Chapter 7

LIVING CONDITIONS IN PLACES OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION

The living conditions of the migrants in their origin (Upper Egypt) and destination (Cairo) are analyzed in this chapter. This analysis includes housing conditions, household ownership, availability of public services (piped water, electricity, sewage disposal, etc.), both in the village and in Cairo, and land ownership in the rural places of origin. Urban–rural linkages and the mechanism of remittance use and allocation are discussed in this chapter also, which will include survey findings from fieldwork in selected villages in Upper Egypt in addition to data from the main field survey in Cairo.

The comparison between living conditions in the places of origin and destination is both an easy and a meaningful comparison to make, since virtually all the respondents maintain close ties to their village "homes". They may be resident in Cairo for most of the year, and may have been so for several years, even decades, but they tend to visit their place of origin regularly and still regard the village as their psychological "base" and family home. Hence they are "members of two worlds", physically present in one place but mentally rooted in another.

7.1 Living conditions in the village of origin

Two geographical reference-points will be referred to when analyzing living conditions of migrants' households in Upper Egypt; Greater Cairo and rural Upper Egypt. Because there is a four-year lag between this study and the latest census data (1996), the results of the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000 are used for comparative purposes instead. The EDHS 2000 is a national survey, in which the household sample size was 16,957 households (National Population Council, 2001).

7.1.1 Housing characteristics

Most rural residents in Egypt – both Upper and Lower – live in owned houses. The case in cities is totally the opposite; here most residents live in rented houses (CAPMAS, 1999). In my main questionnaire survey, 93.0 percent of the study population live in owned houses in their villages, and only 17 cases (7.0 percent) live in rented houses. Some of those 17 cases live in houses that are owned by a relative who offers it to them for free until they manage to build their own houses.

Table 7.1

Housing characteristics of migrants and the national population

	Greater Cairo	Rural Upper Egypt	The study population	
			In Cairo	In Upper Egypt
Electricity	99.7	93.3	71.9	91.7
Piped water	99.7	75.6	64.5	29.3
Connection to public sewage disposal networks	NA	NA	61.2	Zero

Source: Cairo field questionnaire (2000); National Population Council (2001)

Table 7.1 presents the distribution of national households and the sample population by selected housing characteristics, including electricity, piped water and sanitation. The table is based on a multiple comparison which should be spelt out for clarity's sake. The study population gave answers both for their residences in their village of origin and in Cairo; hence for these two columns in the table, the same respondents are involved. The other two columns derive from the EDHS 2000 survey, based on some 17,000 households sampled in Greater Cairo, rural Upper Egypt, and other regions. The percentage of households with electricity in rural Upper Egypt (93.3 percent) is less than that of Greater Cairo (99.7 percent), according to the EDHS survey. Regarding the migrants' households in the villages the coverage is 91.7 percent, while it is only 71.9 in their accommodation in Cairo. This set of figures illustrates that, whilst electricity provision is near-universal now in Egypt, for migrants living (or, often, squatting) in Cairo, it is significantly less, reflecting their marginal accommodation situation there.

Greater Cairo households are more likely to have access to piped water than rural households in Upper Egypt (99.7 versus 75.6 percent). The situation in migrants' households in the villages is much worse, only 29.3 percent of households having access to piped water. This is a further confirmation of the earlier finding that rural migrants from Upper Egypt are selected from amongst the poorest households in village areas. About 65 percent of migrants have access to piped water while being in Cairo. As a matter of fact public sewage disposal networks do not exist in rural Upper Egypt. In general, except for electricity, migrants enjoy better services in Cairo than in their households in Upper Egypt; but migrants are notably worse off on these criteria than the rest of the Egyptian population.

7.1.2 Household possessions

Tables 7.2 and 7.3 provide information on household ownership of durable goods, means of transportation, other possessions, and agricultural land. While about nine out of ten of Greater Cairo households own a radio with a cassette recorder, only two-thirds of households in Upper Egypt own a radio, based on EDHS data. The percent drops to 55.8 in migrant laborers' households in Upper Egypt. Television is now the most prevailing mass-communication consumption good in Egypt. More than 95 percent of Greater Cairo households own a television. The percent drops to 79.1 in rural Upper Egypt and then to 69.4 in migrants' households in Upper Egypt. In spite of the current improvement and expansion of telephone services, the percent of households with telephone lines is still low. About one half of households in Greater Cairo are connected to the telephone network. The coverage of telephone services in rural Upper Egypt (8.3 percent) is very low – both in general and if compared to Greater Cairo. In the migrants' households it is only 2.1 percent. This may appear to contradict with the finding – to be discussed later in this chapter – that migrants prefer to communicate with their families in Upper Egypt using telephones. One telephone line in rural Egypt may be used by ten or more households. It is common to call your neighbors asking them to get someone from your home to come and speak to you, or to ask them to pass on a message.

Table 7.2

Percentage of households possessing various household effects and means of transportation

	Greater Cairo	Rural Upper Egypt	Study population households in Upper Egypt
Household effects:			
Radio	90.3	66.3	55.8
Television	95.3	79.1	69.4
Telephone	51.0	8.7	2.1
Water heater	63.3	8.3	Zero
Refrigerator	88.4	36.5	11.6
Gas stove	NA	NA	12.0
Means of transportation:			
Bicycle	4.0	17.0	20.7
Private car	17.3	2.7	Zero
Motorcycle	1.0	1.2	0.4
Tractor	NA	NA	Zero

Source: Cairo field questionnaire (2000); National Population Council (2001)

Table 7.3

Ownership of agricultural land in origin among migrant laborers in Cairo

	Frequency	Percent
No land	142	58.7
Less than one feddan	58	24.0
One to less than two feddans	28	11.6
Two to three feddans	14	5.8
Total	242	100.0

* Feddan = 0.42 hectare

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Urban households are more likely to have certain household possessions than rural households. For example, 63.3 percent of households in Greater Cairo own a water

heater, compared with only 8.3 percent in rural Upper Egypt. Migrants' households seem to be less than the average of rural Upper Egypt with respect to household possessions in general. With regard to means of transportation, it seams that the bicycle is the most prevailing means among migrants' households, where about one fifth (20.7 percent) of households own a bicycle. No one owns a private car and only one household owns a motorcycle. It is to be expected, given the limited land owned by migrants' households, that none owns a tractor.

About six in ten of the migrants are landless. They do not own any, even small, piece of agricultural land in Upper Egypt. Landless people in Upper Egypt are regarded as the poor of the poor. Keeping the inherited land is a tradition and selling it is regarded as a shame, unless under exceptional circumstances. Migrants' ownership of farmland ranges between zero and 3 feddans (1.26 hectares) with an average of 0.36 feddan. Those who own two to three feddans comprise 5.8 percent of the total households only. The average migrant household land ownership is less than Upper Egypt's average which is 1.16 feddans per household. This average comprises about one third of the region's average: yet another piece of evidence to support the general picture that migrants are drawn from the poorest rural households.

7.1.3 Rural adjustment mechanisms

At this point one may justifiably ask: who is working the agricultural land in Upper Egypt whilst those rural migrant laborers are in Cairo? Are they really an underemployed surplus of labor from the farming sector? Does their absence affect agriculture in rural Egypt or are there adjustment mechanisms that balance the situation there? From the Mabogunje (1970) model (see Figure 3.1) we recall the relevance of the rural control subsystem and especially “adjustment mechanisms” which involve family/household relationships and the reallocation of work tasks and family responsibilities when the migrant departs. How do these adjustment mechanisms work in the Upper Egyptian case?

First, we need to bear in mind the degree of landlessness of the migrants and their families of origin, which in all cases involves either no land at all or just a tiny holding.

Stark (1978: 18–19) speaks of the "cruel parameter" of only a small holding to sustain an often large (and growing) rural family, so that "maturing children" act as the family's migrants, each migrating, one by one, as they reach maturity, leaving the working of the land in the hands of the older family members who are more experienced in farming. In the Upper Egyptian case, by analogy, we can envisage a "crueller parameter" of a landholding which is too small to sustain even the work of just one or two experienced family members (let alone the livelihood of an entire family unit), so that the household head is forced to migrate, probably seasonally, in order to integrate short-term urban work with farm labor. Finally, continuing the analogy, there is the "cruellest parameter" of no land at all, so that all (male) family members of working age must be considered as potential migrants. This is the reality for most of my questionnaire sample – 142 out of the 242.

Second, brief reference to the existing theoretical and empirical literature can be made. This evidence is contradictory: some studies indicating that the withdrawal of rural labor depresses agricultural production, and others demonstrating no productive deterioration (for a selection of reviews and some case studies see Connell *et al*., 1976; Dasgupta, 1981; Griffin, 1976; Lipton, 1980; Lucas, 1997; Miracle and Berry, 1970; Todaro, 1976). Miracle and Berry (1970), for instance, note that the immediate effect of migrant laborers' absence is "primarily a function of how long they are gone; the amount and kind of work open to them during the same period in the supplying economy had they not left; the adequacy of the labor supply in their home area after their departure; and the effect of the departure of migrants on real wages in the supplying area". In the case of no drop in agricultural output, farm product is maintained either by other workers and family members taking over the labor input of the migrants, or by the migrant moving only seasonally so that agricultural labor is maintained at the times of the year when it is needed. Dasgupta (1981) reviews studies which show that, due to the virtually zero marginal product of rural labor in overpopulated areas, agricultural production in some parts of the developing world (Papua New Guinea and Central Africa are mentioned) would not fall until one third or even one half of the male labor is withdrawn. This introduces another parameter which is highly relevant to my Egyptian research: which is the relative balance between, and social organization of, male and female labor, and in

particular the extent to which the latter can be easily substituted for the former (assuming only males migrate – which is mainly the case in rural Upper Egypt).

To return to my questionnaire findings, the answers are quite clear for the Egyptian case. The 100 migrant laborers who have agricultural land in Upper Egypt depend on remaining family members in the village to take care of their land while they are in Cairo. Since most migrant workers come from extended family households where several generations live together, and due to the shared responsibility that household members feel towards the agricultural land that is owned by the family, most family members feel a duty, as well as an economic necessity, to substitute the absence of migrants by more participation in agricultural work. In my visits to villages in Souhag governorate I found that it is not only the male members of the family who take care of the farm, but also female household members, especially wives and older sisters. It is important here to stress that the participation of women in agriculture is common in Egypt; but the absence of a male family member tends very much to increase this participation. This latter finding is also supported by other studies of Egyptian rural society within the context of male out-migration (Brink, 1991; Khafagy, 1983; Khattab and El-Daeif, 1982).

7.2 Living conditions in Cairo

In this section I present an analysis of migrants' living conditions in Cairo. This includes migrants' type of residence in Cairo, cost of housing, cost of living and daily expenses, and food and nutrition.

7.2.1 Where do migrants stay in Cairo?

The vast majority of migrants live with each other (79.3 percent), as Table 7.4 shows. Migrant laborers seem to prefer to live together in groups in crowded and cheap places. Migrants from the same village, or sometimes the same governorate, tend to live together. I found also a few migrants from different governorates who live together. Living together makes it easy to keep the same social contacts and traditions of the village; at the same time this pattern will weaken the mechanisms through which

Table 7.4

Where do migrants stay in Cairo?

	Frequency	Percent
With other workers/friends	192	79.3
With a family	30	12.4
In the street	3	1.2
In an under-construction building	2	0.8
Other	15	6.2
Total	**242**	**100.0**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Table 7.5

Persons (migrant workers) sharing the same room in Cairo

Number of persons (grouped)	Frequency	Percent
1–5	122	50.4
6–10	89	36.7
11–15	15	6.2
16–20	16	6.7
Mean	6.8 persons per room	
Total	**242**	**100.0**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

migrants can learn and acquire new behavioral patterns that prevail in urban environments. It is also a defense mechanism to keep their essentially rural, Upper Egyptian identity. Living together in groups makes migrants feel safer than living alone. Thirty workers (12.4 percent) live with families. They live with permanent (old) migrants' families in slum areas and in old village-like neighborhoods in Cairo. Most of those who live with families are from Souhag governorate (20 cases). Living with permanent migrants' families eases communication with origin villages and facilitates finding work opportunities, as I mentioned before. I found three cases of my

questionnaire subjects who live on the street. They live by a bridge in the Haram area. Two other migrants reported that they live in a building which is under construction. Other modes of accommodation include living with building guards from the same village, and living in shops and offices where they have relatives or friends who work in such facilities.

The number of persons who share the same sleeping room is one of the indicators of standard of living. The higher the number of persons who share the same bedroom the lower is the standard of living and vise versa. The mean number of persons per sleeping room among migrants in my main survey in Cairo is 6.8 (see Table 7.5), which is almost double the mean of their own households in Upper Egypt (3.5 persons per room). Persons who share sleeping arrangements with six workers or more comprise one half of migrants in Cairo. Given the fact that migrants live in the cheapest and the worst accommodation in Cairo, and given this very high number of workers who share the same room, and the very poor dietary conditions – as I will mention later in this chapter – one can imagine how poor these migrants are.

7.2.2 Cost of housing in Cairo

Before analyzing the cost of housing in Cairo, it is important to shed light on the mode of payment (Table 7.6). More than one half of migrants (54.1 percent) pay rent monthly to a landlord, while 8.3 percent pay on a daily basis. The surprising finding regarding the nature of payment is that I found that 37.6 percent of the migrants reside for free. They pay nothing for housing in Cairo. After further questioning with migrants I found that they live in derelict properties and houses. Some of these places can host more than twenty migrant laborers. Migrants who live in such places have almost no luggage or personal possessions with them. Some of them have only worn-out blankets which they bought or borrowed for next to nothing. They do not cater or cook for themselves. They buy their food from street vendors. It is very cheap and rather unhealthy food with low fat and low calories. Hence its nutritional value, for a person engaged mainly in heavy manual work, is poor.

Table 7.6

Mode of payment of housing rental

	Frequency	Percent
Nothing	91	37.6
Daily	20	8.3
Monthly	131	54.1
Total	**242**	**100.0**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

It is also important here to refer to the marginal employment opportunities that are created to meet the needs of the laborer migrants, especially the tea makers and the food sellers who have established their business in the street to serve these working migrants. Most of the tea makers position themselves near large groupings of laborers, bringing with them their primitive tea making equipment – gasoline stove, cups, tea spoons, sugar, tea, and water tank(s). The prices are half the general Cairo equivalent, but double Upper Egypt equivalents. The most important observation is that most of these vendors were former construction laborers. Most of them are old and cannot work in construction any more, but I found that some people inherited this line of business from their parents.

Daily payment for housing is between 0.50 and 1.00 LE (0.12 and 0.25 US$) depending on the condition of the room. However, rooms are not, or only minimally, equipped. There is only one blanket for each resident, to sleep on, not to be covered with. Toilet facilities are shared – sometimes by more than 20 workers – and they are very primitive and dirty. Most of the rooms that landlords rent to such people are in the basement or the roof. The basement rooms suffer from the absence of ventilation; while the roof rooms are generally made from wood with many holes that make them very cold and draughty in winter. In the summer the roof-top rooms are very hot due to their sunny position. Workers who reside on a daily basis are less stable in their life than those who reside on monthly basis. Monthly-based rented rooms are better than rooms of daily rental. They are more equipped and vary according to the monthly rate which ranges between 8 and 65 LE (2 and 16 US$) per migrant – depending on the number of occupants and the monthly room rate – with an average of 20 LE (5 US$) per person

per month. Rooms with high monthly rates and a smaller number of migrants attract older migrants who seek stability. Fully equipped rooms are very rare. Out of the many rooms that I was invited to visit by migrants I found only one room with beds, table, refrigerator, and a good toilet facility.

7.2.3 Cost of living and daily expenses in Cairo

Questionnaire respondents were asked to give an approximate figure for the amount of money that they spend to live in Cairo per day in general, and then they were asked to give details of their daily expenses on food, tea, cigarettes, and other items. Table 7.7 sets out some tabulated answers to these questions. The daily expenses range from 2.5 to 15 LE (0.60 to 4 US$) with an average of 6.34. Adding one more LE to these average daily expenses for housing makes the overall daily living cost equal to 7.34 LE (1.80 US$). This amount of money comprises about 40 percent of migrants' average daily income (19.31 LE, 5 US$). This means – roughly speaking – that migrants can save up to 60 percent of their daily income. Let us now exclude the cost of housing and decompose the average daily expenses (6.34 LE, 1.60 US$) to its main components. These are food, tea, cigarettes, and other expenses. Other expenses include the cost of

Table 7.7

Minimum, maximum, and average daily expenses in Cairo by item of expenditure (LE)

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Percent
Food	1.0	8.5	3.64	57.4
Tea	.0	3.0	1.18	18.6
Cigarettes	.0	4.8	1.31	20.7
Other	.0	5.0	0.21	3.3
Total daily expenses	**2.5**	**15.0**	**6.34**	**100.0**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

transportation in most cases, and hospitality of newcomers from Upper Egypt or from other places in Cairo. Expenditure on food comprises the main bulk of migrants' expenditure while being in Cairo. Migrants' expenditure on food is widely varied. It ranges between 1 LE per day to 8.5 LE with an average of 3.64 LE. This average represents 57.4 percent of the total daily expenses.

Tea and cigarettes are also an important component of migrants' expenses. Migrants spend about one fifth of their daily expenses on tea, and the same proportion on cigarettes. This finding is not surprising in an Egyptian context. Most Egyptians drink tea, which is the most popular drink in Egypt. Upper Egyptians prefer strong tea with about four spoons of sugar per cup. One may conclude that drinking tea is an original and typical routine. Sometimes it is considered as a dessert after heavy meals for the poor. As I mentioned before, the cost of a cup of tea is very cheap. From the street tea maker – especially for migrant workers – it is 0.25 LE. Some workers drink eight cups of tea per day. With respect to smoking, I found that 67.8 percent of the migrants are smokers. They smoke cigarettes and some of them smoke the water pipe, or what is called *shisha* in Egypt. It is an oriental smoking device that uses the water to filter the tobacco. It is important here to mention that smoking cigarettes or shisha may be regarded as a kind of substitution or compensation for their low standards of living in Cairo. Migrant workers consider it as a sort of a cheap pleasure. Other expenses include transportation from their place of residence in Cairo to their work-place for those who live far from their regular work, plus – as mentioned before – hospitality for new arrivals and for visitors from the village.

7.2.4 Food and nutrition

Because of the low level of their housing conditions in Cairo and the unavailability of cooking equipment in most of rented places in Cairo, migrant laborers tend to buy ready-made food from street vendors and cheap restaurants in Cairo. I asked interviewees to list the type – and the quality and quantity – of food that they ate in the last three meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner). The reason for asking such questions is not so much to achieve a precise analysis of their nutritional habits, but rather just to explore and investigate the general characteristics of their patterns of food consumption in order to

compare them with average Egyptians in Cairo and Upper Egypt.

Generally speaking, the consumption of meat is the main indicator of nutritional well-being in Egypt. As a rough estimate – from my own observations – average Cairo families eat meat about twice per week. However, meat is cheaper in Upper Egypt than Cairo, so that, despite the overall marked difference in income standards, average Upper Egyptian families purchase meat once per week and eat home-reared chicken or other birds once per week also. So, both Cairo and Upper Egypt "average" residents eat meat twice per week. The only difference is that Cairo residents purchase it twice while Upper Egyptians purchase it once. When I asked migrant laborers about the last time that they ate meat while being in Cairo, the vast majority reported that they last ate meat on the occasion of their last visit to the village, and that they do not eat meat in Cairo in order to save money. So what do they eat? The in-depth interviews with the migrant laborers may give more clarification about their eating habits. In the following quotes there is frequent reference to *falafel*, a traditional Egyptian food. Falafel were probably first prepared in ancient Egypt and, from that era, these vegetarian delights have remained the country's national food. Traditional falafel are spicy, deep-fried bean patties or balls. Their basic ingredient is ground broad beans, chickpeas, or a combination of both. They are tasty, low in price, rich in proteins and carbohydrates, and high in calories, and they make very satisfying main courses or light snacks.

"*When I have enough money, I head into a restaurant. When not, I just buy falafel for 0.50 Egyptian pounds and bread. I mean that I get some beans and falafel in the restaurant. When I do not have enough money, I buy two pieces of bread, just something to eat for 0.30 or 0.40 LE. At night, I also have dinner at the restaurant if I have enough money. If not, I go eat beans. I eat meat only in my hometown because meat here – in Cairo – is expensive. Moreover, I do not have enough money to order meat at restaurants*" (Mohamed). Some migrants do not eat much because they believe that they should suffer like their families in Upper Egypt. "*Before I eat anything here in Cairo, I think about those in my home. Even if my mouth waters to eat chicken, meat, or any thing else, I ignore it for the sake of my family. They are deprived from certain things at home, and I am here too"* (Henein). Some migrant laborers behave depending on income. "*It depends. I mean that when I earn some money, and after providing all*

the needs of my family, I never deprive myself from anything I need. If I do not care about myself, I will definitely be gone" (Zaki). But some are satisfied with their extremely modest eating habits. "*No meat, sir. I had beans for breakfast, and get lunch for 0.50 LE. As for dinner, it is usually bread and cheese. Thank God, this is very satisfying to me*" (Dessouky). "*I eat meat once a month when I go back to my hometown,*" said another one of the interviewees. The nature of their work is very tough, but their food is very light. "*For breakfast, I usually go to a baker and get two bread pans for 0.25 LE. As for lunch, I get something not more that one pound; such as three loaves of bread, falafel, fried eggplant and stuff,*" said another one. "*The only way for me to get meat is to get it on a charity basis from a benevolent man, otherwise, we will never get close to it. It is exorbitantly expensive, as you can see*" (Diab). It is worth mentioning that newcomers from the village and migrants returning from village visits always bring with them home-made food from the village that is to be shared by all residents of the household – most of whom, as we saw before, are likely to be from the same village or village grouping. It is a good occasion for these hard-working migrants to share short happy times and eat food which reminds them of home and their families.

7.3 Urban–rural linkages

Theoretically speaking, urban–rural linkages and social and family networks shape and condition the migration flows from rural to urban areas (Boyd, 1989; Mabogunje, 1970). What (in the Egyptian case) are the linkages between migrants in Cairo and their villages in Upper Egypt? What are the frequencies of the village visits and by which means of transportation; and what is the effect of distance on the frequency of travel to the home village? Do some migrants lose contact with their rural origins over time? An attempt is made in this section to answer these questions. When migrating to the city, very few migrants begin a new life and forget the old. For most, there are continuing links of all kinds with the village; very often the city is regarded as a kind of stopping place, and the stay there as a kind of sojourn (Caldwell, 1969), consistent with the conceptualization of their status as "circular migrants". Linkage to the migrants' hometowns is not just visiting the origin village from time to time or sending oral or written messages to family; links also consist of monetary, family and moral obligations which are effected through

social and family networks that have their base in the village. Fawcett (1989) classified family and personal networks in a migration context into three types:

- Tangible linkages, which refer to monetary remittances, gifts and written communications among network members that flow in both directions between origin and destination;
- Regulatory linkages, which refer to person-to-person obligations among relatives, whose expression also results in family or chain migration; and
- Relational linkages, which refer to linkages that are derived from comparison of two places or conditions.

I will refer in this section of the chapter to some of these linkages that make Cairo-based rural migrants closely tied to their places of origin.

7.3.1 Visiting the village

The strongest and most obvious physical contacts that the migrant maintains with the village are his return revisits. Tables 7.8 and 7.9 present the frequency of visits to the village and the mean length between successive visits by governorate (distance), marital status, and having permanent relatives in Cairo (old migrants). The length between successive visits is positively correlated with distance between Cairo and the governorates of origin. While the mean duration is 31 days for Beni-Sueif migrants, it is 170 days for Qena migrants. (Luxor and Aswan are discarded from the statistical comparison due to the small numbers of cases). With respect to frequency of visits and marital status, married migrants seem to visit their families more frequently than single and engaged migrants. Migrants with relatives in Cairo stay in Cairo slightly longer than those with no relatives. The statistical analysis – analysis of variance (ANOVA) – revealed that only the difference associated with governorates (distance) is statistically significant. This means that the closer the region of origin to Cairo the shorter the length between successive visits; clear support for the Gravity Model principle. This principle apart, the most notable feature of these data is the great variety of behavior regarding frequency of return: whilst most seem to visit their place of origin on average every one,

two or three months (two-thirds of the total respondents), one tenth visit every two or

Table 7.8

Frequency of village visits

Frequency of village visits	Frequency	Percent
Every 15 days	14	5.8
Every 20 days	10	4.1
Every month	54	22.3
Every 2 months	63	26.0
Every 3 months	42	17.4
Every 4–6 months	32	13.2
Every year or so	27	11.2
Mean gap between visits	94 days	
Total	**242**	**100**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Table 7.9

Mean duration between successive visits to village by marital status, having relatives in Cairo, and governorate of origin (in days)

Variable	Mean	Number
Marital status		
Single/engaged	101	135
Married	84	105
Divorced	90	2
Relatives in Cairo		
Yes	96	157
No	89	85
Place of Origin		
Beni-Sueif	31	19
Menia	59	42
Assiut	83	61
Souhag	107	95
Qena	170	18
Luxor	730	1
Aswan	98	6
Total	**94**	**242**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

three weeks, and one tenth only every year or so (Table 7.8).

The main means of transportation between the village of origin and Cairo for most migrants is the train. This is due to the well-established Egyptian railway network that covers all governorates along the Nile Valley and the fact that this medium is the cheapest among all other means of transportation. Migrants always use the third class service, which is the cheapest. The cost of an adult ticket from Aswan to Cairo (990 kilometers) is only 20 Egyptian Pounds (equivalent to 5 US$). Migrants always use public transportation between the railway station and their place of residence. The cost of a bus ticket in Cairo – for about 20-kilometer journey – is 0.25 LE (0.06 US$). Migrants tend to travel in groups of two or more, especially when they visit their origin, thereby making the return visit and the lengthy travel involved a more sociable occasion.

Table 7.10

Visiting relatives (permanent residents) in Cairo

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
I live with them	11	7.0
Frequently	39	24.8
Rarely	65	41.4
Never	42	26.8
Total	**157**	**100.0**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

7.3.2 Relatives in Cairo

As I just mentioned in the last subsection, the effect of having one or more relatives in Cairo on the frequency of visits to places of origin is not statistically significant. The difference between the two groups with respect to the frequency of village visits is only seven days (96 and 89 days). The two-thirds of migrants who have relatives in Cairo (157) were asked whether they visit them or not. The results (Table 7.10) show that the relation between newcomers to the city and old migrants – permanent residents – is very

weak. More than one quarter (26.8 percent) of the migrants do not visit their relatives in Cairo at all, while 41.4 percent reported that they visit them rarely – once a month and sometimes even less frequently. The percentage of those who frequently visit their relatives in Cairo is only 24.8. Earlier (in Chapter 6, section 6.1.2) it was mentioned that migrants generally received little or no help from "established" relatives when looking for work and accommodation. Why do migrants tend not to visit their relatives in the city frequently? There are many reasons that prevent them from doing so, some cultural and some more psychological. The cultural factors have to do with the fact that it is a custom among Egyptians (especially Upper Egyptians) when they come from their origin to visit someone of their relatives or non-relatives in Cairo to bring with them a gift – called a "visit" – that consists of home-reared or home-made food products such as chicken, pigeons or eggs. Sometimes it includes other farm products like beans, onions or garlic. Since most of these migrants come from very poor families which may not be able to afford having this gift prepared for their Cairo relatives, they prefer not to visit. The psychological factor is that newly-migrated Upper Egyptians feel that they are doing very much less-respected jobs than their established relatives in Cairo; hence, to visit these relatives would be a public acknowledgment of their inferior social and economic status, which they prefer to keep to themselves.

7.3.3 Contacts and means of communication with the village

About two-thirds of migrants to Cairo have non-physical contacts with their families in Upper Egypt while working in Cairo. The percentage of migrants with long-distance contacts to the village varies among governorates. While it is only 47 for migrants from nearby Beni-Sueif, it is 72 for migrants from far-away Qena. It appears that the longer the distance between origin and destination, the higher the percentage of migrants who have non-direct contacts with families in origin (see Table 7.11). This bi-variate relation between distance and non-physical contact with the village is also explained in light of the correlation between distance and frequency of visits as explained in the previous sub-section.

What are the means of non face-to-face communication between migrants and their families? As presented in Table 7.12, the main means of communication is oral messages

with colleagues who are visiting the village as part of the “circularity” of this migration form. About 37 percent of migrants who have contacts with the village while staying in Cairo use this method to contact their family in Upper Egypt. Given the fact that migrants work and live in groups coming from the same village, and sometimes the same family, migrants who want to send oral messages to their families and friends can easily find passengers leaving for their villages almost every day or week.

As a means of communication with the village, telephone calls ranked second. In the last ten years, the telecommunication sector in Egypt has showed a great improvement, especially in rural areas. After following a waiting list strategy in allocating telephone lines, lines now are available in all destinations in Egypt without waiting. It is worth mentioning that most of my surveyed population's houses have no telephone lines. How do they communicate? As I mentioned earlier, a single telephone in a rural settlement may be used by many households. Hence, neighbors can be asked to pass on messages or bring somebody who lives nearby to the phone.

Table 7.11

Percent and number of migrants who have non-physical contacts with families in Upper Egypt while working in Cairo by governorate of origin

Governorate	Percent	Number of migrants
Beni-Sueif	47	9
Menia	62	26
Assiut	66	40
Souhag	68	65
Qena	72	13
Total	**66**	**159**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Table 7.12

Means of communication with family while working in Cairo*

Means of communication	Frequency	Percent
Oral messages via colleagues	90	56.6
Telephone calls	85	53.5
Written messages via colleagues	2	1.3
Written messages via ordinary mail	0	0
Total**	**159**	

* This is a multiple response question, however only 18 respondents gave more than one response

** Total is less than the sum of responses due to multiple responses; percentages sum to more than 100 for the same reason

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Communications via written messages sent via colleagues or via the mail are almost non-existent. This is almost certainly due to the high illiteracy level among migrants and the easiness of communication via oral messages and telephone calls. It was noticed that most migrants who prefer telephone communication have telecommunication cards. Literate migrants help illiterates in using public service telephone sets and dialing the village numbers, which they keep in a piece of paper in their wallets, even if they cannot read them.

7.3.4 Losing contact with rural origins

Do some migrants tend to lose touch with their rural origins over time? In the questionnaire-based study I met a small number of workers who brought their families to live with them in Cairo. One migrant from Menia – out of the 20 in-depth interviews – had also brought his family to live with him in Cairo. Four out of those six workers completely lost contact with the village (two from Menia and two from Qena). The other two still send money to their old mothers in Upper Egypt and communicate with their village. The percentage of those who lost contact is only 1.5; this indicates that overall

the orientation to the rural village home areas remains strong. The significance of this finding will also become apparent later.

7.4 The mechanism of remittance use and allocation

In economic terms the most important aspect in rural–urban circular migration is the counter-flow of remitted money and goods that characterizes the migration stream. Such flows of wealth are undoubtedly important, not only to the families in rural areas but also to the migrants (Caldwell, 1969). Russell (1986) distinguished between three major components of the remittance process:

- the decision to remit;
- the methods used to remit; and
- the use that is made of remittances in the origin community.

In this section I discuss these three elements. This analysis depends heavily on my peer and participatory observations of migrants' households and families in a number of villages in Souhag governorate, but before starting to describe and analyze the results of my observations in Upper Egypt I present first an estimate of the percent of migrants' income that they save per month. Also I present their plans for the money that they make in Cairo and who – from their point of view – has the last word in remittances allocation.

7.4.1 Migrants' savings and expenditure

As was planned at the time of developing the questionnaire, migrants were to be asked about the percent of their income that they save. Since I found in the pre-test that migrants did not fully recognize the meaning of the term percent, I changed it to an absolute number and asked them to give an estimate of the amount of money that they save per month on average. This amount of money can then be easily compared to the average income per month in order to get the average percent of migrants' savings per month. The amount of money that migrants save per month ranges between zero – only ten cases of young migrants – and 500 LE. The average monthly saving is 198.5 LE, or

rather less than US$50. This average represents nearly half the migrants' monthly income and is almost equivalent to the monthly salary of an average government employee, as I mentioned before. Migrants recognize the value of their savings while working in Cairo but they think that they could have been saving more money if the cost of living in Cairo were not so expensive. Hence they tend to do all they can to minimize their living costs in the city, by scrimping and saving in the ways I have already described.

Migrant laborers were asked about their plans for using and investing the savings of their work in Cairo (see Table 7.13). In addition to a pre-coded list of responses, migrants also added other plans of their own. Migrants were asked to list all of their plans (multiple response question). A great proportion of migrants' savings goes to supporting their families in Upper Egypt and satisfying their basic needs. About nine-tenths of migrants declared that the main thing that they do with money that they save is to support their families. A proportion of single migrants tend to save the money to support themselves. One of the parents in Upper Egypt said to me about his migrant son in Cairo: "*I don't need anything from him. I just want him to satisfy his own needs and prepare himself for marriage. Being responsible for his own expenses is an asset to me. God bless him*." In fact, many young migrants consider their work in Cairo or in another major city as a good opportunity to save for marriage expenses. One fourth of the migrants save money to cover – or make a contribution to – marriage expenses. Building a new house, or adding a new housing unit to the family's house, is regarded as the main catalyst to save money. One fourth of migrants save to build a house. Other plans are to educate children, buy land, buy home appliances and durable goods (Table 7.13).

7.4.2 The decision about remittances

Who has the last word in the deployment of the remittance income? The answer to this question depends on the status of the migrant within the family. If the migrant is the head of family, it is expected that he is the one who has the last word in the remittances' expenditure or investment. If the migrant is the head of household but he is an old or experienced migrant to Cairo, it is expected that his wife would take more responsibility about remittance allocation than the wives of new migrants to Cairo. Fathers and mothers (in case of father's death) have the last word in the spending of remittances for

their migrant sons in most cases. The prevalence of extended families that include more than one generation gives parents more authority within the family. These findings broadly match those of Brink (1991) who studied the impact of emigration abroad on family responsibilities of wives remaining at home in a village of Lower Egypt.

More than three-quarters of migrants (75.6 percent) send money to their relatives and families in Upper Egypt while working in Cairo. The percent of remitters is associated with distance between Cairo and governorate of origin, in that the longer the distance of governorate the higher is the percent of remitters (see Table 7.14). While the percent in

Table 7.13

Migrants' plans for the money they make in Cairo

	Percent	**Number of migrants**
Support family	91.3	221
Support myself	28.9	70
Coverage of (contribution to) marriage costs	24.8	60
Build a (new) house	24.4	59
Education of children	6.2	15
Buy land	5.8	14
Buy television	4.1	10
Other	2.1	5
Total	**100**	**242**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

* Numbers do not sum to 242 because of multiple responses; for the same reason the percentage column sums to more than 100.

Table 7.14

Percent of migrants sending money to their families while working in Cairo by governorate of origin and marital status

Governorate	Percent	Number of migrants
Governorate of origin		
Beni-Sueif	57.9	11
Menia	69.0	29
Assiut	73.8	45
Souhag	81.1	77
Qena	88.9	16
Marital status		
Married	80.0	84
Not Married	72.3	99
Total	**75.6**	**183**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

Beni-Sueif is 57.9 it is 88.9 in Qena. The percent among married migrants is higher than that of non-married (80 versus 72.3 respectively), which is probably what one would expect, since a working male migrant in Cairo with a wife and children in the village would have extra obligations compared to an unmarried migrant. Nevertheless, amongst more than three-quarters of the survey population, the primary objective of generating remittances indicates the overriding economic and survival motives behind migration in the first place. It should be realized, however, that in this discussion, and in Table 7.14, my definition of remittances is based solely on money being sent to the village by various channels other than the migrant himself. Therefore, the spatial relationship between distance and intensity of remittances reflects the less frequent visits migrants make to the more distant governorates. In reality, remittance-like flows also occur when migrants take their own money back when they make returning visits.

7.4.3 The method of remittance

The vast majority of migrants who send money to the village while working in Cairo send it with one of their fellow-villager passengers to the village (Table 7.15). This method is used by 77 percent of remitters. As I mentioned before, it is easy to find someone who is visiting the village, for departures are continually taking place at least every few days. This is due to the nature of migrant groups who like to work and live together in groups from the same family, village, or at least the same district or governorate. When they decide to send money they can easily find someone who is trustworthy to send money with to the village. Sending money with relatives ranked second with 13.8 percent of remitters. This medium and the previous one comprise together 90.8 percent of means of sending money to the village.

Almost for each village – or a group of adjacent villages – there is a focal point in Cairo for group taxis and/or microbuses which work continuously – without a regular timetable – between this focal point and given villages in Upper Egypt. These means of transportation sometimes work from door-to-door. Permanent migrants and visitors (rather than migrant laborers) usually use this means of transportation since it is more expensive (but more convenient) than other means of transportation such as trains. Some migrant laborers send money to the villages with the drivers of these taxis and microbuses, given the fact that the drivers know most if not all families in the village. This method of remittance is almost costless, like the previously mentioned means.

Sending money via the post office is the least frequently used medium for remitting money to the village. Only six remitters use this method. As I mentioned before, this is related to the high illiteracy level of migrants and the tendency to depend less on postal communications between migrants and their villages.

Migrants do trust each other. Sending money with a returning visitor to the village is generally regarded as the safest way. Hanna, from Menia, summarized the relationships between migrants who come from the same village in his own words: "*We are villagers, sir. Every one there knows about each other. Families are fully interrelated. When I give any person of my hometown an amount of money to deliver to my family, he goes and delivers it to them before he even goes to his own house. We look after each other*".

Table 7.15

How migrants send money to their families and relatives in the village of origin

Medium	Percent	Number of migrants
With one of the passengers to the village	77.0	141
With relatives	13.8	27
With drivers from village	4.9	9
Via post office	3.3	6
Total	**100.0**	**183**

Source: Cairo questionnaire survey (2000)

7.4.4 Remittance use and allocation: findings from the village

My visits to migrants' houses in selected villages in Souhag governorate enabled me to see and discuss with migrants' families how they invest – in some cases spend – the remittances of their family members' migration experience. The visits shed further light also on the decisions regarding the expenditure or investment of such remittances. The following are some extracts from interviews I conducted; they show both the use of migrant remittances and also the very frugal lives of rural folk in Upper Egypt, even those receiving remittances from the city.

"*The few pounds that he (the husband) sends can barely meet the needs of both the house and the children in these terrible expensive days. Can you imagine that my children are spending about three pounds a day for just buying their sweets, biscuits, and silly things?*" said one of the migrants' wives. "*Suppose then that we have a few pounds saved after spending most of the money on the house and the children. That helps us buy a little goat and raise it at home, feeding it with the left-overs of our food. We can occasionally beg for some bundles of green food for the animals from the neighbors next door. We then become able to sell it and start again and buy a little goat again. Tell*

you what, the little change we get hardly makes us lead a comfortable life, let alone for a feast, an occasion, or even buying the children a uniform for the new school year," said another wife. It is clear that the consumption patterns have changed somewhat due to the husband's migration, although the ways in which they have changed clearly differ from family to family, as the above examples show. Spending three LE per day just for children's sweets is regarded by other families in the village as insanity and a bad allocation of expenditure. On the other hand, some migrants allocate resources better than others. The family who bought a goat and raised it at home follow a common and prevailing model of animal and livestock raising, whereby families buy little animals, raise them, sell them, buy another little one, and get benefit from the price difference between the raised animal and the newly purchased ones. Here is another good example of this practice.

"*We have been raising a calf over the past for two years till the time came and we sold it for 3,000 Egyptian Pounds, which we spent completely on building these two rooms by the entrance of the house as you can see*," said one of the migrants who was on a visit to the village. "*Last summer, work in Cairo was fine, my husband told me. He earned good money and bought us a fan, a color TV and some clothes for the children and me. But we are now back to the same status as if nothing happened… he is staying now in Cairo and whenever he saves some money he sends it to us*," said another of the migrants' wives. Building a house, enhancing housing conditions, and/or purchasing housing equipment and durables are some of the main aspects of expenditure and investment of remittances, as set out in Table 7.13.

Another case-story relates to migrant investment in land: "*We used to rent three feddans which we have planted with berseem to feed the buffalo we raise at home…you know…we get milk from it for the children and sell some too, make some fat, some cheese … My husband has just been talking to the owner of the field, and settled it with him that he would buy the field and pay by installments. He has paid a whole 4,000 LE; we have actually paid 3,000 LE and got the remaining thousand through selling my gold, the wedding gift and all he bought me three years ago.*" It is clear from this example too that families in Upper Egypt can find ways to generate income in addition to – or to substitute shortages in – migration's remittances.

"*My two sons are in Cairo. Thank God, they are working well. It is true that I only see them once a month but this is better for them than staying here doing nothing. We don't have farmland or anything here in the village, and jobs are not available, as you may know. The two of them have secondary technical school. When they send me money, I save it for them. My eldest son plans for marriage. We are preparing his flat now in the upper floor. God willing, his wedding ceremony will take place during the next religious feast"* said a parent of two migrant laborers in Cairo. It is clear that one of the most important expenditure items from remittances is covering the cost of marriage, which is very expensive in Egypt. Usually, parents are responsible for the preparation of their sons' marriage. They start accumulating money to cover the marriage expenses of their sons from the money that they send. If parents in the village have enough money to cover their – and their young children's – expenses they save the whole amount that their sons send for marriage expenses; if not, they save some and spend some.

On the other hand, where families are very big and access to land is limited, even migrant remittances may not be sufficient to properly sustain the entire household, as the following testimony demonstrates. "*Conditions are not like they were in the past. My son is working in Cairo and his brothers and I are working in our field and in other peoples' fields as we only have a small amount of land. We are not supporting my sons, their children and their wives. We are 19 persons at home. What on earth could satisfy them all? May God help us, my son*".

The houses that I visited in the villages of my fieldwork are not markedly different from the other houses in the village. I visited very good houses, well built, with water supplies, electricity, electrical devices, fans, washing machines, refrigerators and the walls painted very nicely. On the other hand, I visited some very poor houses, with crumbling mud or flimsy hardboard walls. However, what was common among all the rural households I visited with member(s) of such families who work in Cairo is that they have something different. That "something different" consists of things which are easily observable as bought from Cairo – smarter children's clothes, or household goods and equipment.

I have also noticed that women's status and cooperation in work have increased, as she is now representing the absent migrant husband and the rest of her family in dealing with

others, like other relatives and neighbors or representatives of government agencies. As for the families which own farmland, I observed that wives work in the family's farmland with the other male members of the family (or even without them) in order to reduce expenses and not to hire external workers. Although women have traditionally been closely involved in the integrated rural economy of the domestic household and the farm holding, it does seem that the migration of men has two effects in this regard: first it imposes extra burdens of responsibility and rural work on the women; and second it lessens the strong patriarchal control over women's behavior, decision-making, and physical movement outside the house.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has ranged widely over issues relating directly and indirectly to living conditions of migrant workers, both in Cairo and in their rural places of origin, and has also focused on rural–urban linkages of various kinds, ranging from visits and telephone calls to the pattern and utilization of remittances. Comparisons were made with published survey data on housing characteristics in the sending and receiving contexts.

Key findings can be highlighted as follows. Migrants tend to own their own housing in their origin villages, but in other respects the quality of housing – both in Cairo and in their villages – tended to be below national norms. For instance, less than 30 percent of migrants' village homes had piped water. The picture which has emerged, then, is one in which the rural background of migrants is materially deprived: about 60 percent have no access to land, and so urban migration of at least some family members is essential for the family's survival. The 40 percent who do have land have small amounts, which can be looked after by other family members, including women, whilst the migrants are working in Cairo.

Living conditions in Cairo were found to be very poor. Often 10 or 15 migrants would share the same bedroom, sleeping on blankets on the floor, with no cooking facilities and only the most rudimentary sanitary facilities. Many migrants lived in ruined buildings or buildings under construction; a few even lived on the street. Their food was of the cheapest kind, often bought from street vendors whose jobs are specially geared to

serving migrant construction workers. Part of the reason for the migrants' poor material living conditions in Cairo was their need to save and remit as much of their low wages as possible. On average, half of their incomes were sent back to the village. This urban-to-rural monetary flow is one of the key urban–rural linkages sustained by the constant and circular migration process between Upper and Lower Egypt.

Other rural–urban linkages were expressed via visits (on average one return visit to the village per month, usually by third-class rail ticket), oral messages sent via friends, and telephone calls. Some evidence of the patterning of these forms of contacts by distance from Cairo was evidenced: for instance, visits were more frequent to closer villages, whereas non-physical context (including remittances) tended to increase with distance from Cairo. Regarding the use of remittances, migrants and their families use them mainly to support themselves (especially those with children), to cover marriage expenses, and to build new houses and buy household goods. These last forms of expenditure imply building for the future, and in the next chapter I examine migrants' changing attitudes and their plans for the future, among other things.

On the whole, the findings from the present chapter strongly suggest that migrants' lives, indeed their very essence of being migrants, remain embedded materially, family-wise and psychologically in the village. Although they spend the great majority of their time physically living in Cairo, and it was here that I "captured" them in the main questionnaire and interview surveys, their mental roots are in their places of origin (except for a very few who have shifted their families to Cairo). All of this is further evidence to support the contention that the group of migrants I have chosen to research are not "conventional" rural–urban migrants whose aspirations and orientations are shifting progressively towards a more permanent engagement with the city; but rather they are rural-based migrants who go to the city out of expediency – the necessity for their families to survive in the places of origin.