

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

What is the role of the rural–urban migration process in the modernization and development of a rapidly-transforming society such as that which is found in Egypt? This is the main “macro-question” which this thesis aims to investigate. It does so, however, by breaking down the question into a series of more specific objectives, which are matched with the structure of an empirical research investigation which is outlined in this introductory chapter. The empirical core of the study is a questionnaire/interview survey of 242 male migrant workers from rural Upper Egypt who are living and working in Cairo, together with longer interviews with a further 20 migrants. From this empirical core the research links both upwards to the bigger questions of Egyptian modernization, such as population control, unemployment, uneven development; and, at a more disaggregated scale, downwards to an exploration of migrants' experience of, and perceptions on, work, housing, health, income, and demographic issues, both in Cairo and in their villages of origin.

1.1 Justification for the study

Most indicators of Egyptian socio-economic well-being show a double dualism: between rural and urban areas, and between Upper and Lower Egypt. Hence the development contrasts are greatest between rural Upper Egypt on the one hand, and the Greater Cairo Region (GCR) on the other. At the human level, these “quality-of-life” differences are most keenly felt in terms of living standards, including health, income and housing, and access to different types of employment. Providing Egypt’s youth with productive job opportunities is undoubtedly one of the major challenges facing the Egyptian government. High rates of population growth have resulted in large numbers of young people entering the labor force each year. In order to accommodate these large numbers of young persons of employable age, Egypt needs to create hundreds of thousands of job opportunities every year for new entrants to the labor force.

Coupled with large numbers of young people entering the labor force each year is growing unemployment. The 1986 census reported that 12 percent of the labor force were unemployed (up from 7.7 percent in 1976), with a large proportion of the unemployed concentrated among educated youth. For example, 90 percent of unemployed were less than 30 years old in 1986 (CAPMAS, 1989) and nearly three-quarters of the unemployed in 1986 were graduates of university or intermediate schools (Shaker, 1990). According to the 1996 census results, the unemployment rate had decreased to 9 percent of labor force, but the total number of unemployed population nevertheless increased due to overall population growth (CAPMAS, 1999), and there remains the statistically unmeasured phenomenon of underemployment or disguised unemployment, which is widely recognized to be huge.

Clearly, in a large, complex, and rapidly growing society such as Egypt, there are many themes that could be explored when discussing issues relating to labor markets, unemployment, education, young people, and migration. Egypt's long-standing problem of graduate unemployment has led to a tradition of "brain-drain" with Egyptian academics, professionals, and business-people scattered worldwide, especially in the Arab World. Egyptian labor migration to the Gulf and to Iraq and Libya has been considerable – one estimate suggests that by 1983 some 2.5–3.0 million Egyptians were working in these countries, representing more than 20 percent of the Egyptian labor force at that time (quoted in Winckler, 1999: 107). In this thesis, however, I will concentrate on internal migration of males from rural to urban districts of the country, and specifically to Cairo. I will explore the many-faceted dimensions of the living and work experiences of these rural–urban migrants, and study how their migration contributes to the various processes of change in their rural home areas, and to their changing behavior and perspectives with regard to fertility. In choosing to focus only on males I am aware that I am introducing a rather restricted perspective; however, in the rural Egyptian context of labor migration, it is overwhelmingly the men who are the migrants.

In choosing to research rural–urban migration within a large developing country, I seek partly to revive academic interest in the study of internal migration in the less-developed world. Since the 1980s, and even more during the 1990s, studies of migration have

become weighted towards its international dimension. This recent boom in scholarly interest in international migration (which also reflects regional and global geopolitical concerns) has somewhat sidelined the study of internal population mobility, especially in developing countries: a point I shall elaborate on in detail in the next chapter. It is worth remembering that in such contexts, rural–urban migration continues to relocate mass numbers of population; far larger numbers, in fact, than are ever likely to be involved in international migration. As a simple illustration of this last point, IOM’s most recent estimate for the total number of international emigrants worldwide – 150 million – is probably exceeded by the number of internal migrants who have relocated in China in the last couple of decades (IOM, 2000).

In developing and in semi-developed countries, those with low-to-middle incomes within the global ranking, rural–urban migration is very much driven by, or at least related to, the uneven geography of employment, income, opportunities or just plain survival (Skeldon, 1990). Rapid population growth, especially in rural areas, provides an important demographic backdrop to these rural–urban population shifts. The Egyptian case – quite apart from my own personal interest in it as a citizen of that country – is highly relevant for at least three reasons. First, Egypt is a rapidly modernizing society and economy which, like many other states bordering the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, has aspirations of soon becoming a middle-income and more highly-developed state. Second, the vast size of the country and its sharply-etched divisions between urban and rural districts makes it a suitable case-study of the phenomenon of internal migration. And third, like North Africa and the Middle East in general, it has scarcely been studied by population geographers and migration specialists in recent decades. Again, this is a point I shall return to in the literature review section of Chapter 3.

Given the growing and well-known difficulties that face the overall Egyptian population in finding productive employment, it is important to study the characteristics of laborers who migrate from rural to urban areas. Youth in rural areas, where the economic base is largely dependent on agriculture, face a different set of employment problems than do young people in urban areas, where the economic base is more varied. It is also important to examine what strategies rural young men and women (in the Egyptian case

it is mainly men) pursue when they are faced with limited economic opportunities. Do they migrate? Do they attempt to acquire new and/or different skills through formal or informal education? Do they adopt a “waiting strategy”? If they migrate, what are their “migration fields”? And what are their intentions with regard to length of stay, return, etc.? For those who are moving back and forth, are we dealing with true “migration” or perhaps some other human mobility phenomenon such as “commuting” or “circulation” etc.?

A further set of questions relates to the village context. What are the distinguishing characteristics of those who migrate from the village to Cairo compared to those who stay or to those who migrate elsewhere – for instance more locally on the one hand or, on the other hand, abroad? What are the effects of these migrations on the villages of origin? How do villages cope with the departure and absence of a portion of the young, male population? What are the effects of remittances on village life and economy? And what roles are played by returnees in the village modernization process?

These are some of the key research questions addressed by the research carried out in this thesis, and which will be listed in more systematic fashion later in this introductory chapter. Some of the research questions mentioned above will be confronted with quite specific quantitative data, either derived from secondary sources or more importantly, from field survey. Other questions will be answered at a more intuitive or interpretive level, drawing on qualitative impressions derived either from field work or interpretations of my questionnaire data. I will also employ census data as a partial control sample in order to exhibit the differential patterns of behavior – economic, demographic, spatial etc. – of the migrant laborers whom I have surveyed.

I would justify the originality of this research in the following terms. Its first claim to the production of original knowledge will be the results of the empirical research on rural–urban laborers in Cairo. This will provide the latest and most up-to-date survey data on a phenomenon which is well-established in Egypt but which has not been researched in-depth before, and especially not so recently. In fact, this will be the first large-scale questionnaire and interview survey of its kind in Egypt. Both the questionnaire survey and the somewhat more detailed biographical case-studies will provide detailed socio-

economic profiles of the migrants, their motivations for migrating and their aspirations for the future, whilst village-based fieldwork will enable a rare and much-needed perspective on migrants' roles in local, rural development to emerge. In addition, as stated in the introductory summary in the first paragraph of this chapter, this empirical heart of the project will link to large-scale questions relating to the scale of the migratory movement, its impact on the labor market and economy of specific sectors of Cairo, and the potential for remittance-led development in the villages of migrant origin in Upper Egypt.

A further important and original aspect of my findings will be a contribution to understanding the process of fertility decline. This process is seen as key not only in Egypt but throughout North Africa and beyond in hastening the completion of the demographic transition towards a stable and demographically balanced population (Sutton, 1999). Hence, I will ask, does the removal of male workers from rural areas lead to deferred marriage and lowered fertility; and are ideas about family size revised downwards by the urban migration experience? If this is the case, then rural–urban migration can be identified and perhaps promoted as a strategy for accelerating fertility decline, although clearly other considerations about the nature and balance of Egyptian spatial development have to be taken into account.

These primary research findings, based on my own field survey research, will be supported by two types of “desk” research which also can lay claim to some originality – especially the second one. The first is the review of literature on rural-urban migration in earlier times in Egypt and some comparison with research results from other rural–urban migration studies in comparable countries elsewhere in the world. This comparison has had to be kept deliberately restricted; otherwise it runs the risk of becoming an unwieldy account of rural–urban migration in many dozens of less-developed countries, diverting our focus away from the Egyptian case study. The second, more original, type of secondary data analysis is a statistical study, based on successive censuses (including access to the tapes of the still unpublished 1996 Census), of rural–urban and inter-regional migration patterns for the country over the past century. The possibility of modeling this migration in respect of several hypothetical socio-economic independent

variables will be explored. This type of analysis has not been done on recent census data for Egypt before.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The main aim of this study is to analyze one strategy that is chosen by young rural men who face limited economic opportunities in their villages: that is, rural-to-urban migration. As stated already, this migratory phenomenon is examined within a set of wider macro-issues which include the rapid but uneven nature of Egyptian development and urbanization; the hyper-growth of Cairo; the nature of Egyptian employment trends, especially as regards the informal economy; and the long-term demographic trends of a country whose rate of population growth, though falling, is still high and whose distribution of population remains uniquely spatially concentrated.

The empirical objectives of the study can be grouped under four main headings as follows.

1. To study the processes of rural–urban mobility in Egypt:
 - What are the motivations and migration choice strategies of Upper Egyptians who migrate to Cairo, and how do these migrants differentiate themselves from non-migrants who stay in the village, and from migrants who go to other destinations, for instance abroad?
 - What are the mechanisms and networks of migration, e.g. in terms of village origins, social and family networks, modes of travel, and migratory types (seasonal, circulatory, long-term, return visits, etc.)?
 - What are the basic demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Upper Egyptian laborers in Cairo?
2. To investigate living conditions and experiences of work of rural labor migrants to Cairo:

- What are migrants' experiences of the urban labor market, both in structural terms (e.g. their role in the informal economy) and in terms of individuals' job mobility and socio-economic progress?
 - What are the migrants' working conditions, including occupational safety, in their work environment, and how do these compare with working conditions in their home villages and with other, non-migrant workers in comparable sectors of the Cairo labor market?
 - What are the migrants' housing and living conditions in Cairo, and how do these compare with their homes and lives in their villages of origin?
3. To investigate the impact of rural–urban migration on Egyptian demography:
- What are migrants' attitudes towards family size and the upbringing of their children?
 - What methods of contraception do migrants use and are they aware of?
4. To examine economic aspects of rural–urban migration, with particular reference to the villages of origin, national development plans, and migrants' views of the future:
- What incomes do migrants earn, and how is this capital directed and deployed in their communities of origin?
 - What is the overall social and economic impact of migration, and returned migrants, on rural villages in Upper Egypt?
 - What attitudes and knowledge do migrants have about various new national development projects?
 - What are migrants' short- and long-term plans for their future?

These objectives and research questions will be mainly addressed via a questionnaire/interview survey of rural–urban migrant workers in Cairo, which is the main research instrument of the thesis, and by supplementary field work in a selected district of Upper Egypt. Further details on methodology are given in Chapter 4.

I should stress here at the outset – and this caveat will be reinforced later wherever appropriate – that I will not be able to supply concrete and thorough answers to all these individual research questions listed above. Some questions will indeed be confronted by precise data; in other cases the light that my research will shed will be dim or somewhat out of focus, for the evidence will be partial or inconclusive. My research strategy and results are not unique in this regard, but are illustrative of a broader dilemma characteristic of many social scientific investigations, including those in population geography and demography: whether to focus on a narrow set of questions and run the risk of either stating the obvious or producing disappointing results; or to select a broad range of questions which are intuitively more interesting but in turn run the risk of not being able to be convincingly answered with data spread too thinly or unevenly. If I have erred in the latter direction, I hope the reasons are (or will become) clear. Naturally, I return to this key point of research strategy in the conclusion to the thesis.

I should also make it clear in this introductory statement that I do not intend to survey all types of rural-urban migrants from Upper Egypt to Cairo. As will become clearer later, my focus is on present-day poor labor migrants; I do not survey the more wealthy, middle-class or elite migrants such as those who go to Cairo for business or educational purposes, nor do I analyze the old-established poor migrant communities which have been settled in Cairo now for two or three generations. My reasons for narrowing the focus of my study in this way are largely practical and have to do with the amount and variety of fieldwork I could realistically do for my thesis. Because of this, and because of my overriding concern with issues of poverty and demography, I decided to concentrate on the poorest status migrant groups.

In the remainder of this brief introductory chapter I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis, chapter by chapter, in order to demonstrate to the reader at the outset how the study “hangs together” and how the research proceeds through a series of logical steps.

1.3 Organization of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, the study will be organized in eight chapters. A summary outline of the study and of the thrust of each chapter is as follows.

Chapter 2 provides a brief description of Egypt, its society, population, labor force, urbanization, and rural/urban migration. This gives the essential background information against which the research questions are addressed, and results interpreted. The chapter comprises four sections. The first describes Egypt in general terms. The second focuses on social, economic, and cultural differentials between Upper and Lower Egypt. A discussion of regional differentials and trends in urbanization is presented in the third part; and the final section is devoted to a description of trends in the labor force structure.

Chapter 3 is a statistical and literature review of rural–urban migration in Egypt and other developing countries. It will include firstly a statistical analysis of the internal migration phenomenon in Egypt and the most recent estimates of internal migration streams using as yet unpublished data from the 1996 Census. Direct and indirect demographic techniques will be used, employing birthplace and residence calculations and migration residual methods. Second, a review of the existing studies on rural–urban migration in Egypt, highlighting the most significant findings and insights, will be made. From this will emerge some significant gaps in knowledge about Egyptian internal migration, which this thesis will aim to fill. Theories of rural–urban migration in developing countries will then be reviewed in the third part of this chapter, and the most suitable conceptual and theoretical frameworks which appear most promising to a study of rural–urban mobility in Egypt will be elaborated. Although a wide range of approaches will be briefly reviewed, particular attention will be reserved for three conceptual frameworks which may be hypothesized to hold particular relevance for analysis of the Egyptian case: the Todaro model of rural–urban migration (Todaro, 1969; see also Harris and Todaro, 1970), a modified version of the Mabogunje (1970) system-based model of rural–urban migration, and a grouping of concepts related to circular migration (Chapman and Prothero, 1985), household economics and “survival” strategies (see Hugo, 1998; Stark, 1991).

Chapter 4 is about methodology. It starts with a fuller presentation and discussion of the research questions and the objectives of the study, elaborated in greater detail than the introductory listing in Chapter 1. Then the methodology and research instruments will be described. This includes a full description of the data collection methods that were followed, the field questionnaire and the qualitative and the quantitative methods employed in the study, and the techniques of data manipulation and analysis. Although the questionnaire (administered via face-to-face interview) constitutes the main research instrument of the thesis, particular attention is given in the latter part of this chapter to the in-depth interviewees, and a brief pen-portrait is provided of each of the interviewees in order to introduce these informants and provide a bridge to the main empirical chapters which then follow.

Chapters 5 through to 8 constitute the empirical heart of the thesis. Chapter 5 asks: Who are the migrants and why do they migrate? It presents data and analysis of the background characteristics of the migrants (age, education, origin, marital status, etc.), and the reasons and strategies behind their migration to Cairo, including some preliminary perspectives from the villages of origin. It also offers some preliminary perspectives on theorizing Egyptian rural–urban migration.

In Chapter 6 I turn to the work status and experiences of migrants including occupation, type of work (contract, daily basis, or task-based), number of working days per week, number of working hours per day, and other related work aspects. An analysis of occupational safety, health insurance coverage, and injuries related to work conditions is also incorporated in this chapter. Reference is made to published survey data for Cairo districts and to fieldwork on non-migrant laborers, in order to provide a comparative frame of reference for the migrant surveys.

Living conditions of the migrants in their origin (Upper Egypt) and destination (Cairo) are the subject of Chapter 7. This will include detailed reference to housing conditions, household ownership, availability of public services (piped water, electricity, sewage disposal, etc.), and land ownership in the rural places of origin. Urban–rural linkages will then be explored. These include various types of contact and travel, but particular attention will be given to the economically important mechanism of remittance transfer

and allocation. Survey findings from fieldwork in selected villages in Upper Egypt round off the analysis of this chapter.

Chapter 8 addresses family and related demographic issues, as well as plans for the future. The account will analyze migrants' attitudes regarding fertility intentions, ideal versus actual and desired family size, preferred level of education for sons and daughters, preferred age at marriage for males and females, awareness of population problems, knowledge of family planning and contraceptive methods. Again comparisons will be made with non-migrant populations in villages of origin. Migrants' plans for the future will be discussed, both with regard to their own personal aspirations, and with regard to their thoughts and knowledge about national development plans and priorities. This line of analysis will include their plans for staying in Cairo, their economic and investment plans of their income, what are their thoughts about return migration to their villages, or about migration elsewhere, and their main aims in life long-term.

Finally, conclusions and policy implications of the research will be presented in Chapter 9, which will also summarize key findings and contributions to knowledge, as well as suggested areas for future research and a critical evaluation of the research strategy employed in the thesis.