

Le quartier des chiffonniers de Manshiat Nasser au Caire : un espace disputé

Contested spaces within Cairo's Garbage City

Wael Salah Fahmi



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ema/3008>

DOI: 10.4000/ema.3008

ISSN: 2090-7273

Publisher

CEDEJ - Centre d'études et de documentation économiques juridiques et sociales

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2011

Number of pages: 59-83

ISBN: 978-2-905838-47-7

ISSN: 1110-5097

Electronic reference

Wael Salah Fahmi, "Le quartier des chiffonniers de Manshiat Nasser au Caire : un espace disputé", *Égypte/Monde arabe* [Online], 8 | 2011, document 8, Online since 01 September 2012, connection on 07 July 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ema/3008> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ema.3008>

RÉSUMÉ / ABSTRACT

LE QUARTIER DES CHIFFONNIERS DE MANSHIAT NASSER AU CAIRE : UN ESPACE DISPUTÉ

L'existence de communautés pauvres habitant dans des quartiers spontanés révèle bien la montée des disparités socio-économiques depuis les années 1970 suite à la politique économique libérale (Infitah) et au programme des années 1990 dit d'ajustement structurel impulsé par le FMI. Un exemple typique de ces poches de pauvreté est le quartier Manshiat Nasser qui inclut le secteur du Muqattam connu pour être habité par les chiffonniers du Caire. Le présent article explore la présence contestée des chiffonniers par les autorités qui a projeté leur déplacement en lointaine banlieue du fait de la prise en charge de la collecte des ordures ménagères par le secteur privé formel. Les conclusions soulignent les effets néfastes de la privatisation des systèmes de gestion des déchets. Derrière la justification officielle de l'expulsion des chiffonniers au titre de « l'amélioration de leur environnement », un agenda caché vise à sécuriser et réserver l'accès à la terre pour des projets de développement urbain et autres activités de spéculation foncière. Le texte propose une analyse du jeu d'acteurs, tout en préconisant une action politique radicale et de planification concertée pour la consolidation d'une gouvernance urbaine « bottom-up ». Il est nécessaire pour cela de renforcer la capacité des populations urbaines pauvres à négocier avec les autorités locales pour sécuriser leur présence au plan de la propriété du foncier et pour reconnaître leur rôle majeur dans la collecte des ordures de la ville. Des partenariats entre la communauté des chiffonniers, les ONG, les autorités locales et les planificateurs permettraient de soutenir des initiatives durables visant à améliorer leurs conditions de logement et les services de base, à développer les petites entreprises et des moyens de transport abordables.

CONTESTED SPACES WITHIN CAIRO'S GARBAGE CITY

Cairo's spontaneous poor communities signify the growing socio-economic disparity since the 1970's open-door economic liberalisation and the 1990s IMF structural adjustment program. A typical example of these poverty belts is the Manshiet Nasser settlement and its Garbage City, located on Muqattam Mountain's lower plateau within Cairo's eastern fringes. The current paper explores contested spatiality within Garbage City in relation to the *Zabaleen's* right to their inner city areas, and their potential relocation to suburban new settlements as a result of the privatization of Cairo's waste management systems. The study's findings highlight the adverse effects of the privatization of waste management systems. Behind the declared official rationalisation for eviction proposals of the *Zabaleen* in terms of "improving the environment", there lies a wider but hidden agenda in terms of securing access to land for urban development projects and land speculation activities. The paper proposes a stakeholder approach to the sustainable development of inner city poverty areas, whilst advocating radical policy action and collaborative planning for consolidating bottom-up urban governance. There is a need to strengthen urban poor's capacity to negotiate with local authorities for security of land tenure and legal recognition of Garbage City. Partnerships between community based groups, NGOs, local authorities, and planners would support the urban poor's sustainable initiatives to improve their housing standards and basic services, and to develop small scale enterprises and affordable transport means.

Architecte de formation à l'Université du Caire, WAEEL FAHMI a obtenu son doctorat en aménagement du territoire et du paysage soutenu à l'Université de Manchester (Royaume-Uni). Maître de conférences, il enseigne l'architecture et l'urbanisme à l'Université de Helwan au Caire. Il a participé à de nombreux programmes de recherche portant entre autres sur les questions de croissance urbaine, la crise du logement, l'extension des banlieues et la gestion des déchets. Ses publications récentes ont porté sur les mouvements de rue et la patrimonialisation contestée du centre-ville du Caire.

WAEEL FAHMI was trained as an architect at Cairo University and received his PhD in Planning and Landscape from the University of Manchester (UK). He teaches architecture and urban design as an Associate Professor of Urbanism at the Architecture Department- Helwan University in Cairo. As a visiting academic at University of Manchester, he has been undergoing joint

research on Greater Cairo's urban growth problems, housing crisis, suburban gated communities, historical Bazaar, cemetery informal settlements and garbage collectors community, focusing on the development of urban poverty areas, population eviction and resettlement. Recent research work includes street movements and 19th century and early 20th century architectural heritage and contested European Quarter.

CONTESTED SPACES WITHIN CAIRO'S GARBAGE CITY

INTRODUCTION

Over the decades, the *Zabaleen* have created what is arguably one of the world's most efficient resource recovery and waste recycling systems (Figures 1 and 2). Yet the continuation of this intricate relationship between community, environment, and livelihood is jeopardized by official municipalities' privatization plans of solid waste services through contracting technology-intensive multinational corporations. Such attempts at privatization threaten the socio-economic sustainability of garbage collectors community as it fails to allow people to build incrementally on their technologically appropriate indigenous patterns of living. Because the authorities do not intend to compensate them for these changes, the *Zabaleen* could lose access to their economic assets; waste garbage. This situation has led the authorities to pursue a policy of moving the *Zabaleen* activities further out of the city, claiming that this will turn *Zabaleen* neighborhoods into cleaner living environments while still allowing the waste garbage sorting, recovering, trading, and recycling to occur. But such relocation plans will increase the *Zabaleen's* traveling distance and cost of services delivered to residential and commercial places, thus creating new risks for the sustainability of the *Zabaleen* foothold on trade and livelihood.

The paper investigates recently launched privatization plans of local solid waste management in Cairo, focusing on local attitudes towards its adverse effects on the sustainability of recycling economy and urban settlement system of garbage collectors' communities (Fahmi 2005; Fahmi and Sutton 2006). According to official development strategy, the privatization of solid waste services is regarded as being fundamental to overall government plans for the rehabilitation of Medieval Cairo. The objectives of the rehabilitation programme tend to favour

tourist-orientated projects, whilst ignoring the interests of the local population (Sutton and Fahmi 2002a; Fahmi and Sutton 2003), through the proposed removal of informal '*Zabaleen*' settlements in Muqattam mountain, and through the future evacuation of the proximate Eastern Cemetery from tomb dwellers and shanty town buildings (Sutton and Fahmi 2002b).

An empirical small area field survey was administered within Garbage City, employing ethnographic techniques of open-ended interviews with primary stakeholder households (waste garbage collectors). Qualitative data and narratives were gathered during focus group discussions dealing with garbage collectors' attitudes towards the future of their settlements, and their coping strategies with the threat of enforced eviction. Informal discussions were carried out with secondary stakeholder agencies (community based groups, the local municipality, NGO agencies) concerning potential gentrification programmes and proposed relocation plans.

The findings emphasize the significance of poverty alleviation initiatives in restructuring solid waste collection and recycling industry development, whilst building local capacity through developing new channels for cooperation and partnership between garbage collec-



Figure 1– Zabaleen Garbage City.

Source: Author 2007.

tors' association (*Gammiya*), grass roots organizations, and between local authorities and multinational waste management companies. In order to promote sustainable livelihoods and better opportunities for the urban poor, the study emphasizes the need to draw on the sustainable flow of local resources within low-income *Zabaleen*, whilst seeking new means of supporting land acquisition and its development for improved housing standards, basic services, and environmental quality.

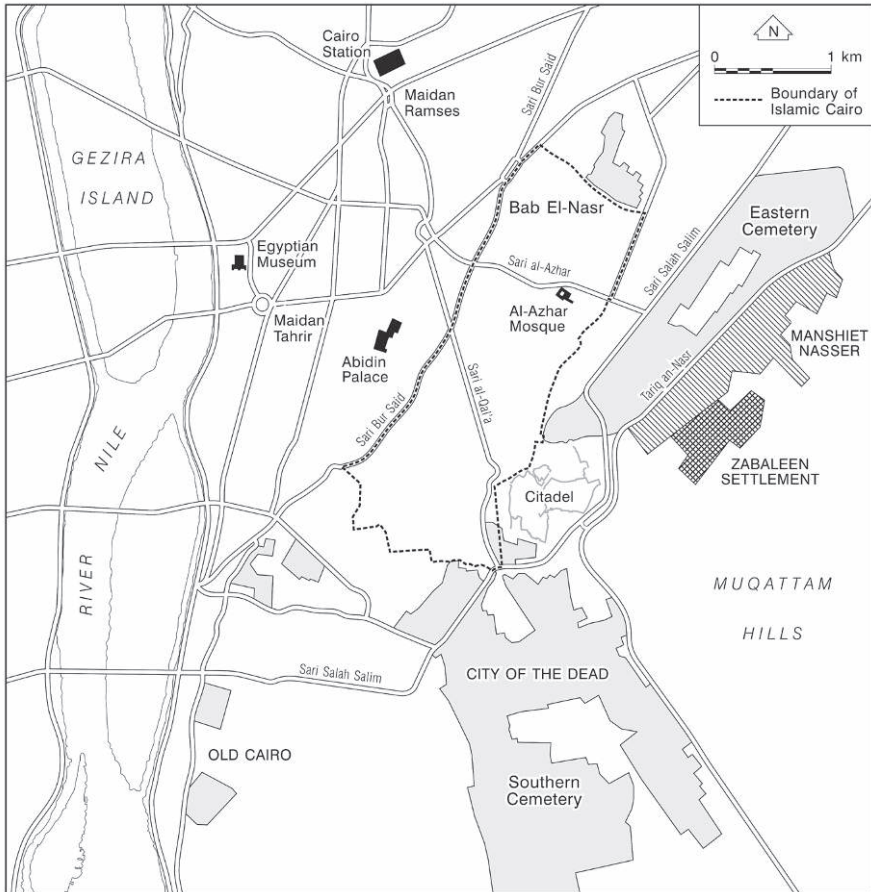


Figure 2– Location of the Muqattam Zabaleen Settlement.

Source: Fahmi, Wael and Keith Sutton (2006).

PRIVATIZATING CAIRO'S WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Various authors have noted the central, but unacknowledged role of informal waste collectors within municipal solid waste management systems. Accordingly, in order to achieve sustainability within waste management systems, the state should formally recognise the significant role played by waste collectors and other informal actors. Visser and Theron (2009) argued for the need to promote alternatives to private sector models whilst improving the conditions of those currently working in the informal waste management sector. Bjerkli (2005) and Nzeadibe (2009) indicated that the state's failure to acknowledge and engage with the informal waste collectors meant that interventions to transform the waste management system have unintended consequences and ultimately cannot succeed.

Rouse and Ali (2001) discussed the sustainable livelihoods approach in relation to waste pickers (collectors), whose aspirations were categorized into various core concepts. Firstly, "vulnerability context", which is related to environmental conditions affecting waste collectors' activities. Secondly, "asset profiles", which consist of various forms of capital: human capital, social capital (waste pickers' relationships with dealers), physical capital (poor living conditions), and financial capital (low income levels). Thirdly, "transforming structures and processes" are related to government decisions on land which affect both waste pickers' livelihoods and the security of their homes, especially when they have little access to structures such as the legal system.

Dias (2000) examined the developments in waste collection and recycling in Belo Horizonte City, in the south-east region of Brazil, where the municipal administration has integrated waste pickers through waste pickers' associations. The Swabhimana Platform in Bangalore, India, launched in 1995, aimed to promote people's participation in the planning, development, and management of Bangalore City. Participants of the Platform included Resident Associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business organisations, and civic agencies such as the Bangalore Development Authority and the Bangalore City Corporation (BCC). The platform advocated a sustainable waste management system, which involved local community-based organisation, whilst developing a land fill and sites for neighbourhood composting projects.

Closely relevant to the *Zabaleen's* case study is the Vincentian Missionaries' (1998) development of a federation of scavengers (waste collectors/pickers) who live close to a major solid waste dump (Payatas)

in Quezon City, the Philippines. The Foundation and other NGOs have supported scavengers and later facilitated a study tour to the *Zabaleen* waste management system in Cairo to allow a consideration of possible technology transfer. Relating the Payatas experience to the *Zabaleen* system paved the way for the formulation of a Payatas Environmental Development Programme, which advocated an alternative waste management system to open dumping, and involved setting up a community-based materials recovery centre, harnessing the waste-picking and recycling skills of scavengers and micro-entrepreneurs, and further supplementing these skills with environmentally friendly technology for solid waste processing and composting. The materials recovery centre was not conceived as an industrial entity but as organized clusters of community based enterprises involved in solid waste recycling or product-enhancing activities. A successful savings and credit programme was initiated to fund micro-enterprises and social needs, including a housing programme. The Federation has also increased the scavengers' capacity to negotiate with local authorities and other government agencies.

The September 2008 rockslide at Duweiqia district within Manshiet Nasser settlement has brought waste garbage collectors (*Zabaleen*) to the attention of official authorities who consequently renewed their demands for the *Zabaleen* resettlement from the Muqattam area. In 1993 the Garbage City was subjected to a similar rockslide. Such frequent rockslides might be attributed to various development construction activities occurring within Muqattam Mountain's upper plateau (Muqattam City is regarded as an upper middle class residential district). In addition the *Zabaleen* began losing their licenses, when international waste management companies started taking over Cairo's waste collection routes, for annual contracts reaching US\$ 50 million. The *Zabaleen* represent the traditional school of recycling against the larger international waste collection companies namely ; FCC and Urbaser, Enser (Spanish), AMA (Italian) , as well as the Egyptian Company for Garbage Collection (ECGC) who are starting to venture into Egypt to take advantage of a potentially profitable niche in the market. More significantly, to improve living conditions for the people of Muqattam and neighbouring communities like Manshiet Nasser, Cairo Governorate decided to move sections of the *Zabaleen* operations (waste garbage recycling procedures, animal rearing activities) 25 kms away to a 50-feddan plot (1 feddan = 1.038 acres), in Cairo's eastern desert settlement of Katameya. The suggested resettlement site is the same location where other government plans have sought to relocate both activities and people from Medieval Cairo and from the eastern cemeteries (Sutton and Fahmi 2002b).

Officials from The Cairo Cleaning and Beautification Authority (CCBA) regarded the *Zabaleen's* indigenous methods of waste garbage collection as unhygienic, and were optimistic about the prospect of investors and entrepreneurs establishing 10 to 12 new recycling facilities in Cairo's eastern fringes. While the *Zabaleen* had previously recycled some 80 percent of the waste collected, foreign companies are required to recycle only 20 percent, with the remainder going into a new landfill. The *Zabaleen* would continue collecting waste garbage, but they would be working for foreign companies, which would also be responsible for street sweeping and the placement of garbage bins. Officials at CCBA, however, seemed to be overlooking the fact that the large companies cannot collect from narrow streets as their mechanized equipment is too large. The companies require residents to take their garbage to central collection points, whereas the *Zabaleen* were able to collect waste from individual houses even if they were located in narrow alleyways.

Nonetheless, despite the benefits promised under foreign management, and while company sources mention salaries ranging between LE 300 to LE 450 per month (USD 50- US\$ 75), some *Zabaleen* claim that the salaries on offer are actually closer to LE 150 per month (US\$ 25). Similar figures were given by one waste garbage collector and sorter with eight children who claimed to make LE 10 a day (US\$ 1.60) compared with the LE 5 a day (US\$ 0.80) offered by the foreign contractors. It appears that the companies realized that keeping the *Zabaleen* completely out of the system was not an option if they wanted to complete the task of waste disposal. Instead, foreign companies have started hiring the *Zabaleen* as subcontractors, paying them LE 0.85 (US\$ 0.14) for each apartment from which they collect waste garbage. While this is less than their previous collection fee of LE 3 (US\$ 0.50) received from the *wahiya*, the new arrangement gives them access to waste garbage for recycling. However, the *Zabaleen* claim that they make 90 per cent of their income from recycling the waste garbage rather than from the collection fee.

Local Cairene households, while initially enthusiastic about environmental improvements within their neighbourhoods following the restructuring of solid waste management, were sceptical about the direct economic benefits they might gain from the privatization project. Instead they preferred to continue dealing directly with the waste garbage collectors, rejecting the government's plans to have them pay extra fees for services provided by multinational companies. Consequently, in spite of recent privatisation plans and official restrictions on their activities, the *Zabaleen* continue to collect waste garbage alongside the operations of multinational companies and local municipalities, an indication of ongoing competition for Cairo's daily waste garbage. The

Zabaleen work throughout the day in shifts, as each group sorts waste garbage on-site into piles of cardboard, glass, and plastic for later collection. This is then done with the aid of donkey carts, mini-cabs, small trucks, as well as on foot.

Respondents at the local NGO "Community and Institutional Development" (CID) expressed reservations about the impact of the privatization of waste garbage services on the Muqattam *Zabaleen* community and the role played by large international waste collection companies. Members of the CID are strong opponents of the decision to force the 27,000 Muqattam workers to relocate their recycling operations. While a leading member of the CID appreciates the government's desire to keep the city clean, he recognises the adverse social effects of the project: "The *Zabaleen* are facing a real crisis. The authorities need to look at the effects their decision could have on local income, employment, economic growth, trade, manufacturing, and environmental conditions. I would like to see the operations of the *Zabaleen* formalized and given a fair chance to use new recycling technologies. The idea of moving them to the desert and squeezing them further out of their trade is not right. These contracts are costing the city big money. Why not spend just 10 percent of such a budget to upgrade the *Zabaleen* system?"

Closely relevant to the privatization plans and proposed eviction of the *Zabaleen* from the Muqattam area were recent measures imposed by the Ministry of Health during the swine flu pandemic, in terms of getting rid of the *Zabaleens'* pigs in the name of environmental and sanitary precautions.

THE SWINE FLU PANDEMIC: OFFICIAL PRECAUTIONS AND THE SLAUGHTERING OF THE ZABALEEN'S PIGS

The 2009 H1N1 'swine flu' pandemic fortunately proved not to be the disaster which had been predicted, except for those concerned with Mexico's tourist industry or with Cairo's solid waste recycling activities. The *Zabaleen* recyclers saw their main processor of organic waste, namely their herds of pigs, slaughtered by the Egyptian Government ostensibly on health grounds. Despite the general agreement that swine flu is not transmitted from pigs to humans, but rather directly from one person to another, the Egyptian Government ordered the slaughter of up to 300,000 pigs. Later a post-facto justification was made on the grounds that a combined bird flu and swine flu outbreak, following mutation, would have endangered Egypt's population.

The Egyptian Agricultural Ministry ordered the slaughter in April 2009 and, by doing so, imperilled the livelihood of about 70,000 *Zabaleen* families. The reported number of pigs slaughtered varies from 190,000 to 300,000, with the higher figure being most frequently quoted. Governmental health officials declared that 'It has been decided to immediately start slaughtering all the pigs in Egypt using the full capacity of the country's slaughterhouses', in response to the Swine Flu. The government regarded the plan of culling 300,000 pigs as a judicious precaution to calm fears of the imminent pandemic. Such a decision affected the livelihood of thousands of *Zabaleen* pig farmers across Egypt, as poor waste garbage collectors expressed their concerns that the slaughter is just the beginning, and that the government is plotting to remove 'Garbage city' and relocate its inhabitants.

Besides selling paper, plastic, and homemade handicrafts from recycled waste garbage, pigs are the main source of income for the *Zabaleen*. Hitherto, the *Zabaleen* claimed to collect 6,000 tons of garbage a day, of which 40% was food and organic waste which their pigs consumed. Every 6 months, waste garbage collectors sell between 5 and 15 adult pigs to traders for LE 7 per kilogram (US\$ 1.25 per kilogram). The trader then takes pigs to the slaughterhouses, where a kilogram is sold for LE 30–35 (US\$ 5–6.25). The waste garbage collectors can earn around LE 450 (US\$ 80) per pig.

Such governmental action forced all pork processors and retail outlets to close. Bereft of their herds of pigs, the *Zabaleen* stopped collecting organic waste, leaving piles of such garbage in streets and other public places. Thereafter, rotting piles of food blighted the streets in middle-class neighbourhoods like Heliopolis, as well as in poorer districts like Imbaba. The threat of swine flu was replaced by the threat of typhus. The FAO declared Egypt's action a mistake, while Egyptian Coptic Christians complained that the slaughter represented religious bias by the Muslim majority. No Egyptian was reported as falling ill with swine flu before the slaughter; since then 891 cases were reported, including two deaths¹.

There were protest riots on the part of some *Zabaleen* in their district of Manshiet Nasser-Muqattam. Signs of malnutrition reportedly appeared amongst *Zabaleen* children as pig-meat had been a major

1. Williams, D. *Swine Flu slaughter leaves Cairo without pigs to devour trash*; Available online: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news> (accessed on 15 January 2010).

source of protein for them. Whereas the authorities claimed that the slaughtering was humane, according to Islamic law, witnesses stated that much cruelty occurred, although the outcry failed to stop the butchery. The reason for the slaughter of pigs changed over time as health officials worldwide claimed that the flu virus was not passed on directly by pigs. Now, the Government claims that the cull was no longer about the flu threat but was about belatedly cleaning up the *Zabaleen's* crowded, filthy neighbourhood.²

Government compensation of US\$10 – \$50 per pig was paid although prior to the slaughter, meat processors would pay the *Zabaleen* producers \$200 per pig. The government has offered 250LE (US\$ 45) as compensation for an adult pig, LE 100 (US\$ 18) for a male pig, and LE 50 (US\$ 9) for a piglet. A month later, the Minister of Agriculture decided to keep 1,000 pigs and breed them in specialized governmental farms near 15th of May City (an industrial area outside Cairo), to preserve the origins of Egyptian stock, while the pigs' owners will be compensated financially. It is uncertain whether the *Zabaleen* will have an opportunity to begin pig breeding again.

As a result of slaughtering the pigs, many garbage collectors stopped collecting organic waste. In addition, International Environmental Services (IES) suspended operations in Giza governorate for few months, from April 2009 until September 2009, as a result of a financial dispute with the Municipality. This has contributed to the piling up of garbage, with organic waste being a source of infectious diseases. Some waste garbage collectors have also abandoned the recycling business, because without pigs, the tedious work of sorting through paper, cans and bottles is economically unfeasible. According to one waste garbage collector who lost his pigs: "Now there's nothing. I spend my time in cafes. The government paid me between LE 50 (US\$ 10) and LE 250 (US\$ 50) for each pig I lost, depending on its size, whilst meat processors would have given me as much as LE 1,000 (US\$ 200)."

2. The New York Times, 2009, *Cleaning Cairo but taking a livelihood*, 25 May; Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed on 15 January 2010); The New York Times, 2009, *Belatedly, Egypt Spots Flaws in Wiping Out Pigs*, 20 September; Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed 15 January 2010); BBC News, 2009, *Struggling after Egypt's pig cull*, 6 August; Available online: <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/> (accessed on 15 January 2010).

PROPOSING THE RELOCATION OF THE ZABALEEN'S RECYCLING ACTIVITIES

Fahmi's (2005) study indicated that the residents most affected by the relocation plans, the *Zabaleen*, were either tenants or house owners. Their negative attitudes towards the government's plans focused on the expected loss of their recycling economy and associated activities and on the threat of eviction and lack of security of tenure amongst house and *zeriba* owners. Most of them had no official documents to prove their ownership of buildings, and thus they faced possible eviction with minimal compensation. The issue of compensation was raised in terms of who would be eligible, with questions about whether there would be enough replacement housing, where it would be located and whether it would be accessible to employment and to such services as schools and health centres. A number of respondents expressed their anxiety: "I will not work anymore if this happens. I won't be able to afford to. If I am forced to move my work to the desert and leave my wife and daughters to work 20 km away from home, then I will stop collecting Cairo's rubbish. My family earns about LE 500 (USD83) a month, which is more than enough... But moving to Katameya will cost more in transportation. This has been our home for many years now. We have grown up, worked, and raised families here."

The government's short term proposals for the relocation of the *Zabaleen* recycling activities will lead to long term eviction of waste garbage collectors as they are forced, under economic hardship, to move from their homes in Muqattam, in which they have lived for decades. Such long-term 'imposed' evictions within the *Zabaleen* settlement reflect the differences in political power within the society, where economic interests resort to the law or to municipal authorities who have the power to evict people for the good of society. Conditions in the new sites are poor, without local employment opportunities and few services. Despite their initial denial concerning the future eviction of the local community, interviews with key government officials revealed their justification for such settlement schemes as being attributed to 'improving the environment' and 'providing the *Zabaleen* with safer and more sustainable settlements'. Such an authoritarian approach is more likely to result in the implementation of such plans with large-scale evictions together with a lack of dialogue with poor *Zabaleen* and their organizations.

Government 'low-cost' resettlement housing projects within the new eastern settlement of Katameya have brought few benefits, since they often end up in the hands of middle-class groups. Whilst

selected sites for relocation were too far from city centre and housing too costly for low-income households, the government did not consider the provision of services such as transport and water. Ironically, the government machinery set up to respond to the housing problems of the poor has in fact been used against them. This is the case despite policies in the 1980's, which sought to regularize (legalize) and upgrade *Zabaleen* areas.

The study revealed the key role played by community leaders in organizing the struggle of poor *Zabaleen* for land in terms of the alliances developing between low-income households threatened with eviction and local NGOs and community development intermediaries. Such alliances can provide legal advice and help gain greater local and national support for the threatened communities who depend on the micro-enterprise recycling economy and who need to live in central locations to earn their livelihoods. Accordingly, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of low-income *Zabaleen* to negotiate with local authorities to improve access to public services, to provide infrastructure and to seek legal solutions and official recognition for low-income households living on land they have occupied illegally (either by transferring tenure to them or by providing alternative and acceptable sites which meet their needs and priorities).

Since the 1980s and 1990s, major improvements in environmental quality within the *Zabaleen* settlement with respect to housing conditions can be attributed to self-help initiatives and community resources. However, inadequate infrastructural services, including water supply and the sewerage system, were attributed to limited allocated budgets, with no institutional connection between the government's sale of the land to squatter occupants and cost recovery for infrastructure development. The Garbage Collectors' Association (*Gammiya*) has in the past emphasized the need to reduce the health burden associated with poor quality housing and lack of basic services. For most families with limited resources in the area, acquiring and developing their own home (usually through self-help or mutual aid) provides them not only with a healthy and secure base, but also with their most valuable and secure capital asset. Accordingly, a home of their own is important for providing low-income households with stability and security. This is especially important for households with children and for the female members of the household who take most responsibility for child-rearing and household management. In addition, it is essential to maintain and sustain niches for a diverse informal economy such as recycling micro-enterprises that could help to increase income or employment for low-income waste garbage collectors.

The paper recognizes the significance of initiatives that integrate savings and credit groups formed by low-income groups (mostly women) to improve housing and living conditions and basic services. Such initiatives challenge the conventional separation between the improvement of housing and living conditions as 'poverty alleviation' and support for income generation as 'poverty reduction', thought to be achievable only by increasing the real incomes of poor individuals or households.

Most of the poorest *Zabaleen* households have little or no possibility of finding resources needed for self-help construction, as the amount they can save is not enough to allow them to obtain the necessary credit to cover the cost of land purchase and to commission a local contractor. Many of the lowest-income households appear to have no savings capacity and thus no possibility of joining housing programmes that require savings. Some households, together with community based organizations (*Gammiya*) and NGOs, have managed to set up and sustain their own emergency credit programme which then developed into a savings scheme for micro-enterprise; housing improvement and building; installing some infrastructure; and setting up and managing basic services. Savings groups provide a means to help low-income groups organize their demands and provide proof of their capacity to contribute towards solutions.

There is a need to recognize the symbiosis between domestic and productive activities of the *Zabaleen*, particularly in relation to micro-enterprise recycling economy, which can provide an understanding of the significance of the home for such households and which could lead to more sensitive and supportive policy responses. This situation is similar to rural models of production and consumption, with a strong emphasis placed on household subsistence, interlinked to kinship and social networks. The home for waste garbage collectors thereby becomes not merely a container of human life but an essential shelter for those life-sustaining productive activities as in rural areas, where home and workplace are frequently combined and intimately inter-related. Where the place of work is also the place of residence, group identities are reinforced, strengthened by residence patterns of clustering by kin and by place of origin.

Recently launched privatization plans and the relocation of recycling activities have contributed to jeopardizing peoples' security of tenure and community investments in housing improvement. Official interventions are threatening to completely disrupt a waste management recycling and recovery system which has provided the community with sustainable means of livelihood and has secured an adequate informal micro-enterprise economy within the settlement.

SPATIAL CONTESTATION WITHIN GARBAGE CITY

Despite safety concerns about construction procedures within the Muqattam area since the 1993 rock collapse, another undeclared justification for evictions is 'redevelopment'. This implies the use of the cleared land more intensively, thus allowing developers to increase profits by redeveloping such sites, especially if they can avoid the cost of re-housing those evicted. Since the *Zabaleen* settlements lower the value of the surrounding land and its housing, and in a bid to 'beautify' Cairo and to maintain or enhance land values, developers may make large profits by doing nothing more than clearing the site and holding the empty land for property speculation. If *Zabaleen* settlements are judged to be illegal, even if they have been there for many decades, this is a convenient excuse to bulldoze them without compensation.

It can further be argued that the *Zabaleen* community is the victim of the Government's hidden agenda for the Muqattam district of Cairo. Behind the declared objectives of improving the *Zabaleens'* livelihoods and the settlement's environmental conditions, within the upgrade of waste collection systems and expanding the associated recycling industry lies a wider but hidden agenda involving the urban redevelopment of this part of the city. This is mainly attributed to two factors. On the one hand, Garbage City within Muqattam Mountain's lower plateau provides urban investment opportunities as a result of its geographical proximity to Cairo's historical quarters and its tourist-orientated urban rehabilitation projects. On the other hand, Muqattam City within the Mountain's upper plateau represents both a powerful pressure group and an urban development model to the detriment of the waste garbage recyclers. This is noted in the proposed planning of a luxury residential gated community project (Uptown Cairo) by Dubai-based Emaar property Development Company. The development of vacant or vacated land by land speculators could follow the precedent of the Agha Khan organisation's development of the Al-Azhar Urban Park, opened in 2004, and the associated upgrading along the Ayyubid Wall fringing the eastern edge of Islamic Cairo (Darb al Ahmar district). Recent efforts at the gradual resettlement of the squatter tomb dwellers of the 'Cities of the Dead' (Sutton & Fahmi, 2002b) and the relocation of supposed obnoxious workshops from Islamic Cairo would seem to act as precursors of the relocation of the *Zabaleen* to Katameya. The geographical proximity of the *Zabaleens'* squatter settlement to the other Muqattam settlement up on the Muqattam plateau above and overlooking what some regard as squalor could well play a part. As an upper middle class residential district, 'upper' Muqattam City represents both a powerful lobby and an urban development model to the detriment of the waste garbage recyclers (Figure 3).

Recently, Dubai-based property developer Emaar has proposed to build seven residential communities, including 25,000 apartments and villa compounds, within its luxury real-estate project Uptown Cairo, located on the upper plateau of Muqattam. Phase one of the project, involves the construction of 400 housing units (with prices ranging from LE 690,000 (USD 120,000) for the smallest apartment). The project will also include two five-star hotels, a golf club, shopping centres, restaurants, banking facilities, schools, clinics, and office blocks (Figure 4). This is also related to ongoing construction work of “The New Cairo Financial Centre and the Office Park” (Muqattam Towers) at the foot of Muqattam plateau and opposite Salah El-Din’s Citadel, which would transfer the financial centre (bank headquarters and the Stock Exchange) to Cairo’s southern suburbs (Figure 5). Such development could be related to the ongoing Autostrade urban development on desert land between Cairo’s eastern suburbs and New Cairo City. This involves New Cairo Centre, a 700 feddan area which includes commercial, residential and tourism development, owned by Carrefour hypermarket (Majid Al Futtaim of Dubai).



Figure 3— Muqattam City (Upper Plateau).

Source: Author 2007.

Further, the undefined and controversial status of the adjacent Manshiet Nasser settlement could threaten the *Zabaleen*. The long-established squatter settlement of Manshiet Nasser could extend to swallow up the *Zabaleen* as an area to accommodate its population growth and land use intensification. Alternatively, both settlements could be relocated and resettled as part of a wider social upgrading of this whole district to the south east of Central Cairo. It will not have escaped property deve-



Figure 4— Uptown Cairo, Emaar project.
Source: Author 2007.



Figure 5— Muqattam Financial Towers.
Source: Author 2007.

lopers that Manshiet Nasser and the Muqattam settlement are close to good road access (Autostrade) and, relative to many other higher class residential districts, are fairly central within Greater Cairo. If cleared of their present lower class residents, both squatter and uncontrolled settlements have immense urban development potential.

If this hidden agenda proves accurate, a future scenario could involve further urban growth within the Muqattam lower plateau through the depopulation of the *Zabaleen* community's area and its repopulation by residents formerly from Manshiet Nasser. This situation could then be followed by the gentrification of both the former *Zabaleen* settlement and the dynamic Manshiet Nasser district as urban land speculation links socially and morphologically the lower and upper Muqattam plateau. Related to these developments could be some upward filtering of those elements of public housing found within the upper Muqattam plateau currently used for housing 1992 earthquake victims or as part of earlier youth housing projects. These postulated developments are accompanied by anticipated population movements involving both residents and workshops of Old Cairo and tomb dwellers in its ancient cemeteries. Accordingly, the *Zabaleen* seem destined to evacuation and resettlement in contrast to the government's declared objectives of merely improving the *Zabaleen* community's environmental conditions through the relocation of its waste garbage sorting and associated recycling activities, as well as its pig rearing.

CONCLUSION

The study has identified the need for local government support for community initiatives to develop small-scale recycling enterprises, and income-generating activities for the *Zabaleen* threatened with relocation. This could be done through mutual self-help; in addition to soft loans, subsidies, and technical support. These would in turn improve, rebuild, or expand their new homes.

In the case of the *Zabaleen's* proposed eviction, there is a need to tackle problems in the new settlements of inadequate provision for water supply, sanitation, and drainage. Any reorganization of the collection and disposal of waste garbage ought to be in partnership with the different stakeholders, from those relocated to community leaders, NGOs, local authorities, and other agencies. Local NGOs with a strong commitment to participation would limit expenses whilst avoiding the reinforcement of patronage, thus creating less dependency amongst relocated local communities. There is a necessity for an overall strategy that sets the

Zabaleen community within the general framework of an Egyptian economy unable to create sufficient jobs and to provide affordable housing for a large proportion of its population. Nonetheless, the dilemma of the *Zabaleen* community cannot be resolved without a transformation of the average Cairene's attitude towards these informal inhabitants.

The socio-economic profile of the *Zabaleen* approximates to that of the poorer quarters of Greater Cairo, whilst there still remains much social stigma attached to a Muqattam *Zabaleen* address. As with the image of tomb dwellers and residents of the nearby cemeteries of the Cities of the Dead, the popular perception of the *Zabaleen* continues to be negative. It is for this reason that both the uniqueness of the *Zabaleen* and their comparability with dynamic squatter settlements elsewhere should be appreciated before plans are implemented to move the community into new desert locations. Such a drastic relocation of *Zabaleen* recycling activities and the consequent resettlement of those involved threatens to meet failure given the authorities' apparent misunderstanding of the complexity of this multifaceted society.

Kamel (2003) has suggested several options for integrating the *Zabaleen* into the international companies' contracts. Transfer stations could be established where a majority of the non-organic waste could be recovered and directed to existing traders. The *Zabaleen* could continue to collect household waste from high-income areas on a daily, door-to-door basis, and pass the residual waste on, after recycling, to larger companies. The *Zabaleen* could receive inorganic garbage from the companies as input to their recycling businesses, and could contract for selected waste, such as paper from print shops, directly from the generators of such waste garbage. Small community-based composting facilities could be established. The *Zabaleen* could pool their financial assets such as trucks and workshops. Further, their nationwide trading network in recycled waste could be connected to the formal sector of the solid waste economy. In such ways, the traditional, informal *Zabaleen* system could be integrated into the new, privatized, and large-scale waste collection system to the mutual benefit of both sides.

In this local-global confrontation, the possible contribution of a Private-Public Partnership (PPP) could be mooted. However, one wonders whether in Cairo the 'private' element of the PPP would include or exclude the *Zabaleen* or just the larger, private companies? (Ahmed and Ali, 2004) Would the new situation merely be one in which the *Zabaleen* work as waged labourers for the international companies? This would represent dependency rather than partnership.

Despite suggestions made by some NGOs such as the *Community and Institutional Development* (CID) that the *Zabaleen* could continue pig rearing whilst collecting waste garbage, sorting it, and then selling it to the international companies for recycling at facilities in Cairo's Eastern fringes, recent developments have demonstrated as unlikely this possibility of such a fruitful local-global partnership. Instead, the international companies favour training the *Zabaleen* as waged employees whilst allowing them to search landfill sites for organic waste for their pig rearing activities. As international expertise meets local practices, a situation of confrontation is more likely than a partnership. As previously mentioned the *Association for the Protection of the Environment* (APE) organisation is more likely to act alongside both government agencies and the big companies in setting up and administering new recycling activities at a local level with the *Zabaleen* garbage collectors engaged as waged labourers.

The NGOs are likely to have a new role under these changed circumstances. The relocation of the sorting activities will disrupt the waste garbage collectors' economic sustainability, particularly in pig rearing. Indeed the whole *Zabaleen* recycling industry is likely to modify its links with *wahya* contractors and with local NGOs involved in the area since the 1980s. These include the APE's paper recycling and rug weaving activities involving female members of *Zabaleen* households and the Environment Quality International's (EQI) upgrading under the World Bank Programme and the establishment of small scale enterprises as part of the *Zabaleen's* Development Programme (ZDP). Whilst the *Zabaleen* are facing a dramatic and disruptive situation, the *wahya* and these local NGOs can be expected to develop new mechanisms for cooperation with the international companies and with their recycling businesses relocated to Eastern Cairo's urban fringes.

The expectations of such collaboration between the NGOs, the *wahya*, and the international companies are based on the APE's positive reaction to the privatisation plans and to the claimed possibility of improving the *Zabaleens'* livelihoods. Further support for this opinion comes from the EQI's reports on the *Zabaleens'* inability to shift from being dependent on the professional assistance provided by the World Bank and various foreign funding agencies since the launch of the 1980s upgrading programme. The EQI's reports also raise the question of the NGO's failure to empower the local *Zabaleen* through community initiatives since the 1980s. They have also failed to assist the *Zabaleen* in building channels of communication with Government agencies. Instead, there have been conflicts with the *Gammiya* and with community leaders regarding recycling activities. The NGOs have

not succeeded in creating any powerful grass-root lobbying to present the *Zabaleens'* case to public opinion as a mechanism to confront recent governmental privatisation plans. It would appear that their business interests now prevail over the NGO's earlier role of promoting the *Zabaleen* community.

Resettlement and relocation of recycling activities threaten the *Zabaleen* community's invested capital and extend their risk-taking and initiatives. The central failure of the government to provide adequate compensation to cover often upgraded dwellings and workshops contributes to the potential traumatic impact of the privatisation and resettlement programme on the *Zabaleen* garbage collectors. The state appears to regard them as just another relocated community requiring a transit shelter scheme in a new location. Little thought has been given to socio-cultural and economic differences, which may affect the *Zabaleen's* relationship with other relocated poor social groups and, more especially, with the affluent residents of gated communities already established at Katameya. The potential for conflict and disputes is high.

More important is the adverse effect of the slaughtering of the pigs on the *Zabaleen's* livelihoods which might be part of the ongoing gentrification of garbage city for land speculations and the taking over of their recycling economy by entrepreneurial businesses investing in Cairo's contested waste garbage. Although most likely a post-facto justification, the *Al-Ahram* newspaper has suggested that a modern-day alternative to pig-rearing based on recycled garbage would be to convert organic waste into ethanol, as is already the case in Brazil, the USA and Canada. Employing such a 'biomass process' to one ton of raw, unsorted waste garbage, with 75% organic composition, would yield about 50 gallons of ethanol, which could be used as an additive to gasoline to increase its octane composition and to lower pollution from vehicles. It is claimed that this would be price competitive as well as being a recycling solution³. The latest serious threat to Cairo's *Zabaleen* community only serves to compound earlier problems stemming from moves to bring in multi-national solid waste management contractors and from policies aiming to relocate garbage processing activities to remote desert locations to the east of Cairo.

3. Mitwally, E. Conversion of domestic solid waste into Ethanol. *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 22–28 October 2009; Available online: www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/946/features.htm (accessed on 15 January 2010).

The clearing of the *Zabaleen* Muqattam settlement will bring to an end this strategic distributing station for Cairo's garbage as they sort out solid waste for the NGO's recycling industry. The *Zabaleen* make use of organic waste for pig breeding and composting, and thereby provide pig-meat for Cairo's local and tourist consumption. This whole recycling system will be threatened by the lengthy travel distances from the proposed new settlements in Eastern Cairo. Faced with increased travel costs, the poor garbage collectors may decide to abandon their sustainable, traditional economic system and join Cairo's underemployed poor. Alternatively, they might decide to return to their ancestral villages in Upper Egypt to seek work as landless, temporary agricultural workers, or seek employment with international companies as waged labourers whilst settling in the Eastern settlements.

REFERENCES:

- AHMED, SHAFIUL Azam and MANSOUR Ali, 2004, "Partnerships for Solid Waste Management in Developing Countries: Linking Theories to Realities", *Habitat International*, Vol. 28, p. 467-479.
- BBC News, 2009, *Struggling after Egypt's pig cull*, 6 August; Available online: <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/> (accessed on 15 January 2010).
- BJERKLI, C.L. , 2005, *The Cycle of Plastic Waste: An Analysis of the Informal Plastic Recovery System in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, Master's Thesis, Department of Geography, Norwegian Institute of Science and Technology: Trondheim, Norway.
- DIAS, S.M. , 2000, "Integrating waste pickers for sustainable recycling – Planning for sustainable waste systems", In *Proceedings of the Collaborative Working Group Workshop on Planning for Sustainable and Integrated Solid Waste Management*, Manila, The Philippines, 18-21 September.
- FAHMI, Wael, 2005, "The impact of privatization of solid waste management on the Zabaleen garbage collectors of Cairo", *Environment and Urbanization* , Vol. 17, n° 2, p. 155-170.
- FAHMI, Wael and Keith Sutton, 2006, "Cairo's Zabaleen garbage recyclers: Multi-nationals' takeover and state relocation plans ", *Habitat International*, Vol. 30, n° 4, p. 809-837.
- FAHMI, Wael and Keith Sutton, 2003, "Reviving Historical Cairo Through Pedestrianisation: The Al-Azhar Street Axis", *International Development Planning Review*, Vol. 25, n° 4, p 407-431.
- KAMEL, L., 2003, "Integrating Local Community-Based Waste Management into International Contracting", paper n° 31, CWG Workshop, Dar El Salaam, Tanzania, March.

- MISSIONARIES, V. ,1998, "The Payatas Environmental Development Programme: Microenterprise promotion and involvement in solid waste management in Quezon City. *Environment and Urbanization*", Vol. 10, p. 55–68.
- NZEADIBE, T.C. , 2009, "Solid waste reforms and informal recycling in Enugu urban area", *Habitat International*, Vol. 33, p. 93–99.
- ROUSE, J. and M. Ali, 2001, *Waste Pickers in Dhaka: Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach – Key Findings and Field Notes*, Water Engineering and Development Centre, Loughborough University: Leicestershire, UK.
- SUTTON, Keith and Wael FAHMI, 2002a, "The Rehabilitation of Old Cairo", *Habitat International*, Vol. 26, n° 1, p. 73- 93.
- SUTTON, Keith and Wael FAHMI, 2002b, "Cairo's 'Cities of the Dead': The Myths, Problems, and Future of a Unique Squatter Settlement", *The Arab World Geographer*, Vol. 5, n° 1, p. 1-21.
- The New York Times, 2009, *Cleaning Cairo but taking a livelihood.*, 25 May 2009; Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed on 15 January 2010).
- The New York Times , 2009, *Belatedly, Egypt Spots Flaws in Wiping Out Pigs.*, 20 September ; Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed 15 January 2010).
- VISSER, M. and J. THERON, 2009, *Waste Not: Externalisation and the Management of Waste in Cape Town*; Working Paper 12; Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS): Cape Town, South Africa.
- WILLIAMS, D., *Swine Flu slaughter leaves Cairo without pigs to devour trash*; Available online: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news> (accessed on 15 January 2010).