

The Experience and Hierarchy of Migration Egyptian Labourers in the Jordan Valley

Mauro Van Aken ¹

Studying the migration network between Egypt and Jordan tackles a set of sensitive issues for both countries, since migration has become not only a political issue, but at the same time a strategic asset.² In Egypt, an overwhelming body of literature and statistical data has followed migrants for twenty years, while at the present time in Jordan a great emphasis is accorded to the problem of illegal workers, inspection campaigns and the Jordanization of the labour force. In this context, migration has been subject of a set of discourses, of studies on the social and economic consequences and local impacts of labour migration, that has attempted to understand and conceptualize what is a moving and heterogeneous dynamic and where it is impossible to quantify a large illegal presence.

The studies of these migrations between Egypt and the Middle East, and more particularly to Jordan, have inevitably followed a dichotomised perspective according to push and pull factors, 'here' and 'there', focusing upon the consequences to the Egyptian economy, or on the impact on security and the labour market in Jordan. Major problems in Egypt have been the outflow of labour power (farmers and construction workers) and the impact of increased commodity consumption back home. Moreover, the use and misuse of remittances by return migrants have become a contested issue linked to the critique of so-called irrational and unproductive investment by migrant villagers and their tendency towards 'useless' consumption patterns.

Little or no attention has been devoted to social actors, their perspectives and their ways of giving sense to the experience of migration; a way of being between two places where there is a link between the hardship of migration and an increase of status back home.

1. Département d'Anthropologie, Université de Milan.

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The attempt here is to focus on the social agency of temporary Egyptian migrants in the Jordan Valley (later Jv), where migration is experienced first of all as a separate time and space dimension to home. At the same time, migration is framed from a cultural perspective as a transition to new roles, status and values back home, while the place of work is characterized by marginalisation and dependency. The intimate relationship between migration and normal rituals linked to the everyday life cycle, such as engagement and marriage, has been the key analytical tool in understanding the cultural meanings of this endeavour, enmeshed within an economic project. The experience of migration can be better understood 'as if' it were a ritual, taking its temporality and spatial dimensions as a model; that is, as a means to better understand the local perceptions of migrants. For example, in this study, the male experience of migration puts manhood at stake, but at the same time it is a process of obtaining manhood through the various transitions of place, time and status.

Egyptians in the valley cannot be understood as mere economic actors. The focus is therefore on their trajectories, choices, and strategies in relation to their social networks and political constraints. The field of research has thus been inevitably multisided. Most of the fieldwork was conducted in the central region of the Jordan valley, where the highest agribusiness investment in greenhouses has taken place, and where the highest number of Egyptians in the valley work as cheap labourers.³ Due to their long hours of work, and the relations of dependency within farms, as the principal site of this research, it was often difficult to talk freely. It was even more difficult following the strengthening of the policy of expulsion of illegal migrants from the Jv which took place during the fieldwork period. The paper begins with an explication of the tradition of migration of Egyptian labourers, between opportunities and constraints, in order to contextualize the cultural perceptions and the hierarchy of places in their trajectories. I then focus on the cultural shape of the experience of migration in relation to the rituals back home and to the reality of agribusiness work in the Jordan Valley.

A TRADITION OF MIGRATION

Temporary migration from rural Egypt is part of a tradition of moving, of a knowledge of territorial circulation and of an historical pattern of diversifying the local subsistence economy in the countryside. Since 1850, the *Izba* system had already absorbed "rural labourers in cash crop production on large

3. One month in 2002 was spent, visiting some return migrants back in their villages in lower Egypt, a perspective of 'back home' that helped in contextualising the experience of migration in the Jv. Besides, the dynamics of the multiethnic context in which Egyptians are absorbed in the valley have been the focus of a previous work (Van Aken, 2003).

plantations in lower Egypt” (Weyland, 1993: 30). It was a system of labour that extended until the 1950s and was linked to an agricultural system directed towards external markets. Subsequently, *tarahil* migrants have represented a fundamental pattern of labour organisation in Egypt. As Toth defined it, *tarahil* is “casual employment that involves gangs of unskilled males recruited from the same village, who travel together to distant production sites for several weeks at a time” (Toth, 1999: 25). Employed often in the construction industry for 2-6 months, *tarahil* still constitute the backbone of the farming economy by diversifying local assets in a continuous oscillation between farming and temporary migration. In fact, migration is the major factor in local economic flexibility that combines multiple economic strategies thanks to the availability of cheap labour.⁴

The experience of *tarahil* temporary labour strongly resembles the pattern of international migration in the Jv in some crucial respects: the workers are linked together horizontally by strong bonds of kinship and of village ties, friendship and age, the harsh employment, the construction of temporary homes during the migration period, the low consumption needs away from home, the saving strategies, the allocation of labour force as important household strategy, and the bridge it represents between the “rural dispossessed and the urban labourer” (Toth, 1999: 58). Besides, *tarahil* labourers have been paralleled by a rural-urban migration in Egypt, often as a rotational migration that has reshaped the demographic context and the countryside.⁵ Indeed, international migration has partly resulted from the decreasing value of agricultural work such that “landless labourers and small land cultivators represent the majority of international migration” (Nada, 1991: 66). Differential resources means that not all *tarahil* labourers need to become international migrants. However, they all invest in the migration project, for both take roots from a similar ‘*savoir circuler*’ (Tarrus, 2002), combining farming resources with migration and interpreting migration not only as an economic project but as a passage of status.

BETWEEN OPEN DOORS, WARS AND CONSTRAINTS

In 1985, three million Egyptians were working abroad from an overall national labour force of 12 million, while “remittances of workers continued to constitute the second largest source of foreign exchange earning for Egypt”

4. This intermixture of different and delocalised resources is well highlighted by Weyland: “the small peasant household autonomously organizes subsistence production to a large extent and simultaneously engages in market production and wage labour” (Weyland, 1993: 34).

5. The link between internal patterns of rural labour migration to the international market for labour is stressed by different authors. Roy, for example, notes: “For these, external migration is perhaps no more than an extension of a process in which they were already involved” (Roy, 1991: 552).

(Roy, 1991: 551). Migrant remittances were the second exchange-earning source after oil revenues.⁶ These numbers give us an image of the magnitude and importance of migration for the national economy in Egypt, but at the same time, they do not help us in understanding how migration is lived by migrants as principal social actors. In order to do that, it is important first of all to sketch the context in which they moved. Various policies, or lack of policies in the case of Jordan, have attempted to control, favour, shape and, lately, limit the transfer of migrant workers from Egypt to Jordan. A temporal frame will allow a better understanding of local agency and of migrant trajectories in their attempts to overcome constraints and use opportunities available in different places. Arab labourers, welcomed in the 1970s, have, in 2003, become stigmatised as the 'illegal workers' targeted for expulsion. This shift in discourse and practice has had a major impact on the circulation of labourers between Egypt and Jordan and on the present context of migrants.

Since the 1960s, Jordan has applied a dichotomised policy towards migrants, distinguishing and favouring Arab over non-Arab nationals. Before 1973, Egypt attempted to limit migration through administrative obstacles⁷, but, following Sadat's *'Infitah'*, migration became one of the backbones of a liberalization policy for the national economy. Migration was supported as national project, consistent with Pan-Arabist ideals for Arab development, but also to 'export' increasing domestic unemployment.⁸

In the 1970s, Libya represented the main destination for Egyptian migrants, mainly qualified labourers. As a consequence of the oil price increases in the years that followed, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait progressively became the main destinations. Towards the 1980s, Egyptians were attracted by Jordan's open-door policy for Arabs (entry visas were not required) and the number of Egyptians in the Jordan Valley increased significantly. From Jordan's perspective, the rotational migration from Egypt became instrumental in the agribusiness 'success' of the Jordan Valley. Their uncertain status, docility and easy exploitation were crucial in decreasing the cost of wage labour that boosted the labour-intensive agriculture of the greenhouses.

6. "Today, it is estimated that the 1.3 million workers in the Gulf remit \$4 billion annually" (Farak, 1999: 4).

7. Migration policies have often been linked to war: before the '70s, Egypt was a country at war and greatly needed a vast manpower in the army, but after 1974 Egypt demobilized thousand of soldiers.

8. Migration restrictions were lifted, military conscriptions eased, exit visas abolished and replaced by travel permits. Besides, between 1967 and 1970, an Emigration Department was established to conduct bilateral agreements with foreign countries, and surveys of employment opportunities were conducted. In 1971, Article 52 of the Constitution established migration as a right of Egyptian citizens, and in 1982 the Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian workers abroad was set up.

A turning point of Egypt-Jordan migration came in the mid 1980s. By that time, Jordan had become one of the major destinations for Egyptian labour migration. Foreigners comprised twenty five per cent of Jordan's labour force (Fargues, 2000) to replace Jordanians who had left for the Gulf states and the first labour agreements were signed in an attempt to regulate the exchange of workers.⁹

Migration to Jordan paralleled a sectorialization of the economy where agriculture, construction and domestic work favoured migrant labourers, a process that, in practice, promoted an illegal presence. By the mid-1980s, 37 per cent of foreign workers in Jordan, mostly Egyptians¹⁰, were working in agriculture (Humphey, 1993). Typically, these three sectors are all labour intensive and were excluded from labour regulation. Foreigners were not allowed to join trade unions.

Iraq, also without visa requirements for Arabs¹¹ gradually became a favoured migrant destination for migrants.¹² Like Jordan, Iraq encouraged migrants' absorption into agriculture and the construction sector, favoured also by cheap transport because of its geographical proximity.¹³

Egypt experienced the first great wave of migrant returnees¹⁴ in the very same years that saw the peak of out-migration from Egypt after 1985 (Weyland, 1993). Discourses and policies on migration began to target the loss of manpower in Egypt, the increase of prices of agricultural lands and products and changing social attitudes in Egypt. At this stage, most Egyptian migrants were of rural origin (Zibani, 1995) and classified as non-qualified¹⁵,

9. 1,790,000 emigrated in 1985 according to CAPMAS (2000) on a population of 48 million inhabitants.

10. According to Birks and Sinclair (1983), the large Egyptian migration to Jordan was due to different concomitant factors: the common language and cultural identity, the geographical proximity and the low costs of transport.

11. See the text of I. Lafargue in this volume.

12. Egyptian migration to Jordan is inextricably linked to the presence of Egyptian labourers in Iraq, who first arrived at the beginning of the 20th century, and significantly increased after 1950-60. Even agricultural resettlement plans were set up within Pan-Arabic ideologies in Iraq. Jordan has been a natural transit route for these migrants and many Egyptians working in Jordan had previously been in Iraq (El-Solh, 1994). Indeed, as the chapter by Lafargue shows in this book, Iraq has represented an ideal model for migration, in contrast to a negative image of Gulf states, although with the end of the Iran-Iraq conflict but even more with the first Gulf war and the consequent Egyptians' large expulsion from Iraq, this preference has changed.

13. Today an average cost for a one-way trip is around \$70.

14. 56.7% from Libya, 12% from Saudi, 12% from Jordan. Return has been explained in the literature according to a mixture of different causes: the start of Asiatic labour competition in the Gulf, the decreasing growth of Gulf economies, the end of Iraq/Iran war with the consequent return of thousands of unemployed soldiers that had been replaced by Egyptians in Iraqi economy, and the first political measures designed to nationalize manpower in the Middle East.

15. A major aspect of this period was the shift from the qualified to low-qualified migrant labourers.

with the majority coming to the Jv from the Lower Egypt (Sharghiye, Gharbiye, Mansura) and a lower percentage from Upper Egypt (Minia, Assiut, Sohag, Quena).¹⁶

After 1985, the Jordan Valley experienced the first agricultural market crisis with high unemployment. The first talk of reducing guest workers that appeared was rhetorical and lacked any effective implementation. Illegal workers increased in the valley to the level of over 90 per cent of male wage labourers. In the following years, migration started to become a sensitive issue and, from 1987, migrants could enter the country on a regular basis only with the prior approval of the Ministry of Labour.¹⁷ This ended the open door policy period. The first official reports on 'illegal migrants' were established following the first inspection campaigns in Jordan. At the same time, there were restrictions from changing job sectors, the raising of visa costs, and fines for illegal entry – all measures that were meant to discipline a moving frame and increase the 'visibility' of clandestine foreigners.¹⁸ The agricultural crisis deepened even more with the inflow of Palestinian returnees to Jordan after the first Gulf War. With the collapse of Gulf remittances, the first attempts were made to deport illegal Egyptian workers.¹⁹ At the same time, the ill treatment of migrants became a sensitive issue in the Arab world.²⁰

After the first Gulf War, around 800,000 migrants were expelled from Iraq and Egyptians also began to be perceived as competitors in Jordan. Since then, many Egyptians have taken the place of Palestinians in the Gulf states. Notwithstanding this major period of forced migration, the role of Egyptians in the MENA economy remained central, representing 60 per

16. While migrants from Upper Egypt tended to leave for a longer period, from Lower Egypt they could leave to Jordan only for the yearly agricultural season due to the shorter distances. The same regions of departure in Egypt for internal migration also became the centers for international migration within a tradition of seasonal, temporary and discontinuous migration linked to the agricultural economic system. This rotational and temporary migration, which also characterises the Jordan Valley, is comprised of 84% unskilled labour, with 68% illiterate and where the average period of migration is around 1.7 years (Weyland, 1993). According to Nada (1991), the average age is 27.9 years and nearly 39.4% were engaged in unskilled agriculture before migration.

17. The first Labour Cooperation agreement was signed between Egypt and Jordan.

18. Notwithstanding the closure policy, agriculture remained a privileged sector favoured by the previous migration policies: while Arabs had to pay \$171 for a visa, in the agriculture sector the fees remained at \$14, while non-Arabs had to pay \$70 for a work permit in agriculture and \$424 outside farming in 1988.

19. Interestingly, while Jordan was facing the start of an agricultural crisis that would last until the present day, Egypt also faced strong labour shortages in farms and construction sectors due to migration, which forced the state to give greater attention to and impose discipline on migration policy.

20. In 1990 clashes against Egyptian erupted in Baghdad, some cases took place in Libya in 1991 and in 1999, 3,000 Egyptians were imprisoned in Kuwait city following riots.

cent of the foreign Arab labour force in the Middle East.²¹ Foreign workers were banned in Jordan from specific professions in 1995²² and in 1996, Egyptians were obliged to obtain a work permit from the Jordanian embassy in Cairo, a measure that opened the way for the *kafil* system.²³ This pattern of labour absorption identifies the role of the guarantor (*kafil*) with the one of the employer in Jordan. This inevitably changed the trajectories of migrants and the previously easy circulation between Egypt and Jordan. The main consequence is that now migrants cannot enter from their personal initiative, within their own web of social relations, but need a contract before departure. The linkages in Jordan with fellow Egyptians or informal recruitment therefore becomes instrumental in obtaining an entry permit. The following narrative offers an image of a trajectory from Upper Egypt and the embeddedness in local agribusiness:

"We come from different parts of Egypt, from Asiuat, Suhaj and we two from Minia. We are here since a year, other since two years. When we left Egypt we came directly here. We were not in other Arab countries. We have work in Egypt, but not the salary, which is low. Some of the parents who were working here have given our name to the kafil, I had my brother here, and when I came, he left in turn. We work here from 5:30 until 13:30, one hour rest, and another pause only on Fridays from 5:30 until 10:30 for the prayer. The local shabbab do not work here! After the work we rest, or we go to work outside. We eat and cook. We take \$128 a month. We manage to send \$141 every two or three months. But they are enough for the expenses (masruf) of the family only! At home we always worked in the farms, honak turi, hon turi, always the same things!"

The work of an agricultural labourer with *turi* (a hoe) was monotonous. What changed was the integration through the *kafil* system, where the new working hours are linked to difficult conditions and to the relations of dependency in a foreign country. This system encourages a pattern where different male members of the family rotate migration as a household strategy.

Increasingly, in the press and in common perceptions, estimations of the migrant presence have been estimated up to one million foreign workers. Indeed, by 1999, Jordan had become the third most preferred destination for Egyptian emigration (Fargues, 2000). The Egyptian labourer came to represent what was portrayed as an invasion of illegal foreign workers.

21. At the same time, this exceptional increase of labour expulsion is similar to the Jordanian experience, where the increase of emigration between the 1970 and 1985 was also impressive.

22. Doctors, engineer, administrative, retail, mechanics and education were some of the major professions that were banned to migrants.

As a consequence, greater emphasis was placed on the cracking down of illegal entry in a re-nationalisation labour policy. Tensions from the ill treatment of workers arose but only at the local level. Egypt merely played down the level of conflict, preferring to deal only with individual cases and events.²⁴ However, since 2001, with a more symbolic and rhetoric reaction against illegal migrants, the government of Jordan has shifted to an effective expulsion of Egyptians without work permits in the Jordan Valley. A special police force has been engaged to look for illegal migrants, farm to farm, and deport them back home.²⁵ In a typical xenophobic response, Egyptians have been increasingly perceived as competitors to low-income communities and used as scapegoats for the economic crisis in the region. The Arab 'guest worker' became synonymous with 'illegal worker'.²⁶ Under the new nationalist policy of 'Jordanians First', the issue of migration has become enmeshed within a public discourse that includes security work and water resources.²⁷ As De Bel-Air's chapter in this book shows well, migration policies have been intimately linked to the *rentier* character of the Jordanian economy, where the dependence upon aid and labour migration has allowed the economy to remain based on indirect rent and has reproduced clientelistic patterns in the distribution of resources. Migration is thus linked to a sectorialization of the economy, where agriculture has remained one of the most vulnerable sectors in terms of work relations and conditions.

Due to the restrictions and expulsions in recent years, the decrease in the availability of cheap Egyptian migrants has led to an increase of wages for legal Egyptians, but also to an increasing feminisation of the agriculture

23. Before, Egyptians could enter Jordan for a period of three months to look for a job.

24. A labour attaché is posted at the Egyptian embassy in Amman to mediate labour disputes. The Egyptian government has tried to cope with "reduction of discriminatory and arbitrary treatment by consensus, rather than by the imposition of restrictions or retaliation measures" (Roy, 1991: 559).

25. Expelled migrants are not allowed to enter Jordan for 3 years.

26. In 2001, official statistics showed 112,396 Egyptians working regularly in Jordan, of which nearly 35,573 were working in agriculture in the Jv, a figure that underestimates the illegal presence in the region. The majority of Egyptians live in East Amman and Jordan valley, the two regions where surveillance and deportation have had a higher impact.

27. Water scarcity has become a critical issue and Egyptians as the 'others' have been blamed as the 'spoilors' of development, or as 'the problem'. A latent tension has also increased at the local level due to the worsening of the economic situation: "After seven consecutive years of drought, the critical water situation openly brings up a latent xenophobic debate. (...) Priority in this government compensations scheme will be given to owners who usually sublease their farm units to foreign workers, such as Pakistani and Egyptian farmers. They should rent their land to us instead of to foreigners. Why should we spend our precious water on foreign workers – they can go back home. (...) The government is subsidizing water to serve the Jordanian farmer, not foreign ones!" (Jordan Times, 24/04/01).

work force, mainly women and girls of low-income Jordanian families.²⁸ This dynamic is also linked to the restructuring of agriculture in the valley caused by the continuous droughts of the last five years, but also following the new national water policies that privilege urban water supply and the decrease of investment in irrigated agriculture in the Jv, favouring other sectors like tourism and industry.²⁹

A HIERARCHY OF PLACES

The local embeddedness of Egyptians in the valley should be looked upon in the wider context of mobility within the Middle East. As Egyptians have undertaken devalued jobs as cheap farm labourers, they have enabled many Jordanians to leave the valley in a process of both geographical and social mobility. Valley Jordanians, whenever possible, mostly opted to migrate to the West Bank, Israel, the Gulf states, or just up the hill within Jordan to gain access to higher salaries and higher status positions. Spatial mobility within a hierarchy of place is associated with social status, where access to visas and social networks provided social capital for emigrants from both Egypt and the Jordan Valley. For Egyptians, different countries (Libya, Saudi, Kuwait...) represent different opportunities, different salaries and various degrees of difficulties in obtaining a visa, that affect their mobility options. The following description highlights the custom of many migrants who came to the Jv during the 1980s to move on to other areas in the Middle East:

"I have been 5 years in Kuwait, three months in Iraq and 20 days in Libya. I went away from Libya because I was earning as much as in Egypt. In Iraq I went to get into Kuwait and they even fired me at the border at night! In Kuwait it was much better than here. Here I work 10 hours for only 3 JD (i.e.\$4.2)! After Kuwait, I married and then remained a little bit at home and then left again for Jordan. Most of us are married. This young boy just married two months ago. He has just arrived here. Is it not haram?"

28. By 'Jordanian' I refer here both to Ghawarneh families (the local tribe of the valley) as Palestinian refugees who have acquired Jordanian nationality.

29. The high investment of development actors in the Jv in the last half century follows not only an economic rationale, but is linked to the construction of a fragile border and to resettlement policies that were planned in the 1950s for Palestinian refugees. Therefore, the modernization of agriculture has been linked both to the symbolic values of settlement and domestication of a frontier landscape, as much as to economic return from the development program (see Van Aken, 2003). In this context, Egyptians were favoured, since they were perceived as being divorced from the Palestinian question and thus represented less of a problem. On the other hand, Iraqis have not been allowed to enter and work in the Jv since 1991, a measure that indicates the strategic role of this border area.

Those who come to Jordan are the ones who could not get access to a priority list, where the Gulf states and Europe are at the top: “We came here because the work permit costs less and it is nearer to Egypt. While in Saudi it costs \$650 or in Kuwait even \$1,300! Who cannot afford that, comes here!” Besides, those who migrate to work and live temporarily in the Jv are those who could not find better work in construction or in restaurants in the cities. Although the Jv is a low status place of work, with harsh climatic conditions, lower salaries and poor labour conditions, living in the valley, compared to urban centers, has allowed work flexibility, less control from the police and the possibility for illegal migrants to hide:

“Often Egyptians in the valley change work or they go uphill if they can. This is not allowed because you are tied to a kafil, and if you change you should find also another kafil, and this is not easy to do. Egyptians try often to find work far away from the police, for example, down (taht) near the Zor [the lowest region of the valley near the river] in the farms, because the police will not control over there!” (Ibrahim)

Illegality and isolation on the farms provide an economic niche for migrants, in a fragile balance between job opportunities and regulatory constraints. As with rotational migration, there is a high mobility within the Jordan Valley and throughout Jordan to fill the summer months when agriculture slows down, particularly with the droughts and water cuts of the last five years.³⁰ “You take the work where you can find it.” They mainly find work in construction, gardening or car washing in urban centres, although it is now more difficult to work out of the sector because of work permit restrictions.³¹

Another status dichotomy operates between the conceptualisation of above/below (*foq/taht*) within the valley. Working *taht* (below) means living and working near the *zor*, far from the urban centre which is on the main road of the valley and far from the mosques, phone facilities and market. Living *foq* (above) means being attached to urban centres and being able to find work related to construction, merchandizing, tailoring and restaurants, which offer generally better salaries and proximity to a wider migrant social network. A greenhouse worker (*taht*) articulates his life of constraints and focus on capital accumulation:

30. The main areas of internal migration are agricultural regions of Zizia, Mafraq and the industrial areas in east Amman.

31. Generally, migrants coming from southern Egypt are landless. They were previously working as wage labourers and are reputed to be more used to the hot climate and work conditions of the Jv. With migrants from Sharghiye, Gharbye and Mansura, more cases of out-farm jobs are evident - as tailors, merchants, hairdressers, waiters and bread makers, although most of these occupations have recently become officially banned for foreigners.

“There are some who manage to save money, others who spend a lot. Life is difficult here and the heat is strong... We are always here and so we do not spend money!”

The isolation and the frugality of living are an integral part of the migration project as much as the hardship and the collective endeavour with fellow migrants. In relation to a priority of places, a return migrant describes his village back home while looking out from the upper floor of his house:

“This one is the house of a Jordanian, they built the house as the one they were doing in Jordan, in Jordanian style! That one is a Saudi. They were three brothers without money. Look what they have built now, a three-storey house, with satellite, all in cement block! That house is a Libyan, that one a Yemenite, that one Bahraini. All the shabbab (young men) left (tala’) here. That house over there, the low house, they left since a short time and they did not build yet – no money yet from the migrants! That other house over there, the owner went to Lebanon. Many after the Iraqi war went to Lebanon after they came back since they had problems in Iraq. Everybody used to like Iraq. Many made money over there! At present time, many go to Lebanon to work in tourism facilities, hotels. That house over there, with the straw on the roof, they did not go anywhere of course. It is the traditional house. They remained here!”

In Egypt, the houses of return migrants (‘Saudi’, ‘Libyan’, ‘Bahraini’...) become visible and manifest social status differences and material success. Remittances have drastically changed the structure and composition of villages in Lower Egypt, the main shift being from traditional mud bricks to red or cement blocks with a growing ‘urbanization’ of the countryside. Housing, therefore, reflects the history and geography of the heterogeneous trajectories of migrations, according to different generations from the same village. In other words, the different trajectories are “visible” in the transformation of the village through the styles imported. The houses themselves demarcate achieved social mobility, where the investment in building an autonomous space symbolizes the new position according to the building materials, the number of floors and rooms, the satellite and the furniture inside.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION

Migration is a cultural experience. Migration includes social values and cultural perspectives that cannot be understood within a mere economic framework. Tolerance of the hardship in the Jv makes sense for the migrants only in a specific cultural idiom and within their expectations for the future.

First, migration is intimately linked to marriage, and so to a specific period of the life cycle. ‘Going outside’ is related to ritual performances back

home and to the social recognition of a transitory status. Second, the migration period itself can be read 'as if' it were a ritual experience.

Stevenson (1988) in a study of Yemenite migrants has applied a ritual analysis of temporary migration. He uses Turner's reading of ritual as '*rite de passage*' and views the migration process as a three-staged passage between separation, transition and incorporation into a new status. I will use the notion of *rite de passage* applied to migration as a model that can grasp the liminality that is often expressed by migrants and the transitional experience of vulnerability and hardship while working in the Jv as 'temporary sojourners'. I do not accept the case of migration in this study as a ritual in itself since it is not recognized as such by the migrants themselves and it does not follow the delimited phases described by Van Gennep and Turner. However, migration does contain characteristics of ritual in terms of temporality and the symbolic meanings of the transition across places, the transnational movement during a specific period of life and the liminality on which living conditions are based 'outside'.

This life-cycle migration may be seen as a necessary means for a status transition – as a means to get out of one's own environment and social position and to return home with a new role. Several aspects characterize this transitional period: the temporary and short-term presence in the Jv, the frugality of living, the collective masculine environment and daily companionship on the farms, the spatial segregation, the relations of dependence that may contradict one's self-esteem and lastly, the harsh environment.

Men migrate in order to marry upon their return or just after the marriage contract (*katb kitab*). It may be motivated by the need to construct an autonomous space from their parents by building a new house, adding new rooms to the existing house and so establishing a separate household.³² The endurance of the hardship of migration is thus seen by migrants in relation to their future personal and social development, where migration is a necessary step in becoming a man. Migration may also be related to the escape from problems at home or as an attempt to build a separate sphere, 'free' from the traditional power structure of the father within the family context:

"Very often Egyptians who leave and come here, they leave because of the problems they have at their place, in their family or in the house, and not only for money. And then, one important thing, when you stay away from your

32. The link between out migration and marriage is also explicit in Nada's work: "In Bani Wallum village international migration has become expected behaviour for any village male who intends to get married" (Nada, 1981: 66). Saad also reports Egyptian accounts of migration as a transformative period in order to 'establish' themselves (Saad, 2002: 6).

home, you get used to your life as a migrant, and when you go back to Egypt you don't feel completely well, you are not free (horrr) as before!" (Ibrahim)

Migration may also be represented as a household, rather than as a purely individual, endeavour where the family's collective resources are strategic in facilitating the departure. For example, a 'successful' household is a precondition for the out-migration – in collecting the money and in the circuits of information such as up to date knowledge about visa costs, changing policy constraints and travel costs. Paradoxically, however, it may lead to the nuclearisation of the family for the remittances may allow more freedom of the individual from family constraints in making marriage choices, business enterprises and generally establishing a more independent life.³³ A new household as a nuclear family is often the consequence of the migration cycle.³⁴ Rotational migration can become a crucial strategy to pay household expenses, the *masruf al-'aila*.³⁵ The migrant's earnings are often used to pay gold and *mahr*, or as often happens in lower Egypt, it is a way to marry "in a suitable way" – in other words, to gain social mobility.³⁶ The local social network, in terms of family closeness or village identity, is fundamental in organizing the trip and for the accommodation on arrival in Jordan since the migrants in the Jv often take charge of the new incomer until he is able to save and pay it back.³⁷ Thus, migration is a transition of status not only in an economic sense but more so in cultural terms, where the difficulties and forms of discriminations are tolerated only because they are part of a passage that will reintegrate the migrant, but in a new social position. Such responsibilities are part of the hardship that a man should face as the main breadwinner, strengthening his sense of autonomy and honour. Yet, the transition period 'outside' is characterized by an inversion of status as the lack of autonomy, the

33. As Weiland (1993) has argued, Egyptian return migrants feel a greater sense of freedom in "choosing the girl" for the marriage contract.

34. The allocation of a division of labour for peasant families is strategic and therefore migrating is a family decision, in a reproduction of a "stability of instability" (Weyland, 1993) of the household in facing market integration.

35. A good average is reputed to be \$141 sent every 2 or 3 months back home and a capacity to spare around \$42 every month for the house expenses.

36. This account in the Jv may help in grasping this aspect: "Now my brother wants to get out, he wants to do like me, because he wants to marry in a suitable way and build a house next to my parents. But he does not want to go in an Arab country. It is not worth it anymore: Saudi is too difficult and expensive, Iraq is under embargo, and in Jordan there is no money now. He wants to go to some European country, to join a friend of our village who is working in Milan since some months." (Maher)

37. In terms of solidarity network, there is an important presence of Christian Copt Egyptian migrants in the valley, who often work in orchards and who do not hold strong relations with fellow Muslim Egyptians.

conditions of dependence and vulnerability are experiences which are felt with high frustration, particularly since they occur with fellow Arabs and Muslims.

Going abroad is part of the experience of *ghurba* and of remaining strangers (*gharib*): an experience that is often silenced in the narratives back home, where the hardship lived in Jordan are censured and only the success symbols are praised, like the family or the new house.³⁸ Indeed, in *ghurba*, the sense of pride and masculinity, in terms of autonomy and honour, are questioned when Egyptian men are faced with the day-to-day cooking, cleaning and washing that creates an ambiguous or inversion of their gender role in contrast to the self-esteem and autonomy of *fellahin* (peasants) back home. They must also adopt stigmatised roles in the greenhouses, perceived as types of places and work that are 'polluted' because of the open discrimination, the low wages and the presence of local female labourers.

Re-incorporation back home is perceived as the conclusion of this liminal state, a phase demarcated by the return with a new status, marriage and the building of an autonomous space. The refusal by male migrants to have a wife or other family members accompany them to Jordan is associated with the temporariness of this kind of work abroad, but also because living alone, with few social connections and social activities, they are more able to save money. In narratives from respondents, their migration project is directly related to the capital investment of marriage:

"Many who come here want to marry. In Egypt you need between \$1,625 and \$2,430. It is not like here. The bridegroom pays everything: the fargat, the sleeping room, the salon, the kitchen, the TV, the fridge, gold, the jihaz. And you need at least two, or two and a half years to save that money by working here! And then when you marry, you come back here again!" (Maher)

They have a very clear idea of how much it will cost for their future house, or for the building of additional rooms to their parents' dwelling and the average time it will take abroad to accumulate enough capital:

"In order to marry I have spent \$16,250. \$1,625 only for the gold, \$162 for the entrée, then the mahr, the furniture and all the rest! A big family (ashira kabira) must spend more money, also for the gold. And marriage has become much more expensive. When the bride arrives everything must be ready (jahiz), the fridge, the entrée, the electric appliances and the kitchen. I have married three months after my return and I soon had two children. Even Abdu

38. Cases of migrants who return back home after a few weeks are not rare and represent a symbol of an unsuccessful investment that is difficult to face.

came back and married directly, and the wife is pregnant now! He opened a shop like the one he had before in Sawalha [Central Jordan Valley]. I want to go out again, not in Jordan but in Europe, to make some more money. I have two sons. They will grow up, and in some years they will marry, build a house. I will need money, and so I will get out again!" (Maher)

Migration as an economic investment is thus linked to social promotion. Besides marriage, other investments include buying a buffalo, a piece of land, a car for agricultural transport, investing in a shop or in the education of children, where the main attempt is to establish their autonomy.

Migrating for marriage means saving the money required to face the rising costs of the bride price and the increasing assets needed as precondition for marriage that includes the new icons of modernity and consumption needs that are part of the performance of a respectful marriage.³⁹ The migration strategy is thus conceived within this dynamic of transition back home in a specific period of the life cycle of a man. Migration is a transformative process of belonging where new values and commodities are absorbed.

A new perception of 'Egyptians' as a national community is built up abroad, with the experience of mixing with other national identities and learning alternative ways of being Arabs and Muslims. Their marginalisation and the encounter of fellow Egyptians from different regions is formulated into an identity specifically in contrast to their home village identity.

Migrating is also perceived as a temporal experience, not only counted in years but also in the number of 'times' (*marrat*) someone has travelled:

"The one who come here do not have work over there or the money are not enough. We come here for 4 or 5 years, lets say 2-3 times according to the needs. You go, come back or leave again. With the money we try to build a house, marry or to open a new activity."

The effective length of time depends on the kind of work found, the type of contract and the capacity to save money. What remains certain is the amount of money that is needed in order to achieve a specific project. Every 'time' therefore corresponds to a transition of status: getting married, building a new house after marriage, providing money for the children to get married – a

39. Fanchette (1992) has calculated the rising costs of marriage from \$406 in 1983 to \$1,625 in 1991. It is always striking to see how many pieces of furniture, or electric appliances have become an essential part of the ritual exchange at marriage and of the new consumption requirements. The symbolic value and prestige of electrical appliances is sometimes higher than the more practical needs. Some appliances are simply not used in the daily life of the married couple; for example, the new TV set will remain off in a guest room while the old black-and-white TV will be more commonly used by the family.

transition to the autonomy of masculinity that has faced hardship and attained self-reliance.⁴⁰

The link with home is marked by a gift-exchange that is already an important process during the migration to the Jv. The circulation of resources occurs when one migrant returns home and delivers gifts for fellow migrants. In daily life, however, it takes place through the suitcase trader, *tiggara-al-shanta*, who plays a crucial role as a weekly commuting merchant from Egypt to the Jv and back. These traders are important transmitters of remittances. They are reputed to be faster and even more reliable than banks. They are well known since they are usually part of the social network back home and they are able to bring the money “right to the front door” of the migrant’s family.⁴¹ Further, following the introduction of the *kafil* system, the merchants can act as informal recruitment agents, organizing the network of potential labourers from Egypt and putting them in contact with Jv employers.⁴² The *tiggara al-shanta* also transports letters or gifts from Egypt to migrants in the Jv (such as *mulughia*, cheese or honey), and on the return journey, he brings tapes with the stories of the workers and greetings recorded, in addition to blankets, textiles and clothes that constitute a circulation of resources and emotions.⁴³

LIVING AMONG GREENHOUSES

Greenhouses represent the modernization of agriculture in the Jv. *Biut-al-plastic*, ‘houses of plastic’ as they are called locally, have become an integral part of the material culture of the Egyptian migrants, since old pipes, plastic mulch, plastic rolls and drip tubes are recycled to make the dwellings where the labourers live ‘temporarily’, although often for years. Since the

40. Migration reinforces a gender division of labour back in Egypt: women are tied to household subsistence and farming, while men provide for their mobility and cash income as main expectations of the breadwinner. The mobility of men is intimately linked to the immobility of women. Indeed, male migration also has a transformative role for women remaining at home, both reproducing gender relations as much as contesting them (see Taylor, 1984; Weyland, 1993).

41. This money transmission is often organized by phone to accelerate the process: in the case of Deir Alla region, the suitcase trader phones one of his brothers working in the network, informs him of the amount of money to transfer and the address; the sum is delivered in Egypt the following day. Average expenses for money delivery are from \$7 to \$14 according to the amount of money and the distance for delivery in Egypt. The cost of every bag transported is around \$4. In the Deir Alla region only, there were around 10 suitcase traders, each one connecting to different regions in Egypt.

42. The average earned by this informal recruiter is \$13 for every labourer employed in Jordan.

43. They trade regularly with a car going to Aqaba, and according to market prices in Egypt and Jordan - agricultural seeds (onions, *mulughia*), cloth, wool covers and blankets to Jordan, while tomato and cucumber seeds, and sometimes electric appliances to Egypt.

1980s, the farms and makeshift houses down in the valley, toward the *zor*, are intimately linked to Egyptians.

This place of production is also distinguished by its intensity. First, the greenhouses, since 1968, have symbolized modernisation, although they are labour-intensive. However, the labour is seasonal (particularly in the harvest period) flexible and cheap.⁴⁴ The boost to production was also linked to efficient water management and intensive agriculture, increasing the productivity per yield over the last few decades. It has allowed for an earlier harvest for the market and significantly reduced the costs of farming. Flexible, cheap and exploitable Egyptian manpower has contained the high farm expenses and capital input in farming.⁴⁵ The Egyptians have adapted well to the environment: they live on the spot, 'free' of family ties and they guard the large amount of capital equipment on the farms. In return, they are allowed to consume the products of the greenhouses free of charge – cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergine, beans, onions, potatoes; they live rent-free and only need to buy bread and *hummus* from time to time.⁴⁶ For these reasons, Egyptians are preferred, rather than Jordanian labourers who will rarely live on the farms nor accept the low payments and working conditions.

Entering a greenhouse one experiences the heavy heat⁴⁷, the low status of the labourers and the oppressive working conditions. A sharp spatial distinction is apparent between 'inside' cultivation and outside agriculture (*makhshuf*). Inside is a place of shame (*'aib*) since most of the female Jordanian labourers in the greenhouses are young unmarried girls between 15-19 years old and because of the presence of the stigmatised, low-status Egyptian workers, whose position has racialised all unskilled male labourers as 'Egyptian'.

In this context, agribusiness has transformed the status of farm labour and the values of agricultural work. Whoever works *al-ajjar*, as wage labour, is perceived as lacking autonomy and reputation, where Egyptians are at the bottom of the hierarchy, in contrast to free (*hurr*) and independent work conditions.⁴⁸

44. Greenhouses require intensive manpower in some peak seasons (from November to May), while from the end of July up to September little work is available.

45. Labour expenses in greenhouse and plasticulture are from 40-50% higher than open fields (Steitieh, 1980). Furthermore, greenhouse cultivation, requiring superior hybrid seeds, chemical fertiliser and intensive pest control are high capital investments.

46. Plants of garghir are often present near Egyptian dwellings in the Jv, a salad that is seldom eaten by Jordanians and Palestinians in the valley.

47. During the long summer, from May to September, the external temperature reaches up to 45 degrees and higher inside the greenhouse where the intense humidity makes it quite oppressive.

48. The supervision of work may be performed by a hired manager, a lessee manager, or manager-owner of the land.

In local farming knowledge, there is a fixed relation of Egyptian workers to greenhouses: one Egyptian labourer for every four greenhouses, or four every 30 *dunums*⁴⁹ of open cultivation. It is acknowledged that Egyptians work better than others because they ask for less and complain less than Jordanian labourers regarding flexible and extra hours. With a high turnover of Egyptian labourers they are also hierarchically organized around tasks and responsibilities according to the age of migration. Supervisory and managerial positions involved with irrigation and pesticides command varying salaries among the Egyptians.

Ten hours a day, seven days per week, with just a larger pause at Friday for prayer is the common rhythm of work where 'no holiday' is often stated explicitly. Thus, farm owners who employ Jordanian labourers complain that they work less than Egyptians, are more expensive and, most importantly, they are not always available since they must take hours or even days off for marriages, visits, or guests at home. By contrast, the Egyptians adapt to the requirements of the farm, taking turns with the night irrigation, guarding the property and working long hours in hot conditions throughout the summer.⁵⁰ Frequent delays in payment, however creates anxiety and conflict. As one Egyptian trader explained:

"The main problems for the Egyptians are the payments. Often the employer does not pay or not all the sum he should. So then, you have to go to Egyptian embassy to see if you can solve the issue. Otherwise, like me, you have to go around looking for the credits. But Jordanians are all indebted in this period. They do not have money now. The other day I turned in the village but did not bring anything home, not a girsh! For this reason often Egyptians delay in returning home." (Abdu)

Even in the administrative practice of issuing an entry visa, the *kafil* relation and work contract have become an integral part of the seasonal agricultural activities. As a Palestinian *kafil* explained:

"The labourers change nearly every year! Sometimes some are not nice; they don't work, so I don't renew their visa. Other times they want to go away in other places in Jordan or they go back home. I am preparing now the paper for the visa; often they are friends of the same village or parents of those who are already here. They earn between \$148-183 a month. The

49. Ten dunums correspond to 1 hectare.

50. Besides the wage differentials, the poor diet, the lack of legal protection of working rights, Egyptians have sometimes to surrender their passport to their employer, so that they cannot leave the country in the event of a dispute at the workplace.

price varies on the basis of whether they are new or old in the farm, if they work well or, for example, if they are responsible for fertilizers, chemicals or water on the farm. You have to prepare the papers now [i.e. May] in order to have the labourers for September when the new season starts. Often I spend even \$2,800 every year for these papers. But then the money comes back because I take it back from their salaries. They pay the travel expenses, only sometimes when I let someone I know come, then I pay the half of the travel expenses.”(Ahmed)

As agriculture has absorbed the highest number of migrant workers, regulation of this sector has been constantly delayed, along with construction and domestic work.

Egyptian labourers fall within a crude market mechanism as much as into patron-client relationships, which are frequent in the valley. The relation is one of dependency and paternalism in a mixture of local integration and exclusion.⁵¹ With an ambiguous legal status, the relations of dependency and exploitation have increased with the growing social tension against ‘the foreigners.’ It has created a curious pattern of exclusion, given the common culture, region, religion and language between Egyptians and Jordanians.

Public discourses on poverty in the Valley in reality obscure the relations of inequality and convert issues of exploitation into problems of market efficiency and productivity. Increasingly, the questions of labour conditions in the Jv are translated into a national and ethnic idiom, between Jordanians and Egyptians, hiding what is an effective economic segmentation.⁵² In this context, the ‘developmental’ representation of a ‘local farmer community’ effectively obscures de-localised economic relations and the wider transnational framework in which they take place.

CONCLUSION: ‘WE REMAIN STRANGERS HERE!’

“I do not have Jordanians friends. We stay here and they stay there. There are no problems, I just see them when they come here to ask for oranges and then I don’t see them until the next season! I remain a stranger here (badallni gharib).” (Munir, worker in an orchard)

51. Since a limit has been imposed by the JVA on the number of foreign labourers to be employed in relation to the land units managed, the exchange of labourers between farmers is frequent in order to circumvent these legal limits.

52. The analysis of Longuenesse of migrants’ impact on the economies of the Gulf states is similar to the case of the Jordan Valley: “Les rapports de classe sont donc quasiment extra-territoriaux, la société locale est régie plus par des rapports de distribution que par des rapports de productions, et la relation entre citoyens et étrangers définie comme rapport d’exclusion ou de ponction” (Longuenesse, 1991: 126).

Although Egyptians may have worked in the valley for many years, the experience is one of being and remaining strangers (*gharib*), a perception heightened within the context of cultural similarities. It is because they are fellow Arabs and Muslims that the exploitative relations are perceived as more shocking by the Egyptians – even more so with the recent increasing tensions and xenophobia towards migrants. Jordanians and Palestinians in the valley are often judged by migrants as lacking in morality and lacking religious coherence, a moral condemnation that well expresses the social distance. What is at stake here, is “how labour migration, in all its forms, has reinforced the sense of Arabness while at the same time heightening tensions – tensions that are heightened precisely because Arabs expect better, demand better, from fellow Arabs” (Shami, 1996: 15).

This also reflects the consequences of the deviant label ‘illegal foreigners.’ The sense of Arabness reinforces an oppositional national identity of Egyptians. Their exclusion from local public places, like a marriage party, where there are few sites for public meetings in the valley (apart from the mosque and their specific farm areas) represent an almost visible segregationist exclusion from Jordanian society.

This estrangement is at the same time a local embeddedness:

“Most Jordanians in their heart do not like the Egyptians. They are always afraid that we are here to steal the jobs from them and their money, but they do not work. They are lazy (taba’nin)! In Egypt the shabbab do not go on asking money from their father or mother. They venture out (tala’a barra). I made it all alone. It has been ten years since I left my house. Before Jordan I was in Libya. Now I am 26 years old and I did not ask anything from anyone!” (Ibrahim)

The hardship and frustration of migration is countered by a national idiom in Egypt that emphasizes, in oral narratives, the national development, the agriculture and the availability of water in contrast to the low and decreasing agricultural resources in the Jv. Saad, in her study on narratives of migration by Egyptian labourers, has stressed the importance of the relationship of peasant and the nation, “which provides the terms through which peasant experience and perception of the wider context are articulated and expressed” (Saad, 1998: 35).

Many wage labourers coming from higher Egypt are *fellahin* (peasants), a term of identity that also serves as an occupational status category.⁵³ Migrating

53. Indeed, as soon as I arrived at the village to visit an Egyptian friend, who was my neighbour in the Jv, the first place I was taken to visit was his farm cultivating cotton, wheat, and vegetables. With a continuous comparison to the Jv, it was made clear that this land is the pride of the fellahin and exhibiting it became a claim of identity and status in contrast to the labour conditions in which I had encountered him in Jordan.

means crossing borders, but it also means boundaries of identity, facing other cultural contexts that shape a new sense of national identity in opposition to Jordan and Jordanians, building new social terms of belonging that are far broader than the notion of *fellahin* or the village in Egypt.⁵⁴ At the same time, however, the local presence of Egyptians in the Jordan Valley cannot be understood as a mere exclusion but in terms of an ambiguous and temporary inclusion. Since the agricultural environment is also a place of encounter with female Jordanian workers of low-income families, local relationships are often established through them, where networks and exchanges of solidarity are activated with their families. For example, Egyptians might ask neighbouring women to cook a *makluba* for the arrival of a new fellow Egyptian to the valley, or to use the neighbour's fridge to store some water in the hot summers. The daily exchanges of favours and hospitality with local low-income families highlights ambiguous relationships – between social exclusion and economic integration, between social distance and relationships restricted to lower status Jordanians.⁵⁵

In the last years, the route to Italy has become a new direction for migration as a bridge towards other European countries following the instability and war in the Middle East. Indeed, between 2001-2002, Italy witnessed a high increase of Egyptian arrivals, often by ship from Libya. Local networks in Egypt, were well informed of the accidents of ships sailing to Sicily, resulting in many casualties and deaths, but it seems that the cost of illegal transport (around \$1,500-2,000) and the risks of travel to Italy have not deterred Egyptian ambitions towards Europe.⁵⁶ New directions are taking place within the long tradition of Egyptian migration.

For combined reasons that are of international policy but are linked to the pushes of what is usually called « globalization », these various levels of sponsorship and of the « national privilege » are called into question. This leads to a true change in the relationship with the migrant and the stranger in its large sense, and brings us back to the issue of migratory policies and networks and communities within the framework of this globalization.

54. Again, Saad's work is enlightening here: "(...) in narrating the migration experience, Egyptian villages foreground their Egyptian national identity and therefore turn personal defeat into a national feud" (Saad, 2002: 6).

55. Indeed, marriage between Egyptians and Ghawarneh tribe or Palestinian families are not rare, but are stigmatised by the Egyptian community, since generally these marriages are refused by the Egyptian family and ties with the household back home are therefore interrupted.

56. 2,000 Egyptians were deported from Italy as illegal migrants at the end of 2002. In 1999, the Egyptian Ministry of Labour, worried about the competition, the insecure environment for their nationals in the Middle East and increasing unemployment in Egypt, tried to open new markets "for Egyptian workers in Africa, Asia and Scandinavia as a way of reducing our dependency on Arab labour markets" (Labib, 1999).

