



15 THE DISTRICT OF GAMALIYA: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Foreword

One of the major current concerns of Egypt is the preservation of its old historic sites, that have, over the years, been decaying either through the effect of environmental factors, neglect, old age, or even abuse. This concern, gradually growing over time, has had a significant push recently in the form of direct government involvement. The loss of a rich heritage cannot be disregarded. Action is presently being taken in different directions to preserve, upgrade, and/or restore these historic sites that are spread all over Egypt.

Gamaliya is one such historic site that looms as deserving special attention. It is located in Cairo. This paper approaches the district of Gamaliya, in the context of an area of top priority in the repertoire of historic heritage of Cairo as the metropolis.

Gamaliya District: A Descriptive Introduction

The district of Gamaliya stands out in significance amidst the concerns of Historic Cairo. In 1977, the German Archaeological Institute conducted a survey of the monuments in Gamaliya, assisted by the Center of Documentation for Islamic and Coptic Monuments of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. Identified monuments numbered 102, and included not only religious sites but also houses and other buildings of historic value—e.g., in the original Turkish terms, *madrasas* (schools), *khankas* (hotels), *wekalas* (trade centers). (Gamaliya 1, 1994 : p. 32). The location of this rich heritage in the district places Gamaliya among the world's heritage list. At present, the north boundaries of Gamaliya are Bab El Fotouh and Bab El Nasr, while in the south is Bab Zuwaila. East of Gamaliya is El Darrassa and to the west, lies El Geish Street. The district in fact covers the area of the city of Al Qahira as built by the Fatimids in 969. (Gamaliya 1, 1994: p. 4).

It must be noted that Gamaliya is one area of Cairo which encloses an environment of diversified features. As a historic site, its monuments are of great value not only historically but also in terms of their architecture. The district has its fame for Al Azhar mosque, Gamaliya having been the nucleus of the old Cairo of Al Moez. In Gamaliya is also located Al Hussein mosque, which is the current center of religious activities that increase on religious occasions, especially during the month of Ramadan. The number of mosques in the district is 42 (CAPMAS, 1994), most of which are of historic value, and give it an Islamic flavor that is clearly reflected in its social environment.

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Gamaliya is dominated by a Moslem population. The district has one church and two synagogues (CAPMAS, 1994), which used to serve the Jewish community living within its boundaries. In Gamaliya lies the Jewish quarter, which used to be the center of Jewish life in earlier periods of history before their exodus starting in 1948.

The historic sites in Gamaliya include, in addition, a number of old palaces, as well as five public baths reminiscent of medieval times, and which still serve the traditional segments. Other landmarks are Khan Al Khalili Bazar and Al Fishawy Coffee House, both being touristic attractions of special appeal to foreigners and Egyptians alike.

The concern with the monuments in Gamaliya has been part of the broader concern for the maintenance and preservation of historic sites, as apparent in the series of laws issued with this objective. However, while these laws tried to define ancient monuments for the purpose of protecting them, they never laid controls on their use for different functions, their alterations, nor on their surrounding environment (Gamaliya 1, 1994: p. 10).

Gamaliya is also a commercial center. It is a hub of activities for the production and sale of goods, especially those of touristic attraction. Moreover, workshops of various functions are spread all over the area, and may be concentrated in some streets more than others. El Moez street, one of the major roads in the district, includes 147 shops, in addition to the larger stores. In Gamaliya street, there are 127 shops, which are larger in area when compared to those in El Moez street. In addition, the three main streets in Gamaliya constitute many small shops and workshops. Approximately 40% of the workshops in the district work in aluminum manufacturing, while approximately 20% of the stores sell lemons, olives, and onions. Other activities, both commercial and industrial, the latter being basically in metal processing, cover the remaining 40%. (UNDP, 1996).

As a residential area, Gamaliya includes buildings that are, in most cases, decaying because of their old age, environmental factors, and poor maintenance. Data from CAPMAS (1994) reveal that 61.5% of the buildings in Gamaliya were built before 1940, 18% between the years 1940 and 1959, while 14.5% date back to the period between 1960 and 1979. Only 6% of the buildings have been built after 1980. The situation as such reflects the old age of the district. It also reflects the variation in architectural style, as the old crumbling buildings live side by side with the relatively new ones, each representing the style of the era.

One-fourth of the buildings are used for commercial purposes. Residential units are of diversified types and may appear in different forms, such as entrances to buildings, garages, corridors between buildings, as well as *wekalas*, all of which can be classified as informal types of residence.

The reason for using such places as dwelling units is mainly their proximity to the work places of those workers in the shops/workshops in the area. Gamaliya has a number of

wekalas, which are mostly in poor condition, and may serve different functions in the community; e.g., residence or storage, according to need.

It is interesting to note that some of the old buildings retain the traditional style, which is characterized by a courtyard in the center. This courtyard is multifunctional. It is a meeting place for women and children. It is also a site for social activities. In some buildings, the courtyard is used as a workshop, a shop, and sometimes even a coffee shop. (Gamaliya 1, 1994: p. 62). However, because of the predominance of shops and workshops in the district, as such outnumbering the residential buildings, the commercial character of Gamaliya prevails.

Households may include extended families, nuclear families, or a combination of nuclear families that are not related, but who share one residential unit (Gamaliya 1, 1994: p. 58). The residential community is characterized by a traditional life style for the most part. It follows that the social milieu in Gamaliya is therefore a reflection of the multifunctional character of the physical layout. The social fabric of the area is a dynamic interaction between the residents who are typical of those in a traditional urban community of old Cairo; owners of shops and workshops who are not necessarily residents of the district; workers and craftsmen working for the workshops and shops; and visitors to Gamaliya whether for the monuments or for shopping, both tourists and Egyptians.

Overcrowding is the natural outcome in such an environment, where most streets are narrow and winding. The busy life is also reflected in the combination of pedestrians with traffic; exhibited goods, dumped industrial waste, and heaps of garbage that cover the roads. One major cause for overcrowding the streets is the transportation for commercial purposes, which in many cases leads to complete blockings.

Administratively, Gamaliya is divided into 17 shiakhass (administrative units). Residentially, the district is not of high population density, especially when compared to other traditional urban communities of similar socio-economic characteristics. The major factor here is the presence of historic sites in Gamaliya. As uninhabited units, they therefore reduce the average density per total area.

The approach of this paper takes a sociological perspective. As such, it is based on results of two field surveys conducted by the researcher, using interview schedules and complemented by in-depth observation of the district. The surveys took place at two different periods, with a time difference of about four years. Each of them covered one of the central areas of Gamaliya, which can be considered representative of the district, and where the sample, different in each case, is typical of the inhabitants.

Both studies were part of a broader interdisciplinary project where architects, urban planners, historians, as well as environmentalists were involved. In both cases, the objective was to upgrade the community, using the existing situation as a starting point, with particular emphasis on the needs of

the inhabitants and the particular nature of the district.

The next part depicts the sociological profile of the community as the outcome of the studies to be followed by the proposed plan for upgrading it.

Profile of the Population

Residents of Gamaliya are of the traditional type, for the most part, in line with the general character of the district, its historic nature, coupled with their long period of residence in it, a combination of factors which give Gamaliya its special flavor. Traditionalism here appears in their concern with such norms and values that enhance male dominance, sex segregation, strict religious observance, early marriage for girls, as well as close family ties. Illiteracy prevails among the inhabitants, and typically the rate for female ranks higher in this respect, especially among the older segments. However, there is a positive trend in education, which is reflected in the high enrollment of the young age brackets, still revealing an excess of males over females.

Informal labor is the norm in Gamaliya. Skilled as well as unskilled labor covers a wide range of industrial, commercial, and touristic activities. The fact that the employment pattern is dominated by informal labor is due to the commercial nature of the district where crafts and workshops labor prevail. According to CAPMAS figures, only 37% of the population are in the labor force whereas 63% are outside it. Female employment is low, as consistent with the traditional character of the area, as well as the high illiteracy rate among women. They are, for the most part, restricted to their domestic role. Females outside the labor force constitute 88.4% as opposed to 39% among males, the high representation of those outside the labor force supports the predominance of informal labor. In the 1986 census of CAPMAS, 2,491,000 of the residents were in the labor force as opposed to 4,082,000 outside it. Of the former segment, 324,000 only are women, whereas 2,167,000 are men. In the latter segment, on the other hand, 1,223,000 are males in comparison to 2,859,000 females. The predominant segment of employment is commerce, restaurants, and hotels, as consistent with the touristic nature of the district. The representation of this segment is 380,000 individuals. The services sector follows, and is represented by 376,000 individuals.

Moreover, national statistics reveal a very low representation of professional jobs. CAPMAS estimates show that they do not exceed 5% of the total Gamaliya population. There are two schools in the district, and they cover the three educational levels. Two health centers serve Gamaliya. The first is El Hussain Hospital, which is the teaching hospital for El Azhar University and lies on El Azhar street. The other is Bab El Shaareya medical center which is in Bab El Shaareya Square (Participatory Rapid Appraisal in Gamaliya, Cairo; November 1996). There is also a health center in Belkini mosque, which provides services at a reasonable cost.

An attempt at evaluating the socio-economic status of the community is no easy task, because it includes different strata. However, the general characteristic is one where a low socio-economic status prevails. Studies on the district confirm the predominance of poverty among the population. Although the poor socio-economic stratum represents the majority of residents, there is a variation in this respect that appears not only in different sectors of the district but also among the various segments in the population. Some streets include a destitute community living under conditions of extreme poverty, both physically and otherwise, whereas others may be better off. It is the owners of shops and some workshops that constitute an upper stratum. They are outnumbered by the working stratum. (Gamaliya 1, 1994 & 2, 1995).

In the middle fall the government employees of the medium level, the regular salaried group who gain their prestige from their occupational status, but who do not parallel the rich workshop/shop owners in wealth. The rate of unemployment is high among the males, since, as has already been mentioned, the females are mostly housewives.

Earlier studies of segments of the Gamaliya community, as in the Toumbakshiya area, revealed that the age pyramid is characterized by a relatively high representation of the aging population and a relatively low representation of children (Gamaliya 2). While it is difficult to generalize from this situation to include the whole district, it is possible to discern some indicators of mobility. Old residents tend to remain within Gamaliya, being rooted in terms of housing facilities (however old and decaying), means of livelihood, and probably social ties. The younger generations may move out. This age bracket, it follows, might include those with the higher level of education, hence the high illiteracy rate in Gamaliya. The age pyramid in such communities where push factors are in operation is therefore in total contradiction to that of the Egyptian population at large.

It is important to mention that data for Gamaliya have been based on the CAPMAS census of 1986. Assessment of current data may be possible by using projection techniques for some while it cannot apply to others because of the probability of certain intervening variables that have to be studied in depth. As an illustration, one can estimate the present population based on the 1986 figure of 7,519,000 for Gamaliya, using the 2.5% rate of annual natural increase. However, one cannot estimate the number of Moslems as opposed to that of Copts, the former being 7,454,000 while the latter is only 65,000. The rate of annual growth might have differed in the two groups over the last decade. The same can apply to the employment pattern and the differentiation between informal and formal labor with the current changes in the labor market, the trend towards privatization and the structural adjustment program. Moreover, the dynamics of mobility in the area have to be considered in demographic estimates of the present situation.

Problems

It is interesting to note that the inhabitants are well aware of the historic sites located in Gamaliya as a major center of Fatimid Cairo, which was constructed within the boundaries of protective walls, in line with the tradition of the time. The district in fact, includes and embodies within its layout a concentration of Islamic monuments unrivaled by any other Islamic city. The attitude of the inhabitants, though reflecting a sincere realization of the historic/touristic value of these monuments, clearly expresses a total dependency on governmental efforts. Community participation is weak. There is a general feeling that the official responsibility of the state requires that it proceed with its restoration activities without any interference with the means of livelihood of the community. In addition, the residents believe that it is their right to receive such governmental service.

Such a situation raises a number of problems. In the first place, government efforts are short of providing total upgrading responsibilities. In the second place, the absence of community participation is a negative position where development pursuits are concerned. In addition, the old, decaying condition of many buildings, coupled with the continuous pollution from the numerous workshops, can be quite destructive to the existing monuments. Delay in taking an active step to improve the situation can lead to hazardous consequences.

Results of the studies on Gamaliya have, therefore, raised a number of points for discussion whereby it is hoped that the attempt to upgrade the district proceed in line with the inhabitants' needs, at the same time bridging the gap between their expectations and the possible practical action to be taken.

It is obvious that the present condition of Gamaliya reflects a number of problems that cover a wide range, cutting across its infrastructure, environment, socio-economic status, and its high value as a site of Islamic monuments. However, the order of priorities in the perception of these problems varies with the different individuals, based on the variation in his/her own agenda according to his/her own list of priorities. In addition, it must be mentioned that the population's perception of problems does not coincide with the existing problems as seen objectively by outsiders. The situation may go to extreme when some inhabitants do not even identify the very obviously persistent problems as such, considering the multitude of these in the district.

Problems of the physical environment range between a poor infrastructure where many roads are unpaved and in bad shape, water cut-offs are frequent, and the sewage system is deteriorated, to the poor condition of many buildings, the neglect of monuments, and the accumulation of solid waste. Overcrowding in the streets, where vehicles of all sorts jam the already congested roads, is one other cause of discontent for the inhabitants.

On the socio-cultural level, the district suffers from an inadequate supply of services—i.e., schools, libraries, or

community centers. Unemployment prevails.

A major problem, which may not be high in the inhabitants' list of priorities, but which is of utmost importance is the location of the monuments side by side with the workshops and shops and residential area. This situation is one main reason for the deterioration in the condition of the monuments, and which necessitates immediate action. It is this factor in particular which has aroused the concern not only of different agencies, but more so the government. Efforts are therefore being made to upgrade the district, maintaining the balance between the inhabitants' needs and the high value of the district as a historic site which also has a touristic function, let alone its commercial activities. The multi-faceted nature of Gamaliya makes it no easy task to achieve this objective. The following part includes a plan in this respect, stemming from studying the existing situation of the community and based on the actual living conditions of its population.

Two Proposed Complexes: Commercial and Service

A plan for upgrading Gamaliya has to be based, first and foremost, on its nature as a touristic, historic site. The district includes a number of vacant plots of land of various sizes, and which are not used productively. Some of them contain ruins of old crumbled buildings and rubble of all sorts. The Sustainable Development Program Report (Nov. 1996) on "Participatory Rapid Appraisal in Gamaliya, Cairo" estimates that lots of this kind are eleven in number. Decaying *wekalas* are also found. It is suggested that these areas of wasted land be used to establish a multifunctional center. The idea here is that this center include a workshop where goods of touristic interest be manufactured; shops to sell these goods; and supporting services such as cafeterias, restaurants, and fast food shops, all of which cater to the average tourist at reasonable costs. The suggestion of having the workshops within the center aims at creating an attraction for the tourists that will help in marketing the goods, which should preferably be items of simple local craftsmanship that can appeal to them.

The center as such can serve an objective which is two-fold. On the one hand, it is a commercial center for touristic attraction, which will help the district to flourish. On the other hand, it can absorb the unemployed within the community, including the women. These two segments of the population should be considered target beneficiaries in this respect, considering the relatively high percentage of the unemployed in the district, as well as the low status of women. The provision of income generating opportunities for these two segments is a positive step in upgrading the community.

The situation of women in particular is of great importance in any developmental concerns. As given above, their educational level is low, and their illiteracy rate is high. It follows that their participation in labor is small. An approach to this problem can be achieved through the establishment of a literacy program, that can cater to the illiterate segment in

general, which is clearly dominated by women. It is proposed that this program be part of a broader context, including a number of services for the district. The idea here is to construct a whole complex that embodies a center for literacy and training programs, which targets the whole community, but which is expected to have a majority of women based on the available data; a medical center for primary health care and maternity and child services; and a center for social counseling. The training center can best be planned to serve the needs of the workshops in the touristic center. In this way, a complementarity of activities can be achieved.

This center of services need not be located in proximity with the commercial one, since each of them has a different function. The availability of enough vacant lots facilitates the selection of the sites. However, it is important that this service center be located in a spot easily accessible to the target beneficiaries.

Likewise, a good idea would be to establish a pedestrian area around the commercial center, in order to facilitate its accessibility. Such a step might require replanning of the surrounding sites, but it is a point worthy of consideration.

The service center is meant to upgrade the demographic characteristics of the community. Any attempt at upgrading the physical conditions of the district is meaningless without upgrading the human resources within. Although this survey has attempted a needs assessment approach, it has not revealed the subjects' concern for such services that can help them in this respect, as has already been mentioned. Health and education do not represent top priorities to them. However, these two aspects in particular cannot be disregarded, even if the community is not aware of their importance.

Whereas the establishment of the commercial center can best be done through private enterprise, this service center must be implemented through state effort. The former can attract investors, since it is profit-oriented, while the latter is a responsibility of the government, since it is a non-profit service. However, non-governmental efforts can collaborate, especially with the literacy and social counseling programs. Here they can provide the personnel and act as channels for raising answers in the community.

Garbage: The Endless Problem

Garbage disposal looms as a major problem in the district, and as such tends to overshadow other concerns of pollution, although the presence of the workshops in the midst of the residential area is a major source of pollution that leads to many health hazards, let alone its negative impact on the monuments.

The community needs an organized system of garbage disposal, that proceeds on a regular basis. At present, no such system exists, and heaps of garbage accumulate all over. What can best serve the purpose is an organization outside the governorate structure. However, the current situation requires

that garbage collection, if done by private individuals, be formally licensed by the governorate. The survey results have shown that some individuals, although small in number are willing to participate in upgrading efforts. The help of these people can be sought to form any organization that can take over this responsibility, at enough cost to cover the expenses, with no profit-oriented objectives. The resulting environmental conditions, free from pollution, are sufficient profit in this respect. It remains that the governorate facilitate the provision of the license to this organization, through simplified bureaucratic measures.

The organization in charge of garbage collection can make use of the unemployed in the community, especially those who may be unskilled and difficult to find employment. What can facilitate the task is the provision of plastic bags for the households and shops and workshops, where garbage may be disposed, to be collected on a regular basis by the hired personnel.

Garbage containers of large sizes are not a feasible solution. These are normally placed at different location spots in the street. The tendency is, however, that they allow for leakage, spilling, and overflow of the contents, in most cases. Irregularity of collection may be one reason in this respect, but there are other factors of relevance, such as poor maintenance, neglect, and improper use by the people. The end result is a worse garbage problem.

An organized system of garbage collection from the households and shops or workshops is the most feasible solution, if any attempt at addressing the problem successfully is sought.

Relocation

The present physical condition of the study area is a mixture of polluted environment; old, crumbling buildings; and a decaying infrastructure. Some buildings need to be renovated; others have to be totally demolished. The presence of the workshops in the midst of a residential area and a historic site has to be reconsidered. It is suggested that the workshops, especially those that deal with metals and are hazardous to the environment, be moved further beyond the residential segment.

Relocation is no easy task, even within close boundaries. Experience in other cases has shown that relocating people can be problematic. They not only depend on their original site for their livelihood in terms of work, but they are also strongly attached to it emotionally, socially, and psychologically. Relocating them means uprooting them, a situation which is highly traumatic.

In the study area, the need to demolish buildings, as well as move workshops is a case of relocation. Consequently, it has to proceed in a way that does not threaten the security of the people; neither should it antagonize them. In the case of moving the workshops, the step should be taken with enough

caution and persuasion, with no orders being imposed upon the owners. Workshops can be rebuilt in areas further down the district and away from the residential sector, thus serving two purposes. On the one hand, the workshops themselves can, in this way, be renovated and upgraded. On the other hand, they, by moving away, will help reduce pollution in the area. Approaching the owners should proceed along these lines.

Inhabitants of the buildings that will be torn down must be offered an alternative, preferably within the boundaries, in order to avoid any problems in this respect. What can aggravate the situation with respect to the possible hostility among the district population is the spread of rumors related to relocation schemes, that are very much loaded with negative attitudes. This situation necessitates the right approach to the target population, in order to achieve results as close as possible to the desired goals. It is therefore suggested that the target population be prepared for relocation. Some program has to be devised to explain clearly and honestly the objectives of relocation, emphasizing the positive aspects and addressing the negative ones in a straight-forward manner. This task has to proceed jointly through community and government efforts. The former can best be represented by some individuals of special respectable, eminent status as well as of high credibility in the district. The latter should not act through a formal, political role which is most likely to antagonize individuals.

Non-Governmental Efforts

Upgrading efforts in the study area, as suggested, cannot be seen as a government responsibility solely. The government, however, should provide the infrastructure, but the total task is definitely beyond its capabilities. Here is where emerges the need for the collaborative efforts of a non-governmental organization. It is important, at this stage, that a serious organization take over some of the proposed activities. Currently, either no such organization exists, or if it is there, its efforts are not significant enough to be felt.

Gamaliya includes educated, enlightened individuals, especially among the youth segment. There are university graduates who can initiate the establishment of a non-governmental organization (NGO), as well as proceed to implement the different tasks, monitor them, and as such develop a community participation aspect, which is very much in demand. There are also the people who are financially well-off, although their number might be small, but they can help provide some of the required funds.

The NGO is expected to have another important role—i.e., that of raising awareness in the community along different lines. Environment, health, education, employment skills are but examples in this respect. In addition, it can very well help in the required persuasive efforts in cases of relocation.

It is important to mention, however, that the legal and formal procedures required to establish an NGO are no easy task.

They are complicated as well as time-consuming. The demand for the organization, on the other hand, should lead the government to facilitate matters for the community and reduce such complicated bureaucratic measures.

Tasks of the NGO should not only center around the initiation of community participation, but more so, a follow-up of the already established activities. One such activity is a campaign for garbage disposal, which was started more than a year ago but has been stumbling because of governmental bureaucracy. It is hoped that an NGO, once established, can, in such cases, act as a pressure group in the community. Its intervention is an attempt to activate the implementation of urban plans in line with the needs of the district, varied as they may be.

Conclusion

This paper approaches the issue of cultural heritage as a current major concern in Egypt, selecting one district which stands out as highly prominent in this context, because of its diversified nature/functions—namely, Gamaliya. The dilemma in the task of preserving its cultural heritage lies in the attempt to maintain the historic legacy of the district as embodied in the numerous monuments included within its boundaries, at the same time addressing the special situation of the large segment of traditional CAIROITES which constitute its residents. Because of the old age of Gamaliya, its infrastructure has significantly decayed. Environmental problems have likewise surfaced. Consequently, the relevant question centers around the means to upgrade the district from a multi-dimensional approach, taking into consideration not only the suffering condition of its physical environments, but also the inferior demographic characteristics of the community. It is along those lines that proposed programs are planned.

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