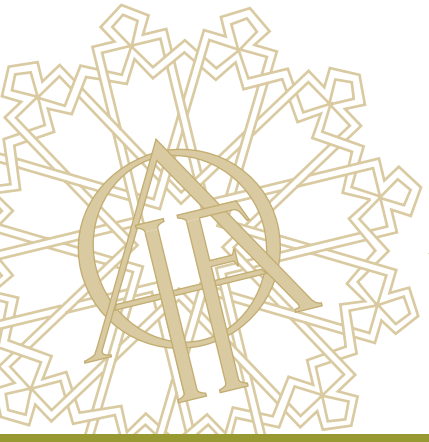

ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

AnIsl 15 (1976), p. 313-348

Nawāl Al-Messiri Nadim

The Concept of the ḥāra. A Historical and Sociological Study of al-Sukkariyya.

THE CONCEPT OF THE ḤĀRA

A HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF AL-SUKKARIYYA

Nawāl AL-MESSIRI NADIM

Anyone who has been brought up in Egypt, and in Cairo in particular, is aware of the common usage of the term *ḥāra* to describe part of the street system. According to Ibn Sīda a *ḥāra* is « a residence place in which houses are close together » (al-Maqrizī 1877, vol. 2 : 2). *Wehr's Arabic-English Dictionary* translates *ḥāra* as a « quarter, part, section (of a city); ghetto, lane, alley, side street » (1966 : 212). Although any or all of these are possible definitions of the *ḥāra,* its precise meaning varies with the historical, administrative, socio-cultural, and perceptual frames of reference.

The *Ḥāra :* A Concept with Historical Depth

In the medieval city, *ḥāra* was the name for a quarter or a section of the town. Each *ḥāra* had a central branch or by-street called *darb,* which often gave its name to the quarter. In many cases these *ḥawārī* had several small dead-end [1] passages called *ʿaṭfa* (sing.) (Raymond 1968 : 110). Twelfth century Cairo was divided into ten to fifteen *ḥawārī* and by the beginning of the fifteenth century, al-Maqrizī (1877) reckoned thirty-six *ḥawārī.* The *ḥawārī* of this time were occupied by homogeneous groups unified by ethnic and/or occupational characteristics, such as Ḥārat-al-Yahūd (Jews' quarters). They were barricaded with gates that were closed at night. Although this type of ethnic separation of people was prevalent, it did not lead to ghetto-like isolation (Lapidus 1969 : 80). These quarters were occupied by both rich and poor individuals because the residents of the *ḥāra* were involved in both the production and distribution of goods. The quarter

[1] ʿAlī Mubārak (1889) in his classification of street patterns refers to the fact that a *ḥāra,* a *darb,* or an *ʿaṭfa* could be dead-end, or open passages (124).

included both the houses of prosperous merchants and the dwellings of poor laborers and craftsmen (Lapidus 1969 : 87-89; Abu-Lughod 1971 : 24). In spite of the economic heterogeneity of the *ḥawārī,* evidence indicates that during the eighteenth century both aristocratic quarters and quarters of the common people existed. The quarters of the poor were centered around and sustained by economic activities such as slaughtering, milling and tanning : activities whose products and presences were not favored by the aristocratic population, since work related to food processing was considered unfit for aristocratic employment (Raymond 1968 : 106). According to Staffa (1968) the Qaṣaba street (where al-Sukkariyya belongs) had a large number of elite dwellings. However, these houses where not grand residences at all, but rather houses of retreat which the Mamluks [1] used when their homes in the aristocratic quarters were liable to be attacked (Staffa 1968 : 356). It is also important to note that Raymond emphasizes the fact that in the eighteenth century, the *ḥāra*'s hierarchically structured street pattern of *darb, ʿaṭfa,* and dead-end offshoots or *zuqāq* was most important in the quarters occupied by the poor (1968 : 110).

In medieval times, the *ḥāra* was also a political unit of administration and control. Each *ḥāra* had its political official, *šayḫ al-ḥāra.* Although he was selected by the governor of the city and was subject to removal by him, he was chief spokesman and administrator of the district. These *šayḫ* were entitled to places of honor in public gatherings and received governors, ambassadors, and other visiting dignitaries. However, his essential administrative duty was to balance the fiscal requirements of the Mamluk regime with the resources of the people (Lapidus 1967 : 92). The role of *šayḫ al-ḥāra* varied over the centuries in accordance with the controlling power of the central government and with the importance of the *ḥāra* as an administrative unit (Abu-Lughod 1971 : 71). Though its character varied through time, the office of *šayḫ al-ḥāra* existed beyond the medieval period into modern times. For example, in the 1830's, Lane observed that the *šayḫ al-ḥāra* was responsible for maintaining order and for settling trifling disputes among the inhabitants and neighbors (1860 : 124). It was only in 1962 that the Naser regime did away with the office (Abu-Lughod 1971 : 71).

[1] The Mamluks composed the elite and the ruling power of Egypt from 1250 until 1517 A.D.

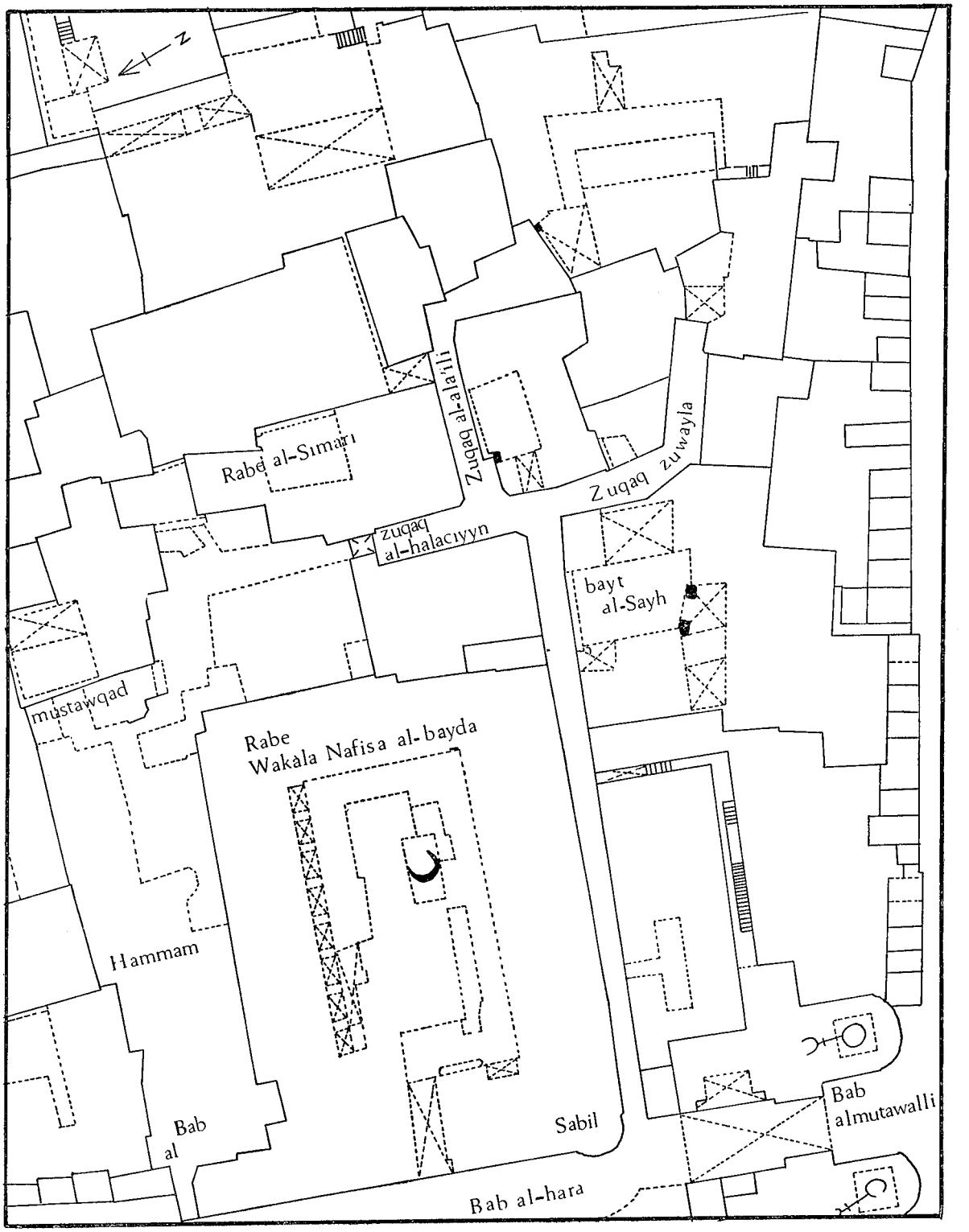

Fig. 1.

AnIsl 15 (1976), p. 313-348 Nawāl Al-Messiri Nadim
The Concept of the ḥāra. A Historical and Sociological Study of al-Sukkariyya.

The medieval *ḥawārī* also had an unofficial institution of leadership known as *futuwwa*. A futuwwa is a strong man who plays the role of the protector of his locality, but a trouble maker for other localities. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, each locality was identified as the territory of one or several young men who were strong and who excelled in using cudgels, knives, swords, and guns. It was common to find that the localities in the old Cairene quarters were identified by the *futuwwa* and the *futuwwa* by the locality (al-Messiri 1974 : 25).

The nature of the *ḥāra* as an administrative unit began to change with the arrival of the French expedition in 1798. The *ḥawārī* became smaller and increased in number. Jomard reports that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Cairo was passing through an era of administrative deterioration which particularly manifested itself in the increasingly meshed network of street systems with numerous dead-end *ḥawārī*. By the end of the eighteenth century, Cairo was subdivided into fifty-three *ḥawārī*. When Cairo came under French rule, the various *ḥawārī* were combined administratively into eight sections, each known as a *ṯumn* (one eighth). These sections became the basis of the current administrative organization of the city (Abu-Lughod 1971 : 25, 65). Each *ṯumn* was divided in *šiyāḫāt*. The official political leader of the *ṯumn* was known as *šayḫ al-ṯumn* and received his salary from the central city government. The official political leader of the *šiyāḫa* was called *šayḫ al-ḥāra*. His responsibility was to help property owners to rent their houses, and he was paid by them (Ali Mubarak 1889 vol. 1 : 216). Although the *ḥāra* had retained its meaning and function as a quarter, by the nineteenth century it was no longer the largest administrative unit but had become the second largest unit.

Historically, al-Sukkariyya of al-Darb al-Aḥmar was never considered a *ḥāra* in the sense of being a discrete administrative quarter. It was part of *Ḥārat al-Rūm*, or the Greek quarter. More specifically al-Sukkariyya referred to a locality in Darb al-Aḥmar currently named Muizz street, which was the major thoroughfare of medieval Cairo and was then known as the qassaba. This street bisected the medieval city, dividing it into east and west.

Different sections or localities of the qassaba had their special names following the prevailing system of nomenclature in Middle Eastern cities of medieval times. The names of the sections were specified according to the occupation and/or ethnic concentration of the occupants. Historians such as Edward Lane (1860)

Stanley Poole (1884), and ʿAlī Mubārak (1860) observe that this principle was still operative in the early nineteenth century, and remnants of the same phenomena still exist in sections of *al-Ḫiyamiya* — tent workers — where there remains a concentration of specialists engaged in appliqué tent work. Similarly, al-Naḥḥāsīn or the market of brasswork, is still famous. The name of the locality under investigation, al-Sukkariyya, is derived from the noun *sukkar* meaning sugar. This locality acquired its name during the eighteenth century when sugar salesmen were concentrated in the area (ʿAlī Mubārak 1889 vol. 2 : 129).

An account of the contemporary physical and demographic condition of that section of the city to which al-Sukkariyya belongs is essential to an understanding of life in that *ḥāra*. This area is now known to city planners as « Medieval Cairo » [1], and incorporates all of al-Darb al-Aḥmar, all of al-Ǧamāliyya, the *šiyāḫa* of Bāb al-Šaʿriyya, and the *šiyāḫāt* of al-Maḫǧar and al-Ḥaṭṭaba. This area has a population of 277, 577, approximately 6.6 percent of the total population of the city. City planners are interested in the area; they hope to preserve it for its historical significance. At the same time that they want to reconstruct the area to allow for modern communication systems and new buildings they do not want such modernization to clash with the existing vernacular style of architecture.

In light of this dual interest, the area was surveyed by the High Council ol Planning of Greater Cairo in 1970 in order to determine and describe its physical and some of its sociological characteristics. « Medieval Cairo » was found to include 9,656 buildings. Of these buildings 23.5 percent had only one floor, while 15.5 percent had two floors. Forty-five percent of all the buildings had three to four floors. Only 14 percent of the total number of buildings consisted of six floors and these were primarily located along main streets and surrounding the major squares. Generally the buildings were in a poor state of repair, and 36.4 percent of the houses could be classified as dilapidated. Mishaps as a result of collapsing buildings were frequent. 85.4 percent of the buildings had running water pipes, 84.5 percent sewage, and only 70.4 percent of the buildings had electricity. (These figures do not indicate whether each lodging unit in a building has access to these utilities).

[1] I am relying in that part on the unpublished information of the *Report of the High Council of Planning of Greater Cairo* on « Planning of Medieval Cairo ».

Of the 9,656 buildings in Medieval Cairo there were 47,333 lodging units. Of these units, 40.4 percent had only one room, 27.6 percent had two rooms, 22.8 percent had three rooms, 7.4 percent had four rooms and only 1.8 percent had five rooms. The rental value of these units was very low in comparison to other parts of the city, and at the time, 61.5 percent of the units were being rented for less than three Egyptian pounds [1] per month.

An examination of the land usage characteristic of « Medieval Cairo » is important to understand the manner in which people organized their lives. The following table indicates the land usage in what city planners call « Medieval Cairo » :

TABLE OF LAND USAGE IN MEDIEVAL CAIRO*

Usage	*Area per feddan*	*Percentage of total*
Lodging only	142	23.1
Lodging, commercial or craft	126	20.5
Commercial	52	8.5
Commercial and craft	23	3.8
Educational	33	5.4
Public	12	1.2
Religious and antiquities	44	7.2
Streets, thoroughfares, and *ḥawārī*	144	23.5
Sites and ruins	35	5.7
Open recreational squares	3	.4

* The information in this table is taken from the unpublished *Report of the High Council of Planning of Greater Cairo* on « Planning of Medieval Cairo ».

The physical and demographic features of the area surrounding al-Sukkariyya are sufficient to characterize it as, in the terms of social workers, one of « the less developed areas » of the city with regard to urban facilities and services. The table reveals the minimal recreational space, which contributes to the use of the street and alleys for recreational activities.

This table also shows the close association between the lodging units and craft and/or commercial units. Approximately 61 percent of the working population

[1] The Egyptian pound is $ 2.20 (1975).

of « Medieval Cairo » works within the area. Since the district is a center of traditional crafts of the city, this figure is an indication of the type of work in which the residents engage. As a locality in Muʿizz street, al-Sukkariyya shares some of the former's fame as a commercial zone. Muʿizz street is a major center for the production and distribution of the traditional Cairo crafts such as lattice work, leather, silverwork, and hand woven textiles. In addition it has several vegetable, fish, poultry, and spice markets. The following quotation is a vivid description of Muʿizz street :

« Traffic now thickens-black-robed women, men in white and blue *jallabiyah,* and darting children in stripped cotton nightshirts and pyjamas. Everyone seems to be carrying something from somewhere and to somewhere else, for the human head is the major delivery van in this zone.

The quality of the building becomes more substantial as the density of the foot traffic increases, indicating that one is approaching the zone of the highest value in this hidden ' down-town ' — the place of the precious metals, the silks, the amber, the carpets, and the ' modern highest use, ' the tourist trade. A detour into one of the tiny alleys to the west would reveal a world never glimpsed by the tourist. It is a dark and dense residential *cum* industrial *cum* commercial quarter, mud-splattered and garbagestrewn, penetrated by winding, narrow, dirt paths, terminating there at the gate to a thirteen-century *khan,* terminating there at a cul-de-sac created by a house that bars a former street. Each step moves one farther back into the centuries ... » (Abu-Lughod 1971 : 190).

Current Administrative Units to which the *Ḥāra* belongs

Today, the integration and sovereignty of the *ḥāra* have nearly vanished. The term no longer denotes a quarter, but refers to the narrow alleys which are found in abundance mainly in Old Cairene quarters and to a lesser extent in other parts of the city.

As we have noted, al-Sukkariyya is located in al-Darb al-Aḥmar qism. Census and survey data as well as political and administrative organization and zoning are based on the division of the city into *aqsām* (pl. of *qism*)[1]. Al-Darb al-Aḥmar occupies an area of 2.8 square kilometers; or 1.5 percent of the area of Cairo. It has a population of 151,947 persons which includes 3.6 percent of the total

[1] Cairo consists of twenty-one *qism,* each one divided into several *šiyāḥāt.* Al-Darb al-Aḥmar has fifteen *šiyāḥa.*

population of the city. Its density is 53,989 persons per square kilometer, while the average density of the entire city is 19, 594. The density of this particular *qism* did not increase significantly between the census data of 1960 and that of 1966. The increase was only 1.7 percent, while for the same year, the increase in density for Cairo as a whole was 25.3 percent (al-Ǧāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya 1970 : 41). One reason for the limitation of the spatial expansion in this area is the poor structure and unreliable condition of the buildings. There can be very little vertical expansion.

Al-Darb al-Aḥmar is one of the traditional quarters in Cairo. The presence of religious structures, average family size, literacy rate, occupational characteristics, mobility, and dress can be used as indices of the traditionality of this *qism*. Al-Darb al-Aḥmar is famous for its religious buildings. Besides eighty-three mosques of various sizes, antiquity, and functions, this *qism* also houses al-Azhar University and its mosque (al-Ǧāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya 1970 : 83). Irrespective of the actual religious behavior of the inhabitants of the *qism*, these structures give an air of traditionalism to the district which cannot be overlooked by the passerby.

The second index to traditionalism in al-Darb al-Aḥmar is the exceptionally high number of members per family unit. This district has the second highest family size for the city of Cairo. It averages 5.3 members per family (al-Ǧāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya 1970 : 41). From such a figure one might expect that there is a preference for a large number of children.

Closely associated with the family size is the high illiteracy rate. Illiteracy has its impact in preventing rapid infiltration of modern modes of living and therefore fosters the preservation of traditional aspects of culture. Approximately 50 percent of the population of that *qism* is illiterate, but about 64 percent of that illiterate population consists of females while only 36 percent are males (al-Ǧāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya 1970 : 56).

A further characteristic of the *qism* is the large proportion of individuals engaged in the traditional crafts and services of the city. They compose 41.5 percent of the working population of the *qism*.

Further trends toward traditionalism can be observed in the lack of physical mobility of the residents of al-Darb al-Aḥmar. A sample survey of the residents of this qism showed that more than one third of the household heads of the sample were born in the same qism (al-Ǧāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya 1970 : 75). This indicates

that a large proportion of the population continually contributes to the continuity of the tradition of the district despite the influx of migrants and movements of other people from other parts of the city. It is in such districts as al-Darb al-Aḥmar that one may still see women wrapped in their black *melaya laf,* the traditional dress of the Cairenes, and men wearing *galabeya,* either plain or striped.

Administratively, the *Muḥāfaẓa,* or municipality of Cairo, has a hierarchy of street systems which it inherited from the medieval city. Street names having the descriptive terms of *ḥāra, ʿaṭfa,* or *zuqāq* added to them are most common in the old sections of Cairo. The meaning of the terms have not changed significantly since medieval times. Currently, in common usage, a *ḥāra* is designated as a narrow alley, an *ʿaṭfa* as a narrower alley, usually branching from a *ḥāra,* and a *zuqāq* as an offshoot of an *ʿaṭfa.* Although the distinctions among these areas are recognized both publically and administratively, the terms are used interchangeably in common usage and greater preference is given to the term *ḥāra,* which describes the larger unit. Residents of the *ʿaṭfa* or the *zoqāq* usually refer to their alley as a *ḥāra* but those of the *ḥāra* would never refer to their alley as an *ʿaṭfa.*

This same principle of identifying with a larger frame of reference is common in al-Sukkariyya. As a locality, it has only one alley branching from Muʿizz Street. This alley is a blind alley now labelled ʿAṭfat al-Qayyāttī. Residents of the aṭfa rarely refer to their alley by the term *ʿaṭfa,* but, rather, employ the term *ḥāra : ahl al-ḥāra* (people of the *ḥāra*), *bāb al-ḥāra* (entrance of the *ḥāra*), and *ʿiyāl al-ḥāra* (children of the *ḥāra*). A mother may tell her child to « play in the *ḥāra* », but she never tells him to « play in the *ʿaṭfa* ». The name ʿaṭfat al-Qayyāttī, is used only for correspondence purposes or whenever a specific address is needed. The residents, however, usually refer to themselves as living in the *ḥāra* of al-Sukkariyya. Accordingly, in this study we will refer to al-Sukkariyya as a *ḥāra,* not as an *ʿaṭfa.*

Current Socio-Cultural Units to which the *Ḥāra* belongs

Besides being viewed in an administrative and historical context, al-Sukkariyya can also be seen as part of other socio-cultural units within the city of Cairo.

Janet Abu-Lughod correlates certain parts of the city with identifiable types : modern urban, rural urban, and traditional urban (1969 : 159-188). Al-Sukkariyya is considered as part of the section which she characterizes as « traditional urban », which accounts for a substantial proportion of the city's population. According to Abu-Lughod, traditionalism within the Egyptian context,

> « ... refers primarily to the persistence of economic activities, forms of social relationships, and systems of value which were once typical within Cairo of a hundred years ago but which, since the advent of the twentieth century at least, have been increasingly challenged by newer ways of organizing production and sales regulating identity and behavior, and setting definitions for the ' good life ' » (1971 : 219).

Abu-Lughod does not attempt to correlate her typology with *aḥyā' šaʿbiyya,* a term meaning « folk quarters » commonly used since the 1940's. The term *šaʿbiyya* pertains to the *šaʿb,* folk or people, a word which has been stressed during the development of socialist ideology in Egypt. This term could apply to that which Abu-Lughod calls « traditional urbanism », as well as to some other quarters which she considers as « rural » and « modern ». The concept refers to the majority of the Cairene districts as opposed to districts which are mainly inhabited by the elite. The term *šaʿbiyya* was first used by the media but has now infiltrated into common colloquial language. The people's current preference for the use of this term results from their wish to avoid the usage of the value-laden concept of *baladī* quarters. *Baladī,* as defined by Abu-Lughod, is commonly used as an adjective which connotes « native » in contrast to « westernized », « folk » as contrasted with « sophisticated », « untutored » as opposed to « refined », and « traditional » as opposed to « modern » (1971 : 191). According to al-Messiri, those who do not identify with *baladī* quarters think of *baladī* as denoting that which is old fashioned, unattractive, ugly, or gauche. Nevertheless, those who live in them regard *baladī* as anything that is good and pure (1970 : 115).

One final socio-cultural concept to which the *ḥāra* could be related is that of the *ḥiṭṭa,* or neighborhood. As a *hāra,* al-Sukkariyya should be distinguished from al-Sukkariyya as a *ḥiṭṭa.* All residents of al-Sukkariyya belong to the same *ḥiṭṭa* and the same *ḥāra.* A *ḥiṭṭa* is both a geographic and social entity. It is a strictly subjective term whose social and geographic boundaries are identified

only by its residents and the people of the bordering *ḥiṭṭāt* (pl. of *ḥiṭṭa*). People residing in the same *ḥiṭṭa* do not necessarily know each other or have face-to-face relationships, but they do consider themselves bound by vicinal ties. They have an *esprit de corps* which is most visible at times of weddings, deaths, and fights. These three events are considered to be public affairs. A successful wedding celebration needs the participation and support of members of the *ḥiṭṭa*. Lights and decorations for the ceremony are not restricted to the celebrating families' houses but include the alleys and the other houses of the *ḥiṭṭa* as well. When a death befalls a family, members of the *ḥiṭṭa* should support the family of the deceased, at least morally, by following the funeral procession to the mosque and attending and participating in the various rituals. Both occasions involve the gathering of a large number of individuals which usually takes place in the alleys. These occasions are public and shared by all members of the *ḥiṭṭa*. Microphones are used extensively so that everyone in the *ḥiṭṭa* can hear the band whether he attends the wedding ceremonies or not. In death rituals, koranic recitals are shared by all residents.

Regional fights between members of the different *ḥiṭṭāt* are serious events. The prestige of the *ḥiṭṭa* is at stake if any of its members has been beaten by members of another *ḥiṭṭa*. Large scale regional conflicts are not very common today, but they were once an important manifestation of the power structure of medieval Cairo. Traces of the role of the *futuwwa* as a protector still exist in Cairo. Al-Messiri points out that « the *futuwwa* in his *ḥiṭṭa* is mainly conceived as the protector of the neighborhood from the rival *futuwwāt*, other opponents from the outside, and generally in many fighting situations » (1974 : 17).

Membership in a *ḥiṭṭa* is usually restricted to actual residents of the area. Commuters such as shopowners, peddlers, and craftsmen, who come to the *ḥiṭṭa* for work, are not considered as *ahl al-ḥiṭṭa*, or people of the *ḥiṭṭa*. A shopowner in al-Sukkariyya once commented :

« I spend all of my day and most of my night in al-Sukkariyya. Nevertheless, I don't consider it my *ḥiṭṭa*. The *ḥiṭṭa* I belong to is that place where I leave my wife and children knowing that they are safe, and no one could harm them in my absence ».

The concept of the *ḥiṭṭa* is a very broad and elastic one and could be used by individuals residing in almost any district of Cairo. But the term is more meaningful

and significant in the traditional quarters. In these quarters one can delimit the physical boundaries of a particular *ḥiṭṭa* and arrive at a consensus among the residents as to its boundaries. In the modern quarters of the city, the concept is less meaningful and there are numerous variations depending on the individual's experiences, network of relations, and conceptions of the neighbors. When the people living in such places as the newly constructed housing district of al-Masākīn were asked : « Where are you from ? » they answered : « *I live in al-Masākīn* ». But a person living in al-Sukkariyya would answer the same question by saying : « *I am from* al-Sukkariyya », in the sense of, « I belong to al-Sukkariyya ». As such, al-Sukkariyya is not only a place of residence, it is a frame of reference; it is part of the individual, and he identifies with it. This strong attachment and sense of belonging to the *ḥiṭṭa* is characteristic of the people who belong to the *ḥāra* subculture.

A *ḥiṭṭa* in traditional quarters is composed of one or more *ḥawārī* and their offshoots. Al-Sukkariyya is actually a *ḥiṭṭa* in Muʿizz street including the *Ḥāra* of al-Sukkariyya and its offshoots. Since this particular section of Muʿizz street is strictly commercial and since the people of the *ḥāra* are the only residents of this *ḥiṭṭa,* we find that « al-Sukkariyya » refers to both the *ḥāra* and *ḥiṭṭa* simultaneously. No other *ḥawārī* are included within this specific *ḥiṭṭa* which explains why it is possible to apply the name of the locality to the *ḥāra.*

Al-Sukkariyya Description and Demographic Composition

As a locality or *ḥiṭṭa,* al-Sukkariyya encompasses an area significant for its history, Islamic monuments, and architecture—including the *ḥāra* of this study. The *ḥiṭṭa* includes al-Muʾayyad mosque, one of the most famous Mamluk mosques of Cairo which was built during the reign of Sultan Muʾayyed (1412-1421). Facing the mosque is a *ḥammām,* or public bath, which dates from the eighteenth century. Until approximately fifty years ago this *ḥammām* was composed of two sections; one for males with an entrance from Muʿizz street, and the other for females and children with an entrance from the *ḥāra* of al-Sukkariyya. Though the female section of the *ḥammām* was demolished forty years ago, the male section functions today.

The *ḥāra* itself, that is, al-Sukkariyya, is nearly ten meters to the right of the famous southern gate, Bawwābat al-Metwalī [1], of Medieval Cairo. Included in the *ḥāra* are two of the houses built over the Fatimid wall of Cairo which are currently considered as archeological sites. The arches entrance of the *ḥāra* is a medieval gate with its medieval name, *al-Ḥammām,* still inscribed on it. The name of the *ḥāra* has changed several times, and each change characterized the *ḥāra* at a particular historic stage. The first account of the existence of al-Sukkariyya was described in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* of al-Maqrizī (1877 vol. 1 : 373, vol. 2 : 102), in which he mentions that in the fifteenth century, the *ḥāra* was known by the name al-Ḫulaʿiyyīn because of the market of second-hand attire which was centered in that area. Al-Maqrizī also points out that prior to the fifteenth century, the *ḥāra* was called al-ḫaššābīn, or the district of woodworkers. When the locality became a center for sugar merchandise, it acquired the name of al-Sukkariyya. But when the *ḥammām* was constructed in the eighteenth century, the *ḥāra* became known as Ḥārat al-Ḥammām. Sometime after the destruction of the ladies' *ḥammām,* the *ḥāra* acquired the name of *al-ʿAlā'ilī* after the name of an Ottoman Bey who owned a large portion of the land of the *ḥāra.* Ruins of his house are now designated as an archeological site. After that the *ḥāra* acquired the name of ʿAṭfat al-Qayyātī which is presently inscribed on the street sign indicating the entrance to the *ḥāra.* Qayyātī refers to a sufi order the leader of which had a house in the *ḥāra* which is still the center for celebrations for the order.

The *ḥāra* has three dead-end *zoqāq* or offshoots. The northern one is labelled al-Ḫulaʿiyyīn while the eastern one is called al-ʿAlā'ilī; two names which, at separate times, identified the *ḥāra* as a whole. The southern *zoqaq* is called Zuwayla, the name applied to the southern gate of the Fatimid wall of Medieval Cairo.

One of the distinguishing marks of al-Sukkariyya is the complex of Nafīsa al-Beyda (1796) which is composed of a *wakāla, rabʿ,* and a *sabīl.* This type of architectural complex flourished during the eighteenth century when it played a

[1] When al-Muʿizz constructed Cairo or *al-Qāhira* as his royal city in 969 A.D. he surrounded it with a protective wall having eight gates. The southern gate was called *Bāb Zuwayla* after a Moroccan tribe of the conquering Moslem troops. The gate acquired the name *Bawwābat al-Metwalī* after the medieval official, al-Metwalī, who used to sit by the gate and collect the taxes from those entering the city (Zakī 1966 : 15).

significant role as a center for three socio-economic, religious institutions. A *wakāla* was originally built as a rest-house for travelling merchants who came to sell their merchandise. Lane, in the first half of the nineteenth century, noted that two hundred of these *wakālāt* (pl. of *wakāla*) were located in Cairo, and three-fourths of them were found within that part which constitutes the original city (1860 : 25). Wakālat al-Sukkariyya, in particular, was a commercial center where merchants of sugar, nuts, eggs, butter, and chickens met (Mubārak 1889 : 129). This *wakāla* is in the shape of a rectangular building surrounding a court and having one common entrance from Muʿizz street. The ground floor consists of thirty-five rooms. Those that face the court are vaulted, and the rest are additions that were later built in the center of the court. The additions, because they created a long corridor leading to the entrance of the *wakāla,* distinguish it from others in which an open court is found. The *wakāla* is no longer the center for transactions of one type of merchandise, but its rooms are rented as storeshops and workshops for a variety of trades and crafts. Leather and silver workshops, carpentry, and embroidery shops, candle and broom-making as well as incense and nut shops are currently operating in the *wakāla.*

Originally the *rabʿ* was built for the use of the *ʿāmma,* or common people, and was rented to families who could not afford to rent an entire house (Lane 1860 : 25). It is a superstructure of the *wakāla* and is divided into distinct lodgings. Though the entrance to the *rabʿ* is from inside the *ḥāra,* its facade, with its beautiful lattice windows and *mašrabiyya* (which attracts tourists and artists to the area) faces Muʿizz street. The *rabʿ* has only one entrance and its staircase leads to a corridor on each side of which various lodgings are located. These lodgings are separate, both from one another and from the shops below. Each lodging in the *rabʿ* comprises one, two, or three rooms, and though some of these lodgings were meant as duplex apartments, they are not used as two or more independent units. Most of the lodgings have added a private latrine, though in some cases several lodging units share a latrine which is located separately from any of them. A large number of apartments are shared by extended families and due to the shortage of housing in the city, some residents sublet rooms in their lodgings. Thus, while the *rabʿ* consist of only twenty-five lodgings, thirty-five families live in this constructed space.

The *sabīl,* or the third unit in the Nafīsa al-Beyḍā' complex, is an annex to the *wakāla* and the *rabʿ*. It was reserved as a place for religious and charitable functions.

The lower floor of the sabīl supplied passers-by with fresh drinking water, and the upper floor was used as a *kuttāb,* or religious school, where the Koran was taught to children. This *kuttāb* functioned until 1958 when the sabil had to be evacuated because the building was going to be restored. Now completely deserted, it is considered an archeological site.

A major landmark of the *ḥāra* is the *mustawqad* which is the heating unit for the *ḥammām.* Its presence is significant to any understanding of the social structure of the *ḥāra.* Besides its primary function as a water heater, this unit is also used for cooking *fūl mudammas,* a traditional breakfast bean dish. The amount of *fūl muddamas* which is cooked daily in the *ḥāra* is sufficient for supplying at least twenty-five thousand individuals in the city with their breakfast meal. The peddling and preparation of *fūl mudammas* is monopolized by *Wāḥiya* migrants living in the *ḥāra* from the Dakhla and Kharga Oases.

Certain physical and health problems have developed because of this unit and the various activities surrounding it. One such problem is caused by the cleaning and washing of the beans. The cleaning procedures result in the continuous blockage of sewage pipes and rarely does a week pass without the inundation of the entire *ḥāra* by sewage water. Some of the educated males of the *ḥāra* have nicknamed it « Venicia », a satirical comment on its constant floods. Residents of the *ḥāra,* faced with such a problem, developed ingenious ways of coping with the overflow of sewage waters. Blocks of stone, for example, are stored next to the *ḥāra*'s entrance, and when the flood comes, they are spread out and used as stepping stones into the *ḥāra.* Male residents often use the back door entrance of the *ḥammām* to reach their houses. It is not uncommon to see some of the women who have to go to work holding their shoes and walking barefooted in the water, followed by a daughter carrying a crock of clean water. As soon as *bāb al-ḥāra* (door of the *ḥāra*) is reached, the working woman washes her feet, puts on her shoes and goes to work. While the « Venicia » condition of the *ḥāra* is an agony for the adults, it provides entertainment for the younger children who play in the puddles. Older male children, however, are frustrated by it since it means that soccor games cannot be played in the passage.

Because it depends exclusively upon garbage for its fuel, the *ḥāra* is known to garbage collectors as a center for selling refuse. Garbage cars enter the *ḥāra* daily and unload in the passage close to the *mustawqad.* This is also the place

where residents and shopkeepers throw their own garbage. Since the dump around *mustawqad* is not fenced, garbage easily spreads throughout the area. About fifty goats feed on the garbage but also contribute to its spread throughout the *ḥāra*.

Besides the physical and health problems caused by the *mustawqad,* the presence of this institution in the area affects the social structure of the *ḥāra*. Al-Sukkariyya has an occupational concentration of *fūl mudammas* peddlers and traders whose work depends on the existence of the *mustawqad*. Since the cooking procedures of the *fūl mudammas* necessitates checking the fire at different intervals of the night, those who engage in this profession find it more convenient to live close to the *mustawqad*. *Fūl mudammas* peddlers are mostly *Wāḥiya* by place of origin and many of them are consanguineously or affinely related. This concentration of one occupational-ethnic-kinship group has its effects on the social relations of the *ḥāra*.

Besides the *mustawqad,* the *ḥāra* has three *ḫarābāt,* or ruins, which are also often used as refuse dumps. One has been recently rented to a junk yard for used military boots and shoes. The other two are ruins which are basically used as playgrounds by the children.

The 117 families in the *ḥāra* belong to a variety of ethnic groups depending on their place of origin and religious affiliation. The largest group are the true Cairenes who identify themselves as *awlād al-balad* [1] and make up half of the families in the *ḥāra*. Twenty-nine families compose the second largest group. These are known and identified as the *wāḥiyya*. Closely related to these two groups are four families which have been formed through intermarriage between *awlād al-balad* and *wāḥiyya*. Thirteen families known as *ṣaʿāyida* are from Upper Egypt and nine families identified as *fallāḥīn* are from Lower Egypt. Finally three families are identified as *al-aqbāṭ,* or Copts. Although they are originally from Upper Egypt, they are constantly characterized on the basis of their religious affiliation rather than by their place of origin. This is also true of the family of

[1] The historical development and various derivations and connotations of this term have been analysed by el-Messiri (1970). The work points out that these who identify as *awlād al-balad* are indigenous, Cairene, urbanite Muslims; and that many of their characteristics which persist today were prevailing in the nineteenth century (pp. 119-120).

Šayḫ al-Qayāttī. Though they are from Upper Egypt, they are known and identified on the basis of their sufi order.

Some association is present between ethnicity and place of residence in the *ḥāra.* The *ḥāra* is conceived in terms of residential blocks or zones which are identifiable by its residents. The *ḥāra* has seven of these residential blocks. The population of these blocks is not proportionate, but variation is one contributing factor to the distribution of centers of power in the *ḥāra.* Block number one which I have been refering to as the *rabᶜ* has thirty-nine families and a population of 171 individuals, thus composing over one-fourth of the total population of the *ḥāra.* This block is composed of an integrated group. A large number of its residents are *awlād al-balad* with a minority of four families of *ṣaᶜāyida.* In addition, most of its residents have kinship relationships with some other members of the same block.

Block number two is known as Bayt al-Bey. Its name and the nomenclature of its different sections are indicative of the type of life which once took place within its walls. The house is divided into two sections. One is called the *salāmlik,* or male residence, whereas the other is called the *ḥaramlik,* or female residence. The latter has two subdivisions, *ḥarīm awwal,* the quarter of the senior wife, and *ḥarīm ṯānī,* the quarter of the junior wife. Such internal structure and social subdivisions were common in the houses of elites throughout Cairo. This house which was once the residence of one family, now accommodates eleven families with a population of sixty-six individuals. All of its residents are *awlād al-balad* except for a Coptic family and another from the *fallāḥīn* group.

The neighboring block, number three, is that of Bayt al-Šayḫ or al-Qayyātī. In the beginning of this century the spacious house of al-Qayyātī witnessed a glamorous and busy life filled with political and religious activities of the sufi order, *al-Qayyātiyya.* At that time, members of this house led a self-contained life which allowed only minimal social interaction with other members of the *ḥāra.* Though the female members of the household enjoyed very close relationships with members of the sufi order in Qayyat, a village in Upper Egypt, they were strictly secluded from the rest of the *ḥāra.* Ceremonies of the order were held in the courtyard of the house and the leader of the order hosted the followers during the festivities. The house occupies a large area of the *ḥāra,* but it has the

least concentration of people. Only twenty-five individuals belonging to only five families live in this relatively spacious building.

Block number four is known as *al-daḥdura.* It is composed of five buildings and has the largest number of residents, 181 individuals composing twenty-seven families. Its residents are a combination of *awlād al-balad* and *wāḥiyya.* The most recently build house in the *ḥāra,* which was built in the 1950's, falls in this block.

Block number five is composed of shelters built next to walls of already existing buildings. Approximately ten of these structures have been built by poor families of the area. The shelter itself protrudes into the passage of the *ḥāra* and consists of large stones stacked on top of one another and covered by straw, cardboard or tin sheet roofs. This block is called the mestawaad and its population is one-hundred percent *wāḥiyya.* Block number six also has a concentration of *wāḥiyya.* It is a *rabᶜ* — like building and is often called *rabᶜ al-Sinnārī.* This *rabᶜ* is composed of ten dwellings; five on each side of a corridor, with one tap shared by all residents.

Block number seven is composed of two buildings comprising ninety-three individuals which make up twelve families. Residents of this block are a mixture of *awlād al-balad, wāḥiyya, fallāḥīn,* as well as a Coptic family.

In terms of daily needs, the *ḥāra* is far from being self-sufficient. It was one small grocer whose merchandise is of poor quality, but who is a handy and close source for supplying residents with such items as bread, soap, cheese, matches, and other small items. It is also useful during times of sudden need or when the child running the errand is still too young to shop outside the *ḥāra.* Several poorer women sell seasonal items or candy in their rooms or at their doorstep. Members of the *ḥāra* purposefully buy from these women with the intention of helping them financially. Few peddlers of food items enter the *ḥāra* since the *sūq,* or market, is very close, but certain door-to-door services are provided by various people. Among them is the yogurt man who makes daily rounds supplying his customers and collecting the empty clay pots of the previous day. The kerosene man makes his tour every morning with his cart and waits at the center of the *ḥāra* until residents come out with their tins to purchase what they need. The laundry boy also passes by the well-to-do families to collect minor items needing ironing and to return whatever he has pressed. The ice cream man with his identifiable whistle calls on the children. Each one of these peddlers has been in the area for a number of years and is known to the residents by name.

The *ḥāra* also has a number of workshops. Among them is the carpenter's workshop which is the most famous shop in Cairo for making the traditional, lattice woodwork, *mašrabiyya*. Other such shops include several metalware workshops, a candle-making shop, and two stores that make cardboard cartons. The products of these workshops are not for local, *ḥāra* consumption, but they serve as the major source for attracting outsiders not necessarily related to any of the residents in the *ḥāra*. Some of the outsiders are workers in the shops, and thirty-eight of them come into the *ḥāra* daily for work. They are incorporated into the *ḥāra* community since all of them are residents of other *ḥawārī* and experience a similar way of living. A stranger in the *ḥāra* is easily noticable and his destination is soon discovered. As soon as he enters *bāb al-ḥāra,* he is asked whom he wants and is required to provide the questioner with the name of the person or shop.

Demographically, al-Sukkariyya is characteristic of al-Darb al-Aḥmar *qism*. The 117 families with a total population of 639 individuals, makes an average family size of 5.46 individuals. This compares with an average for the city at large of 5.0 individuals per family. The majority of the families of the *ḥāra* are of the nuclear family type, but extended families are also present [1]. Two families are polyganous, but in both cases the second wife and her children live in a separate residence in another district. Twenty-seven families have other relatives living with them; however, no regular pattern of extension is present among these families. Sometimes the extended relatives are patrilateral; at other times they are matrilateral. The extended family type which is found in the *ḥāra* does not even follow the traditional patterns in which genealogically related persons of two generations live together, or in which married siblings form one household. It is, rather, based on the incorporation of unmarried relatives into a family. Widows, divorcees (especially those with no children), and bachelors are not expected to live separately. An unmarried son or daughter continues to live with his or her parents until marriage, irrespective of age. After divorce or the death of a spouse, a man or woman returns to his parents if they are still alive, otherwise he can live

[1] Karen Peterson (1968) argues that although extended family households are considered to be typical in the Arab world, in Cairo, data does not support that pattern (p. 351).

with a brother, sister, or other relative. Another extended family pattern is the one in which a child is borrowed by a relative with no children of his own. This is mainly done by grandparents who need the assistance of a child for housework. Finally, migrants do not usually bring their families when they first enter the city. Each lives with other relatives in the *ḥāra* until he becomes established and acquires a house of his own. Non-relatives, such as apprentices and work assistants may also be incorporated into a particular household. Such individuals have a special position, for though not all of them sleep in the house of their employer, their food and laundry is part of the household. For example, the owner of a workshop or a coffeeshop who has an assistant would ask him to sleep in the shop to guard it at night. At such times, the apprentice eats his meals in his master's house or the food is sent to him. These individuals are mainly migrants who have no close relatives in the city. However, in three cases, assistants do sleep in the employer's house.

The web of kinship among members of the *ḥāra* is very intricate. Only thirty-eight of the 117 families have no other relatives living in the *ḥāra,* the remainder have at least one relative and some have as many as twelve related families. Four main factors account for this pattern. First, the housing in this area has a cheap rental value. Members of the *ḥāra* are the first to know that someone will be moving, and a relative is usually given the message so he may start negotiating with the owner of a vacant residence. Second, relatives prefer to live close to each other. When a son or daughter becomes engaged, the family will first attempt to look for vacancies in the *ḥāra* or in neighboring areas. Third, a number of young members of the *ḥāra* have intermarried. Though the young couples do not necessarily reside in the *ḥāra,* their parents develop an in-law type of relationship among the residents. Fourth, migrants from different parts of Egypt have a tendency to live close to other migrants from their place of origin.

In spite of the various groups in the *ḥāra,* the major dichotomy is between the *wāḥiyya* and *awlād al-balad.* The *wāḥiyya* form a significant power group in the *ḥāra* because, in contrast to other groups, most of them are engaged in the same occupation, come from adjacent villages, and many are consanguinally or affinally related. Thus they are the one ethnic group capable of forming a block against *awlād al-balad.*

Three basic concepts account for the occupational stratification in the *ḥāra : al-muwaẓẓafin, ahl al-ṣanᶜa,* and *ahl al-kār.* The *muwaẓẓafin* are government employees who receive a fixed monthly salary and a pension when retired. Of the 332 working individuals in the *ḥāra* only fourteen are *muwaẓẓafin* (4.2 °/₀). Though they do have a stable salary, they are not well off and are in constant financial troubles. Most of them are low-salaried employees who are engaged in domestic governmental services.

Ahl al-ṣanᶜa means the people of the craft. These are the people who have acquired individual skills, and as long as they have the energy to practice their skill their income is assured. Those who are categorized as *ahl al-ṣanᶜa* comprise 142 individuals (42.8 °/₀). They engage in such crafts as carpentry, metal work, mechanics, and leather work.

The third category, *ahl al-kār,* includes 118 individuals (35.5 °/₀). They engage in occupations that do not necessitate technical skills, and the group is composed of such people as peddlers, *fūl mudammas* sellers, and those working in coffeeshops and domestic services. Also included in this group are cart drivers, but not car drivers. Among members of *ahl al-kār,* it is common to have wives or female children help with the work. I have included fifty-eight (17.5 °/₀) of these women in the working population of the *ḥāra.*

Of the entire working population, 142 individuals (42.88) work in the *ḥāra* itself (including the fifty-eight women). Of the male population considered as working within the *ḥāra* fifty-three (63.1 °/₀) are engaged in selling *fūl mudammas* which requires that they prepare their cooked merchandise inside the *ḥāra* and that they peddle outside of it. Sixteen members (4.8 %) work in the *wakāla* whose entrance is not far away from the *ḥāra.* Most of those who work in places outside of the *ḥāra* are still within the boundaries of the old city of Cairo : forty individuals (12.0 %) work in al-Darb al-Aḥmar itself while sixty-six others (19.9 %) go to nearby districts. The rest of the working population, that is, sixty-eight individuals (20.5 %), are engaged in jobs that take them away from « Medieval Cairo ».

Residential mobility in and out of the *ḥāra* is minimal. Of the 117 families, forty-one of the household heads have lived in the *ḥāra* all of their lives, while only eighteen families have been in the *ḥāra* for six years or less. All of those who are new arrivals to the *ḥāra* have had relatives already living in there. The stability

of the *ḥāra* population, in spite of the poor housing conditions, can be attributed to the acute housing problem in the city.

Forty percent of the families in the *ḥāra* live in one-room lodging units, some of which include as many as seven members, while forty-one percent occupy two rooms [1]. Those who live in three-room dwellings compose fifteen percent of the families.

More than half of the lodging units share a latrine with other units. Since water is not connected to most of the units, approximately sixty-one percent of the units do not have access to water taps inside their dwellings. They mainly depend upon buying water tin by tin from others who have installed taps inside their units. Some residents have devised methods of connecting hoses between floors through the windows to minimize the effort of carrying the tins of water. In the *rabᶜ*, one of the residents installed a tap in the corridor of the *rabᶜ* and makes a living out of selling water.

The supply of electricity in the *ḥāra* is relatively better than that of the water. Approximately fifty-one percent of the units do not have electricity and depend primarily on kerosene lamps. In spite of this, twenty-one families have television sets, which are accessible to nearly everyone in the *ḥāra*.

The illiteracy rate in the *ḥāra* is relatively high. About sixty percent of those who are of school age or above are illiterate. The percentage of male and female illiteracy is 61 percent and 59 percent, which is more nearly equal than the remainder of the city. One possible reason for this characteristic is that the young males of the *ḥāra* are encouraged to acquire a craft and work as apprentices to a craftsman. Although the first six years of schooling are compulsory, seven of the children in the *ḥāra* who are in this age group have never been to school. Drop-outs after the fourth years of school are very common especially among girls. About half of the girls going to school drop out before completing their sixth grade. If we add the number of those who have not completed the primary school education to the illiterate percentage, the percentage increases markedly. I found a significant discrepency between the number of students in the primary grades and those in the secondary grade. Less than one-third of those who enter school continue to secondary schools.

[1] In 1960 almost half of the occupied dwelling units in Cairo consisted of only one room with a median of four individuals (Abu-Lughod 1971 : 164).

Popular Perceptions of the *Ḥāra*

Although residents of the *ḥāra* are vaguely aware of the historical significance of their area, they do not know specific historical details. Elderly people tend to believe that the *qism* of al-Darb al-Aḥmar as a whole has passed through numerous catastrophes which led to its present physical and social condition. Among the well remembered disasters that occurred in the area is the collapse of a building during a wedding celebration. The catastrophe killed hundreds of people including both the bride and the groom; « blood was everywhere », they say. Another well-known disaster was the bomb thrown into this crowded area during the Second world War; again, « blood was everywhere ». According to popular interpretation, this district has witnessed so much bloodshed in its streets that it was named al-Darb al-Aḥmar, meaning the « red » district. In reality, however, the association of al-Darb al-Aḥmar with bloodshed carries little weight. Historically, al-Darb al-Aḥmar acquired its name because it was the residence of the Greek troops which joined the Fatimid army. Since these Greeks had « red » faces, the district became known as al-Darb al-Aḥmar (al-Ǧāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya 1970 : 16).

Most of the physical structures in the *ḥāra* have mythic or legendary tradition associated with them. Elderly people remember these tales and transmit them to the young, thereby creating an oral tradition which is shared by and belongs to only the members of the *ḥāra.* Children in al-Sukkariyya are familiar with frightful tales associated with most of the buildings, particularly with ruined structures. Any place which has had an accidental death is said to be inhabited by an *ʿafrīt,* or ghost, which comes to the same place at night. Four of these places around which a number of legends are told are the three *ḫarābāt* and a house in which a man died as a result of an electric shock. Children are taught to repeat the phrase, « In the name of Allah, the merciful and compassionate », whenever they pass by any of these places at night. The only tree in the *ḥāra,* a palm tree, is said to be inhabited by an owl that visits it once every year. When it howls it is said to be an omen that someone in the *ḥāra* will die. The Mu'ayyad minaret which can be reached through the *ḥāra* is said to be inhabited by a snake who guards it and attacks whoever climbs to the top.

The association of various places and buildings with supernatural beings is common in all the old districts of Cairo. Gayer-Anderson has printed a number

of tales he collected concerning an ancient house next to the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn. The narrator, in an opening phrase to one of these tales claims :

« Every ancient house ... has strange legends attached to it which though of the past, are kept in mind from generation to generation ». (1951 : 59-61).

In al-Sukkariyya, one such legend surrounds the female public bath, or *ḥammām*. Before it was demolished, the *ḥammām* was decorated with porcelain tiles and marble, and several boasted glazed-glass domes. Going to the *ḥammām* was a time of great delight for both the women and the children of the *ḥāra* and they usually spent two of three hours there. In the *ḥammām* itself, they were subjected to the ministration of the *ballāna,* a woman specialist who massaged them, depilated their body hair, and their heads. Women went to the *ḥammām* particularly after having given birth in order to be ritually purified by the *ballāna.* The *ḥammām* was frequently reserved for a bride, her relatives, and friends before the wedding so that everyone could be beautified, for the celebration. According to legend, a bride disappeared one day during her wedding bath. It was said that a supernatural, malevolent *ǧinn* who inhabited the *ḥammām* had kidnapped her. For three consecutive years following this incident, similar accidents occurred. Steam would fill the entire place, the bride would disappear and only her hair could be found, floating on the water. It is said that as a result the customers deserted the *ḥammām.* Its manager sacrificed an ox to placate the *ǧinn,* but the *ǧinn* took the ox and continued to steal brides. Reputedly, it is for this reason that the *ḥammām* was shut down, destroyed, and later constructions were built on top of it [1].

The *rabᶜ* has many tales associated with it. Some believe that the various units in the *rabᶜ* were used as graineries or storerooms for merchants of the *wakāla.* Large numbers of people believe that the *rabᶜ* was the residence of Nafīsa al-Bayḍā, who was the wife of Murād Bey, the last of the Mamluks. She is said to have occupied the section of the *rabᶜ* having the *mašrabiyya,* or lattice windows, facing Muᶜizz street and know to this day as *al-qaṣr,* or palace. The surrounding rooms

[1] Edward Lane noted that the bath is believed to be a favorite resort of *ǧinn* and therefore when a person is about to enter it, he should offer up an ejaculatory prayer for protection against evil spirits, and should put his left foot first over the threshhold. For the same reason, he should not pray nor recite the Koran in it (1860 : 337).

are thought to have been the quarters for her servants, and it is believed that, after her death, she bestowed the *rabᶜ* upon them. Others believe that the *rabᶜ* was a prison for the captives of Sultan Mu'ayyed [1].

Members of the *ḥāra* are aware of the various advantages and disadvantages to their life there. The following statements made by various members of the *ḥāra* clearly epitomize their view of what life in the *ḥāra* holds for the individual :

« Here, if you wear rags it makes no difference for people know who you are (elderly woman).

Undoubtedly there are cleaner streets in which to live, but in the *ḥāra* you can raise sheep, goats, and poultry (a middle-aged woman).

The *ḥāra* spoils children, especially if it is a dead-end one. All the children know each other and the parents too. It is like a village — all come together, I beat my children for playing in the *ḥāra* and messing their clothes. They need a tremendous effort to wash. They also learn obscene words (a mother of six children).

When a child calls another, even if he is eating, he leaves his food and runs to play. If I were in an apartment house, I could close my door and bring up my children the way I like. Here it is impossible to do that (a young mother).

Children of the *ḥāra* are uncontrolled. When living in a street, the mother would not allow her child to play in it for fear of cars (middle-aged mother).

Apartments could have bad people too. One finds better ones in the *ḥawārī* in spite of their inelegant dress (middle-aged woman).

To live in the *ḥāra,* especially a dead-end one, is like living in one's own kingdom. The place is controlled, no outsiders could intrude. The minute such a person enters *bāb al-ḥāra* he is noticed. You can smoke hashish with liberty (young bachelor).

Where could you find such a place for that amount of rent ? Anyone would fight for a place in the *ḥāra* (father of five children).

I don't want to move from the *ḥāra.* Where else could I play soccer ? (a young boy).

I like my sister's apartment at al-ᶜAbasseya. It is cleaner there. She has running water and a tub. But, I get bored when I go to her. I don't like to stay for more than one day, here I have more fun (a young girl).

Il is true that in the *ḥāra* you hear children saying obscene words, but if they don't learn these words, they'll be stepped on (a young woman).

There are worse things happening in apartments. The only difference is that in the *ḥāra* every act is noticeable. In apartments things are hidden. » (A young man).

[1] The Mu'ayyed mosque was used as a prison during the fifteenth century, but the *rabᶜ* was not built until the eighteenth century.

To the non-*ḥāra* residents, the term *ḥāra* has various social meanings. Their stereotypic view of the *ḥāra* as a place of residence is a negative one. The *ḥāra* is considered physically as dirty, narrow, and crowded, with unpaved streets; it is believed that the *ḥāra* cannot adapt to modern technology. Its public services, such as street maintenance, garbage collection, and sewage facilities are thought to be poor and substandard, dark, shabby, dirty, and full of insects. Socially, the residents of the *ḥāra* are viewed as vulgar, loud, and aggressive. They are associated with vice, delinquent behavior, narcotics, and smuggled merchandise. The children of the *ḥāra* are considered to be shabbily clad and dirty, lacking manners, and to be disgusting. In fact, it is considered an insult to be said to have been brought up in a *ḥāra* — *tarbiyat ḥawārī* — since the *ḥāra* denotes both a setting and a way of life that are undesirable. The manner in which residents outside the *ḥāra* view it is exemplified by a retired under-secretary's reaction to my interest in the socialization of children in the *ḥāra*. His reply was, « Do these children receive any socialization ? » (implying, do they have any manners ?).

The phrase *tarbiyat ḥawārī,* or brought up in a *ḥāra,* while used by outsiders to mean that *ḥāra* residents lack manners, does not usually insult members of the *ḥāra*. A sophisticated member of the *ḥāra* who had been exposed to other styles of life commented :

> « The phrase *tarbiyat ḥawārī* refers to the person who speaks obscene language, irrespective of his position or the situation. For example, *ḥāra* women do not abstain from using obscene language in the presence of their children ».

As a retort to the statement, *tarbiyat ḥawārī, ḥāra* residents answer with the insult *tarbiyat šawāriʿ,* or « brought up in the street ». Literally, the term best applies to prostitutes and criminals, but it also refers to the idea that one who is brought up in the street has no home. The passage of the *ḥāra* is not thought of as a street; it is an extension of the house and forms an integral part of the home. A child playing in the *ḥāra* is identifiable, but one playing in the street is not. If a child is beaten by an adult or another child in the *ḥāra,* supporters for each party rush to the scene and a large fight breaks out.

Though to an outsider the *ḥāra* might seem to be composed of a homogeneous group having a common way of life, this is not the manner in which its residents view one another. They hold finer stereotypical views which characterize the

various groups in the *ḥāra*. This type of internal stratification is primarily based upon a hierarchy of status related to the type of dwelling and ethnicity.

Residents of the *rabᶜ* are considered by others to have the least prestigious type of residence in the *ḥāra* and certain social stigma are associated with this type of residence. Residents of the *rabᶜ* are believed to be vulnerable to each other because of their crowdedness. They are said to interfere too much in each other's affairs, to quarrel continuously, and to be vulgar and loud. Non-*rabᶜ* residents say that because people of the *rabᶜ* live in single rooms rather than in apartments, they usually socialize outside of those rooms. They sit at the door of their rooms to gossip. They get involved in each other's private lives, and indulge in fights which have both verbal and physical manifestations. To the residents of the *ḥāra* the *rabᶜ* is the extreme example of crowdedness. When I first began my research, I was consistently told even by members of the *ḥāra* that the *rabᶜ* housed at least one hundred to two hundred families. I later discovered that the *rabᶜ* provided housing for only thirty-six families, which is nonetheless a very large number for the physical space available.

Residents of the *rabᶜ* are aware of the stereotypical connotations associated with living in a *rabᶜ*, but they consider themselves as the true Cairenes, or *awlād al-balad*. To them the rest of the *ḥāra*, with few exceptions, is inhabited by *wāḥiyya* migrants who live in huts and work as peddlers. In fact, as we have seen, only twenty-nine families in the *ḥāra* are *wāḥiyya* by origin, and of these only five live in huts.

Elderly people of both sexes who were born or lived most of their lives in the *ḥāra*, believe that both the social life and the physical conditions of the *ḥāra* have deteriorated. In the early decades of the century, the *ḥāra* was dominated by *awlād al-balad*, and other migrant groups composed an inferior, subserviant minority. Elderly people remember the *ḥāra* when its life focused around certain prestigious families who patronized and supported the poorer families. These well-to-do families often held *bayt maftūḥ*, or open house, and on these special occasions they distributed food, meat, or clothes [1]. Most of these wealthy families have now left. Those who have remained in the *ḥāra* have become poorer and now participate in the common life style.

[1] Evidences of this pattern are vividly described by the novelist Naguib Mahfouz who wrote about the life of the traditional quarters during the early decades of this century.

To the elders of the *ḥāra* the major sign of social deterioration in the *ḥāra* is the changing status of the *wāḥīyya* migrant ethnic group. The *wāḥiyya,* who were once an ethnic minority in the *ḥāra,* are now gaining power in terms of number and wealth and are infiltrating the rest of the population. Originally, the *ḥāra* had fewer *wāḥiyya* and they were not engaged in the trading of *fūl mudammas,* but served as porters. As such, the *wāḥiyya* performed various services for members of the *ḥāra.* They were often hired to carry wheat sacks to the mills and return with the flour. Whenever anyone needed help in carrying shopping items, he simply called a *wāḥī* (sing.) away from the coffeehouse near the *ḥāra* where they congregated. *Awlād al-balad* remember the times when they used to slap the *wāḥiyya* on the back of their neck for the smallest mistake. This type of slapping is the most humiliating behavior a male can encounter. The *wāḥiyya* people were ridiculed because they spoke Arabic with a different dialect from *awlād al-balad.* They became subject to even more ridicule when they began to work as garbage collectors. Legend in the *ḥāra* has it that the *wāḥiyya* worked as garbage collectors in the hope that they could improve their status by finding Solomon's lost ring.

As the *wāḥiyya* became established in the *fūl mudammas* business, they also established themselves as members of *ahl al-kar* (those engaged in jobs requiring little technical skill) which, in terms of occupational hierarchy, is not the most esteemed group. Any member of *ahl al-ṣanʿa* (craft speciality) is especially esteemed for his individual skill, regardless of the wealth. A member of *ahl al-kār,* on the other hand, has to acquire this esteem through profit making. A son of a member of *ahl el-kār* can acquire a craft, but the son of *ahl al-ṣanʿa* is not expected or does not aspire to belong to *ahl al-kār* since engaging in such jobs as cooking and selling of food is a job that anyone can undertake. Originally the *wāḥiyya* took this job because they came from their village at an age which did not permit training in a craft. Such training must be begun at an early age. But as the *wāḥiyya* managed to accumulate wealth they began to enjoy greater power and prestige in the *ḥāra.* They are no longer as submissive as they once were. Though no clear cut pattern of segregation between *awlād al-balad* and *wāḥiyya* exists, prejudices each hold about the other become particularly evident during times of conflict. When a fight broke out between a *wāḥiyya* and a member of *awlād al-balad* during the period of my research, a middle-aged woman commented on the entire issue

with the following proverb which summarizes the feelings of *awlād al-balad* toward the *wāḥiyya :*

« He was at the bottom and he rose, he should thank Allah that he did not defecate in the process (and subject himself to public disgrace) ».

The *wāḥiyya* on the other hand, view *awlād al-balad* as incapable of doing the kind of work in which they are engaged. Their jobs require a great tolerance of heat that they believe they can stand because they come from a warmer area of Egypt. To the *wāḥiyya, awlād al-balad* seem less protective of their women and female children. They allow them to wear « indecent » clothes, and the *wāḥiyya* believe that it is only among *awlād al-balad* that loose women can be found; never among the *wāḥiyya*. The *wāḥiyya* consider their children to be more clever and to learn more than those of *awlād al-balad*. They feel, however, that their children are always vulnerable and can be spoiled by the children of *awlād al-balad*. In fact, it is common among the *wāḥiyya* to send their boys, whom they feel are being tempted by children of *awlād al-balad* to neglect schoolwork, to the oases to live with a relative where they will be less distracted and will accomplish more in school.

Residents' Perception of the City

The residents of the *ḥāra* are basically a pedestrian population in the sense that they depend primarily upon walking as a means of transportation both within and outside the *ḥāra*. Because the streets of Old Cairo are congested with pedestrians, vehicles, and peddlers with their carts, the uninitiated pedestrian can find walking difficult. It took me some time to learn how to keep up with the various residents whom I accompanied on their perambulations through the city. I often bumped into people and moved very slowly. Noticing my lack of expertise, one of my informants gave me the following advice :

« When you walk in a crowded street lean with one shoulder forward, move fast, and take a zig-zag. Train your eye to see in all directions at the same time ».

Ḥāra residents' perception of the city and their cognitive mapping varies somewhat with their individual experiences, although among some groups, such as children, women, and *fūl mudammas* peddlers, certain patterns are recognizable.

The preschool child's experience of the city is within the orbit of his female relatives, generally his mother or an elder sister. As soon as the child learns to crawl he is allowed to crawl out of the house and play in the passage next to his parent's lodging. When he matures enough to understand the purchasing power of money, he is given a piaster to buy himself candy or peanuts from one of the women traders in the *ḥāra.* More often than not, the child reaches this stage before he can actually master his own language. *Qirš,* or piaster, is among the first words that the child of the *hāra* learns.

By the time the child is three, he is allowed to move with liberty throughout the *ḥāra* and its offshoots. He can go as far as *bāb al-ḥāra* to run errands for his mother or buy goods from the grocer. But he will rarely venture outside of *bāb al-ḥāra* unaccompanied. Leaving the *ḥāra* would mean losing not only his sense of direction, but also possibly his life by being hit by a car or bus. The use of the word *tetūh* — to lose one's way — demarcates the boundaries outside of which the child will not venture for fear of losing his way. The *munādī,* a specialist hired to announce publically the loss of a child, is a role which still exists in Old Cairene quarters. As an infant, it is customary that the child accompanies his mother in almost all of her tours outside of the *ḥāra.* She usually carries him on one or the other shoulder in order to free her hands for carrying various things.

A child is said to have passed the stage of infancy when he is capable of *odeyan. Odeyan* is a colloquial term meaning « to accomplish quickly ». The word is used in two senses. On the one hand, it means to accomplish the task of running errands and buying daily household needs for the family, and on the other hand it means to accomplish household tasks. At such a time as the child is capable of *odeyan,* he also begins venturing outside of the *ḥāra* without fright. At first, both male and female children get a sense of accomplishment from the achievement of *odeyan.* Female children continue to perform this role until they marry and have children who take over the task of running errands. A boy, however, will at one point in his life reject his role as errand-runner. When he does so, he is considered as having stepped out of childhood. The second type of *odeyan* which refers to helping with household tasks is strictly a female role and continues to be so throughout life.

A child's perception of the city corresponds remarkably with his continual role as errand-runner. Goods in the *ḥāra* are bought daily for immediate

consumption. With the exception of the public employees, wages are received on a weekly or daily basis. *Ahl al-kār* receive their pay on the spot while *ahl al-ṣanʿa* are paid weekly. Accordingly, women receive household allowance either daily or weekly. This basic factor accompanied by the lack of refrigeration in all houses as well as the lack of space for storage, is a possible explanation for the prevailing pattern of spending. In addition, I noticed that an individual's possessions, including food, are often borrowed and shared by other members of the *ḥāra*. Thus if one acquires something in abundance he must share it with his neighbors. Because they are aware of such patterns of borrowing, members of the *ḥāra* only buy enough food for immediate consumption. Otherwise sharing is inevitable. Thus food is bought before each meal; soap is bought only when all other soap is used; cigarettes are often bought by the cigarette, and so on. This kind of spending pattern is further encouraged by the fact that the area outside of the *ḥāra* is a commercial zone and anything needed for daily use can readily be found there.

It is the child's job to run back and forth quickly, buying various goods. Elderly people entice neighbor's children with a treat to run errands for them. In fact, as we noted, it is not uncommon for a grandchild to move into his grandparent's home in order to accomplish whatever needed tasks and errands they may need to have performed. Though a mother usually goes to the market two or three times weekly for major purchases such as meat or poultry, her children are constantly running errands. In fact, children are ranked according to how quickly they can accomplish their errands and according to the quality of the goods they have acquired. If a child purchases something of poor quality he is forced to return it, thus children become good buyers at an early age.

The child's perception of the city outside of the *ḥāra* is largely in terms of which sellers are the closest to his home and which carry the best merchandise. To children, streets are more often known by the salesmen in them than by their names. Children teach each other shortcuts to certain places. These shortcuts can include passing through a mosque or jumping over a neighbor's wall; during the summer, sheltered and cool paths are preferred over sunny ones.

Besides their errand routes, children also take particular routes to school. Most of the *ḥāra* children attend schools within walking distance and the schools are usually located within the area with which they are familiar through their

purchasing efforts. The routes followed to and from school, however, are often different from those used in errand-running. Each child receives lunch money which, though it is meant to be used for food, is also used to buy toys and games. Neither the food nor the toys and games can be purchased in school, and thus the routes pursued vary according to what particular items the child wishes to purchase on his way to or from school.

Two major boundaries break the child's movement into any area of the city. These are the by-passes or thoroughfares such as al-Azhar or Ṣalāḥ Sālim street, and major squares such as Mīdān Bāb al-Ḫalq. When the boys outgrow their *odeyan* stage (which may be as early as nine or ten years of age), they often work as apprentices in various workshops, either in the *ḥāra* or nearby. As apprentices, however, their tasks do not differ much from those which they supposedly outgrew at home. In fact, their task in the workshop is also called *odeyan*. In this role, their major responsibility is buying food, cigarettes, and beverages for the adult members of the workshop, though they may sometimes be assigned to such tasks as buying minor equipment. More ironic, however, is the fact that as apprentices they are required to sweep and clean the workshop, a task which in the home is relegated strictly to females. The movements and knowledge of the male child about the city are thus not much different from those of the female child. However, male children of *fūl mudammas* peddlers who work as apprentices for their parents, in addition to having the experience of other children, have a wider knowledge of the city.

A woman's perception and knowledge of the city is associated with her major role as a housewife responsible for buying the food necessities for the family. A residential area is judged as good or bad on the basis of its food markets. The market must be close to the house and must have good quality products which are also cheap. In their movements and descriptions of the different districts of the city, the women often associate the district with its market. As my apartment in Cairo was not located near a market, my informants from the *ḥāra* found it a very confusing place of residence. They could not imagine how they would be able to manage their lives in such a place without a market nearby.

The movements of the women of the *ḥāra* to different districts of the city depend on their network of relatives and friends. On visits to these friends and relatives the women always take food items with them and return with food given to them.

Because they know the specialities of each other's market, they supplement deficiencies of their own market with goods from the other one.

Although individual women have different social networks which expose them to different parts of the city, the women of the *ḥāra* as a group commonly share knowledge of particular religious places. Belief in saints constitutes a major element in their belief system, and districts of the city are known to these women by the name of their particular saints and the locations of their shrines. Women visit these saints' shrines frequently, either alone or as a group, depending upon the occasion and the reason for the visit. The powers of saints are thought to rest in their capacity to communicate with the supernatural. As intermediaries between the believers and Allah, saints are expected to render services for the believers, but each saint has his own speciality and powers regarding the kinds of services it can provide. Thus, a woman visits the shrine of *al-Sayyida* if she feels depressed, while one who wishes to have a baby visits *al-Ḥusayn.*

The women of the *hāra* are also very familiar with the « city of the dead », known as *qarāfa* (cemeteries). Visits to the qarāfa are rarely made alone, and though men may accompany women there, visits during religious festivals are mainly a female ritual. Visiting the *qarāfa* does not solely involve paying homage to the deceased. It is a social occasion which requires considerable preparation. Traditional baked goods, including *šyrīk* and *feṭā'ir* are prepared in advance, and fruits, cheese, olives, and pickles are also carried. Some of these food items are distributed to the poor, but most of them are eaten by those present during the day-long visit (from sunrise to sunset). When someone has just died, the visit calls for crying and wailing. However, if no one has recently died, going to the *qarāfa* on feast days is a joyful event. In general, this part of the city is perceived as a place where women are exposed to open air, where they have a chance to see other relatives, and enjoy each other's baked goods and other foods.

Since no buses run through the *qarāfa,* the women depend primarily on horse carts for transportation. Although taxis may be used, the horse carts are preferred since they can be loaded with food supplies, water jars, cushions, and quilts to make the group's stay in the *qarāfa* more comfortable. Carts which are commonly used for transporting merchandise and food products can also be used for transporting people from one place to the other in the Old Cairene quarters. It is rare to find men making use of this type of transportation. Previous agreement

with *ʿarabgi niswān,* or a woman's cart driver, must be sought in order to rent a cart for going to and returning from, the *qarāfa.* These carts will also follow routes which lead to and from saints' shrines in the old quarters of the city.

The male members of the *wāḥiyya* travel more than any other inhabitants of the *ḥāra* and over greater distances to areas which do not belong to traditional Cairo. Daily, they leave the *ḥāra* before sunrise and disperse into the city with their decorated carts packed with copper pots of *fūl mudammas.* The *wāḥiyya* differ from other peddlers in that they do not constantly move from one spot to another in order to sell their merchandise. Rather, each of them picks out a specific spot in the city and remains there awaiting his customers. These spots are known to the *wāḥiyya* by the term, *sūq,* which denotes a private market belonging to a single individual. The term does not refer to a shop or a piece of land rented by the *wāḥī.* It is merely a convenient spot in the city, usually a corner of an intersection whose usage is defended on the basis of precedence. A *wāḥī* who wishes to begin selling *fūl mudammas* must survey the city in order to locate a spot which seems to have high potential for his merchandise. An example of such a spot would be one close to a governmental building dealing with public services. It is expected that such a place attracts a large number of people — employees or customers — who would be interested in buying *fūl mudammas.* When a *wāḥī* finds a free spot such as this, that is not monopolized by another, he makes it his *sūq.* Once established, no one can take his place unless he willingly sells it. The spot is usually known by the name of its salesman, and other involved in the *fūl mudammas* business recognize the spot as that *wāḥī's sūq.* While these spots are part of the streets which are government property and no individual can legally buy or sell them, and while it is equally illegal to peddle from a stationary spot in the street, a *wāḥī* who buys a particular *sūq* is actually not buying the land on which he stands; rather, he is buying the right to the other's customers, his fame as a salesman, and the good will of the public official who is ready to disregard his presence. Sometimes a *sūq* is sold or deserted because the public official in charge of the area has changed and the salesman does not know how to approach the new one.

The adult male *wāḥī* mainly perceives the city in terms of intersections and of whether or not these intersections would make a good or a bad *sūq.* A *wāḥī* goes to his *sūq* daily and returns to the *ḥāra* after the time of the *wagba,* or meal, is

over. This usually covers the period from 6 : 00 a.m. till 11 : 00 a.m. Beyond the immediate experience of buying and selling *fūl mudammas,* the *wāḥī* rarely interacts with the residents of these districts, nor does he return to his *sūq* for other purposes. As such he brings back very little of the culture of those areas into the *ḥāra.*

Young men, whether *wāḥiyya, awlād al-balad,* or any other group move around the city for recreational purposes on weekends. Thus they are familiar with the downtown movies, public gardens, and the Nile bank. They go to these places individually or in groups, but are rarely accompanied by their families. On feast days children and teen-agers of both sexes share these recreational areas with the young men.

I have tried to demonstrate how the *ḥāra* as an ecological and historical concept related to other administrative and socio-cultural units in the city at large. Demographically, the *ḥāra* represents one of the densest administrative units of the city. Socially and culturally the residents of the *ḥāra* belong to the most traditional sectors of Cairo. If one could expect to find a traditional relationship anywhere in Cairo, it would be primarily prevalent in such a setting. I have also tried to show the various structural and cultural diversities that exist in the *ḥāra* resulting from its location in an urban setting.

AnIsl 15 (1976), p. 313-348 Nawāl Al-Messiri Nadim
The Concept of the ḥāra. A Historical and Sociological Study of al-Sukkariyya.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abu-Lughod, J., 1969 : « Testing the Theory of Social Area Analysis : The Ecology of Cairo, Egypt », *in American Sociological Review,* April : 198-212, 34.

——, 1971 : *Cairo 1001 Years of the City Victorious.* N.J. : Princeton University Press.

al-Ğāmiʿa al-Maṣriyya, 1970 : *Dirasa Iğtimaʿiyya li-l-'usra wa'l-ḫadamāt bi Hayy al-Darb al-Aḥmar.* (Sociological Study of Services and the Family in al-Darb al-Aḥmar). Cairo : Social Research Office.

Gayer-Anderson, R.G., 1951 : *Legends of Beit al-Kretlya.* Ipswich : The East Anglian Daily Times.

Lane, E.W., 1860 : *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians.* London : Everyman's Library. (First Published in 1836).

Lane-Poole, Stanley, 1884 : *Social Life in Egypt.* New York : P.F. Collier.

Lapidus, Ira M., 1967 : *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages.* Cambridge : Harvard University Press.

——, 1969 : (ed.) *Middle Eastern Cities.* Berkeley : University of California Press.

al-Maqrizī, Taqi al-Dīn Aḥmad (1364-1442), 1877 : *Al mawāʿiẓ wa'l-iʿtibār fī ḏikr al-ḫiṭaṭ wa'l-Aṯar* (Lessons and Considerations in Knowing the Structure of Countries). 2 vols. Cairo : (First Published 1853).

al-Messiri, Sawsan, 1974 : « The Role of the Futuwwa in the Social Structure of the City of Cairo ». *Paper* for the Conference on Changing Forms of Patronage.

——, 1970 : *The Concept of Ibn al-Balad.* Unpublished M.A. Thesis. The American University in Cairo.

Mubārak, ʿAlī, 1889 : *Al-Ḫiṭaṭ al-Tawfiqiyya al-Ğadida li-Miṣr al-Qāhira.* Cairo.

Raymond, André, 1963 : « Essai de géographie des quartiers de résidence aristocratique au Caire au XVIII[e] siècle », *in Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient.* VI : 58-103.

——, 1968 : « Quartiers populaires au Caire au XVIII[e] siècle », *in Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt.* P.M. Holt, ed. London : Oxford University Press.

Staffa, S.J., 1968 : Medieval Cairo : *A Socio-Cultural Study of an Historic Urban Center of the Near East.* Unpublished Doctorat Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Indian University.