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THE IMPACT OF THE EMIGRATION OF THE HUSBAND ON THE STATUS OF THE WIFE: THE CASE OF EGYPT

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With the oil boom in the countries of the Persian Gulf in the 70s, a strong labour migration from neighbouring countries was triggered off in the direction of the Arab countries of the Gulf. This migration increased later on, encouraged by the social repercussions of the liberal policies implemented from the beginning of the 70s, by the implementation of the structural adjustment programme, the official encouragement of emigration and the massive appeal of the labour markets in the immigration countries of the Gulf. Thus, the number of Egyptian emigrant workers went from 75 thousand in 1974 to 188 thousand in 1979, reaching 1.2 million in 1985, at which date the first national survey on the international migration of Egyptians was carried out (Fergany, 1987). The total number of Egyptian emigrants during the period from 1975 to 1985 (reference period for the survey) reached approximately 3 million people, which would represent 32% of the work force (Khoury, 1994). Almost 20% of households experienced migration by one of their members during the reference period of this survey (El Heneidy and Mohammed, 1993). In a short time labour migration became a structural phenomenon occupying an increasingly important place in the State budget and in the budgets of thousands of households, and spreading geographically to recruit workers from all over the country. Neither economic recession in the wealthy countries of the Gulf during the 80s nor even the Gulf War at the beginning of this decade were able to stem this movement for any length of time: Iraq before the Gulf War, Libya, Jordan and Western countries partially compensated for the slowing of demand in the Arab countries of the Gulf.

Among the most salient characteristics of this migration, as revealed by the survey mentioned above, is the fact that the migration observed is

essentially that of married men who are not accompanied by their wives, especially among emigrants from rural areas. More than 96% of labour emigrants were in fact male, with more than 80% married and more than 5% engaged to be married (87.4% of emigrants from rural areas were in this situation). Barely 15% of the emigrants were accompanied by at least one member of the family, and this percentage was only 7.6% for emigrants from rural areas and 23.7% for emigrants from urban areas. Lastly, migration from rural areas seems to be increasing: on average it represented 47% of all migrants for the period from 1975 to 1985, compared with 55% at the time of the survey in 1985 (Fergany, 1987).

This shows therefore, especially in rural areas, the extent to which women are separated from their husbands and children from their fathers for periods lasting several years. El Heneidy and Mohammed (1993) estimate the percentage of households with one member having emigrated between 1975 and 1985 at 38% in the region of Upper Egypt. However, interest in this field of research in Egypt and in the region has been very limited, regarding both the number of studies as well as the approach and method adopted.

RESEARCH CARRIED OUT IN THE FIELD

A prevailing aspect among the studies dealing with the effects of the husband's emigration on the family as a whole and particularly on the status of the wives who remain behind is that global conclusions for most of these studies rarely concur.

Several researchers believe there is a positive contribution of husband's migration to women's status. They have noted a tendency for change towards the nuclear family (Khattab, 1982; Amin, 1985; Moheddin, 1988; Abou Mandour *et al.*, 1989; Brink, 1991; Horchani, 1992; Kraiem, 1993), and most of these researchers believe that the trend has a positive impact on the status of women, freeing them from the influence of interventions and control of other members of the extended family and of that of the husband. Several of them observe that the emigration of the husband increases the wife's participation in economic activities (Abaza, 1987; Abou Mandour *et al.*, 1989).

However, other researchers have noted that the emigration of the husband reduces the wife's participation in economic activities and creates a tendency towards a return to living with her parents (Zaalouk, 1988), or that the duration of the absence of the husband is negatively related to the wife's independence. In other words, the longer the husband is away the less freedom the wife has (Moheddine, 1988). It has been suggested that the husband's emigration does not change anything concerning the wife's submission to the patriarchal order, which is maintained, in the husband's

absence, by members of his lineage (El Singaby, 1985), or that exclusively male temporary migration is possible "only if the traditional values of group solidarity of the agnates remain sufficiently strong for the whole of the group" and that the presence of the father of the married emigrant would be a condition facilitating migration (Baduel, 1980).

A third group of researchers has noted that the husband's emigration has an impact both ways and at the same time: for example, they observed that it reduces the wife's participation in salaried employment but increases her participation in other economic activities, notably agricultural activities (Abou Mandour *et al.*, 1989), or that the trend towards the nuclear family does not necessarily imply increased freedom for the wife but may provide a number of means by which the wife's actions can be controlled (Moheddin, 1988), or that the freedom acquired by the wife of the emigrant is neither complete nor lasting (Taylor, 1984 for the case of Egypt, and Kadioglu, 1994 for the case of Turkey), or finally that migration, on the one hand, reduces traditional relationships, but on the other hand creates serious problems within the family (Kamiar and Ismail, 1991). The results of a survey carried out in approximately 100 developing countries on the theme of migration, which touched on this subject, resulted in similar observations (Stalker, 1995).

Other researchers present a rather negative picture of the impact of the husband's emigration on the status of the wife. Zaalouk (1988) concludes, based on a survey carried out in a suburb of Cairo using a sample of wives of emigrants, that migration "causes a greater marginalisation and exclusion of women", or that it creates a gulf between the migrant and his wife (Abdel Muaty, 1984; Abaza, 1987; Kamiar and Ismail, 1991). Several researchers have observed that migration implies a recurrence of social and psychological problems as well as problems with children's education (Abdel Muaty, 1984; see also the conclusion of the 1986 UNESCO report cited by Brink, 1991, and the results of the study conducted by Goza *et al.*, 1993).

These different observations, sometimes contradictory, are no doubt essentially, but not only, due to the diversity of places and populations studied and to when they were studied. However, other factors must also be considered, notably the survey methods used. Concerning the latter, it should be noted that the comparative approach was rarely used, especially with regard to nonmigrant populations. This considerably reduces the validity of the conclusions. As an example, several researchers have observed among the families of emigrants a change from an extended family to a nuclear family. But these conclusions were based only on a comparison related to the length of the husband's migration, whereas it is a known fact that this change is being experienced by a major part of society and that there is also a tradition, especially in Egyptian society, of passage towards the nuclear family as the couple's life cycle progresses, as we will demonstrate further on.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This article is based on the results of a national survey which was conducted in Egypt in the autumn of 1994¹, covering a sample of 1 651 households with husbands who were labour emigrants at the time of the survey whereas the wife had stayed in Egypt. This sample was drawn from the main sample of the Demographic and Health Survey (nearly 63 000 households), systematically covering all the households who met the criteria. The sample is divided according to the following categories: 76.5% in rural areas, 23.5% in urban areas. Compared to the distribution of the entire migrant population mentioned above, our sample already shows that the migration of husbands, unaccompanied by their wives, is a phenomenon primarily involving rural populations.

The objective of this study is to gain an understanding of the changes concerning the status of the wife of the emigrant who remains at home after the husband has emigrated and to determine the importance of factors involving migration in these changes. Two aspects of the wife's status have been chosen. First is the wife's independence, which we tried to check through changes in her participation in economic activities, changes in the type of family in which she lives, of her movements away from home to do the shopping for the family, of her movements for personal reasons, and lastly changes in the interventions of other relatives in family affairs. The other aspect of the wife's status covers changes concerning her authority which were checked essentially through financial authority, including that over transfers from the husband, supervising the family budget and sharing in decisions concerning family property, but also her authority concerning her children's behaviour. With the aim of more clearly defining the weight of migration factors in the changes in the wife's status, we included two sections in the questionnaire, covering both periods, before and during the husband's migration. This permitted an initial comparison, which we later verified at different times, of the observations of the population of households of the emigrants with similar samples (of the households of married women aged 15 to 49) from nonmigrant populations².

It should be noted that the results of this survey revealed a variety of situations, according to regions, the length of the migration, the migratory tradition and the life cycle, which we partially referred to in the survey report (Louhichi, 1996). However, in this case we simply checked the global data by place of residence (urban and rural).

¹ This survey is part of a study on "Migration and the Status of Women" carried out by the *Unité d'Etudes et de Recherches en Population* (UERP/LAS) in collaboration with UNFPA. This study covers 4 labour emigrant Arab countries: Jordan (1993), Egypt (1994), Tunisia (1995) and Morocco (in progress).

² Including the EMCHS91 survey (PapChild/LEA), the 1993 survey on "Women's Economic Activity" (UERP/LEA) and the 1995 DHS survey (Cairo, 1996), all three of which were carried out in Egypt using samples of married women aged from 15 to 49.

MIGRATION AND WOMEN'S AUTHORITY

The survey results, summarized below, covering diverse aspects concerning the rights and authority of the wife, show for the majority a tendency towards the wives of emigrants having greater authority with regard to the money sent by the husband, control of the budget and of family property.

The first observation is that 85% of emigrant husbands send money (remittances) to their families, compared to a little under 50% for all emigrants (Fergany, 1987). Further, 74% of women whose husbands send money actually receive these remittances and decide how to spend them. Most of the 15% of emigrants who do not send money to their families have emigrated for only a short period of time, which would indicate that they did not have enough time to save money. Moreover, 73% of the wives of emigrants reported that the remittances from the husband were only enough to cover household expenses, and only 10% of the women declared that the transfers allowed other investments. In other words, the remittances from emigrants were hardly sufficient, as Moheddine has already observed (1988), to compensate for the husband's income before his emigration. However, it should be noted that 26% of the women had no control over the transfers sent by their husbands (8% in urban areas and 31% in rural areas). In more than 90% of such cases, this control is in fact reserved only for one of the members of the husband's family.

Other data confirmed the tendency towards greater financial autonomy for the wife of the emigrant. The first observation made was that the percentage of women who had complete control of the household budget went from 37% before the husband emigrated to 86% at the time of the survey for urban residents and from 8% to 64% for rural residents. Concerning this point, the percentage of Egyptian women (DHS, 1995) who had complete control or shared with their husbands the control of the household budget was 61.6% in urban areas and 42.3% in rural areas.

Moreover, the percentage of wives of emigrants who said they had complete control or shared in the control over family property (farm, commercial or housing property) went from 31% before migration to 57% at the time of the survey. What also deserves mention is that the change in the possession and sharing of financial authority in favour of women operated essentially to the detriment of the husband and to a lesser degree to the detriment of his relatives. But the control of the husband's relatives on the household budgets of emigrants seems to persist, especially in rural areas. Thus the percentage of households where the husband's relatives control the household budget dropped from 34.3% before the emigration to 28.5% at the time of the survey, and respectively from 33.7% to 24.6% with respect to control over property.

Concerning the wife's authority over the children's behaviour, 61% of women in urban areas and 51% in rural areas said they had more authority

after the husband emigrated and only 3% declared the opposite. The answers to another question show, however, that more than a quarter of the wives of emigrants, especially among urban residents, had problems with their children. These problems, from their answers, essentially concerned school and the psychological impact of the father's absence.

This data establishes that the woman's financial authority is strengthened after the husband's emigration, especially in urban areas where a third of the women questioned had financial authority compared with 19% of those in rural areas. This authority increases with the duration of migration.

The percentage of women who acquire no power (concerning the money transfers made by the husband, control of the budget and of the property of the family) varies from 35% among those wives whose husband had emigrated for less than one year and 19.5% for those women whose husband had emigrated for at least 4 years, and the percentage of wives who acquired full authority went from 14% for the first category to 30% for the second. However, other factors appear to be closely linked to this evolution, especially the type of household the emigrant's wife is living in and at which stage of the marital life cycle she is.

It has therefore been observed that among women living in a nuclear family at the time of the survey only 3.2% had acquired no autonomy during the husband's migration and 32.5% acquired all the powers considered in this survey, compared with 60.8% and 5.6%, respectively, for women living with the husband's parents at the time of the survey. In the same way and by comparing this time the youngest and oldest age groups (under 25 and over 44), it was noted that the percentage of women who acquired no autonomy during their husband's emigration varied between 52% for the younger women and 4.8% for the older women. The inverse relation also confirms this tendency, the percentages of women who acquired full authority were at 8.7% and 35.7%, respectively.

More than the length of the husband's migration, the age of the wife and residential independence seem to be the key factors that influence the wife's ability to acquire new powers in the husband's absence. Later we will try to expand on this observation.

MIGRATION AND INDEPENDENCE

The evolution of the independence and personal freedom of the wife after the husband has emigrated proved to be somewhat more contrasted than that of her power. Study of the family type³ in which the wife lives before and after her husband's emigration, shows that there has been a strong change towards living independently: the percentage of women living in nuclear families increased from 37% before the migration to 59% after. The relationship of this change with the length of the husband's migration also confirms this tendency. The percentage of women in nuclear families varies from 18.2% on average among the women whose husbands have been away for less than one year to 49.3% among those whose husbands emigrated more than 5 years ago. However, the extent of this change in the type of residence is called into question by the comparison of the sample of wives of emigrants with another sample of Egyptian women (EAEF 1993). This comparison revealed that there are few differences between the two populations: the percentage of households made up of nuclear families at the time of the survey was 59.5% and 56.3%, respectively, in the two samples. The time factor therefore seems to affect both populations in the same way, and the amount of money sent by the husband does not seem to be a determining factor in this change.

As a rule in Egypt young couples live with the husband's parents, especially in rural areas. The change to the nuclear family, after a certain time has elapsed, is also generally the case as revealed in several survey reports (notably the EMCHS 1991, EAEF 1993 and DHS 1995 surveys; Shorter and Zurayk, 1988; Khattab and E. Daef, 1982). For example, according to the results of the EAEF 1993 survey, the percentage of women living with their husband's parents immediately after getting married was 43.8 in urban areas and 82.8 in rural areas, whereas at the time of the survey these percentages were 17.6 and 40.2, respectively. The case studies also revealed a strong link between the transition towards the nuclear family and the life cycle: the greater the woman's age, parity and as a consequence the length of the marriage, the greater the chances are for the wife to leave the home of her in-laws. Table 17.1 illustrates the relations between these variables.

³ Families are classified in two types: the nuclear family, where the household is made up of the wife alone or with her children (and possibly other people who have no family ties); and the complex family, divided into three types according to the family ties of the members of the household with the wife or her husband: with the husband's parents, with the wife's parents, or even with other relatives.

Table 17.1. – Percentage distribution of women who lived with their in-laws before the husband emigrated, according to the change in the type of family after the husband's emigration and the characteristics selected

Age of the wives	Do not receive money from the husband		Receive money		Average number of children		
	stayed with in-laws	changed to nuclear family	stayed with in-laws	changed to nuclear family	Living in nuclear family	Living with in-laws	Total
Under 25	96.7	3.3	63.6	36.4	2.1	1.7	1.7
25-34	88.3	11.7	36.3	63.7	3.6	3.2	3.1
35-44	61.9	38.1	17.1	82.9	4.9	4.7	4.6
45 +	23.1	76.9	11.3	88.7	5.6	4.5	5.1
Total	85.5	14.5	30.4	69.6	4.3	3.0	3.5

The table shows, on the one hand, the strong relation between the money from the migration and the transition of the emigrant's wife from the complex family to the nuclear family. The percentage of women who were able to make this transition after the husband emigrated, out of all the women living in complex families before the husband emigrated, was 70% among the wives receiving money transfers from their husbands, compared with only 14.5% among the women who did not receive any money. However, on the other hand it would seem that this change, for both groups, was automatically conditioned by the wife's age and parity. The transition towards the nuclear family only takes place in 95% of cases from the age of 25 and with a minimum of three children. Lastly, the data in the same table shows that at a certain age the wives' chances of living independently become much closer for both groups. From the age of 45 on the percentage of women having made this change was for each group 89 and 77%, respectively.

Other data also show that the fact that the wife of the emigrant lives in a nuclear family and separate residence does not mean that she is geographically completely independent from the other relatives: 76% of emigrants' wives said that they lived, at the time of the survey, near the parents, especially the husband's parents. And 21% of these women added that they often shared meals with them.

We can therefore conclude that the transition towards the nuclear family, for the households of emigrants as well as for those of non-migrants, depends on the stage reached in the family life cycle, which must be taken into account for comparison of the situation before and after the husband's emigration. Another conclusion is that despite the fact that the emigrant's money is spent, as we know (Fergany, 1987; Louhichi, 1996), essentially on

the acquisition or the construction of homes, this type of investment does not seem to be much greater than that made by nonmigrants⁴ and would not imply a great difference of residential independence between the households of emigrants and those of nonmigrants. The money from the migration seems to enable the wives of emigrants who live in a complex family to move a little sooner and in slightly greater numbers towards the nuclear family situation.

Regarding changes in the participation of the emigrant's wife in economic activities, the results of the survey show on the one hand that there has been a reduction, in actual numbers and percentage, of salaried work after the husband emigrated for women in urban areas as well as wives living in rural areas. In urban areas the percentage of employed emigrants' wives dropped by 2.5 points and it was lower than for the wives of nonmigrants from the EAEF93 survey sample with 19% and 21.4%, respectively. On the other hand, the percentage of employed wives in rural areas increased after the husband emigrated and gained 2 points, thus overtaking the number of women employed in rural areas from the other sample with 23% and 19% respectively.

The reasons for stopping work are essentially (in almost 80% of cases), according to the responses of women from urban areas who stopped working after their husbands emigrated, due either to the wife herself refusing to work or to a refusal on the part of the people in her social circle and especially of the husband. The characteristics of the husbands of this group of women also show that most of them are in management with a relatively high level of education, which would imply a higher level of income in the receiving country. Lastly, the relation between the frequency of money transfers and the women stopping work within this category also seems high: the more regularly they receive money the more likely they are to stop work. Moreover there is the traditional belief among the middle classes in Egypt (Hatem, 1992) that the fact that women work (salaried employment, specifies Morsy, 1993) is a sign of poverty. Everything seems to point to the same conclusion, especially in urban areas, which is that the money from the migration combined with the low status of working women according to prevailing values tends to reduce the participation of the wives of emigrants in remunerated economic activities.

The situation in rural areas is different. After their husbands emigrate, wives must replace their husbands as far as farming and supervising the family farming activity. The percentage of women who are self-employed or who manage their own business was 46% at the time of the survey, compared with only 10% before the husband emigrated. Among characteristics of women in this category it was noted that 77% worked in

⁴ The results of the Egyptian survey on international migration show that during the reference period of the survey 29% of the savings of emigrants were invested either in the acquisition of a home or of a plot of land to build a home, compared with 26% for nonmigrants; and 59% and 58% respectively acquired, during the same period, either homes or plots of land to build homes (Fergany 1987).

agriculture, 81% of whom replaced the husband, that they replaced him generally with the help of another person in the family (the average number of persons working in these projects was 1.8 per project), and that 40% of these projects were intended only for family consumption. The rest of the economically active wives of emigrants among rural populations either worked as salaried employees (27.5%) or as unpaid family workers (26.8%).

The massive assigning of women to production or supervision work in agriculture, a phenomenon which seems to be gaining in many regions in Egypt, in relation with the emigration and departure of men, but also linked to rural men switching to more profitable work such as private transport, trade or services, is in fact a subject of disagreement between researchers concerning its outcome and its repercussions on the status of women. Some researchers think that this change has improved the status of women by giving them new authority and sometimes even the possibility to frequent certain places reserved for men, such as farming cooperatives and markets (Abou Mandour, 1988; Khattab, 1982; Khafagy, 1984). Others believe on the contrary that the feminisation of agricultural labour has devalued this type of activity, which has become the work of women and children, a feminisation of poverty therefore which has only introduced a new form of gender inequality (Hatem, 1992; Morsy, 1993; Abaza, 1987). Moreover, in several respects changes in the roles of the wives of emigrants in rural areas such as observed in our case could correspond to Meillassoux's theory (1975): the migration of the husband has assigned to a number of women, in addition to their roles as mothers and of parents in charge of the education of the children, the roles of domestic production, in other words the reproduction of life as well as of cheap labour, which allows a greater exploitation of migrant labour and the reproduction of the migration itself.

After her husband's emigration, the wife seems to have more opportunities for going out when it is to go shopping or to settle affairs concerning household needs (paying bills, going to the market, sorting out administrative problems or problems concerning the children's education), but less when her reasons are personal (visiting parents or neighbours, leisure outings). In the first case the percentage of women who enjoyed this freedom went from 30% before the husband's emigration to 73% at the time of the survey for women in urban areas and from 5% to 43% for women in rural areas. It was noted therefore that half the women, who did not fill these roles in the husband's presence, replaced their husbands in such roles. The inverse movement also deserves mention: in more than a quarter of the cases these roles were actually left to the husband's parents (17% in urban areas and 30% in rural areas).

In the second case, the percentage of women who said they had few opportunities to go out for pleasure outings after the husband emigrated was 34% among women in urban areas and 43% in rural areas. The absence of the husband therefore enables the wives to go out more often, including for dealing with administrative affairs, traditionally reserved for men, but this is

usually allowed when such outings concern the needs of the household and not when they concern the individual freedom of the wife herself. However, it is noted that one fifth of the wives (19% in urban areas and 21% in rural areas) said they had more opportunities for leisure outings after the husband emigrated.

It seems that the pressure of values and traditions weighed much more on the change affecting this aspect of the woman's status than on other aspects. Thus, on the one hand, the increased freedom for wives to go out, especially for leisure outings, seem, as with everything else, to be closely linked with the life cycle and type of household. The percentage of women who had more opportunities to go out for leisure reasons varied between 16% among women under age 25 and with fewer than three children to 25% for the other women, and from 8% for wives living with their husband's parents to 22% for wives living alone. On the other hand, the women's responses revealed that they felt social pressure weighed greatly against them going out. The main reason for the reduced opportunities for leisure outings given by 63% of the women having experienced this change, was because the husband, the parents or traditions opposed this. The second reason, given by 30% of these women, was the extra load of domestic chores.

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

Lastly, concerning changes in the wives' social relations after the husband's emigration, the responses made by the wives seemed rather surprising to us. First of all very few women reported that interference from the parents in the affairs of the household increased: hardly 15% who still have at least one parent living (father or mother of the wife or the husband). Very few reported that their relations deteriorated after the husband emigrated: 2.4% concerning relations with the husband, 6% for relations with the husband's parents, scarcely 1% for relations with the wife's parents and only 3% said that the image others had of them had deteriorated. On the other hand, a substantial number of wives said that these relations had improved after the husband left and one third said that the image other people had of them had improved, insofar as the people around them respected them more. Better still, over 90% of the women questioned said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall benefits of the migration and 79% said they would encourage their sons to emigrate should the opportunity present itself. However, almost a third of the women said they did not want the husband to return, neither soon nor even after a certain length of time, justifying this attitude in most cases by the need of ensuring a future for the children and of being able to cover household expenses.

Therefore, despite the apparent negative effect of the husband's emigration for many wives regarding personal freedom (fewer leisure

outings, less participation in economic activities outside the home, more domestic chores of all types, a little more interference from the parents and therefore a tendency to stay at home more, especially for women in urban areas), these women seem mainly satisfied by the changes in their status after the husband's emigration. From the data available, the only aspect which could explain this attitude on the part of the women is their increased authority, especially regarding financial matters. In this case, the change could be described in the following manner: for the wife of the emigrant to be able to adopt the roles and prerogatives of the husband she has to prove her worth regarding unanimously recognised values, such as being a good homemaker and above all, as we have shown, be at an advanced stage in the life cycle. To save time, especially as what is at stake is important, the emigrant's wife seems to confine herself more to domestic tasks and roles and to bringing up the children. She has therefore sacrificed some of her freedom, essential in gaining the trust of the family circle and others, to speed up the process of being invested with more autonomy. It is a little like the game of the veil and the hijab that many young women wear so that they may frequent public places (Haenni and Fuger, 1996; Ghannam, 1996; Ferchiou, 1995)⁵.

CONCLUSION

The results of a survey conducted on a representative sample of wives of emigrants residing in Egypt, devoted to establishing the repercussions of the husband's migration on the wife's status, established the following points:

– First, this migration generally allowed women who stayed at home to replace the husband in several of his roles, and above all it invested them with greater financial authority. However it was noted that there was a tendency for wives to stay at home and dedicate themselves more to household chores after the husbands emigrated. In other words, the increased authority did not automatically imply increased individual freedom. This is especially evident among women in urban areas, where it was observed that the more the wife's authority increases the less freedom she has. For example, wives who regularly receive money transfers from the husband are more often tempted not to work as salaried employees.

⁵ Ghannam observes in this regard that "to cross the boundaries that separate the public from the private, women need to protect themselves and prevent any potential social disorder or *fitna* by wearing the veil: women thus can 'enter men's public space only by remaining shielded in their private space'; and the veil is seen as a 'symbol of inferiority', or one that renders the women 'invisible' in the street" (p. 178). Ferchiou, describing the situation in Tunisia, insists on the fact that the "*hijab*", derived from the verb *hajaba*, meaning to hide in the sense of protecting, is used by these women as protection against malicious remarks... the *hijab*, because of this, actually becomes an element giving them freedom (p. 190).

– On the other hand, it would seem that the increased authority of the wives of emigrants is conditioned to a great extent, as for Egyptian society in general, by the point in the life cycle she has reached. In other words, she must prove her reproductive capacity to be able to enjoy this privilege. Women in Maghreb, according to Lacoste-Dujardin (1996), are only really accepted into society once they have become mothers. It is only from this moment that they begin to play a role in society and acquire a status that men recognise.

The husband's migration and especially the money from this migration, have on the one hand invested the wives of emigrants with greater powers, and on the other hand, reduced the time needed for obtaining such powers. In considering patriarchy in the Arab world as a privilege for males and elderly people, including women (Joseph, 1996), one can conclude that the husband's emigration leads especially to reinforcing and speeding up access of women to the powers of the patriarchy. What also deserves mentioning is that the emigrant's wife is not completely passive in this process. Rather, everything seems to happen with her consent: the emigrant's wife seems to scrupulously submit her behaviour to traditions, thus giving up some of her freedom in exchange for acquiring certain powers sooner.

What will the status of the wife be after the husband's return, what will become of her acquired authority, especially financial and moral authority, and what about the contraction of her personal freedom? A few observations concerning changes in values and attitudes of returned emigrants regarding agricultural work and women's work deserve mentioning. The first observation is that several survey results globally concur regarding the fact that returned emigrants prefer to work in trade and private transport, especially as small entrepreneurs (Fergany, 1988; Choukry, 1987; Moheddine, 1988). Choukry and Moheddine add that there is a tendency among the returned emigrants in rural areas to turn away from agriculture: the percentage of emigrants working in agriculture compared with the total number of returned emigrants in the survey sample of the CAPMAS survey (Choukry, 1987) went from 30% before the migration to 11% at the time of the survey. Abdel Muaty (1984) also concludes, in his study of the village of Dafra in Egypt, that emigration has brought about a transformation of values in favour of being one's own boss or setting up small businesses. Abaza (1987) reports that migration brings about a condescending attitude towards agricultural work which has become the work of women, and finally, Morsy (1993) concludes in his study of the Egyptian village of Bahia that the work of the wives of emigrants has not reduced the poverty of these women, but has perpetuated the devaluation of women's work compared with men's work.

Concerning the contribution of this survey, as an exploratory study, towards certain aspects of the hypotheses and methods of investigation into

the relation between the status of women and migration, I would like to make a few remarks.

– The results have shown, among other things, the relevance of and need for a comparative approach, not only between the two periods, before and after the migration, but also and especially between the households of migrants and those of non-migrants. Many researchers have indeed relied on only the first comparison, and their conclusions seem rather exaggerated concerning the effects of migration on women's status. In addition, and due to the fact that this type of migration (that of non-accompanied husbands) seems to affect mainly specific regions and populations, I believe it would be more relevant for the comparison to be carried out using samples from the same regions as those of the migrants. In cases where I have been able to carry out such a comparison, the results seem substantially different from the comparison made with the society of the country of emigration as a whole. Surveys carried out on the same theme in Jordan and in Tunisia (Louhichi, 1996) were conducted on samples of households of migrants and non-migrants taken from the same cluster of the sample frame, and the results quite often confirmed my previous remark.

– Another aspect to be stressed is the wealth of the comparison between the diagnosis of, for example, women's status and how it is changing, based on theoretical concepts and set definitions, and the reality of these changes as revealed by the perception of the women themselves. This could lead, as I have already demonstrated, to conflicting results.

– The survey showed the validity of the approach based on the household as the study unit. In the study on changes in women's status, it made it possible to observe the effects of factors regarding the structure of the household, notably type of family and the family's life cycle stage, on changes in the status of the wives of emigrants, which made it possible to put the effects of migration factors into context.

– However, the survey has shortcomings, such as the absence of complete data on the characteristics, the roles and especially the perceptions of the husbands. The gender approach would allow a better observation of changes in the status and roles of women, but the problem obviously resides in the fact that the husband is absent and therefore cannot supply such data. In addition, several questions would require more qualitative investigations, based mainly on more in-depth interviews of an anthropological nature.

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