so much noise when she had fits that they simply sent

1. A middle-income man reported it, whose retarded son died there in a non-paying ward, and investigation kept being postponed for no reason until the researcher left.
2. This was the first family with whom the researcher tried to use a room and found it impossible due to overcrowdedness and noise.

her away. She was convinced that someone had done black magic to her. The family tried everything, counter-magic, zār and various treatments to no avail. Then someone suggested that her daughter-in-law should leave the house, since she had begun getting fits after her son's marriage. The son and his wife moved out, and the very next morning the symptoms had disappeared. The point is that these hospitals do not attempt much in terms of treatment, and get rid of troublesome patients.

### Public Clinics

Public clinics, or Mustawssaf, are government established clinics more generally available in "popular" or "baladi" areas, at nominal prices. They have a doctor and two nurses, keep official records and are government supervised. Most of them work all morning until 2 p.m. Generally, the doctor is young and has recently finished training. They work for a small salary for two or three years, as part of their public service, before they are allowed to have their own practice. This is the government's way of getting back its own, in exchange for years of free education. Women physicians are often employed in these areas, as both men and women are conservative and some husbands refuse to allow their wives to be examined by a man. Incredible queues (sometimes around the block) are typical of these clinics. As with gamias, the poor are usually sick or carrying sick children, and dragging another two or three, and must stand or squat in the street as they wait. They often queue twice, once to get the ticket and again to take their turn. If there are too many of them, the ticket window is closed, and however sick they are, they have to wait for the next day. The result is minimal care, lack of needed medicines, even for emergencies, and records are kept mainly for women practising birth-control. These clinics are unable to cope with serious illness.

### Private Treatment

Private physicians are only seen in difficult cases where hospitals cannot provide a cure. In Old Cairo, one woman aged 53, who worked cleaning a school, developed a terrible backache and could not move or work. After going to a hospital in the area and finding no improvement, the doctor sent her to a specialist in another area. He told her that the cost would be £2. But when she arrived, she found she had to pay £4 in advance, and £1 for a second visit. She only had £3 and was embarrassed. She borrowed £1 from a shop-owner she knew nearby. The specialist examined her from head to toe and decided she had a slipped disc and that she did not need an operation as the previous doctor had told her. But he gave her a long treatment that she was supposed to repeat four times. Altogether the initial medicines and injections cost £10. She repeated them twice, then was unable to get any more money to keep up the treatment. After improvement had allowed her to go back to work, her condition regressed. When she went back to the doctor, he told her he could not help her since she had stopped the treatment which she should continue. So, she ended, "I left myself to nature. What can I do? I asked my sons for help, they said they had no money to help me". The woman now works on half-pay since she cannot do heavy work, and the school has hired a girl to help her.

Various points must be made here. First, the specialist's fee was too expensive for her, though it may be moderate in comparison to that of others. Second, the cost of the medicines was beyond her means, since her pay was basically £10.500 a month. Third, her children helped at first but were unable to continue since their own income barely provided them with food. Consequently, the patient had to abandon treatment and remain an invalid because she could not meet the expense. She was further disadvantaged by having to reduce work and hence suffer a reduction in income. (A similar pattern to that of Rashād.)

The health and medical problems experienced by the poor are further complicated by the facts of their poverty. As with "free education", "free health services" have serious limitations which have very serious consequences for the poor.

#### 4. Attitudes to Health Institutions and Common Illnesses of the Poor

Only when the poor feel really ill or in pain do they go to a hospital's external clinic, or to a general clinic, whichever happens to be nearer. More often, they carry their nagging pains without recourse to a physician. They may be too busy, or they may try folk medicine or a medicine suggested by a neighbour or relative. As pharmacies are allowed to sell most medicines without prescriptions, there are few problems in buying them.

For example, Nefissah has a lot of trouble with rheumatism but does not go to the doctor for treatment. Once she slept near the stove, waiting for beans to cook, she fell and burnt her arm. Her son got an ointment and put it on for her. Her daughter helped her undress and did the work for her. Next day, she resumed her normal life, using the ointment until she was cured. Samia, her daughter, had a bad backache and pointed to her kidneys, felt flat and lost her appetite. She wondered what was wrong, but she did not go to the doctor to be treated. The idea simply did not seem to cross her mind. One woman, Islāh, had a rheumatic heart, yet has had seven children apart from those who died. She always had a baby that she was breast-feeding. She goes to the general clinic every time she feels bad. As soon as she feels better or her medicine finishes, she stops treatment. As her mother works, it is difficult for her to leave four pre-school children alone, particularly since she has to queue for so long.

The ailment that seems to strike most of the poor is rheumatism, at least in Dēr and among the cases taken (eight cases of the illness

were found). Though Egypt is not a cold country in general, nights are always cool to cold. In Cairo, the cold may be very sharp on winter nights, temperatures dropping to 5° Centigrade. Generally, there are no heating systems except recently in some new offices, and luxury apartments. Better-off people use a butagaz or electric heater for warmth, while the wealthy may put in air-conditioning. People tend to rely on warm clothes. The poor cannot afford wool as most is imported and very expensive. The poor wear cotton clothes, women wear two dresses for warmth. Poor men wear a cotton sweater under their galabiyas or over their shirt, with an occasional cotton scarf and cap. It is rare for either men or women to wear stockings. They wear open plastic slippers, and go bare-foot at home on the cold cement floors. Rugs only cover parts of the rooms. These conditions appear to be conducive to rheumatisms, which is rarely treated at its onset. Doctors rarely ask for blood-tests and people are reluctant to take them. Rheumatic fever is also quite frequent among children, and takes its toll. Tonsillitis is very common and often leads to rheumatic fever.

Gastro-intestinal illnesses and liver infections are very common in the spring and summer, e.g. typhoid, coli-bacillus, dysentery, jaundice, etc. Various factors contribute to the frequency of these illnesses. Swarms of flies fill the neglected streets or haras, and enter houses that have no nets on their windows. As the poor have no refrigerators or cupboards to protect food, food will easily rot in the heat. The lack of water in some houses and the price of soap acts as a deterrent to washing vegetables which are consumed with their dirt and microbes. Illiteracy creates a lack of awareness about basic hygiene and cleanliness. Poor children are not taught to brush flies from their faces, so that they are often seen with flies standing on their eyes, mouths, wounds, etc. Infant mortality is high and blindness in one eye is not infrequent. All the cases investigated had lost between one to

three babies. Most often, death is due to an infection of the digestive tract. The children are often taken to the doctor when it is too late, particularly since these infections progress rapidly and quickly debilitate the child. Amal and Fāteh lost one baby girl through such an infection. Amal reports,

She was alright. Then she got a fever. I took her to the doctor. He gave her a medicine. I gave it to her. The next day she was dead. It was because I had been nervous and angry the night before she got the fever. I slept angry and annoyed and breast-fed her. It all came out in the milk and made her ill. She did not bear it.

Dawlat reported that last year her grandson got diarrhoea and suffered several relapses to the extent that they bought his 'funeral wrappings' to be ready. Then the child miraculously survived.

Children who survive usually develop immunity. Families who suffer most are those who have no water in their houses. For example, the researcher observed a tin can used to go to the lavatory. While it was reserved for this use, it was dipped in the pot that held the water and from which water was also taken for the morning wash and to take water for tea and for cooking. The lavatory was shared by three families who share one apartment. When one caught an infectious disease, all the rest are likely to get it. Recently, a whole family died of typhoid in Dēr, only two children survived because they were taken to their grandparents.

The researcher also observed a child who had fever, identified by the parents as measles, though the child had had measles a year before. They jumped to this conclusion because they had heard that their neighbour's child was down with measles. For two days the child had had a high fever and a bad cough, yet they did not take him to a doctor. The mother was reluctant to carry the heavy child to the clinic. The second day the grandmother sat on the bare tiled floor, in the midst of a

draughty hall with the child on her lap. A neighbour commented that the draught was bad for measles; the grandmother mumbled that she would go to the bedroom, but she remained seated a long time, apparently too tired to move.

Last, but not least, anaemia, bone weakness and stunted mental and physical development of children occurs due to malnutrition. As soon as breast-feeding stops, children stop taking milk. Since they rarely eat meat and fruit, they often lack protein and basic vitamins and minerals. Any stomach-filling food is considered sufficient for children. Most mothers give the husband the best food available on the grounds that he is the breadwinner. The children are given the remains. The researcher observed a family where four pre-school children sat on the floor with one tiny dish of beans for breakfast between them. Each child had a loaf of bread and used to dip it into the beans. Having eaten, they went to play in the hara, some beans still remained in the dish. The beans had not been seasoned with lime or oil. The children were not given anything to drink. As the mother slept late, breakfast was late too (e.g. 10.30 a.m.). The two older boys worked and had left early in the morning. They had tea at home and bought a sandwich of beans to eat on the way to work. The family of the informant was observed to feed the children chips with bread for dinner. The children dipped the bread into the potatoes as with ghumūss. They were given nothing to drink. Sometimes children are given a late breakfast so that the main meal is served at four or five p.m. No other meals are given. They may be given a piece of bread to munch before going to bed, especially if they get white bread.

The attitude of the poor to health institutions and physicians is dominated by the view that "care" only comes to patients who pay. Some think that physicians want people to become ill in order to gain patients and money. One of the poor said, "It is scientists who bring



the microbes so that the physicians may find work to do".

The poor views hospital staff as showing little concern for patients. Nurses are seen as authoritarian, careless and lacking in professional consciousness. For the poor, the nurses want to be tipped before they show attention. Why else should they? All the poor who have been hospitalized reported the necessity of tips in order to obtain services, meals or medicines. Hence their reluctance to go again unless needing it very badly.

There is great respect for the physicians as knowledgeable individuals. Many patients dare not ask questions. Physicians are often impatient and sometimes rough with poor patients. The poor are seen as ignorant and unlikely to understand advice. Some doctors take the trouble to repeat their instructions or make the patient, or the inevitable accompanying relative, repeat what they understood the treatment to be. Others simply write the prescription and leave it to the chemist to explain.

Poor patients often do not go to a physician, because they cannot afford it, rather they go to a chemist they know. They tell him their symptoms, or their child's symptoms, and ask for the required medicine. Very often the chemist complies. If he feels that something more serious may follow, he advises them to see a physician.

## 5. Informal Health Care

### (a) Folk Medicine

If formal medicine fails them, the poor often revert to more informal methods, e.g. folk medicines, prayers by Sheikhs, magic or counter-magic and zār. Education seems to be the main antidote to many of these practices, particularly magic.

Of the traditional informal practices, folk medicine is used most

often. Belief in folk medicine is grounded on the basic principle that 'natural life' is the ideal, and it is disruptions and obstacles to 'natural life' that are debilitating. One man said:

People now don't hear well due to the noise of loud-speakers and can't walk because they always ride buses. People could see the stars at noon, in the past. Food was not cheated as it is nowadays with the chemicals they put in the ground. Due to it, the worms (that eat plants) have increased.... We used to cook molokhia (jew's mallow) coming straight from the fields and cook it without meat because the air was clean, but now they spray, so you can't take anything before four days, when the chemical disappears. God forgive us.

Later he said, 'Medicine is not good. Nature is better'. Natural elements are believed to possess curative powers which fabricated medicine cannot have. Talking of folk medicine as based on nature, this statement by one poor man is representative of a general belief in the curative power of the 'good earth'. He said, 'Wounds used to be treated by wet earth, and if anyone would wound his eye with the maize branches in the fields, he would pee and put the urine in his eye and it would get cured. When a woman used to have a baby, they used to give her a whole plate of fried eggs, now they keep her for three days without food'.

Another basic belief is that illness is often the result of 'envy' (Hassad) or (Naffs) or the 'evil eye' (Ein), i.e. that someone has looked with envy at a person, either because they looked happy, healthy, handsome, pretty, or because they see them as materially better off, e.g. wearing nice clothes or having acquired something new for the house. A person talking, within this society, must never say to someone, 'You look good today', for they might give the person the 'evil eye'. They must say, 'In the name of God and by God's will, you look good today'. This invocation is often accompanied by a sucking noise, the person turns their hands around the other's head, to 'surround' it with this invocation.. This is meant to keep the effects of one's own 'evil eye'

at bay. If a person becomes ill by pure chance, they will not accuse the speaker of having given them the "evil eye". These gestures are not used by the more modern, educated, or higher-income groups. Here it is branded as "Very baladi" or traditional with the implication of unrefined, not at all elegant, or "classy".

The following indicates both the belief in Hassad, or "evil eye", and the process by which a person moved from formal medicine to the informal folk medicine twice.

"I had once a thorn in my finger, like the thorns of a fig tree. I had been touched by envy. I had been newly married [i.e. he had been envied for having married]. I went to the Kasr [hospital] with no results. So in the evening, I went to have it burnt [folk medicine] and I was bearing it. For three months, it was producing pus, and I was frightened. My wife took me again to the Kasr and every time they would take away the pus, it would increase. Then I went to the Arabs at the Pyramids and they burnt it. I was afraid. He was an Arab, a peasant, who was knowledgeable. In Nazlet-El-Sammān [village near the Pyramids], there are Arabs who burn this way. These are baladi [folk or traditional] prescriptions which are better than those of doctors".

When he talked of "Arabs", he meant Bedouins who are famous for their folk medicine. The man concluded that the "Arab" cured him where the doctors at the Kasr-El-Aini Hospital, after three months' treatment, could not.

#### (b) Sheikhs and Holy Cures

Sometimes beliefs in the curative powers of God or of holy things is mixed with some knowledge of formal medicine.

"I had a stone [in the kidney] which I treated for 24 years, but with no avail. One day, I said to Him, 'O God, you have created reasons for my illness, create reasons for the cure'.

I used to have ointment from the Hejāz [the area of the Islamic pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia] for rheumatism. I had a bath and said to her [his wife], 'Rub this part with the ointment' [he indicated his

kidney<sup>7</sup>. While she rubbed, it moved, and after three days, the stone came down<sup>7</sup>.

The man believed in God having answered his prayer and in the curative effects of the ointment that came from such a holy place as the Hejāz. At the same time, he was aware that the rubbing on his kidney had made the stone move. His interpretation was that God has inspired this behaviour, with the ointment's blessing and the rubbing he was cured. In other words, it is believed that all cures lie in God's hands, if God wants the person to get well, God leads to, or inspires, the cure.

Sometimes the poor believe that black-magic has been practised, usually by a resentful woman. This can only be counteracted by more powerful counter-magic, or by special prayers accompanied by potions. The following account, from a man, exemplifies how one kind of magic is used and its cure.

Once, I was given poison, perhaps it was black magic they did to me, or they put it in a glass of tea. The hareem /women<sup>7</sup> do this to a man when they hate him. I stayed for four months with my head and back bent down and could not stay straight. I went to the doctors of the Kasr, and the Mobarrah hospitals, but with no avail. Finally, I went home to the village. There is a khalifah or follower of the Tarikah El-Rifaeyah /ā religious sect in Islam that follows certain rites and traditions<sup>7</sup>. He said, 'A bit of cold milk in the morning and put this antidote in the milk'. /i.e. he had somehow identified the poison<sup>7</sup>. I drank it at 10 o'clock, and at 11.30 a.m., I felt I wanted to vomit. I was on my way to have a letter written /by a scribe<sup>7</sup>, but I returned home. They got me two basins and I began to vomit red, green and yellow pieces, and when I finished, I was able to straighten my back, and the Rifāi /the Sheikh to whom he had gone<sup>7</sup> cried out and said, 'May God punish him /i.e. punish the person who poisoned him<sup>7</sup>. Next day, I vomited less and less until the fourth day. Then upon the advice of the Rifāi, I got a pair of pigeons and cooked it in water and lemon and ate from it all day. Before, I could not even carry a glass of water /i.e. he was so weak<sup>7</sup>. Now I came back with bread and food, and was able to eat. I got cured when the time came for it.

The Rifāi is a Sheikh, or religious man, well-versed in the Korān and belonging to this religious sect. He is seen as particularly knowledgeable in matters of black-magic and identified both the "poison" and its "antidote". The Rifāi takes it for granted that "someone" tried to poison his client. Not only does he administer the cure, but also gives him the food needed to reconstitute his strength later. The man was in fact cured. His belief in the Rifāi's knowledge and power were confirmed.

(c) Zār Ceremonies

Sufferers of nervous or psychological disorders are often advised to celebrate a zār ceremony. Zār is essentially a special dance-ceremony, believed to release tension and create a feeling of well-being afterwards. Women suffering from anxieties, frustration or some psychosomatic disease are advised to make a zār. The ceremony is led by a "master of ceremonies" helped by two or three assistants who beat drums and help the clients to get over the after-effects of the dance. The "master" is called a Sheikh or Sheikha, depending on whether he is a man or a woman. The title implies that he has some secret knowledge or power. If he is a man, he grows his hair long. The client must pay a fixed amount for the ceremony, in addition to the sacrifice of some animal, like a duck, a couple of chickens, or even a sheep, depending on their wealth. The Sheikh or Sheikha also pray and give clients some kind of talisman. Stories abound of the erotic activities that have happened between the master of ceremonies and clients. It would need another research to verify them.

The poor cannot afford to undertake the full cost of a zār ceremony. More often, they participate in a zār that some rich woman has ordered. People invite relatives, friends and neighbours, but cannot forbid all others from joining in. The ceremony has semi-

religious connotations and, allowing the poor to participate, is equivalent to giving them alms. During the ceremony, the master's assistants collect money from the audience, so it is in their interest to have a large audience.

A zār requires a court or wide space that can act as a dance floor and a place for the audience. The dance takes place to the beating of drums, rhythms changing every few minutes. The "master" usually gets up and dances to the rhythm, moving his head back and forth. His clients get up and follow his lead, joining in the zār dance, each responding to a different drum beat. There are no special steps or skills required. The dance consists of jumping and moving the body and head to the rhythm. The clients dance until they fall down exhausted. Many go into a trance, or hypnotic state, due to the regular beating of the drums and the regular jumping and head movement.

In one zār observed by the researcher, a large crowd had gathered in a relatively small court. Most were women. Only one of the clients was a man. He was young and appeared to be very ill. People there said his condition was "hopeless", and he had been told that perhaps a zār would cure him. As the drum beats changed, different women in the audience rose up suddenly and began jumping. About eight to ten were on the dance floor at a time. They all appeared very serious and tense. Some went into a trance, others did not. Those who did appeared to lose consciousness, danced until they fell. Immediately assistants of the master of ceremonies brought water and splashed it on their faces, and seated them on a chair. Some clients cried as they woke from trances and were comforted by the assistants. They reported that they felt "good" after the dance.

The zār lasts for hours. This one lasted from 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. Women without previous acquaintance talked to each other and told

stories and exchanged confidences. People came in and out during this time. There was the mood of a festivity, tinged with seriousness. According to respondents, the virtues of the zār include the power to get rid of devils or possession by a Sheikh or Sheikha. Here the terms Sheikh or Sheikha refer to spirits who are believed to take possession of a person, making them do strange things. These spirits are said to be very demanding and may demand expensive things.

Some rich and educated women are reported to be "zār addicts", who need to have a zār once a month. They are reported to be very nervous women who are frustrated by their husbands, or who are haunted by the fear that he may take a second wife, or are nervous because he has taken one.

Zār is not encouraged by the government and at one time was said to be illegal. However, it is still very much part of the culture of baladi people, a thriving institution too strong to be waived aside by decree. Nevertheless, it is usually kept secret, and one must find out about it through someone that one knows.

## 7. Conclusion

Many of the illnesses of the poor are a result of their poverty, i.e. the lack of basic hygiene, warmth and nutrition. Their limited material condition result in a lack of warm clothing, cold and damp houses, inadequate water, no soap, no facilities for storing and protecting food from flies and other insects, and a general lack of proper hygiene. The neglected condition of the haras means that flies, mosquitoes, mice, etc. are endemic. Diets often lack the basic elements needed for the physical and mental development of children, causing among other things anaemia and other debilitating diseases.

Though the poor use formal health institutions to cope with their

problems, their attitudes are shrouded in mistrust. They are not particularly concerned with technical capacity, though this is sometimes the case. They mistrust the conscientiousness and devotion of personnel in the medical service who are seen as being interested only in persons who can pay. Consequently, parents of patients feel that their own supervision and help is essential. This attitude is in line with traditions of patient-care which emphasize the patient's need for the affection and devotion of his relatives and friends. Their attitude is partly justified since the general attitude of those in medical care is that the non-paying patient cannot expect the best service. Non-paying mental hospitals are, if anything, in an even worse condition.

The poor's attitude to formal medicine is a result of the actual conditions as well as of some deeply anchored traditional ideas on the wisdom of nature. They feel that the efficiency of age-old folk medicine has been proven, including interventions by Sheikhs and zār. The poor, in particular, resort to informal health practices because belief in tradition and the power of the Sheikhs is deeper among them. Further, their desperate material conditions are accompanied by illiteracy and ignorance of basic hygiene. Their poverty is often associated with a deep faith, frequently based on hearsay, in the curative power of Sheikhs. "Preventive medicine", in particular, is neglected. They believe that God is the "Almighty Protector" and cures whomever He wants, and takes away whomever He wants. Physicians or Sheikhs are only tools in God's hands, for ultimately, nothing happens without His will.

The poor incur expenses involved in treatment even in free health institutions. Frequently, the medicine is not available in those free institutions, and they must find it elsewhere. Treatment in hospitals involves payments to nurses. Extra food must be brought to compliment the hospitals. As patients are sent home as soon as they can walk,



cures are often incomplete and may cause permanent health damage. Treatments, food and medicines must be paid for. The poor sometimes have recourse to private physicians or Sheikhs, if they feel that their condition has not improved through the free health service. Debts are often incurred in order to cover the cost of physicians, Sheikhs or medicines. Further expenses are involved where special food is needed, particularly where a long convalescence is involved. The poor do not have a special budget for health expenses. They meet each emergency as it occurs, often selling a piece of jewellery or furniture to cover the costs involved.

## I Recreation

### 1. The Hara

Perhaps the most important place for daily recreation among the poor is the hara itself. Inhabitants of all ages - men, women and children - find some form of recreation here. Women meet each other in the hara to talk, either on their way to or from the market, or on their way to buy from a peddler. The researcher observed a kerosene peddler come in the hara on one afternoon. Although he came every other day, it appeared to be quite an event. The word spread that he had come. Women came out of their homes with empty cans to get two or three litres of kerosene. They stood around his horse-driven cart with its large tank, talking and gossiping. As some left, others arrived. There was quite a commotion. The peddler stayed for about an hour, until almost every woman had made a purchase. The researcher saw all her respondents come one by one. Contrary to their habit of sending children to buy their needs, when it came to this peddler, the women came themselves. It may be that a full can is heavy for a child, but they looked pleased to meet and chat. Women do not usually take a walk

in the hara, the way young boys or girls do. They must have a purpose or excuse, usually to buy something. Those who must fetch water use this as another opportunity to talk, though here the process appears to be less pleasant. The water tank is larger and heavier to carry, and the number of women much smaller.

For girls and particularly boys the hara is a real recreation area. Boys stand and chat and joke on street corners, some play football. Children play hide and seek, with sticks, or pull an empty tin attached to a string. Children are safe in the hara since no cars come in. Very few own a bicycle and these are usually adults who use them for their work.

## 2. The Coffee-House

Men are seldom to be seen to hang around the hara. They usually go to meet their friends at the coffee-house. Friends do not usually enter each other's houses, where their wife and daughters may be seen. The poor are still very conservative. A man must have a good excuse for visiting another's house. If he does so, he calls out and waits outside the house. If he is invited, he will go in; if he is not invited in he will not. Men usually go out when called, rather than invite the caller in. They invite some in while others they do not, depending on whether they are relatives, or friends they trust, and depending on how conservative they are. Among relatives, the restrictions are often eliminated, as a kinsman must protect a kinswoman, at least in principle. The coffee-house is quite an institution for men. It is like the pub or bar in the West. Men meet friends, clients, or entrepreneurs to get jobs. They go to play a game of tric-trac or cards, watch television, or simply sit and watch the street scene. They may go to smoke a gozah, or hubbly-bubbly, with tobacco, or the famous Moassel or Hashish. Of course the latter is a crime punishable by

prison and hard labour for from 10 to 15 years. However, this does not seem to prevent the men from smoking it. It is a very social affair. The smoker will be surrounded by a sort of court of poor men who rush to his service, in the hope of getting a puff for nothing.

One informant explained:

"When an addict smokes it, and others want to take an occasional puff, then you find several persons rushing around him, one puts for him the Moassel on the coal, the other gets the coal, a third changes the water of the gozah when it becomes yellow, a fourth holds the tube and puts it in his mouth. Then he would take a nafass or puff and invite each one of the others, who helped him, to take a puff too".

He explained that a tiny piece of Hashish, as thick as a match, costs £1. He seemed to consider opium as the really dangerous drug. Hashish was considered a very normal thing for men who could afford it. The researcher expressed surprise that some men earned £3 to £5 a day yet continued to live in bad housing. It was explained that men with any extra money in the quarter spent it all on Hashish rather than on improving their houses or living conditions. Some consider that Hashish helps them bear the hardships of their jobs, homes and Cairo's commuting problems. Without it, they believe they would not be able to cope.

In general, the very poor do not go to the coffee-house. They cannot afford a glass of tea which, in this area, costs 2.5 to 3 PT, particularly since sitting there obliges them to invite friends to a glass of tea also. Some go occasionally, but so rarely that it has little significance for their budget. The coffee-house is usually where adult and older men go. Two coffee-houses stand just outside of Dēr-El-Sabbakin, on the Nile Cornishe.

### 3. Joking

Part of the male social atmosphere of meeting friends is joking.

Humour and jokes are held to be features of the Egyptian national character. Any situation, however serious, political, economic or social, is turned into a joke. At times of political or economic tension, political and economic jokes pass through all income groups. It becomes a way of coping psychologically; A response to situations that apparently have no solution, particularly among the poor— A way of relieving the tension. Therefore they constitute quite an important aspect of every man's free time. Women may chat and joke, but it cannot be said that joking is an institution with them as it is with men. Men enter into joking contests, where each must answer the other's joke by instantly improvising an answer. These contests involve quick-wittedness as well as humour. A good joker is nicknamed a hashash. The source of the word being hashish, since the latter is supposed to sharpen wits and encourage the desire for fun. Jokes with erotic connotations are exchanged only among men. Women must be kept chaste, at least in principle. Joking is a form of recreation that costs no money, and is therefore very much practised and appreciated by the poor.

#### 4. The Cinema

Young men find recreation by walking on the Nile border, or in areas where they can see new faces, girls, sights, etc. They are the group most likely to go to a cinema, if they can afford it. Prices of cinema tickets vary according to the area or location of the cinema. The cinema closest to Dēr-El-Sabbakin costs 15 PT and shows two old films at every performance. Most of a boy's pocket money may go on cinemas. It is easier for them if they work as apprentices. Only in one of the households studied were the boys able to afford to go to the cinema.

Some men go to the cinema, but older men seem to form a much smaller percentage. Men rarely take out their wives, daughters, or

mothers. A wife's place is in the home and she cannot be allowed to sit in a cinema beside strange men, or be ogled by the male audience. Still, young couples do go. Moreover, it is felt that women should not see certain scenes, considered erotic, as these may open their eyes to things that an honest woman should not know, and may threaten her chastity or make them too demanding. Thus, most of the cinema audiences in baladi areas are made up of men, particularly the poorer areas. Again, among the poor, the expense is not too significant for their budgets.

##### 5. Television

Television is one of the more recent recreation activities and is quickly gaining ground. Some coffee-houses now have a television set to attract customers. This is particularly important for the poor who do not own a set, as they cannot usually afford them. However, recently the poor have begun to buy television sets, as soon as they can afford them. To do so they pay by instalments and form a gamia to cover the initial cash down payment. It is often the first gadget they try to get, even before a butagaz stove, which a few years ago was considered of primary importance. Since television licences have been abolished, more people are buying them.

Though most of the poor have no television in their homes, most see it at the home of a close relative or neighbour. Comments are made and news events discussed as part of social gatherings. Programmes begin daily at 5 p.m., except on Fridays and Sundays, when they start in the morning. In this respect, women have certain advantages, as they can "drop in" and be invited to sit, while a man cannot drop in while the women are sitting, unless he is invited by the male head of household. This explains the importance of the television set in a coffee-house where viewers pay an extra charge for watching television.

Here again, to pay for a television set on instalments, a poor family has to make sacrifices and sometimes deprive itself of certain foods. The example of Narguess has already indicated this. Only in two other cases was a television obtained, one as a present from a daughter recently married to a Seoudi, and one from a sister working in Kuwait who left it with her poor brother in trust.

#### 6. The Transistor

Most households either have an old second-hand radio or a small transistor. It is usually in quite a bad condition, broken and patched with locoplast or simple elastic. Some of those who are able to read would buy the daily newspaper, which costs 2PT; the rest rely on the radio for news. There is always the blare of a radio from the coffee-house. Men listen to the national and international news and pass comments to each other. For them, this is quite a source of distraction and political rumours are widely exchanged. Political awareness is quite highly developed and all sorts of theorisation takes place on the outcome of policies and events. All types of cultural and religious programmes are listened to in addition to music and plays.

#### 7. The Tombs

The official holiday for most is on Friday, except for those who work in commercial shops in the centre of town who take their holiday on Sunday. In this area, as the majority are Moslem, they follow the official holiday. Consequently, Thursday night is the equivalent of Saturday night in the West. On Thursday, many women go to visit the Arafāh or tombs, at day break. They take food for the day as well as food to distribute to the poor for the souls of their departed. As the tombs usually take the form of an open-air court surrounding the burial room, the visits often become picnics and social gatherings. The poorer among them go only during the feasts, as the food constitutes

extra expenses. They must take good food in order to achieve their purpose. Because others may see them there, they must be of good appearance. Some go just to receive food and alms from the better off, but these make sure they go to rich tombs where their neighbours will not see them begging.

#### 8. Picnics

Only one feast involves a more gay celebration and this is the Sham-El-Nessim, which literally means "Breathing the breeze". This is a national feast which celebrates the coming of the summer season and is always held on the Monday following the Eastern Easter. The celebration consists of an early morning picnic. Breakfast involves baked beans with taamia (a beans burger), onions, eggs and a special kind of salted fish or fissich. By lunch time, the celebration is nearly over. All public parks and gardens are crowded on this day. Even small patches of green grass along the roads are used for picnicking by the masses. For this reason, wealthier families go to distant places or limit themselves to the gardens of private clubs. Picnicking may take place on other feasts too, for families who do not go to visit the tombs. More often, fathers take children to spend the morning in the gardens while the mother prepares the meal for the feast.

#### 9. Elements of the Feasts' Celebrations

Although feasts are a major time for recreation, they are often spoilt by the anxiety they arouse among the poor who are concerned about meeting extra expenses. Traditionally, children and adults must wear new clothes for the feast. Moreover, meat must be cooked and biscuits baked in large quantities. The biscuits usually need a large quantity of pure animal butter which is very expensive. Many of the poor cannot any longer bake the traditional kinds of biscuits, and make the type that require less butter. Gamias (credit groups) are formed more

frequently before feasts in order to meet all the extra expenses. However, the very poor cannot afford gamias and must have recourse to the dalālah, or the second-hand market to buy the "new" clothes for the feast.

#### 10. Conclusion

The poor's recreational activities centre mainly within and around the hara. For women, it consists of visiting, chatting and watching television at a neighbour's or relative's. These activities do not cost anything. On feast days, they may visit the tombs or picnic. In this case, extra food expenses and the price of new clothes have to be met. Thus, they have recourse to a dalālah, second-hand market, or savings through a gamia.

For men, joking is important, while visits and watching television are limited to relatives or close neighbours. Friends and relatives meet in the coffee-house, if they can afford it. It may cost them between 2.5 and 3 PT, unless they have been invited for a drink.

For younger men, walks with friends or chatting and joking at street corners, as well as the cinema are the most common activities. The cinema is the most expensive recreation. For boys, a game of football in the hara is a favourite activity. Younger children play in the hara and with improvised toys, an old tin can, or rope. These games cost nothing. For families, picnics to tombs or public gardens in feasts are common. The radio is an important source of distraction particularly for older men. Only a few of the literate poor buy newspapers, some may borrow them. Buying a television set or using hashish remain the two most expensive recreational activities. These are rarely bought by the very poor, and are a source of great deprivation if they are to be obtained. Here again, we cannot speak of a budget for recreation, except where a television set is purchased and particular



amounts are set aside for it monthly. Here they either use a gamia to make the initial cash payment, or to meet the monthly instalments required later.

CHAPTER SEVEN:            HELP FOR THE POOR

The everyday life of the poor takes place within a context of institutions, organisations and agencies, which, to varying degrees, provide help and assistance. Particularly in extreme circumstances, when all else fails, the poor rely heavily on these formal and informal support mechanisms. This chapter will outline the various forms of help and assistance available, their importance, and their inadequacies, as seen by the poor. This is clearly a whole field of research in itself, the studies undertaken so far have been of a very limited nature and most remain unpublished.

Formal Institutions

1. Role of the Social Affairs Ministry

Generally speaking, all employees in both the private and the public sector have social insurance which provides a pension on retirement. Many of the poor are day-workers or peddlars who do not have such an insurance. On retirement, loss of job, disablement or illness, they are left completely destitute. If they die, their families become destitute. To provide for such individuals and their families, Law 133/1964 was enacted. According to this law the Ministry of Social Affairs provides assistance to the following categories of persons, "Orphans, widows with children, totally disabled persons, and the aged (65 years and older). These persons are entitled to a monthly pension of a maximum of L.E.3.500 and a minimum of L.E.1.900" (Kamel, 1976: 16). In 1975 a Law 107 was enacted, adding two other categories: "families suffering from calamities and former government employees who do not have a right to pensions". In addition, pensions were increased to a maximum of L.E.5 and a minimum of L.E.2.500 (Kamel, 1976). In 1977, Law 30 was enacted adding the categories: divorced women,

children of divorced women who die, re-marry, or are imprisoned; the family of a person imprisoned for a minimum of ten years; women who have never married of 50 years or more; and special groups of unemployed who had paid social insurance and did not resign or leave because of some criminal offence (NCSCR Report 1979: 74-80). Amounts were increased, the range being 36% per person to 139% for a widow or divorced woman who has three children, while pensions for old age were increased to 275% (in urban areas) (NCSCR Report, 1979: 92).<sup>1</sup>

The income needed to cover a person's needs in terms of food, clothing and housing was estimated to be (in 1972) L.E.11 for industrial workers and L.E.9 for agricultural workers, living in a family (Kamel, 1976, p.22). This estimate provides some measure of the levels of poverty in Der-El-Sabbakin, and shows the inadequacy of the amounts granted by the Social Affairs even in terms of its "maximum". Studies have also shown that "many persons who are qualified to receive such aid do not actually receive it" (Kamel, 1976: 23). This is largely due to shortage of the necessary funds. The number of families who received pensions in 1977 was: 347,648 (NCSCR, 1979: 76). If the person does any work, such as a peddler of radishes whose income is extremely small, they will not receive assistance. They are considered to possess a job and thereby an income. If people receive help from kin or friends they will not be given assistance by Social Affairs.

When Rashad was paralyzed, he and Nefissah went to see the director of the area office of Social Affairs. She explained that her husband had been a peddler, but was now paralyzed and needed assistance. The director asked about their children. As soon as the director heard that

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1. NCSCR refers to the National Center for Social and Criminological Research.

their son worked and gave them L.E.5 a month, she said that they were not eligible for any help. The poor old couple were very upset and angry. Nefissah commented, "And are L.E.5 or L.E.6 enough? Perhaps we should have lied. But he said he would tell them the truth. So they refused to give us anything. Yet we saw these respectable ladies (i.e. better-off) who come in and they told them they would get help. Had we had relatives or friends there, they would have given us help".

People seeking assistance must fill in an application form, explaining their situation and problems to a social worker, usually a woman, who is sent to examine the case. Neighbours are asked to corroborate the information on the application. If approved, the person is put on a long waiting-list and sometimes there is a delay of more than a year before help is given. Respondents said that often the help came too late. They told the story of an old woman whose husband had died and she could not work. People in the area convinced her to put in an application. She had absolutely no money and lived on the charity of neighbours. She was underfed, and died nine months later. A short while after her death, Social Affairs offered to provide assistance for her.

Even if assistance is provided, in many cases it lasts for only a few months. People must re-apply and may or may not be given the help since others must get their turn. Three years earlier, an old man, known as <sup>c</sup>Am Hassanein, lived in the quarter. He practically lived on charity. He was over 70 years old and could not work. He applied for help and was given L.E.1 a month for 6 months. When interviewed, he told the researcher, "And why for six months? Have they decided that the person will live for just six months?". For the last two years of his life he was entirely dependent on private charity. Evidently, the assistance granted is always the minimum rather than the maximum allowance.

For funds are limited and demands many. For the poor, it is often better than nothing, but not much.

The application creates problems for the illiterate. Most of the very poor are illiterate. They have to get someone to write the application for them and then hand it into the nearest Social Affairs Office. Further, they have to keep going to the office in order to press their case, otherwise the papers lie on the desk and are never forwarded. This is difficult for them, they are often chided for their frequent calls, and may finally abandon their claim out of sheer despair.

### Image of the Social Worker

If and when the papers are finally sent to the Ministry and approved, the case must be examined. Social workers are often reluctant to actually go out and examine the case. Respondents reported that social workers suffer from "laziness" and "carelessness". As one respondent put it, "They never actually go to examine cases, but pretend they did". They seem to fill the papers according to their own, not always correct, impressions of the person. To be on the safe side, they advise minimum assistance. Some respondents believe that the social workers tear up applications if they get too many, and that people cannot get their case examined unless they have an influential relative or friend to press their case. Those who know a social worker may ask him to push the case as a personal favour, as Nefissah said earlier.

The image of the social worker is not a happy one. <sup>c</sup> Am Hassanein described the social worker as a "doll" sitting there waiting to be admired rather than working. Naima, who works as a maid, said ironically, "And what will the Social Affairs do? They are reckless people". Moreover, the procedures they follow to evaluate cases are criticized. Narguess,

who had wanted to apply for help, reported what she had been told about them.

When I asked, they told me, 'They will ask about you, and of course if they do, they send you a woman who will ask about you, outside, and your neighbours will say, 'she is well-off'. So they won't give you anything'. So I did not go, of course. I told myself that since outside they will say that I am well-off, there is no need that I should go. Besides, you have to be living in a room to get help, and to be 'defeated' and poor [i.e. destitute], and of course, I am not living in one room, I am living in an apartment as you can see, so I don't know ...

Narguess was annoyed that the neighbours would be asked about the person applying for assistance.

I don't complain to anyone, so of course people have an idea about me that I am well-off, and that's it.

Later she confides that people expect the needy to say:

"By the Prophet, I am in need, I don't have (money), I am ... I don't know what." But we are not used to this kind of thing. Even when we have nothing at all, we say that we have and thank God .

This is a woman who sleeps through the morning to forget about breakfast.

Apart from the rather negative image of the social worker and the procedures followed, a more grave complaint was made. One person explained that he saw what happened to a woman granted L.E.3 per month when she came into the office to get the money. The employee who handed the money to her said, "And where is my hallawa or tip?". She handed him P.T.50 since he was a respectable muwazaf or bureaucrat and cannot be given less. Then a second employee said, "And do I go with nothing?". So she handed him P.T.25. She was left with L.E.2.25 to live on for the month. Apparently, the same thing happens each time she cashed her grant. Another person told a similar story of corruption, and was ready to take the researcher to the office in question to examine what was going on. He said that, as a migrant from a Canal city, he had been entitled to a monthly

allowance. A group of employees of a certain office of Social Affairs had agreed together to invent names of supposed migrants from the Canal cities. Together they issued cards in these names with which they cashed the money allocated for these imaginary families. They signed as the deported people and divided the money among them. For years this provided them with a good sum each month.

Accounts such as these, of corruption and lack of concern, contribute to the poor's feelings of hopelessness. Nevertheless, they still try, and some do get a few pounds for a few months. The current social security plans hope to cover all elements of the population that have no property or adequate pension. However, when it comes to the self-employed peddler and the daily-worker it still leaves much to be desired. It is still based on monthly contributions which these groups and the destitute cannot afford.

## 2. Role of Religious Institutions

### Help through Mosques

Some religious institutions, e.g. mosques, churches and Waqfs, provide help to the poor. Opinions are divided as to the regularity of the help provided by mosques.

Mosques provide money and meat during the major religious feasts of the small and big Bairam. Apparently this help comes from private sources who give charity to the poor. They give it to the mosques for distribution. As the poor know that mosques give assistance in the form of food and money, they go there for help. Thus, during Ramadan or the Islamic month of fasting, an informant reported that the poor "would gather in the mosque and break their fast every day. People would send them trays of food and they would eat, and whatever remains is distributed to

them to take home". This is repeated during other religious feasts or Mawāssem. The rich "may give money or a sheep, and the mosque would distribute them". The distributor responsible for these donations is the Sheikh of the Mosque.

Some poor declare that, "No Mosque gives anything here in the area". Still others complained of corruption among the employees responsible. One poor man said:

"No. If I get it [i.e. help], the employees eat it up. We had made a Gamia [credit group] for the tombs [i.e. for funerals] and they took P.T.5 per month from each, but the employee who collected it would ask, 'Don't you want help? I'll get you L.E.2, you take L.E.1 and I take L.E.1' i.e. he has to gain something out of this employment".

Obviously, Mosques in poor areas have less to give than Mosques in rich areas, since it is the inhabitants of an area who usually give the donations. However, in general, it seems that more donations of food reach the poor than donations of money.

Some of the poor said that money donations are more often than not used to repair or improve the Mosque rather than given to the poor. One poor woman said, "If the Mosque needs anything, it is he [a certain person in the area] who takes care of it, but to look after someone who is poor like us, No!". Her shack was right against the wall of the mosque.

### Help through Churches

No Christians live in Der-El-Sabbakin, but there are many churches in Old Cairo that provide help for the poor. Usually, they have a list of poor families and dispense monthly grants to them that are slightly more than those of Social Affairs. The churches rely on private donations, major annual bazars and sometimes smaller sales. Frequently, various women's clubs hold bazars, each in its turn, and divide the profits among



various churches to support these families. Research in other areas indicated that the Churches in rich areas get more donations than those in poor areas. This leaves the poor who are more numerous in latter areas with less donations.

### Help through Waqfs

A third type of religious institution that gives help to the poor is money that comes from the Ministry of Al-Awqaf. Property donated to the Awqaf provides income which is distributed in terms of

"monthly pensions to poor families ... to students and families suffering from calamities or unable to meet social obligations as, for example, the expenses of marriages, funerals, etc. In 1973, the ministry allocated the amount of L.E.325,000 for the above types of need".

(Kamel, 1976)

None of the cases studied in this other area had applied to this institution.

One non-religious institution gives money to the poor, this is the Child Care Centre. However, this institution helps mothers of young children rather than other categories. It gives them powder milk, cooking butter, flour and various foods that come as aid from international organizations. The purpose is to encourage family planning.

## B. Informal Institutions

### 1. Private Charity in Koranic Laws

In a country where the majority is formed of Muslims, it is important to refer to the beliefs underlying private charity grants. The Koran urges the rich to give to the poor by making charity an obligation: This is one of the five pillars of Islam. The obligation is repeated in various Koranic verses. One verse from Surat Al Isr's says....

And give the Kinsman his due,  
And the needy and the wayfarer".

Another says that the rich are those, "In whose wealth there is a right acknowledged, for the beggar and the destitute". (Surat Al-Macoarij'). (Kamel, 1976: 29). Injunctions cover obligation to help not only relatives, but also "the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbour who is not of kin". (Surat Nisa 4/36) (Kamel, 1976: 30).

In old Islamic practice, a zakat was given to the poor, i.e. "an annual tax on the capital of the rich to create a fund for the relief of the impoverished" (Kamel, 1976: 31). The zakat consisted of a quarter of a tenth of a person's capital. Devout Moslems still follow this injunction and some will give monthly sums to poor families that amount to that percentage of their income. However, such help is given within the neighbourhood, as therein lies their first obligation. Consequently, Der-El-Sabbakin gets private help monthly from the Island of Roda, just across the Nile. One informant said, "From Roda, there are rich people who come and give money and clothes". Another said, "I know people who give something to the poor every month, they go to them monthly. They give them a pay, but here people are very bad". This remark refers to people in the area of Old Cairo some of whom are "said to be very rich" yet do not give help to the poor.

## 2. Help from Private Organisations

Sometimes, private institutions, like factories, give charity out of their own production. One factory was reported as making donations. A woman said, "It is a factory of damur<sup>1</sup> here at the entrance of the hara. During the big Bairam, they give them (the poor) meat and money, and at the small Bairam, they give them clothes, galabiyas". This, the woman

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1. A thick cotton material used for covering cushions or mattresses but also used for galabiyas because of its resistance.

explained is the zakat given by the factory.

### 3. Help from the Neighbourhood

The poor have formed their own informal institutions for helping one another. As mentioned earlier, when <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein died, the whole quarter joined together to give him a respectable funeral. Everyone knew he was living on charity. Fateh reported that one ironer, who was from Der, and worked in Roda had nothing when he died. Again each one gave what he could for the funeral and an amount for his widow. They believe that this would win them Sawab or grace with God, and they also would be provided for when their last hour came. People like <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein could rely on the inhabitants of the hara to provide him with a proper meal on Fridays, feast days and whenever anyone had some tabich (cooked food) to spare. They also believe that to he who gives, God will return it two-fold. One woman who often gave <sup>Ā</sup>Am Hassanein a meal said, "Am Hassanein taught me that when one gives, he will find that God will grant him the double". This woman lived on subsistence level. In fact, given the little they have, the poor appear to be relatively more charitable than the rich, whatever their belief may be.

Thus, formal institutions like the Social Affairs Ministry, and the Waqfs appear to provide little to very few— No doubt due to their limited budgets. Mosques and Churches rely heavily on private donations. Der-El-Sabbakin's share of this help appears to be insignificant, and certainly not enough to allow the poor to rely upon it to meet their needs. Private charities seem to be more forthcoming in terms of money or materials for clothing. This helps to explain the absence of clothing from their stated budgets. When asked to explain the somewhat mysterious phrase "God provides", in answer to queries about how they get their clothes, they

refer to charity and what they often like to call "a present".<sup>1</sup> The poor, then, have little choice but to utilise informal institutions and their own means, in order to, as they say, "keep going".

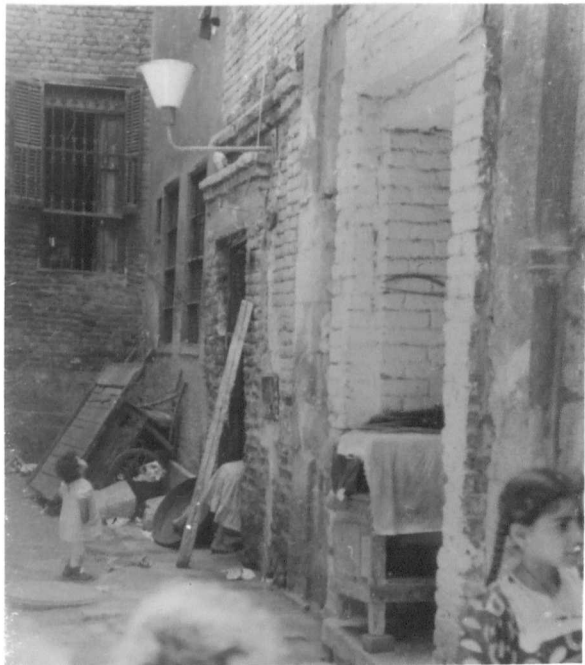
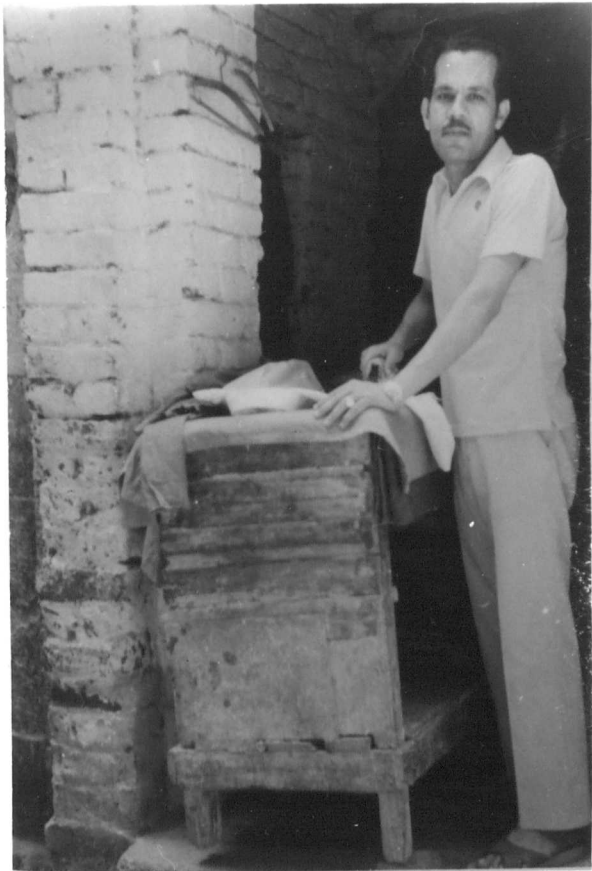
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1. The whole institution of charity as seen by the poor is tackled in more detail within the frame of their "Social Construction of Poverty".

Fateh: Ironing just within his staircase on a table of odd bits of wood. He is accessible to any passer-by. (1979).

The entrance to Fateh's dead-end alley or atfah. The first door shows his table. The second entrance belongs to another poor respondent whose broken cart is seen lying in the corner.

Fateh and his two daughters in front of their house. The condition of the houses and alley are obvious.



CHAPTER EIGHT: LIFE-STYLES AND PATTERNS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A description of the daily round of activities of four households is used here to give a more rounded picture of the life-styles, everyday activities and problems of the urban poor. For this purpose, care has been taken to use, wherever possible, the same cases throughout the thesis for the illustrations provided here. From the intricacies of their daily existence, an attempt has been made to identify the common features and patterns in the life of the poor. However, variations must also be respected, since they involve the essence of empirical reality, and represent particular styles of dealing with specific circumstances.

1. Their Daily Round

a. The Self-employed Skilled Worker and the Employed Janitor

Amal and Fateh are the couple who work. They live in two small rooms, one on the ground floor and one on the first floor. Furniture corresponds to the two-room model. Fateh is a self-employed skilled ironer or irza'i as he has no shop and his income depends on daily circumstances. Amal works as a janitor in a Club and has a fixed, though low, monthly wage. She has to be there by 8.30 a.m. Their two daughters have to be at school by the same time. They begin their day at about 7 a.m. Amal prepares the children's breakfast, and sandwiches for their lunch. All three rush off around 8 a.m., she to her work, and the girls to school. Amal takes the metro while the girls walk. Fateh drags about as all he has to do is go downstairs and start ironing on the staircase. He may wear trousers and shirt, or stay in his pyjamas. He does not usually have much work to do. Sometimes, the ironer at Roda sends a child to tell him that he will be needed the next day to do some work. If Fateh goes,

he is paid a wage daily. If he finishes his ironing early, before Amal and the children arrive home, he may drop in on a friend for a chat.

At 3 p.m. Amal returns home, at the peak rush-hour, in the overcrowded metro, tired and flushed. She usually buys vegetables on her way home. She takes a cold shower and changes her trouser-suit into a more casual galabiyah dress, with a kerchief on her hair. She cooks dinner quickly, before the girls come from school. At about 4.30 p.m. the girls arrive, change their uniform into the dress and trousers that they wear at home and begin their homework, working on their parents' bed. They have no desk. When dinner is ready, about 5 p.m., they all eat; their meals correspond closely to the model<sup>1</sup> presented earlier. The girls go back to their homework. Amal tidies up, hand-washing their clothes, bed sheets or cotton carpets, in a basin, before making preparations for the next day's meal, e.g. cleaning vegetables or grains, she then goes down to watch T.V. until bedtime. After the meal, her husband irons, if any extra work comes in. Usually, when the girls are home, he sends them with the ironed clothes telling them what cash they are supposed to collect. The girls never object even if they have homework to do. If anyone comes with any ironing that is required urgently, he does it at once, if it is not urgent, it is put aside for the next day.

Friends, neighbours and relations keep dropping in after 5 p.m. If men, they call on Fateh, he either goes outside to talk to them, if he does not want them to come in, or he asks them to come in. They sit in the living-room/bedroom, which is the girl's bedroom. There is an important exchange of services between them. For instance, he has a cousin

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1. As in Chapter 5, see the Two Days Model of a Food Budget.



who works at the gamia and gets them the items they need, instead of queuing like others, daily. If a woman drops in, she usually greets him, then sits and talks with Amal. This does not mean that Fateh will not participate in the conversation. Sometimes, a person says, "I came in to see you and to watch some T.V." If the T.V. is not on, they immediately switch it on. After a short time Amal usually goes to make tea for everyone, even if the others have only just been served. Visitors who are already there must call after her, saying they cannot drink another glass, otherwise she will get them one without asking. If she is tired, she may ask her elder daughter to make tea, but more often she will do it herself. It is unusual to offer anything with tea, as biscuits are only made for feasts, and the poor cannot afford them. The tea is served black and very sweet, it is not left to the visitors to add sugar. If the T.V. is on, they may comment on what they see, otherwise they discuss personal problems, news they have heard about a neighbour or relative, talk about food items that have come into the cooperative or Gamia that day, or talk about their children's exams or future prospects, e.g. study, work or marriage. On Mondays, Fateh takes his holiday. It is the acknowledged official holiday for ironers. One Monday the researcher witnessed several people dropping in, among whom was a young man. The young man was a friend of Fateh who was not invited in. Another was a woman, a peddler who brought Amal 2½ kilos of green mint and was chided for getting so much. She then sat and watched T.V. Fateh, jokingly, blamed her for insulting her husband by leaving him, and refusing to make peace. To which the woman replied, that her husband would have to take the first step because he was at fault. The upstairs neighbour, whose husband is a janitor, came in with her baby to watch T.V.; she lives in one small room. She sat on the floor cross-legged, gave the

child her breast, and helped Amal pick the mint leaves off their stem. All the while she chatted and watched T.V. <sup>ċ</sup>Am Mohamed, an Upper Egyptian construction worker lives in a cell they rent to him for a few piastres, dropped in and watched T.V. There were nine persons in that small room. Amal decided to visit a lady neighbour who had been ill for a few days. She put on her melayyah, or black sheet which is wrapped all over the body to cover it, and left. Meanwhile, the young woman with the baby asked Fateh to join her in a gamia, where everyone would pay L.E.3 every 10 days. Fateh appeared thoughtful but did not answer. He was unable to afford such a gamia. The conversation then turned to hashish. Fateh took it occasionally and the young woman's father was a hashish dealer. By the time that Amal returned, the mint peddler and the construction worker had left. When the researcher left at 9.30 p.m., the young woman was still there, with the baby at her breast, picking the mint with Amal. The children could not go to bed, as everyone was in the room where they slept.

It should be noted that, Fateh and Amal represent the more "modernized" of the baladi families in Der-El-Sabbakin and have become better-off since Amal began work. However, their main problems still centre around their daily food. Amal had gone out to work only when Fateh's income became insufficient (after the monthly grant of L.E.9 to Canal refugees was stopped). The researcher was there on the day the electricity bill came. As the bill was for two months instead of the usual one month, it was a rather heavy one. Fateh came in without his usual smile, looking rather pale. He threw the bill in Amal's lap in an angry gesture and said drily, "See what you're going to do about this!". I understood then that he did not have the money. Amal looked taken-aback, annoyed, and almost guilty said, "Alright. Leave it". It was early in the month, and she had just been paid.

They still had to cover all the month's expenses. They paid monthly instalments on their latest acquisition, a refrigerator. Fateh was peeved that it was she who would have to pay the bill. His manly dignity as head of the household was hurt. Cultural values dictate that a man must provide for his family, otherwise he is not a worthy man. These values act as yet another pressure on Fateh, in addition to his material worries. Amal, in addition to her work inside and outside the house, and her financial worries, has to manipulate delicate situations in order to save his feelings.

In general, Amal and Fateh make an exceptionally good couple and appear to understand each other. Yet in their daily life, Amal always seems under tension due to her fear of losing her husband. She often tells him, "Mind you don't marry another woman, O Fateh". She is particularly worried since she has not begotten him a son. She is afraid of any woman neighbour who shows the slightest interest in him. Once she reported a terrible quarrel with a female divorced neighbour who was always at the window and whom Amal was convinced was after Fateh. Fateh's attitude in response is not quite reassuring. He remains calm and either ignores her comments, or smiles and does not answer. He appears flattered and never says that he would not do such a thing. It does not seem to occur to Amal to demand an answer from him. Yet, Fateh's observed behaviour is impeccable, although women in the quarter often stand and joke with him while he irons. He responds wittily but never leaves any doubt but that he enjoys humour and it ends there. His only 'crazy dream', he says to his wife is to 'spend one night with Warda, a popular singer, and die'.

Amal has a serious kidney infection and the physician advised her to have a complete rest and forbade another pregnancy. The researcher

observed numerous instances when Amal went to work even though she felt sick and could not eat. Amal was afraid of losing her job, particularly since she had not had it long. She exposed her health, in a "dangerous" way, as the physician told her, yet she would not rest. In afternoons when she is back home, she does the washing by hand, even when she has fever. She is afraid that the 'house' work will accumulate and that she will be unable to do it. She never thinks to ask her husband's help, nor does he offer. Here again, traditional values do not permit a man to do the housework, especially in baladi areas. Amal intimated her exhaustion and pains to the researcher several times, although she is not the type who complains. In the past, her favourite recreation was the cinema, but now her only recreation is T.V. and visits to neighbours. She says that she is so tired now that she prefers to go to bed rather than watch T.V. The improvement in the family's conditions have been obtained at the expense of her health. Her great hope is that her eldest daughter may become a chemist and be well-paid in a shop. Her second ambition is to move into a nice apartment, larger and in a better area, as she despises this house which, she says, circumstances have forced them to inhabit. Fateh believes that what a person is, is more important than what he has. Being dignified, respected and free puts him above his circumstances. In fact, in his behaviour, he never stoops to gain something.

Fateh rarely goes to the coffee-house, he prefers to stay at home with his family. Amal is also an exceptional kind of woman in this area. She is a nice and witty conversationalist, conversing with her husband and his friends. Other women in the area do not appear to be on such conversational terms with their husbands. Even if they do not go to the coffee-house, other husbands rarely address their wives, except to give an order, a message, or to pass a remark, as in the case of Nefissah and Rashad.

Others never stay at home, as in the case of Dawlat's husband. Amal has also a good relationship with her husband's brothers and sisters, who find her very clever. Her opinion is respected by them and by Fateh, who leaves her free to do what she wants.

Both Amal and Fateh provide good care for their two daughters. Amal believes her daughters are the loveliest and most intelligent in the world. She often tells Fateh, "The nail of your daughter is better than a thousand Wardas". He laughs and says, "This is a mother talking. There is nothing like a mother's tenderness". Amal and Nema, his sister, praise him, "He is tender. He was always tender with his mother, and he is tender with his family". Tenderness is an appreciated quality in the Egyptian poor family. Meanwhile, Nema helps her brother when needed. The family all stand by one another in time of need. Nema paid Fateh's debt when he went to Libya and returned in debt. She paid for large repairs done to the house. In return, she expects concern, and small services which Fateh is always ready to provide. This is typical of kin support in Der and other areas.

#### b. The Life-Style of a Street Peddler

Zeinab, the sweets dealer, lives with her mother and her brother's family. She shares a room with his children and her mother. Zeinab shares the rent and contributes L.E.3 for her own and her mother's meals. At first, she kept their meals separate, but two years later, she began contributing and sharing dinner only. Traditionally, her brother is responsible for his mother. She and Dawlat do not like each other but co-exist. After breakfast, Zeinab does her shopping for their meals and for her trade. Dawlat would ask her to buy vegetables on her way back.

The following account is of one day which is more or less typical of

her daily round. Zeinab had gone to the market to get her merchandise from the dealer and came home about 11.15 a.m. She had bought three or four nylon bags full of sweets. She sat on her high four-poster bed, cross-legged, produced her money from a nylon sack and began counting it. She counted her packs of sweets and put them in order. As she did so, her two grand-nephews jumped on the bed, making a lot of noise. She occasionally scolded them gruffily, and went back to her thinking and counting. She took a loaf of bread, which presumably formed part of her lunch, and put it in a nylon sack. She had various mysterious packs which she kept rolling and unrolling, peering into them and thinking deeply. She sat there for about half an hour. Then she pulled her merchandise from under the bed (a place often used to store things) - there on top of a big basket lay a black square metal tray, the traditional type used for baking in large ovens. It was covered with a cotton sheet, once white but now grey, smeared and dusty. It was awkward to carry. Her old mother bent and held the big tray on one side with both hands, and both women swung it up on to Zeinab's head and held it there. Zeinab held it with both hands and adjusted its balance. At 12 o'clock sharp Zeinab, with her heavy weight, went down the narrow creaking wooden stairs, and walked to her spot in the main hara. She was followed by children who gathered round. Sometime after 1 p.m. she had produced bread and stuffed it with white cheese or green vegetable and ate it.

Zeinab sat there from 12 noon to 5 p.m., when the sun set. Before it got dark, she gathered her merchandise and left. There was no electricity in their building, and she had to get home before it got completely dark. Back home, she ate dinner with the family. Her mother cleaned the vegetables as she sat in the corridor. Otherwise, Zeinab may eat some ful medames, or ready-cooked beans, which she would boil on her primus

stove, add some lemon and oil if she has any, and eat them with her mother. Then, she may go to a neighbour to watch T.V., or stay home and listen to her nieces. By 10 p.m., she is in bed. The nieces sit and study by the light of the kerosene lamp. Zeinab's problems, apart from those of getting along with her mother and sister-in-law, are mainly material ones. Her income is so small that she can hardly get the food she needs. Although she is among the poorest in the area, Zeinab appears to have her condition under control. She knows how much she makes each day and buys only what she can afford. Her meals are very frugal indeed, consisting mainly of bread with some ghumuss. When she needs a dress, she has to go on an "economy drive" to save the P.T.1 or 2 per day to make up the P.T.10 or 15 to give to the dalalah each week. The seamstress charges about P.T.15 to make the galabiyah. Zeinab never complains. She takes her condition for granted. Her legs ached from hours of sitting cross-legged at her trade. Her pain was evident in the way she grimaced and moved back and forth holding her thigh. Whenever the researcher asked how she was able to manage, she always answered gruffly, "And what else can I do?". The only thing she ever complained about was her mother's authoritarian attitude towards her, and Dawlat's 'hardness of heart' towards her. She had one regret, the loss of the only 'loving' sister she had. But she loves her nieces and cuddles the youngest (see photograph). Her sense of dignity is very strong, and this is what prevents her from whining or complaining. She never intimated that she felt lesser than anyone in the hara because she is poorer, or in fact the poorest.

c. The Daily Wage Earner and the Multiple-Trade Person

Dawlat, Zeinab's sister-in-law, has more to do within the house as she has a large family. Her husband and son have to leave early to go

to their jobs. Her husband had not come home on the previous night, and she was not quite sure whether he had really slept in the garage used as a warehouse by the woman for whom he works, whether he got too drunk to come home, or whether there was another woman. He does this rather frequently. In his presence, Dawlat becomes very bitter, puts his food on the floor and leaves him alone. Her son works in the Social Bank Nasser, running errands. He is the one who has epileptic fits. He has his main meal when he comes home but often does not like it and eats out with most of his salary. This reflects the quality of the home food. He is the only one of the family who is plump, the rest are skinny and very pale. Her two daughters go to school. One is already in her first year of Secondary Commercial School, the other is still in Preparatory School. However, as it was the end of April, the final exams were to take place in a week's time, they had a holiday for studying.

The grandmother sat silently cross-legged on the floor. She appeared to be very weak. One of her eyes had gone white, the other appeared to be weak, but when Dawlat came in with the vegetables and washed them and brought them to the old lady, she came out into the open-air corridor to help clean them. They put the vegetables on the ground on newspaper, and both sat cross-legged and began to prepare them for cooking as they chatted. The five pigeons Dawlat owned walked about the corridor and into the rooms. She decided they had taken enough air and sunshine, and put them back in their cage. She brought out the new-born chicks from another cage and made a fence against the wall, with a basket covered with a rug to give them shade, and gave them sand and water. She said the sand roughened their intestines and made them stronger, she would sell her chickens and pigeons when there was a demand or when she needs the money. Dawlat also cleaned molokhia, or Jew's mallow, which she was



preparing to cook for her eldest daughter who had just had a baby. She would cook it and take it to her in a pot. Her other daughter's children were playing in Zeinab's room. They made so much noise that the conversation was drowned by their screams. The girls often complained that they could not study because of them. Dawlat suddenly turned to her elder daughter and said loudly "Come on, O Naima, get the injection from inside and catch Fahd first", referring to the little boy. The children screamed, frightened and began crying. They all ran downstairs, throwing their slippers at their grandmother and refused to return to pick them up. The two older women appeared relieved and went on picking the mallow leaves off their stems. A little boy came up the stairs and said he wanted to borrow a pen. Her daughter lent him a pen. Just then, the grandchildren returned. Dawlat shouted "You came back, you children of a dog? Go back". The little girl laughed, but they went downstairs. As she cleaned the vegetables, Dawlat told the researcher the story of how she married off her two eldest daughters, how she made up their trousseau and how she helps people so that God sends people who help her. When they had finished with the vegetables, they were spread on the paper in the sun to dry. Dawlat's daughter said "The children are crying in the street", she changed her clothes to go down to find out. She put a scarf on her hair and went down for a few minutes and was soon back to study having discovered that they had quarrelled with a neighbour's children. The grandmother brought a curved knife and began cutting the mallow into tiny pieces. Dawlat wore her good black velvet traditional dress and prepared her money to go to a different market to get some vegetables that she could sell. She left and returned about 1½ hours later, changed into her dusty old black dress, which she wears on top of her coloured dress, and took her basket with the vegetables to sell them in the main hara, squatting in the shade. On other

occasions, she went to the gamia to queue for oil, or sugar, or meat or fish. Often, she would go from one gamia to the other to see where they got fish or meat. She would go from one pedlar to the other for vegetables to get the cheapest. The researcher often went with her. She was on talking relationships with all of them, in her engaging bitter-sweet way.

Usually, when the girls go to school, they return at 5.45 p.m. That day, the younger girl went to school in the afternoon for "special group lessons", devised for those who think they are weak in a particular subject. The food was prepared and left in pots. Each person lunches at a different time. Whenever the father returns, he eats. He never returns before 1 a.m. 'because he drinks'. Dawlat sometimes leaves her merchandise with Zeinab, while she goes home to complete a meal and eat quickly and return. She squats in the hara beside Zeinab until she sells all she has. In the evening, she may go to a neighbour to watch T.V. or chat, or remains at home. She is always going up and down, and is rather restless. The girls stay home to study or they may go with her.

It is work or study which seems to give some order to their lives, otherwise, they all do what they want in their own time. One rule is always kept, the girls must always tell their mother where they are going. Dawlat is afraid for them, since a girl from the hara stopped to drink a coke at a kiosk outside the hara and woke up to find she had been raped. A narcotic had been put in the coke. So she forbade them to go anywhere alone.

Dawlat carries the full responsibility for managing the household money. She makes sure that there is food and clothing for the family, and covers the expenses of education. Her husband only gives her P.T.20 a day and does not want to be bothered with the rest (two years later, he made it P.T.50). He takes decisions only when it comes to a suitor for

his daughters. Having married his two older daughters to government employees, to make sure they would enjoy a secure life, he decided he wanted the two younger ones to have an education and work. The two elder daughters were only sent to school for a couple of years and were practically illiterate. Dawlat was annoyed, as she thought that by marrying the two younger girls, she would be relieved of most of her responsibilities, since her husband and son were out all day. The money which came from her husband, together with some from her son, would be sufficient. She would not have to work, and rush about continually. She also wanted to know that they would be provided for and would not suffer her lot. She counts her money all the time, as does Zeinab and Nefissah. She has to make sure she does not spend her very small capital, which she must use for her daily expenses for merchandise.

Dawlat is loved and respected by her daughters. Their dream is that their mother should not be reduced to sitting in the street "with her back to the wall". While the older girl dreamt of work and of helping the family, the younger wanted to either work or "marry a Saudi" so as to help the family. The son appeared to take the situation for granted. He had already been working for years, and he was not very well. The father was largely absent. On the rare occasions when he was home, he was silent. For the girls he was someone whose approval was needed in critical decisions, but they also believed that he was someone who could be convinced, but it took time. As far as he was concerned, he was working and giving them what he believed to be enough. The rest was his life, and no one appeared to know exactly what he did with it.

Keeping Shop at Home and Small Employees Life-style

Nefissah presents a slightly different pattern of daily life, as her commerce takes place at home. They are a family of five. Their apartment is shared with two other tenants who each have a room. Rashad and Nefissah rent two rooms and a hall as well as a small room which they have turned into a kitchen, as the house has no kitchen and no water supply. A door separates them from the two other rented rooms. As the apartment has two entrance doors, they use one and the other tenants use the other. The hall became Nefissah's shop, here clients came to buy food. The hall is totally empty except for a sofa, in the corner near the windows where the half paralyzed Rashad sat almost all day. There is a table on which four water-pots stand to keep the water cold and where any food she wants to keep fresh is put. Windows and doors are kept open all day long.

Nefissah, Rashad and their daughter, Samia, all share the same bedroom. The room has a four-poster bed used by the couple while the daughter sleeps on a sofa. The large cupboard used by all five members is insufficient, and so the four-poster bed's railings, which were originally made to hold a mosquito net, are used as a rack on which all kinds of clothes are hung. The space under the bed is used to stack dirty linen and the family's shoes. This room is separated from the one adjacent by a curtain. The other room, which was only recently rented by the working son has a wooden double-bed with two night tables, a sofa, a desk and a chair. The desk has a mirror and is used as a dressing table too. There is a rug on the floor and curtains. It is clear that the son spent some money on getting this furniture which looks lower middle-class. The two sons sleep in this room. A year earlier, all of them had slept in the parent's room. The windows of the kitchen and parent's room are blocked by a wall which leaves only 20 cm at the top that let in some light and air. This wall was built by a neighbouring house that

wanted to protect itself from theft. The two other families that share their apartment use the corridor for washing and cooking. All eleven persons share the w.c.

Nefissah's day begins at dawn when she wakes up to boil the beans and belilah. Her husband gets up to wash and pray. She prepares his tea and breakfast on a tray, then washes the dishes and sits at her two pots in the hall to receive her clients. Usually the two working children go to work. One observed morning, Samia was the first of the children to wake up. She went to the w.c. and was scolding a neighbour's son, who shared their apartment, because he had put the water container on the floor of the w.c.<sup>1</sup> The 11 year old boy cried loudly and ran out of the apartment and was not seen again that day. Nefissah mumbled to Samia not to anger his mother, but Samia was furious and went back to the bedroom. His mother, Om Ashraf soon came out. She was separated from her husband, and worked as a maid mostly in Roda, for a daily wage of P.T.50. She complained that this, her younger son was "hopeless", "a school drop out" who ran away from the mechanic's shop where she had put him as an apprentice. His father who is married to a second wife, rejects him. Nefissah's married daughter Battah dropped in with her young son just as Om Ashraf complained about the electricity bill, which she shared with Nefissah and a third family in the apartment. Om Ashraf had both a T.V. and radio, and Battah commented casually that she forgets them on all day, even when away.

As she prepared tea, Nefissah said she could not find sugar in the Gamia these days, and their tea ration was never sufficient, as Rashad drank tea

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1. Samia, who has her Secondary Certificate in Commerce, has distinct notions of hygiene and was aware of the consequences. This container had to be plunged in the bastilla to get water, the same water used for cooking and washing kitchen ware.

all day. She said she could not get white cheese from the Gamia except by "beating and quarrelling". Om Ashraf commented that sometimes on Fridays, she could not find bread after noon. Samia came in dressed in a shirt and a skirt, with a dish of beans and a loaf of baladi bread, and said, "You are welcome to join me". Om Ashraf said teasingly, "But you have only one loaf!". Samia replied embarrassed, "Excuse me, but we don't have another". Om Ashraf rose, went in and returned dressed in her black galabiyah and left for her job. All the time, children came to buy beans. Nefissah filled a box with beans and gave it to Samia to hand to a client on her way to the shop where she worked.

Nefissah kept going into the boys' room to wake them up, but they would not. Usually, the older son goes to work about 8.30 a.m., but he had taken the day off to get a passport, and had overslept. The head of the third family sharing their apartment came and gave her the key of her room which she hung on a nail, and left. Now that all had gone and the boys slept, she went to do her morning toilet. A larger number of flies stood on the floor. When her two grandchildren came, she asked the little girls to buy leeks for P.T.1. She had put a large pot of water on the primus stove, and called the boys again. The older son woke up and took the pot to the w.c. to have a bath. Her granddaughter called from the hara that a neighbour's daughter was throwing stones at them. Nefissah ordered her to come up immediately before they got hurt, but said nothing to the mischievous child.

The younger boy woke up and went to the kitchen, squatted before the basin and washed his face, then went to his parents' room to get dressed. While Nefissah prepared breakfast, pouring some oil on a plate of beans, she commented, "I got this bottle (1 litre) four days ago and already it is finishing. It cost P.T.32. It was half that price". The breakfast tray

for the boys was now ready; A plate of beans, a small piece of white cheese, which had cost her P.T.5, and four loaves of baladi bread. She took it into their bedroom and they sat on a baladi sofa with the tray between them. While they ate, she prepared tea, pouring sugar into the teapot. She complained about rising costs; her irritation with the Social Affairs, who had refused to give her husband and herself a pension and the fact that Samia was still waiting for the government job promised to school graduates, which would give her double the income she was getting for less hours. The boys returned the tray. The plate of beans was half-full, since ghumuss makes food stretch. One loaf remained. She made sandwiches for her grandchildren out of it. She said she would eat some fried potatoes or mish cheese with bread. But on that day, she ate no breakfast. She just cleaned the bean pot with a morsel of bread and ate it.

The younger boy took his books and went to his Secondary Technical School. Nefissah waited for the older one to finish his noontime prayers before she cleaned the room. She commented, "They tell me, we have to train you to pray. But I don't know, I work all day and I don't take anyone's money". As she made the beds she said to her son, "Give me one pound, by the Prophet! , You have to. I have no money to get food". But he went out. Soon Battah was back. Nefissah told her eldest granddaughter, who is about nine, to buy bread, two potatoes and two litres of petrol. She gave her P.T.7 and told her the petrol man owed her P.T.2 from the previous day. A few minutes later a neighbour's grown-up daughter came with bread she had bought for them, 18 loaves for P.T.9. Nefissah put newspaper in a pot and put the bread in, wrapping the paper over it. Her morning work was completed, now she had to buy the vegetables. When she goes out she also buys the beans and rice for her trade. As usual, she had her capital about P.T.72, plus

her gain of about P.T.20. This gain had to suffice for their meal, since her son would not give her money. Usually, Rashad held the money that his son gave to help. But Rashad had gone to the village for a few days, "to eat good food at his sister's". On that day, Nefissah complained that, Rashad ordered her about and criticized her, that her sons always found fault with her, did not try to help her and do not appreciate the fact that she does everything for them, only Samia does. However tired she is, they ask her to make tea when their friends come. She appears to have neither authority nor influence over them. Nefissah runs around in her one and only galabiyah dress, worn upside down, needing another to be able to wash this one. Rashad says that a housewife must necessarily wear dirty clothes since she does the housework, yet he himself is always dressed cleanly. While she had no time to wash her face once during the day, he washes his face, hands and feet five times a day to do his prayers. So do his sons. Nefissah scratches herself all the time. She says she is very tired and unhappy with her life. While Rashad reads the newspaper, sips tea, and smokes, analyzing the situation in the country, and relating it to the conditions they suffered. Nefissah almost envied him his invalidity. The children eat when they return from school or work. The eldest son usually returns from his office about 2.30 p.m., while Samia returns at 3 p.m. The younger son has his meal when he returns in the evening. Again Nefissah has to serve each one. She eats what remains of her children's food, though she says that at lunch, she eats with them. Nefissah tries to cook once every two days, to save money and effort. Their meals correspond closely to the model diet. Unlike Dawlat who goes to the slaughterhouse for cheap animal remains, Nefissah is too tired to do so. They rarely eat meat. Rashad often complained that he was tired of eating beans. He liked meat, and they were not even raising poultry.



After her meal at 3 p.m., Samia takes the bastilla and fills it with water for 24 hours. On that day, she went back and forth four times. She swept the hall with a short-handled broom, then wiped it with water using a piece of old sack-cloth. Samia changed into a straight cotton dress to do this work, then changed into her nice clothes to return to the shop at 5 p.m. It is her way of saving on clothes.

Nefissah filled the four water earth-pots kept for drinking. She does not waste a drop of water. The water used by the boys for their morning wash is used to wipe the kitchen floor. One water basin is used to wash all the breakfast dishes, then it is thrown into the w.c. to clean it. Having no water connection in the house requires much extra effort and organisation to save water. Water costs P.T.2 a day, which makes P.T.60 a month. People who have water at home pay this amount for two months, and use much more water.

Samia works till 10 p.m. and returns to help her mother with the laundry. The men are always changing their clothes. While the women do the washing, the beans and belilah cook on the primus stove. Both of them go to sleep late at night, and never seem to get enough rest. Unlike some others, Nefissah has no time for recreation, and only makes necessary visits, even though her husband's niece had a T.V. and lived in the next hara.

The men appear to have a better life. The eldest son whose work ends at 2 p.m. usually sleeps after lunch, and meets his friends in the evening, or may go to a cinema. To all outside appearances, he leads the life of a middle-income employee. He wears a galabiyah robe for sleep and relaxing at home. He wears his good clothes to go to work or meet his friends. All the children dress well considering their condition, and it is impossible to guess from their appearance that their budget is strained. The younger

son sleeps late in the morning, and wakes up just on time to get ready for school. On his return, he studies or meets with his friends. His school is a long way off, so he has to take a bus. As each member of the family work, he only worries about his studies, but he is aware of his mother's efforts. His dream is to go to university and become an engineer.

The elder son is a dissatisfied and impatient young man, he is tired of being poor and is trying his best to improve his condition. At that time, he was trying desperately to find a job abroad. The only person he seemed to respect was his father, yet the father complained that his son would not listen to his advice, because he thinks his father is "old-fashioned". It was clear the father was reluctant to see him go away. Yet it was this that was later to bring some relief to the family.

The older son has a strange relation with his mother. He orders his mother about like his father and appears to despise her. She says that once she fell on the stove and burnt her arm, he never even came to ask how she felt. It was observed that he never talked to her, or answered when she talked to him. He appears to be ashamed of her being his mother. He is rather curt with every one in general. The younger boy is very sociable and cheerful. He is kind to his mother, though he expects her to serve him. When she burnt her arm, he ran to the pharmacy and brought her ointment and was most concerned. He also plays with his nephew and nieces, while the older boy shouts at them if they come near.

There is always someone coming to borrow something. A relative of Nefissah may borrow her washing basin during the day, another may borrow Samia's clothes. Some neighbours ask Nefissah to keep them some of the bean-water, in which they soak the remains of bread to give to their goat. Nefissah seems to be doing services for everyone all the time. She makes

a distinct effort to maintain good relations with the neighbours who share their apartment, as well as with others. She sends bean water to her upstairs neighbour to feed her goat. Rashad extends counselling advice to them, as he is considered a wise man. He believes that a good word has a lasting effect.

Three years later, the older son went to Italy. A few months later Rashad had another stroke and died. Nefissah's work was greatly reduced. Her son began to send her a small allowance, and told her to stop her trade. With the family reduced to half its size, Nefissah no longer needed the L.E.5 that she obtained monthly from her trade. The last time the researcher saw her, she finally wore a new galabiyah.

#### Common Patterns in their Daily Round

Whatever their individual circumstances among the various cases, certain patterns emerged in the daily round of the inhabitants of the hara. The activity around which their life is patterned is mainly work for adults and school for the young. The second activity around which their life is patterned is the acquisition of food. Work and school determine the time of breakfast and of the main meal on their return home, whether it happens to be at lunch time, in the afternoon, or evening. Meals are not taken together in general, unless they happen to have the same hours. Family members are likely to have dinner together. Generally, food is prepared by the mother, wife, or woman if she lives by herself or with an older parent. It is prepared and left available for whoever happens to come in and wants to eat. If a grandmother lives in the house, she usually helps with the preparation of food. If the woman is at home, or works at home, she usually warms the food and prepares it for the person coming in to eat. She usually eats last. Few families sit in the old traditional way and eat

together out of a common pot or plate, although some still do. This appears to be more common when the children are still young. As they grow and each has his or her hours, the pattern changes.

Most rely on their children to buy breakfast or vegetables. Children may buy things for their parents from the age of 4 years, but at this age they are not allowed to go beyond the pavement just outside the hara. This is an age which, for the educated middle-income parent, would be one where the child is still spoon fed and would never be allowed out of the door unaccompanied. Older children, especially boys, may be sent to the market. However, the pattern is for women to go to the gamia and queue for food. It is farther away and it may be necessary to push or fight their way in. This becomes a frequent hardship, as they rely on it for most of their food, which it is impossible for them to get at high cost, at market prices. They often go daily, each time for a different item, since those living on daily income have no large sums available. Food cannot be stored, since they lack refrigerators.

Friday is a holiday for the majority of people in the hara, unless they are in the laundry or hairdressing business when their holiday is on Mondays. On Fridays, usually all the family have a bath and the women are frequently busy washing after this, unless they keep the washing for the next day. It is usual for all the women of the household to join in the washing, using a large copper or aluminium basin, and squatting or sitting on a low stool before it on the floor. Where a relative or neighbour shares a flat, she may join in the washing. The clothes are boiled in a large tin can or bastilla, then rinsed and hung on a line usually hanging outside a window, balcony, or on a terrace. If the washing is done at night, it is usually kept wet and piled till the next morning, then hung on the washing line. On Fridays, they all cook tabich, as all

the family is present at home, at least until after lunch. They visit relatives in the afternoon.

Usually, a man gives his wife the daily expenses he considers sufficient, keeping the rest for himself. He lets her worry about how to manage with the little he gives. From it, she is supposed to save for their clothes. He pays the rent, electricity and water bills. If she works he may leave the latter to her, depending on the nature of their occupation and the availability of cash. At feasts, she may make more demands on him for food or clothes, sometimes asking him to buy them himself. Women more often than men enter a gamia (credit group) to get clothes for the family. She may tell the husband she wants L.E.1 more per month for the gamia but he may tell her she has to manage it herself since she chose to enter it. The poor must usually "save" out of their daily food to get money for a gamia. It is easier for an employee with a fixed salary to join in one than for an irza'i.

Social life consists mostly of relatives or neighbours dropping in on mornings, afternoons, or evenings. Official visits are reserved for special events like weddings, funerals or feasts. Persons who have a T.V. are likely to be visited in the evenings, when everyone is free to watch. Some men watch T.V. at the coffee-house or meet their friends there to chat or play a game. Those who do not watch T.V. or go to the coffee-house usually go to sleep early.

Some jobs involve working late, particularly apprentices in workshops or workers and employees in commerce. Those with most leisure time are government employees.

Relations between fathers and children are mostly dominated by the father, the children show respect. Relations with the mother involve more love than respect, particularly when the children are sons. Adult sons

seem to show more love and respect to their mother, though there are deviations from this pattern. However, sons always expect mothers to serve them. They are usually trained by the mothers themselves into this way of thinking, and Egypt remains a male dominated culture. However, sons and daughters feel responsible to help a poor parent. Members of a nuclear family take it for granted that they must support one another, at least as long as they share one household. Daughters help the mother in the household and appear to be emotionally more concerned than sons.

Relations between husband and wife usually follow a domination-submission pattern, with the wife manipulating the husband. Husbands do not generally participate in the housework or help with the children even when the wife works. Most wives express the fear that the husband may take a second wife, or divorce to take a second wife, since both law and religion allow it. This fear seems to be ever present even among the closest couples. It appears to mar the relationship, to a certain extent, by breaking trust. Wives believe that the moment a man has any extra money, he will take a new wife, so she must make sure that he is left with as little as possible always. In the case of the poor, this is no problem.

Grandchildren, especially a daughter's children, are often sent to their grandparents to spend a large part of the day. They are often given a meal which puts an additional strain on the budget. However, daughters often send their parents food, if they have cooked a good meal, and vice versa. Thus, whoever has had a good day's gain will share it with the other.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION TO PART II

Part II of this thesis has described and analyzed the everyday life of the urban poor in a Cairo slum. The focus has fallen on the following aspects:

1. The material manifestations of poverty centring around their occupations, sources of income, their difficulties of acquiring and budgeting for food, clothes, education, housing, health, transport and recreation, i.e. the nature of their economic problems was revealed.
2. The institution established by the State to cope with these difficulties, as well as the informal institutions devised by and for the poor, to cope with their unresolved problems. These coping mechanisms help the poor survive. It is important to know how they function.
3. A description of the poor's "daily round", in terms of a typical day in the life of four families, their daily patterns and life-styles.

Concerning the objective or material manifestations of poverty, the hara is in a deteriorated condition and nothing is done to improve the conditions of its alleys nor of its houses, either by the government or inhabitants. Most of the tenants are too poor to make any major repairs. Rents are so low that no proprietor sees it as worthwhile, except where a ceiling falls and must be repaired. In fact, most of the inhabitants, even the wealthier proprietors, were found to be among the lower status groups. These follow a traditional way of life, whose educated children have moved out of the area as soon as they have obtained a good job. Whenever their condition improve inhabitants buy land in other areas, where agricultural land is available and at a cheap price. They build on it and move out of the quarter to live in their new property. Inhabitants of the quarter seem to have a preference for Dar-El-Salaam a few kilometres south of Old Cairo, where there is a building boom, and sometime El-Amraneyah at Guizeh.

No empty land is available for building in Der-El-Sabbakin, except where four houses have fallen and the ruins have been left untouched. The newest building is 15 years old, while the oldest are about 100 years old. This is indicative of the deteriorating condition of the quarter.

With regard to amenities within the house, most buildings were found to have water. Frequently, the only tap is found in the w.c., a mere hole in the ground without a flush. As only 35% of houses in the quarter have a kitchen, often with no sink or tap, the tap in the w.c. remains the only source of water and is used for all purposes, bathing, drinking, washing dishes and cooking. Thus, conditions of sanitation are very bad, in addition to the widespread ignorance of basic notions of hygiene. Infant mortality due to diarrhoea, or gastro-intestinal infections was found to be high in the area. Most poor families were found to have lost at least one or two children, and up to three or four, due to such health hazards. This does not take account of those who got the illness but survived.

Houses were found to be overcrowded, beds used by from one to four persons. Others had to sleep on the floor, under the bed. The same applies to the w.c. and tap, which have to be shared by from 10 to 12 tenants. "Apartments" consisted of more than one family, each living in one or two rooms.

Similar findings were observed in other areas of Old Cairo (e.g. the areas of Al-Anwar). These same objective conditions were also revealed in the area of Athar-El-Nabi, South of Old Cairo, and at Ain Shams, North-east of Cairo, particularly in various quarters of Ain Shams: Ezbet Atef, Kafr-Farouk and Kafr-El-Zahraa. In this last area, there was no overcrowding in the houses, but, on the other hand, more houses were without water and electricity and people had to go to a public tap for water. At



Athar-El-Nabi and Al-Anwar, there were shacks which provided even worse housing conditions, where the winter months became a real ordeal. Luckily rain is infrequent in Cairo, as rainy days mean catastrophe to the inhabitants of shacks. Conditions of haras and housing were found to be similar in Suez, except that here the poor inhabit old houses that have a wooden structure, as used to be common in that city. However, the condition of houses and drainage were worse in Suez than in Cairo due to war damage, but inhabitants had hopes of improvement as the government had promised to pay for such damage. Overcrowding was not evident except among some very poor renting rooms, since many of the evacuated inhabitants had not yet returned.

Concerning the occupation of the inhabitants of Der-El-Sabbakin, workers form a majority, about two thirds of the quarter. Only about a fifth are skilled, working in large industries or in carpentry. About 18% are semi-skilled and 29.3% are unskilled. A small group (8.2%) are professionals with a larger group (12%) are in the army or police. The rest were engaged in petty trades or are self-employed. At any rate, none of the inhabitants occupy high status positions, though some are making good profits from their trade, e.g. owners of kiosks or ready-made food carts. These still live in the same way they lived when they were poorer, except that they eat more meat, their women wear more gold and more expensive materials, though still traditional clothes, and their children wear more modern and better quality clothes. Some may use their income to smoke hashish. It is the children of such people who get a better chance to improve through education, as they can afford the expenses involved.

Concerning the occupations of working individuals taken in the 31 case studies in Der-El-Sabbakin and six other areas of Cairo, the poor's occupations fell into seven types:

- A. Self-employed skilled or semi-skilled working in a poor area (12%)
- B. Self-employed peddlars (16%)
- C. Persons employed in menial jobs (20%)
- D. Persons employed in semi skilled jobs (14%)
- E. Blue-collar state employment (2%)
- F. Disabled and old men who were of pension age, but with no pension (8%)
- G. Widows with several young children who could not work and were dependent on kin or institution help (6%).

Two groups were "working class": workers in heavy industry (6%) and employed skilled workers (16%) though one of the latter, a baker, was poor before he went abroad.

Of these 50 individuals, 36% were unskilled, mainly those in menial jobs and peddlars; 26% were semi-skilled, mainly those in private employment or self-employment, 22% were skilled and were not poor, but working class, and only one (2%) had a secondary education working as a junior clerk. One old woman was a beggar (but not computed because she is the wife of one of the disabled men and on Church support). This analysis indicates that generally, a skill acts as a safeguard against real poverty. In fact, skills proved to be more lucrative than a secondary education, which generally left the person a petty employee with little chance of real material improvement.

About half of the poor cases had more than one wage earner in the family. In both Der-El-Sabbakin and the six other areas, there was no "absolute unemployment", except where people were truly old and disabled and should actually be called "pensioners", except that they got no pension. Everyone had to work; no one can afford to stay without work since there is no social security or insurance to rely upon. (There is some kind of unemployment pension, but only for those who paid insurance and with strict conditions). People work at anything in order to survive, unless they want

to go begging.

Those who appear to suffer most, and who are considered by the inhabitants as most insecure in their occupations, are the irza'is. These are people who are daily workers who rely on insecure and irregular occupations, where their income is largely a question of chance. They are often uneducated and unskilled or semi-skilled (only rarely skilled). If they engage in trade, it is often based on very small capital which cannot bring in much profit. The cases of Zeinab and Dawlat are two such examples, as is the old couple Nefissah and Rashad. Fateh, the ironer is uneducated but possesses skill. However, his presence in a poor quarter limits his income, so that he really only works part-time (i.e. he is under-employed). By and large, the same applies to all the others. Their location and environment limits what they can earn, since it puts limits on the amount they can sell. Their conditions do not allow them to seek work outside of the quarter where competition is great, demanding more capital, goods and permits.

The case of Rashad illustrates what happened to an irza' when he was disabled by illness. His source of income stopped. In this case, his wife took up his job but is restricted to the quarter, so that she makes half what he used to make. In some other areas and cases, the wife was unable to do that, and they sink into a condition of destitution and total dependence on help of kin or institutions. The case of Narguess illustrates what happened when death struck the head of household. Luckily for Narguess, her husband worked in a government institution that paid her a pension. This was so small that she had to rely on help from her own and her husband's family. Her older boys could not continue at school and she sent them to work as apprentices in order to learn a skill. This also helped increase their income. These examples show that immediate kin act

as an important support group for the poor, particularly where vital cash is needed, (especially children and next come uncles, brothers and sisters.)

Among the material manifestations of poverty is their difficulty in budgeting for the various items necessary for their livelihood. The poor here have no budget in the true sense of the word, since their gain is often: 1] irregular and 2] very small. Basic items of expenditure are rent and food. The rest have to be managed according to circumstances. The study revealed that it is only by a reduction in the quality and quantity of food that allows cash for clothes, education, health, transport and sometimes recreation, to be released.

Diets consist mainly of beans, white cheese, potatoes, rice and vegetables, i.e. mainly grains and carbohydrates, with protein intake consisting mainly of grain. They drink tea extremely sweetened with sugar. Meat is eaten about once or twice a month, bought from the Gamia Taawonia, the government cooperative. They eat fish more frequently than meat, and occasionally a chicken raised at home. In short, about two thirds of their budget goes on food while from 21% to 30% of their incomes goes on housing: rent, electricity and water bills. Thus, they are left with very little, if any, for the other items. This is clearly shown in the models of their food budget, as well as concrete examples. The rest of their expenses have to be covered by some kind of credit system like the gamia savings group, the dalalah for clothes, or the second-hand market or suk. However, even the gamia savings group may be beyond the very poor. It assumes a regular income in order to afford instalments. These informal institutions reappear now and again as coping mechanisms that help them face expenses involved in various other areas of everyday life. These institutions are used to buy furniture or other housing needs, to face schooling expenses and to meet the requirements of feasts. Other informal

strategies involve borrowing, whether it be for food, clothes, home utensils, or money, though the latter occurs mainly when faced with ill-health, a death, or a fine. Bargaining is another strategy that is used whenever anything is to be bought, including services. Sharing is an institution that extends to most aspects of life. During feasts, the poor rely on presents or private charity, sometimes distributed by religious institutions like churches, mosques or waqfs. These cover both food and clothes, but may extend to items of furniture or other belongings, as well as school fees, health needs, or feast expenses. When in dire need, women may sell her shabkah or engagement token, usually a gold bracelet or chain with a trinket, or necklace. This is resorted to in cases of severe ill-health, or a trousseau, where a large or unexpected sum is needed urgently. Relatives are expected to help, particularly when the poor person is a woman. A woman is not expected to provide for herself, within the traditional context. In such cases, they provide some regular or irregular cash depending on their means and degree of kinship, or sense of obligation.

### Formal Institutions

Within the frame of a socialist policy, governments have established certain formal institutions, after the Revolution of 1952, which were devised to help the masses cope with everyday life. Four major institutions may be said to predominate; others being off-shoots of these.

1. Government subsidies which cover certain basic food items, materials for clothes and housing, certain medicines, and within-the-cities transport.
2. Price controls which, again, keep certain prices of food items under control. It also applies to the cost of certain clothes materials known as akmeshah shaābiyah or "popular materials", named so because used by the majority of the masses, particularly the poorer among

them. These are sold in stores known as Public Sector Stores which are government controlled. These include certain housing items that include materials for bed-sheets, mattresses, etc. They also include items like stoves, T.V.'s, etc... The latter can be obtained on Credit through the institution known as The Social Bank Nasser of Bank Nasser El Ighimai.

3. Ration Cards provide certain food items at about half price and grant a fixed ration for every person in the family. They also cover certain "popular materials" and upholstery.
4. Government Cooperatives or Gamia Taawania are institutions where certain subsidized or price-controlled food and other items are sold. The ration card must sometimes be used to get certain materials.

Other formal institutions that work on the basis of government subsidies operate in the field of health. They work on the basis of a nominal fee. They are mainly Maternal and Child Health Centres, which often also act as Family Planning Units and provide various birth-control gadgets. They sometimes distribute milk and butter to mothers. Health offices provide free immunization. Schools and certain other institutions have health units and hospitals. Public hospitals also offer free service, whether they be general or specialized. In principle, they offer free treatment or medicine at reduced prices, but often medicines are lacking and must be bought from pharmacies at market prices. Public clinics offer health services for nominal fees. Some private physicians sometimes hold "external clinics" for a reduced fee at certain hours of the day. However, some of the inhabitants do not believe in formal medicine, particularly the more traditional sections of the population, and the poor always figure among this section. These have recourse to folk medicine, where treatment involves herbs or natural treatment, thus saving the expense of physicians and medicine. Sheikhs, counter-magic and zar are other informal institutions that are resorted to. Actually, these are not

necessarily cheaper than formal health institutions, but appear to provide psychological comfort where formal medicine often fails, particularly since the poor are not well-treated by nurses or other health personnel. This study merely reveals some of the flaws in the free health-system and raises the question: "What chances of a cure do the poor have when compared to the rich?".

Education is, in principle, "free", through all stages, so long as the pupil "succeeds". However, with failure, the pupil must move to Arab Socialist Union schools where payment is made, but is partly subsidized by government. Hence they are far cheaper than private schools, offering possibilities of further reduction of fees on the recommendation of the School Board, or other influential bodies or people. Only Al-Azhar offers free education in any absolute way. Group-classes are offered for no fees, while they are offered for reduced fees in schools to replace the high price of private lessons. Private lessons have become a must for learning and "success". Universities are free, with an initial fee of about L.E.4.50 for the whole year. There is one private fee-paying university, The American University.

While free education is supposed to offer equal opportunity to people on all levels of income, in fact the system eliminates the poor. Consequently, the poor do not actually have "equal opportunity" with regard to the higher income levels, necessary to acquire a good education. However, this does not mean that none of them ever reach university, a few do but only at the cost of great sacrifices on the part of their family. Further research should try to find out how "equal" their opportunities are, and just how many finally reach this stage. Among all the poor family cases investigated in both Der and the six other areas of Cairo, only one person reached university level, entirely supported by the Church.

Concerning recreation, neighbouring visits and the hara itself seems to provide the main recreations for the poor because they cost nothing. Joking forms part of neighbour's visits. Most possess a small transistor or old radio. They may watch T.V. at their "wealthier" neighbour's home. Men may go to the coffee-house, and boys to a cheap cinema, but already this presupposes better conditions. On main feasts, families may visit and picnic at tombs on the first day of the feast, while on the next two days they may visit relatives or picnic in parks. Some poor go to visit wealthy tombs in order to get alms from the rich. During mawalids or saint's feasts, visits to shrines are made, and religious celebrations attended. Feasts present heavy expenses for the poor, as they celebrate by eating meat and sweets, wearing new clothes, and going to tombs where they must take choice foods and fruits to distribute for the peace of the soul of their departed.

On religious feasts, major institutions established to help the poor usually distribute food and/or clothing as mentioned; (mosques, churches and waqfs), while private persons, industrial or commercial institutions may also give charity. "Charity" in both Christianity and Islam is an obligation. In Islam it is called zakat and is imposed on capital, while in Christianity it is called ushur, and consists of the tenth of income. Charity is believed to obtain sawab or grace for the giver, and makes fasting acceptable to God.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is the institution responsible for helping the poor, as well as providing pensions, social securities, social insurances and so on. However, its rules and regulations are such that few people have a right to its formal help, though very recently, a new pension is supposed one day to cover every old person. Its budget is so limited that its help is merely nominal, and would hardly cover the cost of



bread alone. Besides its assistance lasts for very limited periods of time, so others on the waiting list may get benefits. Only when a pension is due, or insurance has been paid, does it become permanent.

A description of the poor's daily round reveals some of the conditions and common patterns in their daily life. A division of labour was observed where women were expected to do the housework and look after children. They serve their children, especially the male ones. They are usually given a sum each day by the husband, and this is expected to be used to cover all their expenses, however minimal. It is expected to cover their own and their children's clothing needs. Usually, the women form the gamias or credit groups. Men are supposed to be the providers, but among the poor many wives help with some petty trade. This is the only work they are allowed to do without being shamed. Any job entailing service in another's house is viewed as humiliating, as abuse is always a threat. Only in the case of young educated women working as "muwazafah", or employees in an office, shop or institution, which is a public place, does work for a woman become acceptable and honourable.

Daily life is organized around the hours of work or school, meals are rarely a family affair, except in families with younger children. Children are used to buy food and run errands.

Relationships between husband and wife follow a domination-submission pattern. Divorce hangs as a threat over a wife's head, so that even the closest relationships appear to suffer from this threat, as the example of Fateh and Amal illustrates. This does not wane with age, as it is precisely at an older age that a man may want to take a younger wife. Among the poor, this is more difficult as it is difficult for a poor man who is old to find a family who would find him acceptable to marry their young daughter. This 'privilege' is reserved for the rich old men.

Relations between father and children are mostly based on respect and fear. While more love and tenderness is shown to the mother, less respect is shown. However, this is not a hard and fast rule and individual differences occur, the relationship changing with age.

Relations between neighbours appear to be more intense than between relatives, unless these happen also to be neighbours. Relations between married children and their parents are intense, but again only if they live in the same quarter. In such a case, the grandchildren appear to spend more time with their grandparents than with their own parents.

### Levels of Poverty

There are many concrete and essentially qualitative levels and distinctions to be identified within the general label "urban poverty". The research here shows that "poverty" should not be seen as simply a general condition at the bottom of the social scale, but one which has its own scale - a scale that cannot always be visualised in hierarchical terms, but which involves horizontal, uneven and cross-cutting aspects, and that it is difficult to define conditions purely in terms of figures.

What follows is an outline of the different levels of poverty, as revealed through the research.

#### 1. "The Destitute"

Housing: A shack (i.e. cannot afford to rent) built from old baskets, cardboard and nylon. Better ones are made from tin and odd pieces of wood. A thin mattress or pile of old clothes, together with a pair of old blankets, provides the bedding. Water must be fetched from a public tap, there is no w.c. (use fields or a mosque). Facade may serve as a shop.

Possessions: Some kitchen utensils, a primus stove, and perhaps a gaz lamp or a lamp hanging at the end of an electric wire extended from a neighbouring house. A few baskets containing fruit and

vegetables of poor quality.

Income: P.T.20 to P.T.30 a day, which must serve a family of five or six.

Food: The minimum described in the model, mostly mish cheese for breakfast, rice or a cheap vegetable for lunch or dinner. Only two meals a day. Children sometimes given fruit or raw vegetables from father's merchandise, if he is a peddler.

Clothes: Clothes are worn-out and dirty. New clothes obtained through a dalalah (on credit) or a charity.

Future: Very bleak. Head of household's health is bad. Mother continues to have babies, who often die in infancy. Children may or may not go to school, depending on the parents and child's aptitude. Special lessons only available by reducing food intake, even then they are unlikely to continue as the expenses rise beyond the family's means.

Illustrations: Two cases in Athar El-Nabi, one case in Dar-Es-Salam. The case of Am Hassanein in Der-El-Sabbakin.

## 2. "The Very Poor"

Housing: Rent one room, or share part of a room, on ground floor or roof. Overcrowded, not less than five person per room, not unusual to find only one bed. Lack water or electricity, or both. W.C. shared by all tenants. Corridor or staircase used for cooking.

Possessions: Kitchen utensils, stove, minimal furniture, some old cotton rugs used in lieu of beds for sleeping. Head of household is an irza'i, peddler or cart-driver. Merchandise worth between L.E.7 to L.E.15.

Income: Average P.T.30 to P.T.35 a day, only one person works. <sup>Income</sup> Could be much less for one person living within a household (i.e. Zeinab).

Food: The minimum included in the model, mainly bread and cheap ghumuss. Two main meals a day.

Clothes: Perhaps one other set besides that worn, plus some worn-out clothes. One black dress and veil or melayah used by all the women in the family in turn, thus only one can go out at a time. Clothes obtained through a dalalah, charity or 'presents'.

Future: Gloomy. No provision for any crisis. Those with no children are worse off. If they refuse to let their daughters work, their prospects are limited, marriage may help slightly. The possibilities for sons are limited to primary school level, often 4th and 5th years (age 10) are sent as apprentices to help the family.

Illustration: Zeinab, Safia in Al-Anwar (has eight daughters), the two old people at Ezbet Atef.

### 3. "The Quite Poor"

- Housing: Rent a room or two. Overcrowded. Water or electricity is lacking, w.c. shared with other tenants. Cook in corridor or on staircase. Sleep two to three a bed.
- Possessions: Some old furniture in very bad condition (see model of "House of the Poor"), some improvised furniture. Some poultry.
- Income: More than one person works - head of household is irza'i plus wife, son or daughter, usually in a semi-skilled or menial job. Household income calculated from L.E.18 to L.E.21 a month.
- Food: As per the model of "Food Budget", rarely meat or fish obtained from the Gamia, or a chicken they have raised, more often, buy animal grease.
- Clothes: May have more than two galabiyas bought from the dalalah. Children have more clothes, purchased from the second-hand market. A son who works may have better clothes.
- Future: Present conditions are harsh. Children represent a real hope for a slightly better future. Up to half of the children may get a Preparatory School education, the rest become apprentices. Families with daughters must face the threat of being plunged into debt to provide a trousseau, before they experience some relief on their budget.
- Illustration: Dawlat, four cases in Ezbet Atef and one case in Dir-El-Malek.

### 4. "The Average Poor"

- Housing: House itself in better condition. Share an apartment with other tenants. Usually have two rooms, and sometimes a hall or corridor. Use small room as a kitchen, w.c. within. Either water or electricity lacking.
- Possessions: Old furniture but in better condition than found in 3, a complete or half-bedroom with a desk for children. Have land or property shared with several others, hence insolvent - at most may not pay rent, if they have agricultural land they may get food from it (e.g. poultry, butter, etc.). Head of household may own a cart, used for work, and perhaps a donkey or goat.
- Income: More than one person works, sometimes all adults (including unmarried girls) in semi-skilled or junior clerical positions, with parent as peddlars. Household income between L.E.25 to L.E.28 a month. Part of this is earned on a daily basis, and part from the weekly or monthly contributions from the children.
- Food: Conforms to the model "Food Budget", once or twice a month meat, fish or chicken from the Gamia.

- Clothes: Parents have just two galabiyahs for each season, but they still buy from the dalalah and the public sector stores (after saving up). Working children contribute little to the household, spending the rest on clothes and food, as if to satisfy a craving.
- Future: The immediate present is hard, but as all of them work there is some hope for improvement in the future. The childrens' future may seem better but they can easily remain poor, especially if their wives or husbands do not work. For children with skills, the prospects are much brighter than average. If they find work abroad, this may lift them out of poverty. If they are government employees, pay is low and promotion slow, then prospects are not good.
- Illustration: Rashad and Nefissah, Sadek, and several cases in Der, two cases in Ezbet Atef, and one case in Al-Anwar.

#### 5. "Those Who Have Become Poor"

All the people in levels 1 to 4 were born into poverty, however, there are a number of formerly middle-income households which have become poor due to the illness and/or death of the head of the household. Given that they used to live as part of lower status middle-income groups, there is a sharp contrast between their possessions and their current life-styles.

- Housing: Separate two to three roomed apartment in very old house. Have a sink and a small w.c. but not proper kitchen. May pay no rent if the house is owned by a parent of the husband or wife, otherwise rents are low due to the age of the building.
- Possessions: A complete bedroom with curtains, a living-room with sofas, tables and family pictures on the walls. A third room is used as a bedroom for the children, with a bed and baladi sofas. They have a butagaz stove-oven, often a T.V. (on instalments) and perhaps an old refrigerator. They have space to keep poultry. They often have working-class parents who own property and may help out at times.
- Income: They live on a small pension paid by government or church agencies (between L.E.8 to L.E.15 per month), plus contributions from children working as apprentices or as semi-skilled workers in small factories. Total household monthly income between L.E.23 and L.E.30 a month, depending on the size of the pension and the help received from relatives. (A person employed in a factory receives about L.E.15 a month).

The widows of many government employees and of skilled self-employed men, follow this pattern. Most cases helped by the church fall into this category. They are a group ashamed to

appear poor. Curiously most have at least five children, perhaps because of less infant mortality due to better conditions at birth.

- Food: Conforms to model "Food Budget", supplemented with meat or fish, from the Gamia, or chicken and eggs produced at home. They experience considerable hardship towards the end of each month, when the pension runs out.
- Clothes: Mother wears modern clothes in public (but with a black veil over her head and shoulders) and traditional clothes at home, obtained from the public sector stores. She obviously has some good clothes left over from better times. As cash is short, growing children do not dress well. Older boys, in work, are better dressed. The girls at home are not well dressed.
- Future: The present situation is not good, particularly if the older boys are due to enter the army. It is usual for only the boys who fail at school to be put as apprentices to help the family, especially the eldest. Half the children complete secondary or preparatory school education. However, family circumstances are increasingly strained and only one or two boys may continue their education. Only when all of the children have "finished" their education and begun work, is the family's condition likely to improve. Trousseaus for daughters place a very heavy strain on the limited resources. Mothers always hope that when the boys grow up and start work, their situation will improve. However, such a future is dependent on their qualifications, skills, behaviour and the kind of job they obtain.
- Illustration: Narguess and other cases in Der-El-Sabbakin, one case in Demerdash, two cases in Ezbet Atef, and many cases reported by Church social workers.

## 6. "The Improving Poor"

Some of those born into poverty have gradually improved their condition. These are mostly young, uneducated, skilled or semi-skilled, and hard-working. Compared to the people in levels 1 to 5, they are better off. However, there is the ever present threat that any crisis may bring them down again.

- Housing: A separate two-roomed apartment. While not in good condition, they have painted and repaired it, put in a sink, perhaps a shower, a tiny kitchen (barely separated from the w.c.). They have introduced water and electricity supplies, if these were lacking.
- Possessions: They own one complete bedroom. The second room acts as a living-room and a childrens' room, with a bed, sofa and table. There is a butagaz stove-oven, a kitchen cupboard with china, curtains on the windows and a T.V. set. They have newly acquired gadgets, bought on credit.

Income: Husband and wife, and perhaps the children, work - one as a self-employed irza'i, the other as an employee in a semi-skilled or menial position. One member of the household may seek work abroad. Household income varies according to the season and particular circumstances, but is usually between L.E.30 and L.E.40 a month, with some prospects for an increase.

The conditions of larger families improve when one member works abroad, but such work does not last long. If the work abroad continues for some time, the family may move out of poverty - in such cases the family income may jump as high as L.E.150 a month.

Food: As for the model "Food Budget", supplemented by more meat and fish (protein) than found in levels 1 to 5, bought at the Gamia. They are able to afford milk and fruit on certain days.

Clothes: The wife usually has good clothes, both modern and traditional - keeping her head covered with a kerchief outside the quarter but always wearing the black tarha veil within it. Children wear reasonable clothes. The head of the household's clothes are reasonable and clean.

They still use the dalalah for certain items, and especially the gamia credit-groups (for initial cash payments) for gadgets, feasts and clothes.

Future: While both parents, or one parent and a child, work hard, their welfare and improving conditions are constantly threatened by crises engendered by illness or accident. This is critical, since they make considerable use of instalments and credit. Otherwise, their conditions continue to improve each year.

The childrens' education is accorded special importance, relatives and neighbours give them lessons. As the children grow, their educational expenses rise, if the parents' income fails to keep pace, their conditions may deteriorate, or some children withdraw from school, if they fail.

By comparison with the cases in levels 1 to 5, these families are better off than many others. The family's conditions and prospects would improve still further if one of its members gained educational qualifications, or a skilled job.

Illustration: Fateh and Amal, Dokdok and several other families in Der, Islah in Al-Anwar (a baker). Such families are rarely found in fringe areas.

While this outline of the different levels of poverty is by no means exhaustive, the majority of the urban poor would seem to fall within one category or another. Of course, there are people who, as in level 4, may

go abroad and make a small fortune, only to return and spend it all without investing in something yielding more long-term income or profit. In such cases, they may return to their old jobs and their conditions revert to what they were (e.g. Dokdok).

Perhaps the most indicative sign of poverty is to be found in the poor's food budgets. The people studied spent two-thirds or more of their income on food. Anywhere in the world, this is indicative of poverty and of deperately low standards of living.

Further surveys and studies, of other groups in other areas, would be needed to confirm or modify this outline of levels of poverty. The levels of poverty described and discussed here emerged out of the ethnographic research, the cases researched in six areas of Cairo and applies to Suez.



PART III

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF POVERTY

Introduction

The assumption underlying the social construction of reality approach is that people are actively, creatively and continually engaged in using language, culture and beliefs to restructure meanings in order to cope with situations and take practical decisions. A focus on the social construction of poverty, allows us to avoid the view that the poor are passive bearers of a "culture of poverty" or are "ideological puppets".

Part II described the everyday reality of the poor's "life-world". The advantage of ethnography is that it enables enough rapport to develop to allow the views of the poor themselves to be incorporated in the research process. Such an approach is necessary if basic misunderstandings are to be avoided. It is particularly important, within a phenomenologically informed ethnography, to examine the way the poor structure their reality, what devices or beliefs are used to construct this reality, and how beliefs are restructured to explain their particular situations or conditions.

The causes and explanations, provided by the poor themselves, are instrumental in helping them cope with their difficulties. Part III is concerned to present two related aspects of the subjective life of the poor:

[1] The socially constructed aspects of their realities as defined in the Egyptian cultural heritage, or "reference schemata".

[2] The socially constructed aspects of poverty as defined by the poor, themselves, in response to the need to cope with their situation.

The phrase "social construction of reality" refers to the interplay between these two aspects. Particular attention falls on the various elements that constitute this construction in terms of the typifications and concepts used

by the poor themselves in order to understand their rationale in relation to attitudes, behaviours and life-styles. Where contradictions arise, such an approach allows us to see just how these contradictions are explained in specific situations.

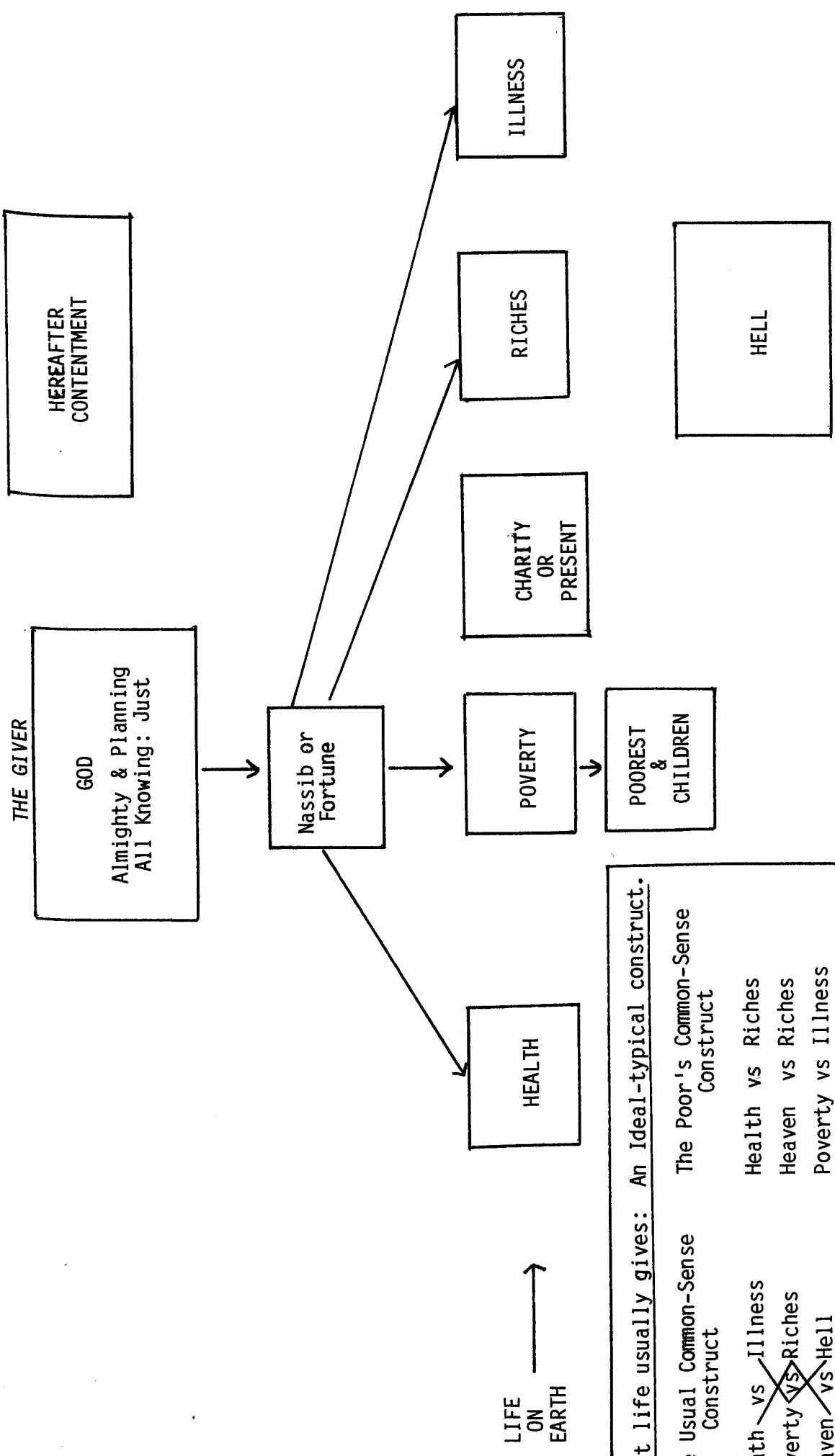
Within Part III, Chapter 9 is primarily concerned to describe the way the poor define "poverty", how they define themselves, the philosophy of life they have developed in order to cope with their everyday economic problems, and how they explain their own conditions within Egyptian society. In short, the relationship between the rationality, self-image and life-style of the poor.

Chapter 10 presents the philosophy of the poor as it is elaborated by two respondents from Der-El-Sabbakin. These two examples illustrate the way personal accounts of "poverty" are constructed using biographical, cultural and situational factors.

Chapter 11 utilizes information drawn from cases studied in other areas in Cairo. The material is used to assess whether the findings drawn from the case studies support or challenge the ethnographic data. Finally, the influence of other factors which may or may not contribute to the "social construction of poverty" are examined: age, sex, occupation, place of origin, place of residence, education, religion, mass media and associations affiliation.

Part III concludes with a summary of the main findings on the subjective dimensions of the economic experience of poverty, and the meanings and typifications that emerge as central to the "social construction of poverty".

DIAGRAM II : *The Structure of the Poor's Belief System (The Alternatives)*



What life usually gives: An Ideal-typical construct.

| The Usual Common-Sense Construct | The Poor's Common-Sense Construct |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Health vs Illness                | Health vs Riches                  |
| <del>Poverty vs Riches</del>     | Heaven vs Riches                  |
| <del>Heaven vs Hell</del>        | Poverty vs Illness                |
|                                  | Poverty vs Hell                   |

CHAPTER NINE: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF POVERTY

"Today, the poor is a dead man".

Sadek: a poor revolted respondent

1. The Life-World of the Poor

Within the Egyptian social-cultural and linguistic frame of reference, the concept of 'view of life' is a label that refers to what the concept of world-view generally includes in its broadest sense, the 'view of life' or hayat of the Egyptian encompasses the whole of creation. It includes worldly life or dunyah and the Hereafter or akherah, i.e. it involves both the construction of past, present and future of humanity, as well as beliefs about the heavenly order with its hierarchy of God, angels, prophets, saints or walis, as well as devils and jin. This conception allows for both "religious" and "secular" explanations of the World, yet both are so intermeshed within the social-cultural framework of language that it is difficult to separate them without distorting the essence of their meanings. Yet for analytic purposes, an attempt will be made here to identify the various concepts and structures of thought that go into the building up of this 'view of life', as this study is concerned with the poor and not with the 'view of life' of Egyptians in general, only those aspects which relate to the study will be examined in detail.

The data discussed here are drawn from the ethnographic study of a poor Moslem group. However, as the study was carried out in other areas and Christian groups were interviewed where the general themes were found to be largely similar, the researcher was led to think that the construct of this reality was essentially Egyptian, rather than Islamic or Christian. This is not to say that such beliefs are not drawn from religion, for to a

large extent they are. But both Islam and Christianity are Heavenly religions with a Supreme Being and common aspects. Moreover, the poor's beliefs are mixed with popular and folk-beliefs, to the extent that they form a complex whole, in which the various sources reinforce each other.

The following analysis begins with a description of the total 'view of life', then analyzes the concepts and typifications used to construct their reality, and indicates the way they build up this view.

In their definition of their poverty, the poor elaborate a general view of their poverty which one could term a "world view" except that it does not represent a tight system as the term implies. It is quite a flexible view of the world and of their place in it - one which allows for contradictory explanations of both a religious and secular character of how the world works. This will become evident in the course of the description.

Here poverty is explained as part of the Creator's design, which is based largely within the Egyptian religious tradition. The universe is viewed as created and structured by an Almighty God who has planned and ordered it wisely. He can do this because He is All-Knowing. Being All-Knowing, He is just, hence, He has distributed to every human being his share of well-being and hardship. All persons are equal in His eyes. How are people equal if some are poor and some are rich? True, God distributes everything according to His will and preferences. Indeed, He has placed people one above the other in degrees, as the Qor'an says clearly, yet in His divine justice, He has devised things in such a way, that what you do not get on earth, you get in the Hereafter. For this reason, a human being must accept what God has given him, hence the importance of 'acceptance' or 'redah'. Whatever a person's condition may be, they have to accept it, and thank God, because God will compensate them one way or another. Of course, this in no way implies that people should not strive to live, for,

"as long as one lives, one must struggle".

God, however, does not give all compensation in the Afterlife. Being fair, He also gives it in this life (please see Diagram II <sup>p 266a</sup>). To each, God gives rizk or his livelihood, whether small or plentiful. It forms part of his destined share of fortune, known as nassib. Each person has his nassib of the good or bad things of life. Nassib or destined share is not at all similar to the notion of "fate", a mistake often made in interpreting these Arab concepts. It does not have the notion of "blindness" attached to the Western idea of fate. In 'fate' there is an implication of the absurd, appropriate to a blind force which can topple everything, or stop something aimlessly. Nassib has no such implication. On the contrary, it carries the implication of planned order together with a Divine Volition and Decision which has the whole range of time in view, time going on to infinity or eternity. As opposed to the notion of "absurdity", which implies no meaning and no rationality, nassib again implies a rationality or Divine intentionality consequently charged with meaning - a measure that goes so far and deep that it is ultimate. Hence it explains the inexplicable. It assumes a Being with absolute rationality, intentionality and a master plan. There is no passivity implied for humans in the concept of nassib. It is that "unknown" which no one can truly predict, but which God knows. A person goes on acting, thinking and making choices to the best of their ability, i.e. they are active, as opposed to passive.

Of what do these good or bad things of life that form one's nassib consist? Obviously, one may count dozens of things. But what the poor think about, or at least discuss most, are the following: poverty and riches, health and illness, heaven and hell. These are the basics with which they are concerned, with which they construct the view of their poverty.

Most people, i.e. whether poor or non-poor, are concerned about these alternatives. These are everyday common-sense constructs of people which are usually seen in terms of polar types, with the gradations in-between coming in when details are dealt with. That is, they are ideal-typical constructs.

When thinking of their share in life, the poor have restructured these constructs to form a different set of alternatives, a kind of rationalization which they seem to have devised to make more acceptable their conditions, or to cope with their poverty.

The Usual Common-Sense Construct

Health vs Illness  
Poverty vs Riches  
Heaven vs Hell

The Poor's Common-Sense Construct  
Restructured

Health vs Riches  
Heaven vs Riches  
Poverty vs Illness  
Poverty vs Hell

(The criss-crosses show the poor's common-sense constructs).

Where the usual common-sense alternatives mean that God gives a person either health or illness, poverty or riches, etc. the poor restructure it into the belief that God gives either health or riches. In other words, the poor's alternatives say that, if a person is poor, he will not have a serious or bad illness. If he is poor, he has had his share of hardships on earth, therefore, since God is just, he will not go to Hell. Conversely the rich cannot have good health, because they have riches. What is more important, not having suffered deprivations, the rich are not likely to go to Heaven, because they cannot have everything, so they must logically go to Hell. However, God being fair, has given the rich a chance to save themselves, and this is through "charity" to the poor and not a haphazard one, but

through payment of a zakat for Moslems, or tithe or ushur for Christians on their fortune, whatever it may be.<sup>1</sup> This is what the poor believe.

The notion of "charity to the poor" is found in the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and is spelt out clearly in both the Bible and the Qoran. Hence, this is no invention by the poor, but is drawn from formal religion. Of course, in both Christianity and Islam, the rich and poor alike must fast and deprive themselves of the pleasures of life, at certain periods, to gain Heaven. Fasting for the rich Moslem is particularly important since it was devised so that "the rich may acquire an understanding of the deprivation and hunger that the poor suffer".<sup>2</sup> But it is particularly at periods of fasting that charity must be given, as fasting alone is believed to be ineffective. It is charity which makes fasting acceptable to God. This belief is widely held in Egyptian society, by Christians and Moslems, poor and rich.

Thus the poor believe that they have a right to the charity of the rich particularly since for the rich, charity is an obligation. The Qor'an says that those who save their money without doing charity are branded in hell with it. An impressive verse from the Qor'an states:

Those who treasure gold and silver and do not spend [of] them for the sake of God [i.e. give to God or the poor], announce to them painful sufferings the day that they are burned in the fire of hell, for they will be branded with it [i.e. the gold and silver] on their brows, sides and backs. This is what you have [truly] treasured unto yourselves, and hence, taste of what you have treasured.

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Since this is God's money or what is owed to God by the rich, when the poor

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1. While the tithe or ushur is specified as being the tenth of whatever one gets as income or gain, the zakat for the Moslem should be the quarter of the tenth of gold or silver or money possessed according to the Qor'an.
  2. Explained by the Sheikh Jad El Hak, Head of the Azher at the Ramadan fasting period July, 1982, on a special T.V. talk.
  3. Translation by the researcher.



ask for charity, they ask God for it, not the rich person. Indeed, a poor man or a beggar never asks for help with reference to himself, but will always say, "Give to God". And in giving, the rich believe they have given God His due, if it may be put this way, for it is God who gives and takes and He demanded it of them. Similarly, the poor believe that it is God who gives and not the rich, God gives through the rich person, and hence it is God who is to be thanked.

The poor ask God for help, believing that God will always answer their prayers through charity or a present. The poor's gratitude goes to God, not man, for it is God Who is the 'Giver', and had He not answered the poor's prayers, no rich person would have given them anything (Please see Chart II on Charity, p. 266a).

The poor believe that the rich benefit from charity, apart from fulfilling an obligation, in two ways: one is stated in the Qo'ran, 'zakat purifies wealth', so that wealth becomes halal or lawful, having received God's blessing, so that grace or barakah will touch it making it to become even more plentiful. This belief has its origins in the Qo'ran which likens charity to grain:

Those who spend their wealth in the way of God are like unto a grain that has grown seven heads [of wheat epi de blé] and in each head there are one hundred grains. And God multiplies to whomever He wants.

The grain produces seven hundred grains. Consequently, upon receiving charity, a poor man invokes God saying, 'May God increase your possessions'. His state is supported by this promise. Both the poor and the rich are confident that God will listen to the poor man's prayer.

Again, the poor man may say to the charitable rich, "May God give you good health", because the rich are seen as needing the poor's prayers for good health. This is the second benefit that the rich man is seen to obtain from charity.

These are the beliefs upon which the poor man's commonsense constructs are based. They underly his view of the rich and their vulnerability. In a sense, the rich are dependent on the poor's prayers and charity to obtain heaven, good health and even a multiplication of their wealth. The poor also see <sup>that</sup> these are very important to the rich man. Thus, in the poor's view of their life-world, there is a continual triangular negotiation going on between God, poor and rich and in the rich's perception of all the good things of life. In a way, the poor <sup>man</sup> stands as a sort of "middle-man" between the rich and God.

However, there are certain obligations that the poor believe they are expected to fulfill. One is to help others to the best of their ability, particularly those poorer than themselves, the handicapped and children, for these are the "loved ones of God" or Ahbab Allah. To give help to these is to give to God. In response to this kind of help, God facilitates other things. A common saying is, "Facilitate to others so that God may facilitate to you", i.e. He will make helpful people to stand by you or back you up. So here, there is this notion of reciprocity between God and man, but it does not spring from a kind of bargain with God, as the deal is always uneven, for God always rewards with much more than the person gives as he is a generous God, 'karim', and He does not need what the person gives. It is a question of "doing unto others as you would that they do unto you", a code of ethics and an index of the interaction between God and man, a code which emphasizes "good deeds", Al Amal-al-Saleh. This draws God's approval, for man must not do anything that angers God (la yaghdeb Allah). This leads to the second obligation, the poor must observe the haram and halal. The haram is the sinful, because it is forbidden by God, while the halal is the lawful or permitted by God.

Before going into the details of the sinful and the lawful, this view

view of life must be completed. For the poor, the villains who do evil things are usually the rich. The rich are 'corrupt'; they cheat, swindle and rarely give charity to help the poor. A rich man may give charity once a year, leaving the poor to suffer for the rest of the time. Not only this, but he may not even be aware of the presence of the poor. The poor are invisible to him since he lives in a different area. Even if the rich man sees them he ignores them as if they did not exist, and may despise them, thus ignoring God's injunctions to help the poor. Whenever the rich are caught while doing any evil, they try to pin it on a poor man who will be punished, while they go free. They feel no qualms at having "swallowed" all the gain, as the poor put it.

In general, the money of the rich is seen by the poor as haram or sinful because it is not acquired by honest means. (Please see Table of Conceptions of Good and Evil, p. 296b) Such sinful money will never bring any good to its owner, nor does it last. This is the attribute of haram money. Generally speaking, it is a social belief that haram money is always spent either on illness, on corruption, or on meaningless things, so that it never benefits its owner.

Of course, the rich do not believe that their money is haram unless they really feel guilty about some transaction. In general, some of the rich who deal in illegal business believe that they are clever businessmen and see their transactions as shatarah or 'cleverness', and not haram. It is rather the poor who believe that most of the 'big money' is made through haram means.

Money acquired easily is lost easily, for it holds no barakah. Barakah is "grace". Barakah money somehow stretches, and one makes the best out of it. However little it may be, it suffices. Not only does it suffice, but it brings good results or consequences. This is because it is

halal money. Halal comes through hard work and sweat of the brow as God ordained. It does not come by ~~stealing~~, cheating, or swindling people. It does not come through illegal means and it does not come as a result of any dealings that have been forbidden by God like vices and gambling. These beliefs about haram and halal money are notions shared by all <sup>members of</sup> the society. However, they are used by the poor to provide a certain rationale when applied within the context of rich or poor.

To the poor, their money is halal, though there is not much. Because it is halal, God gives it barakah or grace so that it suffices, however little it may be. Consequently children that are brought up with halal money grow into good adults, improve and may even become well-off. Halal money is not usually spent on illness nor wasted, but on good things that bring benefits to their owner.

Thus, the poor use the notions of haram and halal or sinful and lawful as a rationale to explain why the rich have so much money and why they have so little. Further, it explains how the rich's money is spent on unprofitable things, "like cars, amusements, vices, etc...." The poor reason that the rich are not getting anything worthwhile from their wealth, and they, the poor, are better-off without these material objects, which are anyway 'worthless'.

This kind of rationale appears to help the poor cope with their feelings of deprivation. What is more important, it helps a great deal in preserving their pride and dignity or karamah. Such dignity revealed itself to be the single most important value in the sense that it is basically all that is left to them to preserve their self-image.

The dignity of the poor is further sustained through the view that they remain the "loved ones of God". They are to have eternity and good health. Therefore, they are well-compensated indeed. They are worthy

human beings. Their hard life is not for nothing, they are not worthless nor failures. In the larger scheme of the universe they ultimately occupy a good and important place. It is through them, the poor, that God judges the powerful rich, and it is because of them, in a sense, that the rich either go to Heaven or to Hell.

A further belief that reduces the importance of riches is that which sees worldly riches as having no real value since at death, they must be all left behind. A popular saying is "And does anyone take anything with him?" It is understood that reference is here made to death and to the futility of caring too much for riches. Another saying is "funeral wrappings have no pockets". As in Islam, the dead are wrapped in white sheets or wrappings which obviously have no pockets, the idea is that the <sup>dead</sup> cannot take anything with them. Again, the idea here is that ultimately riches are worthless since they cannot be taken to the grave or make a person "eternally" content.

The poor construct this view by drawing heavily on formal religious tenets which have been restructured and mixed with popular beliefs to form a sort of philosophy of life which constructs poverty within a larger frame than the social, and places the poor in a favoured place, preserving their dignity and self-image.

It is important to note that most elements of this view form part of the religious and popular beliefs of poor and non-poor alike. The notions of God as Almighty, All-knowing, Just, the Giver, and so on, are widely believed in both Christianity and Islam. In Islam, they form only a few of the ninety-nine names or attributes that are given to God. Belief that charity for the poor is a basic tenet of religion and that God gives several times more to the charitable are all common to Egyptian society, including notions of haram and halal. However, the way the poor restructure

such notions to put themselves at the centre and <sup>to</sup> elaborate their view of the distribution of the good things of life, is largely their own.

Two important points must be made concerning the poor's religious explanations of their own poverty. 1] if they see poverty within a larger scheme as their nassib, or part of God's design for them, this does not mean that they are blind to injustice. On the contrary, they are quite aware of it, and are in turn angry, revolted, or bitter about it. One example is the way they condemn the 'corrupt' rich's haram money. They condemn the abuse of power and authority vis-a-vis the poor. In short, whatever the injustice, they see the necessity of change on a societal scale, but are aware of their own powerlessness in trying to change it. Indeed, those who have tried to assert their rights on an individual scale, had cause to regret it (Please see Section 5 in this chapter). 2] The religious view does not necessarily mean that they are "fatalistic," nor does this view prevent them from striving. This view was expressed by persons who were working and struggling very hard to survive; persons who have hopes of a better life in the future, of an improvement in their conditions through their own work or through their children's education, and hopes of future gainful employment. The <sup>poor</sup> are quite aware of the role material conditions play in determining such improvements. The following section is concerned to make this point clear: to show that this religious perspective does not prevent <sup>the poor from developing</sup> "rational" and "secular" explanations of their own poverty.

## 2. The Secular Explanation of Poverty

If the 'view of life' of the poor provides a religious explanation of poverty, it also involves more practical and 'secular' explanations. They relate <sup>poverty</sup> to certain facts of their life, which act as "causes",

the effect of which is a condition named 'poverty'. They may even suggest secular remedies to some of the causes which their particular circumstances do not allow them to overcome. Thus, they blame their own, or their spouse's, lack of education, lack of skill, vice, illness or death of the provider for their misfortune.

One woman had a husband who had shifted from one job to another. She defined herself as poor. Her husband was at home. When asked if she told him to work, she replied ....

I tell him all day, and it is a cause of bickering between us all the time. He does not work everyday, and whenever he buys vegetables [to trade], he makes a loss, because it is not his job, and it is the first time he peddles it, so he does not know how to deal with it. Hence, it was left over and stayed overnight and withered.

According to her, the cause of his poverty is that: 1] He does not work every day. 2] He is not skilled at his job because it is new to him, so he makes a loss. Apparently, her father was a successful vegetable merchant who owned a shop. When asked why her husband did not work with him, she said ..

My father offered him to join in, but it is he who refused to work with him or with anyone else. I don't know why ... He wakes up late, and stays for one hour coughing, and they begin their work early. But, whenever he wakes up early, he coughs even more, and remains coughing for a longer time. And so he can't work early with them.

Thus, two more reasons appear: 1] He wakes up late so he cannot work with them. 2] He has a bad cough and tries to sleep it off. He has a health problem.<sup>1</sup>

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1. In fact, the man has the beginnings of asthma. His brother is also a serious asthma case. This makes him breathless and tired most mornings, and he never leaves bed before 1 p.m. as observed by the researcher.

Another woman, a widow, explained the causes of her poverty thus,

The causes are the times, God preserve you from it. The proverb tells you: The times do not leave the walker walking nor the rider riding. There would be a family like ours, we were very well-off, and my husband was mabsut or well-off, and he had cars and we were contented. Then this bout of illness came over him, and he lay with it for seven years. We sold everything we had and we became impoverished. So ... if the man had not become ill for seven years and lain at home, with a heart ailment for seven years, go so 'tired' [materially, by going to doctors and hospitals], we would have been now the best of people.

The cause of poverty given was a long illness during which the husband was so unwell that he could not work. He went to private doctors and hospitals. According to her account, they had to sell all his property: "His own car, and a semi-transport van, the money in the house", all was spent. All her children were very young, and she kept going in and out of hospital with him. Finally, he died leaving them destitute.

Sometimes, the cause of poverty is simply the small income gained from the job. For example, Zeinab, the poorest woman in the area was defined as poor because her income is very small. Her sister-in-law defined Zeinab's income as "nonsense", not worth the effort. An inhabitant of the hara said, "Zeinab, who sells a bit of pips, God provides her dinner", i.e. were it not for God's providence, her trade would not provide her with the price of her dinner.

In most cases of this nature, the poor observe the poor's sabubah or the object which causes his gain to be small or limited. Sabubah comes from the root sabab which means a "cause". Sabubah is a colloquial term. It is used particularly in talking of any kind of trade. The object of the trade is the sabubah. It is particularly used by the poor or baladi people who inhabit the haras.<sup>1</sup> The main informant explained it thus:

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1. The researcher had never heard this term before outside of these haras. So it seems to be a folk concept, though Rashad, who was literate, said that it was to be found in the Qoran. It may also be used more by inhabitants of rural areas, and brought into Cairo by rural migrants (see Rashad's definition of his poverty in Chapter 10).



Sabubah means that someone gets something which he sells, and he says, 'I got a sabubah for so much and made a profit of so much out of it.' Those of Upper Egypt call it so, or merchants do so, for example. Sabubah means each object which is a reason or cause for gain. Traders say, 'I will get a sabubah today; I don't know whether I will gain or lose from it'. 1

Thus, sabubah is used as a secular concept, even though mentioned in the Qor'an. However, it lends itself to any interpretation, depending on the forces which it is subsumed. If used with reference to market forces it assumes a secular aspect. Later, Rashad showed how it can be used with reference to a religious view of life.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the poor attribute the causes of poverty to circumstances, such as death or illness, <sup>or the</sup> drinking of <sup>a</sup> husband (see Dawlat's example: Chapter 10, section 2), or to low and insecure income as with itinerant peddlars; however, others attribute it to certain expenditure patterns, e.g. no attempt at saving. The main informant explained that many people in the area, who go to Arab countries prosper for a while, then plunge back into poverty: 'Even people who go to Libya to work and come back with money, buy things for their families and clothe them, finally finish the money, and so have to return [to Libya]. Some of them get ill there and must spend the money on treatment, so they come back with very little'. Rashad when asked whether there are people who smoke hashish, said,

"Yes, some do, they go to coffee houses, [to get it]. Those who work in constructions <sup>m</sup>soke it and then work for three or four days, then sit and smoke and drink and make Abu Aly [i.e. spend extravagantly on others], and so are left with

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1. As my informant's origins are from Upper Egypt, just South of Cairo actually, he believes that it come originally from there. But Rashad whose origins are from Lower Egypt was also very familiar with it and used it. So it is probably as explained in the previous note.
  2. See Chapter 10 in the Philosophy of Rashad.

nothing. Some work for two days and do not work for the rest of the week. .. They say, "You who save, behind you are the devils who raise dust", i.e. money gets spent anyway, even if you try to save it'.

Thus, even people who work in construction where they can make higher wages lose what they have through drinking or smoking hashish, while others work two or three days out of seven, so that the income is irregular and is spent on non-working days.

Very often, the poor spend all their earnings the same day<sup>as</sup> they receive them. They leave nothing for the morrow, even if on a day they make a better gain. The extra gain immediately goes to buy meat or chicken so as to get a good meal, before it is spent on something else. The problem is that they lack so many things, that were they to try<sup>to buy</sup> them, they would never eat their fill.

One poor man from Dar-El-Salam put it succinctly, 'We live a day to day life and spend what we have before we die, and God provides'. And later he added, 'We spend what we get before going to sleep'. This theme runs through the statements made by the majority of the poor in Cairo.<sup>1</sup> They have a fear of what tomorrow may bring, which goes to the extent of thinking that tomorrow may never come. This aspect of momentary living is quite evident in many aspects of their life, in their beliefs about the morrow, in the pattern of expenditure which focusses on daily considerations. Since the present already holds so many problems, to solve the day's problems is already sufficient. This does not mean that they do not save

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1. This statement made by a poor of another area was chosen because it summarizes concisely and clearly what most poor said with more elaboration. (A more elaborate statement is made by Dawlat in Chapter 10, Section 2). This man has an illness in the bones, works as a vegetable merchant in Dar-El-Salaam south of Old Cairo. He was interviewed in his shack which lay between two buildings and which he also used as his shop to sell vegetables.

for clothes or other urgent needs, as evidence of payments of the dalaleh or gamia. But often, income is so small that all of it is already spent before they go to bed, if on nothing else, at least on food.

In accounting for the causes of their poverty, secular explanations are given and living patterns are revealed which are largely of a practical nature not necessarily related to religious beliefs. They could easily be related to religion as in the case of the sick vegetable merchant of Dar-el-Salam, who at one moment talked in terms of momentary living and at the other in terms of divine providence. This is a very common shift and is typical of the way reality is explained. This "double explanation" does not seem to cause them any problems or contradictions. They simply move from the religious to the commonsensical and back again, as a matter of course. The religious and secular go hand in hand, and bear evidence to the flexibility of this "life-view". Religious perspectives may be shifted, restructured or even completely ignored depending on the situation. It is through these contradictions that one may more clearly observe attempts to satisfy both their wish to explain their condition according to what they see as "objective facts", as well as to cope with their hardships by explanations that provide hope and make it easier to accept their condition while preserving their dignity, when their condition becomes apparently unlikely to undergo any basic change, or when the strain becomes too hard to bear. For example, they will resort to religious explanations to say that it is their fortune or nassib not to have had the chance to be educated or skilled. It was God's will that their nassib should be such. Then, to comfort themselves, they add that, anyway "God compensates". This is the way that the religious aspects are used. Part II which described their everyday economic life, shows their practical sense, the way they maximize very limited resources, the privations of which they

are capable and their rationality.

### 3. Typifications in the Social Construction of Poverty

Within the social construction of poverty, there are certain typifications which offer the poor "ready-made" conceptualizations of their identity as well as conceptualizations related to their conditions and life-styles. These concepts or typifications are charged with meanings - meanings which describe certain ways of being, certain experiences and the status they occupy in the larger society. These typifications may or may not be related to their religious view of poverty, depending on the situation and on individual views or tendencies. Among the typifications available in the language itself, the poor use those which have descriptive power and implications which reflect their difficulties on the physical, material and psychological levels. These terms are more colloquial than literary, and are unlikely to appear in any classical Arabic text that identifies the poor.

The following analytic description presents these typifications, and their usual meanings, and the connotations the poor themselves imply, as they define and elaborate them. Two kinds of typifications are presented here: terms which represent "personal types" and terms that represent "course-of-action types".

#### [a] Typifications Related to Self-image

The self-image of the poor is constructed on the basis of their everyday experiences. That is, on a more secular experiential aspect, although the religious is not totally excluded.

The term a 'poor man' translates as 'fakir' or 'maskin' in literary Arabic. Within the social construction of poverty, another colloquial vocabulary has formed. There are typifications which originally had a

literal sense, that referred to a certain state of being not particularly attached to the state of poverty, which were adopted and adapted. They offered "ready-made" typifications which appeared to describe the poor's state of being. The most outstanding typifications of "the poor" are the following 'personal types':

Fakir or poor: A literary and a colloquial term most often used by Egyptians to cover various categories. However, in Der-El-Sabbakin some respondents said that it is a term used colloquially by persons of Upper Egyptian origin more than by Cairenes. Fakir usually emphasizes the material deprivation aspects of poverty. It refers to the lack of material things; "being in need" or "needy".

Maskin or "poor person" carries the implication of "being worthy of pity". None of the poor used it in Cairo. It is used more often by the larger society to describe a poor man.

Other terms which may be used to refer to the poor in the larger society exist, but are rarely used by the poor themselves. These terms are: mehtag or métaz which emphasize the sense of 'needy'. Another is maādum or 'destitute'. There is also the term maázur which also means a poor person who has no money. It was used in one instance for one respondent to refer to a person who could not afford to pay for something. Again, this is used by the larger society when referring to a person who "runs short of money" and incurs a debt in the fact of a particular situation, i.e. if he is unable to meet with his material obligations, he is to be 'excused'.

Ghalban: may be translated as 'miserable' or 'wretched'. This term is used as an alternative to fakir, to indicate the poor in Der-El-Sabbakin. However, it is sometimes used by the larger society to also refer to the non-poor who have been down-trodden by life in some way. The origin of

the term is the verb ghalaba, 'to defeat' or 'to conquer'. Hence, the ghalban is used in the sense of being 'defeated or beaten' by life or by the 'vicissitudes of time', as some respondents put it. The poor use it in the latter two senses, when speaking of themselves or other poor. It seems to be the term that best expresses their view of themselves. Its descriptive power covers all aspects of poverty (as will become evident from the quote), it implies a certain quality of life peculiar to the poor which makes them particular types of people: persons who essentially feel 'defeated' or 'beaten'.

Taaban: literally means 'tired'. In the figurative sense, it is used to refer to the poor, indicating more particularly that they are tired, physically, materially, psychologically, or all of the three. This term has the potential for use in a variety of situations, as it covers a range of implications.

Three main terms were used by the poor in Der-El-Sabbakin as forms of typifications: fakir, ghalban and taaban. Only these three will be explained in detail.<sup>1</sup>

Having defined themselves as fakir, or "poor", and "ghalban" or "defeated", they described themselves as ghalban or ghalbanah (feminine). taaban or taabanah (feminine). When defining fakir, they would always say, "The fakir is the ghalban". Thus indicating that the best way to define the poor person is to say that he is 'defeated', because it describes his condition as well as his way of being. One could also extend it to include his place in society, as being among the wretched, miserable, or suffering. All these are implications of the concept. The quotes

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1. The following quotes and explanations are drawn from the ethnographic data, more precisely from the cases investigated in depth. They were the results of long conversations and discussions in which respondents spoke of their problems and during which explanations of what they meant by these terms were solicited.

included in the following paragraph may not indicate the latter implications, but they will become evident in another section of this chapter, where cases will be presented at some length.

The ghalban is defined by the poor in the following terms: "The ghalban is one who has no property, nor anything. He lies at God's door, Ala Bab Allah, like us". He is a poor man who lives on whatever God may send him. He lies at God's door as a beggar, awaiting help or charity, because he has nothing. The means of livelihood are understood to be haphazard. Here, though the explanation begins with a secular explanation, the latter part has implications for the poor's place in society being the group who need help, those that have to rely on God for help in the larger scheme of the universe.<sup>1</sup> They are the persons who are entitled to charity.

A woman of the area defined the poorest person in the area as ghalbana or "defeated". When asked why she calls her "defeated", she replied; "Just because she has no one, nor has begotten a son, nor has someone, nor anything". Meaning that she is a person whom life has left destitute, with no support of any kind, material, moral, or in terms of persons who could offer support. In this sense, she is "defeated" or "beaten by life".

Another said, "The ghalban or fakir is one who has no one, who does not work; it would be an old man, or a woman who has no one. There are many "defeated" people."<sup>2</sup> The ghalban, therefore, is a person: who:

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1. This statement was made by a peddler who is a particularly *angry man*. He is one of the cases taken in depth. This statement came as part of a long talk with him in his house where he spoke of his life, career and revolt at the system which did not allow him to roam freely in the city to sell his vegetables. He was particularly bitter about his condition and was one of the less pious few, i.e. he was quite secular in his approach to his condition. But belief in God is so much part of the Egyptian cultural heritage that the language itself is fully charged with it.
  2. This definition was made by a widowed woman who lives on a pension of LE.8 per month. Her husband's brother, married to her sister has forbidden her to work as this would expose her to exploitation. He was helping her materially. We were having one of our long taped conversations. She had been talking about her relatives, the poorer and better-off, her neighbours and the inhabitants of the areas. The conversation had been geared to discussing the problems that the poor face which eventually led to this definition and a definition of her own hardships.

[1] has no possessions, [2] has no stable job or means of livelihood, [3] has no one to help him, [4] is an old man or a woman, and therefore cannot work.

Taking all these elements together, ghalban translates as a person whom life has treated badly on the material, emotional and physical levels, hence "defeated". One element here remains unexplained. The definition says 'A woman', not an 'old woman'. This is no accident or omission. According to various references in the ethnographic data, it was found that a woman who has to strive for a living alone, because she has no male support of any kind, is immediately defined as ghalbana. Life is assumed to be harder on a woman than on a man. This relates to the whole Egyptian conception of "femaleness". A woman is assumed to be weak, in various ways, and unable to cope with difficulties as a man might. She is handicapped by her very "femaleness" which limits her possibilities of work, types of hardship, and particularly aspects related to shame which are liable to affect her much more than they would affect a man. Her chastity, an important Egyptian value, may be at stake through male exploitation of her needs.<sup>1</sup> Thus a poor woman is seen as more ghalbana than a poor man. She is eligible for social security, while a poor man is not, unless he is old. Thus, the establishment supports this cultural definition, and in this sense, it is not peculiar to the poor.

The taaban or 'tired' is a person who is less poor than the ghalban. He is not totally "defeated by life". He is 'tired' because of the hard lot dealt to him by life. He is not destitute, but he is materially uncomfortable because his earnings are very limited. In the words of one

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1. This conception forms part of a field-study by the researcher, an unpublished M.A. thesis on "Zamala, Sadaka and Hob: Conceptions of relations between the Sexes among Urban Cairo Youth and Adults", 1973. The present study confirmed that this conception is widely held in the various poor areas of Cairo that were investigated, as well as in rural areas.



respondent, "Any larger expense pulls him down". The employee whose pay is low and fixed, so that he has no chance of additional gain, is defined as 'tired'. The implication is that he is "tired with worry", the worry of not being able to make ends meet. The effort involved, the harassment, the hardships and the crises he faces all make him physically and psychologically tired, not simply materially. So the term describes both the subjective and objective conditions of persons of limited means.

The 'tired' or taaban is not as completely destitute as the poor or "defeated". He has a job and he strives very hard to avoid becoming totally poor. Whereas the poor are destitute to the point that they are unable to acquire anything beyond cheap food, bare shelter and a minimum of clothing. The 'tired' try to maintain at least an appearance of respectability.

One woman defined 'taaben' as: "The materially taaban or 'tired' makes no gain, that is, his gain is small or weak. It means his condition is not so good. He is not of middle income or mutawassett". She then declared that she considered herself to be in the taaban category. "We manage it by hook or by crook. We just let it pass: a bit of stuffed cabbage, or anything... Anything makes us 'tired', like big expenses, or anything that comes on a large scale would tire us. If we buy something important, it tires us. We can't afford it".<sup>1</sup>

In talking of 'defeated' and 'tired', we are really dealing with levels of poverty as defined by the poor themselves. They will often

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1. This woman works as a peddler. That day she was at home precisely cooking stuffed cabbage. As she cooked it, sitting on the floor, I sat with her conversing, and taping her. Members of her family kept coming in and going out. She is one of the cases with whom I had developed very good rapport over the years. She is one of the two low examples I put in later, in Chapter 10.

speak of someone who is 'defeated' and someone who is 'very defeated', they may speak of someone who is 'very tired' but also of someone who is 'a bit tired' or just 'tired'. But no one is 'a bit defeated'. They are either defeated or not, but could be 'very defeated' and that implies complete destitution.

Thus, the small employee whose pay is fixed is considered 'very tired', while the slightly better paid is 'tired'. The 'tired' typification is actually very elastic and may be stretched to the various levels of poverty and low-paid employments until we reach the middle-income groups labelled mutawasett.

The mutawasett literally means 'the middle', neither rich nor poor. Actually, the poor in defining their poverty rarely mention this 'middle' type. They oppose their image to that of the rich, but not to that of the mutawasett. They only use it when asked about the condition of someone in the area. They say that he is not poor, he is 'mutawasett'. So to get at their definition, one had frequently to ask directly and their reply was invariably based on their belief that he had enough to cover his expenses. Whenever asked for a definition, they save examples of who they mean. This was in contrast to the definition of the rich or poor, where they could put their definition into words. For example, one poor woman stated that the mutawasett is "Someone who is a janitor and who gets some gain or rizk (she means tips apart from his fixed pay), or a lawyer's clerk who sits at a desk".<sup>1</sup>

Asked how many times she thought that this mutawasett ate meat each

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1. Whenever I have to quote examples, I prefer quoting those whom I was able to tape or record verbatim, thus resorting to the fewer cases studied in more depth. However these examples illustrate one instance of the kind of definition obtained by the majority.

week (as eating meat for the poor, is a critical criterion of wealth and poverty), she replied "Twice per week, the mabsut or satisfied would; two kilos per week". Here it is interesting that she associated the mutawasett with the "satisfied". Asked if he would eat fruit, she said: "He can, Why not? "Then asked if he would buy milk and eggs, she replied: "He can get what he wants". Her answer is typical of others, except that some said that he has a property, 'a shop, or land, something'. Thus, it became evident that poverty to the poor would go only as far as the 'tired' or taaban, whereas the moment the person is typified as mutawasett he is not seen by them as "needy" but as "well-off" or mabsut. This differs from the widely held societal view which defines the mutawasett today as 'tired', in the sense of having difficulties in making ends meet due to inflation and soaring prices. The mutawasett is not equated with the well-off or mabsut by the higher income levels of society, nor by the middle income groups, nor yet by mass media. He is only seen as mabsut by the poor, relative to their own condition.

Just as the poor have typifications of "poor personal types", they also have typifications of the rich and well-off. These are lumped into two general "personal types".

The Ghani, which literally means 'rich'. It refers to material affluence to the truly rich and covers the whole range up to the fabulously rich. This is done by adding to the term ghani the equivalent of the term 'very' or awi. Thus, there are the rich, the very rich, the very very rich, etc.. What is important to note here is that, when the poor use it, they mean the very rich. Only a few defined it in moderate terms.

Mabsut refers to the well-off in general. Literally, it means 'satisfied' or 'contented' and thus is descriptive of a way of life which implies satisfaction of all needs to the point of contentment. It implies comfort,

well-being, enjoyment of life, and happiness. It not only describes material affluence, as the term ghani or rich does but a subjective state too. Frequently in describing the rich, a poor man will say that "the rich is mabsut or contented" i.e. the term stands in the same relation to the 'rich' as ghalban stands to fakir or poor. It is often also used in the sense of being well-off, not very rich.

An attribute of being rich or mabsut is mertah. This term literally means 'rested' or 'relieved', and carries the connotation of being satisfied or pleased, having the time for leisure, not pushed or constrained. Mertah stands in contrast to the fatigue or tiredness of the poor, or ghalban, or taaban. Both the ghani or rich and the mabsut or well-off are always mertah or rested according to the poor, since they do not have to struggle as the poor do. The mertah has a comfortable home, private transport, and feels his future to be secure, however much he needs to spend. He can get everything he wants without the fatigue of having to worry about his income or having to queue at the gamia to get things at a cheaper price. Therefore, he is mertah or 'rested'.

The ghani or rich man is seen as the owner of important property that bring him a large income. He is usually seen as owning several buildings, companies or factories, or may be several taxis, possessing more than one car and able to afford anything he wishes.

A peddler, expressing his dissatisfaction with his condition and wishing he had been a skilled worker, commented that the workers who made good profits were those who owned their shops. He continued: "These have, now, each perhaps twenty or thirty buildings and can get anything they want just by a phone call. These are the people who are really living, while we are dead though living. What is beans and taamia? [bean cakes sold ready, considered cheap foods) and even these are hard to find. In this country

it is true that the poor is dead while living!". As usual, in defining either the poor or the rich, they have to bring in the opposite condition. This man's views are representative of many similar statements.<sup>1</sup>

In this definition of the rich, this poor peddler is describing a new category of rich who have emerged in the last four or five years. These were previously working class and who used to be defined as barely earning a livelihood, or at best belonging to a lower middle income group. After the open-door policy, many workers went to the Arab oil countries to work under contract. Consequently those remaining raised their prices tremendously, particularly independent workers and those working in construction. As many of these workers live close to the area of research and some of them were well known by these peddlars, the latter felt left out, and the effects of "relative deprivation" made themselves felt, bringing home to the poor what they were missing. While others were 'living' they were 'dead' in a sense. This image is quite commonly invoked.

This man who was a ghalban held this view of the rich, the informant was one of the 'tired' poor and defined the rich in the following terms:

Those who have the money are those who have the property, who get a regular income of say L.E.200 or L.E.300 per month. For example, I know someone in Rhoda [a richer area across the bridge from his area] who has property, and one of the children owns 34 taxis all by himself. Not only this, but he is also an employee of muwazaf".

He appeared bemused, then added:

Not only he has 34 taxis, but also an employment!  
These people have regular incomes so even if he spends all his income [from work], he's got always this monthly income that comes to him. So this is a man whose income never finishes".

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1. Again this is one of the cases studied in depth. This was one of the poor who not only was quite aware about the economic condition of the country like the others, but who often made biting and critical comments as he was very resentful of the rich and of the system that left the unskilled behind.

This, to him, was what being rich meant: an income that never finishes.<sup>1</sup> This would ensure that a man would always be mabsut or contented. It was the security of the rich that he envied. To the poor, the problem is always that the money finishes too soon. It is this effort to try to make it last which makes them 'tired'. It is this surplus that the rich possess which is seen by them as the essence of security and riches.

A poor woman who had to learn her livelihood by selling vegetables piece by piece on the street corners declared, "Some people are contented or mabsultah and rested or mertah, they don't have problems, but we have problems because we have little, or hardly enough". Here, the "way of being" of the rich is emphasized as contentment and comfort, the lack of effort. It is set in contrast to the problematic state in which the poor live.

Another woman who lived in a shack because they could no more afford to pay a rent declared, "The rich is mabsut and calm or rayek in his living, but we are all alike". When asked what she meant by this she replied, "It means he has money with which he is mabsut or contented, that's all".

Thus, according to the poor's view of self and others, we get a form of equivalence which appears to be:

|         |                |        |               |
|---------|----------------|--------|---------------|
| Poor is | <u>ghalban</u> | or/and | <u>haaban</u> |
|         | defeated       |        | tired         |
| Rich is | <u>mabsut</u>  | and    | <u>mertah</u> |
|         | contented      |        | rested        |

The following 'course of action types' provide the typifications that qualify the quality of the poor's life-experiences.

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1. My informant is a poor ironer who has no shop and hence uses the tiny entrance to his staircase as a shop where he sets the table and the iron he uses. As he was born in this area and has at moments been employed in the area of the rich, he is well-informed about the man's possessions. However, the man he describes probably has a much higher income which he could not conceive.

(b) Typifications Related to Life-style

The 'course of action types' are typifications that describe the poor's style of life, their particular life-experience and the course they have taken. These reflect the conditions of deprivation they suffer, the manner in which they have to cope, and consequently define their nature. As these typifications emerged in all their complexity, now dealing with one level of experience and now with another, it became necessary to find a way to present the data in a comprehensible manner, one that allows these various levels to be pooled and, at the same time, to preserve the integrity of the data i.e. its holistic meaning, since it was all part of particular life experiences. The construct that was finally devised is labeled the 'path of patience'. This is a construct which, according to the researcher's judgement, comes closest to the spirit that pervades these course of action typifications.

The 'path of patience' conceptualizes the course of action of the poor's life. It describes the quality of their life-experience as conceptualized by them. It also describes their ideal-typical attitudes. This does not mean that it is always adopted, but it is the sort of path they believe they must engage in to solve their problems and cope with their hardships. They may revolt against it or accept it in turns, depending on their circumstances and reactions, but it forms an important aspect of their life, often a bitter one.

Those who follow this 'path of patience' are the suffering fakir, ghalban and taaban who need one quality to accompany them through life, and this is patience. Patience or sabr is a key concept in coping with poverty. It is so vital that it permeates the secular everyday life of the poor and is integrated into their religious view. Whenever they feel they are running into trouble and out of patience, the poor say, "God is with the

patient", or "Patience is good" or "Patience is the key to relief", or yet "O God, patience!". They are all invocations to patience. All these expressions are folk sayings that epitomize or encapsulate the various beliefs related to patience. Primarily, there is a belief that God stands by the patient and gives relief. However, the relief is not immediate, since patience implies suffering for a long time and waiting for relief. If the reward were to be quick, then patience would not be needed, nor indeed have a value. The value of patience lies in helping the person to bear hardships. That is, the belief that patience is a virtue that eventually bears fruit makes the poor ready to wait for the relief. And they need to wait long, sometimes a life-time. If it promised quick rewards, it would have caused frustration. <sup>since for the poor, relief does not come immediately. But the</sup> <sup>injunction</sup> sustains their hopes for years. For those who have nothing, hope is the only thing that saves them from despair. <sup>There is</sup> a saying, 'He who is patient will obtain'. The implication here is that time solves problems. This is another piece of popular wisdom. Thus, with the concept of patience, we get a religious belief, compounded with a folk belief, and popular wisdom encapsulated in sayings or proverbs. Patience is not just seen as an attitude and quality of virtue but also as a value.

At the end of a "path of patience", we get 'relief' or farag, as it is called (please see diagram). Till relief is reached, the poor must live a life of deprivation and suffering. How is this typified? The poor gets a limited share, "to his measure". Ala-Addu, which is an aspect of his rizk or what God sends him, as a measure of livelihood - a measure which is just enough for him. Since he has just that much "measure" he has to do without certain things until better times come, i.e. he has to let the hard times pass. Here the other typification of "letting it pass" or yekdiha or yemadiha comes in. In order to bear it all, and

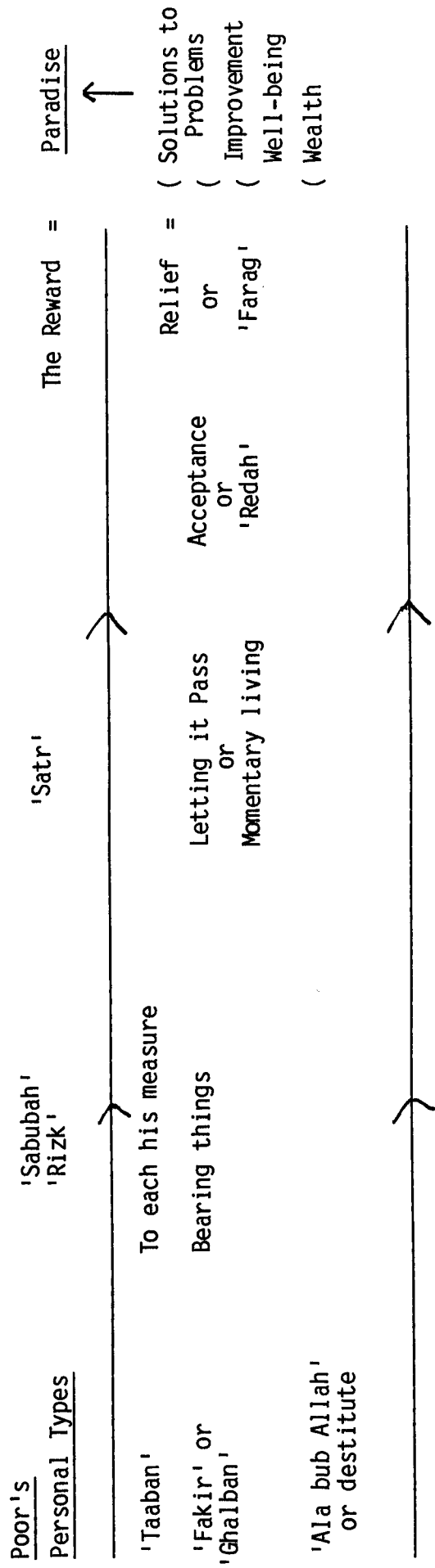


remain patient, he must accept his condition. Acceptance expresses both patience and acceptance of God's will (redah has been mentioned before in their view of life). All he can hope for along this path is "to be covered", in the sense of not being exposed, through his poverty, as typified in the notion of satr. Finally, when he reached the end of this "path of patience", he obtains relief which spells out relief from dire poverty by means of material improvement, solutions to material problems, or even actual wealth. It may also involve the poor's children growing out of poverty. Ultimately, there is the promised reward of well-being or Paradise - the ultimate relief from poverty. As is evident, these course of action types support religious-cultural views of poverty, but at some points deal with very practical issues. A closer examination of these typifications will show how they conceptualize the poor's quality of life and how they relate to the total view of life.

Ala Addu translates as "to each his measure" according to his means. As explained in the view of life, God gives to each person his nassib or destined share of the good and bad things of life, part of his nassib is his rizk. Each person is born with his rizk, i.e. rizk is always God given. (~~No one gets more or less than his rizk, i.e. rizk is always God given.~~) No one gets more or less than his rizk, which is his means of livelihood. His rizk may be 'large' or 'narrow', but whatever it may be, it will be sufficient to him because God gives 'to each his measure'. This is one of the "course of action" typifications that supports religious views. This view of rizk is held by the wider society, and is not peculiar to the poor. However, the notion of 'to each his measure' is often used in a very secular or practical way, in the sense that each person or family, must live according to their 'measure' or means. Where the expression is used in the sentence, "He lives to his measure", it implies that the person has a limited

DIAGRAM III

Typifications on The Path of Patience or 'Sabr' (The Researcher's Model of the Poor's Life)



What is Haram?

- It comes through dishonest work i.e. either not working hard for money paid.
- or through cheating, or stealing, or swindling others,
- or dealing with illegal goods or means
- it deals with anything forbidden by God
- taking money off orphans or widows

THE HARAM  
(Forbidden - sinful  
by God)

THE HALAL  
Permitted - lawful

- it comes through honest and hard work as God ordained
- It does not come through easy money, or stealing, or cheating, or swindling
- it does not deal with any illegal means or aims
- it does not deal with anything forbidden by God.

What is HalalConsequences

1. is condemned by God. it is annihilated sooner or later, does not last.
2. It leads even to loss of what was previously obtained through the halal, leads to poverty
3. it leads to destruction of self-respect and dignity.
4. it leads to humiliation by others and contempt i.e. lack of respect.
5. his children will grow up into deviants or good for nothings, because money spent on them was obtained through sinful means.

Consequences

1. is always blessed, multiplies, fruitifies, or suffices to one's needs however little it may be i.e. It lasts.
2. It brings compensation in the form of breeding good children, or being honoured socially or respect.
3. It preserves one's dignity. One is never subjected to humiliations, because there is no cause for disrespect.
4. God will facilitate things to him by putting in his way the good helpful people [called "the children of Hatal"].
5. Whatever you avoid to get through the haram, you will get through the halal, through Divine Providence.

THE SHAMEFUL or EIB

Forbidden by Society: Break of Social Values or Norms

1. Dishonour on the person & her or his family.
2. Loss of face and feelings of shame, i.e. feels dignity has been reduced.
3. Loss of other people's respect.
4. Social ostracism.

N.B. Their relevance to a study of poverty is that they provide a rationale to the poor that a lot of the rich's money is haram and sooner or later will go.. While the few gains he gets are halal and will be blessed, last longer, and produce good children or suffice - The relevance of Eib or Shame is that certain jobs are seen as a shame, like working as a maid in a house, because her chastity is threatened and because of undignified treatment a person may get. Any work or behaviour that reduces respect or dignity. For Upper Egyptians, to allow his wife to work is a shame on the man, means he is exploiting her when he should support her. So even if he is very poor, he will not allow her to work.

measure or means, and it immediately signifies that he is poor. The expression is sometimes substituted for the word 'poor' by saying 'He is to his measure', meaning he is poor. Thus, the poor have to live within their small measure, and this implies that their share of any worldly goods will be small, or limited. It means living with very little low income. In a practical sense, this measure refers to economic aspects. At the same time, on a more metaphysical level, it refers to a person's destiny, to a person's share in life, to a share dealt by an Almighty God. It is an aspect that follows the course of a person's life, at least for a while, until they enter another phase and obtain relief at some point. This possibility is always present yet it remains in the realm of the unknown, and may come from unexpected sources.

Referring to its religious meaning, a poor woman stated: "God gives to each one his measure. The poor is poor, the mabsut or contented is mabsut, and the rich is rich. Each one's livelihood is according to his measure. And to each God has made his daily bread halal or legitimate (or lawful), whether it be with salt, or with mish cheese, or with meat, or with onions. God has made each person's living legitimate or halal".

This statement does not seek to question why God made it so. This is the way He willed it, whatever one gets is legitimate. This acceptance of whatever one gets, is what redah or acceptance means. By making this statement, this person expresses her acceptance of her poor condition, though in the process she explains the meaning of 'measure'. When a poor person is asked how he or she is doing, they always answer, "Thank God, redah". That is, they accept, and express their satisfaction with, what God gives, even if it be ever so little. Of course, this is an act of faith on their part. Where there is no faith, no such statement is made, but the faith found among the poor is outstanding and seems to give them great moral

support in bearing their hardships. Redah, or acceptance, is an aspect of faith and of patience. Yet both reflect one belief, the belief in farag or relief at the end of the bitter path. Both redah, and patience are acts of faith. However, while they are seen on a spiritual or metaphysical level, again they exist on the practical level. For they mean bearing the everyday hardships and deprivations with acceptance. However, several poor reported their revulsion and resentment of their condition. Their annoyance and irritation was also observed in their everyday life, yet it comes to the surface in their leisure moments, moments which to them may be filled with boredom because their possibilities are so limited. Despite this no matter how they work and however hard their conditions of labour, they accept them. The moments that create most conflict are crises, i.e. when they need money for some urgent matter and know they do not have it, or when they aspire to something which they know they cannot achieve. At such moments, redah is difficult to achieve. However, when it finally is achieved, it brings profound relief, at least from the frustrations and fills them with the feeling that God will reward their patience and acceptance. In this, lies their only solace, and it can only be imagined just how important such a belief becomes, when other relief or solutions do not appear forthcoming.

As a poor person's income is limited, or at least sporadic, there are moments when money is simply insufficient for a full meal. They use anything, mish cheese with bread, or some rice, or a few piastres of beans - anything that satisfies hunger and makes it pass. It is a way of passing through a difficult period. This is what the expression of 'letting it pass' or 'passing it over' means, being patient about one's condition and letting bad moments pass. They often know it is not a momentary condition, but the implication of the belief breeds the hope of

better days to come. Yet, what actually seems to happen is that it becomes a way of life. They seem to be living momentarily all the time, yet it is not only the moment that is passing, but their own life. Thus, their life seems to be built on 'momentary living'. Whenever they get extra income on any day, they immediately buy meat, cook a good meal and eat it without any thought for the morrow. This is the only way they ever get a good meal. If they try to save some money for the next day, it means again going without it, eternally eating beans, mish and sometimes lentils and rice. A man who has a family of eight living on L.E.25 per month, was asked how he is able to manage: he replied, "I just let it pass, one day with mish cheese, one day with molokhia (Jew's mallow) cooked with water, and so on". Thus, "letting it pass" is a course of action typification which describes a way of life and the quality of the poor's life. It also explains an economic device whereby they maintain their existence with very little. The poor do not cook often. When someone says "Today we have cooked", they are boasting about abundance.

Satr or 'protection from being exposed' is an important concept. It implies that the person, however, poor, has enough to satisfy his basic needs without being exposed to the shame of begging because he is hungry, or barely dressed because of lack of money, or exposed to sleeping in the street because he cannot afford shelter. These are all conditions that are seen as degrading a person because they affect his dignity and self-respect. God is labeled the sattar, "He who covers or protects". The poor often express their fear of being exposed by saying, "We want nothing but satr" or "May God keep us covered". Sometimes better-off people may use it in situations that are threatening, in which they risk losing their job, property, or whatever preserves a facade of respectability. However, when the poor use it, it is usually in the sense explained above. Implied

in the notion of satr is that it is God who ultimately provides it. The poor seem to use it most frequently with the implication of the Sattar. The implication of satr for the poor is the fear of exposure, the fear of a day when they truly run out of the little money they have. This is a fear they live with. Only the belief in rizk and God's protection saves them from complete breakdowns under the stress of such a fear. The fear is all the more real since most of them have no regular jobs and rely entirely on daily odd jobs that they often have to improvise.

The concept 'to each his measure' also refers to various levels of experience. On the one hand, it refers to the economic level of their experiences, small and limited income and strict budgeting or at least a careful distribution of their meagre economic means. On the other hand, it refers to the physical level of their experiences, bodily discomfort, limited and insufficient food, as well as poor clothing and shelter. It means feeling cold, weak, ill, dirty, tired, or living in unhygienic conditions. On the level of psychological experiences, it refers to feelings of deprivation, of the frustration of being unable to obtain what they need or wish to have. On each of these levels, the poor person is "defeated" or "ghalban". They have to endure or bear things, continually. They are forced to 'accept' a situation termed 'poverty', and in order to accept it, they need patience. The difference between 'accepting' and 'acceptance' is large. 'Accepting' causes frustration because the person is forced to live in this situation. In 'acceptance' or redah, the person accepts his situation through "free will", through an act of faith. He accepts it because it comes from God and he knows that God is fair. As a human, he has no means of knowing the reason why God has willed it so, but he is sure there is some good reason. His very acceptance provides him with dignity, for he exercises his will to accept.

Acceptance or redah is yet another level of the experience of poverty. It is a sublimation of the phase of 'letting it pass'. Patience is also a sublimation in this sense, for again, it presupposes an exercise of the will. Instead of a product of oppressive forces, suffering and the deprivation become a means of exercising one's will, building up one's endurance, and lifting oneself up in one's own self-esteem, as well as in one's status with God. It also preserves the poor's pride when facing their fellow-men. Instead of degrading themselves by whining or appearing beggarly, they answer 'redah', and hence acquire respect.

This emphasis on the role of an "active will", rather than a "passive acquiescence" of their condition would not be complete without discussing a related point often argued by Orientalists and others on the effects of religion, and particularly Islam. The 'reliance on God' advocated by Islam is often seen as encouraging a "passive attitude" and justifying "laziness". In fact there is a distinction made in Islam between what is called tawakkúl which means total reliance on God, and tawāakul, which means 'the interplay between personal initiative and divine assistance' (Kamel, 1976). While the latter is advocated, the first is condemned as an excuse for laziness or passivity.

These course of action types provide us with a typification of the poor's reality. They allow us to draw out the main lines, and give some indications of their life-experiences and the quality of life that is peculiar to a condition called 'poverty'. A style of life based on the little they can afford, insufficient and cheap food, clothes and shelter. They live according to their "small measure" involving great deprivation. It is also a style of life which is constructed as if it were a temporary condition, in which the fear of exposure is only overcome by faith in a God who is essentially Sattar, or Protective.



#### 4. Sayings, Proverbs and Stories in the Social Construction of Poverty

Popular beliefs and popular wisdom are often encapsulated in sayings, proverbs and stories. The poor often invoked these "fixed forms", as well as free forms of oral tradition to define their reality. These forms are part of the cultural heritage, or 'reference schemata', which are drawn upon in everyday life. They act as guidelines for action. At times they constitute "ready-made" explanations for their circumstances, at other times rationalizations that help them accept their condition. As these were elaborated and analyzed, some were found to reinforce the religious view of poverty, while others were formed of cultural secular wisdom constituting 'recipes for action'.

Sayings and proverbs can be divided into several categories which fulfill different functions. Indeed, proverbs and sayings are so numerous in such an old culture that they could fill a volume. However, the choice made here was based on three criteria. 1.] Those most often used by the poor. 2.] Those that Church social workers mentioned in interviews frequently used by the poor. 3.] Those that social workers referred to in defining the poor and poverty. These are analyzed here as part of the social construction of poverty. Proverbs and sayings were categorized according to the various situations in which they were used.

##### [a] Proverbs and sayings that help the poor accept their condition

Such proverbs range from those that speak of an assured sufficiency to those that assert the advantages of poverty. Of the first, one proverb says, "God gives the cold to the extent of the cover" which is the equivalent of the English proverb, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb". Here, the implication is that however little they may have, God will make it suffice for their needs. Taken more literally, both the poor and social workers declared that they were astonished how the poor were able to bear

the cold without getting ill, while the well-off wear woollies and yet keep catching colds. The poor use both the religious and secular perspectives almost in the same breath to explain this. The religious falls within the Health versus Riches common-sense construct: God gives the poor health and immunity to compensate them, so that they do not feel the cold as much as the rich, nor catch colds as they do, even though neither their clothes nor homes are warm enough. The secular perspective used explains that as you get used to the cold, you feel it less, and you also develop immunity. For example, a poor man compared poor children playing in water crevices bare-foot, after the rain on a cold day, to a rich boy who stood observing them, wearing a coat and shoes. Yet the children did not catch a cold while the boy did. The poor man explained that the boy's mother covered him too much and so he remained delicate.

A proverb which emphasizes sufficiency, but also warns against use of dishonest means says, "The haram or sinful closes down houses, and the halal or lawful, however thin, lasts". Here, there is an obvious reinforcement of the elements found in the religious view. This proverb reassures them that, however small their income, it will stretch to cover their needs since it is halal, while sinful money would bring utter ruin or destruction to the family.

Proverbs that help them accept their poverty by proclaiming its advantages say, "Poverty is a medicine to us", i.e. it is a cure for many vices. Since the poor cannot afford them, the implication is that proverbs uphold virtue within its confines. A similar proverb runs, "Poverty is modest and wealth is immodest", meaning that wealth has a corrupting effect, while poverty leads to virtuousness, because it prevents indulgence in vice, which is costly. It must be noted that social workers, rather than the poor, spoke of these two last proverbs. It appears that the poor

cannot bear to rationalize poverty on this basis, and prefer to see it in terms of a Godly design, rather than as bitter medicine which leads to virtuousness.

Some proverbs and sayings attempt to provide a sense of security, like the saying, "No one will go hungry or naked". This asserts that somehow, food and clothing will always be available. Similarly "The living gets his food". This asserts that the poor will eat whatever their condition. They often cited this at the end of accounts of their limited means, as if to reassure themselves or assert that somehow they will manage.

Another saying puts the emphasis on divine control of the world: "You want, and I want, and your God does what He wants". Here the emphasis is on God's will. There is a planning God who exists, and hence, whatever persons may will, God's Will finally overrides them all. This again supports the religious view of poverty, riches and a person's destined share, or nassib.

A final saying in this series is far from giving a sense of security to the poor or anyone else, but it helps the poor accept their condition with the belief that at any time, anyone can fall into their condition, for it blames "the vicissitudes of time". It says, "The times do not leave the walker walking nor the rider riding", and as is evident it bears a tinge of the ancient Greek belief in the ironies of fate and the notion of the "Gods will laugh". It is a pessimistic view that implies that every person experiences his moment of downfall. For neither time nor life ever let people go their way unhindered. This is quite a secular saying in which there is no compassionate, just God to equalize the balance through compensation. Yet time acts as an equalizer bringing down everyone in turn. Implied here is a lesson: onlookers (here, the poor) must

not be deluded into thinking that he who is revelling in fortune will remain so, since he too will see bad times. Hence, the poor are not so badly off, since everyone is threatened by the prospect of suffering or bad times. The poor are therefore not alone in their misfortune.

[b] Proverbs and Sayings that Define the Poor's Situation

A proverb which defines absolute poverty states, "At the poor's, if bread is available, then salt is a luxury". Another that balances this austere definition runs, "God gives the salt the taste of meat". That is God gives the poor the grace to enjoy their bread and salt as if they were eating meat to compensate their deprivation. Here the emphasis is on the religious perspective and God's compassion to the poor, a sort of miracle.

Another which indicates utter destitution is "He is on the iron", i.e. he has absolutely nothing, lives from hand to mouth. The same meaning is given by "A person beaten by the wire". It is the bareness, the lack of possessions and the idea of being beaten or defeated which are emphasised in these two sayings.

Two sayings emphasize the fact that "hidden poverty" exists: there are families that are poor, but no one knows it. Inhabitants of Der responded with this saying often, whenever asked who were the poor in the area. They would each name a few, then indicate that many others are "undeclared poor". These were often reasonably successful workers, families who upon the death of the head of the family lost all income. However, they were too proud to show it, and tried to manage somehow on a "let it pass" basis. They kept a facade of respectability by always appearing clean and reasonably well-clothed at the expense of better food. Sometimes, however, they had to gradually sell their better pieces of

furniture to meet school fees, basic clothing needs or an illness expense (e.g. the case of Narguess).

Another saying which emphasizes "undeclared poverty" is: "No one knows anything about he who sleeps without dinner". This was mentioned by a majority of the poor interviewed. It also emphasizes the fact that the non-poor are unaware of the sufferings or basic deprivations of the poor. Although it is a common saying that, "In Egypt, no one dies of hunger" for the non-begging poor, it often happens that they must miss a meal. They often said that they went without dinner because they could not afford it. It is a particularly bitter definition of poverty since it implies feeling the pangs of hunger all night and consequently being unable to sleep. Sleep without dinner was, for them, the height of misery. When unable to eat at all, especially going without breakfast or lunch, the poor sometimes used the expression, "I am moving (or going about) on my stomach's flesh". This implies that breakfast or lunch has not been willingly dropped and that the pangs of hunger are deeply felt.

[c] Proverbs and Sayings stated by Church Social Workers that warn against laziness.

Church social workers are unpaid volunteers, in each of the Coptic Churches' communities, who organize various kinds of help and charity for poor Christians living in their defined areas. From interviews with 12 volunteers and without soliciting any proverbs or sayings from them, the following sayings were mentioned during the conversations. The social workers came from other areas than the area of ethnographic research. Most had served the poor for ten years or more.

They mentioned the proverb "At the poor's, if bread is available, then salt is a luxury", as well as such expressions as "on the iron" and

"beaten by the wire", and "families which the walls are hiding". These proverbs were used to define poverty.

However, they had another set of proverbs and sayings which warned against poverty and its evils, and which urge people to 'work' as the supreme antidote to poverty. These sayings were not mentioned by the poor at all. One says, "The lazy is poor", which warns against laziness as a cause of poverty. A similar one says, "Whoever does not work, does not eat". Here, there is an exhortation or appeal to work. Again, another says, "Don't get fond of sleep lest you become impoverished". Again it refers to laziness which leads to poverty. And finally: "Rizk (or God given livelihood) demands swift action", implying that sloppiness does not lead to gain. 'Swift action' or khifiyah also implies cleverness and quickwittedness.

In all these sayings, there is a clear statement that laziness leads to poverty and no account is taken of the lazy rich. It seems that the poor are seen as lazy and the cause of their own poverty. This is similar to some Western theories which blame poverty on the poor. However, the interviews indicated that these social workers do not blame the poor for their condition. They always examined every case that needed help and declared that there was always a valid cause of poverty, e.g. death, disabledness, illness of the head of household, a poor job or particularly difficult circumstances. However, they emphasized that the Church was very careful to have a policy that did not encourage dependence on its help, but pushes all able members of the family to take a job or take a part-time paying activity if they are not studying, otherwise it withdraws its help. That is, they encouraged work and discouraged any form of laziness. No doubt social workers resort to these sayings in talking to the poor to push them to work.

[d] Stories that Help in the Construction of a Philosophy of the Poor

The prevalent view of poverty, as well as the various typifications, are supported by stories and folklore which one rarely hears from middle or upper income groups. Not only in fixed forms, but also in the free form of modern stories which run along the same lines, emphasizing the same philosophy of life implied in their view of poverty, and the proverbs and sayings.

In this section, a story has been taken from the oral tradition which comes through migrants from the villages. This story is told in poor slum areas like Der to children and young adults. It is recounted here as told by one poor man who was disabled and who was particularly articulate.<sup>1</sup> This folk tale supports cultural and religious views of poverty and emphasizes a belief in the equality of mankind, poor and rich, destitute and nobleman.

"A king had a daughter to marry off. He told his minister that the only condition he required of her prospective husband was that the latter's kingdom should be exactly equal to his. His minister looked everywhere but could not find one person who fulfilled this condition. Then, one day, he found a poor man, who said to him, 'I am the one you want, and I am ready to die if I don't fulfill the condition'. The minister asked, 'But how do you fulfill the condition?'. But the poor man insisted saying, 'This is not your business. Just get me a galabiyah to wear in

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1. The life-history of this man was taken down and taped. He is taken later as one of the two major examples used who elaborate a "philosophy of the poor", and more details are given of his life. He believes that such stories only come from the village and not from the city. However, as the majority of the Cairenes were, at one time or another, rural migrants, more people may know these stories than one may warrant. However, only further research may be conclusive.

order to be able to meet the king'. The poor man was provided with one, and he put a piece of chalk in his pocket and went to meet the king. He was invited to the king's table and after eating, said to the king, 'Do as I tell you'. The king accepted. So he told the king to lie on the floor, and when he did, with the chalk he drew around him his shape. Then he asked him to get up and the poor man lay within the same outline, and said to the king 'Our kingdoms are equal for we will be the same in the tomb'. The king accepted his reasoning, and accepted that he marry his daughter".

Thus, death is seen as the equalizer. The king's kingdom was no larger than his tomb and all men became equal in death. In death no one possesses more than another. While this story was not told by others, similar stories emphasized the equality of people in death. Many of which are reflected in such statements and sayings as, "No one takes anything with him [to the grave]", or "Funeral wrappings have no pockets" or "We are all equal before God", etc....

Stories were not solicited from respondents, they were left to explain poverty and their condition as they wanted. More often than not they told free-form stories rather than folk-tales, mainly about rich people who lived in Der and were known to everyone because they owned two or more houses within the area, and whose life and particularly death were used as examples of the empty vanity of riches and meaninglessness in death. Such is the story of Om Fayez and her daughter (Chapter 4, pp.90-91). Om Fayez never enjoyed her riches because she was 'stingy' and the day came when her hundred pound notes became worthless, her children did not love her and her daughter died of a 'bad illness'. The daughter's husband did not grieve for her, but married a 14 year old girl and used his dead wife's



money to enjoy himself. Zeinab Toghana (Chapter 4, p.91) is now half-paralyzed and the children of the hara make fun of her, as she sits on a stone in front of her house. Finally, there is the story of the rich woman who suffered from an incurable disease and died. Her husband married her maid three days later (Please see Chapter 10, under Dawlat).

All the stories are of rich women who lived in Der-El-Sabbakin. All suffer from incurable diseases, thus emphasizing the Health versus Riches construct. Either their children or husbands are found not to love them, but await their death with impatience so as to inherit and enjoy their riches. Their riches are seen as having brought bad health and have robbed them of their families' affections. They die leaving their riches behind. Even their memory is not kept alive by their spouses, nor their death lamented even for a short while (they remarry three days later). Thus, the stories become 'lessons' to the poor of the worthlessness of riches.

##### 5. The Experience of Poverty and the Resulting Self-Image.

How does poverty appear in the consciousness of the poor? One way to answer this question is to examine the poor's own definitions of poverty. Such definitions spring mainly from their immediate experiences of the facts of poverty, but are embedded within a host of social and cultural meanings. Experiential views of poverty are accompanied by deeply felt emotions that must be grasped by incorporating descriptions of their life incidents with the various hardships endured. In turn, one must ask, "What is the self-image that results from the experiences of poverty?".

It is important to note that the discussion which follows does not necessarily apply to all the urban poor in Cairo. It focusses on the image given of themselves by some poor, the poor studied. Consequently, aspects may vary between individuals and across areas. Further in-depth studies

are required to indicate the extent to which these particular self-images are more widely applicable.

Experiences of poverty were expressed in terms of three interrelated themes:

[a] deprivation and economic difficulties;

[b] suffering and hardships; and,

[c] humiliations arising out of poverty and their effects on self-image.

[a] In defining their own poverty, the poor invariably speak in economic terms of what it means to be poor. They speak of their low income, of how difficult it is to make ends meet, of sleep without dinner, of having to pay for clothing or their children's school by going without food, of being unable to afford meat or fruit, and of being forced to stop treating chronic illnesses because they cannot afford the continuing expense. They point out that they were born of poor families, or that they have become impoverished through circumstances beyond their control.

One poor man, a peddler, uneducated and unskilled, defined poverty in the following terms:

"The ghalban or beaten is he who has no money; and of those, he who gets breakfast does not get a lunch, and he who gets a lunch does not get a dinner. We, the poor, are like that because we have no money, and he [the poor man] stays till next day without food. The poor is like us, as you see," he ended with a sweep of the hand taking in the very poor condition of the one room in which seven persons live, cook, eat, bathe, sleep, etc....  
I ask, "You mean you consider yourself poor?"

He, "Yes, I am poor".

I ask, "And what are the reasons for his poverty?"

He replies, "He has nothing to begin with. He is a peddler or salesman who gains 30 or 40 P.T. which are just sufficient for a dinner, and he also knows from this one £1 and from that one £1 and from everyone, until God solves it".

I ask, "And what do you mean by 'until God solves it?'".

He replies, "He would make a gamia (a credit association) for 2 or 3 piastres per day to pay later, and he saves it from his daily bread, i.e. from his tummy"... from cuts in his food:

I ask him if he thinks that the poor person could do something

to get out of his poverty, i.e. whether he is to blame in any way. He replies, "The poor is poor and wants to be rich, but he cannot. And is he so by his own will or approval? It is in spite of himself! And you see the children ... When I gain anything, it does not last. And I am sleeping, I don't work. I am afraid of the government".

He was referring to the price control which does not allow him to make a gain, and when he does not respect it, he gets caught, is fined and risks imprisonment. He had a long theory about the evils of price control, of how the wholesale merchant gets away without it, while the peddler gets the fines or is left with minimal gain.

This man emphasizes the fact that they have to skip meals. The poor are rarely able to eat the three traditional meals a day. The emphasis is also on the very limited income which keeps some always in debt. To avoid credit others prefer to go without meals. This is exemplified by this family who tried to avoid debt. They were kicked out of the room they rented because they had not paid the rent for four months. So they built a shack. The man is ill. He is a vegetable peddler. He has three living children and three who died. Asked to define who are the poor, invariably leads them to define their own condition. This is evident in a self-description given by the wife, "The poor is the one who gets only a basket of tomatoes from which to gain a living, which gets him a quarter of a pound gain. What can this buy for three children?". Asked what they usually eat, she replied, "Rice or potatoes, just anything. If we get one meal, it will do. If we get two meals it will do. A bit of mish cheese and bread will let it pass, and thank God".

This woman later said that they could not afford to borrow because they know they cannot pay it back. So they just skip a meal, or have one meal a day. It was observed that she gave the children a tomato each at noon. She and her husband were so weak that they could hardly talk, while the children may die. As usual, and like others, she could not explain the

cause of death, but said that when they reached age two they died. It was observed that this was the age at which they are weaned. So it becomes easier for them to catch infections from unwashed vegetables and also to become under-nourished. Her acceptance of her condition and the way she thanked God for the little she had are to be noted.

Another woman complained of the high cost of fruit and vegetables as well as the impossibility of eating meat. She said, "We can't even eat meat once a month. One would stand and feel dizzy [i.e. with weakness]. It is all due to worrying". Here she seems to say that the lack of meat makes her dizzy, then she says it is worry that has this effect. She tried to identify the reasons for her dizziness, in the process she points to two problem areas. The poor have a strong feeling of being deprived of meat. They all believe firmly that it gives strength and also "strengthens his heart". To them, being rich means affording meat. It is also the criteria by which they evaluate someone's material condition. They will say, "Meat never enters his home". Sometimes, they use it also to define the "stingy".

Since the government began selling meat at the cooperatives for the cheaper price of 68 P.T. per kilo, more poor are able to buy it, but not as often as they wish. Many of the poor had 3 kilos of meat on their ration card per month, but did not have its price. Buying meat meant not being able to buy something else, like vegetables or bread. This was particularly the case with the irzai's or daily wage earners.

The woman continued saying, "If you want to buy even dry beans, they are for 45 P.T. the kilo .... Fruits come and go and we don't taste them ... Take for example, peas, I would need three kilos for my family, how can I get it?".

A third woman said she spends 50 P.T. a day when they were five

adults. She said, "And you know the condition of food. And even if we eat and pinch hard [tighten our belt] it is not enough for us".

A poor man sums it all up. It is said:

'The satisfied is not aware of the hungry'... The poor man does not eat fruits. This is a difference. The rich man has a refrigerator and puts it all in. The poor does not have it, so he must do without it. We only get the minimum necessary food (al gut al daruri). We can't buy milk ... The poor tries to get what is cheap so that he can go on'.

This is the meaning of poverty in economic terms: deprived of milk, meat, fruits, some vegetables and often a whole meal or even two. Poverty means to feel weak. True, no one dies of hunger in Egypt but they often suffer from diseases due to malnutrition. The poor feel that "the satisfied" are not aware of them, i.e. that their sufferings are ignored, and this they resent.

What happens when they get ill? They can go to the free State hospitals to get treatment, but the treatment often consists of "only one kind of pill applied for everything". If they want a good prescription, they must buy it from the pharmacy. They may do it once, but if the ailment continues, they cannot afford to go on. So poverty has another meaning for the poor. A peddler who has had a bad cough for a long time said, "You know, when one of us [i.e. the poor] gets ill and dies without going to the doctor, it is because there is no money". There was a short impressive silence, then he said, "I have a friend who is a physician, who says to me, 'If you feel anything, come to me, whatever you want'. But I am shy to go. I mean, shall I beg from him? I am a Saidi [i.e. Upper Egyptian] and it shames me. I would rather die like this than go to someone". Here this poor man states the extent of his pride. It does unto death. He cannot bear the humiliation of having to ask for help without payment, because to him it means begging. His pride and dignity rebel against it. He prefers death to humiliation. This is in line with the Upper Egyptian system of values. It is important to note that

this man is not merely talking in this manner, he really refused to go. Observing his condition and discussing it with his wife and neighbours, it became evident that he was getting so much worse that he tried to sleep-off half the day to avoid coughing and smoking.

Earlier, the case of the woman who had a bad backache and could not repeat the treatment to get a complete cure was recounted. As a consequence, she became disabled. The researcher observed that she had to sit in bed at home. Again there is the case of a man who had a stroke and had to have physical therapy to regain his power to walk, but he could not afford it and became an invalid until his death.

Thus, the deprivation was expressed not only in terms of food, clothing, shelter and economic difficulties, but also in good health which consequently increased all other forms of deprivation. Examples abound. One poor man put it in a very short sentence: "Today, the poor person is a dead man". Again, in describing the poor, the informant said, "The poor person is dead". It is understood of course that some use the phrase in a figurative sense. In the sense that they are not really living, where really living means enjoying the fact of being alive. Of course, there are non-poor who do not enjoy life either, but the poor, more than any other are deprived of most of the things that make life bearable and pleasant and this on several planes: food, health, clothing, adequate shelter, minimal needs of comfort and treatment by others.

When defining their poverty, the majority of the poor relate the nature of their hardships to the feelings of intense fatigue or frustration they continue to bear. There was an alternation of anger and depression that became very evident, not only from their verbal expressions, but from various other forms of behaviour observed.

Taking first verbal expressions, a woman, a peddler, remembered the

years when her five children had to go to school and she had to provide for them by selling sugar-cane. She took large bunches to her home, cut and peeled them, and sold them in the hara, mostly to the children. She remembered with bitterness what she had to suffer:

In the full swing of winter, I used to carry it from street Abu Sefein, and it used to drench me completely with water, in full winter ... Then I would peel it, and sell it in the hara. And by the evening, I would feel this body of mine as though it were salt and it melted [i.e. completely exhausted and painful], and they would tell me [i.e. her family], 'make tea for us', and I would say, 'I can't. Whoever wants, let him make it'. And I would remain there in this corner [she indicates the bed corner] unable to move until the dawn call for prayer.

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This woman suffers now from rheumatism as getting wet appears to have affected her health. The pains she felt may have been due partly to this fact too. She also said that she was so exhausted and had so much pain that she could hardly sleep. She felt very bitter about her life-experiences.

Nefissah, whose husband used to sell beans and wheat porridge on a cart but became paralyzed had to take up his work. She worked all day, yet had to stay up all night until 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. to cook the beans and wheat slowly and to switch off the stove before going to bed. She had to wake up at 5 a.m. to heat it, since her clients began arriving from 6 a.m. onwards, to buy it for their breakfast. Thus, she only slept for two to three hours and never had time for rest. She recounted her difficulties, feeling as if she was "dying with fatigue",

Once, I quarrelled with the man [her husband]. He needed

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1. On the floor of the bed-room-kitchen, she sat cross-legged with the primus stove on the ground before her cooking. The walls and ceiling were all blackened with the smoke of primus ang gaz lamp We were just chatting, as I asked her about her life history in a casual manner. This chat was taped without her knowledge, and so gives an exact wording. The poor often estimate time by sun-rise and its movement as they have no watches or clocks. The five times a day call for prayer from all the minarets of the capital fixes time for them five times a day.

fruits but I did not have money to buy them ....  
I was angry and slept. Then I fell on the cooking  
pot and all of my arm was burnt. Samia [her daughter]  
cooked and cleaned the house at night [because she  
works all day]. And I went back to doing the house-  
work as I do now, although I was burnt.

Complaining about her "great fatigue", she began to cry, the tears rolling on her wrinkled face. She said how tired she gets and cannot rest, yet her husband shouts at her all the time and she felt he did not pity her. She said, as she cried, "I can't complain to the neighbours because they would reproach me or make fun of me". Nefissah felt that she was not even getting sympathy, in spite of her sufferings and efforts. "I want to have a bath and change", she added, holding her galabiyah between her fingers and looking at it, "But by night, I am too tired to do so".

All this effort hardly brought in L.E.5.50 per month. But she needed it. It paid for their daily dinner. The whole operation of cooking and washing was complicated by the fact that there was no water installation in the house. So Samia had to go daily, during her lunch break, to get several loads of water. Samia was as tired as her mother. She too was in pain from her kidneys. Her face was pale and swollen. Their fatigue was complicated by the worry of material difficulties. The eldest son was always in a very bad mood, angry and frustrated. He seized the first opportunity to go abroad. Actually, this was to help the family tremendously as he began sending them more consistent amounts, so that the mother could stop working.<sup>1</sup> The point is that each member of the family suffered some kind of hardship; the father had become an invalid because of inability to pay for treatment. Consequently, Nefissah and Samia

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1. This case was mentioned before in illustrating their daily round.



suffered from hard work and lack of rest, the eldest son was frustrated and unhappy, and the youngest studied hard to succeed, in the hope of finding work and, one day, helping the family. They all lived in the hope of solving their problems through some kind of work and eventually improving their condition.

Other forms of expression were observed. In the summer school holidays which stretch for four months for Preparatory and Secondary schools, two young girls 16 and 18 years old, had to stay between the room of the parents and theirs, a corridor connecting the two. Each of the girls had failed in two subjects in her exams, though one of them took group lessons.<sup>1</sup> They have a very poorly fed white dog which seemed to have lost its hair and which they keep to protect the pigeons from cats and other attackers.

Both girls dragged their feet listlessly, in their cheap plastic slippers, as they strolled slowly around the room, very pale and thin, an expression of dead boredom and misery on their faces. The dog left the strong sunshine of the corridor and came to sit in the shade of the room, near one of the girls who sat on the bed. She got up and without reason, kicked the dog angrily, saying "You want to sit in the shade, Eh?". She took a broom and swept the bed from which a wave of dust rose, filling the room. There was nothing else for her to do, and no possibility to go out. All household conversations centred on what to buy for peddling and how to meet the day's expenses.<sup>2</sup> There was no T.V. and no possibility to buy magazines.

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1. Their 'daily round' was described in Chapter 8, the family of Dawlat.
  2. Both the mother and aunt were peddlars, so their main concern was what to get for the day to sell it. As they had no refrigerator, the mother had to go daily to the market to buy the food items for her trade.

They had obtained an old "Hawaa" or woman's magazine from someone. Little nephews and nieces played around, screaming at each other. Whenever any children came near the magazine one girl would scream hysterically, "If anyone of you touch my magazine, I will kill him". And she sounded as if she meant it.

Their economic problems put severe constraints on their movements, on their ability to improve their surroundings and to participate in any activity. Their hopes of succeeding in school and work had been marred by their recent failure, even though temporarily. Their frustration came out in their anger against the dog, the children, even the aggressiveness with which the broom was used to sweep the bedroom. This alternated with their listlessness.

Another family where the wife was a widow expressed her unhappiness with her conditions. While her husband was living, they were relatively well-off. He had developed heart disease and was ill for seven years, dying after exhausting all the family's savings. She said, "I cry and say 'You died and left me to misery or ghulb (root of ghalban or defeated). Would that I had been the one to die'. After the man, neither father nor children of my womb [count] ... The man is the best of all ... I could tell him 'Get this, and that', and so when he died ..."

She had felt lost, as though it were the end of everything. When he was ill, she would say,

"'Let that man only live and the children die, I can beget others'. When he died, I used to take sand and put it on my head (an old Pharaonic custom of expressing intense grief). People told me, 'Had it been you who had died, he would have remarried very quickly. So this is better for your children'".

She had five children, and as she had no skills or education, she was not able to work. The age of the children did not allow her to go out to work even as a maid. She had fallen into despair as she became aware that all she could count on, for a family of six, was the L.E.8 pension. Others considered this a 'good' pension since they could get nothing. Not used to poverty and 'managing' she had to learn how to live to her new 'measure', with one meal a day. For the first time, she had to rely on 'charity', i.e. the generosity of her brother-in-law which at first was sporadic (the few piastres he gave to each) later it became more regular, on a day-to-day basis. She had to experience her daughter and two older boys leaving school at the primary level because they failed and she could not pay for their schooling. They had become apprentices, working from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Her level of aspirations had fallen much below what she had dreamt of for them. A good system of solid security and real 'free' education would have largely solved her problems.<sup>1</sup>

Children of the poor must often bear the responsibility of helping provide for their family. The hardships they bear are beyond their age. There are many such cases among the poor, but one rarely sees these children, as they usually work as apprentices from early morning till late at night, so there is practically no chance to talk to them or observe them. However, a rare opportunity to observe one such case occurred. It was not in Der, but in a Christian family in Ezbet Atef, on the urban fringe of Ain Shams. The informants were two young volunteer Church social workers.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Please see Chapter 5 - the Case of Narguess.

2. As this was an interview, I obtained much information on this case and others from these social workers who have been visiting these families regularly. This observation has its limitations, but is worth mentioning because of the rare opportunity it presented. It gives at least an idea of some of the difficulties that some poor children undergo, and the very early heavy responsibility they shoulder. It is at least one example. A single observation is always insufficient, but it gives a lead to some of the issues that should be investigated in a study of poverty, and arouses many questions as to the methodology or techniques one must use to reach such cases. I did see children apprentices in Der on Fridays, but they were always rushing to go out with their friends. They only stayed at home long enough to take a bath or eat.

The family consisted of a couple who have eight living children. They live in a room, hall and staircase. They have neither water nor electricity. The mother said that she begot 22 babies, but the rest had died. The children's ages ranged from 22 years to 6 years. The father was 53 years old. He used to work as a construction carrier or guardian of construction sites but had rheumatism and was unable to do so. He had always been badly paid, and he was an irza'i daily wage earner. The wife worked as a seamstress, making dresses for 10 piastres each. She said that she did not do so anymore, except for herself or for her children. As soon as the children began to work, the mother stopped working; this is a pattern often observed. The eldest son worked as a helper to a bricklayer and got L.E.2 per day, but as he is preparing to get married, he has rented a room for himself and did not help with the household. However, he helped by getting medicine for his parents who both suffered ailments. One son went to work in Upper Egypt, it remained vague whether he sent help. However, wages there were less than in Cairo, in general. The third son was the only one who ever went to school. He was 11 years old and was in 6th Primary. The fourth worked in a tailor's shop for L.E.5.50 per month. He helped them with L.E.3. The fifth son Emed was 9 years old. He did not go to school. He sold ghazl el banat, which is sugar blown into a cloudy pink or white mass which children buy. They said Emed was too impatient and nervous to go to school. Apparently, he was the one who provided a reliable daily income of 25 P.T. Rifaat, the 11 years old, also worked like him, but only during the summer holidays. Both left the house at 7 a.m. and returned about 7 p.m. As we sat a woman came in to complain that Emed had beaten her daughter, and thrown her sack in the river. The mother said she was very sorry for what had happened and she would tell his father, and he would give him a good beating. This

is a classic answer to children's quarrels. It appeases neighbours and helps maintain good relations. Sometimes the beating takes place and sometimes not, depending on the attitude of the parents, their moods, or how much the complaining person is esteemed by them.

The researcher was there when Emad arrived. He was very small and thin for his 9 years. His galabeya was covered in spots and smears. His face, hands and feet were all smeared. He had the look of a man, not a child, a disillusioned man. His mother said to us "This is Emad". He swept us all with a glance, did not utter a word and sat on the floor facing us, leaning against the bare wall. He never gave us another look. He had no time for such nonsense. He was busy with the crucial business of everyday livelihood, shouldering the responsibility of a large family. He sat with his back against this wall, on the cement floor, his legs outspread, slightly apart before him, so that his galabeyah formed a platform on which his piastres could be counted. He plunged his hand into his pocket, and held as many piastres as his little fist could hold. He looked at them intently, probably counting them, then he threw them in his lap. One deduced that he could count in some way, though he had never gone to school. Was he taught by his parents?

He appeared to have a feeling of his own importance, but he was also very closed on himself. He gave his mother the money without a word. The boy appeared tired and hungry. Apparently, dinner was their main meal, the boy would buy a round loaf of baladi bread and stuff it with mish cheese or taamia (bean burger) for a lunch, a meal that costs 1.5 P.T.

They had one bedroom and a sofa in the hall outside where we sat. Facing us, was a room rented by a Moslem family. When the father of Emad came in, he greeted us, then went to sit with them to watch T.V. They had brought in an electricity wire and had light. Emad's family had no

electricity in the bedroom. In the semi-darkness one could see one large bed and one sofa inside. Eight persons slept on one bed and two sofas. Some would have to sleep on the floor.

Emad had earned one skill, that of selling, but he would probably never become literate. The family was reliant on the L.E.7.50 per month he brought home. They left him to himself, as long as the money was coming in. It was a hard life for a young boy, a hardship which no one seemed to notice, or question. It seemed to be taken for granted, even by the boy himself. In many of the cases observed, there was this unspoken, taken-for-granted hardship, specially in families with a large number of children, because whatever they gained was never enough. In the case of this boy, he seemed to have built a hard shell around himself, yet his work was partly the result of an awareness of his family's needs.

He listened to his mother who was recounting her anxiety and how she spent many sleepless nights wondering how to meet tomorrow's needs. Then she said that she tells her eldest daughter, who had just got a suitor,

"My daughter, You will only feel sleepless when you get married. However much a girl is tabbana or 'tired' in her father's home, she really is not. It is not real fatigue. Only when she gets kids and has continual demands made upon her does she spend all night awake, thinking, and cannot close her eyes.

This was part of her definition of her poverty and its worries. It was a dreary prospect for the poor girl who already had a problem: her parents could not accept the suitor because they could not afford a trousseau.

The social workers promised help.

In their self-definition, whether they speak about their economic problems, the causes of their poverty or the expression of their fatigue and the harshness of their life, the self-image that emerges remains a dignified one.

The poor are deprived of all material goods and comforts and are left with only one thing, pride or dignity known as karamah. For this reason it is held to and prized above everything else. Thus, anything that threatens it is avoided, any humiliation hurts deeply. Poverty in itself is not shameful since within their view of poverty it is part of the divine scheme of things. This is why that scheme is reinforced with every new frustrating experience, for it maintains their feelings of dignity. Dignity, thus, is the single most important value for the poor.

For example, being poor for Rashad, a peddler, does not mean a low social status, for by respecting the haram and halaal, he rises above his poverty. He can be a sultan, as when he says, "He is a sultan whoever knows the sultan", i.e. he who respects authority is a sultan because he remains respected (the second use of sultan means authority). However poor he may be, as long as he works honestly, he is respectable. Most poor declare that it is shameful to beg, for it implies not feeling shame, and it implies being exposed to the humiliation of refusal or bad treatment. Because shame threatens a person's dignity, only by being ashamed of doing the shameful is a person's dignity preserved. Anything that exposes a person to ridicule also shames.

The feelings of shame attached to poverty usually come from two sources: [1] The feeling of being unable to fulfill an obligation due to material insufficiency, and [2] the shame that comes from being humiliated by others, either because one presents a poor appearance, or because one is seen as a beggar.

[1] The shame that comes from being unable to fulfill obligations, arises as a result of two values that are widespread in Egyptian society: generosity and hospitality. These two values impose obligations. Failure to fulfill

such obligations may give rise to feelings of shortcoming which may easily affect a person's pride.

To avoid obligations and save their pride, the poor must often limit their interaction with kin and friends. For any visits entail expenses, either that of offering hospitality in terms of food and drink, or presents if they are to visit others, for they cannot go to visit relatives or friends with empty hands. Presents such as fruit, sweets, or giving money to young children are entailed in visiting. If a man goes to a coffee-house, he must be ready to offer a soft drink to his friends, if they happen to be there. Failure to do so makes him 'lose face', as the culture would have it, i.e. it shames him. This reduces him greatly and affects his dignity. A poor man who knows he cannot afford such hospitality, avoids going to the coffee-house. If this is repeated, the person may find himself isolated from those whom he needs most at his difficult moments. The following example gives an idea of what is involved. It relates the poor's self-definition in economic terms with the shame attached to limited means:

The taaban or tired is the one who is like us, whose son is a carpenter or ironsmith, who spends on him [his father], it is one who gets a basket [of merchandise] and loses on it. The other is rich, mabsut or contented, possesses two or three buildings. The poor has no breakfast. The rich enters the bathroom with a towel to wash his face. But here is the poor: I wake up from sleep, lit a cigarette, and did not even wash my face. The rich would stay for two hours in the bathroom, and comes out white and clean.

As the researcher commented that the poor can also wash his face, he retorted, "When my purse is full, I would wash my face, and go to the coffee-house and invite three or four of my friends to drink a pepsi, but why should I wash my face since I can't sit at a coffee-house?"

Refusing to wash his face appears to have been his reaction to the fact that he realized that he could not "show his face" to his friends.



It was an expression of revolt against poverty, on the one hand, and of a sort of dejection on the other. This is in line with the Egyptian expression, 'He is unable to show his face', i.e. it expresses shame, which somehow is related to one's face. Consciously or unconsciously, his behaviour appears symbolic here. He hides his face from his friends, not only by staying indoors, but also by hiding behind the uncleanness which according to him, blackens his face, since the bath makes the rich man "white and clean". All this is related to the expressions used, for example, "It is clean like jasmin", which implies whiteness. It is also related to another expression, "He is covered with nila", which implies being in trouble materially or morally. Nila was a kind of black mud extracted from the Nile, and used by Ancient Egyptians in funerals to cover the face or head, as an expression of grief. Here, this man leaves his face covered with a symbolic nila.

[2] Because poverty as well as a person's self-image are socially constructed, though the poor try to preserve their dignity by means of their view of life and through a sort of dignified behaviour and self-respect, shame is often thrust upon them, as it were, through humiliations by others, either poor or non-poor. This is often due to a poor appearance, or/and an unwashed face or clothes. To give continuity to the account, the example of the same above person will be taken again here. He is giving an account of how the poor are treated by the food cooperatives' or gamia employees:

A well-dressed man comes in, he does not stand in the queue. He walks right in and buys what he wants, and he is saluted and called 'Bey' [a title] and he walks out. But a person like me .... no one looks at. They tell me, 'Go and stand in the queue', and they would insult me and may even beat me. But he is dressed in a suit, and is cleanly dressed, and so, he is respected because of his clothes.

It is important to note here that, every single poor person reported having been badly treated by these Coop or Gamia employees, who themselves come from poor families, who make money through tips on the job. This kind of treatment seems to bring home to the poor the hard facts of their condition. Whereas in their own quarter each respects the other because they know one another, and they can preserve feelings of pride and dignity, the moment they go beyond it, they become "non-persons" as Goffman would put it. The resulting bitterness, anger, frustration and resentment are tremendous. It is as though suddenly, they realize that to the better-off they are indeed 'beggars', as they would put it, and as though they have neither human nor citizen rights. They realize they are at the bottom of the social scale. They feel despised and scorned. This problem is most apparent among those poor who come into contact most with the world beyond their hara.

As is common in most countries, crime is often associated more with the poor than the rich. The rich can often cover up their crimes and get away with them. Thus, when a poor man is arrested under suspicion, he is more likely to be badly treated than a rich man, and may even be imprisoned until judged, while the rich man can pay the bail and a good attorney.

One poor man who had tried various jobs as cart-driver, vegetable peddler, cart-transport dealer, guardian for construction works and finally a maize peddler said,

"To the poor, the police officer says 'You son of a dog!' and pushes him. Once, my son was hit by an army truck and I had to quarrel with the officer to know if my son was dead or not [apparently the officer was not answering his question, though he had been called to the police station to ascertain that he was the father] ... Today the poor is a dead man",

he ended, in a typical fashion. Then after a short silence he said,

"This is the government. He salutes respectfully the capitalist, because he cannot beat him, but he beats the poor".

This man had been arrested and imprisoned, for from three to four days on several occasions, for using a cart and peddling the streets without a license and a formally regulated location. He did, finally, obtain a license but was particularly irritated by the different treatment accorded wholesale merchants who had been arrested for illegal activities. He felt humiliated and defeated by the unfair and unequal treatment he suffered at the hands of the authorities, and life in general. He shook with anger and resentment, as he told story after story against the government, the powerful and the rich - "Those who are really living", as he called them. He kept saying, "I want to live!". On a more depressed and sarcastic note he said "But God has given me rest from everything", i.e. that He had taken everything away from him, so that he may "rest".

He could not understand a law that forbade a poor man to honestly sell his merchandise in the street. He could not understand why his punishment had been so severe: [1] he had been fined ten times his income, [2] he had been temporarily imprisoned because he could not pay the fines, [3] he had been beaten for simply pursuing his trade, and [4] he had been dragged to the police station, "like a murderer who has killed eight persons". He was forced to restrict his activities until he obtained a license. However, by then his work entailed only selling maize in the evenings, perhaps because he had acquired the habit of over-sleeping but more likely because his sons had been able to find work.

This man clearly saw the poor as "dead men" and the rich as "really living". He saw the poor as objects of scorn and derision, while the rich were respected due to their money and appearance. The rich were seen as innocent and respectable because they could use their money and influence

to defend their rights. The poor were seen as "criminals". He felt that "the bite of inequality" came from the very people who were supposed to administer justice, but they did so unjustly. Whether or not his observations were right or wrong is not the point. What is important is the way the self-image of the poor is formed on the basis of their life experiences in the context of the wider society.

In Egyptian society, based on both Christian and Islamic morality, all people are held to be equal before the law. However, the poor's definition of themselves is always set in opposition to the rich and powerful. The poor see themselves as the subject of victimisation. For example, this quote by Rashad who was one of the mildest in his criticism of the rich declares:

"The poor stand at the Cooperative or gamia, while the rich gets his servant or porter to do so. They get two chickens to put in their refrigerator, when she has already six chickens and boasts, 'I have and I have!' And the poor can't get even one. So the rich has taken the portion of six poor families. The poor gets the chicken for 68 P.T. [its cost at the gamia in 1978] the kilo; while the rich go, get it and put it in their refrigerator, when they can buy the expensive type. Why don't they leave it to the poor instead? Your God is present!".

His resentment against the rich who take the poor's share is obvious.

Then he continued:

"Every time the Government does something for the poor, the rich take it. Like the 'people's material' they [the rich] buy it to sell it in the black market. Look at X .... in the People's Council, And the big people are not content with the high pay they get and look to the poor. They want to eat and that's all [i.e. the rich want to eat]. If God will not bring down guidance to people, nothing will be of any avail".

The self-image of the poor is one of a victim, exploited and abused by the rich, who instead of helping the poor, as the moral code dictates, take their share. Rashad declared, 'There is no conscience ...' The rich are seen as selfish and devoid of conscience, in contrast to the poor

who suffer and are 'patient'. Not only this, but the rich are seen as "having no faith". For example, Rashad continued, "When he is poor, the thief steals to eat. But when he is a manager and steals, why does he do it? Does he need it? He has no faith". By contrast, the poor are seen as "having faith", relying on God, accepting his Will, being generally honest and even if they steal, it is to eat. There is an Islamic hadith that says that a man who steals a loaf of bread because he is hungry is not guilty, since he is trying to save his life.<sup>1</sup> This is probably the basis of Rashad's explanation.

Among the poor, there is a conflict between the strong feeling of dignity which they try to preserve, and the humiliations imposed on them which threaten this pride. It is as though society, in the person of its administrators and authority figures, is set upon taking away from the poor the only thing they have left.

The deeply felt emotional overtones that accompany experiential views of poverty may now be summarised.

- [1] Feelings of bitterness related to the hardships and suffering they experience in daily life.
- [2] Feelings of depression or defeat which are related to those bleak moments when all their efforts appear in vain.
- [3] Feelings of acceptance in moments of faith, which seem to greatly relieve their depression and perhaps prevent more severe psychological disturbances.
- [4] Feelings of frustration when their hopes and plans are unfulfilled.
- [5] Feelings of anger directed against those who despise and treat them unfairly.
- [6] Feelings of resentment against the rich and powerful who ignore their sufferings, and who exploit rather than help the poor.

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1. Unfortunately, I could not lay my hands on this hadith, but it forms part of my knowledge of Islam.

- [7] Feelings of shame and humiliation when they have been insulted, beaten or made to feel "beggary", or when they cannot meet their social obligations.
- [8] Feelings of boredom, particularly among the young when various activities, or entertainment and recreation are closed to them.

One final observation on the self-image of the poor needs to be made. When all the cases were compared in terms of self-definitions, it emerged that those who had adopted a more religious view of their condition were better able to sustain their own image as "dignified" than those who had adopted a more secular view.

The adoption of a more religious view may have given the poor a more dignified image of themselves, since it provided them with a place, not only in society and the world, but also eternity - a place, elaborated within the religious dimension, that accorded them a privileged status, one of the "children of God". Alternatively, the religious view within which the poor defined themselves may have been an image constructed for "outsiders" (e.g. myself). Nevertheless, an image that they wanted very much to believe in, so as to establish and protect a dignity which was challenged daily and damaged every time they left the shelter of their hara.

CHAPTER TEN: THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE POOR AS ELABORATED  
BY TWO POOR "PHILOSOPHERS"

"The world is nothing; a bite of bread  
... a piece of rag ... these are  
sufficient for the times, for he who has  
not and who owes not".

Rashad

The religious view of poverty, the typifications of poverty embodied in personal types and course-of-action types, together with proverbs, sayings and popular beliefs, are all combined to form a 'philosophy of the poor'. It is a philosophy formed out of the facts of their life, constructed of ethics and folk wisdom that were drawn from the social heritage of a system of metaphysics. In other words, they have integrated many of the basic elements that go to form a "philosophy". These elements have already been discussed. The following two examples have been selected to show how these elements are combined in the consciousness of two individuals who have been poor for most of their life. They are a man and a woman, each from a different family, each with his<sup>or her</sup> own life experiences, circumstances and personality. As they discussed their poverty, a "philosophy" emerged which bears a close resemblance to that of others of the poor. They render a philosophy that pools the different aspects elaborated by other poor people in their various definitions and descriptions of poverty. Even if they were taken as two individual accounts, they would still be meaningful in showing how two poor persons define their condition and construct their reality. Their own philosophy of life is constructed from their life experiences and a mixture of religious and folk beliefs, values, norms and the nature of the environment,

as they see it. Their common-sense constructs emerge within the context of their life-world, as they restructure them to suit their own reality.

An attempt is made here to provide a description of the situation in which the account occurred and to summarize certain happenings that clarify the circumstances that led up to these accounts. Thus, relevant parts of the field-notes will be rendered as they are while others will be summarized to preserve the logical sequence of the account.

## 1. Rashad's Philosophy of Poverty

### His Life Profile

Rashad was born on the 27th of June 1914, in a village of the province of Sharkiyah in Lower Egypt. At the age of 12, his father died and he was brought up by his father's brother. He is literate, having gone to the kottab school at the village.<sup>1</sup>

He had three brothers who died and two sisters, one living in Cairo and the other in his village of origin.

Rashad's work career is a strange one. After learning the Qo'ran, he got bored with the kottab and at the age of 13, he ran away from his village and "walked till Cairo" without a piastre in his pocket, then walked back. For two years he was ill with swollen feet. After this he made his second trip to Cairo "working in milk". Then returned to the village to work on the land. It is then that he left his uncle and brothers and worked for a wage. He came back to Cairo and worked on its rural fringe in Matariah, lifting sacks. He worked for 4 piastres a day. He

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1. Kottab are rudimentary schools in which a Sheikh teaches the children reading and writing, basing all his teaching on the Qo'ran which they have to memorize even before they can read by ear and rote memorization.



worked in agriculture for the Sheikh of a tribe and showed his skill in agriculture. When the Sheikh died, he left and came to Cairo to work with the <sup>Sheikh's</sup> sons. It was his last job on the land.

He worked in a soap factory, where at first he did their accounts, then when he learnt about the soap industry guided them to make better soap. He warned them about selling their products to one person to avoid monopoly. He worked there for about 10 years.

Then he worked in a pharmacy doing their accounts for one month. He then worked for a man who produced "surgical threads for operations out of sheep gut", but this lasted for only a short time. Then he worked as a construction worker. His last job was preparing baked beans and wheat (as porridge) and selling them every morning on a cart. One day, he had a stroke and became paralyzed. He recovered enough to be able to walk, dragging his foot, he had a slightly heavy tongue and a limp arm. Early April, 1979, Rashad suffered another stroke and died three days later at age 65. Contact was maintained with his family.

Rashad married a divorced woman, Nefissah, at a later age than is customary (about 33 years). He begot two girls and two boys. Only the eldest was married. All his children were sent to school and finished their secondary education in technical colleges. The son and daughter began working.<sup>1</sup>

When Rashad sold beans, as a roaming peddler, he made between 65 P.T. and 75 P.T. per day. But after his illness, his wife cooked half the quantity and could not sell it all. So their daily income dropped to less than half.

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1. The rest of the details of their life were covered in Chapters 5 and 8 and shortly in Chapter 10.

The researcher was first introduced to Rashad in December 1974. He was still healthy and a somewhat remarkable person in an area where most of the other men of his generation were illiterate.

His "philosophy" was taken down in late April, 1978. It had not been particularly solicited as the following text will show. He had already had his first stroke.

### The situation

I had visited his wife several times during which she had told me about his illness and their economic problems. He was in the village, sent there to "eat well" for he needed a protein diet which they could not afford. On Monday, 17th April, 1978, 4 p.m., he returned. He was a truly pathetic figure. He had lost much of his stature and was very thin. He was more lucid than ever, in spite of the heaviness in his tongue. I told him I remembered the wise words he had spoken three years earlier, whereupon he remarked, "Politeness and moral education are achieved by these proverbs". He had not forgotten anything, his use of the figures of speech was amazing. For everything he wanted to say he could find a proverb, saying, Qo'ranic verse, or parable.

Rashad sat on the baladi sofa, cross-legged in the corner, his back against the wall. It was the only piece of furniture in the hall of the apartment. His son brought to him a box of locally-made Cleopatra cigarettes, but Rashad emptied them into a Rothman's and laughed telling me "I put it in a Rothman's, but it is local cigarettes", and he made a gesture that said that he kidded himself, since he could not afford foreign cigarettes. His wife brought me a glass of helba, grains that are boiled for their beneficial effects on the stomach. As I said I had just drunk something, Rashad took it. He looked pleased that I was recording his words verbatim

His Philosophy of the Haram and Hatal

I explained to him that I was studying poverty and the poor's problems, and could he help me in understanding what they were. I knew how proud he was, so I did not tell him that I saw him as a "case". I had known his condition from three years ago, when he was still working. The meetings with his wife had given me the details of how much worse their condition had become. I had observed her commerce which began early every morning.

He began by telling me that Egypt had good economic resources, but the conditions of war and misuse had impoverished it. He said,

"And he who protects something is usually its thief. However, he enjoys it [the fruits of his robbery] for a while and then falls [is caught]. But what a pity! People's conscience is not good. Help us O God! The haram or forbidden has closed houses and does not last, and the halal or legitimate, however thin it may be, lasts".

Rashad was referring to a scandal in the papers about a high official who had appropriated government money which he was supposed <sup>to</sup> protect. He then declared that such people undermine the resources of the country. Like all other poor people, he was aware of what was going on. In his case, he read the daily newspaper, others heard it on their second-hand transistors or through hear-say.

With references to poverty he said,

"God divides wealth among people as He wishes. These are arzak (plural of rizk) destined and divided by the Sovereign, and to each, God has given a mind for the good and evil. And the proverb says, 'Learn politeness from the impolite', and we say to him [who is being taught], 'avoid these things so that you don't become like him' [i.e. like the impolite]." (Of course here he is not referring

to the impolite but to the corrupt).

"Some people do not tire themselves [i.e. don't work hard] and they do not eat within the halal [because they don't work hard, the money they get to eat is not lawful or

legitimate]. For example, in every three or four offices, only one really works, while others shout and cause the loss of other people's rights. But he who builds his life on cheating, the day comes when he gets cornered, and he who works hard, the day comes when God gives him relief or farag. Whatever you avoid to get through forbidden or haram means, will come to you through halal or lawful means. That is, suppose I want to steal a glass [because it is needed] if I don't steal it, God will either provide me with its price or give me a similar one. If I take it through immoral or haram means, God will cause me to spend its price. [i.e. as a punishment]. Thus, pickpockets steal thousands, yet the next day, when he needs a cigarette, he can't find it. Thank God, the God of all the Universe".

He ended with a contented smile of a man who thinks he has never taken what is not his, what is forbidden. The last sentence of thanksgiving implies it.

He continued,

"When you walk with God, He compensates you and he compensates the patient. When there is no money, it comes later. For example, I feel like eating dates, I could climb on any date tree; but if I don't, I would be walking, and someone would tell me, 'Take, Take!'. But once the decision taken, he should not say 'But I feel like having it', since he has intended the good. If he climbs to steal it, he may fall and break his back and die!".

He ended on a lighter tone, laughing and displaying his dry sense of humour. Rashad means that if he refuses to steal the dates, God will send him someone who will give him dates. Thus, God compensates he who keeps within the halal as well as the patient.

He then launched on a long example of his own honesty when he was working with the soap producer.

#### Shame, Dignity in Poverty

Then, his wife suddenly said, "When we had a cart [the one he used to sell his beans], some people said, 'Don't keep it, people will say you are ....'". Rashad interrupted her saying,

"I take it away? So what if I have a cart? is it a stigma or are. The doctor and the police officer ate of this, my hand. Were it not for the dirt, you would eat nothing tasty. If you are in the kitchen, your clothes must get dirty, and they will get spots. The one you despise, your cook, is the one who feeds you with the sweets [or nice food]. When you see her appearance, you get disgusted of her. But you eat nice things thanks to her. It is said 'Sell and buy and do not deny'. One may be a beggar and be disgusting, but he may have a castle, i.e. he has pride. And in a family, you may get the good and the bad, and this and that, and this beggar comes from a great family, but he does not want to throw himself [i.e. be a weight to any of them]".

His wife said, "I know a beggar who owned four houses".

Rashad commented,

"When you become aware that your neighbour is in need, give him [charity]. But he who begs saying 'Give to God', that one does not feel shame, and you should not give him. But the first you should give him and you will gain a grace with God.

Some people used to send me down tea, and they were Pashas and Beys [i.e. titled persons], while here in the hetta or area, it is a poor quarter, and they think here ~~that~~ the peddler is low and is nothing. When I got ill, notables, men and women, used to come in their cars to ask about me. Those who used to talk badly about me, upon seeing this, said 'No! Uncle!' [i.e. they were amazed]. I said to them, 'These are people whom I respect and who respect me'. Yet I used to wear torn clothes".

He gave another example of how people respect him, those in the rich area where he used to go with his cart to sell beans. Concluding his comments on the people of his quarter who despised him, he said gravely:

'If I get a criticism from those who are lacking  
It is the proof for me that I am perfect'.

A person may be poor, but may be of good origin.

This verse of poetry, as well as his statements, illustrate:

[1] His strong sense of dignity. He said that what he considered shameful was begging, not poverty or a 'lowly' job. Peddling is not shameful and

bears no stigma or are<sup>c</sup>, as people in the area seem to think. To prove that he was respected in spite of being a peddler, he told how even the rich respected him and showed concern when he was ill. If the rich who had important status 'pashas and beys' respected him, the attitude of inhabitants of the quarter who criticised him only proved their own 'lack' or ignorance, while it even stood as evidence of his own merit or 'perfection'. This verse of poetry is famous and has become a saying.

[2] He said that the poor should be helped without asking for it, since they manifest dignity. There is a widespread belief that it is the 'dignified poor' who should be helped, not the 'beggars' who have made begging a trade, and whom the public, mass media and police have denounced as sometimes acquiring great wealth by begging, hence his wife's comment on the 'beggar who owned four houses'.

[3] His statement on the possibility of a person being poor but being of 'good origin' refers to himself. Several times during his account he indicated this. Later, in his life-history, he said that he had had a brother in Alexandria who was a 'lewa', the highest grade in the army, and who had died a couple of months earlier and 'all the country was sad for him'. Again here, he expressed his pride, and attempted to show that poverty did not tarnish a person's dignity, since there is no shame attached to it.

It was a few minutes to six and I had to ask Rashad for leave to keep my appointment with my informant. Rashad had been talking for two hours, but I was sorry I had to leave.

The next day, I went to see Rashad again. I had my recorder and asked his permission to tape him. He accepted, very pleased. He was one of the rare persons who did not show fear of being taped.

Their upstairs neighbour sat on the sofa beside Rashad. After talking

about her nephew's studies, they began talking about the lack of "natural life" in the city. Rashad expressed his condemnation of birth control because it "contradicts God", then he expressed his disapproval of pollution, and distrust of formal medicine. He said that insecticides polluted food and air. Finally, he said, "Money used to be little, but there was barakah [grace which makes it sufficient] in food. Mish cheese used to be better than mutton meat".

### Health Vs. Riches

Rashad continued his remembrances,

"The father of Sayed Marei<sup>1</sup>, his land is our land [i.e. he worked on his estate and lived on it], and there were fifteen of us digging the ground for the cotton, and we used to eat bissarah [lentils cooked in a special way], and all day Tong we would be holding the axe that weighs 5 rotelis and bending [more than 10 kilos]. Hussein Bey Marei had gone to visit the village. He asked, 'What will they eat?'. They answered, 'Mish cheese or onions' [i.e. with bread].

He said, 'But they will die'.

They ate bissarah and mish and plunged in the canal, and then slept. He said to them, 'O people! don't you feel anything wrong in your body?'

They said, 'No'.

He said, 'Won't you have all my money and give me good health?'

The reason is that he was ill with diabetes".

Rashad ended on a note of pity for the man. This illustrates the notion of Health versus Riches. The man had riches but not health and he realized what he had missed so was proposing an impossible exchange.

Rashad continued,

"There was a man who had a garden [i.e. fruit plantation], but he was sick and used to eat only boiled food. He had hired workers to plant his garden. At noon, he found them eating torshy [salted and spiced vegetables] and onions, while some others had brought cheese. This man could not sleep except with pills. He said, 'Wouldn't anyone help me and I would write in his name 5 feddans?'

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1. Sayed Marei is the author of the Land Reform in Egypt and for years had various important positions in Sadat's government. The Marei family themselves were large land-owners.

So someone said to him, 'Eat dry village bread with salted cheese'. He did, and as soon as he ate, he slept under a tree. They woke him up in the evening, he was hungry, and he went to the doctor and then threw away all the medicines and said, 'I want bread and salted cheese'. This is a lesson to the poor and the rich. God gives the taste of meat to the salt that the poor eats.

Here again his stories illustrate the Health versus Riches notion. In spite of their scanty food which was very salty, it caused them no harm. He believed it nourished them, perhaps as much as meat. Here the view that God gives salt the taste of meat to compensate the poor, is illustrated. It also illustrates how the poor can sleep well, while the rich need pills to sleep. When the rich man takes the poor man's advice, and eats the same food, he is able to acquire the same deep sleep which the poor enjoy, even when it is under a tree as poor peasants are known to do. The deep sleep of the poor is often envied by the rich who declare that once a peasant or a poor worker has eaten, he sleeps soundly because he has no other care in the world, while the rich have the worry of what to do with their fortune. Rashad may or may not have been aware of the rich man's stereotype of the poor. Having worked with landlords he probably did, particularly as he quotes Marei in the first example and the owner of the fruit plantation or garden in the second, but he did not imply that the poor did not worry. Evidence from this research indicates that they do worry, but their acceptance of their condition may be misinterpreted by the rich as lack of worry or care.

Rashad then continued,

Once, I had a stone [in the kidney] which I treated for 24 years, but with no avail. One day, I said to Him, 'O God, you have created causes for my illness, create causes for the cure'. And I used to have ointment from the Hejaz for rheumatism. I had a bath and told her [his wife], 'Rub this part with the ointment'. While she rubbed, it moved, and after three days, the stone came down.



Here is an interesting example of how this person integrates into his explanation the religious view which sees God as the Almighty Giver of health, cure and riches with the more secular causes of illness and cure. It shows how he eliminated the contradiction by making the worldly causes part of the divine design. This was reinforced by the fact that the ointment came from the Hejaz and therefore was believed to possess some holy power. Rashad does not seem to note that though his stories say that the poor have good health, he suffered from ill health for 24 years. His life history indicates a series of other illnesses starting with his feet which were "swollen" for two years when only 13 years old, accounts of poisoning, the stroke and his own disability. However, he never complained of these. He always told them as stories to indicate that the Curer is God, not man. He also showed evidence of belief in folk medicine rather than formal medicine, and belief in the evil eye or envy.

Changing Attitudes to the Poor: Rashad had lived for 35 years in this quarter of Der. He lived in the Tahuna Alley (see diagram of Der-El-Sabbakin, p. 78a) Asked about the kind of people who lived there and whether they were well-off, he gave an account of the quarter (already mentioned in Chapter 4).

When asked, "Did they all know each other?", he replied "Yes, they were all one hand and helped each other. But this was before. Now, the son does not help his father, and as soon as he gains a piastre, he wants to get away from his father".

His remarks reflect the fact that his eldest son who worked in Social Affairs was trying to obtain a passport which he finally did. Rashad continued, "Before, the city itself was one family. He who had [wealth] used to give to he who had not. But now no more".

I asked, "Why?".

He replied,

"Because of the increase of people, it tightened. [i.e. there is not enough for everyone]. When your condition is well-off, you become compassionate, but when you have little, you see to yourself. The rich used to pity the poor. Today, the rich wants to eat the food of the poor. We used to have cows and buffalos [in the village] and we used to be 18 persons. And as for milk, people who were poor would get it twice a month. It used to be a shame or eibah on anyone who sold his milk, or an egg, or a chicken. It used to be a shame. So he who did not need something would give it to the poor and not sell it. But today, if one woman has milk, even if it is for money, she denies having it [i.e. so as not to be obliged to give it]. The kela [a measure] of maize used to be for nothing, today they say, 'it would feed one chicken for a day, and the chicken would then lay an egg for 5 P.T. High prices have taught ingratitude, and made the son to ignore his father. It is He [God] who is moving it all according to His understanding".

Thus, Rashad depicted conditions for the poor in the quarter in Cairo in the past and present, and those in the village in the past and present. As he had just come back from the visit to his sister in the village, he had observed the changes. He concluded that today, life is harder on the poor than it used to be. In the past, the poor could rely on help from the better-off whether in the village or the city. However, today people had become more reluctant to help because of the high cost of living which had made it more difficult even for the better-off in the city. In the village, notions of shame had dwindled with rising costs, and things had acquired a value they did not have before, so that farmers were reluctant to give away any surplus and would rather sell it.

He also tried to make me understand that he came from a good family and a big one, which to the villagers means ezwa or honour and dignity. He said they had "cows and buffalos" i.e. that they were well-off. Later, in his life-history, Rashad told how he became separated from his uncles and brothers, and how he never cared for money. Either he had sold his

share to them, or had left it to them, as part of his attitude of great dignity in which he always declared that material things were unimportant.

### Rashad's Definition and Philosophy of his Poverty

Asked "And who is the 'poor'?" Rashad replied:

"It is he who has no sabubah or object cause of gain. A poor man, someone like me, who has no [physical or material] capacity or potential. Some people sell but do not gain, and others sell and gain. These are arzak [God-given means of livelihood] that belong to God. The poor's sabubah is to his measure or Ala Addu, and another's sabubah God has made plentiful or easy. I sell beans and am [to] limited to my measure, while another may sell beans and has [series of] shops. Arzak .... arzak ... and the distributor of them is God. He has preferred some to others in their arzak, and He has preferred some to others in degress [Qo'ranic view of classes] and he has subsumed some to others. I am poor, but God has subsumed you to me. If you want to build a house, you have to get a construction worker, and this and that. And degrees belong<sup>to</sup> or are decreed by God, this depends on your actions! So what if someone is a manager, but his actions are evil? But one may be poor yet know God. This one would be a degree above. And to whom he gave much rizk is to thank God. The Qo'ran teaches us everything. Read the Qo'ran."

In this definition of who is the poor, Rashad pulls various concepts together displaying the particular construct of his reality. First, the concept of sabubah or object cause of gain appears as a worldly concept, however, it is integrated into a cultural-religious view of poverty. Rashad subsumed it to the notion of rizk or arzak (plural). If sabubah becomes an aspect of rizk which God gives, then it is subject to Divine Will and may be made small to the poor's measure or large to fit the riches'. Rashad gave the example of himself who is poor and of others who own series of shops to sell beans. One of whom is reknowned, El-Tabēi, who was like Rashad but gradually became very rich. Thus Rashad indicated that he could have become rich had God willed it. The only explanation is that God prefers some to others in their shares or arzak, not because they

are better, but because He wants to for some reason. God has also "preferred some to others in degrees". This is a Qo'ranic verse which has been the subject of much theological debate among Islamic scholars and Imams, or interpreters of the Qo'ran. Generally, it implies that God has created people unequal in a variety of ways, by birth where some were born of higher status than others, by riches, by natural endowments that allow some to develop more or better than others. Whenever this happens, the stronger, or higher in status, or riches, subsumes the others to him. At different periods of history, this text has been interpreted to suit the controlling groups. If God 'subsumed' some to others, the subsumed must obey the others. At other periods where equality was emphasized, the text was either not discussed or reinterpreted to mean that each category needs the other and that the criteria of levels is based on virtue or piousness. Usually the rich or those of higher status explain that God created classes and so subsumed the lower to the higher classes. However, in Rashad's version it is the better-off who are subsumed to the poorer because they need them to do their work. Not only this, but to Rashad, the hierarchy was a moral one, since the 'poor' who 'knows God' would be a degree above the 'rich manager' who does 'evil'. Thus, according to his explanation, Rashad's 'degree' rises and he regains the dignity that he thinks he has lost by being a small peddler disregarded by the people in his quarter, or by anyone else for that matter. He rises a degree above the 'rich manager'. This is a classic example of the construction of reality through a restructuring of constructs.

He followed this by a long account of how the rich exploit the facilities created by the government to help the poor (e.g. cooperatives), indicating that they, the rich, have no consideration for the poor. He gave examples of their dishonesty and God's punishment. Later he said

that God could turn any poor man into a rich man quickly, if he wanted, and told a folk tale:

Once a king went to visit a poor man who killed his last goat for him. The king gave him money, but the poor man gave it back. The king told the poor man to come to the mosque. Once there, the poor man found the king asking God to give him: 'O God, Give me!' So the poor man thought to himself: 'Why don't I ask He who gives the king to give me?'. And he did. When he returned to his tent, he saw it fly and land on a spot. Where it landed, he set the tent, and found there a treasure and became rich. Two years later, the king returned to see him and was astonished to find him rich. He came to know the truth.

So, don't ask 'Why is this man poor?' If God wants He can give, for He is the Giver and He will provide a reason for a man to become rich. So don't ask the question.

These are the words of the poor. The rich never say these things. God gives to each his measure which is enough for him.

A few points must be noted here. First, the poor man kills 'his last goat' for the king. Here the tale finds its support in a popular saying that the poor are always so generous, that they will kill their last goat, chicken or whatever they possess to offer their hospitality to their guest, though this may not be at all necessary. This is no mere myth. Wherever I visited the poor, I was offered hospitality in terms of food or drinks, that sometimes were a real strain on their budget. I also had to avoid being there at meal times. Once, I stayed longer and a poor woman wanted to kill one of her pigeons which she sells, to offer me a 'meat meal'. I immediately rose and left, insisting that I was tied up with my family and they would get very worried. The woman put the live pigeon in a nylon bag and offered it to me. It took 15 good minutes to excuse myself. Finally I swore to her that her receiving me and answering my questions were like giving me a hundred pigeons. This convinced her and I left. Church social workers told of similar experiences. They said that

sometimes the poor were more generous and hospitable than the rich, even though these values are widely held in the society.

The poor may be trying to regain their dignity or to reinstate themselves in the eyes of others by this extraordinary expression of hospitality. It could be a sort of over-compensation. They feel that failure in this respect would truly shame them, not their actual poverty.

Going back to the tale, the poor man refused the money given to him by the king. If he accepted it, his hospitality would be nullified. It is as though he did it to obtain compensation or to take advantage, rather than to honour his guest. This would reduce his dignity, and turn him into a mere merchant. At any time, dignity to the poor is more important than money. By contrast, he asked God for money just as the king did. Therefore, both men are equal in this respect, and God, the Giver, answers both. Here, the lesson is obviously that God is the Giver, and does answer the prayers of he who asks, poor or rich. Rashad emphasised the fact that God provides a reason or cause for persons who become rich (e.g. the tent flies and lands where the treasure lies).

It should be emphasized here that Rashad is a man who has studied the Qo'ran and finds in it a source for his explanations. A well-known Qo'ranic text says, "And He hath made for everything a cause". Though Rashad does not mention this text, he believes in it, hence his frequent emphasis on a "cause" for everything, for poverty, riches, health and illness. Thus, any logical reason or cause can become part of the religious view. This means that causes for happenings may be discussed, thought or sought, evaluated for their own meaning yet ultimately be subsumed to the religious view. Of course, there were some poor who appeared to be totally secular and who did not subsume any cause to the religious view.

The statement of "God gives to each his measure, which is enough for him" always remains perplexing, for the poor always declare that what they have is insufficient. As people of faith, the poor seem to think they must always express redah or acceptance. Redah implies full acceptance, with satisfaction of what is given. By complaining that what God gives them is insufficient, they may anger God. Like a poor woman who said "Shall I climb on a stairs [meaning to reach God] and say: why did you do this? I would be blaspheming". Yet, once this statement is made, they do explain their difficulties. Perhaps they "explain" but do not "complain" and if they do, they always end by saying, "Anyway, I thank God for everything". There is an implication that God knows anyway that what they have is insufficient, and He will compensate.

This apparent acceptance and redah also struck the Church social workers, who interpreted it as the poor's "great faith". In fact, redah became even more striking with the Christian group, particularly the poorer among them, in both Cairo and the village.

Rashad recited another verse from the Qor'an about the poor:

'The poor are my children and the rich my delegates.  
If my delegates become avaricious towards my children,  
I shall send them to hell. Why? If they have wealth,  
part of their money, the zakat should be given to the  
poor. If they are not given, God will judge him'.

The statement establishes the relationship between God and the poor, and God and the rich, as well as between rich and poor. Whereas the poor are God's children, the rich are His delegates and must look after the poor as though they were their children. God has made the rich responsible for the poor's livelihood, and has threatened them with hell or punishment if they show themselves avaricious. The responsibility is such, that mere occasional charity does not fulfill it. It actually means that the rich must, in a sense, keep an eye on the poor. The zakat are determined shares

of a person's income and even capital, according to Islam. The tith for Christians stands almost in the same relationship. In Islam, the zakat is given once a year. At other feasts it may also be given. However, according to the text, a once a year obligation is not sufficient fulfillment, it is a minimum.

Many poor complained that the rich gave help once a year, then forgot all about them. It was as though the rest of the year the poor will stop living. Rashad was well aware of this, particularly since his roaming job brought him into contact with both rich and poor. His wife sat on the floor, listening with interest, while he told another story,

A king had a bahlul or clown. He asked him to go to the market and find out what is there. The clown found a rich date merchant and a poor date merchant. The rich one sold the dates for 13 the wekeyah [about a pound, lb.], while the poor sold it for 11 the wekeyah, yet the rich merchant had more clients. So someone asked, 'How is that?', and the answer was, 'Because the poor man is cheating'.

Here, Rashad had gone back to the haram and halaal, where the cheater's haram money does not last or his work has no baraka or grace. It is not blessed. The rich got more clients because his way of earning money was halal. Of course, it could also be explained that the clients found out who was cheating, but this is not the way it is meant. Rashad mused and then said,

"Some people say to me 'You say this because of your poverty'. The owner of the soap factory with whom I worked used to say [about certain employees], 'Look at the embezzlement'.

And I would say, 'The World is nothing: a bite of bread, a piece of rag ... these are sufficient for the times, for he who has not and who owes not. That is, all is enough and all is the same, ultimately. Whether one wears silk or rough sack cloth is the same, because the world is passing and all of us when we die, become equal.

This was the ultimate in Rashad's philosophy of poverty. Death was the equalizer, whatever one's status or condition has been earlier. He



followed this statement with a story of a poor man who drew the king's shape on the ground, then lay in it himself and told the king, 'We will be the same [or equal] in the tomb'.

In this statement of his philosophy, Rashad summarizes, in his almost poetic style, a few important points. First, that "the world is nothing", by which he means it is a passing thing, and hence is not worth much regret nor committing the haram to survive, nor yet to be sad when it comes to his condition. By contrast, there is a Hereafter which is more important and of value. If the world is nothing, then anything that keeps a person going, is sufficient. Being a temporary condition it is not worth worrying what one eats or wears. Nor is it worth accumulating riches or caring about riches or status, since rich and poor, high and low, all become equal. There were moments when Rashad appeared to renounce worldly goods, of his own accord, rather than be forced to renounce them. Certainly this statement has undertones of ascetism. Yet, he was not a person who had lost interest in life, on the contrary, he followed events, commented on them and was concerned about his children's success. But to him, enjoying life did not necessarily mean possessions. Though he enjoyed his cigarettes and tea, he seemed to have placed objects in the larger frame of this religious view. Within this view, possessions were seen as short-lived and relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of things.

Rashad was very much respected by his children, as was evident by countless little gestures of respect and concern. He influenced them enough so that they all learned to pray, as his wife told me later. When I visited them after his death, his eldest daughter gave me a detailed account of the funeral. She said,

"God loves him. Everything has been easy. He was running and everything had happened between 9 a.m. and noon."

By "he was running" she tried to tell me that her father was a holy man. There is a popular belief that a holy or good man, is always light in his coffin, so that the persons carrying it do not feel his weight. Some express it by saying that the coffin is "flying", but that would be too pretentious, so it was just "running". His wife told her daughter calmly, "If one is good, then one's tomb becomes lit" (in contrast to being dark for others).

These tributes to Rashad were from his family which would be particularly meaningful to him. They indicated that, in the global scheme of things, his nassib was ultimately a good one.

## 2. Dawlat's Philosophy of Poverty

### Her Life Profile

Dawlat was born in the village of El-Ful in Minia Province, in Upper Egypt. Her father had one feddan which he planted. At the age of 13½ she came to Cairo and married a man who was from the same village, but lived in Cairo. He paid just L.E.15 as mahr or bride-piece, which is evidence of both her father's and husband's poverty. She had never gone to school, as was common for poor girls of Upper Egyptian villages. She said she was 57 years old, but had no birth certificate, as is common with so many poor. She wanted to get one to be able to get a passport, and go to Saudi Arabia, to visit her youngest daughter who had recently married a Saudi.

Dawlat gave birth to six children after which she practised birth-control by means of a IUD. She had four daughters and one son, having lost a second son in early childhood. Three girls were married. Two of the girls were illiterate and two were educated. The boy had gone as far as Preparatory School.

As her husband earned little and gave her 20 P.T. a day, while he

drank with the rest, she had to raise money. She improvised a trade whereby she bought 2 or 3 kilos of vegetables or fruit and sold it per piece, making a small gain of a few piastres per day 13 to 15 P.T. She also occasionally sold poultry which she raised in her corridor. She would work occasionally as a maid on a daily basis, or cook for the rich in Roda on some occasions.

Her son became epileptic after a bus hit him, and he often got fits of fainting. Still, after being trained as a car mechanic, and with a few years of school, he was employed in a bank. He received L.E. 22 a month. He contributes the rent and electricity bill. The rest he spends on eating.

Seven persons live in two rooms on a roof. Dawlat and her husband live in a room which they built themselves, and which she uses also as a kitchen. While her three, then unmarried children (the two girls and young man), their grandmother and aunt all used the other as their bedroom. They sleep five in three beds.

After her youngest daughter married the Saudi in the Autumn of 1979, who paid a bride-price of a thousand pounds, and gave her another thousand in jewellery, Dawlat stopped work. Her husband began to give her 50 P.T. a day, after she "quarrelled with him". Her daughter sent her a T.V., a radio-cassette, and clothes for the family. All this happened in 1980. Most of the data obtained was before her daughter's marriage. Still, even after this, Dawlat did not change very much.

The Situation Dawlat came to my attention somewhat later in the research. Zeinab, her husband's sister, had been defined as the "poorest" person in Der. One day, as I came into the hara, I saw Zeinab sitting in her usual place against the wall. Beside her was another woman sitting selling pieces of cucumber. As I greeted Zeineb, this woman greeted me too. She

appeared to know me. I thought she had seen me before, like others in the hara. I was later to learn that she was Zeinab's brother's wife. She insisted on giving me a piece of cucumber, at first refusing to take its price, but I insisted. The second time I saw Dawlat, she was again in the hara. At noon, Zeinab came with her tray of sweets, as usual, and sat in the shade. I wanted to talk to her and observe her trade. So I sat beside her. A few minutes later, Dawlat came and sat beside Zeinab. She greeted me with a big smile. Dawlat was always smiling, but it was always a bitter smile, with a flavour of abandon. The impression of abandon came from the way she moved her long thin arms. She often made the gesture which in Egyptian silent language means, 'Leave it, never mind. It is not important. Nothing really matters'.

On that day, Dawlat talked for almost three hours on her philosophy of poverty. It all began when I inquired about her trade and since when she was practising it. It was on the 12th April, 1978. At that time, Dawlat was given 10 P.T. daily by her husband, her son was still an apprentice in a mechanic's shop, and her condition appeared to her hopeless. The following is the gist of what she said that day.<sup>1</sup>

#### Her View of Poverty

Dawlat gave me to understand that she had accepted her nassib or destined share in life, but she had hope that Almighty God would help her survive and bring up her children. As she spoke, I realized that her attitude epitomized that of the poor. I quote here from my field-notes the gist of what she told me and my impressions following her conversation:

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1. As I sat in the street with all the people of the hara passing, and I was intent on observing events and listening, I took only short notes and wrote certain statements. Back home, I wrote the gist of what she had said. Had I recorded it, it would have filled a volume.

"Dawlat has her own philosophy of life, and at moments, I imagine that she epitomizes the philosophy of poverty in Egypt. This is because her attitude englobes much of the attitudes of the poor whenever I chanced to see them in this country. She seems to have collected all the variations of attitudes into her own. She shows her frustrations resulting from all the hopes she had ever held which were never realized, and there is no doubt that there is a strong sting of bitterness about the downfall of all her hopes. However, she seems to override it all enough to avoid resenting others who are better off. This is because she believes that her nassib or destined share has allotted to her this share of Life. Nassib is not a pagan belief for her, for this nassib has been allotted to her by an Almighty and Planning God, and not by the unfairness of life. Dawlat does not think that life is unfair, and if she does, she thinks that this is an attribute of life on earth, which she accepts with humility and great belief, because it is Almighty God who has designed it to be so, and He is all knowing and therefore He is just and will compensate her some way, somehow, some time, probably in the After-life. And God rewards those who accept his judgement or Hokm or what He chose for her. Therefore there is no point to objecting to it. He is not unfair, because what she does not get in this life, He will give her in the next.

Besides, when she is in need of something very much, she asks God for it, and He send it to her immediately, in the image of someone coming back from a trip who would get her the thing she wanted, as a present. Someone always turns up at the right moment to help her.

Because she believes in God's generosity, she believes she has to be generous. So in spite of her poverty, she gives whenever she can, which seems to be frequently. For example, as we sat she was selling horonkesh (a berry, looks like small tomatoes). But when the children came to her and asked her for some, she would give each 3 or 4 fruits. A child standing by looking, and who has not asked for any, she would call to and say, 'Come take some you too'. It was really an astonishing sight. She would then murmur as if to herself, 'Children are loved by God. Come on! Perhaps God will give me as I give them'.

It appeared reckless behaviour for a woman who needed every piastre to live but not in the light of her attitudes and beliefs. There was a real consistency between her behaviour, beliefs and attitudes.

Zeinab never commented on Dawlat's behaviour, nor on what she was telling me. Zeinab appeared to be more careful about how she gave and

gave definitely less and more gruffly. While Dawlat always gave with a half-sweet - half-bitter smile, with a strange, reckless pleasure.

Dawlat explained her trade, her income and her husband's trade. At the moment he sold sweet potatoes. She wanted him to get steady employment, but he kept selling. I noted verbatim a statement she had made, "All my life I have seen others building; while all my life I have been 'defeated' or ghalbana". There was real bitterness in that statement.

I continue now quoting from the field-notes.

"She then added, that in spite of this, God always sends her help. For example, her daughter failed in school, and she had to send her to a paying school to have her continue, but she could not afford it! However, she added, 'But a Saidi [from Upper Egypt] said he would help, and gave me L.E.6 plus L.E.1 which I had to add to it to have the sum required for the school term. For the second term, a woman living in No. 12 here helped me, and helped reduce [the fee] it to L.E.2 only", because that woman worked with the Socialist Union and can file in a recommendation, I learned later".

Dawlat's belief that God would help was realized and confirmed. All her examples indicated this. I realized, that she may be trying to get my help too. I knew at the time that a rumour was circulating that I was a government social worker in disguise. The notion of doing research in this way was unknown to them. I took good care to mention my research to Dawlat as we chatted, but I do not know whether she believed me at that time.

### Health Versus Riches

Dawlat spoke then of her belief in God's Divine Justice.

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1. Though education is free, it is only free for those who get a passing grade. If they fail, they have to be sent to a semi-paying government school, as the State does not pay fully for 'failures'. In the chapter 'Economy of the Poor' I explain the system fully, and show how gradually it eliminates the poor.

"Dawlat believes that no one has everything. When God gives people money or riches, he takes away from them more important things like health. Dawlat appeared to fear illness, and believes that health is more important than any other single thing. She appears also to think that almost invariably, if you have riches, then you cannot have good health, as all her examples seem to indicate.

She told me the example of a moallema i.e. a rich woman who has a going business which she manages with much authority and success, who used to get L.E.50 - L.E.90 per day of profit. This woman got a bad illness (she did not say what, but usually people here call 'bad illness' either cancer or T.B. and they mean by it something incurable). This woman owned three houses, but she had to sell them in order to pay for her treatment. When she finally died, her husband married their maid servant, the third day after she died. To Dawlat, this was the climax of the series of miseries the rich woman suffered because she was rich. Dawlat concluded that she thanks God, and all she asks for is that He would give them all good health."

#### Uncertainty of the Morrow

"Elaborating more on her philosophy of life, she said, 'When we get a chicken, I say to the kids: 'let us eat it now, immediately, while we are well'. She means that she does not know what will happen a moment later, or on the morrow.

She continued, 'If the kids ask for dry cinnamon, I say 'yes', and give it to them'. She said she prepares it, and grinds it, has it boiled and mixed and gives it to them. She means she wants to give them all she can and at the same time, give them the thing now because later, she may not be able to give it, or they may not be able to take it".

In other words, it is the uncertainty of the morrow which one could perhaps call in psychological terms: feeling of insecurity, or a free-floating anxiety.

#### Her Notion of Reciprocity

Then, talking about her belief that just as you give, you are given, i.e. the reciprocity of life, or belief that God rewards those who give, she said, 'When I go to a peddler and he knows my condition, they give me, i.e. they give her the vegetables free.' She adds, 'I say, perhaps if I give a child, God will ease matters for me, i.e. facilitate things.'

As she chatted, a woman came and told her "Om Shahat wants you". Immediately Dawlat appeared thrilled and said to me that this woman had just returned from abroad and perhaps she brought her a present. So she left us. When she returned, she declared she had got a galabiyah material as a present from Om Shahat who is married in Jordan. Om Shahat used to be breast-fed by Dawlat as a child. Dawlat recounted that Om Shahat kissed her and said, 'Do you remember when you used to grill the maize and give me the best piece of it?' and she said she had never forgotten Dawlat's tenderness. Then Dawlat said to me, 'You see, What one gives on the one hand, turns and turns and he gets it back! It is God who gives'. I said it was true. So she went on to tell me how she used to pity this girl when she was a child, and how she used to give her of whatever she had the way she does usually with children, and this woman never forgot it. Dawlat was certainly in high spirits.

Later in the day, she intimated that she has relations who are well-off but she said, 'One of them asked me: what is your husband's job? And I replied, 'he sells maize'. They are ashamed of me because of the selling. So I said, 'By God, I won't visit anyone! And when I realized this, I said, 'No, Either my daughters marry a functionary or not at all. Within six months, God sent me such suitors for the two girls, and the suitors said, 'We shall make their trousseau'. While the two others are sticking to studies, and I am vomiting blood [i.e. killing herself to provide for their schooling]'. .

She said that she had not been able to give the two eldest girls an education, so they are illiterate.

I was to see Dawlat regularly after that memorable day, confirming what I had heard of her philosophy of poverty.

In the summer of 1979, both girls failed in school, one completely, and one in two subjects. The atmosphere of their home was very miserable. Dawlat appeared nervous and in despair. The girls said that the parents had decided that the younger girl who failed would not go to school any more. I had a long talk with the girl, she was determined to continue school, or get married to a rich Saudi. I was astonished at the second alternative, and asked where she could meet him? It turned out that a distant cousin in the hara had married one, and so young Saudi men came to visit them. I asked her, why she wanted to marry <sup>a</sup> Saudi ? She replied, 'So that one may



help them a bit", i.e. help her parents. It was the 6th of August, three weeks later, the girl was asked for marriage by a Saudi who was already married, but he explained he was separated from his wife. The parents asked her what she thought, she accepted. The marriage took place at the end of the Summer and they lived in a furnished flat for three months in a rich area nearby. The girl took her family everywhere and the man offered them all kinds of presents. When they left Dawlat felt guilty that her daughter had married to help them. She was afraid the girl would be divorced and so did not touch the bride-price of £1000. In February 1980, she spoke of putting the money in a bank in the girl's name, in case her life was ruined. She said it was haram to touch it, because it was the "price of her neck".

Poverty and Dignity Her husband now gave her 50 P.T. per day. Their food had improved slightly. More importantly Dawlat had stopped work. I wanted to talk to her again about her construction of her reality and see whether she held the same views.

I asked how they were on that day in February, 1980, she said that her son was 'not well in the head'. Upon asking for details, she said his epilepsy had become worse. As she had never told me about his accident before, she told it that day. He had been playing football on the main road and a bus hit him on the head. A case was brought in court, and the government gave her a lawyer. The wife of the bus driver visited Dawlat's son in hospital, taking with her their four young children. It was a question of compensation, and Dawlat began to think, 'May God cure my son and I want nothing from anyone'. A policeman was a witness to the accident. On the day of the court session, when the judge asked her what had happened, she said that it was her son's fault because he should not have been standing in the middle of the street. The judge told her not to

say this, since all her witnesses said the opposite and she would lose her case. Upon which Dawlat replied:

This is my son and I am free with him [i.e. she is free to do whatever she wants concerning him], I don't want a diyah or blood price for him. This is God's will and He wanted this to happen to him rather than to anyone else of the boys who stood there with him. What I must get, I shall get from God. I will not take it from any man. Nor do I want to take the money of those kids! What shall I do with it anyway?!

The policeman, witness of the accident, told her, 'You crazy woman! Your son was hit and you stand against your son?!'. Dawlat answered back, 'My son is cured and has been saved. I want nothing else! I am free and want no diyyah!' Actually, the boy had developed epilepsy as a result of the accident, and consequently she herself considered him totally unreliable to help in their livelihood. This incident happened when Dawlat was in her worst condition. It illustrates several things. [1] The accident was allowed by God. Who was she to object to or ask compensation from? It was God who would compensate her. [2] She had great dignity in the face of money. She showed no greediness in spite of her dire need at the time, and the seriousness of the accident. [3] To her, it was haram to take this driver's money. It was as if she were taking it away from his children to give it to her son. Such money would bring her no blessing, because it was not hers. [4] She realized that the bus driver was very lowly paid and would have problems of payment. She was provoking a financial crisis at his end, the dimension of which she knew only too well. [5] She believed that since it was a question of Health Vs. Riches in life, she was afraid that by choosing money or riches, she would lose her children's health, or perhaps her son's life which God had granted.

She commented, after the above account, that she did not want the

money "because no one takes anything with him [to the other world]" and she could not see what she could do with extra money. This, of course, was an expression of her dignity. She said that she did not need that money to live: "Health is more important than anything else. I ask God not to give me money, but to give me and my children good health".<sup>1</sup>

Suddenly, she exclaimed, excited, "Here, she died!".

I asked, 'Who'?

She said, 'The lady who lives near me here. She died the day before yesterday and she left two houses [as property], this house [i.e. where Dawlat lives], and the one in which the butcher lives, the outside one. I mean to tell you that she did not take anything with her. Did she take anything with her?' She ended in a thin voice that had become quite sarcastic.

I said gravely, 'No one takes anything, of course'.

She went on, 'He takes only the good deed and the good word, and that is all! And the one who has much is like the one who has little. But what is important, with God's frankness [i.e. she is being very frank], the truth is I want good health, to sit and be cured and look after my children'.

In the first part of her statement is the implication of the worthlessness of riches as opposed to the 'good deed' and the notion of death being the equalizer. In the second part she was referring to her back pains. She had a fear that because she had her daughter's money, it meant she was rich, therefore she would not have health, and this frightened her. Perhaps she thought she was getting ill because she now had money. However, she kept emphasizing that she could not use it. In fact, nothing had changed in the house, except for the T.V. and radio-cassette that her daughter sent to them, and the electricity they had introduced to operate them.

The Philosophy of Poverty I asked her if she had any idea about what religion says about the poor and the rich. She said,

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1. The interview of that day was taped.

What does it say? It says: God is with the patient. What could it say? It says God is with the patient, does it say anything more? If you are not patient, you would be blaspheming, and God's order will be done, isn't it? That is, one is patient. Patience is better. The most important is our patience [i.e. the poor's]. It is the best thing. Patience is the key to relief, and may God make us to count among the 'patient'.

When asked, 'And what does it say about the rich?' (I noticed she had answered the part on the poor). She replied,

The rich is unjust or a tyrant. His riches make him unjust, i.e. his satisfaction makes him non-attentive to others. He has no conscience like others. He is a man of appearances. He likes appearances. But the poor, no one is concerned about him.

I asked, 'And is this acceptable to God?'. She replied, 'Yes, of course. If it were not so, things would not roll on. I would not want to serve you, if we were rich like each other. But if I am poor, I need you. And you being rich, you need one and I go to you. God created you so [i.e. either poor or rich]. True wealth is wealth of the self or spirit'. Then she lowered her voice as if to intimate to me a secret, saying, 'He who is not rich in this world, will be rich in the next. Isn't it? Let us at least get this'.

And she smiled, as her voice became a whisper, and her face went all up in wrinkles. She imparted to me the impression that this thought now, was uppermost in her mind. She had become resigned to her nassib, but also satisfied that at least her hopes for one of her daughters were realized and so whatever hope she had for herself was concentrated in the happiness or wealth in a Hereafter. It was as though, suddenly, she was afraid that, if riches came now as they seemed to come with her daughter's marriage, they would cancel all her past sufferings and deprivations, and deprive her of a future wealth that would be much more worthwhile. It was a very tense moment. Her thought and feeling appeared to reach me more directly than her words - a moment of deep understanding.

The feeling of the importance of the Hereafter was confirmed when I

asked:

"Tell me, when one grows in age, do one's opinions about riches change? I mean with time and the days?"

She replied, 'He left the world'[i.e. abandoned it]. At first I did not understand what she meant.

I said, 'Left the world?'

She said, 'M-m-m One thinks: and shall I live as long as I have already lived? One is finished. There are others than ourselves who want [things of the world] now, in turn'. So now, her mind was set on the other world.

Like Rashad, Dawlat's philosophy of her poverty could fill a whole volume in itself. But let me close with a short statement that she made that came at the end of our talk of that day. She was telling me about a woman in the hara who went mad. She used to dress up and put on make-up as no one in the hara did. Then as if this reminded her of something, she said to me, looking me in the eyes, as I had stopped questioning her,

I used to wear the shawl with golden threads on my head, and the galabeyah bahari (fancy, all worked), and the shoes, and I never let even my toe touch the ground [now she often walks barefoot]. Now, the ants come down the wall, crawl on me and prick me, and I don't do anything .... I sit and think of these old times and of how I was. But never mind! Let me get something from Paradise, isn't it better?

She smiled a broad questioning smile. I said, "yes, yes". It was the climax of her construction of her poverty, the best picture she had given of her condition, and it had come unsolicited. It was the epitome of her past, present and future. It was her own view of how she saw herself as she had been, as she had become, and of her 'hopes' for the future.

CHAPTER ELEVEN      FACTORS EFFECTING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF POVERTY

This chapter looks more closely at the major factors which appear to underly and condition the social construction of poverty. The aim is to examine the relative importance and role of such factors as "place of residence", "age", "sex", "education", "religion", etc., and in certain instances to predict their likely future effects.

Among these factors, the "area of residence" constitutes the "here and now", everyday environment of the poor. The first section of this chapter examines data drawn from six areas in Cairo and compares the results with those obtained from Der-El-Sabbakin. The aim is to see whether the social construction of poverty revealed through the ethnographic research in Der-El-Sabbakin was a unique manifestation, or part of a more widespread phenomenon that finds echoes in other areas of Cairo. The second section examines the major factors which appear to operate in all the areas studied.

1. The Social Construction of Poverty in Other Areas of Cairo

The research conducted in other areas of Cairo consisted of visits and informal interviews, hence objective or material aspects of poverty were easier to observe, than acquisition of subjective data. The limitations of time restricted the acquisition of more in-depth research into attitudes and life-styles. Interviews took the form of conversations and some were written-up afterwards. Guides and informants stressed the need to avoid note-taking and tape-recordings as much as possible, as these would frighten the family and would yield little information. Consequently, only those aspects of the social construction of poverty will be discussed here which were made evident through these techniques. The differences between ethnographic research and interviews were striking. The

longer the interview, the more data it yielded on definitions, attitudes and beliefs related to poverty. Household and economic data were easier to come by, and this was used to confirm or modify that gathered in Der-El-Sabbakin.

Almost all the poor families visited expressed the belief that "God is the Provider" or "the Giver": that it is God who helps the poor manage with the little they possess. God cared for them and would not leave them unassisted. The poorer they were, the more expressions of this faith were forthcoming. The better-off they were, the fewer references to God.

The families of four workers, who turned out not to be poor, were interviewed. Apart from the traditional statements, "thanking God", there were few other expressions of a religious nature. This contrasted sharply with the poor, where there were always, and many, expressions that their condition was "God's will"; that rizk and a person's nassib are in "God's hands". Such beliefs are widespread in Egyptian society, but they appear to be much more commonly articulated and used among the less educated and more traditional sections of the population, known as baladi people.

Six of the families interviewed seemed to have adopted the religious view of life in its entirety. Three lived in the area of Old Cairo, not far from Der. Two lived at Athar-El-Nabi (south of Cairo), and one at Dar-El-Salam (previously part of Cairo's southern rural fringe but which has rapidly become urbanised). Among these families, the themes of "patience in hardship", "let it pass", "acceptance" or redah, and "each according to his measure", were used with reference to many matters. While interviews allow such typifications to emerge, they do not allow us to see how they are woven into a view of life or how they enter into everyday life.

Still, the prevalence of the above themes appears to be common to all the poor studied whether in the city or village since they translate into a life-style resulting from economic constraints. Glimpses of what could be evidence of a religious view of life appear in other cases, but could only be fully revealed by further in-depth research.

Social workers, who acted as informants on the Christian cases, stressed the great faith of the poor, the poor's views of the rich and of "God the Giver". It soon became evident that Christian and Moslem poor alike saw God as imposing charity on the rich and judging them according to their treatment of the poor. The Christian poor expressed belief in the value of "patience in hardship", adding that God was not only "merciful" but also "compassionate".

One woman told of how, when she was unable to purchase her daughter's trousseau, the suitor had obtained the wedding dress. She ended with, "God's heart is compassionate." Similar views were expressed by Christians, in the form, "God makes hearts compassionate." That is, God engenders compassion in people towards the poor.

Expressions of compassion invariably arose in references to the receipt of charity. "God makes hearts compassionate," was used constantly to indicate that the family's meagre resources were being supplemented by charity from kin, friends, etc. The phrase, "God compensates; He gives with his ten hands," was used by a woman whose husband had throat cancer and had undergone seven operations. The family had been helped by relatives, neighbours, church social workers, and even the administrators at the school where the wife worked. She used the phrase, "God helps" many times. The sick man whose voice was gone, would point to the sky and kiss his hand, a gesture which meant that he thanked God.



The personal typifications of the poor and of the rich that appear in Der were widely used in interviews conducted in the other areas. As was the emphasis on "all men being equal". Notions of shame and the importance of dignity appeared frequently, and particularly where circumstances raised it as a problem, i.e. among the poorer families. For example, a destitute family lived in a shack (in Athar-El-Nabi), their very low income came from selling vegetables (most of which rotted as sales were very bad). Speaking of their income, the wife said: "It is 20 P.T. to 25 P.T. (a day), but sometimes we have a loss of 25 P.T. to 40 P.T. and I can't do the washing for someone, because it is a shame. When it is a job like selling something, this is not a shame. But when a woman washes the tiles of another woman, it is a shame." When it was pointed out that honest work is not shameful, she replied: "But there is my own freedom at stake, and I would not bear that someone would say to me - 'Go, O girl! Come, O girl!'" The thing is that the humiliation of one's self or spirit to another self or spirit ... far be it from you ..." (i.e., it is unbearable).

It is interesting how some phrases and sayings are found in certain areas more than others. In the same area as the interview reported above, an old man recounted how his wife had left him with their young children. She had sent his eldest daughter to work as a maid. Several women sat listening while he told his story, throwing in comments from time to time. Some made sucking sounds, expressing sympathy and pity for the girl. One said, "Yes! She would have to wipe the floor tiles!", another that, "The rule of one self (or nafss) on another self is cruel or difficult!" Yet another said, "Ya Aini (expression of pity), he cannot bear that this should happen

to her." As twelve people in all were present during this interview, it seems clear that these views were widely held throughout this community.

The job of maid was viewed by all the poor, in all areas, as "shameful". It was not unusual to find the same phrases used in the same area to describe it (e.g., "wiping the tiles of someone else's house", "rule of one self over another", etc.) with the implication that it was dehumanising and degrading. It is in the humiliation that the shame lies. For all the poor, dignity was more important than food, and more important than deriving income from working as a maid. The poorer the person, the more they seemed to feel the need to assert their dignity, and the more sensitive they were to humiliation and shame.

The humiliation and shame attached to begging emerged very clearly in two of the Christian families visited. In one family, a girl who had been given a coat by church social workers never again attended the church. She felt ashamed to have been given charity, "like a beggar" and could not bear being pointed out as the girl to whom charity had been given. In the other family, a girl had been given a dress by the Church Association. The dress was too large. She was ridiculed at sewing classes by two girls who guessed she had received charity. This occurred despite the fact that social workers go to great lengths to keep secret the people they help.<sup>1</sup> In this instance the girl's dignity was deeply

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1. A study of the administration of charity in one Church community was made. It showed great efficiency in the organization of distribution of food, clothes, monthly amounts, amounts given in emergencies like engagements, weddings, funerals, debts, etc. Unfortunately, space and focus do not allow a detailed account here.

affected and she suffered a breakdown.

As in Der, the poor's own descriptions of poverty in other areas of Cairo focused on economic problems: inadequate and irregular income, insufficient quality and quantities of food, the erosion of food budgets to pay for schooling and medicines. The phrase, "He who sleeps without dinner, no one knows anything about him", was echoed in all interviews, except among Christian families receiving assistance.

The self-image of the poor, from the other areas of Cairo, is one that stresses the importance of dignity. But detailed information which would allow more direct comparisons with the ethnographic material could not be obtained through interviews. Such comparisons must await more intensive and in-depth research.

With regard to the emotional overtones that accompany experiential accounts of poverty, the widespread and deeply held faith expressed in redah or acceptance was the most striking. Feelings of humiliation and shame were brought forward to emphasise the importance of dignity. However, feelings of anger, resentment and frustration were not apparent (perhaps due to the interview-visit format). Feelings of depression were evident in a few instances but only where the people made no attempt to hide them from a "stranger". Feelings of anger, resentment, frustration and depression may have been more widespread but it was not possible to assess these on the basis of interviews alone. Feelings of boredom were not observed, no doubt the visit itself served as a distraction.

The Christian families interviewed were in receipt of assistance from the local church - small regular monthly amounts of money, rice, macaroni, butter, milk and even meat once a week. The church also provided free medical help and clothing. Children were given free

books and financial support for school and university. The church organised clubs and training classes for the children, for instruction as well as recreation. The Christian families did not complain of having to skip meals or having to go to bed without dinner. In general these families appeared to be much more relaxed and happy than those not receiving assistance.

## 2. The Major Factors Effecting the Social Construction of Poverty

### (a) Place of Residence

The ethnographic data revealed the place of residence or neighbourhood as a dominant factor in the social construction of poverty. The local neighbourhood provided the basic context and support for religious views of poverty and personal and course-of-action typifications. It provided an environment within which typifications were learned, asserted, modified and re-applied in daily discussion, conversation and gossip.

The level of social interaction within the quarter was intense, particularly between kin and neighbours. Everyone in the quarter knew everyone else - their face, name, kinship group and life-history. Descriptions of personal characteristics and conditions (e.g., "good", "bad", "kind", "reliable", "well-off", "poor", etc.) were the basic stuff of everyday social discourse.

The repeated use of the same terms, proverbs and sayings with reference to the same phenomena, indicate a degree of consensus among the poor in their view of poverty. For a largely illiterate population, the acquisition of knowledge and information, relevant for everyday life, came through interaction with others. The neighbourhood itself holds a special importance as a source of information and a forum for the exchange of news and views. The life-styles of the poor facilitate daily interaction. Doors to living quarters stand open. Neighbours visit at all hours on the slightest pretext. Frequent social discourse is built into the daily borrowing patterns between kin and neighbours, for cooking utensils, food, stoves and clothing, not to mention watching T.V.

Those who resided in villages showed much more adherence to religious view than their counterparts in the city. Faith in God and the belief

in "Divine Providence" was very pronounced and, at times, reached a remarkable degree. In the villages, poverty appeared to be more "absolute" than that found in the city. The rural poor were destitute. Assistance in any shape or form was much harder to come by in the villages. In spite of living in severe and desperate conditions, they repeatedly stressed that "God is with the poor", "God provides for them", and that "being with Him, they need no one else", because, "He is the Giver and the Compassionate one." Their acceptance and repeated expressions of redah were striking, especially since their life must be lived on a day-to-day basis, not knowing where tomorrow's food may come from.

(b) Religion

Religion has an immediacy and a relevance that is central to the social construction of poverty. It is important to recognise that religious education of the illiterate and semi-illiterate poor comes largely through hearsay, particularly so for women. Moslem women do not usually go to the mosque for daily, or even Friday prayers, though they are not forbidden to do so. Compared to the men, far fewer women knew formal prayers, or pray. A few poor illiterate women have been taught formal prayers by repetition, and actually prayed.

Religious beliefs spread largely through conversations - quoting the Qor'an, moralising using proverbs, sayings or stories. Often this occurs through exchanging views about happenings in the local neighbourhood, and drawing religious conclusions. It is mainly through the mechanism of everyday life that religious interpretations come to be acquired and utilised.

Whenever persons in Der articulated their religious views of poverty, mentioned suras or Qor'anic verses, they invariably said they had learned them through hearsay. This was so even in the case

of one literate poor man who had learned the Q-or'an in a village school, or kottab, an Islamic institution. His views were so coloured by folklore that, upon inquiring where he had heard such lore, he replied that the men in the village would sit and talk about such things, while the younger men listened. Thus, he too had learned much popular wisdom and semi-religious interpretations through hearsay.

Christian poor women appeared to be slightly more aware of formal religion than Moslem women. This was no doubt due to their attendance at church services. However, as they too were overwhelmingly illiterate and dependent on hearsay, they were unable to quote any Biblical verses correctly.

It is important to note that the Christian and Moslem religious views of poverty display striking similarities. Evidently, the poor's social construction of poverty is essentially Egyptian, or a product of Egyptian cultural heritage. While religion is used as a resource upon which to base their view of reality, only those aspects of religion which are common to both Christianity and Islam seem to have been drawn upon to construct an account of their reality and to cope with poverty.

This is a perplexing finding, for which there are no obvious explanations since, in the past, it has been the differences, between Christianity and Islam, rather than the similarities that have been emphasised. However, an attempt is made here to advance possible explanations that may be seen as complementing one another.

1) One explanation may be that there are certain basic elements of belief in the Heavenly religions that present similarities. Such beliefs are: belief in a Supreme Being adorned with various absolute qualities, the belief in the existence in a Hereafter, an emphasis on charity and the difficulties facing the rich (if they are to enter Heaven or Paradise) unless they are charitable, equality of all

men in the eyes of God, the notion of compensation for worldly sufferings in the Afterlife, the moral code of the sinful and the permitted by God, respect for "God's Will" and the notion of a divine scheme of things.

The differences seem to be more related to religious symbolism, rituals, and to the aspects of each creed that do not bear directly on everyday life, in short, to the "mysteries" of each faith as such. These were not discussed by either the Moslem or Christian poor in relation to their social constructions of poverty nor did they seem to play any distinctive role in their definitions of poverty. For example, while the Islamic Paradise is conceived along different lines from the Christian Heaven, both present a conception of an "Eternal Hereafter" with a "perfect happiness". In the social constructions of poverty, it was the promise of an eternal and perfect happiness in the Hereafter which was primary, rather than whether this Hereafter was inhabited by houris or angels. The particular form which "perfect happiness" will take appears to be secondary. Again, notions of One God or a Trinity do not seem to interfere with a belief in Allah, who is the same for all and who is just. For both Moslems and Christians, it is Allah who gives and takes, wills, judges and rules, demanding faith in His Will and acceptance for whatever He sends.

2) Cultural elements appear to play an important role in the similarities encountered among Moslem and Christian poor. The Egyptian socio-cultural complex has a particularly long history. Over the centuries, Egyptian traditional beliefs have become closely integrated with religious beliefs, affecting religious interpretations, and bringing in a rapprochement in world-view. Indeed, if we examine



the cultural heritage derived from the ancient Egyptians, as it appears on tomb inscriptions, it reveals a wealth of beliefs which seem to have been appropriated and handed-down with minimal modification.

For example, Breasted (1972: 234) cites an injunction from "The Wisdom of Ptahhotep":

If thou becomes great after thou wert little, and gettest possessions after thou wert formerly poor in the city, ... be not (proud)-hearted because of thy wealth. It has come to thee as a gift of the God.

Here, even though reference is made to a different God, He is still "the Giver", and wealth comes through Him as a gift, not through personal cleverness.

There are numerous examples of codes of ethics which stress the importance of acting charitably towards the poor, in inscriptions dated some five thousand years ago. "I gave bread to all the hungry of the Cerates-Mountain [his domain] - I clothed him who was naked therein" (Breasted, 1972: 168). Similar inscriptions have more religious overtones: "I gave bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, I ferried him who had no boat ... I desired that it might be well with me in the Great God's presence" (Breasted, 1972: 169).

The morality expressed in these inscriptions is very similar to that found in present-day Egyptian society. Charity is done because there is a belief that God judges people according to the "good deed" or charity practised. Even today, "standing in God's presence" is an expression in common usage. The often repeated phrase used by the contemporary poor in this piece of research that, "no man takes anything with him," is almost word for word an inscription from Neferhotep's tomb:

Celebrate the glad day,  
Be not weary therein.  
Lo, no man taketh his goods with him. (Breasted, 1972: 183)

Here, it is the wisdom of the ages that comes through the millenia unscathed.

Where Breasted has focused on religion and thought in Ancient Egypt without reference to the present, others have hypothesised that there is a continuity of Pharaonic culture in contemporary Egypt. That, while other influences have been at work over the centuries, they have remained "superficial" and on the "periphery" (see, for example, Wassef, 1968; A. R. Saleh, 1954; and especially A. Abdel-Malek, 1969: 296-299). Indeed Abdel-Malek argues that many beliefs and superstitions are common to Egyptian Moslems, Christian Copts and Jews, even though these groups may be in opposition over other matters of faith (Abdel-Malek, 1969: 295).

3) Another important, though complementary, factor which may help explain the similarities between Moslem and Christian views of poverty, is the long period of interaction between the two religious communities during which both communities have used the same language and shared the same values. Thus, consciously or unconsciously rapprochements are highly likely to occur. In a society where illiteracy was widespread, until recently (please see table on literacy in Appendix), oral traditions and hearsay constituted the main mechanisms by which knowledge and beliefs were acquired. The existence of the two religious communities, in such close proximity and over such a long period of time, has produced cross-cutting influences at the level of everyday life. The language itself (known as the language of the Qor'an) and the use of the same concepts when referring to religious beliefs, even where some are different, colours interpretations of these beliefs, and itself brings about a rapprochement of world-views.

4) Given that all social constructions of reality draw on common stocks of knowledge, inherited social and cultural elements, and the typifications embedded in everyday language usage, it would be

rather unusual if such rapprochement did not take place (the exception rather than the rule). In the case of the Moslem and Christian poor, the similarities in their views not only reflect the processes at work in all social construction of reality but also a situational response to the objectively similar conditions under which they are forced to live.

Even supposedly secular descriptions and facts are so imbued with religious connotations that it is difficult to classify any given statement as categorically "religious" or "secular". This was clearly evident when the poor described their life-styles within the notion of "the path of patience".

Thus, one may conclude that (1) There appears to be common cultural tradition, or "reference schemata", consisting of a set of morals and attitudes which are common to Moslems and Christians. This is particularly the case for those who come from the largely illiterate popular masses. (2) Because of the existence of this "reference schemata" and the common social and economic experiences associated with poverty, the poor's adjustment or response to their condition draws upon a common cultural tradition which provides them with a shared vocabulary - one that justifies their existence and gives them the courage to go on.

The extent to which there exists a common cultural tradition among the better-off classes in Egyptian society, who are connected with the different 'literate' traditions of Islam and Christianity, requires a study in its own right. One may observe that the poor appear to be more directly embedded in their day-to-day life experiences than higher-income groups; living closer to an "objective reality" which they are unable to cushion or escape. The reality of the poor is built on the material deprivation of their

lives. It is described and conceived from within an ancient cultural tradition that had already pre-defined the life-world and the poor's place in the larger scheme of things, before the emergence of a 'modern' science, or <sup>of</sup> 'modern' theories coloured by abstractions that emerged from a Western reality which is not Egyptian, but that has coloured the literate Egyptian's world — a world which is certainly not that of the poor.

#### (c) Place of Origin

Place of origin, or birth, did seem to have some effect on the social construction of poverty. The urban poor who had originally come from Upper Egypt differed from others in their definition of what was seen as shameful or eib. These people found it very difficult to allow their women to work, particularly if the men worked, or were able to work. For them, a working wife was seen as shaming the husband, as unmanly, a form of exploitation, exposing her to worldly corruption. Such shame brings dishonour, or at least contempt, on the husband. This does not mean that all husbands of Upper Egyptian origin do not allow their wives to work, many did, but they did so very reluctantly and under conditions of extreme hardship. Even then, some husbands refused to allow their wife or daughters to work, no matter how bad their conditions became. In general, Egyptian men of the older generation disliked the idea of their wives' working. However, among the poor who did not originate from Upper Egypt, there was no shame attached to a wife who worked.

#### (d) Sex

Sex did not seem to be a particularly significant factor in social constructions of poverty. No differences were noted between men and women in their descriptions and views of poverty. Sex did become significant when definitions of shame and honour were discussed. Even a poor

woman must be careful of what job she does in order to survive, shame is associated with occupations that may endanger a woman's morality, bringing dishonour on herself, her husband and the rest of the family. More restrictions are imposed on girls than on married women, again in an effort to protect their morality. Such fears and restrictions did not apply to boys, young or married men, who can only be shamed by the behaviour of their women.

(e) Occupation

The poorer the person the more recourse to religion to provide coping mechanisms to face the uncertainties of life. Thus, the poorer the person the more his social construction of poverty was coloured by the religious views. The particular occupation followed affected the social construction of reality in the same way. The more insecure the occupation (e.g. an irzai who is a daily-wage worker or small peddler) the more the social construction of poverty was coloured by religious views.

The kind of occupations, that women may undertake are critical, for shame and honour are basic concerns. All the people interviewed saw working as a maid in a house as humiliating and very shameful. Such a job would put a woman's chastity in danger. Most people interviewed rejected the idea of such a job for a woman. Chastity and honour are closely related in Egyptian society, and such work would bring dishonour on the whole family. Yet there were two instances of women who worked as maids and who lived in Der. One was an old childless widow who had no one else to support her. All the people in the quarter sympathised with her plight. The other was a divorced woman in her mid-thirties, with two school-aged sons. She had no one to support her, as her ex-husband refused to pay alimony. She worked on a daily basis as a cook or washerwoman in houses. Only

her immediate neighbours commented on her work with sympathy and pity, as a "ghalbanah" or "defeated" woman. Thus, condemnation in theory does not always mean condemnation in practice. Common-sense judgements appear to prevail, and people are judged on actual behaviour rather than theoretical values. It is worth noting that both women had been married, were not young and were without male support. The first two facts were held to make them better able to defend themselves and less likely to attract male advances. The lack of a male provider, however, constituted the fundamental rationale for this kind of work.

In the village, women who kneaded dough and baked bread for others were considered to have shameful jobs, or éibah<sup>c</sup>, especially if their husbands were living. It is viewed as the lowliest of jobs. Very poor women, desperately in need of income, did this kind of work between midnight and 5 a.m., so that no one would know about it. Usually, only very poor widows do this job in the village. Such women are always regarded with contempt, or at best with pity.

The occupation considered most honourable for poor women was selling. Hence, the large number of peddler-women among the poor in urban and rural areas.

#### (f) Age

Generation rather than age itself seemed to be an important factor. A mixture of religious and secular views of poverty prevailed among the elderly and middle-aged. However, among the younger generations, while typifications, definitions and descriptions of poverty were the same as for older generations, religious views and interpretations were rarely expressed.

The younger generations appear to be more "open" and less traditional in their views. They adopted a more "modern" or

"Westernised" view of life, in the sense that they do not speak of rizk. They all hoped to improve their conditions through education or travel. Those still at school dreamed of employment and a regular income, in order to escape the insecurity which dominated their present lives. Travel and work abroad were seen as important among those who had graduated from school, technical school, or possessed skills and even semi-skilled apprentices.

Members of the younger generations invariably expressed the hope that they would be able to relieve their family's poverty through work. They certainly placed much more stress on opportunities and achievement, than on nassib. However, religion had by no means been discarded, and continued to play an important role in their lives. Those members of the younger generation that had had some education, had learned formal prayers, and did pray.

Over the long period of research, three individuals went abroad in search of work. One was a middle-aged man who became quite well-off and this resulted in major improvements in his family's conditions. One was a young man who went to Italy. While he did not do very well, he was able to send his family irregular sums of up to £40 at a time. The family had never before possessed such large sums, and their conditions were considerably eased. The third was one of the main informants for this project, he had failed to find success. He returned after two months, more deeply in debt due to the cost of his trip.

Those young people who managed to obtain employment on a fixed salary were always paid the minimum set (at the time of the research it was £22 for those with a Secondary School certificate). At first they were happy with their situation, usually contributing a third of their wages to the household and spending the rest on clothes,

transport costs, cigarettes and outings with their friends. However, they soon became dissatisfied, their pay was low and rises extremely small, opportunities for promotion were small and slow. They came to realise that their chances of getting married, of taking a room of their own, of saving, were virtually nil. They could only achieve these things by plunging themselves into a poverty that was only slightly better than that of their parents, and maybe as bad in the future as their family grew. The hopes and aspirations of such people invariably turned towards the opportunities which seemed to exist by working abroad.

It remains to be seen precisely how these younger generations cope with their conditions if they remain poor themselves. That is, when they are unable to improve their conditions locally, or unable to travel or succeed abroad. One can anticipate that, under such conditions there is a better than average chance that they will have much more recourse to religion. The more so, since in Egypt today there is a strong religious movement, particularly among youth. This movement seems to find supporters among those who lack opportunities for improvement, particularly where educated but unskilled youth are concerned, in both the middle and lower-income sections of society.

(g) Education

Education played an important role in the poor's views and constructions of reality. The more educated they were, the more worldly or secular their explanations of poverty: they do not speak of religion very much and are convinced that education (especially Secondary Education) can help them achieve much.



Among the very poor families studied, there were no instances of children who had entered university, except for some from Christian families who were supported by the church. The poor families that get no help or assistance are unable to support their children beyond Secondary School. Moreover, the children of poor families rarely achieve continuing success in school, most fail at the Primary Certificate level and the parents stop sending them to school because they cannot afford the extra costs incurred. Elder brothers and sisters, who have not completed their schooling, sometimes work to provide the income needed so that younger children can continue at school. Elder brothers and sisters who provided this kind of assistance expressed their unhappiness at not being able to improve their own conditions, e.g., going without new clothes, etc. These people are often unskilled and very badly paid. Under such conditions they expressed frustration, resentment and anger, whereas their parents found consolation and some degree of contentment in their religious faith.

Education should not be seen as an "antidote" for religion in Egypt. As noted in the final paragraph in (f) above, the younger generations appear to be more deeply involved in religious movements today than they have for many years. Ten years ago, while involved in a study of young educated people for another project, the researcher found members of the younger generations to be rather sarcastic about religion. Over the last three to four years, Egyptian youths have gone back to religion, forming organised groups with specific goals. Such a change can be observed among educated youth, both Moslem and Christian. Thus, religious views of the life-world are experiencing a revival, particularly among the educated, and may see an unprecedented spread since the early

twentieth century.

(h) Associational Affiliations

In Der-El-Sabbakin, where ethnographic research was carried out, there were no associations that provided the poor with other versions of how the world operates or their place in it. They were not members, nor did they participate, in any formal organisations. Networks of kin, friends and neighbours predominated.

Among the Christian poor families, in other areas of Cairo, religious views gained support and reinforcement through church activities. Films, social and religious gatherings take place regularly for adults, youths and children. Young people who participate in the Church Association are given lessons in morality, amusing activities that breed skills, vocational training for school drop outs, and sewing for schoolgirls. Great stress is laid on participation, co-operation and helping others in all these activities. The importance of education and the value of work are emphasised. Throughout all these activities, religious perspectives are encouraged and taught, e.g. a few minutes on each occasion is devoted to prayer, and perhaps a short religious lesson.

Similar activities occur in certain mosques, but as a widespread phenomenon this appears to be of much more recent origin than that found in Christian churches. There is an Islamic Institution in Old Cairo, that provides a range of services and activities. However, none of the poor children from Der were involved, because it was some distance away and nothing had been done to recruit them at that stage. In the last month of the research work, two eight-year old girls from Der were sent to the Mosque to learn the Qor'an. On instructions from their female teacher, they went with their hair

covered. The teacher gave them sweets each time they went. However, there appeared to be no other activities, in addition to the teaching, taking place. The girls had to memorise and recite a page of the Quor'an each time they went. However, when asked to do so, they recited it but were unable to explain its meaning. A short time later one of the girls stopped going to the mosque.

(i) Mass Media

Radio and television programmes play an important role in reinforcing religious views. All the poor families living in urban areas possessed a radio, and this was a very important medium for the transmission of views, news, and information, which were widely discussed as part-and-parcel of everyday life. None of the poor families in the village possessed a radio, either they could not afford the radio and batteries or they were without electricity supplies.

In Cairo, the radios of the poor are on all hours of the day and night. Radio transmissions were important factors reinforcing both religious and secular views of the poor's view of themselves and their conditions. Prayers were broadcast five times a day and there were daily religious talks transmitted. These radio broadcasts provided concepts, typifications, interpretations and labels (through plays, stories, and interviews with celebrities) that became incorporated into the everyday discourse of the poor.

It is unusual for a poor family to possess a television set. The television sets found among the poor usually were purchased from money sent by a member of the family working abroad, or were purchased on return from working abroad. Once acquired, television sets were important in promoting visits from kin and neighbours.

Movies and serials were especially popular. In response to the religious revival, and the return to the purer Wahabi Islam, there has been an increase in the number of religious programmes on television. Religious programmes, which include historical or contemporary plays and serials based on Islamic characters and attitudes, seem likely to become more important in encouraging and reinforcing Islamic religious views.

The influence of mass media are important to examine because there is a conscious effort, through newspapers, radio and television, to emphasise two sets of issues:

- (1) To emphasise that it is not shameful for women to work. Among the poor this has had an increasingly significant impact. More and more women, especially the younger ones, assume that they must work after their school years are over. There has been a considerable reduction in the feelings of shame that some of the poor felt when the women in the household had to go out to work. However, among the older generations the impact of such efforts does not seem to have produced any great change in attitudes and beliefs.
- (2) To explain that while tawakkúl, or passive "reliance on God", should be rejected, Islam actually advocates tawāakul, which implies "personal effort" in addition to reliance on God. The aim clearly is to dispel those beliefs which may be used to justify personal laziness, regardless of the living conditions or income of the household.

In general, mass media appear to play an essentially supportive role in the poor's social constructions of reality. The basic religious beliefs transmitted through the media support the poor's

own views while their interpretations remain largely a group phenomenon built around the local neighbourhood, hearsay and social networks. During Ramadan, radio, television, newspapers and magazines are replete with injunctions advocating charity for the poor, quotations from the Qor'an which emphasise the importance of charity as part of making fasting acceptable to God, as well as quotes stating the punishment that will befall the rich in the Hereafter if they do not give zakāt, or charity to the poor. These stories, statements and injunctions, serve to confirm the poor's own view of their importance in society, as mediators between Heaven and Earth, as the subjects of "Divine care" and as the responsibility of the rich.

#### Some Concluding Remarks

The factors which appear to be most influential in the poor's social constructions of their reality are "place of residence", or the local neighbourhood, and religion. Mass media and associational affiliation appear to operate as contributory, rather than directly influential, factors which confirm social constructions of poverty. Age and education appear to bring a secularising influence to bear but this may be a temporary phenomenon. The recent religious revival, together with the blossoming of religious organisations, appears likely to counter-act secularizing trends in all sections of Egyptian society.

Place of origin did not seem to directly influence social constructions of poverty, but it did seem to effect the criteria on which behaviour was judged, e.g., attitudes towards wives and daughters working among those of Upper Egyptian origin. Where occupation is concerned, among all the people studied in Cairo,

work as a maid in a house was seen as "morally dangerous" and "humiliating".

The particular type of occupation, or means of earning a living, did not appear to directly influence social constructions of poverty. However, the less stable their occupation and the more unsure the income, the more there was a need to rely on God, and the more religion was used to cope with day-to-day uncertainties.

No differences were identified in social constructions of poverty based on sex differences. Indeed, sex seems to be the least significant of all the factors analysed. Nor is it possible to conclude that women were more religious, had more faith, or were more pious, than men. It seemed that neither religious faith nor social constructions of poverty were affected by the factor of sex.

CONCLUSIONS TO PART III

Part III has examined the poor's definitions and descriptions of themselves, their common-sense typifications and the philosophy of life they used to cope with, and explain, the everyday problems they encountered. In the process, it has examined the self-image that results from their social constructions of poverty. Part III closed with an examination of the effect of such factors as "place of residence", "religion", "Age", etc., on the poor's definitions and descriptions of their everyday lives.

By examining the coping responses of the poor in relation to their own descriptions of their conditions, it was revealed that, in order to preserve and protect their self-image (with its central value of dignity), the poor's world-view is one within which they hold a place of special importance, a place, which means that, in the universal frame of the world and the Hereafter, the entire administration of "Divine Justice" takes them as a focal point, both in the distribution of wealth in the world, and in the distribution of rewards and punishments in the Hereafter. Within this view of life, the poor are the pivot around which health and illness are distributed; a view, within which, the giving and receiving of charity, are decisive factors in deciding a person's fate in the Hereafter.

In such a scheme, not only are all men equal, but the poor occupy a position "a degree" above the rich, to use the poor's own terms. The poor deal they get in a "momentary" (i.e. temporary) world is more than counterbalanced by the great rewards of "eternal happiness". Thus, their construction of reality provides a promise of compensation for their worldly misery. Not

only is their self-image bolstered by such a view, it also provides a "psychological compensation" that helps them bear their hardships with "acceptance", in the hope of future rewards. This forbearance is further reinforced by a strong belief in a kind of patience which always ends in relief.

Among the poor individuals and families studied, the more they adopted the world-view just outlined, the more they indicated they felt their dignity was preserved and the less they described themselves as "dead". They also were less likely to bear and express resentment towards the wealthy and better-off, who did not suffer their deprivations. Moreover, they were more ready to accept their condition with a true feeling of redah, which implied an "active acceptance" rather than mere 'accepting'. That is, with a wilful acceptance filled with a conviction that Within the Divine Scheme, the position of the poor was just, since better rewards lay ahead.

To what extent did such a world-view lead to a reduction in activity? Did religion act as an opiate for their condition? Those who professed their faith, and hence the world-view, were hard-working people. They were not blind to inequalities or injustices, and believed that God condemned these. They resisted and objected whenever they could, but were well aware of their own powerlessness. They could not afford the "luxury" of unemployment or inactivity. Social security is very restricted, inadequate and often temporary - it is always more profitable to work wherever possible. True, the Christian poor families, in Ain Shams and Matariah, received assistance from the local church. However, this was mainly given to the elderly, the disabled and the widowed with children, and even here did not reduce their attempts



to earn more income. In all the cases studied, the poor went to great lengths to find and remain in employment of some kind. In Cairo, the opportunities for finding employment and for improvising income-earning activities are extensive. However, government rules and regulations do impose restrictions on such activities. Thus, the adoption of this religious view appears to be a positive, rather than negative, response.

The general religious view of life was not adopted in its entirety by all the poor people studied. It was expressed more in total by the more religious elements of the poor, since at its core it involves a belief in God and "His Divine Providence". Some of the poor had less contact with religious sources. These expressed a belief in God but did not believe that God ordained such conditions as they were forced to live under. Such people "accepted" their conditions but expressed a good deal of resentment towards the rich and powerful, or their unjust and unfair treatment. However, whenever they spoke of a particular "well-off" person whom they knew, and not some vague category "the rich", they did not express resentment. Where they did resent such a person, it was based on his avaricious behaviour, his humiliation of someone in the area, or his bad reputation. On such occasions, more secular interpretations and judgements are sustained. Anger and resentment were manifested where unfairness, corruption or theft were believed to have taken place. The general response was one of deep dissatisfaction and frustration, rather than a deep feeling of redah. Here, their acceptance is more akin to a form of "abandonment" rather than a feeling of real acceptance implied in redah.

The range and extent of the adoption of the religious view of life and poverty was effected by education and age, more than any of the other factors. Here more emphasis should be placed on age rather than education. If education, then "modern" education as opposed to "traditional" education (e.g. as in the village kottab school or in Azharist institutions in Cairo, which emphasise religious perspectives).

The poor young people included in the study rarely, if ever, mentioned the religious view of life and poverty. They used the phrase "Inchaa Allah" ("if God wills") when referring to future plans, but this seems to be more a cultural, rather than a specifically religious, usage.

There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that the extensive and long-standing Egyptian social and cultural tradition has profoundly influenced religious views of life and poverty and is itself imbued with ancient religious ethics. The religious view of life and poverty, outlined above, was common to Moslems and Christians alike. The poor's definitions and descriptions of poverty seem to be a product of the Egyptian cultural tradition, rather than a product of either Islam or Christianity.

The moral notions of haram and halal money provide the poor with a rationale for why the poor are poor, while others are or become rich. The view that God created some people poor and some rich is contradicted somewhat by the belief that the money of the rich is often haram (i.e. a product of dishonest, illegitimate means). Such a rationale provides the poor with an explanation of why they do not become rich and protects them from the more "modern" notion that poverty indicates "failure". The equation of

poverty with failure would shatter the self-image and dignity of the poor; they would appear as incompetent and inadequate people. The notions of haram and halal then, act as both coping responses and psychological defense mechanisms. From within their social construction of the world, the poor appear as honest, whose money is always halal, and this is why it suffices for them. This stress on "honesty" is integral to the value placed on dignity. The dishonesty of the rich produces haram money. So while the rich appear proud they are diminished by the activities they pursued to become rich. Hence, the poor occupy a position "a degree" higher than the rich. With reference to this point, one poor woman described the pride of the rich as "false pride", an indication of his "bad nafss" (i.e. self or spirit).

The notions of haram and halal, and of the poor as "honest" and the rich as "corrupt", are not necessarily part of the strictly religious world-view. They often appeared among those who adopted more secular views. Here the rich were often used as scapegoats, as the objects of scorn and resentment.

While the typifications, personal types and course-of-action types, were used to support religious views of society and poverty, they were also used to support secular accounts of social life and poverty. Thus, while the terms and concepts may be the same, their use is not always associated with the adoption of the religious view of poverty. They are used to build-up definitions, accounts, descriptions and philosophies because they are part of the socio-cultural tradition and language that every Egyptian must use.

The typifications used to refer to "personal types" of rich and poor people reveal a form of classificatory system that corresponds to the different level of poverty identified and used by the poor.

They can be presented in the form of a hierarchy.

|                                 |       |                               |   |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|---|
| Ghani awi                       | ----- | very rich                     |   |
| Ghani                           | ----- | rich                          |   |
| Mabsūt                          | ----- | well-off or contented         |   |
| Mutawasett                      | ----- | of middle condition           |   |
| Taaban                          | ----- | tired                         |   |
| Taaban awi                      | ----- | very tired                    |   |
| { Ghalban                       | ----- | defeated                      | } Used interchangeably<br>according to<br>qualifications<br>prevailing. |
| { Fakir                         | ----- | poor                          |   |
| ghalban awi<br>or Ala bab Allah | ----- | destitute<br>or at God's door |   |

These "personal types" do not refer to "economic levels", rather they refer to a certain "way-of-being-in-the-world". As such they reflect society's view of, and behaviour towards, "the defeated", "the tired", etc. They also reflect the life-experiences of each "type" of person, as it was described in the text.

The ideas associated with "the path of patience" grouped together basic typifications used by the poor to describe the quality of their lives, allowing them to emphasise specific aspects of their particular life-style under the umbrella of "each according to his measure". It allowed them to tell of how they had to skip meals, of how they had to buy the cheapest food, of how they disguised their meals to give the illusion of a tasty meal, of "letting things pass", which also implies bearing conditions or crisis situations, of their reliance on God to provide satr i.e., protection from exposure due to lack of shelter, clothing or food, which may lead to begging - which condition would humiliate them and do away with their human dignity. Redah and patience express an interpretive and psychological framework which allows them to "pass through" their most difficult moment.

At the end of "the path of patience" lies farag, or "relief", the hope that they sustain through their popular and religious beliefs. Patience, then, is a fundamental component of their everyday lives, the key to many of the solutions of their problems. God will reward the patient and accompany them along that path. The belief that He is "on their side" gives them hope and compensates them for the sufferings and anxieties which are part of their poverty.

Proverbs, sayings and stories are not simply devices used to socially construct accounts of poverty, they also operate to help the poor accept and adapt to their circumstances. For the poor, proverbs, sayings and stories epitomise and encapsulate "the wisdom of the ages". They exist as ready-made explanations, devices and supports for coping with everyday life. The stories emphasise the religious view of poverty as well as a philosophy of poverty, riches, equality in death and the advantages of health over riches. The stories emphasise the "momentary", or temporary, value of wealth and its worthlessness on the one hand, and they offer the hope of obtaining wealth if God is invoked or prayed to with enough faith, on the other. The contradictions do not seem to bother the poor. What seemed to be important was to be able to tell the appropriate story on the appropriate occasion.

The philosophies of Rashād and Dawlat provided two examples of the way reality was socially constructed among the poor. One was a literate man, the other an illiterate woman. Both constructed their philosophies out of the social and cultural tradition available and related this to their particular life-experience, living conditions, and self-images. With Dawlat, it was possible to observe a high degree of consistency between her philosophy, her behaviour and her

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way of life. This was not possible with Rashād. Rashād's philosophy had to be supplemented by the views of his wife and children. According to his wife, during the later stages of his illness he wanted good food, tea and cigarettes and got irritated when the money was not available for such things. Earlier in his illness, he had not become irritated or angry because he was well aware of the family's circumstances. This seems to indicate that there was a high degree of consistency between his philosophy, behaviour and way of life but that this deteriorated after he became an invalid. Here we must remember that illness can have far-reaching implications for a person's behaviour, whether they are poor or not.

The factors that effect the poor's social constructions of reality are those which anchor their lives to particular places at particular times, with particular beliefs, and with particular educational or occupational backgrounds. There appear to be a set of common beliefs, of both cultural and religious origin, that produce similar social constructions of poverty among Moslems and Christians.

Interviews conducted among poor families in areas outside Der-El-Sabakin , provided general support for the typifications, personal types and course-of-action types related to life-styles. The notions of haram and halal, the threat of shame or eib, and self-images which centred on notions of dignity, were expressed in all interviews.

While aspects of the world-view and social construction of poverty, outlined earlier, were observed in almost all the families interviewed, in only a few instances was the view outlined or

elaborated in full. The research suggests that such a view may not exist in all cases, since even the ethnographic project revealed people who adopted more or less secular views. However, it is the contention of this researcher that, the methodology of interviewing does not allow the time or opportunity for more elaborate questions to be raised. Nor does the interview allow the kind of rapport to develop which would allow more complex and subtle data to be elicited. Beliefs, philosophies, descriptions and definitions are exceedingly complex phenomena. In the Egyptian context, where a certain degree of reserve is customary with "strangers", such data are labelled "intimate" and are not forthcoming unless the questioner is well known and respected.



CONCLUSIONS

Not the worst but the best of mankind  
suffer the most. The intensity with  
which suffering is felt may be con- 1  
sidered an index of a man's depth.

Adopting a phenomenological approach, more particularly a Schutzian framework, and an ethnographic methodology, this study has attempted to discover and describe the life-world of the poor, their daily life-style, and the manner in which they cope with the situation of poverty in which they live. In an attempt to give a rounded picture of their reality, both objective and subjective aspects of their life were observed, analyzed and described, and the ways in which each affected the other were explained. Insights into their daily struggle were revealed as well as the way in which they themselves define it and define themselves. Wherever possible, models were constructed on the basis of this study; scientific models based on the researcher's observations, and common sense constructs and typifications used by the poor, in the construction of their poverty. The conclusions put forward in this chapter draw upon, and elaborate, those outlined in Parts I, II and III.

The most important point to grasp about the slum quarter of Der-El-Sabbakin is that it lies within the mainstream of the daily life of Cairo, yet it is isolated behind an urban facade that does not allow passers-by to see it or even suspect the dramas enacted within its confines. This is a facade of "modernization" which runs along the large thoroughfare that ties southern Cairo to other parts of the city. The slum quarter lies behind the beautiful Cornishe Road, along the banks of the Nile, flush to a

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1. Nicholas Berdyev, quoted by Robert Olson, "The Anguish of Nothingness in Modern Philosophy", The Antioch Review, Vol. 17, No.2, p.251.

bridge-crossing that connects the island of Roda to the mainland, and from Roda to the western bank of the Nile, to Guizah, to the site of the Pyramids. Tourists pass along this route, admiring the mix of ancient and modern elements, as a "typical Egyptian scene". The better-off pass by in their cars, totally ignorant of what lies behind the buildings, the coffee-houses, the car-repair shops, the primary school with its post-Nasserite style, the Gamia taawonia with its queues of women dressed in traditional black dresses and veils, and down the large thoroughfare that links Old Cairo to New Cairo, or "Heliopolis", and on to Cairo's two main airports.

Feteh's words, cutting, brief and to the point, could never ring more true. "The rich is not aware of the poor. He does not see him. He lives elsewhere". According to Hassan Riad (1964), these poor people comprise about one third of Cairo's total population. Behind this modern facade lies a slum that houses people who range from those who form part of all the city's hustle and bustle, to those who seldom go beyond it. One young girl recounted her experience of bewilderment that resulted from a train trip to Bab-El-Luk, only two stations from the quarter. She exclaimed, "How beautiful! What is all this?" Yet there is nothing beautiful about the cross-roads, the railway stations, the food market, the mediocre shops. But then, everything is relative to the eye of the beholder.

Views of poverty are also relative. To the very poor, the "less poor" appear "well-off", and so on up the scale. The scale of poverty is long and wide. There are levels of income, but also a broad spectrum of qualitative differences, as the outline of "levels of poverty" has indicated. The criteria used are numerous, some are obvious, others less easy to define. Quality of life is always a matter of evaluation and judgement. Because

personal conditions vary, there are various ways of "being poor". However, at some point basic similarities emerge and the "necessary conditions" of poverty impose themselves.

Egypt is experiencing an economic boom and further great changes due to the "open-door" policy. Egypt exports labour, education and expertise to other countries in the Middle East and Africa. Many foreign companies have established themselves in Egypt, and in Cairo in particular. These changes have created new markets for local labour and new opportunities, or possibilities, for personal and household improvement. Some workers, particularly the skilled, have acquired sudden wealth and property. Many more people have benefited from these changes. Low wages and salaries are only part of the story here. Inflation has increased rapidly in the last six years. Those people whose conditions have not been improved have actually become poorer. While this study was not specifically concerned to examine the effects of inflation or the economic boom on the urban poor, it is evident that these national developments serve to highlight the conditions that keep the poor plunged in their poverty. The opportunities and possibilities for improvement that operate at the national level seem to have exacerbated the problems and conditions of the urban poor.

### Characteristics of the Poor

The first set of conclusions to be drawn from this study relate to the poor themselves, rather than to the "levels of poverty". The poor are ill-equipped to face life. They are not lazy, reckless or careless, as some bureaucracies define them. The cases reported here show how industrious, hard-working and ingenious they are in making the most of the little they have. The characteristics of the poor, as revealed in

evidence drawn from all areas of this study, indicate the true conditions that inhibit improvement through their own efforts.

1. The majority of the poor are uneducated and only semi-literate, as the statistics show. Illiteracy is much more widespread among women than men. While all the children of the poor go to school for two or three years, and a majority reach the sixth grade in primary school, the quality and quantity of education is very low. The education system exhibits many well publicised flaws and produces children who are barely literate. To succeed in the education system children must take special lessons given outside the usual school curriculum. Only those who can afford such lessons can ensure educational progress and success. The overwhelming majority of the poor's children stop school at their sixth year of primary education because they fail the examinations for further "free education". This study has revealed the way the Egyptian education system operates, at each level, to systematically eliminate poor children, despite the original intention to provide "equal educational opportunities for all".

The children of the poor, having left school at an early age, with little knowledge and literacy skills, soon forget what they had learned. This is especially the case since their life rapidly becomes geared to jobs that do not require the use of literacy skills on an everyday basis. At the same time, most jobs, particularly in government institutions, require written examinations for entry. The children of the poor are unable to do such examinations, and, thus, their opportunities for secure and better employment are exceedingly small.

2. The overwhelming majority of the poor are unskilled or semi-skilled. What few skills the adult poor possessed were derived from their lives in the village. The city did not provide opportunities to practice such skills,

and most turned to odd-jobs, petty trading, or work as janitors, cart drivers, or guards on building sites. Those in good physical health may turn to heavy labouring work on building sites which do not use machinery (as is often the case in Cairo). Second-generation migrants often begin work as errand boys with small restaurants, merchants, ironers, etc. The luckier ones find employment as apprentices, where they can acquire new skills, or as janitors, where they may receive a small pension on retirement. The vast majority of the poor move from one menial job to another, unable to improve their living conditions.

Those who turn to petty trading rarely improve their conditions. They work on a tiny capital investment and their returns barely keep them at the level of subsistence. These people suffer very badly; their incomes are insecure and irregular, their opportunities for improvement almost nil. These are the people called irza'i - a term which is unknown among many of the rich but which the researcher found in common useage in all the poor families studied.

3. It may appear obvious to conclude that the poor have low incomes, and this itself is the primary criterion of poverty. However, the term "low income" not only involves remuneration for work, but it means that these people have no other source of income or support, that could add up to a reasonable total. The jobs they take are menial, require little education or skill, and however exhausting the job may be, the jobs they take are considered "lowly" in themselves.
4. The poor do not have any form of remuneration from inherited property. There are many people in Egypt who are uneducated and unskilled,

particularly among the older generation, but they are not counted among the poor. Some may be quite well-off, due to the income they receive from rents or agricultural produce which derives from inherited remunerative property. Others are well-off because they had soluble property, which they were able to sell in order to acquire capital to set up some kind of trade on a scale that allowed good gains and sometimes fabulous ones.

The kind of property that the poor possess, inherited or otherwise, is not remunerative, nor saleable. That is, it is a kind of property from which income cannot be derived. Inherited property is held in common with many other members of the family, each one's share is in effect very small. Other members are too poor to purchase another's share even if they had the desire to do so. There are strong social and cultural forces preventing the practice of selling a share to a 'stranger'. Family ties are very strong in Egypt, especially among the villagers and more traditionally conservative sections of the population, to whom the poor invariably belong. Threats of shame, loss of dignity and ostracism from the family network face those who may seek to sell their shares for in so doing they 'sell' their own kin, who act as a moral and financial support in moments of crisis.

Two of the cases presented exemplified this situation: Rashad who had inherited land in partnership with a large number of relatives, and Fateh who had inherited the house in which he lived in partnership with his brothers and sisters. Rashad occasionally received gifts of food from his village-based kin. Fateh did not have to pay the official rent (£2-), which helped him a great deal but did not improve his conditions.

Rashad could have opened a restaurant had he been able to dispose of his share of the family's land, and could have made much more money out of selling beans and taamia than he in fact did. Fateh could have sold his share of the house and established a shop in Roda, thereby providing himself with a more stable income, nor could the property be translated into capital resources that could be used to improve the conditions under which they were condemned to live.

Remunerative inherited property is not simply important as either a source of income or of capital, it provides support for families in times of crisis. Where no such property is possessed, crises (e.g. ill health, death of spouse, loss of job, old age, school fees, etc.) turn into catastrophes that plunge families into destitution and depression, e.g. Rashad's invalidity, Narguess who lost her husband when all her children were young.

5. The jobs and incomes of the poor are insecure and irregular. This characteristic applies most directly to irza'is. While irza'is, working as petty traders for example, may make a good return on some days (e.g. feasts), most days they barely break even. Whatever income is gained is soon dispersed and average incomes are dramatically low. The work of the poor is directly effected by weather and seasonal considerations. Nefissah's petty trade in beans and belilah dropped dramatically in autumn and winter months, when children were given no breakfast at home but just a sandwich before leaving for school. Fateh's work as an ironer, with no shop, was concentrated in the summer months. The insecure and irregular income of the poor, derived as it is from insecure and irregular employment or trade, is deeply effected by

increasing inflation, e.g. less poor people send their clothes to be ironed due to rising costs.

6. The poor live in a poor quarter - A local environment within which the residents could not afford to pay very much for goods and services. Those who pursued their livelihood within the quarter had their living conditions restricted by the very nature of the quarter itself. Rashad had used his cart to ply his trade in more affluent areas, and was one of the few able to finance his children's education through secondary technical school. When Rashad became an invalid, his wife was unable to manage the cart and had to restrict her trade to the quarter. Their income dropped by half. Fateh reported that he could earn more working in other areas and that no one would send their clothes to be ironed in such a poor quarter as the one he lived in. The local environment of the poor sets severe limits on the prices that could be charged for all goods and services.
  
7. The poor often lack the necessary identification papers, or permits necessary for wider economic activity. Almost all the poor interviewed lacked one or more of the official papers necessary to facilitate life or improve their conditions. Zeinab, the sweets peddler, had no birth certificate so was unable to get an identity card or a ration card, nor could she get an official permit to work as a street peddler outside Der. She could not afford the costs involved to obtain a birth certificate. Birth certificates, identity cards and permits for trading involve expenses and procedures that make them difficult, if not impossible, for the poor to obtain. The poor must find ways to survive without them. Sadek, for example, was arrested and fined several times for trading



maize beyond the quarter. He has no other means of livelihood and was forced to continue trading unofficially. The fines became a heavy but necessary cost : "It is either this or we die of hunger, my children and I".

The poor's lack of education and skills is compounded by the difficulties they face in obtaining birth certificates, identity cards and permits. Together these factors act to limit the poor to their own quarter, and are the subject of considerable anger and frustration.

8. The poor lack the 'proper' appearance. The poor do not have the means to clothe themselves in order to appear clean, well-dressed and confident. This lack of adequate clothing closes many doors that could ease their daily lives. Because of their appearance they are denied certain jobs, badly treated by the population at large, left to queue while the better-off are served and beaten by the police as they stand in line before gamia taawonia or railway station. These incidents may be observed every day. Because of their appearance, they are easily suspected of thefts, by the police and shops' personnel and not easily released, if caught. They are badly treated by medical personnel. They are insulted, humiliated and dehumanized in most of their encounters outside the quarter, for no other reason except that they wear old, dirty, or ill-fitting garments.
9. The poor do not know how to defend themselves. The poor are often cheated, exploited or ignored because they do not know their legal rights. They are largely ignorant of legal matters, and dare not pursue their claims because they feel the system is weighted in favour of the rich

and the powerful.

The characteristics listed here were observed in all the poor families studied. While "low income" is perhaps the defining characteristic of poverty everywhere, it is important to recognize that "low income" does not exist in isolation from the other characteristics. Further, it is important to note that apart from the characteristics which relate to the "lack of remunerative property" and the prevalence of "insecure and irregular employment", the conditions of the poor could be considerably eased by a programme of reform which centred on the conditions mentioned.

Taken together, the characteristics of the poor are directly responsible for the income-earning activities they take or improvise. This was clearly evident in the analysis of the occupational structure of Der-El-Sabbakin. Out of the 43 "working persons" identified, 30 were found to be irza'is working as either "self-employed" or "daily-wage earners".<sup>1</sup> The number of peddlars and menial workers among the poor bears evidence of the relationship between their lack of education and skills, and the income-earning opportunities available to them. Those employed as semi-skilled workers in small private workshops, acquired their skills "on the job", they were very badly paid and worked between 10 to 12 hours a day, they could be made redundant at any time (in spite of the Labour Laws), and had no prospect of social security support.<sup>2</sup> In this

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1. See Chapter 5.

2. In small privately owned workshops it is usual to find only "master workmen" listed with the Labour Office and provided with social security. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers are sent away when officials visit the workshop.

sense, they were exploited by their employers: poor and powerless they accepted these conditions to keep their jobs. Neither 'privately employed workers' nor irza'is currently receive social security.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the poor irza'is envy the security and regularity of employment and income, such as it is, experienced by workers in small privately owned enterprises.

### Coping Mechanisms

In coming to grips with their daily economic problems - the acquisition of food, clothing, furniture and transport - the poor have recourse to five major government institutions:

- 1] government subsidies
- 2] price controls
- 3] ration cards
- 4] food co-operatives (gamia taawonia)
- 5] public sector stores

The poor's ability to cope with their daily economic problems would be severely restricted without these institutions. Despite serious flaws, such government provisions constitute an important source of basic help and assistance. Most often, it is the treatment they receive from the personnel operating such institutions, a treatment which derives from the wider stereotype of the poor in Egyptian society, that generates quite specific problems for the poor. The effectiveness of these institutions is further impaired by widespread corruption among the employees and the ability of the better-off to by-pass official channels of distribution. The effectiveness of gamia and public sector stores are impaired by inadequacies in the supply and distribution of goods.

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1. The laws relating to Social Security are currently under review. Hopefully, they will be designed to reach the poor groups identified here.

The government has established institutions to provide "free" education and health services. This study has shown that the education system is urgently in need of reform. The major problems in the poor's access to health care related to the medical personnel's attitudes toward, and care of, the poor. The poor's access to treatment and medication is restricted by a number of hidden costs. Maladministration, shortages of medicine, and sometimes corruption among the nurses and administrators, all exacerbate the problems facing the poor.

When their circumstances become very desperate, the poor have recourse to the Ministry of Social Affairs or to religious organizations. The Ministry of Social Affairs is beset by problems which relate directly to its limited and inadequate funding. The help given is restricted to desperate cases, the amounts provided are welcomed but totally inadequate, assistance is provided for only a limited period and may not be given until it is too late. To obtain assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs the poor must undergo detailed, lengthy and demanding bureaucratic procedures and examinations, and must then wait their turn. Mosques, churches and waqfs are other sources of assistance used by the poor. The assistance that can be provided by such institutions are limited and are very dependent on local community support.

The informal institutions used as a coping mechanism by the poor are essentially supplementary to the formal institutions and organizations that provide assistance. However, some of these informal coping mechanisms are basic constituents of the poor's everyday lives. Food, clothing, cooking utensils and household items are constantly borrowed and lent to make ends meet. Apartments, amenities and bills are shared. The dalalah and gamia groups provide credit and cash to cover day-to-day expenses as well as more specific expenses, e.g. trousseaus, medicine, school fees, etc.

Second-hand clothing and furniture are purchased at the suk and private sales. Cash to meet unforeseen or urgent expenses is often obtained by the sale of jewellery, furniture or clothing. Help and charity from kin, neighbours and friends is very important when avenues to credit are unobtainable. When all else fails, the poor cope by skipping meals, sleeping through the day or wearing old and torn clothes, e.g. the example of the woman who wore her dress upside down in the home to preserve it for going out.

Feasts and mawalid can strain already overburdened budgets, but they may also provide relief through the charity dispensed on such occasions. Where medical treatment is difficult to obtain or too expensive, the poor have recourse to folk medicine and magical or holy devices. In practice, folk medicine and magical or holy devices may also turn out to be costly, particularly where a Sheikh, talisman or zar ceremony are involved. Such forms of "treatment" appear to bring the poor considerably more psychological comfort than that derived from hospitals or clinics.

Among the poor, kinship groups formed the basic support groups. Kin, and sometimes neighbours, provided assistance in the form of cash, credit, goods and services to meet day-to-day expenses as well as crisis situations. They did so as part of their kinship obligations, without any expectation, or desire, of repayment or return. Kinship obligations towards the poor were taken very seriously when women and children were involved.

Finally, it is important to identify the major processes involved in the poor's coping responses, [a] preserving limited and strained resources through the multiple-use of clothing, furniture, living space, cooking utensils and food, [b] reciprocity and sharing in all dealings with kin and neighbours, and [c] the use of "credit facilities" such as the dalalah, gamia (credit groups), and where possible the purchase of goods from public

sector stores on an instalment basis, [d] against this background, charity is seen as a "last resort", regardless of whether it comes from mosques, churches, waqfs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, or from private companies or individuals.

### Levels of Poverty and Common-sense Typifications

Part II outlined a model of "levels of poverty" which emerged through the study. Following Schutz (1963: 302-326), this "scientific model" was constructed by the researcher as opposed to the common-sense views of the poor, formed out of their "personal types" and "course-of-action types". The latter were presented in the form of the poor's "path of patience". The relationship, or degree of correspondence, between the researcher's "levels of poverty" and the views of poverty among the poor require specific comment.

Firstly, "personal types", as defined by the poor, were found to form a hierarchy, a sort of classification of social stratification. This hierarchy was primarily based on personal possessions, e.g. food, clothing, housing and sometimes an estimate of income. However, over and above these items, the poor were also concerned with "a way of being in the world", with subjective states. Hence, they spoke of Ala bab Allah ("at God's door"), ghalban ("defeated"), taaban ("tired"), mabsut ("contented"), and mertah ("rested"). Corresponding to the poor's "personal types" are typifications that refer to "course-of-action" which indicate life-styles. Whether Ala bab Allah, taaban or ghalban, the poor's "course-of-action" centres on coping with their hardships, privations and deprivations. This is the "small measure", or ala adduh, which their nassib (destined share or fortune) has meted out to them (religious view), or which their particular circumstances have caused them to endure (secular view). In this

context, "letting things pass" refers to bearing-up or managing difficult times until they pass. But the lives of the poor are a succession of crises, they are in a perpetual condition which requires endurance and patience (sabr). A patience that may not end in relief but which promises relief (farag) as reward for endurance which upkeep hope. Thus, a necessity, patience, is elevated to the status of virtue: "God is with the patient". This lays the ground for redah or acceptance of God's will.

For the destitute poor, or Ala bab Allah, perpetual endurance, patience and acceptance of God's will, are basic components of life-styles. Farag, or relief, may come from various charitable sources. For the ghalban or defeated, each day brings its crises and because they have insecure and irregular incomes and lack education, skills, property and support, their efforts are 'defeated'. The ghalban must endure, "let it pass", "be patient", and live according to his "measure", accepting his nassib. The taaban, or tired, is forced to make such a continual effort to earn a living that they become exhausted or 'tired', emerging from one crisis only to face the next. His income is low, even though he has a more regular and secure occupation than the ghalban. The taaban, then, must also endure, "let things pass", "be patient" until relief comes through better times. This type of people may experience some marginal and temporary relief from their daily crises, but the "course-of-action" must continue as they know their relief is only temporary.

Schutz's hypothesis that there is a logical consistency between the "personal types" and "course-of-action types" that people express, and their life-styles, is supported by this piece of research. Given this, we must go on to ask: To what extent is there a correspondence between the researcher's "levels of poverty" and the typifications used by the poor

themselves? Is such a correspondence necessary?

The typifications given above are used by the poor in their everyday lives. They are part of the poor's social construction of reality, and are lodged in the poor's daily experiences. The researcher's "levels of poverty" were constructed out of the various factors and elements which appeared to be important - occupation, possessions, housing, food, clothing, and future prospects. These factors and elements are more narrow, specific and quantitative than those used by the poor. Both, however, involve interpretive judgements on the quality of life involved. Thus, we should not expect a one-to-one correspondence between the researcher's model and that used by the poor. However, given that both models were abstracted from the same reality, some kind of correspondence must be expected.

The poor define four different kinds of poverty, arranged in a hierarchy. The researcher's model is also hierarchical but, as pointed out above, based on more narrow and specific criteria. The correspondence between the two can be presented as follows:

| <u>Researcher's Model</u>     | <u>Poor's Classification</u>  |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. destitute                  | <u>ghalban awi</u> (very defeated) or<br><u>Ala bab Allah</u> (at God's door) |
| 2. very poor                  | → <u>ghalban</u> (defeated)   |
| 3. quite poor                 | → <u>ghalban</u> (defeated)   |
| 4. average poor               | <u>taaban awi</u> (very tired)  |
| 5. those who have become poor | → <u>ghalban</u> (defeated)<br>→ <u>taaban awi</u> (very tired)               |
| 6. the improving poor         | <u>taaban</u> (tired)   |

Where the poor identified four levels of poverty, the research identified six levels. There are the "destitute", who, like <sup>c</sup>Am Hassanein, because



of old age, live almost entirely on charity (indicated by the term Ala bab Allah). There are the "destitute" who have an improvised job but are so badly off that they literally have no roof over their head and who look on those who receive charity as "well-off" (these were referred to as ghalban awi). Thus, there are important nuances between the use of the terms ghalban awi and Ala bab Allah, which only become clear with regard to particular local circumstances and individuals.

Ghalban covers the researcher's levels "very poor" and "quite poor", revealing the more specific and narrow criteria used to distinguish the six levels of poverty. At times, ghalban awi was also used to refer to the "very poor". Clearly, the poor's use of a particular term depends on speaker's own evaluations of the individual or person in question. However, the poor's term ghalban does tend to obscure qualitative and quantitative differences in the life-styles of the "very poor" and the "quite poor", which the model specifies in terms of each individual factor.

The level "average poor" equates with the poor's taaban awi. These are the poor who strive to improve their conditions, and who enjoy distinctly brighter prospects than those discussed above. Yet they could fall deeper into poverty due to some crises. The level "those who have become poor" are difficult to locate within the poor's hierarchy, they may be referred to as "very tired" (taaban awi) or "quite defeated" (ghalban), or even "tired" (taaban). Clearly, the specific term used by the poor would be made with reference to a particular individual, and would take into account the particular circumstances. Here it is inappropriate to speak in terms of "correspondence", since the use of a particular term to refer to such a specific category, as identified by the researcher, is dependent on a particular moment in time. The advantage of the researcher's levels here is apparent. The level "those who have become poor" helps describe and

explain the property, clothes and housing that this group of poor "bring into poverty", but which are ignored or obscured by the typifications used by the poor.

The term "tired" (taaban) is again used by the poor to refer to the 'improving poor' since it refers to a particular individual or family at a particular moment in time. The usefulness of the researcher's level "the improving poor" here, allows us to distinguish important qualitative and quantitative differences in the life-styles and prospects of these people in relation to "those who have become poor" and the "average poor". A future level may see them reaching a "middle" condition which would not count them any more among the 'poor'.

The researcher's "levels of poverty" could, of course, be specified still further, using more definitive criteria and scale for measuring poverty. However, ethnographic research tends to lead fieldworkers in other directions. Were such criteria and measurement tools developed and used in survey-research, they would still require ethnographic work to put meat on their bones. Survey research, in principle, would provide the 'numbers' needed for achieving such refinement. However, survey-research presents major difficulties in Egyptian society, e.g. reluctance to answer questions relating to personal circumstances, sources and levels of income, etc. In research among the poor, access and trust are vitally important, if we are to obtain reliable and valid data.

The "personal types" and "course-of-action types" used by the poor are very important to grasp. These were used by all the poor studied, whether they adopted religious or secular perspectives. Such types were also found among the non-poor resident in Der-El-Sabbakin, as well as more widely in Egyptian society. For the poor, such typifications play a critical role in the social constructions of the life-world. Expressions of victimisation

are implied in the poor's terms taaban but more particularly ghalban (i.e. the one "whom life has defeated" as opposed to the "contented", the rich or ghani). Since the basic division is between ghalban or ghani, the poor conceived of themselves in opposition to the ghani. The ghani are rich, arrogant, greedy, dishonest, selfish and are "really living", while the poor are "dead" while alive, lacking all the good things of life. The poor see this as unjust. They see themselves as honest, generous, hardworking, the little they possess is halal. Where the poor are not religious, they predict the "downfall" of the ghani through the "vissitudes of time". The poor speak of the unknown rich in terms of an unjust, ugly and unknown figure who exploits the gamia and corrupts the gamia's employees with bribes. The self-image and dignity of the poor is sustained by opposing it to meanness and corruption of the rich. Thus, the poor work with a stereotype of the ghani. This helps them overcome their puzzlement over the nature of wealth. They quite simply cannot conceive of what it would be like to be "wealthy", or even to acquire "wealth". Many have never held a ten pound note in their hand, especially the irza'is. To retain their sense of dignity and to balance their experience of deep frustration in the face of their own poverty, in contrast to the extravagance they daily observe, many have recourse to religion.

### Religion as a Coping Mechanism

At the outset, this research project was primarily concerned with the institutions used by the poor to cope with their poverty. As the research progressed, it became evident that non-material factors played key roles in the life of the poor: religious institutions and the Egyptian social and cultural heritage. It was to their social and cultural heritage, or "reference schemata", that the poor turned when recounting their definition,

description and acceptance of poverty. Religion and popular wisdom too were used to rationalise, and hence cope with their condition. Religious faith acted as a powerful social and psychological force which infused their past, present and future life with meaning and relevance. Drawing upon a common social and cultural heritage, and making specific use of religious elements, the poor re-located themselves, not at the bottom of society, irrelevant to social and religious life, but at the centre of "creation", the central group in the measure of "Divine Justice" on earth and in the Hereafter. This view of themselves ensured the promise of "eternal happiness", as opposed to all the temporary advantages of terrestrial life. A "merciful and compassionate God" cared for the poor, told the rich to look after them and promised them an ultimate justice that no human society could provide. It is little wonder that the life-world of the poor was dominated by religious perspectives.

While the researcher is well-aware of the importance of religion in the lives of most Egyptians, whatever their creed, the views encountered in this project went beyond all expectations. Such a finding is all the more important since the project was not initially concerned to study religion, or the role of religious beliefs among the poor. The significance of the Egyptian social and cultural heritage and the centrality of religion in the lives of the poor emerged out of a study which focused on their everyday lives. Ethnographic methods proved their worth here in that they allowed these unexpected, but very important, themes to emerge and to be pursued.

Religion emerged as an important factor in this study in two ways: [1] as a major social and psychological mechanism for coping with day-to-day problems: and [2] as a basic resource in social constructions of reality. Part III elaborated these points in some detail. Both Moslems and

Christians reported similar views of poverty and used religion in the same way. Hence, their coping mechanisms and social constructions of poverty were not simply reflections of particular creeds. These seemed to be based on a more general view of life and poverty, definitely involving religious faith as a component in coping responses, but a view that derived essentially from an Egyptian social and cultural world-view that stretches back many centuries. Evidence for the existence of this more general view of life and poverty came through those who defined and described poverty in more secular terms. Even those who did not use religion as a major coping mechanism in their everyday lives, showed that their views and attitudes had been coloured by this general cultural heritage.

There are two aspects of the poor's hope or relief, a religious and secular one. Sometimes the poor see "relief" in more worldly terms, for example, when children grow up they will be able to support their parents (e.g. Sadek and Nefissah), or when children succeed in their own lives and bring satisfaction to their parents, or when children are able to support themselves and relieve their parents of the expense and worry (e.g. Dawlat). Others hope for "relief" in the form of a job abroad or a good job in Cairo (e.g. Fateh), or may be a part-time job to supplement their meagre income. Many hope for a windfall. Among the irza'is it was common to encounter people hoping for a piece of luck, an unexpected source of rizk. The common-sense views were infused with the wider religious view.

For most of the poor, the religious view of the life-world is central. For the less religious, the religious view seems to give an order to their conceptualisations. The religious view of life and poverty is very broad, within it more worldly conceptualisations find a niche. Most of the poor see no contradiction in combining religious and secular explanations of

life and poverty. For them, religious views are just as much common-sense explanations to religious explanations subsuming the worldly to the religious wherever contractions arise, e.g. when worldly causes for poverty or illness were advanced, these were later said to be the outcome of "God's will for them".

The use of shifting conceptualisations of the world, within the one account are well known to anthropologists. Geertz, (1966) observes:

The movement back and forth between the religious perspective and the common-sense perspective is actually one of the more obvious occurrences on the social scene, though again, one of the most neglected by social anthropologists, virtually all of whom have seen it happen countless times ... They failed to see man as moving more or less easily and very frequently, between radically contrasting ways of looking at the world, ways which are not continuous with one another but separated by cultural gaps across which Kierkegaardian leaps must be made in both directions.

Those who adopt a more religious view, while still maintaining worldly hopes and aspirations, draw their feelings of "worth" and "dignity" from religion. The less religious among the poor seemed to feel their self-image was more threatened. While they fought hard to maintain their dignity, the manner in which they expressed their indignation, resentment and frustration, leads one to believe that they are tortured by doubts over their own "worth". The religious poor, who see themselves as the tools of "Divine Justice" or as the subject of "Divine care", can draw upon such beliefs to sustain their self-respect.

Religion also provides the poor with a degree of freedom from the worry and fear that surrounds their future. Religion reassures them. Each person will receive his daily rizk, however small, it will be sufficient, "ala adduh". It assures them that their daily sufferings and hardships will be compensated, for one day "relief" will come, and hence saves them from despair. The poorer the individual concerned, the stronger

and deeper their faith appears to be. All the church social workers remarked on the "extraordinary faith" displayed by the poor. One Christian social worker commented, "Their faith shames us".

Sociologists may well say that the poor have more religious faith because they need it in order to be able to cope with their conditions. That is, that the poor's religious faith fulfills certain basic social and psychological functions. However, for the poor, each day that passes confirms their religious faith. Each day they are able to find food constitutes a miracle for them, an answer to their prayers, a proof of God's providence. As a coping response, these religious beliefs are certainly very successful. These religious views preserve the poor's hope and dignity, sustains them morally, all without hindering their daily strivings.

The argument that religion is an "opiate", does not seem to apply to the better-off and the rich. One is tempted to ask, "Why should the rich be allowed to enjoy everything, including religion without question, while every action and belief of the poor is, itself, seen as a cause of their condition?". Religion is not an "opiate" for the poor, it is through religion that the poor see and interpret the injustices and humiliations that make them so angry and resentful. Indeed, the poor people in this study demonstrated an active political consciousness. They were well-aware of current events and developments, they all observed and noted the vested interests that motivated their area's representatives. Despite their political awareness, many of the poor did not have voting cards because they lacked identification papers or because they believed that their illiteracy barred them from possessing such cards. It is their poverty, rather than their religion, that acts as an "opiate". Their poverty makes them powerless; when they do raise their voice in protest they are squashed.

The area of residence, or local neighbourhood, emerged as the most important factor, apart from religion, influencing their social constructions of poverty. The local neighbourhood acts as a basic source of, and forum for, the exchange of news, views and information. The local neighbourhood, through hearsay, acts as a channel and filter for the social and cultural heritage, religious views and popular wisdom. Within the confines of the residential area constructions, and definitions are learned, applied, modified and applied again.

#### The Finding of This Study in Relation to the Literature on Poverty

The poor's response to their poverty reveals a mixture of situational and cultural processes, as Gans (1971) had suggested. The behaviour of the poor does not spring from any "culture of poverty", but rather from an ancient social and cultural tradition that is common to the wider Egyptian society. This tradition has been preserved in folk-culture, and forms the building blocks for their world-views. It is not the world-view that prevents their integration into the wider society, for similar views are to be found in religious education and the mass media. The mixing of religious and secular views within the same explanation, is also characteristic of the wider society, e.g. the much quoted motto of the Sadat government was "Science and Faith". Saroit Abaza's novel 'Kandil Om Hashem' deals with the conflicting views and resolves it by subsuming to faith and accepting their co-existence. T.V. scientific programs assure the 'consistence' of both views (e.g. Dr. Mustafa Mahmud's program).

No "culture" or "world-view" condemns the poor to a life of privation and hardship. The barriers that inhibit the poor from improving their own conditions have been discussed in the "Characteristics of the Poor". The poor are all too aware of their own limitations, as well as those of



the education and health systems. This study has clearly shown that even their belief in nassib and "God's will" do not obscure their view of the objective facts, nor prevent them from struggling to throw off their poverty. The whole study bears evidence to the strivings of the poor, to their hopes and aspirations for a better life. The hopes and aspirations of the poor do not differ markedly from those of the middle-classes, nothing seems to dampen these hopes.

The research reported here supports the finds from Gans (1962), Liebow (1967), Hannerz (1969) and the ethnographies from Latin America. The poor share the same values, hopes and aspirations as members of the wider society, they are active, pragmatic and socially conservative. The life-styles, institutions and social relationships are best seen as adaptations forced upon them by limited and insecure resources. It is difficult to suggest any more effective ways of managing budgets and life-styles, than those they have already devised.

Those aspects of "social disorganisation" often associated with the notion of "culture of poverty", were largely absent.<sup>1</sup> They do suffer badly from over-crowding and a lack of privacy but these are a product of their economic limitations. Deviance and crime did not appear to be widespread. However, respondents reported that juvenile delinquency, among school drop-outs and those unable to find jobs, was a growing problem in poor areas.

By and large the description of Egyptian slums provided by Rugh (1979) and Wikan (1980) were supported by this piece of research. Ghamri's (1980) slum is more typical of those found in urban fringe areas, such as those observed in Ain Shams. Neither Wikan nor Ghamri were concerned to identify

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1. See Chapter 2.

the poor's coping institutions, and examine their nature. Rugh focused on the way the poor coped with such "constraints" as limited space, housing, services, occupations and clothing, but treats these all on a very general level and does not locate them within the sphere of everyday life (this is no doubt due to the fact that a survey methodology was used). Rugh focused on what she called "The Domestic cycle", which was another way of approaching "life-cycle poverty". Rugh was careful not to engage in "subjective analysis", since her "scientific awareness" alerted her to the need for such analyses to be firmly based in a thorough knowledge of the culture and language. While this is a limitation of her study, it is a well-calculated one. In this sense, Rugh's study emerged as more insightful, meaningful and reliable work than that produced by Wikan.

The research undertaken here confirms the broad outlines of Rugh's descriptions of the objective circumstances found among the urban poor. This research project complements her study in two respects:

- 1] It provides a picture of the everyday life of the poor - their diet, food budgets, daily routines, coping mechanisms, and a detailed ethnographic account of the poor's quality of life.
- 2] It examines the poor's social construction of poverty - their attitudes, definitions, descriptions, stories, religious and cultural beliefs and relates these, through ethnographic description, to the everyday lives of the poor.

This thesis has consciously avoided detailed accounts of relationships, since, they were her main concern and were the focus of both the Wikan (1980) and Ghamri (1980) and the El-Messiri Nadim (1977) ethnography of relationships in baladi areas (though the latter's focus was not the poor). While in general agreeing with Ghamri's description of social relationships among the poor (Ghamri, 1980), this research finds little evidence of any kind

of "culture of poverty", to which he attributes central significance. Ghamri states that he found the poor to be "passive", "pessimistic", "pliant", "accepting their situation", as "marginal", living in "social isolation". His poor live in a geographically marginal area, on the city's western fringe, and it may well be that the migrants were concerned to conserve their "rural way of life". However, neither aspect means that the people are socially, economically, politically, culturally or historically, "marginal". Ghamri defines their jobs as carriers, porters, guards, or in providing services for government institutions, etc., all as "marginal" (Ghamri, 1980: 246-7). The fact that all these jobs were unskilled or "casual labour" seems to be enough to Ghamri to regard them as "marginal". However, as this, and the Latin American research show, the unskilled, irregular and insecure jobs the poor are forced to take are not "marginal" to the wider economy but an essential ingredient of it (see, for example, Peattie, 1974; Perlman, 1976).

The research reported here also contradicts Ghamri's (1980: 254) view that the poor are "lazy", do not work and loiter about, that they "see work as unimportant and not essential, and that they only work to eat." Ghamri concludes that the poor are "lazy, not serious, fatalistic in looking for a job" (*ibid*). The question we must ask of Ghamri is, "How then are they managing to survive?". This researcher has found that the poor cannot afford not to work. Either Ghamri's poor were engaged in illicit activities, and hence sought to keep them secret, or they were in receipt of support from kin. It seems clear that Ghamri should have examined the poor's source of livelihood more closely, even his own respondents said they had 'to work in order to eat' (Ghamri, 1980: 254). Ghamri fails to see that his own data provides many examples of the poor's resourcefulness, ingenuity and pragmatism.

### Poverty, Urbanization and the Village

It is often assumed that there is a direct relationship between poverty and urbanization. It is the contention of this researcher that urbanization is not conducive to poverty, since the whole process of urbanization seems to engender a need for more services which provide jobs for the poor. Nor does it seem true that urban migration increases the scale of poverty, it may increase the number of poor in the city but poverty will not be reduced by keeping the people in the villages. On the contrary, urban life provides the poor with more opportunities for self improvement than are found in the villages. [1] The opportunities for earning an income are much more numerous in the city than in the villages. [2] The nature and range of services designed to assist the poor are far more numerous in the city than in the villages, e.g. clean water, electricity, health services. [3] Education is more widely available, at all levels, in the city. Where school-books may be difficult to obtain in the city, they may be non-existent in the village. Thus, education, one of the main sources of hope for the poor's future, may have its problems in the city, but it is much better than that provided in the villages. [4] Transport services in the city are comparatively cheap compared to the villages. Daily trips to school, hospital or work are often beyond the means of villagers. [5] Maladministration, poor distribution and corruption in the food co-operatives, or Gamias, is even worse in rural areas than it is in the city, giving rise to severe shortages of basic food items. Where food shortages occur nationally, the cities take priority. [6] The chances of acquiring a skill in the city are far higher, through technical school or apprenticeship, than in the village. [7] The poverty found in the villages appears to be more "absolute" than that found in the cities.

Thus, the poor who come to the city gain many advantages over their

village counterparts. At the very least, their children stand a better chance of improving their living conditions. The research on Egyptian villages reports extraordinary patterns of exploitation and deprivation. Obviously, if goods and services had been more equally distributed, villages may have been better places in which to live, and the poor would not have left them.

### Macro and Micro Relationships

Egypt is a poor country, with limited resources and an underdeveloped industrial sector (see Chapter 1). According to a number of estimates, at least one third of Egypt's population are quite poor, while about half the population live below the middle-income group.

Poverty is essentially a structural problem, part-and-parcel of the social, economic, political and historical forces that have shaped Egyptian society. As such, macro-economic conditions and processes are reflected at the level of group and individual life. The open-door policy, emigration abroad for work, and the growing demand for skilled workers within Egypt, have all contributed to the economic boom, increasing wages and costs. Even with inflation, general living conditions have improved and more jobs have become available. The impact of these developments have been felt by the poor, particularly in Cairo where most of the recent economic activity is based. The emigration of skilled workers has opened up opportunities for semi-skilled workers and apprentices, at higher rates of pay. Wages have also risen among unskilled labourers and daily-wage earners. Remittances from family members working abroad have transformed the living conditions of some poor households.

However, not all families have members working abroad. For those members of the poor who are uneducated and unskilled, their opportunities

for work and self-improvement have not greatly changed. Their incomes remain low, they still take temporary menial jobs. Inflation has increased the suffering of the poor. A truly "free education" would have, at least, increased the prospects for their children, but the government is unable to find the necessary resources. Thus, the poor are unable to take advantage of the new possibilities opening up. While there are many projected new technical schools, the government's budget does not allow for much expansion in this sphere. Yet, an expansion of technical schools could play an important role in improving the children of the poor's life-chances. Similar shortages of funds restrict reforms in, and expansion of, the health service and social security.

Many of the problems and characteristics that beset the poor could be eased by special policy measures and organisational reforms. However, poor countries, such as Egypt, clearly have much less potential for breaking the cycle of poverty than do countries such as Britain. The costs incurred by special policy measures and organisational reforms would surely stretch the national Egyptian budget to breaking-point. Various foreign-aid agencies have established assistance and development programmes, but these are small-scale and very limited in scope.

In the meantime, in the face of changes in the wider economy, government subsidies are being gradually withdrawn, resulting in sudden and steep rises in the price of lentils, beans, sugar, tea, white cheese, etc., all items upon which the poor rely. Such price increases force the poor to further restrict their meagre diets, sometimes with serious implications for their health. In short, each and every change at the macro-level is felt at the micro-level, and particularly among the poor. A full realisation of the impact of these developments on the poor can only be grasped through first-hand observation. Policy makers should observe the impact of their

policies on the people in the streets. Whatever the importance or beneficial aspects a particular cluster of policies may be held to have for the economy as a whole, it is imperative that the burden should not fall disproportionately on the poor.

### Phenomenology and Ethnography

This study has shown the ability of ethnographic research to come to grips with the everyday life of the poor, providing insights into the key elements that shape their life-styles. Such methodologies deserve more attention in the Egyptian context. The rapport and close personal relationships that develop within such an approach allow such sensitive and intimate phenomena as feelings, hopes and aspirations to be studied in relation to life-styles and behaviour. Trust is an essential ingredient here, sensitive and complex phenomena are quite simply not accessible to "strangers" or "interviewers". In this sense, this project has provided some basic data and insights into the life of the urban poor. As such it has laid the groundwork for further ethnographic work, and for the adoption of other research procedures to examine particular aspects identified and discussed.

Phenomenological perspectives gave a particular focus to this ethnographic study. The taken-for-granted assumptions of the poor were viewed as problematic, requiring special attention and examination. While ethnography creates the opportunity for research based on face-to-face encounters, phenomenology directed the researcher's attention to the way respondents defined situations, used concepts and terms, and accomplished their descriptions and definitions of their own conditions and lives. While other approaches predefine the situation, the concepts used, and sometimes even hypothesize on the expected findings, phenomenology enjoins the

researcher to use the respondents' own typifications, to follow the respondents' lines of explanation and action and then to relate these to the particular everyday lives under examination. Such a methodology demands a suspension of judgement, while information and insights are accumulated, before reflection and analysis.

Further, phenomenology directed the researcher's attention to the importance of "personal types" and "course-of-action types", that were not only used to define and describe poverty (e.g. social constructions of poverty) but were also essential ingredients in the process whereby the poor coped with their circumstances. Such a focus revealed the poor's common-sense views of poverty but also allowed the importance of folklore, religion and Egyptian culture to emerge. Religion and the Egyptian cultural tradition proved especially important in that they encapsulated a variety of "solutions" for the poor's everyday problems. The interplay between the poor's experience of poverty, religion, popular wisdom and the wider Egyptian social and cultural tradition, were clearly evident in the "philosophy of life" recounted by two respondents.

The advantage of a phenomenologically informed ethnography is that it takes account of the interplay between cultural, situational, material and subjective factors, at a particular time and place. The "here and now" of the everyday economic life of the poor formed the starting point, and foundation of this project. It makes little sense to discuss the relevance of religion, culture, attitudes and language, without reference to the everyday lives of the people involved. In this sense, a phenomenologically informed ethnographic approach helped avoid simplistic "culturalist" and "situationalist" explanations.

Approaches to, and definitions of, poverty used in the "industrialized advanced societies" are of limited utility in societies where the economic



structures, material conditions and cultural context is very different. Nor is it simply a matter of re-definition, for this too can lead to misleading conclusions. In the absence of generally applicable approach to, and definition of, poverty, that incorporates the essential economic structures, material conditions and cultural context of Egyptian society, the researcher focused on the poor's own definitions and descriptions of poverty. The focus fell on the everyday life of the poor, the poor's own terms were initially used to describe their reality, as they sprang from daily conversations. Once the economic life of the poor had been described and the poor's terms and views grasped, the researcher was able to construct her own models. In this way, the integrity of the poor's views, within the Egyptian context, were preserved as far as possible. Thus, on the theoretical level, this research has contributed a definition of Egyptian typifications "personal types" and "course-of-action types", as well as the various Egyptian concepts used to define the various aspects of 'world-view' on the basis of an Egyptian interpretation springing from its own socio-economic and cultural reality. This would hopefully go towards the building of an indigenous Social Science.

#### Areas for Further Research

A great variety of topics requiring further research have emerged from this project. Twelve such topics, which are of particular interest to this researcher, deserve special mention.

##### 1] Studies of children supporting poor families and households

Research into the activities, life-styles and views of children working as peddlars, apprentices, errand boys, etc. and who are the sole providers for their family or household constitutes an important area for further

study. Such studies bear directly on work-laws concerning children, the education system and the kinds of help and assistance given to parents. Research could focus on why and when they left school, how they took up a particular occupation, the nature and period of family dependence on their activities, as well as the kind of social and personal characters they become.

#### 2] Studies of poor young adults

It would be interesting and relevant to study a number of different age groups over several years. Research could focus on their life experiences, how they manage the demands of family life and obligations, how they cope with finding a livelihood, the influence of religion and policies on their lives, their recreational activities, and the effect of marriage and raising a family, etc.

#### 3] Studies of Juvenile Delinquency and the Poor

In the 1960s, a number of studies focused on juvenile delinquency, in relation to poverty, in Egypt. While it is doubtful that poverty can be seen as a direct cause of juvenile delinquency, the poor in this study did report an increase in, and their fear of, juvenile delinquency. It would be interesting to explore the nature and extent of juvenile delinquency among the poor urban youth of Cairo.

#### 4] Studies of Poor Widows

This is a particularly important area for research if the life-chances of poor children are to be improved. Very often widows are obliged to let one or two of their children leave school in order to find work and support the family. Widows without children, or whose children have grown-up and moved away, also constitute a group worthy of special attention. Clearly, such research work would be of special interest to the Ministry

of Social Affairs.

5] Studies of Attitudes towards the Poor

The attitudes of employees of the Ministry of Social Affairs, social workers, church social workers, nurses, doctors, teachers, police and the employees of Gamias, are all worthy of special attention. All these occupational groups have daily contact with the poor. In a very important sense, such occupations form the essential official face of Egyptian society, as far as the poor are concerned. Their attitudes are worthy of research since almost all the poor in this study expressed feelings of resentment, anger, and humiliation with regard to these groups. Further, it can be expected that such occupational groupings hold invalid and unwarranted stereotypes of the poor. Research of this kind is vital if we are to change the treatment accorded poor people seeking assistance.

6] Studies of the Images of the Poor in the Mass Media

There are all too few studies of the nature and role of the mass media in Third World countries. The pervasiveness of radio broadcasting, and the increasing influence of television, in Egypt suggests that these are the key areas for research into stereotypes, images and reports on the life of the poor. If we are to change the treatment accorded to the poor in Egyptian society, the mass media will have a central role to play.

7] Area-based Studies of the Poor

The research work reported here obviously suggested further area-based studies to complement, modify or challenge the findings of this project. Some areas seem to offer more opportunities for improving the living conditions of the poor than others. Poor areas on the urban fringe seem to offer very restricted opportunities coupled with desperate conditions.

Prices and levels of pay seem to be related to particular areas of the city. For example, in Athar-El-Nabi the workers, even skilled ones, were particularly badly paid, yet the firms in that area prospered and they were well-connected to transportation. In such areas the poor suffer more than anyone else. The causes of such localised conditions call for examination and rectification.

#### 8] Studies of Occupational Groupings among the Poor

It emerged clearly from this research that some of the poor are worse-off than others. One way to extend this line of research would be to focus on specific occupational groups within the poor population. Fishermen and garbage collectors have already been studied. There are many others awaiting our attention. Studies of particular occupational groups can reveal particular problems that require government intervention. Often research is required to identify such groups before further study can proceed. For example, this project has revealed some of the problems of the irza'is - particularly the peddlars, the self-employed and those employed in small private workshops. Each of these groups require further study. Those employed in small private workshops appear to be working in very bad conditions, for long hours at low wages.

#### 9] Studies of the Rural Poor

While there have been a number of studies of the rural poor, these have been carried out at the macro-level. There have been no recent ethnographic accounts of rural poverty published. As part of the research work reported here, an exploratory study of life among the rural poor in a village was undertaken. This study revealed a great

deal of important data and information that requires further investigation. Research on life-styles and occupations among the rural poor seems especially important. A number of studies of migrant workers have been made, but there has been little attempt to study the lives of the non-agricultural poor in the villages. The conditions of these people seem extremely desperate. Further, there are many "community development" programmes planned for villages, but it is not clear what such programmes intend for the poor.

10] Studies of the World-Views of the Upper-Classes and Middle-Classes

Studies of the world-views held by the upper-classes and middle-classes would be complementary to the work presented here on the world-views of the poor. In this study, the poor's view of the better-off, the rich and the powerful, have been discussed at some length. It would be interesting to see the world from "the top". Such studies would be of more than academic relevance, since the middle and upper-classes are much more influential in policy and planning circles than the poor. In short, it is important to study the world-views of the middle and upper-classes because it is these people that form the essential constituency of the political system, and it is they who man the senior administrative positions.

11] Studies of Moslem and Christian Groups

This study has thrown up some interesting and intriguing similarities in the world-views of Moslem and Christian poor. While the similarities in the views expressed by the Moslem and Christian poor warrant further study, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the views of Moslems and Christians in other areas of Egyptian society. A study of Christians and Moslems from the middle and upper-classes could throw

light on the relevance of the Egyptian social and cultural tradition, on the influence of class consciousness, on the role of education and a literate tradition in opposition to the illiterate oral traditions of the poor. The effect of these processes on views of wealth, poverty, equality, justice, and the like would be especially interesting to study. Again, the role religion plays, among groups who presumably do not need it in order to cope as the poor do, is a potentially important area for investigation.

#### 12] Studies of the Rich Young, or Adult, Girls

Some initial investigations into this area of research revealed that such girls saw their worlds as "superficial" and very different from "the man in the street". Do these girls feel "alienated" from the rest of society? Do such observations reflect a basic sympathy with the poor? What does "superficial" mean in the context of their everyday lives and behaviour? What is the source of these feelings? Do other members of their families hold them? Are such views more widespread than we realise in Egyptian society?

#### Recommendations for Policy and Reform

The following recommendations refer to both short-term and long-term strategies to help ease the problems of the poor. As such, some will be of direct and immediate assistance to the poor, while others will have more indirect consequences.

##### 1. Recommended Changes in the Education System.

[a] Free education should not be limited to those who "succeed" at the examinations held at each level. Free education should be provided

for all children at all levels of education. This is particularly important since it is widely recognised that few "succeed" in the education system without private lessons.

- [b] The salaries of teachers should be increased sufficiently to eliminate the use of private lessons as additional sources of income. In return, children should receive much more attention, information, explanation and skills in the classroom.
- [c] Where extra group-lessons are provided, they should be funded by the government and not by the pupils' parents. Teachers could be paid on an overtime or bonus basis for such classes.
- [d] The school curriculum should include instruction on mechanical and technical matters. This would help pupils prepare for later technical training.
- [e] It is urgent that the provision of Secondary Technical Schools be expanded in poor areas. Such schools should provide instruction in the production of traditional crafts for tourism, as well as for preparation for employment in factories, workshops and intermediary industries.
- [f] Where possible, Preparatory Technical schools should be established to provide formal apprenticeship training for poor children who refuse to continue their schooling, or whose parents withdraw them from school to work in workshops. Additional summer courses could be provided. Such Technical Schools would provide additional opportunities for poor children, and may help reduce the problem of juvenile delinquency.

2. There is an urgent need to increase the range, scope and size of Egyptian industry in a planned manner. Such industrial expansion would improve the employment prospects of skilled and semi-skilled workers,

and would help to off-set the current high unemployment among educated young people. Against the background of a rapid increase in population, the prospects for well-planned industrial enterprises are good, especially if the products are priced below that of foreign industries.

3. The government should introduce legislation to protect local industries. At the moment these are suffering badly due to the open-door policy. Means to increase national production should replace the removal of subsidies as sources of income.
4. The Social Security budget should be increased systematically each year, in order to gradually cover all the applications for assistance. Social Security should be extended to cover the elderly or the disabled who have one member of the family in work earning less than L.E.50 a month. Help given should rise systematically with inflation.
5. Birth certificates, ration cards, identity cards and work permits, should all be made much easier to obtain. This could be complemented by programmes in the mass media which explain precisely (not in literary Arabic) how such papers could be obtained.
6. Within the Ministry of Social Affairs a special legal advice centre should be established. This centre would provide free legal advice to the poor and the illiterate, on their rights, provide practical advice on legal matters and in cases of need, help them find legal assistance for court appearances. Such an office could also help the poor by assisting in completing various application forms (otherwise they must pay a scribe) and by forwarding the forms, or directing the people, to the relevant office. These are all procedures that the poor find difficult and costly.
7. The poor should be provided with the opportunity to take out low-interest loans in order to increase their income through increased capital



investment. This would be very beneficial to peddlars and the self-employed. The loans need not be large, but the time-limit on repayments should be flexible. If the loans provided were too large, they would be used by others rather than the poor. Further, if the loans were small the lending agency would not lose very much if the poor were unable to repay them.

8. Attitudes towards, and treatment of, the poor must change. Administrators, doctors, nurses, social workers, police, etc., should be instructed to treat the poor with respect. Perhaps regular media campaigns would help. All representatives of government agencies should be instructed to inform the poor of their rights in situations involving conflict or arrest. The poor should be encouraged to be more demanding and assertive of their rights, and less afraid of government personnel.
9. M.P.'s should be more responsive and helpful with regard to the poor, e.g. in matters relating to exploitation, or where their rights of property or useage have been negated. M.P.'s have an especially important role to play in demanding improved services in slum areas.
10. Local communities should be encouraged to assist the poor living in their area. Some Coptic churches do this already, their organisations could be used as a guide which could be supplemented by a more systematic "community development" scheme. If the organisational and material resources of mosques, churches and voluntary associations in an area were mobilised, the limitations in the operation of the Ministry of Social Affairs would be partly off-set. Such strategies would also have an impact on the attitudes of the poor.
11. Recommended Changes in the Health System
  - [a] The organisation and material conditions in basic units and hospitals are in urgent need of improvement. Basic services - medical,

nursing, hygiene and nutrition - are also in need of reform and further funding.

[b] Nurses' wages should be increased and their training improved.

The training of nurses should include a more humanistic approach to the care and treatment of the patient, especially poor patients.

[c] The salaries of all hospital staff should be raised. At the same time, penalties should be introduced for those hospital personnel who encourage tipping or harass patients into paying tips for their services.

[d] The provision, supply and distribution of medication needs to be better organised. Supervision to prevent irregular or illicit dealings in medical supplies should be instituted. Hospitals should provide medication free to the poor.

[e] Doctors must be urged to treat poor patients with respect, and explain the treatment clearly and carefully.

[f] External clinics should provide more waiting-space for patients. Poor and ill patients should not be forced to queue in the street while awaiting treatment.

12. Parasitic diseases which render adults anaemic or tired, and which can incapacitate children, can only be eliminated through improvements in the water supply and in sewerage disposal.

[a] It is necessary to provide more water taps in poor areas and water connections in fringe areas. The water filtering system must be more closely supervised and renewed if necessary. Many of these systems are old and in the summer months bacteria breed in the tanks. The "clean water project" should be speeded up in all areas of the country. This would have a dramatic impact on what currently

appear to be endemic diseases.

[b] A systematic long-term plan is needed to replace the old, crumbling and overflowing sewerage systems in poor areas. Savings in health costs alone would compensate for the expense involved. Sewerage must be established all over the country as soon as possible. This is crucial for the eradication of belharzia and other diseases in rural areas. Indeed, a number of local communities are already willing to contribute to the expense of constructing a sewerage system.

13. Reform in the food co-operatives is needed and should focus on:

- [a] a reorganisation of the supply and distribution of goods;
- [b] changing employees' attitudes toward and treatment of, poor customers;
- [c] the introduction of penalties for employees who accept tips; and
- [d] the institution of punishment for those who give tips or try to exploit the co-operative.

14. Reforms in the Public Sector Stores where rations cards are used should centre on increasing the salaries of employees and on generating more public awareness of the harm done to the poor and to employees through misuse of tipping as a way of obtaining favours.

Table XXI

| District           | Population<br>1976 | Households<br>1976 | Household Size |      | Gross Density |      |      | Area<br>Km <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|------|---------------|------|------|-------------------------|
|                    |                    |                    | 1960           | 1966 | 1960          | 1966 | 1976 |                         |
| <u>West Cairo</u>  |                    |                    |                |      |               |      |      |                         |
| El Mouski          | 58,402             | 11,682             | 4.8            | 5.3  | 64            | 60   | 97   | 0.6                     |
| El Azbakia         | 59,667             | 12,419             | 4.3            | 4.6  | 38            | 37   | 35   | 1.7                     |
| Boulaq             | 177,929            | 38,502             | 4.5            | 4.9  | 75            | 75   | 66   | 2.7                     |
| Qasr El Nil        | 39,342             | 9,880              | 3.7            | 4.0  | 7             | 7    | 7    | 6.0                     |
| Abdine             | 88,282             | 19,744             | 4.6            | 4.6  | 56            | 58   | 55   | 1.6                     |
| <u>South Cairo</u> |                    |                    |                |      |               |      |      |                         |
| El Sayeda Zeinab   | 252,260            | 53,108             | 5.0            | 5.2  | 72            | 78   | 72   | 3.5                     |
| El Khalifa         | 186,963            | 40,002             | 4.8            | 4.9  | 19            | 27   | 22   | 8.6                     |
| Masr El Qadima     | 273,670            | 56,588             | 4.9            | 5.0  | 21            | 25   | 27   | 10.1                    |
| <u>Helwan</u>      |                    |                    |                |      |               |      |      |                         |
| El Maadi           | 267,056            | 58,160             | 4.7            | 4.8  | 2             | 6    | 11   | 25.1                    |
| Helwan             | 282,597            | 61,021             | 4.9            | 4.8  | 15            | 31   | 49   | 6.4                     |
| El Tibbin          | 33,593             | 7,299              | 4.9            | 4.8  | 4.6           | 4.6  | 4.6  |                         |
| Total              | 5,084,463          | 1,065,354          | 4.8            | 4.9  | 17            | 20   | 24   | 214.2                   |

Source: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.

Table XXII  
Households with Access to Filtered Water Supply

| Governorate | Individual Supply in the Dwelling Unit |       | Common Supply in the Structure |       | Common Supply Outside the Structure |       | No Supply Close by |       | Total Number of Households in Thousands |       |       |      |       |       |       |
|-------------|--|-------|--------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|---|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
|             | Urban                                  | Rural | Urban                          | Rural | Urban                               | Rural | Urban              | Rural | Urban                                   | Rural | Total |      |       |       |       |
| Cairo       | 70.1                                   | -     | 70.1                           | 10.6  | 10.6                                | 17.7  | 17.7               | 1.6   | -                                       | 1.6   | 1,065 | -    | 1,065 |       |       |
| Alexandria  | 77.8                                   | -     | 77.8                           | 11.8  | 11.8                                | 9.2   | 9.2                | 1.2   | -                                       | 1.2   | 466   | -    | 466   |       |       |
| Minia       | 38.7                                   | 1.1   | 9.0                            | 8.2   | 0.9                                 | 2.4   | 19.9               | 55.7  | 48.2                                    | 33.2  | 42.3  | 40.4 | 87    | 329   | 416   |
| Qena        | 35.7                                   | 2.4   | 9.9                            | 5.6   | 1.4                                 | 2.4   | 24.7               | 39.2  | 35.9                                    | 34.0  | 57.0  | 51.8 | 76    | 264   | 342   |
| Egypt       | 60.6                                   | 3.7   | 30.2                           | 8.6   | 1.8                                 | 4.9   | 18.5               | 58.2  | 39.7                                    | 12.3  | 36.3  | 25.2 | 3,248 | 3,738 | 6,985 |

Source: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Preliminary Results of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing, Cairo, April 1977, Table 25.

Table XXIII  
Households in Dwelling Units with Electricity - 1976

| Governorate  | Percent with Electricity |       |       | Total Number of Households<br>(in Thousands) |       |       |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------|-------|--|-------|-------|
|              | Urban                    | Rural | Total | Urban  | Rural | Total |
| <u>Cairo</u> | 82.1                     | -     | 82.1  | 1,065  | -     | 1,065 |
| Alexandria   | 89.6                     | -     | 89.6  | 466  | -     | 466   |
| Minia        | 60.0                     | 9.2   | 19.8  | 87   | 329   | 416   |
| Qena         | 52.7                     | 10.7  | 20.2  | 76   | 264   | 342   |
| Egypt        | 77.0                     | 18.6  | 45.7  | 3,248  | 3,738 | 6,985 |

Source: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Preliminary Results of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing, Cairo, April 1977, Table 23.

TABLE XXIV

Egypt - Educational Level - 1960, 1976  
(Population Age 10 & Above)

| Educational Level                   | 1960  |        |       | 1976  |        |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
|                                     | Male  | Female | Total | Male  | Female | Total |
| Illiterate <sup>(1)</sup>           | 56.9  | 84.0   | 70.5  | 43.2  | 71.0   | 56.5  |
| Able to Read & Write <sup>(2)</sup> | 32.6  | 12.4   | 22.5  | 33.2  | 16.2   | 25.1  |
| School Graduate                     | 9.0   | 3.4    | 6.2   | 20.4  | 11.6   | 16.2  |
| University Graduate                 | 1.5   | 0.2    | 0.8   | 3.2   | 1.2    | 2.2   |
| Total                               | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |

Source: Central Agency for Public Mobilization & Statistics, Preliminary Results of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing, Cairo, April 1977, Table 8.

NOTES: (1) Includes the unspecified category.

(2) Includes those able to read only.

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