

Chapter 5

WHO ARE THE MIGRANTS AND WHY DO THEY MIGRATE?

This relatively brief chapter commences the presentation of my survey and interview data. It contains the analysis of the background characteristics of the migrants and the reasons and strategies behind their migration to Cairo, including some perspectives from the villages of origin. The chapter therefore helps to answer the following questions: What are the basic demographic, educational and socio-economic characteristics of Upper Egyptian laborers who migrate to Cairo? What are their migration choice strategies and motivations? How do those who migrate 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? How do Upper Egyptian rural workers envision their migration experience to Cairo while they were in their villages? Who talked to them about working in Cairo? I should stress at the outset that this chapter will not provide complete and conclusive answers to all these questions: some will be answered more effectively than others by the data that I present and have at my disposal. And subsequent chapters will also enable some more complex answers to build up to questions which the present chapter is only answering in a preliminary way. As in the chapters that follow, my data here will consist of results from my main questionnaire survey, supplemented by insights drawn from the more open interviews.

5.1 Who are the migrants?

Migration theory tells us that some people are more likely to migrate than are others. If the groups who are most likely to migrate to big cities can be identified, future urban growth, and the impact of various socio-economic changes on the volume and the direction of rural–urban movement, can be predicted to some extent.

5.1.1 Background characteristics of the migrants

In this sub-section I answer the following question: Who are those people who migrate and circulate from Upper Egypt to work in the informal sector in Cairo? What are their demographic, educational and socio-economic characteristics? The background characteristics of the surveyed sample (242 cases) are given in Table 5.1. A cross-tabulation of age of migrants by education is given in Table 5.2. About two-thirds of the migrants (65.2 percent) are between 14 and 29 years old. The highest concentration of laborers is found in the age group 20–24 years old: 34.7 percent of the surveyed population. Migrants' ages range between 14 and 54 years old, but respondents who are 50 or more years old comprise only 2.9 percent of the surveyed population (and it will be remembered that one of the 20 interviewees, Ibrahim, was over 60). The mean age of migrants (at the time of survey) is 28.9 years old. It is quite clear that in Egypt young people tend to experience rural–urban migration more than old people. This young age structure of migrants has an effect on the marital status of migrants, where I found that more than half of them are single (42.1 percent) or engaged (13.6 percent), while 43.4 percent are married. The extent to which married migrants bring their wives and families to Cairo, as opposed to leaving them in the village, will be commented on later.

The basic demographic characteristics of Upper Egyptian migrant laborers in Cairo are quite closely matched by other roughly comparable surveys (see Oberai, 1984 for some summary examples). To take just one specific example, migrants to Khartoum in neighboring Sudan had, according to Oberai (1975), an almost identical age distribution to that recorded in Table 5.1: in Khartoum 67.9 percent of all rural in-migrants were aged 15–29, compared to 65.2 percent aged 14–29 for Cairo. Further similarities were found in terms of educational background: about half of Sudanese migrants had no

formal education, and whilst there was a prevalence of primary over secondary education for the remainder, the percentage with university education (1.2 percent) was identical.

Regarding the precise figures on the educational status of migrants to Cairo, one can say that most of them (81.4 percent) belong to two educational categories: none (no education) comprise 45.9 percent, and those with a technical secondary certificate comprise 35.5 percent. The technical secondary certificate is regarded in Egypt as a final certificate that enables its holder to join the labor force. Technical secondary has many branches such as agricultural, commercial, and industrial certificates. However the technical secondary certificate is considered as a final qualification; very few of its holders may go on to university education and only under very restrictive rules. It is important to mention here that those who join the technical secondary route are preparatory certificate holders with rather minimum examination scores, while those with high scores join the general secondary, then university education. The level of technical secondary education is way below the level of general secondary education. Most of technical secondary certificate holders are not able to compete in an open (or even semi-open) market economy because of the sheer pressure of supply of labor market participants and entrants with high qualifications.

One may therefore tentatively conclude that technical secondary certificate holders have higher rates of unemployment and higher rates of migration too. Other categories – other than technical secondary and no education – comprise 18.6 percent. Only 1.2 percent of migrants are university degree holders. Of course, we do not infer from this that university graduates comprise a tiny minority of migrants to Cairo: my sample was drawn exclusively from the laboring class of migrants interviewed in ways and in settings that were elaborated in Chapter 4. So, instead, what we can conclude is that, amongst the rural–urban laboring migrants who move from Upper Egypt to Cairo, those with lower educational standards and aptitudes constitute the overwhelming majority. Finally, we can be reminded that quite a few of the interviewees mentioned at the end of the previous chapter were exam failures and school drop-outs.

Table 5.1

Background characteristics of respondents

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age (in 5 year age groups)		
14–19	25	10.3
20–24	84	34.7
25–29	49	20.2
30–34	21	8.7
35–39	23	9.5
40–44	12	5.0
45–49	21	8.7
50–54	7	2.9
Mean		28.9 years
Marital status		
Single	102	42.1
Engaged	33	13.6
Married	105	43.4
Divorced	2	0.8
Highest level of schooling successfully completed		
None	111	45.9
Primary	24	9.9
Preparatory	9	3.7
Secondary General	9	3.7
Secondary Technical	86	35.5
University	3	1.2
Place of origin		
Beni-Sueif	19	7.9
Menia	42	17.4
Assiut	61	25.2
Souhag	95	39.3
Qena	18	7.4
Luxor	1	0.4
Aswan	6	2.5
Total	242	100.0

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

From where did those migrants come? They came from all Upper Egypt governorates, from Beni-Sueif in the north (100 kilometers from Cairo) to Aswan in the south (1000 kilometers from Cairo), but most of the laborers in my sample came

from three governorates that are located in the middle of the Upper Egypt region. These governorates are Souhag (95 migrants or 39.3 percent), Assiut (61 migrants, 25.2 percent), and Menia (42 migrants, 17.4 percent). The contribution of Beni-Sueif (in the north) and Qena (in the south) is about the same (19 and 18 migrants respectively). Few migrants come from Luxor and Aswan, in the far south. Is there a relation between distance and the flow of migration, according to the rationale of the Gravity Model? According to the data from my sample, the relation is very weak. This finding also contradicts one of Ravenstein's "laws" since distance control seems not to work in the Egyptian case. This may be attributed in part to the enhancement of means of transportation between Cairo and Upper Egypt governorates, and the fact that Menia, Assiut, and Souhag governorates are the highly populated governorates in Upper Egypt with the lowest levels of socio-economic development in the region. Nor do migrants from Upper Egypt engage in step-migration: almost without exception, their move to Cairo is a direct one, without any intermediate stages in intervening smaller towns.

Next, is there a relation between age of migrants and education? The cross-tabulation of age and education in Table 5.2 may answer this question. After grouping educational status into three categories (no education, technical secondary, and others) and using five-year age groups, one can say that most young-age migrants are educated (at least to the extent of having the technical secondary qualification), while most older migrants are not educated. It is clear from the table also that the number of migrants with no education increases by age, while the number of migrants with technical secondary education decreases by age. Since the minimum graduation age for technical secondary education is 17 years old, it seems that migration right after graduation is common and is regarded as a kind of waiting strategy until young males find a permanent or a long-term job related to their specialization. This strategy will be discussed later in this chapter when we explore reasons for migration and in successive chapters when we discuss migrants' future goals and aims.

Table 5.2

Cross-tabulation of age and education

Age group	Highest level of schooling successfully completed			Total
	None	Secondary technical	Other	
14–19	5 4.5%	9 10.5%	11 24.4%	25 10.3%
20–24	19 17.1%	47 54.7%	18 40.0%	84 34.7%
25–29	21 18.9%	20 23.3%	8 17.8%	49 20.2%
30+	66 59.5%	10 11.6%	8 17.8%	84 34.7%
Total	111 100.0%	86 100.0%	45 100.0%	242 100.0%

Chi Square = 69.56 $p \leq .000$

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Table 5.3

Mean family size by place of origin

Place of Origin	Mean	n
Beni-Sueif	7.4	19
Menia	8.2	42
Assiut	8.6	61
Souhag	8.4	95
Qena	7.5	18
Luxor	6.0	1
Aswan	5.2	6
Total	8.2	242

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Family size is one of the reasons that were mentioned by interviewees as a reason for migration and this too will be discussed later in this chapter. People from large family backgrounds tend to migrate to escape family problems, to relieve their burden on the family, or to contribute towards the family income. The higher the family size, the higher the likelihood of migration. The family size – that is to say the household size – of the surveyed population ranges between 2 and 25 individuals with a mean of 8.2 individuals. As Table 5.3 shows, there is some variation by place of origin. The highest mean family size is found in Assiut (8.6 individuals), followed by Souhag (8.4 individuals). Qena ranked the third with a mean of 7.5 individuals. The lowest family sizes are found in Luxor and Aswan (6.0 and 5.2 individuals respectively). According to the results of the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000 (National Population Council, 2001), the mean household size in rural Upper Egypt was 5.9 individuals. This means that the surveyed migrants came from larger families (on average 8.2) than the average of the sending region, although in drawing this conclusion one needs to be aware of possible age-specific and cohort effects of the survey sample when compared to the general population of rural Upper Egypt.

Another important factor that correlates with background family size is the dependency burden. This reflects the burden on working people to look after themselves and their dependent family members. The dependency burden increases when non-working family members increase. Children (as well as non-active elderly people) increase the dependency burden and therefore the pressure on the family head to seek other income generation solutions. Migration is one of these solutions.

The number of surviving children for the ever married – currently married, divorced, and widowed – surveyed population (107 cases) ranges between zero and 12 with a mean of 3.4 children. This mean is more than the recorded mean for Upper Egypt in the Demographic and Health Survey 2000, which is 2.2 living children. This means that fertility among migrants is higher than the average for the sending regions. This comparison assumes similar age structure among migrants and non-migrants and a similar mortality level and pattern among children in the two groups, which can not be assessed using the current available data. This comparison should be regarded as an approximation, therefore. The total fertility rate of the migrants can be approximately

gauged from the family sizes of the older respondents, which are around 6, again higher than the national and Upper Egypt TFR figures.

The overall mean surviving children figure hides difference among migrants according to age, which is an important factor in measuring fertility outcomes. The mean surviving children in the surveyed population increases by age – as expected – from 1.2 surviving children for the first age group (20–24), to 5.6 for migrants in the 45–49 age group, then it starts to decrease for the last age groups. This decrease may be attributed – in part – to the effect of mortality. See Tables 5.4 and 5.5 for the full set of data on family size derived from the questionnaire survey. I shall return to this important topic of fertility behavior in much more detail in Chapter 8.

Table 5.4
Absolute number of living children for ever married people

Number	Frequency	Percent
0	21	19.6
1	11	10.3
2	16	15.0
3–4	22	20.6
5+	37	34.6
Total	107	100.0

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Table 5.5
Mean number of living children for married people by age group of respondents

Age	Mean	Number of cases
20–24	1.2	9
25–29	1.4	12
30–34	2.2	12
35–39	3.2	20
40–44	5.2	12
45–49	5.6	19
50–54	5.0	7
Total	3.4	91

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

5.1.2 Age at first movement and international migration experience

Age at first movement – first migratory experience – reflects the start of the practical implementation of a set of decision-making and influencing factors. Less-skilled Upper Egyptian laborers tend to start migration early in their life span, even as early as at the age of ten, while new entrants to the world of migration continue to experience migration for the first time until the age of 44, with a wide range of 34 years. The modal concentration of cases is found between 15 and 19 years old, with the mean age of migrants at the first move being 18.9 years old (Table 5.6). Regarding the relation between age at first movement and education, it is clear from Table 5.7 that fresh technical secondary school-leavers tend to migrate immediately or soon after their graduation to work in Cairo and, as noted earlier, to use this migration to survive and earn some income whilst they are waiting for any permanent job. Less and non-educated laborers start their migration experience earlier than educated migrants, but there are also some instances of the uneducated groups starting to experience migration for the first time in middle age.

Table 5.6

Age at first movement from village for work

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
10–14	46	19.0
15–19	121	50.0
20–24	46	19.0
25–29	11	4.5
30–34	8	3.3
35–39	8	3.3
40–44	2	.8
Mean		18.9 years
Total	242	100.0

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Table 5.7**Cross-tabulation of age at first movement and education**

Age group	Highest level of schooling successfully completed			Total
	None	Secondary technical	Other	
10–14	28	15	3	46
Percent	25.2	17.4	6.7	19.0
15–19	38	55	28	121
Percent	34.2	64.0	62.2	50.0
20–24	20	16	10	46
Percent	18.0	18.6	22.2	19.0
25–29	8	0	3	11
Percent	7.2		6.7	4.5
30+	17	0	1	18
Percent	15.3		2.2	7.4
Total	111	86	45	242
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi Square = 39.88 $p \leq .000$

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

In the migration literature, it is well known that internal migration can often function as a catalyst for international migration (see for example Bauer and Zimmermann, 1988; Boyle *et al.*, 1998; Korcelli, 1994; White and Woods, 1980). To take two specific examples from the eastern Mediterranean, Salt and Clout (1976) have shown how many Turkish migrants to Western Europe had already migrated within Turkey to the big cities, whilst Dimitrias (1998) has argued that Greek emigration to Australia was a historical follow-on to long-established patterns of rural–urban migration within Greece. Is this the case with Upper Egyptian migrants in Cairo? Before answering this question I will present migrants' international migration experience. More than one-quarter of the surveyed population have experienced international migration (64 cases, 26.4 percent). They migrated to four Arab countries, Libya (25 migrants), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

(16 migrants), Jordan (13), and Iraq (10 migrants). Migration to Libya is regarded in Egypt virtually like internal migration. After the accusation of two Libyans in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and the international political, military, and economic sanctions against Libya, and motivated by his Arab nationalist attitudes, the Libyan leader Gaddafi opened the borders between Libya and Egypt. Thousands of new school and college graduates and unemployed people migrated to Libya, for which visas or even passports were not required. The transportation medium was the bus. A private bi-national transportation company was established for that reason. The cost was very cheap – starting from 100 Egyptian pounds (around US\$ 25) – which made it very easy and affordable to migrate to Libya and to travel back and forth.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a traditional destination for Egyptian emigrants. On average Egyptians may pay more than 5000 Egyptian pounds (henceforth LE) or US\$1,200 to employment offices for a visa for work in KSA. However, after more elaboration with my research subjects in the in-depth interviews, I found that most of the migrants to KSA did not follow the legal way of getting a visa for work there. Most of them got visas for “Umra” (an out-of-season pilgrimage to Mecca known as the “minor Hajj”) and then they stay there doing any kind of work with lower earnings than the legal migrants. One of my interviewees went for Umra, then stayed in KSA for three years.

The main flow of less costly and less restrictive international migration of Egyptians – less expensive and restrictive than the Gulf Emirates – in the last two decades has been to Iraq and Jordan. Many Egyptian young men experienced migration to Iraq and Jordan starting from the beginning of the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran; in particular they were able to substitute the absence of great numbers of the Iraqi labor force who were enrolled in the Iraqi army. Jordan was a step towards migration to Iraq; however, it attracted a substantial proportion of Egyptian migrants to stay and work there rather than continue on to Iraq. Since migrants used to use buses between Cairo and Baghdad, Jordan was a transit stop-over in the passage between Egypt and Iraq. Many of these migrants established strong networks in Jordan and Iraq. There was usually at least one person from each village in Egypt to receive new migrants.

The duration of international migration for the surveyed population ranges between three months and 22 years. The mean duration is 3.7 years. The duration of international migration varies somewhat by country of destination. The highest mean duration is 4.9 years (Jordan), followed by 3.9 years (KSA), 3.7 years (Iraq), and 3.0 years (Libya); however the relatively small absolute numbers involved mean that these narrow differences in length of stay are probably non-significant.

Now I return to the question that I raised in the beginning of this sub-section: Does internal migration work as a catalyst for international migration in the Egyptian case? The answer seems to be no. After the second Gulf War – the Kuwait liberation war – many Egyptians were forced to return. When they returned to their villages after long periods of absence abroad they did not manage to accustom themselves to their old life in the village, so that internal migration – especially to a metropolitan area like Cairo – was the alternative. Their life in Cairo is quite similar to their experiences in Iraq or Jordan. Returned migrants from Iraq and Jordan told me that there were focal points for the Egyptian laborers to gather in the main squares and some parks in Baghdad, Amman, Aqaba, and many other cities in Iraq and Jordan, exactly the same as the gathering points in Cairo where Upper Egyptians meet to socialize and get hired for work.

The conclusion, therefore, is that, rather than internal leading to international migration, the Egyptian case is the reverse, namely that international migration worked as a catalyst for internal migration. This is due to the unexpected timing and circumstances of the return from Iraq and Jordan, and the change in lifestyle due to migration experience which made migrants less connected to their families. Living and working in a metropolitan area like Cairo was the easiest alternative to their previous migrant life in Iraq and Jordan, as well as being a sensible income-earning strategy. However, it has to be acknowledged that there is a logical flaw in my conclusion about the sequencing of internal versus international migration, since those individuals who had migrated first internally and then abroad are obviously no longer in Egypt. A further perspective on this particular question will be offered towards the end of this thesis in Chapter 8 when I consider migrants' views about their future, including the possibility of moving abroad.

5.2 Why do they migrate?

Why do unskilled Upper Egyptian laborers migrate to Cairo? In the standard questionnaire, each interviewee was given the opportunity of nominating one, two, or three reasons for his migration to Cairo. Out of the 242 interviewees, 120 gave one reason, 86 gave two reasons, and 36 gave three reasons. The total number of responses is therefore 400. The frequency of reasons and their relative percent are given in Table 5.8. The most common influencing reason – as given by respondents – is the unavailability of job opportunities at the village. This reason comprises 35.8 percent of the reasons given by respondents. It is followed by a similar reason, which is the rarity of job opportunities at the village (8.8 percent). Some of my interview respondents summed up the dire situation with regard to rural jobs as follows. “*Work opportunities are almost non-existent there – in the village. In case I find a job, it will be for five pounds a day – about one third of the Cairo rate. This will never be sufficient for my expenses and the family’s*”, said Khairy. “*I realized that there were no opportunities to work there – in the village – so I came to Cairo*” (Ali). “*We do not have jobs in my hometown and I do not have any agricultural land*” (Diab).

Let us now pause for a moment and theorize a bit on the nature of these data and interview quotes. As per the “dual economy model of development and migration” that was proposed by Lewis (1954) and later extended by Fei and Ranis (1961), migration is considered as an equilibrating mechanism which, through transfer of labor from the labor-surplus to the labor-deficit sector, eventually brings about wage equality in the two sectors. The model is based on the concept of a dual economy, comprising a subsistence, agricultural sector characterized by underemployment, and a modern industrial sector characterized by full employment. Bearing in mind the limitations of this model – as mentioned in Chapter 3 – Upper Egyptian laborers certainly do migrate to benefit from the difference in wages between rural and urban sectors. Many of the reasons given by migrants are related to the much lower incomes in the village than Cairo. “*One can find a job there in Upper Egypt, but for a lower income than here*”, said Zaky. “*Here, I can go working for 15 to 20 pounds a day according to what is available, and I might be paid an extra 5 pounds as a tip. It is much better than my hometown*” (Diab). “*On my best day, I earn 18 pounds. My daily income here is almost equivalent to my weekly income in the village*” (Henein). “*If I manage to find work in the village, I work with my*

axe on someone else's land. Anybody who needs me to work for him can hire me for 8 pounds in my hometown. It is much less than here and it is not affordable" (Nasralla). On the other hand, what does not seem to happen is any significant narrowing of the gap between Upper and Lower Egypt, the two parts of the two-sector model. This implies that the rural–urban labor transfer is not (yet) an equilibrating mechanism for wage differences, but rather a fundamental structural element of the geographically divided dual-sector economy, where the two economies remain both functionally and spatially apart yet connected by migration channels which, as we will see later, are partly circulatory but partly also very long-term. I shall return to re-analyze this important point later in the thesis.

Other reasons listed in Table 5.8 include bad living conditions in the village (7.0 percent), need for money/contribution to the family income (5.5 percent), seasonality of work in the village (4.3 percent), the temporary nature of the work at the village (4.3 percent), landlessness (3.8 percent), to lessen the burden of a big landless family (3.8 percent), work in the village does not afford enough food (3.3 percent), escape from family pressures and troubles (2.8 percent), and some other reasons such as being with no occupation, facing tough conditions at home, and disability to work in farming.

Although in Table 5.8 I have separated out quite a large number of nominated reasons, it is not difficult to appreciate that most of the reasons are basically saying the same thing: that living conditions in the village, at least for the migrants, are desperately poor, with extremely low incomes and limited access to work. Hence, and especially if migrants come from families which are landless and have many family members, there is scarcely enough to eat – as summed up in the commonly-used phrase in Arabic, “life does not afford a mouth full of bread”. What we seem to be dealing with here, therefore, is a migration for survival or, at its most extreme, “starvation migration”.

Further articulation of these reasons may be found in the interview case studies. Some quotes are here extracted. *“My family has always been in need of money in order to live. My father is a farmer. The money we get from cultivating certain crops on our land is very little, and such money is always raised over too long intervals. Yes there are other crops that can be cultivated, but their revenue is insufficient to meet our*

needs” (Rady). “It is hard to find a job there except at harvest time. One cannot buy neither flour, nor butter, nor oil. There is not any spare land to be cultivated. Had I owned a small piece of land, I would have not come to Cairo” (Ahmed). “What made me leave my town was the living standards of course. It is very difficult there; who is poor remains poor and who is rich stays rich” (Gaber).

Table 5.8

Reasons to come to Cairo to work

Reason	Frequency	Percent
No job opportunities available in the village	143	35.8
Income in the village is lower than Cairo/ Wages in the village are poor/ There is more money in Cairo	63	15.8
Job opportunities are rare in the village	35	8.8
Bad living conditions in the village	28	7.0
Need for money/ Contribution to the family income	22	5.5
Work in the village is seasonal	17	4.3
Work in the village is temporary	17	4.3
Do not own agricultural land to work in village	15	3.8
Relieve burden of a big landless family	15	3.8
Work in the village “does not afford a mouth full of bread”	13	3.3
Escape from family pressures and troubles	11	2.8
Have no occupation (not a craftsman)	5	1.3
Facing tough conditions at home	5	1.3
Cannot work in farming	4	1.0
Other reasons	7	1.8
Total	400	100.0

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Amongst the younger, unmarried migrants, some rather different reasons emerged, more to do with the attractions of Cairo and the possibilities of purchasing goods other than food for survival. *“They told me that Cairo is fascinating”* (Henein). *“Like everybody in our village, I went to my preparatory school in the same village, but the secondary school was in another bigger town. I had to have enough clothes and stuff. We do not have such things in our village. One feels down when seeing one's mates wearing better outfits. That is why I made up my mind to travel and work in Cairo. My sole goal in moving has been to get enough money for buying clothes, or even just to have some money in my pocket”* (Kamel). Hanna, from Menia, told this interesting story: *“I wanted to watch a football match between Ahly and Zamalek – the two famous Egyptian football teams. We, as villagers, often have animals to breed. I was really eager to listen to the match on the radio, so I asked my sister-in-law to feed one of our animals. I relied on her to do this, but she did not do it. I went to listen to the match, but when I went back things were bad. There was a big problem with my brother; we had a quarrel with each other and he beat me up. I made up my mind to leave the house, took my belongings, and eventually ended up here in Cairo.”*

When respondents were asked about whether they considered any other options before taking the decision to migrate to Cairo, their answers reflected the rarity of alternatives available to them. It seemed as if the decision of migration is the only solution to their unemployment – or underemployment – and all of their other problems. About 95 percent mentioned that they did not have any other options at the time of taking the decision to migrate to Cairo. *“What do you expect me to do? Migrate to Cairo or die from hunger in my village?”* said one of the respondents. Those who proposed other options are few, about 5 percent of the surveyed population. The main options were to stay in the village and accept low rates of income, or to continue to work the family's land. It seems that the motivation for migration for those who considered other options at the time of migrating was less than those who had no other options at that time. Linking those who mentioned that they had other options with their reasons for migration may explain that this group of migrants were not under pressure like the majority of migrants. *“There is more money in Cairo”, “I love freedom and want to work in Cairo”, and “I just want to live in Cairo”,* were some of the key factors nominated by

the subgroup of respondents who felt that they had other options apart from the sheer necessity to migrate.

The final element of the migration decision to be considered here is the question of who took the decision to migrate and who else was influential. We saw from Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2) that there is an increasing tendency in theorizing migration to focus on households, families and other small social groups rather than narrowly conceptualizing the individual migrant as the key and only decision-maker. We also saw how, under the “new economics of migration” approach, the “investment decision” of migration is often interrelated with other household strategies regarding work, place and income. Although I did not address the family-based nature of migration decision-making directly in my questionnaire, the interviews, more casual conversations and the village-based fieldwork provided some illumination on this issue. Clearly, when migration from Upper Egypt is primarily motivated by the need to ensure the survival of the rural household, other members of that household are likely to be involved in almost any discussions about potential or actual migration. In rural households in Upper Egypt, family discussions about migration take place practically all the time, and although the impression might be given that discussions and decisions are exclusively a male preserve, it would be naïve to omit the input of wives, mothers, sisters etc. This family-circle environment for discussions about migration is long-established in Egyptian rural areas. For instance, an early study of Egyptian rural–urban migration from Kharga Oasis to the Nile Valley maintained that “it is not the mere concern of the individual who migrates ... it is rather the whole family that decides on who among its members should migrate, how long a migrant should stay away...” etc. (Abou-Zeid, 1963). But it would also be naïve to assume that such discussions about migration were not without tensions within the family, and also hardships resulting from migration and separation. Hanna’s account of his argument with his brother, in which his sister-in-law was also implicated, was mentioned above; and the hardship for both the migrants and (especially) their female family members who remain behind, shouldering extra familial, household and family/working responsibilities, cannot be exaggerated. This is perhaps all the more so since separate circuits of female migration do not exist in rural Egypt, except perhaps for the further education of a select few daughters of wealthy families.

5.3 Rural knowledge of the town

How did Upper Egyptian farm workers envisage their migration experience to Cairo while they were in their villages? Who talked to them about working in Cairo? Due to the narrative nature of responses to these questions, they were not addressed to respondents in the standard questionnaire, but were included in the in-depth interviews. Selected quotes shed some light on the picture of Cairo as drawn in the mind and dreams of the migrants before the start of the migration process.

“Folks (in my village) used to travel to Cairo. They told me that Cairo is fascinating. Better than our hometown. One can find work there. So I came” (Henein). *“I talked to my brother. He had been working here before I came. I asked him whether I should come to work with him after I had finished with my schooling. Things were tough in our hometown. I asked him to take me with him, and he consented”* (Selim). *“I came here for the first time with my father. I had thought that I was going to have fun. I had thought that Cairo is a charming place,”* said Ismail. *“I heard that there was a contractor looking for some workers, so I came with him”* (Gaber). *“I came with a friend of mine. He talked me into working with him”* (Dessouky). *“My relatives who were working in Cairo gave me the chance to join them. They invited me to come”* (Shaaban). *“I heard from some people in my hometown that there are work opportunities here, so I came”* (Fakhry). *“I told a friend of mine who used to work in Cairo that I was thinking about going to Cairo. He was a neighbor of mine, and approved my plans”* (Kamal). *“I came with some fellows from my village. They were organizing group-trips and I came with them,”* said Radwan. Other quite common responses were that migrants visited their relatives in Cairo before migration; and some mentioned the experience of living in Cairo – or nearby – before migration to fulfill the requirements of obligatory military service.

From the above quotes, and my various other discussions with migrants, I noticed that most migrants were to some extent lured on by what were essentially rather exaggerated pictures arising partly from faulty communications and partly from the inability of persons unfamiliar with the town to interpret correctly the information they received. The deteriorating living conditions and rising unemployment in Upper Egypt made it

easy for potential migrants to believe or imagine better conditions in Cairo than the reality.

Worker-to-worker communication seems to be the prevailing pattern of information sharing. Team-, chain-, and family-migration prevail, and circulatory movements bring a constant stream of labor migrants in Cairo back to their villages for visits. Earlier migrants tend to guide their younger family members and relatives. It is common to find brothers, father and son, and groups of relatives all working in the same place in Cairo. It is common also to find that all occupants of a particular place of work in Cairo have come from the same village. These aspects of social and family networking will be explored in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.4 Theorizing reasons of migration

What is the correspondence of the Egyptian case to the theories of rural/urban migration I presented in Chapter 3? As I mentioned before, the relation between distance and the flow of migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo is very weak which means that Ravenstein's distance dimension of migration or the Gravity Model principle are not relevant to the case under study. The pull and push factors of Lee (1966) are more fully relevant to the Egyptian case, where migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo is mainly stimulated by the push factors of rural poverty and the historical isolation of Upper Egypt from national development plans and resource allocation. This situation of permanent structural backwardness has increased the unemployment rates and decreased the life opportunities in the region, which in turn has led its residents to seek pretty much any other sources of better living conditions and income generation. Drawing on my personal judgment of the survey results and my knowledge of socio-economic conditions in Upper and Lower Egypt, I can confidently say that migration is stimulated by push pressures – in origin – rather than pull factors – in destination. The knowledge of migrants about opportunities in Cairo is not, however, complete or certain, as will be discussed in the next paragraph. In sum, rural poverty is the main stimulus of migration flows from Upper Egypt to Cairo, at least for the not insignificant sample of migrants I surveyed.

Given the socio-economic and the educational background of the study population as presented in the beginning of this chapter, I can safely say that they do not have the knowledge and the degree of awareness which make them able to rigorously compare or evaluate the expected costs and returns of their migration decision over time and to study other alternatives – if there are any – of their decision to migrate. Sjaastad's human investment theory (Sjaastad, 1962) is not really relevant to the Egyptian case. The movement of unskilled laborers who represent the surplus of the agricultural sector may be explained as a survival mechanism rather than an investment strategy.

Todaro's model of rural–urban migration, which helps to explain reasons for continued migration to urban areas even with high urban unemployment rates – which is the case of Cairo – is perhaps marginally more relevant to the Egyptian case. This model helps us to understand why migrant laborers move from their villages to Cairo despite its high unemployment rate. These unskilled migrants enter the traditional, not modern, sector of the city's labor market, and their incomes, whilst significantly higher than those that are yielded from agriculture and other uncertain rural activities, are not those of the modern urban wage sector, but derive from insecure and tough unskilled labor in the marginal and informal sectors of the city's sprawling economy (more on this in the next chapter).

The systems approach of Mabogunje (1970) is a theoretically elegant and attractive model for explaining the phenomenon of rural–urban migration but it is difficult to be tested in reality. This may explain why this model has hardly ever been applied to real data. Also, the model represents a precise and rigid system that cannot be applied to human behavior with a lot of intervening factors that explain variations in the phenomenon of migration that researchers cannot control for. The model can be taken as a theoretical template for the migration phenomenon; only some parts of the framework can be usefully referred to, especially to explore migration networks and describe the control subsystems.

5.5 Conclusion

From this account of the key background characteristics of the respondents to the main questionnaire survey, supplemented by some quotes from the tapes of the in-depth interviews, the following points can be summed up.

Migrants from Upper Egypt included in my sample survey in Cairo are young, rather poorly educated, and from poor socio-economic backgrounds. The mean age of interviewees is 29 years, and 55 percent are aged 20–29. Only 10 percent are aged less than 20, but 35 percent are aged 30–35 (Table 5.1). However, as far as age at first migration is concerned, 88 percent migrated before the age of 25, with half leaving between the ages of 15 and 19 (Table 5.6). This picture compares well with the standard literature on rural–urban migration, which confirms a strong trend to depart in early adulthood: such people have fewer attachments, a longer life horizon to enjoy the expected increased income that migration to an urban area yields, and a longer time to amortize any costs of migration. However the Egyptian findings do indicate a somewhat earlier start to a migratory career than the average of other surveys and models (see Lucas, 1997: 730).

Migrants surveyed in Cairo are overwhelmingly from low-qualification school backgrounds: 46 percent have no recognized level of schooling and 35 percent have achieved only the low-status secondary technical level (Table 5.1). Older migrants have lower educational achievements than younger migrants (Table 5.2).

The evidence of both quantitative and case-study surveys tends strongly to suggest that labor migrants in Cairo come from the poorest and most disadvantaged of rural backgrounds. This finding is particularly interesting as it contradicts the conventional wisdom that rural–urban migrants in developing countries tend to be positively selected with regard to social features and educational qualifications (cf. for example Oberai, 1984; Skeldon, 1990; Todaro, 1976). However, the “self-selective” nature of my sample of poor migrant workers, heavily influenced by the field methodology I employed, must be borne in mind here; hence this finding must be qualified. Demographically the survey respondents originated from family/household sizes which are larger than the regional averages for Upper Egypt. There is a concentration of origins in the more densely-populated central governorates of Upper Egypt, namely Menia, Assiut, and Souhag.

Regarding motives for migrating, these are overwhelmingly economic and have to do with factors such as unemployment, lack of rural job opportunities, very low incomes and bad rural living conditions. Cairo offers better wages (generally around triple those in rural Upper Egypt), somewhat more regular work (and therefore regular income), more exciting life (though excitement here is a relative concept since, as we shall see later, migrants' lives in Cairo are pretty tough), and the chance to remit and support family members at home in the village.

Although the nature of the questionnaire and interview data used in this study implied an individual focus on 262 respondents (including the case-study interviewees), all male, it can be suggested that migration decisions are not necessarily taken at the individual level by only the migrant himself. Evidence exists for this being a shared decision by the family/household in which, however, male views predominate, given the nature of gender relations in villages in Upper Egypt.

Only a minority of respondents felt that they had much in the way of alternative viable options in the village. More than a quarter of respondents (64 out of 242) had worked abroad, in all cases in other Arab countries. The evidence suggests that in the Egyptian case international migration leads to internal migration rather than the reverse.

Regarding the migrants' prior knowledge of the city, one may conclude that most migrants were lured on by what were essentially rather exaggerated pictures arising partly as a result of faulty communications and partly from the inability of persons unfamiliar with the town to interpret correctly the information they received. The very poor living conditions and high unemployment rates in Upper Egypt made it easy for potential migrants to believe or imagine that better conditions existed in Cairo than were in fact the case. We shall find out later the extent of their disillusionment. We shall also find out later to what extent migrants' extremely harsh lives of sacrifice and self-deprivation in Cairo are balanced by periodic return visits and continued orientation to "the village" as the psychological base for their urban labor.