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FAMILIAL ADAPTATIONS TO THE
INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EGYPTIAN LABOUR

by

Soheir A. Morsy, Ph.D.
Alexandria, Egypt

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Abstract: The effects of the recent internationalization of Egyptian labour have been analyzed primarily from the perspective of macroeconomics and regional politics. The ethnographic approach adopted by anthropologists in the study of the relation between migration and rural transformation provides an important complement to macroanalytic studies. This paper offers such a complementary perspective. Beyond a general account of the effects of migration on labour exporting Egypt, this study focuses on familial adaptations. Emphasis is placed on the family within the broader context of agrarian transformation.

About the Author: Soheir A. Morsy is an anthropologist specializing in the study of health systems. Her research and publications have been in the areas of Political Economy of Health, Peasantry and Agrarian Transformation, Third World Underdevelopment, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective. With support from a MEAward grant, she is currently preparing a book on health in rural Egypt.

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Introduction

The rise of oil prices during the first part of the past decade has prompted much discussion of the relations between OPEC, the oil corporations, and the oil-importing industrial countries which also dominate the distribution of oil. Less attention has been extended to internal changes that have accompanied the oil boom, notably the effects of the out/inflow of skilled and unskilled labour from the poor countries of the Middle East, and into the rich oil-producing states. This relatively recent labour movement has had more dramatic effects on both the labour-importing and the labour-exporting countries than the waves of migrant labour into Western Europe following the last World War (Halliday 1977; UN 1982). These effects have been analyzed primarily from the perspective of macroeconomics and regional politics. Less prevalent are anthropological studies of the effects of labour migration.

With minor exceptions, the important developments surrounding the internationalization of labour in the Middle East are yet to receive the serious consideration of anthropologists.¹ In a recent review article that deals with anthropological studies of returning migrants (Gmelch 1980), a bibliographic listing of ninety-three entries, contains not a single reference to Middle Eastern migrants. At a time when some anthropologists studying other parts of the world have focused on migration (even within national boundaries) to examine the major propositions of the world system paradigm through ethnographic approaches (Nash 1981), anthropologists concerned with issues of development and underdevelopment in the Middle East have yet to produce empirical research contextualized in regional transformations. We have yet to utilize the microanalytic anthropological perspective to flesh out generalizations about regional transformations related to labour migration.

The limited number of anthropological studies of Egyptian labour migration have focused on labour export primarily in relation to rural transformation (Hopkins 1980; Awni 1982, 1984; Khafagy 1984; Khattab and El Daeif 1982). This paper draws on such anthropological studies and on my own research in the village of Bahiya,² as well as on more general accounts of the effect of international migration on labour-exporting Egypt. Following an overview of the pattern of Egyptian labour migration, attention is extended to the economic and political consequences of labour export. The next major

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section of the paper focuses on familial adaptations. It includes a discussion of relevant theoretical issues that bear upon interpretations of the impact of labour migration on familial power relations. Finally, familial adaptation is placed within the broader context of agrarian transformation to illuminate the differential impact of male migration on family-centered production and related authority patterns.

Labour Migration: General Features and Economic and Political Consequences:

Over the past decade, international labour movement within the Arab World has become an important feature of the region's economy and society. The rapid development of the petroleum-producing countries (PPC) of the region during the 1970s involved massive flows of temporary labour into these countries from neighbouring poor countries as well as from elsewhere. Egyptians, a traditional labour supply in the Middle East and Africa (Birks and Sinclair 1979:291), have predominated numerically in the new migration in the Middle East (Choukri 1977; Suleiman 1983; Imam and Zayda 1983).

The exact number of Egyptians working in the PPC of the Arab world is unknown. Estimates by the Development Planning and Technological Research Center of Cairo University place the active Egyptian work force abroad in 1981 at one million or 1.7 million if dependents are considered (Waterberry 1983:212). This estimate, like others, is debatable. As a consultant of the General Union of Egypt's Workers has remarked,

...the figures which are published about the number of Egyptians abroad are far from accurate, and differences between them are great; estimates range between 2 million and 1.25 million workers. Even the information of the ministries of Interior and Exterior, and the Labour Force Agency are contradictory (cited in Suleiman 1983:195, in Arabic).

Although estimates of migrant labour vary greatly, there is no doubt about the increase in the number of migrants. The 1976 census puts the number at 1.4 million and estimates for 1982 vary from 1.667 million (according to the Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics) to 2.658 million (according to the national councils) (El-Gabaly 1983:87-88).

The absence of exact figures for labour migration is explained in terms of the government's relative lack of control over migration, particularly when labour movement involves the private sector (ibid.). This relatively limited ability by the government to supervise and regulate the labour exodus has resulted in unforeseen sufferings among poor Egyptian families left at the mercy of greedy labour contractors at home and exploitive employers abroad.

Egyptian emigration is by no means new: Current migration patterns involve changes primarily in the rate of increase and in the technical profile of migrant labour (Choukri 1977, 1983; El-Bakry 1981; Suleiman 1983). During the early 1950s and 1960s, Egyptians working in the PPC were

primarily professionals and to a lesser extent, relatively unskilled workers. During the oil boom of the 1970s, the demand for both skilled and unskilled labour increased dramatically, drawing a large number of construction workers and agricultural labourers from Egypt's rural areas. Emigrating citizens now include unskilled, semiskilled, and skilled workers as well as professional, technical, and administrative staff. The destinations of these citizens has also shifted over the past few years. Whereas in 1976 Libya attracted the highest number of Egyptian migrants, (40% as compared with 35% for Saudi Arabia and 11% for Kuwait), by the early 1980s Saudi Arabia occupied first place, receiving 32% of Egypt's migrant labour, followed by Iraq with 25%, Libya with 18% and Kuwait with 12% (El-Gably 1983:88).

Unlike the inter-Arab long-term or permanent migration of the 1950s and 1960s, migration during the 1970s has consisted largely of temporary flows (UN 1982:40). Moreover, labour migration to the oil-exporting countries has been male-dominated. Several factors have contributed to the general pattern of the departure of men, leaving behind women and children. Factors related to the labour-importing countries include these countries' restrictions on permanent migration and citizenship, as well as prospective employers' unwillingness to provide housing and transportation funds for their Egyptian workers (Khattab and El Daeif 1982). Since Egyptian labour migration has been, by and large, of the "foraging" type (according to which people migrate for the accomplishment of specific goals within a specific time period and then return home), lone male migrant workers, unhampered by economically dependent family members, have the opportunity to maximize their savings and expedite their return home. Leaving women and children behind has additional perceived benefits, including the management of production and family property (where applicable) at home. Women left behind also ensure the supervision of children's education and, more generally, the reproduction of Egypt's labour.

In cases where single female professionals seek employment in the PPC, their departure from Egypt has often been restricted by the host government's stipulation that they be accompanied by a maHram (a male blood relative), thereby reinforcing male control over women (Hatem 1983:11). Less privileged single women seeking employment in the oil-rich countries are prey to a system of disguised slavery. "Warnings" of the escape of Egyptian servants on the pages of some newspapers in the Gulf area reveal the subordination and humiliation of these women. Some of the even less fortunate fall prey to prostitution. Still other young women, whose access to economic resources is blocked, marry relatively rich Arab men many years their senior.

Married Egyptian women may choose to take their children as they accompany their husbands during their residence as professional, technical, or administrative employees in the PPC. In some cases it is the married woman, not her husband, who may secure a contract for employment in a labour importing country. In such cases, the husband may accompany the employed woman as murafiq (escort). While such husbands may eventually become

employed in the host country, some do not. Unable to tolerate their obvious economic dependence on their wives, a clear role reversal, such unemployed husbands are likely to attempt to ensure their authority within the family through irrational demands, thus contributing to a tension-ridden family life.

There have been several explanations for the trend of labour exodus. While there is general agreement that, from the perspective of individuals and families, migration provides an opportunity to resolve intensifying family-centered economic crises, there are varied interpretations of the broader economic, social, and political concomitants of migration. Some observers explain migration in light of market forces of supply and demand. Other social commentators explain Egyptian labour export as rooted in the political economy of dependent capitalist development and unequal exchange. The latter explanation recognizes the dialectical responses to global forces affecting Egyptian economy and society. Consequently, migration within the Arab world is perceived as a component of a broad complex of transformations involving economic, political, social, and ideological forces, notably those related to Egypt's more recent and more complete reintegration into the world capitalist economy within the framework of the Open Door Economic Policies (ODEP) (a market-oriented capitalist development strategy). The ODEP increased Egypt's "openness" to the structural constraints imposed by the international capitalist market, in particular the restriction of the development of the productive industrial sector. The supply and demand argument is exemplified by the statement that

Egypt's position as a major donor to other Arab States is due to a particular mix of supply and demand relationships. On the supply side, three factors stand out ... an extensive Egyptian infrastructure ..., limited domestic opportunities for ... employment ... social equity programs of the government and its commitment to the expansion of the country's educational base irrespective of employment opportunities.

On the demand side, the most important factors are the economic incentives in Arab states ... These were reinforced by the petroleum crisis of October 1973 ... and the generation of surplus revenue which provided greater impetus for migration (Choukri 1977:423-24).

The idea of an Egyptian labour "surplus" undermines the capacity of Egypt's underdeveloped capitalist sector to absorb informal sector occupations (cf. Hammam 1981:9). It also undermines the selectivity of labour importation. Given this selectivity (increasingly limited in recent years), the impact of migration on the shortage of skilled labour has been immense (Birks and Sinclair 1982:47). While the relation of migrant skilled labour to total employment is almost irrelevant, its relation to domestic modern sector employment is crucial (ibid.). It should be noted that the ratio of skilled migrant labour to the total pool has been on the increase

while the proportion of unskilled labour is on the decrease. The percentage of migrant skilled labour increased from 45.7% in 1975 to 58.7% in 1980. By contrast, the percentage of migrant unskilled labour decreased from 54.3% in 1975 to 41.3% in 1980 (El-Gabaly 1983:88).

With respect to the argument regarding "demand" on the part of labour-importing countries, Professor Abdel Basit Abdel Mu'ati remarks that the demand for labour in the Gulf area is illusory in light of the fact that in the Gulf states half of the population (the female half) is not economically active. Moreover, those who are considered economically active are not always involved in productive work. Additionally, while some sectors of the economics of these states suffer from masked unemployment, others exhibit a clear shortage (Gaballah 1983:13).

In contrast to the economic explanation noted earlier and psychological reductionist references to "world view" and "motivations" (Saleh 1977), a number of Egyptian social analysts suggest that dependent capitalist development in Egypt and the labour-importing Arab countries provides the key to a more appropriate explanation of labour out/inflow (ibid.). Beyond individual and family motivations and strategies of confronting economic problems, the wave of labour flow from Egypt is a product of certain historical structural transformations which transcend the aspirations of individuals and families for accumulation of wealth across the borders of their country. As Mark Wojno has observed for Portugal,

... migration [itself is] a symptom of underdevelopment and dependence, conditions which in turn are shaped by the interplay between regional, national and international forces (Wojno 1982:1).

Changes in the policies of the Egyptian government illustrate the relation between migration patterns and politically-inspired development strategies. The differential valuations of workers' skills and their remittances are functions of the framework of development. During the period of Egypt's state capitalist development based on public sector industrialization, migration to neighbouring Arab countries was restricted. Nasser believed that anyone who could find work abroad would be greatly needed at home (Waterberry 1983:204).

Under Sadat, and within the framework of his ODEP, the labour exodus increased dramatically.³ Not only did Sadat facilitate labour migration, he also emphasized migration as a constitutional right of every Egyptian citizen. He considered migration a challenge that would prove Egypt's capacity to produce successive generations of scientists and technicians (Mayo, May 11, 1981). Although Egypt has not had an official migration policy in recent years (UN 1982), the government has definitely encouraged the exodus of both skilled and unskilled Egyptians. Laments about the "brain drain" are contradicted by the government's support of the migration of professionals and technicians, an appropriate posture within the framework of dependent development (Morsy and El-Bayoumi 1981).

The continuing debate about the causes of labour migration extends to its economic and political effects. Proponents of labour migration argue that workers' remittances (estimated at \$3 billion for 1982) not only improve standards of living but also provide much needed foreign exchange to partially offset balance of payment deficits and stimulate Egypt's economic development. The labour exodus is also described as a safety valve that alleviates the country's unemployment problem and contributes to political stability. Regarding migration's socio-political "benefits" to Egypt, a political scientist has argued that

Migration may also reduce the probabilities of mobilizing social discontent and political opposition to the government (through the) educated intelligensia ... that has always served as a potential reservoir of political opposition. University graduates are among the most mobilizable sectors of the society and have, periodically, exerted that potential ... Allowing, and even encouraging, migration of the relatively unskilled also serves to reduce the more popular domestic base from which political opposition might potentially evolve ... since ... portions of both university graduates and unskilled labour tend to share an ethos of radical fundamentalism, the domestic political effects of the migration of potentially dissatisfied elements might have greater than proportional benefits for domestic stability (Choukri 1977:432).

Counter arguments to the claim that labour migration siphon off "surplus" labour have already been noted in terms of the adverse effects of migration on the local shortage of skilled labour in the modern industrial sector. This shortage also has repercussions for agricultural labour. As rural workers replace urban skilled labour (thereby contributing to reduced industrial productivity), or take the migrant route across Egypt's borders, at least seasonal labour shortages occur in certain rural areas. Rural labour shortages and attendant surges in agriculture wages have contributed to a decline in agricultural production. Labour shortages during the cotton-harvesting season reach such proportions that the Ministry of Education postponed the opening of the schools for two weeks so that school children could help harvest the cotton (El-Gabaly 1983:88). In one of Egypt's governorates, it was estimated that 8,000 feddans (1 feddan = approximately 1.8 acres) were left fallow because of a labour shortage (ibid.).

While the specific impact of labour export may be expected to vary from one community to another as a function of peasants' class position and related family labour patterns, the consequences for national agricultural production and food security have been catastrophic (ef. Chaney 1983). For the first time in its history, Egypt has become a net importer of agricultural products (Richards 1980). Food production per capita has been falling (Birks and Sinclair 1980:221). Along with the reduction of agricultural labour, artificially low government-imposed prices, low levels of investment in land reclamation, and loss of land to urban growth and

rural housing construction have all contributed to lowered agricultural productivity. Moreover, the increasing reliance on food imports undermines migrants' foreign exchange remittances through its contribution to balance of payment deficits. As rural household self-sufficiency declines, an increasing portion of remitted income is allocated to the purchase of market goods while household production declines (Hammam 1981:10).

A widespread response to the rural labour shortage has been the resort to capital-intensive production techniques involving the use of machinery, the cultivation of citrus fruits, and dairy farming. Such changes in production techniques have decreased employment demand, a short term solution that can be expected to have dire consequences when an increasing number of Egyptians return home. As Alan Richards has remarked,

... there are considerable grounds for skepticism about ... [mechanization's] ... net social benefits ... The question must be asked: If all agricultural operations are to be mechanized by 1990, where will the people displaced by such mechanization be employed? Where will the capital come from to create their new jobs? What will happen if the overseas migrants return? Where will all of these people live? (1981:422).

Long-term decreases in rural employment opportunities may be expected to bring about the increasing concentration of returning migrants in already crowded cities suffering from a host of problems, including inflated land prices and related housing shortages (UN 1982). One response to the housing shortage is an increase in extended-family residence and related stressful crowding of adults and children.

Government reliance on labour migration as an antidote to high levels of unemployment has undermined the priority of employment creation in Egypt (ibid.). Moreover, as Birks and Sinclair have warned,

Hiding behind over-optimistic targets of employment creation and exports of manpower to other Arab states renders false aspirations and bad planning decisions. The country's economic and employment prospects are bad - so bad that the sooner Egypt and the Arab World face them the better (1980:231).

Projections of Egyptian employment trends to the year 1990 indicate that the imbalance between job seekers and job opportunities will increase greatly. Informal sector employment (primarily the domain of family labour) is expected to increase fourfold by the end of the 1980s (Birks and Sinclair 1982:50). In short, the burden of subsidizing the Egyptian economy may be expected to fall increasingly on the family.

It is often argued that migrants' remittances are an important contribution to Egypt's balance of payment. Indeed, remittances exceed other sources of foreign exchange and cover a large part of the country's import charges, but as has been frequently pointed out,

... individuals enjoy considerable flexibility with their foreign currency. It is by no means certain that all foreign exchange saved by migrant workers is remitted to Egypt.^[4] ... Apart from noting that remittances to Egypt enjoy an uncertain future, it should be noted that remittances are not a source of foreign exchange comparable with say Suez Canal dues,... workers' remittances are at the disposition of individual migrant workers, who may choose to invest them or spend them as they please. Thus it is only in an accounting framework that remittances are comparable with other sources of foreign exchange ... In an economic sense they can more usefully be seen as an enhancement to personal income and as an increase to the money supply (Birks and Sinclair 1982:41).

The potential contribution of migrants' remittances to alleviating Egypt's balance of payment deficit are also constrained by certain import regulations. Under the license of the "own exchange" regulation of the ODEP, individuals are permitted to independently import goods that are paid for with hard currency acquired abroad. The "liberalization" of import regulations has permitted an increase of remittances in kind over remittances in currency (El-Gabaly 1983:89). Consequently, "own exchange" importation which stood at 27.2% of total imports in 1975 rose to 48% in 1979 and to 45% in 1980.

Contrary to the predictions of the architects of the ODEP, migrants' remittances have not contributed sufficiently to the anticipated "transfusion" to Egypt's troubled economy. Promises of economic development and prosperity are yet to be realized. Migrants' remittances (and other sources of income such as tourism and the Suez Canal), which have been critical for a surge of growth in the Egyptian economy since 1975 and which have undoubtedly ameliorated the increasing inequality of income distribution (Waterberry 1982), are themselves symptomatic of constrained development. Reliance on these sources of income indicates Egypt's "turning once more into a dependent economy, relying on the export of raw materials (and now also on services) rather than on the growth of the domestic market, and on foreign capital rather than domestic savings" (Amin 1981:434).

The Egyptian case approximates the general international pattern of failure of migrant remittances to catalyze economic development. While migrant labourers send portions of their earnings home, thereby increasing local family consumption, there is no evidence of investment in industrial infrastructure (cf. Swanson 1979; Wojno 1982; UN 1982). Personal savings by no means ensure national economic development (Lawrence 1977). As indicated in a recent United Nations study of the effects of international labour migration,

Although remittances constitute a substantial proportion ... of foreign exchange earnings for many developing countries, such transfers generally have failed to contribute to development ...

Most of the money that migrants have remitted to their home countries has been used to increase household consumption ... The remainder of the migrants' savings usually has been devoted to financing some personal project. Typically, little or none of the migrants' savings has been invested in capital generating activities (UN 1982:42).

In Egypt, a "consumer craze" rather than productive investment predominates; a low level of domestic capital formation is maintained despite increased individual savings. The anticipated "development" has turned out to be nothing more than a housing boom in both urban and rural areas, a related rise in land values, encroachment on agricultural land for non-agricultural exploitation, increased mechanized agriculture and transportation in the rural areas, as well as increases in small-scale commercial enterprises, the province of informal sector family labour.

Not only have migrant remittances not contributed to productive investment, they have in fact aggravated local inflation (Abdel Fadi 1980). While there is no doubt that migrant remittances are not the only source of inflation in Egypt, it is also certain that these remittances, and related labour shortages, fuelled inflation through increased buying power of returning migrants or their resident families, through increases of costs of production (related to labour shortage), and through the increasing demand for imported consumer goods, which has affected the devaluation of Egyptian currency (Gabaly 1983:90-91).

In sum, the European experience of primitive accumulation through migration during the mercantile phase of capitalist development has not been replicated for Egypt. Accumulated savings have not been transformed into capital for industrial development.

As for the anticipated "political stability" as a correlate of labour exodus, one cannot ignore the increasing disparities in income and the increasing potential for social unrest (Abdel Khalek 1981:407). In fact, within the framework of the ODEP, the Sadat government anticipated such social unrest and was prepared with appropriate repressive legislation. Law #90, which was issued in May 1980 under the title "Law for the Protection of Values from Shame," illustrates the linkage between the Egyptian regime's economic policies and political repression. This law, which legalizes the most blatant forms of repression, was described by Sadat as necessary because Egypt was, in his words,

... entering into a new stage of development in which it would receive billions of dollars and the executive authority must be spared the burden of having to deal with political malcontents (Sadat as cited in Jabara 1981).

In light of such repressive laws and the decline of state responsibilities in favour of "market forces" and individual and family solutions to economic crises, the prediction of political stability is questionable.

Social Consequences of Labour Migration: Familial Adaptations:

Beyond individual economic gains, labour migration has left a trail of social consequences that have been gaining the attention and concern of Egyptian social scientists. The individual resolution of economic problems has been correlated with generalized alienation and social apathy. The pursuit of the "Egyptian dream" (Ibrahim as cited in Gaballah 1983:15) perpetuates individualism in a variety of social spheres. Commitments to country, profession, and extended family have waned in favour of the pursuit of individual or nuclear family goals, often narrowly defined primarily in terms of economic security (ibid.). In fact, what may be conceived by some as family security is often compromised in favour of the ultimate goal of economic gains.

Family life in Egypt is often disrupted by the departure of the father, and in some cases both parents, while children remain behind in female-headed households or in the households of relatives. The effects on children of deprivation of parental influence are yet to be clearly documented for Egyptian families. Generalizations by some Egyptian social scientists indicate the ill-effects of parent migration on family members left behind. Alleged adverse consequences include decline in scholastic performance, marital infidelity, divorce, and juvenile delinquency (ibid.).

The migration of entire families also has its problems. Leaving Egypt often means loss of the support available within the extended family structure. Women no longer have access to female relatives for child care, companionship, and general emotional and material support. Children are no more fortunate in many cases. Denied the traditional companionship of grandparents or, more generally, older community members, children often suffer from neglect. Some may be left with complete strangers or even alone while parents are at work. For parents whose primary goal is the accumulation of savings while away from home, day care centers for children, even when available, are not necessarily a welcome option. The psychological burden on parents and the danger and insecurity to children are immense.

Whether they migrate as companions of husbands or as employees themselves, Egyptian women in adjusting to the social environments of the labour-importing states, find themselves compromising certain rights related to personal emancipation (notably unveiling) which they had taken for granted at home (Hatem 1983:11). For many married Egyptian women, migration interrupts professional development. Such women's professional skills remain dormant until their return to Egypt (ibid.:14).

Problems for families of male migrants who remain in Egypt are equally severe among the less fortunate urban and rural poor. The redivision of labour resulting from adult male labour shortage has meant an increased work burden for children. This is not to say that adult male emigration is the cause of child labour in Egypt. This form of labour certainly predates the

recent labour outflow to PPC. But since labour export and related labour shortages have developed within the framework of other general negative transformations in Egyptian society (notably those related to the ODEP), its adverse effects have been intensified (cf. Gaballah 1983:17).

In parts of rural Egypt, the labour shortage has been so severe that child labour became absolutely necessary.⁵ Child labour is also cheaper labour. In the village of Bahiya, where male migration to the PPC has increased in recent years, children and, to a lesser extent, women predominate in the harvesting of jasmine for a fraction of the pay received for picking cotton. It is indeed a wonder that anyone's labour power is committed by his/her parent(s) to the harvesting of jasmine at lower wages. It turns out that children (and women) engage in the harvesting of jasmine on the land of rich peasants so that these rich peasants will guarantee regular employment for family members during the slack agricultural season in the winter months. Additionally, the harvesting of jasmine by children (and women) is often a form of repayment of loans (and other favours) extended by rich peasants to these workers' kinsmen or to female household heads during the absence of migrant male relatives.

Some of the malnourished and overworked children who once harvested jasmine in Bahiya succumbed to what local inhabitants describe as "jasmine illness." Villagers cite this illness as the cause of the deaths of several children some years ago and as the cause of the continued ill health of those children who currently work in the harvesting of jasmine. "Jasmine illness," a form of anclystomiasis or hookworm disease, has been on the decline over the past few years as decreasing international market demands for jasmine and aggravated labour shortages have forced cultivators to uproot their jasmine shrubs. The picking of cotton by children of increasingly earlier ages pays higher wages but is no less hazardous to their health. Children are exposed to crops sprayed with an inordinate amount of pesticides (some of which have been banned elsewhere) at earlier and earlier ages.

The housing boom, stimulated by migrants' remittances and savings has drawn an increasing number of children into construction work. The physical hazards to children are enormous. For example, children who work in brickyards in rural Egypt often suffer irreparable spinal damage (Smolowe 1983:21). The exploitation of children's labour power at increasingly earlier ages occurs in the urban areas as well as in rural ones. As a recent report on child labour indicates,

In Cairo, for example, labour laws prohibit the employment of children under 16. Nevertheless, 9- and 10-year olds regularly dig ditches, haul construction materials at building sites and work in small, private factories (ibid.: 21, 22).

In Egypt, as in other underdeveloped countries characterized by internationalization of labour, the adult labour exodus has contributed to lowering the age of children's sustained economic activity. This has in

turn resulted in the reduction of the duration of education and the consequent aggravation of the shortage of skilled labour (UN 1982:41). The emerging ethic of the "Egyptian dream," noted earlier, encourages the valuation of wages over education. Confronting soaring inflation, some families' only resort, short of migration which is not a universal option, is to tap their children's wage-earning potential to the detriment of their education. For an increasing number of children who are raised in the shadow of the "Egyptian dream,"

... the word "education" has little meaning. "I want to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and I want a house and a color television," says one 13-year old Egyptian who washes cars. "If I finished school, I would learn very little and would never be able to get these things" (Smalowe et al. 1983:25).

Compulsory education laws are as elusive as labour laws (ibid.). Rural schools are virtually abandoned during times of heavy agricultural work. Indeed the very government that legislates compulsory education and prohibits child labour, schedules the school year to accommodate the increasing, urgent need for child labour in rural areas.

As the predominantly male labour exodus increased dependence on children and generally maximized self-exploitation of family labour, it also increased dependence on women's work, particularly among unskilled women and in the informal sector.⁶ While no noticeable feminization of the professional labour force has occurred, it is evident that male migration (and related inflationary trends) has had a different effect on unskilled women's participation in the formal sector. In this regard, Hammam reports that,

in Egypt ... it is common for a working class husband to take on a second job in the informal sector while his wife raises chickens ... for the family's direct consumption and for exchange. She might also take on casual labour as a washerwoman or as a seamstress. In another pattern, the wife works as an unpaid family producer/trader in her husband's secondary occupation outside the capitalist sector ... Low wages (or the reproduction of labour power at below its exchange value) serves to enlarge the informal sector and to "push" women into it (Hammam 1981:6).

Within the framework of the articulation of non-capitalist and capitalist modes of production, women's income generating activities in the informal sector and household use value production in Egypt, as elsewhere, subsidize wage employment in the formal, capitalist sector (cf. Deere 1977; Cho and Koo 1983, Jules-Rosette 1983).

The migration of males from the rural areas has led to an increase in the agricultural work load of women in middle peasant, poor peasant, and rural proletarian households. While many women have been drawn into the wage labour arena as substitutes for absent males, a large portion of female

(and child) labour remains oriented towards subsistence production. Women are being only partially absorbed into the monetized sector of the economy as a result of male labour shortage, while continuing to reproduce labour power at below its exchange value, thereby continuing to subsidize capital accumulation. For example, in the Upper Egyptian villages of Beit Alam and Hagara, where male outmigration ranges between 50 and 75% of the economically active men, labour shortages and dramatic increases in wages have accentuated dependence on the unpaid family labour of women and children (Hammam 1981:10).

A noticeable social consequence of male migration from rural Egypt is the increased incidence of female-headed households. A recent study of this phenomenon was undertaken by anthropologists in the village of Babel Wa Kafr Hamam in Menoufia Governorate (Khattab and El Daeif 1982). Based on case studies of a small sample of 15 labour migrant families and five non-migrant families, the researchers note a trend towards the dissolution of patrilocal residence patterns, a related emergence of nuclear families among the labour migrants' kin, and the increasing appearance of female-headed households upon departure of males. Similar changes are reported for joint families and nuclear families that shared common housing.

In the village of Bahiya, as earnings from abroad are increasingly perceived to be the sole means for social mobility, kinship ties based on extended family property relations are undermined. The tendency towards dissolution of the extended family has also been observed in Bahiya. It should be noted, however, that the extent of this tendency carries with peasants' class position, related property relations, and contributions to the extended family labour pool at different phases of the developmental cycle of the family. The tendency is also variable in relation to primary sources of livelihood of migrating men. Among non-agricultural rural dwellers such as teachers or those involved in non-agricultural commercial activities, the tendency towards the dissolution of extended families intensifies in relation to migration. But, even in such cases, property relations influence couples' decisions. Indeed, in some cases extended family membership is a welcome form of familial adjustment which provides economic as well as emotional security, at least immediately following the migrant male's departure. Contributions to the financing of a male's trip to the PPC may come not only from nuclear family members (e.g. the sale of a wife's jewelry), but also from the savings of others in the extended family household, and from affinal kin. Extended family and affines may continue to be a source of support during the male's absence.

Where the extended family as a household is dissolved a correlate of emigration, the power of the mother-in-law is undermined. Similarly, the authority of senior females in joint family households is challenged. Khattab and El Daeif's study reveals that

The economic independence of migrant wives has deprived the senior female of some of her economic functions which gave her control of all economic roles among females in the family, hence depriving her of the power to inhibit revolt against subordination (Khattab and El Daeif 1982:70).

In Bahiya the increasing incidence of the illness Cuzr⁷ among women who are senior in their households and their own statements support the contention that these females' control over culturally meaningful power bases has been held in check by recent migration-related changes among certain families at certain stages of their developmental cycle.

Significant changes in women's socio-economic roles in rural Egypt have been noted in Babel Wa Kafr Hamam, where

Male labour migration ... has ... created major modifications in the socio-economic roles of women left behind. Of these, major changes occurred in the increased value of women's contribution to family sustenance especially during the preparation for migration and the early days when remittances sent home were unsure and irregular. New alternative roles played by migrant wives which are non-familial in nature, display the actual size and value of these women's contributions (ibid.:70).

The assumption of new responsibilities by women during men's absence has also been observed in Bahiya. Among poor peasants, in contrast to middle and rich peasants, women take on major responsibilities for agricultural production. These poor peasant women are now burdened with obligations that were previously shouldered by males of their families. Among these many obligations is the time-consuming and unpleasant charge of dealing with the state bureaucracy. In some cases, semi-proletarianized men who are heavily involved in wage labour or who migrate temporarily register land in the names of their wives to facilitate their interaction with the staff of the agricultural cooperative, which continues to play an important role in the management of agriculture and the extraction of surplus. Thus, as poor peasant men become increasingly involved in wage labour or pursue employment away from the village, a greater proportion of use value production becomes the responsibility of poor peasant women.

Increased mechanization in Bahiya, particularly in relation to irrigation and crop processing has helped alleviate women's increased work burden. Women appreciate the labour and time saving contributions of combines and water pumps. These devices save them from the backbreaking work of manual threshing and driving the draft animals that turn the water wheels.

For the women of Bahiya who replaced men as wage earners, integration into capitalist production as wage labourers has meant that the virtually unlimited labour service offered to landlords' households has declined. While some female wage labourers continue to be exploited beyond their roles

in agricultural production by landlords' families (e.g., helping out with baking, cleaning, and market purchases.), this occurs to a much more limited extent than was the case formerly or even currently for sharecroppers' kinswomen.

While there is general agreement that male outmigration increases women's work load and prompts them to assume certain responsibilities traditionally considered the province of males, the consequences of increased dependence on women's work for family welfare and authority patterns has stimulated much debate in the Women in Development literature (Youssef et al. 1979). For rural Egypt, Khattab and El Daeif, on the basis of a rare, though very limited anthropological study, hypothesize that

... wives of labour migrants who are forced to make independent decisions during husbands' absences concerning management of property and remittances will gain high status relative to husband and in-laws, whereas women who are deprived of managing husbands' remittances and property will experience little or no change in their roles and status (1982:68).

They also assert that

Egyptian labour migrant wives are experiencing definite changes in their traditional array of roles which in turn is affecting their status within their families and the community at large (ibid.:52),

Khattab and El Daeif conclude their study questioning

Will the wife of the migrant retain this egalitarian relationship in terms of decision-making ... and authority after the return of her husband? Will she retreat to familial [?] roles and abandon involvement in the public domain? (ibid.:71).

In contrast to this questioning, Mervat Hatem offers a more definitive evaluation. She states that

... increased dependence on women's work in the labour exporting economies ... [has] ... not significantly changed women's position in the family and vis-a-vis men, in general ... while changes in women's work roles could be observed ..., they did not constitute a sufficient basis for challenging the character of the existing patriarchies. Social/sexual relations maintained their autonomy and succeeded in adapting the new roles to the existing patriarchal value system (Hatem 1983:1).

In the same vein, Cynthia Myntti has observed that

... [in Yemen] ... male relatives remaining behind make the decisions as surrogates for the absent emigrants (Population Council 1978:30).

Moreover, it has been argued that the prevalence of female-headed households is not necessarily indicative of improved conditions for women; feminization of poverty has been noted as a widespread correlate in the Third World (Youssef et al. 1979:59 in Hatem 1983:14).

As Hatem describes,

Even though women had taken over new agricultural tasks, the tendency had been for them to work under the auspices of younger or older men. In other words, the adoption of new work roles did not necessarily lead to greater independence, but substituted the missing head of the household with the next male in line whether a son, a father, or brother-in-law. More importantly, the decision on how to spend this money from the remittances was often a male decision either by the migrant himself or his family. In other words, women might not necessarily gain any new decision-making power within the family as a result of the absence of the male head of the household and/or the availability of new sources of income ... the general promotion and acceptance of work as a societal response to change had not materialized ... The social and material rewards for women's involvement continued to be weak (Hatem 1983:15, 16).

In light of my observations in Bahiya, one aspect of Hatem's assumption requires clarification. While it is true, as suggested by Khattab and El Daef, that not all migrant wives will gain new decision-making powers, it is nevertheless important to recognize that some of them do acquire at least temporary decision-making powers. Hatem's expectation of the substitution of the missing head of the household with the next male in line is not uniformly borne out by observations in Bahiya. While women do usually function with some degree of male support during the absence of the heads of their household (or other significant male relatives), such support, even when readily accessible to women, does not necessarily curtail women's temporarily delegated decision-making powers. Female household heads often seek and secure the help (material and emotional) of males (and females), particularly cognates during the absence of their husbands, but it is the wife herself who acts as surrogate for absent emigrant husband. While the legitimacy of her decision-making powers may be accepted by some and rejected by others in certain cases, she is nevertheless the source of the decision. In some cases, power delegated to women by men takes on a legal character thereby acquiring a more permanent duration. This occurs when a husband registers land that he owns or controls on a contractual basis in the name of his wife.

This clarification aside, observations in Bahiya support Hatem's contention that "... while changes (in women's work roles) could be observed ... they did not constitute sufficient basis for challenging the character of the existing patriarchies" (emphasis added). Differently stated, the case of Bahiya indicates that male out-migration has not produced a

fundamental change in the social relations of production and attendant male-female power relations. Control over valued instruments of production is vested in males. Productive resources are only sporadically available to women. Variation among strata of the peasantry aside, control over goods and services that have exchange value rests with men. Women's increased work load, usually involving increased use value production, has not altered male-female authority patterns in a meaningful way. Although, as Khattab and El Daeif conclude, "migrants' wives are experiencing definite changes" (emphasis added), these are by no means fundamental changes (cf. Awni 1984). Legal codes that regulate access to productive resources through inheritance are still male biased, and the ideology that legitimizes female subordination still thrives in both rural and urban Egypt. In rural areas, legalized polygamy still remains a weapon by which presumably independent migrants' wives are threatened (ibid.). It is not unheard of for a returning migrant to "invest" his savings in a new marriage, thereby withdrawing delegated authority to his wife at his convenience.

Some evaluations of the consequences of male migration for women's power imply certain assumptions about the definition of power, but these assumptions are seldom made explicit (cf. Nelson 1975; Morsy 1978). The absence of clear definition of power in much Middle Eastern literature on family relations has often contributed to the creation of a mirage of power even when women's access to culturally meaningful power bases is blocked by structural barriers.⁸ Temporary assumption of delegated responsibility is certainly not equivalent to acquiring (or seizing) control over culturally significant, durable power bases that induce permanent modification of social status.

The important determinant of women's power is not their involvement in work per se, or their assumption of new economic roles; it is the framework of social relations of production into which their contributions are channelled and the related cultural evaluation of such contributions. As Lane has noted for Jordan, as long as women's roles in production are considered secondary to those of men, females remain consigned to the pool of surplus labour where the temporary nature of work mitigates against equality and independence (Lane 1981). Finally, with regard to the focus on decision-making in gauging changes in women's status, beyond the importance of women's decision-making power as an affront to male-biased accounts of the presumed passivity of Middle Eastern women, it is important to consider the structural reservoir into which these decisions flow, and the contributions of these very decisions in reproducing existing authority patterns.

As for the assumption that "male labour migration has presented the wives left behind with opportunities to play alternative roles to their familial ones" (Khattab and El Daeif 1982:54), it is useful to look at variation among various strata of the peasantry. In contrast to Khattab and El Daeif's observation that "Only in very few cases in [their] sample [of 20 families] were rural women relieved of the necessity to work" (ibid.), my

observations in the village of Suad (a pseudonym) in the governorate of Gharbiya indicate that among the upper strata of the peasantry, wealth accumulated through migrant remittances prompts families to confine the labour of their women to the household.⁹ Women's isolation in the sphere of reproduction remains a mark of status in rural Egypt (cf. Tucker 1983:330).

Mark Wojno's observations of the consequences of emigration for traditional economic roles of women in northern Portugal are instructive. He hypothesizes that

... the greater the dependence of women upon remittances sent from family members working outside Portugal, the less change will take place in the traditional economic activities normally carried out by them. A corollary of this hypothesis suggests that the dependence upon remitted earnings may in fact lead to a shrinkage in the everyday economic activities of women ... (Wojno 1982 personal communication).

In evaluating the impact of migration-related changes in women's roles on power relations in the family, it is not sufficient to consider women's partaking of new economic activities and decision-making powers when appropriate family structures and residence and remittance patterns permit. Neither is it sufficient to note "the manner in which the husbands and relatives acknowledge their efforts and accomplishments . . ." (Khattab and El Daeif 1983:64). To properly assess the significance of certain women's newly acquired roles, one must move, conceptually, outside the analytical boundaries of roles themselves and evaluations thereof to consider the structural elements that maintain or constrain the evolution of these roles. This takes us beyond individual familial adaptations, social mobility, and family structure and residence patterns to consider the framework of production relations and related class structure. Migration studies, by focusing on social mobility, consumerism, and status mobility, have characteristically ignored social class structure (cf. Wojno 1982). While there is no doubt that social mobility, newly acquired roles, and patterns of consumption constitute important emigration-related changes, they do not contribute sufficiently to our understanding of the linkages between local social structure and the broader class relations in which they are subsumed (ibid.:16).

The evolution of rural class structure, analyzed for earlier phases of the development of the Egyptian social formation (Amer 1954; Abdel Fadil 1980), is yet to receive detailed documentation as a correlate of migration. But even the few available detailed studies indicate multiple paths of agrarian transformation in terms of social differentiation of the peasantry and social relations of production. In Bahiya there are not only differences in standards of consumption as indicated by the various comforts found in village dwellings, food consumption, dressing habits, education of children and cash remittances from abroad, there are also noticeable variations at the more fundamental level of production. One observes unequal access to productive resources and related differential control of

surplus product and accumulation of resources - differential investment capacity, variation in the extent of the employment of wage labourers by households and the proletarianization of men and women of differentiated households, and differences in crop mixes and agricultural mechanization. Variation in women's contribution to social production is also a correlate of this pattern of social differentiation of the peasant household.

Proletarianization in Bahiya is of a specific kind that does not correspond to the polar dichotomy land consolidation-proletarianization. The designation "landless" peasant is seasonally variable for any given peasant. "Landless" peasants strive to have access to land constantly. Such access may be acquired in the form of sharecropping arrangements for short duration or through informal (and illegal) short-term leases at exorbitant prices.

While "landless" peasants, during certain periods, gain their income as wage labourers, the poor peasant's household labour force is also semi-proletarianized, supplementing income with wage labour. Thus, in addition to "landless" peasants whose income derives almost totally from wage labour, poor peasants (those with less than one feddan) derive part of their income from wage labour. They are not proletarian in the full sense of the word since they have certain control of the means of production and the production process. Among these poor peasants, family labour, including women's non-capitalist production, subsidizes the wages of the semi-proletarian villagers. In fact, these peasants' involvement in subsistence production is a means of reproduction of their labour power. The women of wage labourer and poor peasant families, in addition to contributing to the cultivation of subsistence crops, often sell their labour power as wage earners, depending of the size of landholding accessible to their families from one agricultural cycle to another.

For proletarianized and semi-proletarianized families, remittances from migrants may allow women to forego wage labour employment and confine their efforts to family production. On the other hand, in the early days of a male's emigration, when remittances are irregular, or non-existent, a woman whose labour was once confined to family production may be forced to become a wage earner for varying periods of time, depending on the consequent pattern and amount of remittances.

Aromatic plant cultivation, once a lucrative source of income, has seldom been a realistic option for poor peasants. Although poor peasants, under conditions of seasonal labour shortage and through increased self-exploitation of family labour, are well-suited to maintain the daily harvest of jasmine, they cannot devote their entire small areas of land to aromatic plants or other commercial crop cultivation. Aromatic plants require more than one harvest season to mature, and poor peasants ordinarily cannot survive with income from their land for this period. More importantly, they cannot give up the subsistence crops such as wheat, rice, and corn. Nor can they give up the cultivation of feed for their animals.

Migrants' remittances may allow poor peasant households to forego subsistence production in favour of commercial crop agriculture. The family may use remitted cash for food purchases and devote land to commercial exploitation. In such cases, women's contributions are likely to be confined to domestic work. Their contribution to commercial crop cultivation is only supplementary and is evaluated as such. Family production thus evolves to a different form, depending on the amounts of accumulated savings and possible investment options and decisions.

Among middle peasants' households, characterized by the relative self-sufficiency of labour requirements, women's contribution is usually confined to family labour. Their only work on land controlled by other households is within the framework of exchange labour at times of heavy agricultural work. Commoditization of women's labour power is not characteristic of middle peasant households. In fact, only on rare occasions do middle peasants' households resort to engaging others as day labourers for supplementary help.

Migrant savings may alter the middle peasant family's pattern of sexual division of labour if it permits expansion of landholdings. In such cases, depending on the size of newly-acquired holdings and available remittances for their management, women's work may actually increase as their activities as family producers intensify, or they may retreat to prestigious domestic production as their efforts in agricultural production are replaced by hired non-family labour.

When landholdings expand beyond the capability of family labour, as is the case among rich peasants, the land owner's role in production gradually becomes a supervisory one with wage labourers (male and female) hired to do the work. The women of rich peasant households are secluded and confined to use value production in the "private" domain. Large scale aromatic plant cultivation and citrus fruit production is an option for rich peasants as well as for the agrarian bourgeoisie in the outlying regions of Bahiya. Their access to productive resources beyond their subsistence requirements and their access to cash for market purchases permit them to forego the products of their land for an extended period of time.

Under conditions of labour shortage due to emigration exploitation of land on capitalist principles has been increasingly difficult to maintain. Indeed, the investigation of agricultural transformation in the study area indicates that it has not followed a unilinear path of change from non-capitalist to capitalist relations of production based on wage labour. Sharecropping arrangements for exploitation of relatively large areas of land, once widespread in Bahiya and surrounding areas, declined during the 1950s and 1960s with the imposition of land reform legislation. During the latter decade, cultivation of jasmine proceeded according to capitalist relations of production based on male and female (as well as child) wage labour. In recent years however, increased out-migration and changes in the international market demands for local aromatic plants have affected cultivation patterns in the region. Rich peasants are increasingly

resorting to exploitation of their relatively large landholdings through sharecropping arrangements (cf. Awni 1982:38). Moreover, in some cases, one can foresee the dissolution of capitalist landholdings in formation. As the educated descendents of rich peasants leave the rural areas, increasingly as migrants, land fragmented through inheritance may be either sold or parcelled out for sharecropping or cash rent.

Under sharecropping arrangements, the labour power of the entire family is exploited by the landlord. Although contractual relations and the specification of conditions of surplus appropriation are arranged by men, the poor tenant in fact also commits the labour of his/her family to cultivation. In such cases, as in the case of cultivation of private land by the peasant family, women's and children's contributions are undermined and described as supplementary. This is in contrast to cultivation in return for a fixed wage where women's and children's contributions are evident and their monetary value noted.

In short, for the village of Bahiya variable access to means of production among the differentiated peasantry of the study community has a direct relation to household composition and family structure, forms of income generation, the sexual division of labour, social relations of production and familial power relations. Women, in addition to engaging in use value production, are engaged in commodity production to various degrees; some women's labour power is commoditized. In spite of women's contributions to the reproduction of labour, men are considered the "breadwinners." When both male and female are wage labourers, the woman's contribution to family livelihood is more readily recognized, given its obvious remuneration. In terms of the community at large, landless male and female wage labourers have the least status, but male/female among them are more egalitarian.

Social differentiation of the peasantry (an important index of capitalist transformation in agriculture) did not commence with migration. Within the already existing framework of capitalist transformation, labour migration only helps perpetuate the existing pattern of differentiation of the peasantry. This is not to say that capitalist transformation has followed a unilinear path. On the contrary, in the early days of the recent wave of migration to the PPC countries, migrants' remittances and income derived from cultivation of jasmine, allowed some villagers to engage in capitalist production. Labour shortages in more recent years have reinforced certain pre-capitalist relations of production. In short, emigration has not transformed the class structure of Bahiya. While shifts over class segments have occurred, the structure has remained intact (cf. Wojno 1982:17). To the extent that emigration-related social mobility among men and women has involved nothing more than "horizontal social mobility," (ibid.), migration has not produced a fundamental structural change. To the extent that the structural boundaries of the social relations of production and the related sexual division of labour and familial power relations have been maintained, women and men have not experienced a fundamental change in their relations to each other and within the family.

Within the framework of the ODEP, labour migration has affected various dimensions of Egyptian economy and society. The impact of the labour exodus has been examined primarily from the perspective of macroeconomics, and there have been few studies that complement this perspective with field documentation of specific adaptations to migration and variations thereof. Familial adaptations, which have received relatively limited consideration, also require close scrutiny. Families belong to different classes, inhabit different geographic areas, and experience migration-related changes in different ways. This variation deserves serious consideration. But unless the migration-related experiences of families are placed within a broad, historically - specific structural context involving national, regional, and international developments, family studies will only yield generalizations of suspect reliability.

The task ahead is at once challenging and difficult, but promising.

NOTES

¹This is not to say that migration has been neglected in the Middle Eastern anthropological literature. In fact, as the reviewers of the recent anthropological literature on migration have noted, "Migration theory in a sense is as old as tribal mythology" (Adams et al. 1978:483). But for the Middle East, anthropological studies of migration have been primarily historical. In a 1978 review of the anthropological literature on migration (ibid.), and under the heading "A World Tour of Migration Theories," the authors identify various studies related to the prehistory and ancient history of Egypt and the Near East, but no studies of recent international migration are cited.

²Bahiya is the pseudonym I have chosen for a village located in the Nile Delta, approximately 30 km North of Tanta and nearly 30 km West of the industrial center of MiHala. Bahiya, with a population of about 8,000 is under the administrative jurisdiction of markaz Qutur, famous as a major center for the cultivation and partial processing of aromatic plants. The primary focus of my research during 1980 was the impact of agrarian transformation (related to jasmine production and export) on health and male-female power relations. Male migration to the PPC of the Arab world presented itself as an important feature of rural transformation. I wish to acknowledge the financial support for this research from the NEH and ARCE.

³On its part, the Egyptian government advocates the belief that migration is beneficial. This advocacy extends to public education. A public primary school reader introduces Egyptian children to migration as a natural process. Under the title "Migration of Birds," school children are informed that "as humans migrate, so do birds" (Gaballah 1983:12).

⁴A study of fifty cases of migrants by Dr. Abdel Basit Abdel Mu^cti revealed that all persons in his entire sample transferred funds to Egypt through black market transactions except in cases of payment for cars and real estate (Gaballah 1983:14).

⁵Questions related to the continued availability of child labour at its present levels bear on the issue of spousal separation and its effects on levels of fertility. The effects of male migration on fertility levels in Egypt remain to be seen (cf. Myntti 1978).

⁶The use of more women in the formal sector has been constrained by the excess availability of both male and female university graduates. Migrants have generally been replaced with others from the available workforce, irrespective of sex (Hatem 1983:13).

⁷cu^zr is a local variant of spirit possession which my earlier investigations in the study areas had identified as a significant index of relative powerlessness (Morsy 1978).

8An extreme example is the identification of prostitution as a form of female power.

9I originally became acquainted with the village of Suad in 1974 when I knew it to be a center for the cultivation of jasmine where women and children are employed as wage labourers to harvest flowers. I visited the village upon my return to the area in 1979. When I went out to the fields in the early mornings, I found very few people gathering jasmine. When I asked about the many women who used to harvest the flowers only a few years earlier, villagers simply remarked that they had become "ladies." Some of the women who had once worked as wage labourers now confine their work to the household as a result of accumulated wealth through migrants' remittances.

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