

## Chapter 4

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a detailed presentation and discussion of the research questions and the objectives of the study, building on and refining the list of objectives set out in briefer fashion in Chapter 1 and integrating these with the theoretical and conceptual perspectives reviewed in Chapter 3. Then the methodology is described. This latter includes a full description of the data collection methods that I follow, the field questionnaire and the qualitative and the quantitative methods to be employed, in addition to data manipulation and analysis procedures. The final section of the chapter acts as a link to the succeeding empirical results chapters by presenting brief biographical sketches of the 20 individuals I conducted more detailed interviews with.

#### 4.1 Objectives of the study

The main aim of my research is to explore a common strategy chosen by a certain category of young rural men in Upper Egypt who face limited economic opportunities in their villages – that is, rural-to-urban migration. As stated in the introductory chapter, this migratory phenomenon is couched within a set of wider macro-issues which include the rapid but uneven nature of Egyptian spatial development; the rapid growth of Cairo; the nature of Egyptian employment trends; and the population trends of a country whose rate of demographic growth, though falling, is still high and whose population distribution remains highly spatially imbalanced.

It needs to be re-emphasized here that the group of migrants I surveyed – poor rural-origin migrants working in casual employment in the informal sector in Cairo – are but one (albeit the most numerous) set of migrants from rural Upper Egypt, and that therefore the objectives (and, later, conclusions) which follow need to be shaped around this specific form of rural–urban migration/circulation. I did not directly interview or analyze rural-to-urban migrants who were drawn from upper strata of rural society and

who were moving to Cairo for professional, business, education or other reasons. Nor did I interview the old-established migrant communities drawn from Upper Egypt as a result of earlier labor migrations. The specific nature of my migrant sample (more details will be given on this presently) must be constantly held in mind in the analysis that follows.

I now move to a more detailed specification of the empirical objectives of my study. In the following four subsections I flesh out the four main research themes listed in Chapter 1 (see section 1.2) by including both more explicit descriptive detail and integrated reference to the relevant conceptual frameworks for migration study reviewed in Chapter 3. I both refine and narrow my objectives in the light of the existing literature on Egyptian migration, and also taking on board the preliminary conceptual indications about the relevance of “circulation” as well as migration. This discussion therefore functions strategically as a bridging point in my thesis, leading the reader from the introductory discussions on research objectives, theory, literature review, and the Egyptian context, into the empirical heart of the study which starts in the next chapter and continues to Chapter 8. Chapter 9 will then attempt to tie the research together by evaluating the extent to which the empirical findings answer the research questions and relate to the various theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 3.

#### ***4.1.1 Processes of rural–urban migration and mobility in Egypt***

This first major theme connects directly to explanations of migration behavior based on economic and behavioral frameworks and to the listing of groups of migration factors made at the end of Chapter 3 and modeled in Figure 3.3. At the macro scale, we can refer to models of uneven regional economic development and of the dual economy which were outlined in section 3.3.2. At the individual level, reference can be made to various “rational choice” theories such as some of the laws of Ravenstein (e.g. “migrants move from areas of low opportunity to those of high opportunity”), the human investment theory of Sjasstad, or the Todaro model based on prevailing wage differentials and migrant expectations. Following Zelinsky, Hugo and Skeldon, we shall also take on board the relationship between stage of modernization and type of mobility/circulation, and pay particular attention to the notion of “survival migration”

and the likelihood that what we are dealing with in the Egyptian case is not so much a permanent residential relocation, but a kind of long-distance, long-term circulation of rural labor to urban areas in which the rural link is never broken. Furthermore, we also need to consider whether the migration of Upper Egyptian laborers to Cairo is basically an individually-motivated process or whether, following Stark and others, it can be set within the broader context of family and household decision-making.

Hence the basic research question which lies at the base of much of the work compiled in my empirical analysis: what are the migration choice strategies and motivations of poor rural Egyptians who migrate to Cairo?

Further questions concerning the nature of the rural–urban migration process grow out of this. How, for instance, do those who move differentiate themselves from those who do not, or from those who choose to migrate internationally? What, from the perspective of the village, is the relationship between internal and international mobility? Are these two forms of migration viewed as straight alternatives; are they the preferred options of different groups of people (distinguished perhaps by wealth or education); or are internal and international migration engaged in sequentially by the same individuals?

Picking up the topic of migrant characteristics for rural–urban movement, what are the basic demographic, educational and socio-economic characteristics of Upper Egyptian laborers who migrate and locate themselves in the peripheral, informal sector in Cairo? Are they the very poorest, or are they drawn from a modest variety of rural social and landowning backgrounds?

Next, what are the mechanisms, networks and patterns of migration through space and time? Here, the conceptual references are to the parameters of distance (the Gravity Model), to research on social networks, and to systems approaches. So, more specifically, is there a relationship between distance from Cairo and quantity of migration from various parts of Upper Egypt? What are the social and family networks which lubricate the migration flows from villages to Cairo, and how do they function at both the rural and urban ends of the migration transect? How do Mabogunje's urban and rural control sub-systems function in the Egyptian case? What are the frequencies of

movement, how does this movement back and forth take place (what transport media are used), and is there a relationship between frequency of travel to the home village and its distance from Cairo? In the absence of such movement, or as a supplement to it, what other means of communication are used to keep in touch with the village? Do some migrants tend to lose contact with their rural origins over time, or are there powerful system mechanisms which sustain the rural–urban migration chain and the pre-eminence of the village “anchor” over long periods of time? The historical evidence of established migration flows from Upper to Lower Egypt over the last hundred years reviewed in the first part of Chapter 3 would support both outcomes, since, as we saw in section 3.2.8, some earlier migrations led to permanent settlement, and others remained temporary and circular.

Here, then, is a long list of questions about the basic process and rationales of rural–urban movement in Egypt. My research will not be able to answer them all exhaustively but it will, largely through the questionnaire survey, shed light on most of them, thus creating new knowledge about the phenomenon I have chosen to investigate.

#### ***4.1.2 Living and working conditions of the migrants***

I specified earlier a list of straightforward descriptive research questions under this heading, designed mainly to elicit factual information about migrants’ lives in Cairo. I will spell out the precise questions (housing, health, food, work etc.) I am interested in here in more detail later, when I outline the questionnaire. At a broader and more conceptual level, I wish to elaborate at this point on three more general questions which link to theory and to comparisons. The first comparative question compares migrants’ living and housing conditions in Cairo with conditions in their villages. Are they better off in Cairo under these respects, or do they sacrifice themselves in order to transfer their accumulated capital back to their families and villages? The second question makes the same urban–rural comparison with respect to work experiences, but expands into particular areas where I have an interest such as occupational safety and accidents. The third general question under this heading is more theoretical and links to labor market characteristics. In fact several separate issues can be picked out here. Are migrant workers confined to certain types of work, and, equally importantly, do they experience any upward occupational mobility during their time in

Cairo? To what extent are their jobs characteristic of the “traditional” or “secondary” or “informal” sectors of the urban economy (recognizing that these are a set of overlapping and not identical constructs), and therefore part of the very structuration of the urban economy of Cairo? If the migrants are not successful in “escaping” the poorest-quality jobs, can we therefore speak of a segmented labor market structure in Cairo, with powerful barriers erected between migrant and non-migrant work, such that migrants are (perhaps with exceptional cases) simply unable to move out of their designated job sectors, complemented by a situation in which local Cairo people, even those who are working class and/or unemployed, would not deign to offer themselves up to these low-status jobs?

Once again, I have to acknowledge that my research data will not enable me to furnish complete answers to all these individual questions, not least because of the rather specific construction of my sample of migrants and the way in which they were located “in the field” in Cairo. The limitation of this research design will be commented on again from time to time, in the concluding analysis to Chapter 6 on “Work” and in the final conclusion in Chapter 9.

#### ***4.1.3 Impact of rural–urban migration on demographic behavior***

The third set of issues I am interested in investigating concerns demography; this is of special interest to me given my academic background as a demographer. The theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter 3 have little direct bearing on this question, except insofar as “modernization” experience obtained in the city, including “modern” demographic behavior (small family size, practice of contraception, gender equality etc.), might be conveyed back to the village by return visits and eventual resettlement, thereby helping to establish greater regional equilibrium in economic and population growth terms. It will be interesting to observe whether the demographic implications of rural–urban migration in Egypt extend beyond the simple temporary transfer of “surplus population” from high-fertility regions of low economic dynamism to a more modern urban economy; or whether, through the possible adoption of urban norms of demographic behavior (birth rate in Cairo being much lower than that in Upper Egypt), rural–urban migration becomes an agent of overall national fertility decline. If these

hypothesized outcomes do not occur, to what extent can this be explained by reference to a particular “model” of migration (i.e. circulation) and its assumption of the persistence of rural-based norms as regards demographic and social behavior?

#### ***4.1.4 Economic aspects of rural–urban migration***

The final set of research questions I wish to spell out concern various economic implications of the particular Egyptian migratory phenomenon under investigation. In opening up these questions, I again refer where relevant to the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 3.

One key question here concerns the incomes migrants earn in the urban setting of Cairo, and the use of this income to sustain both themselves in the city and, important for regional development, their villages and home districts. Is rural–urban migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo purely a survival mechanism, redistributing surplus labor and enabling the rural areas to avoid sliding into even worse poverty and overpopulation? Or does the income earned by the migrants enable them to develop their villages by investing in new housing, infrastructures, and economic activities such as farming equipment or rural industries?

These questions presuppose the collection of two types of data: information on migrant incomes, expenditures and savings (via the questionnaire to migrant laborers in Cairo); and fieldwork in the villages to determine the impacts of out-migration, monetary transfers, circulation and return migration on the rural areas. This line of questioning also presumes an understanding of supra-individual scales of migrant behavior: family and kinship networks, community and ideological/religious values, and wider structural forces to do with the continuing nature of uneven spatial development in Egypt.

Migrants’ awareness of these structural forces, and more specifically of national plans for developing the country and its constituent parts, form another aspect of this investigation, and in the main interview schedule questions will be asked about respondents’ knowledge of certain government regional development plans.

Finally it is important to ascertain migrants' perceptions on their own futures: to stay in Cairo; to move on to somewhere else, perhaps abroad; to alternate periods of work in Cairo with periodic spells in the home village; or to return definitively back to the place of origin. These questions, too, link to various conceptual constructs: to Ravenstein's law of "counterstream flow"; to push and pull factors which may change over time (so that the village, once a "push" factor, exerts a "pull"); to possible changing balances in the nature of the dual economy; to various system pathways in the model of rural-urban migration outlined by Mabogunje (1970) and its variant portrayed in Figure 3.3; and to theories of circulation which posit mobility as a more-or-less permanent structural feature of certain developing societies.

## **4.2 Data and methods**

The objectives and research questions elaborated in the previous account will be mainly addressed via the questionnaire/interview survey of rural-urban migrant workers in Cairo, which is the main research instrument of the thesis. Where necessary, comparative perspectives will be introduced by reference to two control groups: non-migrants in Upper Egypt, and non-migrant laborers in Cairo. These comparisons will be made largely with reference to secondary data rather than additional primary surveys carried out by the researcher. However, two further forms of primary data collection were carried out: more detailed (and tape-recorded) interviews to a small sample of migrant laborers in Cairo, and qualitative fieldwork in selected villages in Upper Egypt. The remainder of this chapter describes these research instruments and field methodologies in more detail. Subsections follow on the main questionnaire, the in-depth interviews, and the village fieldwork.

However, before we move to this more technical description of methodologies and research instruments, it would be useful, perhaps, at this point if I declared my own "positionality" within the research. I was born in a village in Upper Egypt (Souhag governorate) and lived there until the age of 11 years, when my father's job moved the family to Cairo. Since then, I have continued to visit the village of my childhood on average twice every year; naturally, I have many relatives still living there. I believe that my own "history" gives me a rather unique insight into both of the "poles" of the

migratory process I am researching, since I am very familiar with both the rural and the urban contexts and their respective traditions and ways of life.

#### ***4.2.1 The questionnaire***

This is my main research instrument and provides the main source of primary data. To call it simply a questionnaire is slightly a misnomer as it was administered face-to-face via a brief interview, usually lasting about 20–30 minutes. Other forms of standard questionnaire distribution (postal, drop-and-collect etc.) were completely inappropriate for my target population, a high proportion of whom are illiterate and do not have stable residence in Cairo. Also, the postal, drop-and-collect methods of questionnaire data collection are not commonly used in Egypt, even among the highly educated people. Hence it is really a “questionnaire/interview” but I will refer to it as the questionnaire survey in order to differentiate it unambiguously from other, more in-depth interviews I also carried out.

My initial aim was to carry out 200–300 standardized interviews with the questionnaire, this being a sample size deemed suitable to generalize results and to study the statistical relations between variables, given the level of detail and subcategories on the questionnaire. My final total is 242. After about 150 questionnaires, I found that a consistent pattern was already firmly established, with duplication and repetition setting in, and no significant new information forthcoming. I continued for another 90–100 questionnaires, in order to ensure maximum validity and robustness of numbers for the numerical analysis.

The questionnaires were taken at different sites where are to be found rural laborers in Cairo. These included squares, parks, and coffee shops where it is well-known that laborers seeking work are gathered, and where employers looking for workers will go to hire them. Most of the questionnaires were administered either early in the mornings, before the main hiring time began, or in the evenings when laborers would gather in coffee shops in the hope of being hired for the next day. Some questionnaires were administered in the course of the day with laborers who did not manage to catch a full day employment opportunity and who were waiting for short task-based assignments,



while some others were administered in laborers' residences in Cairo. This phase of fieldwork with the questionnaire lasted from June to October 2000.

It is important to acknowledge here that the nature of the collection of the questionnaire sample rather rigidly defines the target group surveyed – more or less by definition, they are the poorest rural-urban laborers working in the most marginal and precarious employment sector in the city's labor market. As will be apparent later on, this may constrain my ability to answer a few of the research objectives set out above, since the sample design "closes off" certain possible variations and outcomes (for instance mobility to another, better segment of the labor market).

Questionnaire respondents were offered tea, cigarettes or a small monetary incentive to encourage their contribution in the survey, and to thank them for participating. No insuperable problems were encountered in the survey, once I had explained who I was, the purpose of the study (academic research for a university degree), and reassured respondents that I was not a government official. Some refusals were encountered but they were few, no more than 2 or 3 percent. It is perhaps worth pointing out here that, through my earlier researches on fertility issues amongst various sectors of the Egyptian population, I had already acquired a wide range of experience of carrying out survey work amongst laborers in both rural and urban contexts, and hence I believe I was quickly able to develop good contacts and relationships with my target population. The fact that I am myself originally from Upper Egypt was a plus factor in dealing with interviews. Being able to communicate with them using an Upper Egyptian accent – which is very rigid and strange in Cairo – and using their common expressions made me also be able to understand and elaborate on their experience more quickly and effectively.

The questionnaire was obviously constructed in such a way as to provide some data for formulating answers to many of the research questions set out in the previous section of this chapter. In drafting the questionnaire schedule I followed a "common-sense" approach based on linking the research objectives with relatively simple questions which could be readily understood by the respondents, drawing on my previous experience of

carrying out questionnaire surveys in Egypt. However I also cross-checked the design of the schedule with the very useful manual on migration surveys in low-income countries edited by Bilsborrow *et al.* (1984), especially those chapters relating to survey design (Bilsborrow, 1984), social and demographic aspects of migrant surveys (Oberai, 1984), and migrants and the labor process (Standing, 1984).

The full questionnaire can be found in an Appendix at the back of the thesis. It includes the following main groups of questions:

1. Background information:

Age, education, place of origin, marital status, number of brothers and sisters, number of sons and daughters (if ever married), etc.

2. Reasons for migration:

Consideration of alternative options; previous migration experience; relatives or other family members' migration experience, etc.

3. Information about work:

Current and previous jobs, number of working hours per day, number of working days per week, daily wage, duration of current work, health insurance, occupational safety, accidents and injuries related to work, etc.

4. Information about living conditions in places of origin and destination:

Ownership of durable goods in village of origin; access to electricity, piped water, and sewage disposal; ownership of agricultural land, livestock, agricultural machines and vehicles; duration of stay away from family for work; cost of living in Cairo; nutritional status and expenditure on food and health, etc.

5. Information about income and its disposal:

Division of income between living expenses in Cairo and savings/remittances, methods of channeling money back home, use of remitted income, and investment plans for future.

6. Information about family:

Fertility intentions, preferred level of education for sons and daughters, preferred age at marriage for males and females, awareness of the Egyptian population problem, knowledge of family planning and contraceptive methods, etc.

7. Information about the new national projects:

Knowledge about the new national projects in Upper Egypt (Toshka, The New Valley Projects) and Sinai (Assalam Canal and other projects); and respondents' willingness to work in these new projects if such work became available to them.

8. Plans for the future:

How long do respondents plan to remain in Cairo? What are their thoughts about return migration to their villages, or about migration elsewhere? What are their main aims in life long-term?

After the questionnaire survey, the questionnaire data was entered into a specially designed data entry program, and subsequently checked and cleaned using Epi-Info software package. Data processing was done using SPSS software package. Further details of the methods used will be provided when the results are presented in subsequent chapters. As one might expect for a data set of this kind, the techniques ranged from frequency tabulation of all the variables, to cross-tabulation of selected variables, to appropriate tests of association and similarity/dissimilarity.

#### ***4.2.2 In-depth interviews and village fieldwork***

As mentioned earlier, and as is implicit in the listing of research questions, the study of the laborers in Cairo will be sometimes made against the background of two comparison groups: the population of the villages of origin in Upper Egypt, and non-migrant laborers doing similar or analogous jobs in Cairo. These control groups are investigated in two ways: via published survey and census data for the requisite urban and rural districts of Egypt; and through mainly qualitative fieldwork in the two research sites, Cairo and Upper Egypt. In Cairo I use targeted field investigation to make comparisons regarding working conditions and housing facilities with non-migrant laborers. In Upper Egypt I carried out fieldwork in March 2001 in a selected representative district (a group of villages where I have family connections, and hence could find accommodation, in

Souhag governorate) to explore the non-migrant, return migration, remittance and village development perspectives. This village work employed a range of survey methods, mainly of a qualitative nature, with non-migrants, the families of migrants living in Cairo, returned migrants and various key village personnel. The fieldwork was carried out in four villages. The four villages comprise what is called a local unit in the Egyptian local administration system. They consist of one main village – Seflaque – and three satellite villages – Nagaa Hermas, Yaakoub, and Nagaa Hamed. The total population of the local unit is about 60,000 inhabitants. Among the questions to be explored in this village fieldwork are the following:

- What factors help to explain who migrates and who does not?
- What are the roles of family and social networks in conditioning the migration process and in keeping contact with migrants in Cairo?
- How are remittances used?
- What do migrants do when they return?
- What are the main demographic and economic contrasts between migrant and non-migrant households?

Regarding the more detailed interviews with Egyptian laborers in Cairo, I carried out 20 in-depth interviews with key informant people and cassette-taped them. The tapes were transcribed by me both in Arabic and in English. The selection of key informants depended mainly on my experience in the first phase of data collection – the questionnaire survey – where I managed to specify the broad characteristics and hence the criteria for choosing these key informants: laborers who have more than one year of work experience in Cairo, who have engaged in many different types of work, and who have interesting and informative stories to tell. The objective of the interviews was to collect more personalized accounts of some of the key open-ended questions on the questionnaire. When I approached the groups of laborers and explained to them my research objectives, they helped me to identify good key informants. In most of the cases they referred me to someone that all of them agreed about with regard to his ability to summarize and explore their experience, in addition to his own. The in-depth interviews

took place in November and December 2000. A biographical summary of these 20 interviewees is given in the final section of this chapter.

Actually, to call these interviews “in-depth” might be an exaggeration in some cases. Rarely did these interviews last more than one hour – usually the duration was 30–40 minutes. The difficult conditions of life for migrant laborers in Cairo do not generally permit relaxed and long-winded conversations. The interviewees, whilst nearly always being perfectly willing to answer my questions, often did not elaborate in much depth or detail. They saw their lives as simple, hard, and not worthy of much detailed description or analysis. By and large they are poorly educated, simple, honest, rural folk who are perhaps unconfident about engaging in lengthy conversations with a researcher, preferring instead relatively short, straightforward answers.

#### ***4.2.3 Ethical considerations***

As far as I can judge, there are no major ethical constraints on the research carried out in this thesis. Trespassing on respondents’ time was compensated by small gifts of cigarettes and refreshment. This is not unusual in survey fieldwork in such settings and no element of bribery is implied: my previous field survey experience in Egypt confirms the unproblematic nature of this and other potentially sensitive issues. Questions on family planning might be regarded as sensitive, but again I stress my prior experience of surveying in this area. I am confident that my interviewees were straightforward in their responses. In order to avoid conflict over working hours, I carried out interviews mainly early in the morning or after interviewees’ working days. Where the identity of individuals might be problematic, as with biographical case-studies or key informants, strict anonymity is preserved by the use of pseudonyms.

### **4.3 Introduction to the in-depth interviewees**

As a way of linking these four introductory chapters to the main body of the thesis which follows and presents the main set of research results, I use the final section of this chapter to introduce the personalities of the interviewees. These 20 case-histories of migration were chosen partly for their typicality of various common migration situations

amongst my research subjects, but also need to be acknowledged as a counterface to the norm. Most of these individuals, under their pseudonyms, will make repeated, if often brief, appearances in the next five chapters, so I feel it is useful, at this point in the thesis, to give little thumbnail sketches of who they are, where they come from, and a brief note on their migration characteristics. I give each interviewee a kind of subtitle in order to personalize the biographical summaries and in order to provide a set of key characteristics of the migrants, their backgrounds and their motivations and behaviors.

Mohamed: victim of the new agricultural reform

Mohamed is from El-Gezira village in Menia governorate. He is in his mid-40s, married, with three children all in school. Since he was a young child, he worked in farming but, because his family has never owned any agricultural land, he used to work on the land of others. He then was able to hire a piece of land, but after the new agrarian reform laws which introduced a more marketized regime of farming prices, his rent for this piece of land increased from 200 to 2,000 Egyptian pounds per year (very roughly, from US\$50 to 500). He had no option but to return the land to its owner and migrate to Cairo. This was three years ago. Mohamed had no experience of construction work, but he heard about opportunities in Cairo from those in his village who have worked there. He thinks that, during his time in Cairo, working conditions have got worse. Mohamed hopes to find a job in his village in order to be able to return and live with his family.

Henein: the cement carrier

Henein is from a village which is in Mallawy district of Menia governorate. He is 28 years old, married, with one young son. He comes from a large, landless, farming family. He first came to Cairo to work when he was just 11 years old. His main job in recent years has been as a cement carrier, loading and unloading tractors and trucks. This work is very tough and physical. Henein says it is harder than just working as an ordinary builder's laborer. There is also an element of skill in handling the bags, knowing how to lift the sacks properly so they do not snag or drop. In spite of the heavy nature of his work, Henein is satisfied with his job since it gives him the means to support his family

Ibrahim: the veteran

Ibrahim left his village in Beni-Suif governorate in the 1970s. Now he is in his early 60s – he does not know his exact age. He has seven daughters, four of them married, and one son, the youngest child. He was one of the pioneering Upper Egyptian migrant laborers in the Mokattam area, on the eastern side of Cairo. He was also a migrant worker in Iraq before the Gulf War. After returning to Mokattam, Ibrahim resumed his work in construction. He has become well-known and well-respected amongst the construction workers and porters who make up the migrant labor force in Mokattam. Whilst working in Cairo, two of his daughters married two of his young migrant co-workers. Ibrahim makes many visits to his wife and remaining young children in Upper Egypt. The most important thing in his life is his son Magdy: it is his wish to do everything for him that he can afford to do.

#### Selim: the school drop-out

Selim migrated from the village of El-Lokka in Assiut. He is 28 years old and single. Both his parents are dead. He dropped out of school and followed his brother to Cairo. The brother introduced him to his house- and work-mates, and helped him to find work in the building sector. Since the death of his father and mother, he visits his village rather infrequently – to see his four married sisters, with one of whom he entrusts part of the money he earns in Cairo. His sisters nag him to get married. Selim wants to find a secure job in Cairo before settling down; he would like to marry a girl from his home area and bring her to Cairo when he has a better job, for instance working on a secure contract as a porter.

#### Nasralla: the accident victim

Nasralla is from Barsha village in Menia. He is in his late 30s, married with three sons. His wife is pregnant with their fourth child. He started working in Cairo when he was 16 years old, joining one of his relatives. His work consists of loading and unloading sacks of cement for a cement dealer. Nasralla's brother lives permanently in Cairo but he rarely visits him. Nasralla had a bad accident when he fell from a speeding tractor, and was hospitalized and unconscious for five days. His dream is to run a small business of his own, but he cannot afford to do this yet, so he carries on humping bags of cement.

#### Rady: the eldest son

Rady came to Cairo five years ago from El Atoush village in Menia. He is 27, married with three children. He finished the technical secondary school and then worked in agriculture but the work was very seasonal and poorly paid. His family has no land and, since he was the eldest of seven brothers, he had more or less no option but to migrate to Cairo. He works in the construction sector in the Egyptian capital. To some extent, his migration has been a success for he has been able to use part of his earnings to build a separate house in his village for himself and his family. However, he views his migration to Cairo as just a means of avoiding indigence; the only advantage lies in money and work, while the big disadvantage is that he has to live apart from his family. Rady hopes to find a permanent government job in his village so that he can return and reunite with his family.

Khairy: the pilgrim

Khairy originates from a small village in Menia. He is 24 years old, married with a young baby. He migrated to Cairo when he was 17, after finishing the secondary technical school, pushed by the lack of employment opportunities in his home district. First he worked in the building sector but then found work in a confectioner's shop and, after that, in a paint shop. In 1995 he traveled to Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage visa and overstayed, working illegally for 10 months, before he was arrested and forced to return to Egypt. He went back to construction work, picking up his earlier contacts in the suburb of Haram. Khairy's dream is to find a more permanent job in order to enjoy some stability in his life. He would like to resettle in his home area, provided that he can find a job there.

Zaky: the child migrant

Zaky is from Diabat village in Souhag. He is 29 years old, and newly married. He is the eldest son in a large family of five brothers and four sisters. His family is very poor, with no land. He first came to Cairo when he was 14, during the school summer holidays, to look for temporary work to earn money to help his family. He continued this for a few more years, taking his summer earnings back home to his father and helping to pay for his school clothes. After he finished his high school diploma, he moved to Cairo more



permanently to work. Zaky lives in Cairo with other workers from his village, socializing only with them. He hopes to return to his home if he can find a permanent job there.

Ismail: the rubble remover

Ismail comes from Bani Gorra village in Assiut. He is 25 years old and is married. He is the eldest son in a large family of five brothers and four sisters. Like Zaky, Ismail came to Cairo for the first time whilst still at secondary school. He traveled with his father who was working in the building trade in Cairo. As a student, Ismail thought he was going to have fun in Cairo and was impressed by the liveliness of the big city. He did a summer job in a restaurant. After he finished his high school diploma, Ismail and his father got to know a man who was working in the business of clearing rubble from building sites. They worked as rubble removers for some time, but Ismail did not like this type of work because of the constant dust. He shifted to work in construction as an ordinary general laborer. Ismail lives in Cairo in a rented room with a younger brother, a cousin, and six other workers – nine people sharing one room. His ultimate goal in life is to find a permanent job in his hometown – he would take this even if it paid half the income he earns in Cairo.

Ahmed: the porter

Ahmed is from El-Badary in Assiut. He is 36 years old and is married with three children. He first came to Cairo three years ago to work in the construction sector. The village offered him no real opportunities, since he came from a large family which owned no land. He managed to improve his situation in Cairo, working first as a construction laborer and then getting a more secure job as a porter in a building he had helped to construct. The owner of the building offered him the porter's job and a room on the ground floor of the building. This enabled him to bring his wife and children to live with him in Cairo. After about a year, his wife started to share his job as a porter and cleaner of the public area of the building; she also picks up occasional cleaning work for the residents of the building within their own apartments. This gives Ahmed extra time to seek additional construction work elsewhere, so whenever he has spare working time, he goes to one of the meeting points near his block where construction workers assemble to be hired.

Dessouky: the landless migrant

Dessouky is from Mahroussa village, Qena. He is 41, married with six children. In his village he was a landless potential migrant with no trade or occupation; he found only occasional work as an agricultural laborer. Work in the village was short-term and seasonal, linked to harvesting sugar-cane, the main crop in Qena. Dessouky first came to Cairo to try his luck 15 years ago. He lives with others from his village. He has no hopes or plans for the future, resigned to take life as it is.

Mahmoud: the reluctant migrant

From Essawyya village in Souhag, Mohamed is 20 years old and newly married. After marriage, he continued to live with his parents – this is common practice in rural Upper Egypt. Mahmoud used to work in the construction sector in his home region but could not make any progress since work opportunities were very scarce. He moved to Cairo two years ago. His friends in Cairo are those from his home area. He does not like living in Cairo and feels he is forced by circumstances to stay there against his will.

Hanna: “a problem with my brother”

Hanna originated from Bertebat village, Menia. He is 35, married with three children. He first came to Cairo in 1982 after a quarrel with his brother over looking after animals at home: violence occurred and he left home and took the train to Cairo, seeking out some village acquaintances to stay with. After a week, his brother came to Cairo to take him back to the village, but Hanna continued to periodically visit Cairo for the purposes of getting short-term work; the city impressed him. Hanna also spent two periods of about a year each working in Iraq during the 1980s. At the time of the interview, Hanna was working in construction, living alone and for free in the unfinished building he is working on. When the building is finished he hopes to get a job as a porter in the building and leave the tough work of construction. At this stage he may bring his family to Cairo; or, if he can get a permanent job back home, he would reunite with his family there.

Shaaban: the aspiring businessman

From Diabat village in Souhag, Shaaban is 24 years old and engaged to be married. He has a high school commercial diploma. He is from a large family: five brothers and four sisters. Shaaban's family owns a café in the village. All of the brothers spend some time working in the café but there is nowhere near enough work to keep them occupied and so they need to seek other means of employment and income generation. Shaaban came to Cairo soon after finishing his diploma and met up with a brother and other relatives, with whom he stayed for a while. This was five years ago. He has done various jobs in Cairo. His aim is to establish a business of his own in the village.

Fakhry: more children, more education

From El-Mahroussa village in Qena, Fakhry is 32, married with five children. He wants to have more children. He has been a migrant laborer in Cairo for 15 years. He used to do casual work in farming in his village, but the work was highly seasonal and only available during the harvest. He moved to Cairo on the advice of village friends who told him about work opportunities; he traveled there and linked up with them to find work. However, his dream is to return to the village and open a small shop so he can stay with his family. Because he did not complete his own education, he is very keen to educate his own kids – for him this is the most important thing in his life.

Kamal: the computer scientist

Kamal is from Bertbat village in Menia. He is 30 years old and single. He has a high school diploma in computer science but has never been able to further that line of study in his work. He started to come to Cairo in the late 1980s whilst pursuing his secondary school studies: he needed money to buy clothes and travel to school which was in the district capital. He went to Cairo with one of his relatives. His first experience of earning money in Cairo as a teenager made a deep impression on him. He worked for 15 days in a workshop (night shift) and earned 35 Egyptian pounds (9 US\$): he went to the clothes market, got some gear for 30 and returned home to his village with 5. Next he migrated with a cousin who was a mason in Cairo, lending him a hand with the preparation of the concrete and mortar. After his father's death in 1993 he returned to the village for a while. Next, he got a construction job at Sharm El-Sheikh at the southern tip of Sinai, building a new hotel. Now he is back in Cairo, working in construction, but hoping for a permanent job in the city so he can stay there for good.

Ali: the mason

Relatively recently married and with one daughter, Ali came to Cairo from Belfia village in Beni-Sueif about five years ago. He migrated with a friend from the village, where there was a chronic lack of work. At first he found a job in a poultry shop in the Manial neighborhood of Cairo, but he did not like this type of work so he eventually quit and went back to the village for a while. His next migration was to the new town of El-Shorouk, still in the Cairo region, where he made contact with a building contractor with whom he worked as a mason for couple of years. Ali sees working in Cairo as a necessary but humiliating experience; local people look down on construction workers from Upper Egypt. He wishes he could find a decent job, perhaps working for the government, in his hometown.

Gaber: the exam failure

Thirty years old, married and with two sons, Gaber is from Beni Shoqair Village in Assiut governorate. When he first left the village to work in Cairo he was 15 years old; he came with a group of migrants from the same village who had heard about a building contractor in Cairo who was looking to hire workers. Gaber started his migratory career early because he failed in his preparatory stage examinations for secondary school. He picked up short periods of work in other places in Egypt but he found Cairo generally more profitable and successful for getting unskilled work – the only work he was qualified to do. He also had three months working in Saudi Arabia. After his return from that country he got married and migrated once again to Cairo. The thing he hates most is the instability of his situation, linked to the insecurity of his work.

Radwan: a man of experience

He is also from the village of Beni Shoqair, and was 15 when he first migrated to work in Cairo. Now he is 43 years old, married, with seven children. He first worked for a quarry company, then moved on from place to place around Cairo, always within the broad construction sector, and acquired skills as a mason. He has also worked from time to time elsewhere in Egypt. Although most of his family remains back in the village, he lives and works with his eldest son, aged 17, who has followed him to Cairo after dropping out of school. Radwan is considered a man of experience as he has worked in many jobs in different

places in Egypt. His motives for work are not only money: for him it is equally important to be treated properly by one's employer and to have good relations with one's fellow-workers.

Diab: the former railway man

Diab is from El-Mansha village in Souhag. He is 50 years old, married with four children. His first migration was to Alexandria where he stayed many years before finally moving, at the mature age of 47, to Cairo. He has several cousins who have migrated and settled in Alexandria. In Alexandria he used to work as a laborer on the railway. He came to Cairo after the laying off of many railway workers. Returning to the village was not an option because of the extreme lack of opportunities there. So he moved to Cairo to seek work in construction. At present, Diab does not have a proper place to stay; he is lodging with a friend who works as a guard. Whenever he can – which means whenever he has some money saved – he travels back home to spend time with his family.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The main purpose of this chapter has been to lay out the methodological framework of the thesis. I have set down my research objectives, organized under main themes and then subsidiary questions within those themes; and I have described both the structure and methodology of my two main surveys, the questionnaire/interview survey and the 20 in-depth case studies. In the final section of the chapter I have introduced the case-history biographies in the hope that these pen-portraits will bring some initial human content to what has thus far been a predominantly background, literature-based, methodological account. The biographies also provide an introductory perspective on some of the recurring themes about rural–urban migration which will resonate throughout the following empirical chapters. Amongst these recurring refrains of personal experience we can note the following: the poverty, landlessness and large family sizes of the migrants' village origins; their limited options but to migrate to Cairo where the construction and other casual-labor sectors offer them a means of survival; the insecurity, nevertheless, of their lives in Cairo, with unstable access to work, overcrowded and unsatisfactory arrangements for accommodation; the lack of opportunity to trade on any school qualifications they may have acquired; their aspirations to return to the highly unrealistic prospect of a permanent job in their home

region; and their resignation to the reality of their situation as poor, but surviving, migrant workers.