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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Gendering Migratory Social Spaces in Upper Egypt

A Thesis Submitted to

the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies
in Middle East/ North Africa

Specialization in Gender and Women's Studies Middle East and North Africa

by Azza Salman

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker
September 2013

The American University in Cairo
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all the wives who spend the spring of their age waiting for their husbands while managing their households, educating their children and surviving the stressful male-dominated Upper Egyptian communities; and to my husband, Haitham Elsherif. Without his unconditional support, encouragement and love I would not be to achieve or excel in my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My whole gratitude goes to Allah for completing this research.

I would like to thank my grant sponsors, The Open Society Foundation and The American University in Cairo for their generous financial support without which it would not have been possible to accomplish my M.A. degree.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. Martina Rieker for her continuous support of my M.A. study and research, for her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my M.A. study. Besides my advisor, I would like to thank my two readers: Dr. Reem Saad and Dr. Ayman Zohry, for their encouragement, insightful comments, and hard questions.

To my family, particularly my parents thank you for your love, support, and unwavering belief in me. Without you, I would not be the person I am today. Above all I would like to thank my husband Haitham for his love and constant support, for all the late nights and early mornings, and for keeping me sane over the past few months. Thank you for being my best friend. I owe you everything.

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ABSTRACT

Gendering Migratory Social Spaces in Upper Egypt

Azza Salman

The American University in Cairo

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

Male out migration especially to Gulf countries is a well-established phenomenon in Upper Egypt. It is considered the easy way out of poverty and unemployment. Moreover, remittances represent the only monetary source for most migratory families. This thesis explores the impact of male out migration on their community of origin with a special focus on its impact on women. Fieldwork has been conducted in the village of Hekma, Qena, Upper Egypt where everything is influenced by the absence of men. A gendered approach is utilized to understand the everyday life of this community. This thesis consists of three main parts. The first part investigates how the social space is influenced by the absence of men. The second part explores remittances as a process and its role in the economic life with special attention to the role of women in this process. In addition, it discusses women's empowerment from the understanding of Hekma women. The third part investigates the impact of remittances on consumption at the household level, as well as the difference between remittance receiving and non-receiving households. This thesis contributes to the gender and migration discourse as it offers a new understanding of social space, remittances and consumption in an Upper Egyptian context.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENDERING MIGRATORY SOCIAL SPACESM

In the 1970s with the open door policy international migration especially to the Gulf, became an integral part of the Egyptian economy. Initially limited to Egyptian professionals, such as teachers, engineers, doctors, eventually unskilled and semi-skilled labor found job opportunities in the Gulf especially in the construction sector. International labor migration is well established in many parts of rural Egypt, and Upper Egypt in particular since the early seventies. Gulfi migration is predominantly male migration due to visa restrictions and the high costs of living in the Gulf. Most recent Egyptian migrants come from rural and urban working class backgrounds with limited education, which confines them to low-wage jobs abroad primarily in construction and the service sector. Despite the role of international migration in the post 1970s Egyptian economy and society the academic literature on migration in Egypt remains limited and uneven. In the 1980's a number of ethnographies explored the impact of migration on rural households (see Taylor, 1984; Khadafy, 1984; Brink, 1991), yet, since then migration has been studied within predominantly quantitative frameworks.

Within the gender and migration field a rich literature has explored the impact of male labor migration on left behind wives, families and households (e.g. McEvoy, 2008; Archambault, 2010; Biao, 2006; Ahlin and Dahlberg, 2010; Desai and Banerji, 2008), yet very little of this kind of work has been conducted in Egypt, especially rural Upper Egypt in the last two decades. This thesis intends to contribute to a fuller understanding of the impact of male migration on households in contemporary rural Upper Egypt. Given the massive changes in rural Egypt over the last twenty years it is important to (re)engage questions of migration and households within a contemporary ethnographic context. This thesis is an attempt to capture the social and economic life of wives of migrants in Hekma, a village in the governorate of Qena, Upper Egypt. It

explores the following questions: What is the impact of male migration on wives that remain in the village of origin? With migratory males a normalized features in contemporary rural life, what are its effects on the social spaces of the village? How has the remittance economy influenced gendered dynamics between married couples, as well as relationships within households across generations and gender divides? And finally, how have aspirations for a different present and future for households been transformed due to the varied impact of migration?

Literature Review:

In 2005 the World Bank began to collect gender-sensitive quantitative data (Sika, 2011, p.2), as migration research until then has focused predominantly on male migrants, their characteristics, remittances, and nature of work in host countries and neglected the role of women in the process of migration (Archambault, 2010; Kunz, 2008). In Egypt, the data has been almost exclusively focused on male migrants due to institutional and social restrictions on single women traveling abroad for work (Sika, 2011). Egyptian women migrants represented only 2.94% of total migrants in 2008 (CAPMAS, 2010). The bulk of Egyptian women migrants (75%), according to a study by the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower, the International Organization of Migration and the Italian Government, migrate to accompany their husbands, to marry Egyptians living abroad, or for other family reasons (Sika, 2011, p.2).

While the bulk of researchers tend to concentrate on migrants, rather than the ones who stay behind and receive remittances (see Niimi and Reilly, 2008; Piper, 2005), there is a growing interest in studying the impact of migration and remittances on households (see Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007; Desai and Banerji 2008; McEvoy et al., 2012), the social

impact of migration and remittances and the roles of women as migrants both as remittance senders as well as remittance receivers (see Weinstein Bever, 2002; Bio, 2006; Archambault, 2010). Accordingly, the literature increasingly has been focusing on everyday lives of women such as their social and political participation, household strategies, decision-making abilities, gender roles, gender inequality, empowerment, power hierarchies in the household, as well as community structures.

The gender and migration field has focused on three interrelated domains concerning the impact of male out-migration: (1) the autonomy, decision-making abilities and empowerment of the wives of male migrants (2) the impact of remittances on communities (3) and the links between remittances and consumption. The research can be divided into three sets of arguments. One position holds that male out-migration affects women positively because it adds to their autonomy, independence and engages them in making decisions family (Khalaf, 2009; Archambault, 2010; Ahlin and Dahlberg, 2010; Khattab, 1982; Amin, 1985; Moheddin, 1988; Abou Mandour et al., 1989; Brink, 1991; Kraiem, 1993). In Egypt, Khattab (1982), Moheddin (1988), Abou Mandour et al. (1989), Brink (1991), Kraiem (1993), and Taylor (1984) argue that the absence of husbands allows for women's greater social participation, in the sense that they maintain social relations with other women in the community. They also note the tendency of those women to establish nuclear families instead of living within an extended family, which reduces the control of in-laws. Additionally, it has been observed that the absence of husbands encourages women's political participation especially in the domestic sphere (Abaza, 1987; Abou Mandour et al., 1989).

Another body of work argues that male migration has had a negative impact on

women's autonomy, employment and independence. In their work on Morocco de Haas and van Rooji (2010) highlight that when men migrate for work, the burden of domestic labor increases for women as does their economic dependency on their husbands' remittances (see also Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007; Weinstein Bever, 2002; Louhichi, 1997). In Egypt, Zaalouk (1998) and Hoodfar (1997) argue that wives experience further "exclusion and marginalization" as they have to live with their in-laws or return to their parent's house during their husbands' absence. Migration furthermore reduces women's participation in the labor force due to added household obligations. Abu Mandour (1989) in his work in rural Egypt in at least the 1980s observes that the burden of agrarian work also increases for women with migratory husbands. Louhich (1997) and Menjivar and Agadjanian (2007) show that men will not remit to their wives if they receive their own salary, hence many of them therefore withdraw from the labor market.

Obviously, the impact of male migration on women is "context-specific" and differs from country to country and even within the same country (McEvoy et al., 2012; Elbadawy and Roushdy, 2009). For example, in their study of Mali, Ahlin and Dahlberg (2010) found that male out-migration has a slight impact on their wives' empowerment and ability to make choices. They point out that women's empowerment depends greatly on the social structure of the community they live in, cultural values, traditions, and stability of remittances. In their work on India Desai and Banerji (2008) include other factors such as the importance of family structures, and its impact on housing decisions, in increasing or decreasing women's autonomy. McEvoy's Petrzelka, P., Radel, C., & Schmook, B. (2012) work on Mexican migration problematizes the criteria used to analyze 'empowerment.' They found that wives that work outside the house during their husbands' absence might have more fiscal autonomy,

but are vulnerable to ‘gossip’ and potential abandonment. Wives that withdraw from the labor market while dependent on the regular flow of remittances, have less of a work burden and have a greater opportunity to secure their marriages. (also McEvoy, 2008)

In the case of Egypt, research has suggested that living with the in-laws represents an obstacle towards wives’ economic independence and social participation. In this regard, Khafagy (1984), Brink (1991) and Louhichi (1997) argue that decision-making abilities, control over remittances, and freedom of mobility are the main possibilities that women acquire during the absence of their husbands. However, such possibilities are hard to realize when living in an extended household. Khafagy (1984), for example, argues that wives have more power in nuclear families than in extended families, which encourages most wives to move to a separate apartment as soon as possible. Brink’s (1991) research likewise shows that living with in-laws makes the wives of migrants dependent on older male members of the family. In her study of Sadeeq, a village in rural Egypt, Brink (1991) measured status increase by women’s ability to allocate money for food, routine expenditures and making decisions on major investment. Both Brink (1991) and Taylor (1984) concur that women in nuclear families are able to control their economic resources, and move in and out of the house more freely than the ones in extended households. Furthermore, Khafagy (1984) and Brink (1991) observe that in the absence of their husbands, rural Egyptian wives interact with governmental institutes, local health units, schools, shop and supervise the land. The increased responsibilities of women inside and outside the household motivate women to move in and out of their households more freely, especially if they do not live in extended households or have older sons. Nevertheless, the majority of researchers point out that the potentials and power a wife gains does not last after her husband returns, as husbands

attempt to restore their power in the household upon return. (Brink, 1991; Taylor, 1984). As Taylor (1984; p. 10) argues in her study in Giza villages, the power acquired by women during their husbands absence is “neither total nor permanent.” In the first generation international migratory households studied by Taylor, the husband’s migration did not result in a permanent change of his wife’s lifestyle or in her continued participation in production.

On the other hand, Khafagy (1984) concluded in her study of El Qababat, also in the province of Giza, that women do not lose part or all of their gained power after their husband’s return. Instead, it enhances their relationship with their husbands as wives use their gained power in advising their husbands about how to invest cash remittances. Moheddine (1988) notes as significant the duration of the husband’s absence arguing that the longer the husband is away, the less freedom the wife has. Women are still subject to the patriarchal order of their (male-dominated) community, because they are under the supervision of the older male of their husband’s family during his absence. This literature is based on assumptions of autonomy that all women a priori seek without much attention given to the social, cultural and economic contexts of their lives. It does not analyze the discourse that ‘left behind’ wives, and their migratory husbands, use to express their aspirations and their relationships to their communities. As Ali (1988) observes, the Egyptian literature rarely addresses the emotional affection between spouses, mutual caring and support.

While the relationship between remittances and national development has been given much attention (see Straubhaar and Vadean, 2005; Gubert, 2005; Hamdouch, 2005; Zamora, 2005; Ribeiro et al., 2005; de Haas, 2006; Wahba and Zenou, 2012), remittances as an ongoing social process of “negotiation and agreement” (Ariola, 2007, p.851; Chiodi et al,

2012, p. 1140) between remitters and recipients has received less attention. In the study of gendered migration, however, relationships between remittances and women's empowerment, employment, investment, are significant areas of inquiry (Reichert, 1993).

Decision making and remittance control constitute core criteria for definitions of empowerment. For example, Khalaf (2009) argues that wives' ability to allocate money and decide on expenditures redistributes power in the household and makes women empowered. In the same vein, Khafagy (1984) and Brink (1991) show that in the absence of their husbands women are able to take decisions and control remittances, processes which help breakdown male dominance and equalize power in the household. Kabeer (2005) defines empowerment as "the ability to make choices." The control over resources hence is a significant factor in the debates on migration and empowerment. (cf Ahlin and Dahlberg (2010), McEvoy et al (2012). Louhichi (1997) furthermore argues that wife's residential independence is the key factor for wives to acquire power in the absence of husbands. In the literature empowerment and increase in status of left behind wives is based on the assumption that they take on added responsibilities in the absence of their husband, though wives themselves might not see these responsibilities as empowering or emancipating (de Haas and van Rooji, 2010). The absence of the male migrant increases non-monetarized labor in the household for their wives in particular. This burden increases further if the wife in addition has or seeks paid employment in the absence of her husband. In some contexts, wives stop paid employment to ensure the continuity of the remittance flow. (Binzel and Assaad, 2008; Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007; Hoodfar, 1997) Though remittances play an important role in enhancing the economic and social wellbeing of receiving households (de Haas and van Rooji, 2010; Chiodi et al, 2012; Adams and Cuecuecha,

2010; Ariola, 2007; Wahba and Zenou, 2012; de Haas, 2006; Reichert, 2012), Ahlin and Dahlberg, 2010 and Kunz, 2008) urged for more country specific research in this domain.

Households that receive remittances increase their consumption abilities. (Koc and Onan, 2001; McEvoy, 2008; Bui and Kugler, 2011; Ariola, 2007; Jamie, 2008, Lopez- Ekra et al, 2011; Ennaji et al, 2008; Nguyen and Winters, 2011; Adams an Cuecuecha, 2010; Yasmeen, 2011; Zaraty-Hoyos, 2008). Yet the literature is divided as to the impact of these consumption practices. Some researchers argue that most of remittance spending is focused on everyday household needs such as food and clothes (cf Jimenez, 2009; Koc and Onan, 2001, Lipton, 1980; Massey, 1992; Jamie, 2008). Others, have found that the lion share of remittances is spent on investments (Ariola, 2007; Chiodi et al, 2012; Wahba and Zenou, 2012; de Haas, 2006; viet Cuong and Mont, 2012; Reichert, 1993; Bui and Kugler, 2011; Quisumbing and McNiven, 2010). Likewise, earlier distinctions made between consumption practices of migrant and non-migrant households are increasingly being questioned (Zaraty-Hoyos (2008), Jimenez (2009) and Koc and Onan (2001). Kunz (2011) shows that one of the most common assumptions in the migration literature is that women and men spend remittances differently. Whereas men are presumed to invest in physical capital (and hence contribute to the development of the national economy), women's predominant investment in human capital has been subject to much debate.

Conceptual Reflections:

There are certain conceptual categories in gender and migration research that continue to be recycled in the field. One of these is the notion of 'left behind' to refer to wives of migrants remaining in the village upon their husbands departure (Khalaf, 2009; Binzel and Assaad, 2009;

de Has and van Rooji, 2010; Zaalouk, 1988). In his work on rural China, Biao (2006) deploys the notion of 'left behind' to indicate those wives, families, households that are economically left behind by institutional processes. Archambault (2010) avoids labeling wives of migrants in his study of Ugweno, Tanzania as left behind. He argues that 'left behind' may rightly point to the difficult situations that women can face in contexts of high male out-migration" (Archambault, 2010), yet he also points out that researchers refer to wives of migrants as 'left behind' while at the same time structuring the benefits around male migration through an empowerment framework. When I began my fieldwork referring to 'mitsaba' (left behind), the women I interviewed immediately challenged this assumption. They countered that 'mitsaba' connotes the abandonment and the severance of remittances and communication, which indicates that the migrant acquired a new wife abroad. For the women I interviewed classifications are very important, "mitsaba" in the village is used to refer to the status of abandonment either through divorce, separation or polygamy. They suggested that I use 'sit al-bayt' (housewife or staying at home) to describe their lives.

A second recurring theme in the literature is the question of empowerment. Khalaf (2009) defines empowerment as gains made by wives during their husbands' absence such as controlling remittances and hence increasing their decision-making abilities in the household. The women I interviewed did not relate to the notion of empowerment as a way to describe their aspirations. For them empowerment was linked to paid employment within the well-known modern development framework. Their aspirations of staying at home, building a house, raising the children are not within these dominant registers. In addition to the larger question of empowerment to what, and on whose terms that critical feminist work has been interrogating over the last few years, in the fieldwork for this thesis I attempt to take women's aspirations and

articulations as the categories of analysis. For instance, as alluded to previously, much of the literature assumes that women in rural areas do not talk about their feelings towards their husbands due to traditions and gossip, and hence much research has focused on empowerment of the individual gendered subject and not taken other issues such as of emotional loss seriously (Ali 1988). One of my participants stopped me one day and asked me if my research would solve the problem of migration because she wants her husband back. When I asked her “why do you want him back?”, she said “because I love him.” I did not expect this kind of direct answer, but she said, “no one asks me about my feelings, even him. He always calls to ask if we have money, if we need clothes, but he never asks me if I still love him or not”.

Fieldwork Site:

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in a village that throughout this thesis will be called ‘Hekma’ located in the northern part of the Upper Egyptian province of Qena during the spring of 2013. I was drawn to this topic as grew up in a town not too far from Hekma in which transnational families constitute a significant part of the urban fabric. The village of Hekma is located five kilometers from a town I shall call ‘Nag Abdel Rahman’ which today serves much of the villages administrative, educational and consumption needs. Hekma together with four other small villages, appear as one unit in administrative unit records, hence no formal data is available for Hekma itself. According to the health unit’s yearly census, the village has three thousand inhabitants, with more than five hundred migratory households with one or more migrant members. Villagers divide Hekma into three neighborhoods. An unpaved main street cuts through the three neighborhoods with redbrick and mud brick houses on both sides. It is surrounded by fields of sugarcane, wheat and alfalfa. Based on my interviews, villagers point

towards a thirty year history of internal and external migration, primarily to Qatar and Kuwait, The Kuwaiti households are the most affluent, inhabiting their own neighborhood, characterized by villas and accessible by the only paved road in the village. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in the adjacent neighborhood where most male migrants are in Qatar. This neighborhood can most succinctly be described as a rural aspiring middle class. On an average day the public spaces of Hekma are inhabited by a few men who run the food stores in the village, elderly men sitting in cafe's and children. During the period of my fieldwork, women of the 'Qatari' households ventured out of their houses predominantly to visit the health unit, wearing a black abaya and the niqab.

Given its proximity to the town of Nag Abdel Rahman, the relationship between these two locations is one of dependency, desire as well as distinction. Nag Abdel Rahman has a population of approximately 25,000, and is located on the west side of the Nile, connected to the east side through two metal bridges. A highway separates the town from the vast sugarcane and wheat fields surrounding it. Nag Abdel Rahman is the commercial, transportation and administrative hub for the villages and towns in northern Qena. Its economy is based on sugar cane cultivation and processing, aluminum industry, and remittances. According to the residents of Hekmet, villagers prefer to work on the land or in construction as opposed to the factories, stores or administrative jobs available in Nag Abdel Rahman. Despite its size and urbanity, tribal affiliations are significant in the city's social and commercial infrastructure. I selected to conduct fieldwork in Hekma, and in its 'Qatari' neighborhood based on contacts I was able to develop with the village health unit. This thesis is based on interviews with thirty people. Twenty wives married to current migrants, two elderly men that had permanently returned to the village, two mother-in-laws, two young men awaiting migration opportunities, two migrants visiting the

village during their holiday, and two young unmarried women. Salwa, the health unit employee, initiated my initial contacts to the wives of migrants. Most of the interviews were conducted in the mornings before women became busy with preparing lunch for their families. In addition to individual interviews, I conducted a number of focus groups in households where three or more wives of migrants lived together. Half way through the fieldwork, I also interviewed men that were visiting or had returned due to the mandatory retirement age for migrants in Qatar. Interviewing men was welcome by their wives. In an interview with an elderly returnee, while his wife was in the same room, she said, “I am happy that you made him talk, because he does not talk with me or with anyone in the house.”

In my initial meetings with village women facilitated by Salwa, the only health unit employee actually living in Hekma, I was struck by the complexity and diversity of the stories of life in the village that did not so easily fit into the categories and questions through which the gender and migration field in Egypt has made migratory households visible. For instance, the aspirations and pride in being a housewife (*sitt al-bayt*) stood in contrast to the discourse of empowerment that defines the field, similarly, the complex patterns of dwelling of nuclear families and extended families in the village raised questions as to fixed categories and meanings attached to these forms within feminist inspired frameworks. While I began this research with the intention of understanding more fully women’s lives in these migratory villages, following my initial set of conversations, I also realized the importance of reflecting on the categories through which they represented their lives and aspirations which often stood in stark contrast to the categories deployed in the gender and migration field.

Chapter Outline:

The questions explored in this thesis regarding rural migrant households are centered on three domains: village social life, remittances, and consumption. Chapter two traces the historical experiences of migration from Hekma to the Gulf. It examines the generational differences and aspirations regarding marriage, family, household, community, education, work and the management of remittances. Particular attention is paid to the conceptual vocabulary through which individual women and men in migrant households express their transnational every day. Chapter three explores remittances as a process and their impact on the transformation of social spaces in the village, and the changing power relationships within households. A significant feature of contemporary migratory households is the shift from women's agrarian labor to the status of housewife (*sitt al-bayt*). The chapter traces the relationships between remittances, the newly acquired cultural capital of the status of housewife and its impact on both village life and the reproduction of transnational families. Chapter four focuses on ways in which the aspirations of migrant households are expressed through their consumption patterns and investment. It discusses the politics of consumption between migratory and non-migratory households, the different interpretations of cultural capital between migrant men and their village housewives, and the larger impact on the social spaces of the village. It also explores investments in Hekma at the community level. Chapter five reflects on the kinds of questions that ethnographic work raises that is sensitive to the historical transformation of aspirations across different migratory generations and that has as its starting point the conceptual framework in which transnational families articulate and make sense of their lives.

CHAPTER TWO: MIGRATORY SOCIAL SPACES

Rural Migration is a well-established phenomenon in the modern Egyptian state (Zohry 2002), from the mid nineteenth century to the 1970s this was predominantly a process of internal migration from Upper Egypt to the Delta, the Port Cities and Cairo, population movements which Zohry (2002) terms “survival migration” formally known as tarahil labor. In his study of tarahil labor from Minya, Toth defines it as (1999: p 2) “the type of casual employment that involves gangs of unskilled males, recruited from the same village, who travel together to distant production sites far from home for several weeks at a time” (see also Reichert, 1993, p. 1). Tarahil labor are recruited by labor brokers to work in “construction, reclaiming desert land, excavating and repairing irrigation canals, building and rebuilding railroads, laying telephone lines, digging building foundations, and paving roads”(Toth, 1999, p 2). Given the poor living and labor conditions, Toth notes the importance of the village household for the well-being of migrating men. The unorganized mass migration of Upper Egyptians to the north, on the other hand, has tended to weaken social ties to villages of origin over time (cf Zohry 2002). Hekma has a long history of tarahil laborers going to Ismailia for the mango season, and more recently to Alexandria in the summer for tourism. However, with the possibilities of migration to the Gulf that emerged in the late 1970s (Reichert, 1993, p. 42) and the much higher earning potential, migration to the Gulf has been a desired destination for Hekma men over the past thirty years.

This chapter traces the social impact of male-out migration on Hekma with a particular focus on women. It asks the following questions: what is the social impact of male out migration on wives in the village? What do men and women aspire to achieve out of migration? What are the changes that male migration has brought to the social spaces in Hekma? How do gender roles change in the households after male migration? Despite the body of literature that argues women

are positively affected by male migration, as they gain power and have freedom of mobility in the absence of men (Khalaf, 2009; Khadafy, 1984; Louhichi, 1997; Brink, 1991; Taylor, 1984), I argue that women, at the family level, gain power in certain aspects but they lose freedom of mobility upon marriage which thereby has many negative effects on women and the entire community. I start by viewing the issue of categorizing migrants and their wives in literature, and move to the aspirations of men and women in Hekma. After that, I move to capture the changes that occurred in Hekma, and how it is different in the contemporary moment.

Male ‘migrants’ and the ‘left behind’ women

Atchambault (2010) argues that not only have women been neglected in the migration field, but that non-mobile women have been presented as “passive” agents. When I began my fieldwork armed with the vocabulary of the migration field, such as *muhajreen* (migrants), country of destination, sending and receiving countries, and more importantly ‘left behind’ wives, these terms were received with frustration by the women and men in Hekma. “I am not a migrant (*muhajir*), I am a traveler (*musafir*)” one man responded to my initial interview question. He explained that *muhajreen* are the ones who travel and do not come back to the village, while travelers (*misafreen*) are the ones who work overseas and come to visit the village regularly. As mentioned early in the chapter, men first left the village in search of work as *tarahil* laborers in 1897 (Toth, 1999), more recently, men from poor households seek work as seasonal mango pickers in Ismailia and informal workers in Alexandria and Hurghada. Therefore, given the historical link between migration and abject poverty, village men currently working in the Gulf disavow their status as migrants (*muhajreen*), and capture their social aspirations in the notion of travelers.

Likewise, when I literally translated ‘left behind’ into ‘mitsaba’ in Arabic, one woman corrected me saying “I am not mitsaba; I am a housewife (sitt al bayt).” It is a matter of choice, she explained. The housewife chooses to wait for her husband, raise the children and run the household. “My husband calls me every day, sends me money and clothes, and comes every year for a month to spend the Eid with us, he did not leave me; I rather chose to stay here” said a wife of a misafir. In the context of Hekma, mitsaba is a broad term suggesting abandonment and marginalization and reserved for separated and divorced women (See also Archambault, 2010). Similar to the notion of the misafir, the notion of sitt al bayt constitutes an investment in the aspirations of upward mobility and cultural capital, i.e the ability to afford to have a non-working wife (cf Abaza, 1987). Although their access to land and resources might not shift significantly, the sitt al bayt prefer to stay in Hekma where they remain connected to their larger familial and social infrastructure. As noted previously, the high cost of living in Qatar increases the social isolation of visiting wives. Safaa, a wife of a misafir in her twenties, recalls that when she travelled to her husband in Qatar, she had to stay in his room the entire day until he came back from work, “I was locked in a room the entire time, and we could not go out, because my husband could not afford enjoying the city.”

Despite the fact that migration started as a response to economic needs thirty years ago, and many see it as a way of improving their families' standard of living (Brink, 1991, p. 203), what compels a son of a migrant who already has a better standard of living than his father and his grandfather to migrate? Why do most young men in Hekma in their early twenties seek unskilled and skilled labor in the Gulf? As Zohry (2002) observes, previously only the heads of households had to migrate so as to provide their families with the necessary needs, but nowadays migration has turned to be a “job” itself (Zohry, 2002, p. 43) In Hekma, it is not men coming

from landless families or day laborer's that seek migration opportunities, but the sons of migrants with middle class aspirations. As one of the men I spoke with put it, "migration is good money in a short time." A migrant in his sixties who already has two sons abroad and persuading the third son to migrate as well, explained to me that migrants hold a more prestigious social rank (*makana ahsan*) than those who stay in the village and hold intermittent or permanent local jobs. Even though land (more on this in chapter 3) continues to constitute an essential identity for Hekma residents. My mistaken use of the term *fellah* (farmer) was resisted with the same ferocity as 'migrant' and 'left behind'. Social rank for the aspiring middle class in Hekma is closely associated with the ability to purchase land as a commodity and the display of this purchasing power in their social relationships in the village, for instance, serving imported packed tea, coffee and other drink to their guests, wearing Khaliji perfumes, wearing imported abayas and galabeyas, decorating the ceilings of the house, purchasing electronic devices with foreign brand names such as water coolers, microwaves, washing machines, giving the foreign currency as a souvenir to their friends and relatives. Misafreen and their wives not only aspire to enhance their economic status, but also aspire to move up in the class hierarchy of their community.

Aspirations: Housing, Marriage, Education, and Land

Hekma residents describe their aspirations for their lives, and the priorities and contestations within transnational households around a list of four goals: marriage, housing, education, and land not necessarily always in that order. Given the high costs of marriage (Rashad et al, 2005), families favor misafreen as husbands for their daughters rather than men that have temporary or permanent jobs in the village. Young women themselves prefer to marry a misafir as he is able to provide a well-furnished separate apartment, eventually build a house, and provide middle class

village social status. Since men have to cover two thirds of the marriage expenses (Roshdy et al., 2005), young Hekma men seek work in the Gulf to increase their chances of accumulating the necessary capital for marriage in as short of time as possible. When I asked Samia, a 38 years old single woman, why she is not married she responded that she “did not find a misafir to marry.” The pressure to marry a misafir puts pressure on young women, including from their families, concerning marriage decisions. Hind, in her late twenties, was forced by her mother to marry a misafir to secure food, shelter and increase the family’s social position in the village. Hind was divorced after six months of marriage due to her husband’s frugality. Seven of the ten married women I interviewed had arranged marriages to misafreen.

The question of housing features centrally among young village women. To build a house or at least have a separate apartment within the family house is a core demand and expectation of marriage. Almost all participants established a strong desire to privatizing their space. This “privatization” process is initiated by wives in most cases in an attempt by the wife to avoid disputes with her in-laws (see also Abaza, 1987). Having a private bathroom, kitchen and bedroom represented a common demand amongst all the wives I met. They expressed discomfort living with their in-laws, sharing facilities, cleaning and cooking tasks, and navigating the household budget. “I want to feel free to eat and shower whenever I want. I got married because I wanted to leave my family house not to move to another family house” said Hanan, a wife of a misafir in her twenties.

The family house or bayt-al-a’ila in rural Upper Egypt is known of its protection, support and inclusion of its members. Historically, the household is run by the older male consultatively with the older female. If more than one nuclear family resides in the same house, they more likely share the budget to spend on the household. Males are typically responsible for

working outside the house, supervising the family land, and doing the shopping, while women are staying home cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. Tasks are distributed to females inside the household by the older female (the mother or mother in-law) (Brink, 1991). Older women are usually responsible for rearing the children and feeding them. Given this hierarchical structure, wives (especially newlywed) express discomfort living among a big family, serving everyone, and bearing heavy tasks plus raising her own children. They also complain about not having a separate budget and not participating in the decision making process regarding the household expenditures or investment. Splitting from the household is the dream those wives, especially when their children grow. Men also dream of leaving the family house to establish their own family house and in Hekma, there are big family houses that consist of four families and other houses of nuclear families.

Twenty years ago families arranged marriages. The misafreen had to wait until their mothers and sisters located a suitable bride (Brink, 1991, p 208). An older male relative would then meet the bride's family and propose officially. The misafir would then visit for a short holiday to sign the marriage contract and meet the bride (Taylor 1984, Brink 1991). Some men were brave enough to look for a wife on their own in a neighboring village. In the past a room in the household of the groom was enough to begin a family with; later the couple would build their own apartment or move to a different house (Zohry, 2002, Taylor, 1984, Ali, 1998). Um Hind, a wife of a misafir in her fifties, told me that her husband came from the neighboring village to her parents' house in search for a bride, and when he saw her, he decided to marry her right away. She accepted and insisted to marry him against her parents' will. At that time, her husband was not a misafir, and she married in a room in his family's household. Five years later, he travelled to the Gulf for a better salary, leaving Um Hind and four children under the supervision of his

family. After ten years, Um Hind was able to build a house and move there with her children. Leaving her husband's extended family dwelling and live independently Um Hind recalls as a turning point in her life.

Things have significantly changed recently, but education seems to have a slight effect on family relations and marriage. Families are tied together through strong tribal connections through which they arrange marriages based on age rather than education, mentality or affection. However, girls can pick and choose for themselves between the available proposals. Today, young women have more options, and seek potential partners with particular qualities. For example, Doaa, a 20-year-old newlywed, told me that she wanted to marry a sheikh as she was looking for "a religious and respectful husband." Therefore, she went to the mosque and filled out an application for marrying a sheikh. A sheikh did eventually propose, but unfortunately it was too late as her cousin (Abbas) had proposed and her parents had already accepted. This left Doaa in a dilemma. First, she cannot refuse and disturb her parents' relation with the rest of the extended family. Second, due to gossip, if she refused Abbas and he married another girl before she is married to the sheikh, her reputation in the village would have been ruined. Many other recently married women felt that they have nonetheless limited options regarding choice of marriage partner. Their families accepted the first proposal from a male relative as long as he is a misafir.

Meeting potential marriage partners has changed due to new information technology. Now the misafir, the-would-be-bride and her family have the first "visit" on the internet. If the proposal is rejected the misafir does not incur any costs, if it is accepted the misafir visits the village for a week or more to propose officially to the bride's family and to host an engagement party. The women I interviewed noted that the ability to give their consent via this new

technology marks a significant change in their ability to participate in selecting a suitable husband. Furthermore, the ability of the misafir to provide a flat immediately upon marriage reduces the historical tensions with mother-in-laws and gives the marriage a very different start.

Transnational marriages have been influenced by modern technology in a variety of ways. The wives I interviewed recall that in the past they used to send letters written by themselves or their older sons to their husbands with a visiting relative. Ten years ago they started exchanging recorded tapes. Um Safaa, a wife of a misafir in her fifties, told me that she was very romantic in the construction of her tapes, interspersing her conversations with music. Her husband, on the other hand, instructed her on what she should do with the money he sent on his recordings. The men I spoke with told me that twenty years ago there was only one telephone in the village belonging to a wealthy family. A misafir had to call twice. First to let the owner of the phone know who he wishes to speak with. Then call again once the owner was able to inform his wife and children that a phone call awaited them. Today the mobile phone has enabled transnational families to remain in regular contact. Many wives I spoke with however pointed out that their husbands call only when they are in a good mood or when they have time, otherwise they rarely call. While some of the households in the village have computers, they rarely have internet access. Older children usually teach their mothers how to use Skype, for instance, to communicate with their fathers abroad.

The gender and migration literature has given much attention to housing that migrants invest in, design and manage in their villages of origin. Today most migrants provide a flat immediately upon marriage often within or adjacent to his family's household. Marwa, a 20 year old, is engaged to a migrant, and insisted that the flat be available immediately upon engagement. Although she is marrying her cousin, she explained that she wants to have her own

social space avoiding any problem with her relatives in the future. Women rarely live on their own in independent houses in Hekma. Khadra is an exception. Upon marriage she lived in a two room mudbrick house next to her in-laws without electricity and water. Married for fifteen years, and after saving her husband's remittances for 10 years, she built their own multi-story house with the assistance of her younger brothers and now resides within it. Given that she is the mother of four children, including a number of sons, it is socially acceptable for her to live on her own.

The cost of maintaining transnational marriages is a source of tension and concern with many of the longer married women I spoke with. Contrary to the gender and migration fields concerns with empowerment and autonomy, many women spoke of their emotional loneliness. For example, Khadra, a very active wife of a misafir in her thirties, dreams of her husband's return. She would prefer him to return even if he were to work in the village at half the salary than he is making in Qatar. Every time her husband comes for a visit she notices that his hair is becoming whiter. Khadra is depressed seeing her husband aging far away, reminding her of a life spent apart. Her husband dyed his hair several times during his recent one month visit to please her. Um Hind, another *sitt al bayt* wife in her 40s, has a husband who is ill and in a hospital in Qatar. She talks to him on Skype, and is forlorn every time she sees him in his hospital bed without a single visitor. Khadra and Um Hind aspire to raise, educate and marry their children. Khadra has bought some land that she intends to sell to ensure her daughter's suitable marriage. They both variously expressed that they wish to live with dignity (*mastoreen*).

The literature on migration as noted in chapter one, with its focus on empowerment and autonomy has by and large ignored the complex navigation of transnational marriages. In other words, as Ali (1997) also observes in her fieldwork on Minya, much of the literature in the Egypt

field in the 1980s and 90s directly or indirectly, begin with the assumption that the absence of men from the villages is good for women. The prevalence of arranged marriages in some form or the other, accounts for the limited categories through which women's lives are made visible. Brink (1991, p. 208) argues that "rural Egyptian marriages are not based on love, and any display of this emotion between husbands and wives is considered shameful. However, I was able to get to know some of these women well enough to explore beneath the public facade, and I believe that separation from their spouses was as difficult as it would be for a couple whose marriage is based on romantic love."

Some of the village women do visit their husbands in Qatar for extended visits lasting a few months, primarily to increase their chances of conception. Depending on resources and the kinds of jobs they do, men return to their villages for one month every year, some only as little as once every six years. With the limited salary, and the high costs of life in Qatar, Safaa who spent a few months with her husband describes her visit as a "miserable experience." With her husband working long hours, unable to afford anything in the city, she spent most of her time alone in her husband's room. Sabreen, whose husband has a better job than Safaa's, on the other hand is one of the few village women who is looking forward to joining her husband permanently in Qatar along with their youngest daughter.

Housing:

Moreover, Abaza's (1987) classification of three migratory household structures in rural Egypt in the 1980s no longer holds for at least my fieldwork. Household structures in Hekma are diverse. A number of factors are significant to consider the age of the wife, the number of children in the household and their gender, who receives the remittances, and in how close proximity women live to their in-laws and their relationships with them. Four staying-home

wives in the village, married to brothers run a joint household on their own. They take turns managing the household. Every month one sister-in-law is responsible for expenditures such as food, electricity, water bills, animals fodder other everyday needs. Each handles her own personal expenditures: clothes, children, and medical bills. The four women expressed their relief that their mother-in-law passed away four years ago. Until then, they noted, “they worked as slaves in her household.” Others live with their own families, and only stay in their independent apartment during the husbands’ visits. Once they have two or more children, their families encourage them to permanently move to their own apartment. In my interviews with women, the experience of living with in-laws was mixed. Some were “the kindest people on earth,” others treated their son’s young wife as a maid. Hind stayed with her in-laws for several months after her husband returned to Qatar. He did not send her enough money to live on based on the assumption that his family is taking care of her. She recalls that her mother-in-law controlled everything and was tight with spending on basic household needs, including food. Hind could not ask her family for money because the remittances they receive from her father barely cover their own expenses. However, her mother used to send her food, money and sometimes clothes. Hind eventually got divorced and now lives with her family. Avoiding gossip is the reason why many younger wives endure these situations. To become the “talk of the village,” especially with their husbands are away, in their eyes is the more costly alternative. During my visits to the village, I never heard of a woman having a bad reputation because she lives alone. Villagers noted to me that if women have a son or are beyond a certain age, it is not problem to live by oneself.

Education:

Employment in the Gulf has given new value to education in Hekma. In conversations with men they did not see education as offering possibilities for upward mobility while growing up in the village, yet, given their experiences of working in the Gulf, they now heavily invest in their children's, both girls' and boys' education. In their study Elbadawy and Roushdy (2010, p. 12) conclude that remittances have had a positive impact on school and university attendance of boys and girls in Egypt, with the exception of girls in rural Upper Egypt (ibid, p. 8) While the older generation of women (grandmothers over 60 years of age) in Hekma certainly fall into this Upper Egyptian rural exception, the women I interviewed for this study predominantly within the 20-28 year age range, all had secondary school certificates, and a number of them university degrees. Parents not only dream of educating their children, but have specific career goals in mind such as doctors and engineers, or the very least teachers. While husbands and their wives share the dream of education for their children, there is a clear generational divide as to the meaning of education for girls in particular. The cultural capital aspired to by mid aged marriage couples, the investments in being able to afford the *sitt al-bayt* status, is perceived much more critically by the two young unmarried women I encountered during my fieldwork. While their great-grandmothers worked in the fields and had much more access to the social spaces of the village, for these young women education and jobs are closely linked to the possibilities of mobility, and establishing a social life outside their household. Safaa, a newlywed wife of a *misafir* notes that "we look up to those who have a university degree, because they are free to go in and out for work". In addition to the educational challenges students in villages confront, should they succeed in gaining university admission; young women face additional obstacles as families are reluctant to let them travel by themselves to the cities where universities are located. While salaried employment remains a dream of young women in the village, few are able to

accomplish this. Given the early age of marriage (14-18), education for the daughters of the musafir and sitt al bayt is primarily linked to the additional value it offers their daughters in the marriage market

Why do misafreen insist on educating their children? A misaifr with three daughters and one son in school said “I wish my parents had been as keen on my education as I am now for my children”. The misafreen want their children to accomplish what they could not accomplish. The misafreen with primary education work predominantly in construction, but those with more educational qualifications manage to secure better-paying jobs such as work as security guards. The older men observe that the more educated they are, the better jobs and salaries they get in Qatar, and hence manage to remit to their families. Naser, who has a technical education diploma and works in Qatar, laments his lack of further education, “I wish I completed my education, my friends work as teachers, and I open the doors for them every day.” Parents, especially fathers with young children today, dream of well-educated children and hence bright futures. For example, Khadra’s husband is ready to educate his children “to the last pound”. He encourages his four children to go to school even if it is far from their village. Hence, Khadra has arranged for a taxi to take them to school every day.

Gender Roles:

Migration becomes the “norm” in communities with well-established history of migration (de Haas and van Rooji, 2010); therefore the staying members adjust themselves to the roles assigned to them to replace migrants. Generally speaking, women in Hekma assume new roles in the absence of men. Researchers disagree on the impacts of these new roles on them. One party (Ahlin and Dahlberg, 2010; Taylor, 1984; Brink, 1991; Louhichi, 1997; Khadafy, 1984) argues that women benefit from the new roles assigned to them, meanwhile the other party (Weinstein

Bever, 2002; de Haas and van Rooji, 2010; McEvoy et al., 2012; Archambault, 2010; Biao, 2006) argues that they represent a burden on women's shoulders as they reinforce gender inequality in the household and the entire community. In nuclear households women bear more responsibilities as they become the de facto heads of households than those in extended households, yet they can seek help from their male relatives and in-laws. Menjivar and Agadjanian (2007) and Brink (1991) highlight that women living in nuclear families do not live isolated from the community, they rather receive help from their relatives and in-laws. Those women acquire decision making abilities and independence, which some researchers refer to as "empowerment" (Khalaf, 2009; Sika, 2011). This power does not last after husbands' return (Brink, 1991; Taylor, 1984). In other contexts, men stay the heads of the households during their absence through monitoring the household and instructing their wives on how to manage it (Weinstein Bever, 2002). In Yucatan, Mexico for instance, "gender ideologies continue to be strongly defended" (Weinstein Bever, 2002) which thereby promotes gender hierarchies which often subordinate women to men in rural communities. As a result, women are not privileged or empowered. However wives in extended households bear fewer burdens than those in nuclear ones, they are still subordinated to the oldest women in the household (the mother in-law) who distributes household chores on younger women and controls the budget (Brink, 1991; Khadafy, 1984).

Most wives in Hekma live in extended households where the mother in-law is in charge of managing the household and controls the budget in the absence of males; otherwise the older male would be in charge of the household's budget. Given the above discussion, the situation is a slightly different in Hekma, because wives married in extended households are relatives due to intermarriage; they do not necessarily experience subordination to their mother-in-laws. In

addition, husbands are more tolerant in terms of mobility outside the house in this case, because what goes on his wife goes on the rest of the household as a whole. For example, if his family is invited to weddings, or any other occasion all females go together. Since the housework and responsibilities are divided in the household and decisions are solely taken by the older male in consultations with the older female, the wife is deprived of many potential capacities that wives living in nuclear families acquire such as decision-making, budget control, and problem solving. Unlike Brink (1991) and Taylor (1984) the Hekma wives in nuclear households expect their acquired power to last beyond their husbands' return. They do not lose it for many reasons. First women play the role of the supervisor to their husbands as they instruct them on when to send money, the wisest way of spending it, and what kinds of investment they shall seek. Second, husbands stay away for a year or two and come back for a month to "act like guests, and do not bear any responsibility" said Khadra, therefore women are still the head of the household even in the presence of their husbands. Third, the younger generation is more open-minded and tolerant than their fathers and grandfathers in the sense that they accept sharing the responsibility with their wives as they see convenient. Although gender hierarchies are visible in Hekma, women enjoy managing their households in cooperation with their husbands. However, women's mobility outside the house is restricted because of limiting the public sphere to men and the domestic sphere to women (de Haas and van Rooji, 2010). This will be discussed in detail in the flowing part. Although many wives believe this distinction is unjust to them, others believe that it is saves them from going grocery shopping or working in the field. In sum, wives in Hekma did not agree on whether the absence of their husbands is changing gender roles in the household, because the majority of them live in extended households where they do not

participate in decision making, meanwhile the rest have established their nuclear families and became heads of households.

Mobility and Gossip:

Women not only feel uncomfortable about their new roles, but about their mobility outside the house that does not necessarily guarantee their access to resources but rather made them vulnerable to gossip as well (McEvoy et al., 2013; de Haas and van Rooji, 2010; Jamie, 2008). How do migratory communities police their members, especially females? Why women in Hekma do not work, go to the field, and cannot be seen in public? Back in the eighties, Abaza (1987) argues that middle and lower class peasants imitated the upper class in preventing their women from the public sphere as their economic status rises. Thus, women's mobility is negatively associated with the economic wellbeing of husbands and their desire to enhance their social class. In Mexico, Jamie (2008) argues that women fear being gossiped about when seen in the public sphere with their friends or family, because otherwise, their husbands might suspect their infidelity and abandon them and cutoff remittances. As a result, women become vulnerable to poverty and unable to work outside the house to cover their everyday needs. McEvoy et al. (2012) likewise argue that wives' mobility does not guarantee their access to resources, but rather make them vulnerable to gossip. Women in Hekma, particularly wives of misafreen, are aware of the fact that their mobility outside the house is policed by members of their community. Salwa told me that she cannot come with me everywhere because she does not want people to gossip about her. Although Salwa is not married, she is aware that her reputation might be ruined if she is seen everywhere in the village. Moreover, I experienced difficulty gathering women in one of the households to conduct group discussions, because they are not allowed to move outside the house for a "legitimate" reason. A "legitimate" reason from their husbands' point of

view is returning a favor to a family member in a wedding or a funeral. Grocery shopping is considered a man-only task. Women are not allowed in the field as well. There was only one woman in the field is in her seventies helping her husband cultivating their small plot because it is their only source of living and they do not have children. My interviewees did not have an explanation why they are restricted from the public sphere other than “that is how it is in the village” said Sahar, a wife of a misafir. Salwa also said “the worst thing about villages is gossip. A woman cannot do what she wants or go anywhere without people talking about her.” It has been suggested that the more conservative gender roles of the host communities Egyptians migrate to, the more likely they come back with them (Sika, 2011, p. 4; Elbadawy and Roushdy, 2008). Thus, the misafreen in Qatar and Kuwait come back to Hekma with conservative norms that target women’s mobility.

Mobility is not the only issue though. Forcing the niqab (face cover) is also very restricting to women in Hekma. Conservative communities that misafreen migrate to might be the reason why they force it on their women as it was not part of the village tradition before migration (Sika, 2011, p. 4). I have seen grandmothers in the health unit without the niqab. Women beyond certain age do not have to wear it. Doaa explained to me that wives of misafreen and engaged girls have to wear it. She said that mothers and grandmothers do not wear it because they are too old to be distracted by men in the street. She also pointed out that husbands force women to wear it because they don’t want other men to distinguish and look at them. “I do not want anyone to see my bida’a (goods)” Marwa’s fiancé said convincing her to wear it. It is not uncommon in Hekma that men treat their wives as a property, and the latter do not mind it. Women are used to be referred to as bida’a and therefore they do not mind being controlled by men. Many women addressed that however they wear the niqab when going to another village or

to Nag-Abdelrahman, they do not wear it at home in front of their brother-in-laws and other male relatives. On the other hand, some husbands do not force women to wear the niqab and let them wear it willingly claiming that their husbands feel comfortable in their destinations that their wives are modest and unreachable. Eventually, wives of misafreen envy those who have their husbands at home as they hang out with them in Nag Abdelrahman and are not stressed by being gossiped about.

Landownership in Hekma:

Everyone tells a different story about the history of landownership in Hekma. The closest story to reality is that most of the agrarian land was owned by two wealthy families. They lived in few mud-brick houses. The members of these families were highly educated unlike most of the village. When international migration started in the seventies, unskilled landless people and small owners migrated and came back with enough money to buy a small land and build a redbrick house. Members of the same family started building houses next to each other composing two small nag'as (districts) separated by sugarcane fields.

Chain migration played an important role in dividing the village into three parts. Members from the same family started encouraging each other to migrate to the same country, and they come back to expand their land and household. The misafreen who travelled to Kuwait were the first to migrate. They were very educated and worked as lawyers, accountants, engineers, doctors and teachers. Now, they are centered in the eastern part of the village where they built villas and houses of several floors surrounded by spacious green fields isolating themselves from the rest of the village. Due to their wealth and high education, the Kuwaiti misafreen became the upper class in Hekma. The ones who travelled to Qatar, on the other hand, were not as skilled and educated as the Kuwaiti ones, and thus they constitute the middle class.

They live in the western part of Hekma. In the middle of these two parts reside small families from other villages and. They also have migrants in Qatar and United Arab Emirates, but they are not as skilled or educated as the Qatari and Kuwaiti ones. Hence, they constitute the lower class. Their houses are in mud brick and red brick, and some of them own small plots to live on beside remittances.

Now, the three parts of Hekma are hardly distinguishable due to the expansion of households and the rapid increase of population. However, boundaries are very visible between these parts in terms of the style of buildings, car brands, and dress. The Kuwait villas are omissible at the beginning of the village facing the high way. They even have a separate entrance from the village, while the Qatari part consists of blocks of several floors next to each other divided by an unpaved road. Despite the social differences, the three parts are connected lineage relationships, tribal connections and business. The Kuwaiti misafreen were the first who prevented their women from the public, built fenced villas, bought cars, and educated their children regardless of gender. The rest of the village follows them aspiring to the same social position.

Most studies link landownership to remittances and consumption forgetting its social importance amongst a community with a longstanding history of migration (Citation). The economic impact of remittances on land consumption will be extensively discussed in chapter four. Given the agrarian history of Hekma, land and people's relationship to land remains an important marker of class distinction and power within the Hekma. The Omda (mayor) in Hekma comes from the largest landowning family. "Traditionally, social status and position in the Fellah society (agrarian society) were determined by landownership and position in the extended family system (Reichert, 1993, p. 48)". Landless villagers are at the bottom of the social scale, as our

villagers that do not have a migrant in the household and hence need to work their own land. For migrant families in Hekma, land is a commodity they invest in as part of their middle class aspirations. Souma, a wife of a misafir in her late forties observed “my husband was landless when he traveled; he dreamt of owning a feddan at least to cultivate and live on instead of working on his family land and receive a harvest share alongside his brothers and sisters. Thus, I saved money as much as I could to make his dream comes true. Now, thank God, he owns three feddans and he has the upper hand among his family members because he owns more land than them.” The women I interviewed were proud to show me their land from the window of their house, and at length described their difficulties in acquiring a particular feddan of land. In their study of rural Armenia Agadjanian and Sevoyan (2013) argue that if migrants invest their remittances in large scale investment, it is thereby embedding them in their community of origin. In Hekma the focus on housing and the purchase of land as a commodity by formerly often landless individuals and families re-embeds them in the village on new terms.

Eventually, the social space in Hekma is greatly influenced by male out migration which makes it a distinguished rural village. Starting as tarahil laborers, young men followed their dreams of owning a house, marriage, land and educating the children, they turned to misafreen in the Gulf. Social as well as economic aspirations of middle-class misafreen and their families to better living standards are associated with special terms that they are ready to defend such as sit-al-bayt and misafir. These terms are as important as achieving any of the previous four aspirations. Although building a house and buying land represents a priority, most misafreen insist on educating their children (boys and girls equally) and dream of a particular career for them such as doctors and engineers. Being able to achieve these aspirations, misafreen became

desired marriage partners more than anyone else. Most families prefer a misafir from the same family or any other family than a relative who has a permanent or temporary job in the village. Wives as well as husbands aspire to live in their own house thereby avoiding disputes with their in-laws. Although wives become the de facto household heads through the new roles assigned to them inside, they cannot move outside the house without an explicit permission from their husbands. In addition, they are not allowed to work outside the house, and they do not consider their domestic chores worth paying or being considered a “job.” They believe that it is their duty to take over the responsibility of the household until their husbands’ return, which lasts forever because husbands come home every year or two for a month and act as guests and do not carry any responsibility.

Women’s mobility is positively associated to gossip; therefore women are hardly seen in the public sphere. Limiting women’s mobility to the domestic sphere is one of the disadvantages of the upper class. Following their aspirations to an upper class lifestyle, most men (if not all) prevent their women from the public sphere and forcing the niqab. However, women reach out to each other in occasions and maintain family connections in the absence of men. Moreover, land has become a very common way of investing in Hekma, and the more land one has, the higher his social class becomes. It is well-known that landless people or those with small plots are in the lowest social and economic hierarchy in Hekma.

CHAPTER THREE: REMITTANCES AND POWER

Most researchers agree that remittances play a great role in enhancing the economic and social wellbeing of receiving households in many countries (de Haas and van Rooji, 2010; Chiodi et al, 2012; Adams and Cuecuecha, 2010; Ariola, 2007; Wahba and Zenou, 2012; de Haas, 2006; Reichert, 2012). This is true in Hekma as most migratory households enjoy a middle-class lifestyle. On the other hand, migrants themselves experience miserable living conditions in Qatar and Kuwait working as construction workers or general laborers. Remittances whether in cash or in kind are sent regularly to awaiting families through a variety of ways. Most migrants prefer to remit with a visiting relative, friend or wait until they visit the village. Some misafreen also prefers sending cash remittances through a bank transaction despite the high fee compared to the previous method. They believe it is safer through the bank. At the end of the day, remittances get home safely and help in building a house; buying more land, providing food and clothes, and debt repayment.

The process of remitting is rarely discussed in the migration literature; however it involves negotiation and agreement between the remitter and the recipient (Ariola, 2007, p.851; Chiodi et al, 2012, p. 1140). This social process draws directions of power hierarchies in the household and the entire community. It reveals how remittances are sent, received and spent. Who receives remittances is a big question in Hekma due to the social structure of the community as most wives live with their in-laws. Knowing how remittances are sent reveals the options available and the services preferred by migrants and their families for remitting and receiving. Moreover, Women are estimated to be the majority of remittance receivers around the world, however their role in this process is often stereotyped and marginalized (Kunz, 2008). Most women in Hekma receive remittances directly from their husbands through a friend or a

bank transaction. Even though, this cannot be generalized about the entire village because other wives who live in extended households always wait for their share after remittances are distributed between them and the head of the household. In rural Mexico women seek salaried employment if their share is not enough to cover their basic expenses (McEvoy et al, 2012). On the other hand, controlling remittances and deciding on expenditures are considered perquisites of empowerment (Khafagy, 1984; Khalaf, 2008; McEvoy, 2012; Ahlin and Dahlberg, 2010). Women receiving remittances directly from their husbands are assumed to be independent from the extended household and therefore able to make decisions regarding expenditures and decide on their everyday matters. Thus, they experience power in the household unlike other wives staying with their in-laws and share the budget. The processes of remitting as well as the points discussed above are explored in detail in this chapter.

Remittances in Hekma

Egypt has moved from being the seventh largest (cash) remittances receiving country in the world in 2009 (World Bank, 2009, p 10) to the fifth in 2011 (World Bank, 2012, p 2). Remittances inflows to Egypt from Saudi Arabia (\$3,959 billion) are the highest followed by Kuwait (\$1,521 billion), Libya (\$1,451 billion), the United Emirates (\$650 million), and Qatar (\$488 million) (World Bank, 2011). These numbers represent only the cash sent through official channels such as bank transactions and other monetary institutions such as Western Union. Real numbers are hard to be predicted, because misafreen often send remittances informally to their families as needed. They remit large sums of money more frequently if they are in the process of building a new house, marriage, or buying land. In Hekma, half the migrants are in Kuwait and the other half is in Qatar. Despite the high rate of illiteracy among elderly members of the household, they keep written records of the money sent by each misafir (if they have more than

one abroad). One grandmother showed me an old notebook on which she had her granddaughter write the amounts received underneath each name of her sons. A father estimated receiving more than 10,000 LE (Egyptian Pound) per year from his son distributed each month. He admitted receiving double the amount when they were building the new house. No matter how much the misafir earns per month he feels it is a duty to remit to his family. "I quit smoking to save money and remit to my wife and children," said a misafir. A skilled misafir working as a plumber, carpenter or a construction worker remits an average of 10,000 to 20,000 LE per year to his family. Some misafreen remit more if they work in the service sector such as teachers and office workers, meanwhile others remit less if they are unskilled workers. Remittances are often exaggerated and even doubled when mothers are asked about the amount sent to their daughters-in-law and vice versa. Nonetheless, how much a misafir remits depends greatly on his marital status and household structure. A married misafir remits relatively more money than a single one. If the misafir has a separate household he has to remit to his wife and his parents separately. Although this is not obligatory on misafreen to remit to their parents and extended families, most of them do out of gratitude to their parents. In brief, remittances rise and fall depending on the purpose they are sent for and the aspirations of the misafir and his family.

Runners versus Banks

Some migrants use banks to transfer money, while others prefer to send the money with a visiting friend. Others prefer to deliver the money themselves when they visit home on vacations. Due to the irregularity of vacations, visiting friends, and financial emergencies money might not be delivered on time. Despite the irregularity and instability of remittances, they represent the only source of monetary income to the majority of families in Hekma.

The flow and timing of remittances is not always predictable, because of the small salaries of migrants and expensive living expenses in the Gulf. There are three ways to send remittances: bank transfer, a visiting relative or runners. Zohry (2002, p 178) notes that 77 percent of migrants remit with a “trustworthy” passenger from the village, while only 3.3 percent remit through the post office. Most migrants do not prefer the bank because it charges a fee for money transfers in addition to the costs of varying currency rates. El Sakka (1993) argues that providing “realistic” interest and exchange rates can attract substantial remittance earnings through official channels. Misafreen with small salaries find remitting rates exaggeratedly expensive and the amount they send is not worth it. Therefore they started looking for another safer, cheaper, and faster way to remit to their families.

The irregularity of remittances, the constant financial need of households as well as high interest and exchange rates opened the door for two new professions “runners” or “agents” and “delivery travelers” to emerge to ease the process of sending remittances to small villages. These professions depend mainly on social connections and trust (Zohry, 2002, p 222). “Agents” are the people responsible for receiving and delivering the money from migrants to their families. There is only one money agent in Hekma, and he is preparing his son to take his place. The process requires two agents one (international) in the country of destination Qatar for instance, and the other (local) in the village. They both have access to a local bank account where the first collects the money to-be-sent from migrants and deposits it into the local bank account. Mainly, wealthy landowners manage the money of migrants as Abu Elwafa (the money agent) is wealthy and owns many feddans in Hekma. Abu Elwafa, the local agent, withdraws the amount deposited from the bank and distributes it as the international agent instructs him. This process is carried out for a certain fee lower than those charged by banks. Many people prefer to send money

through this informal process because it is cheaper than the bank and faster than the visiting friend. I asked Abu Elwafa about why he selected to become an agent rather than a migrant. He replied “why should I travel if I can make money while I am staying in the village with my family and friends?” He continued, “I have a lot to do here as well. I go to the field every morning, and spend the evening with my friends. We drink tea and talk. I also go to the bank once or twice a week to pick up the money and distribute it.” His ability to work as an agent in the village is due to his good reputation, he said “everyone in the village knows me, my family and that I do not need the money, so they trust me as much as they trust my cousin in Qatar.” Abu Elwafa, in his forties, is known for his honesty, good manners and seriousness. I asked him how he started his business and he corrected me “this is not business it is a service I do for my friends and neighbors.” He does not think of his business as such, because he does not have a work place or legal documents for work; however, he gains money. I argued with him that as long as he gains money it is considered business. He said “I only take a small amount that covers my transportation to and from the bank. I also do not force anybody to send the money through me.” He said that his father was a migrant and used to send him the money through his friends who visited them irregularly. He used to wait few weeks before the money made it home. After he finished high school, he opened a bank account and finally persuaded his father to open an account as well in Qatar so he can remit to him directly through a regular transaction. “It was like a revolution,” he said. After a while his father’s friends (who preferred not to open bank accounts) started to give his father the money and he sent it to Abu Elwafa to distribute it. “I was a good son, and I followed my father’s instructions carefully. My father did not want me to travel and work with him because he wanted me to stay in the village, receive the money, stay with my family and supervise the land.” As Abu Elwafa states, many migrants do not open bank accounts

because they will not use them. They barely have money to live with after they have sent the lion share home to their families to build the house or buy more land. I asked him how he knew that people trust him. He said, “Nobody calls me to check if his money arrived or not, because before he calls the money would have been delivered to his family already.” Other people tried to do the same job that Abu Elwafa does but they were not as effective and fast as he is. Thus, they did not last long. Abu Elwafa is an example of the community’s response to the changing social and economic structure of the village. Many families do not have an older male to take care of financial issues or to deal with governmental institutions while men are away, hence money agents (runners) emerged to fill this gap and facilitate the process for all.

Cargo Service:

Another job that has emerged is “everything delivery.” This job has the same flexibility but it is more profitable. Older people pointed out to me that these jobs have emerged around ten years ago when it was hard for misafreen to send money and items such as furniture, but now the younger generation is more educated and more creative.

The service of transferring in-kind remittances from misafreen in Qatar or Kuwait to their families in Hekma is called cargo service or “everything delivery.” Since all migrants want to send goods, clothes, and electronic devices to their families in Hekma, and sending in-kind remittances are from the Gulf to Hekma is relatively expensive, some people specialized in transferring these goods against a certain fee depending on the size and weight of the transferred items. Zohy (2009, p. 19) notices a similar service among Egyptians in France and Italy. “Cargo travelers” are not migrants, but they travel to Qatar or Kuwait very frequently to collect the items that migrants wish to send to their families, write down their names and phone numbers and

within few days they return to the village with these items to be distributed. Although the fee is determined by weight, it is usually negotiated between the “delivery man” and the migrant. Some families prefer to pay the “delivery man” after he delivers the items, while some “delivery men” refuse to take the item before it is paid for. They explain that it takes a lot of money and effort to transfer huge items such as furniture, fridges, air conditioners, cookers and many other things, and they pay taxes and extra weight at the airport. Sometimes people send small items that they cannot send via mail or banks such as medication, certificates and important papers. The only way for sending these items immediately is the cargo service. Delivery travelers refused to meet with me, and answer my questions; however I managed to interview one of their wives. Um Saad is a busy housewife in her thirties who invited me to her house when her husband refused to meet me. “My husband is very ambitious” she said, and stressed that her husband does not want to travel and stay away from his family, but rather he wants to make a living out of traveling and delivering items. Like with Abu Elwafa, Um Saad insists that what her husband does is a “service” not a job. She explains that any job has to be regular and with a stable salary, but her husband’s services are not very regular and he does not get a fixed salary at the end of every month. Money agents and cargo travelers do not accept to do this service to people they do not know, their networks consist of families and friends. They also do not deliver to other villages even if it is a neighboring village, because each village has its own agents and customers.

Money delivery and cargo services are very common in migratory villages, and delivery men are known to everyone and their services are considered convenient for everyone. Nonetheless, there are many other official options available for remitting to Hekma such as banks, money transfer companies and the post office. Misafreen maintain good connections between them in Qatar or Kuwait. The wider the misafir’s social circle gets, the more often he

can remit to his family. A misafir usually calls his friends to tell them that he is visiting the village and ask if they have something to send to their families. He expects to deliver more than four items to his friends' families free of charge. Doing this, he is sure that his friends will return this favor letting him remit with them when they visit home. Thus, Hekma people do not miss a chance to remit to their families in Hekma.

Who Receives Remittances?

Hekma is not completely empty of men, even though some women receive remittances directly from their husbands. Despite the assumption that men tend to remit to their male family members and female migrants remit to female relatives (mothers or sisters), remitting behavior in Hekma depends on the structure of the household. If the wife lives in a nuclear family, she receives remittances directly rather than the one living in extended household who shares them with her in-laws. According to the fact that the majority of families in Hekma live in extended households, the probability of having a joint budget is higher. Wives do not favor this, but they have to accept it until they are able to allocate the money required for building a separate house or apartment for their families.

Two women out of the twenty I interviewed admitted that they receive remittances directly through a bank transaction or through a visiting friend. The rest of the wives in my sample live in extended families, and technically follow the family tradition that puts the older male with the older female in charge of the entire household (Brink, 1991; Zohry, 2002). Sabah and Sabreen live in totally different circumstances but both receive remittances directly from their husbands. Sabah is a university graduate wife of a misafir who returns to her parents' house when her husband leaves. On the other hand, Sabreen is a 45 years old wife of a misafir with primary education; she lives on her own with her two unemployed sons and their wives. The two

women have different reasons why their husbands remit to them and not to other male relatives in the village. “My husband loves me and trusts me because I built the house, and take care of the family when he is not here. I also follow his instructions to the letter,” said Sabreen. Her statement is particularly important because it sets criteria for the reasons why men remit to their wives such as trustworthiness. Sabreen said this to me in front of an audience consisting of her daughters, her daughters-in-law and another woman from the village as if she were teaching us a lesson about married life. It seems that these are the general principles that mothers pass to their daughters. Sabreen’s lecture highlights a crucial connection between love, trust, and remittances. Although women such as Sabreen formally state that they do not know how much their husbands earn, and follow their husbands’ instructions “to the letter,” most of them receive remittances as their husbands realize that they are the person responsible for their children. In contrast, Sabah is a university graduate in her thirties and her husband has a high school diploma. She has a separate apartment where she lives with her husband during his visits, and moves to her family’s house again after he leaves. Sabah’s husband remits to her directly through a bank transaction. “My husband trusts me because I am educated and he trusts how I behave and spend the money,” said Sabah. Her statement also emphasizes the importance of trust in the husband-wife relationship and its connection to remittances. Sabah does not receive instructions on how to spend the money. She can spend it the way she pleases; however, she said “it is a huge responsibility to have money in your hands that represents a price of my husband’s loneliness and alienation in Qatar.”

Responsibilities and connections to extended family members also determine the choice of the remittance recipients. Mona is a wife of a misafer in her thirties whose husband remits to her older sister. Despite the fact that Mona can receive the money from her husband directly, she

explained that her husband decided to send the money through her sister Sodfa, because he does not want her to feel left out. Sodfa is a divorced woman in her forties. She only has primary education; however, she has a bank account and goes to the city regularly to receive the money sent to her. Although Sodfa has been married four times, she does not have children, and thus her family feels responsible for enhancing her self-esteem through assigning economic tasks to her. After all, women's education seems to have less influence on whether they receive remittances or not, because she can receive remittances without dealing with banks or handling written tasks through money agents. Relationships built on trust between spouses are rather more influential.

The Arrival of El-Hadaya (gifts)

Bringing in kind remittances represent a very important social practice in migration. Families and friends wait the annual visit of the misafir to get an imported mobile phone, perfume or clothes. The misafreen are aware of this fact, and most of them feel it is obligatory to give gifts to their family members and friends. Although buying gifts to a big number of people represents an economic burden on the misafreen's shoulder, they are keen on upholding this tradition because it strengthens their family connections and maintains their relationships with their community. Most misafreen come in Ramadan and spend the Eid with their families. Most wives mentioned that everyone in the village thinks that misafreen earn loads of money every month, but the part that only wives and husbands know about is that the misafreen accumulate part of their salaries every month to buy gifts for their families and friends. Wives have arguments with their husbands on the phone about the things they should and should not buy before arrival. More importantly, bringing many gifts reveals the misafreen's ability of consumption. This will be extensively discussed in the next chapter.

The arrival of the misafir loaded with at least three big luggage's bags is always celebrated. However, most misafreen prefer to arrive secretly late at night due to the tradition that they might get envied by neighbors. The tradition in Hekma is that when people see the misafir loaded with luggage's bags at arrival it brings bad luck to the family; hence families of the misafreen always advise them to arrive at night so as to avoid evil eye and envy of neighbors. This arrival is always gossiped about, and people try to guess what might be in these bags. One of the wives said "every time my husband arrives from abroad all my children get very sick." She explained saying, "People envy us because we have money." Envy and gossip are exaggerated among the village community to the extent that everything happens they relate it to envy and evil eye. This tradition is well-established in the village and it passes down from fathers to sons. Although gifts might not be expensive, they still represent a high value gift in the eyes of the family.

The Role of Women in the Process of Remittances

In her study of "Remittances are Beautiful"? Gender implications of the new global remittances trend," Kunz (2008, p 1403) argues that the migration literature is preoccupied by three gender stereotypes about the role of women in the remittances process. One of them is that women are passive remittance receivers who sit back and wait for remittances unlike men who are active remittance senders. She argues that on the contrary, women are more active than men whose role stops at sending remittances. In the same vein, I argue that the process of remittances does not start when men work to gain the money they remit, but it starts when they remit the money and it continues until the recipient spends it. This is not based on a one-sided decision; however it is a complicated process of negotiation and agreement between remitters and

recipients (Ariola, 2007, p.851; Kunz, 2008; Chiodi et al, 2012, p. 1140). It has been stated earlier that most Hekma women do not receive remittances directly; therefore their role begins once they get their share of the money. However, they participate in deciding how much the husband should remit according to their estimated expenses. In the presence of a male member in the household, he becomes responsible for spending the money (Zohry, 2002) but again he has to consult with the *sitt el bayt* because she knows what the household needs. Remittances, as most women expressed, always come with explicit or implicit instructions from the sender on how they should be spent (also see Brink, 1991, p 205). Most migrants want to make sure that their objectives such as building a house, buying land and educating the children are eventually met. Many men in the village complain that their wives do not spend the money the way they instructed them to do. Abu Safaa's wife argues that she followed her husbands' instructions thoroughly, she built a house, and educated their children, two of them are university graduates and the other three have high school diplomas. The tensions in transnational marriages between expectations on the part of the husbands, and the possibilities available to the women in the village to realize the hopes and dreams of their husbands in Qatar or Kuwait, constitute a core struggle in the everyday life in Hekma. In line with Kunz (2008) Hekma wives cannot be considered passive remittance receivers, because they participate in taking decisions regarding the amount sent, and how it will be spent. It is also worth mentioning that most *misafreen* choose the most convenient method to send remittances based on their wives' recommendations. They also remit as often as their wives ask for money, clothes or appliances.

Empowering the Empowered

Women's empowerment has gained much attention lately, especially empowering the "left behind." Researchers are divided regarding whether remittances in particular and migration

in general empower or disempower staying-home wives of migrants. Yet, all of them seem to agree on a fixed definition of empowerment highlighting decision-making, autonomy, making choices, and more importantly controlling resources. In the past, Khafagy (1984), Taylor (1984), Brink (1991), and recently Kabeer (2010) and Khalaf (2008) refer to the power wives gain in the absence of their husbands as the ability to make choices and take decisions regarding remittances and expenditures. Researchers investigate wives' empowerment in rural and poor areas armed with this set of qualities that might not be applicable in these areas according to their social and cultural specificity. Moreover, it is not clear if researchers reflect what empowerment means for those wives or they just go in consistence with the imposed vocabulary on the empowerment mainstream.

Based on the above discussion, in an attempt to avoid homogenizing women's experiences, I explore what empowerment means for Hekma wives. Based on my research in Hekma, wives especially the ones in nuclear families gain autonomy because they have a separate budget. They engage in decision-making regarding expenditures and children's education. On the other hand, although wives living in extended families do not have the same extent of power, they admit receiving their share of remittances which most of them accumulate to realize their aspiration of building their own house. According to the above definition of empowerment, Hekam women are empowered as they gain power and autonomy and make decision in the absence of men. However, wives themselves do not see this as empowering. Instead, all of them agreed that freedom of mobility, education, and salaried employment are more empowering. "I envy those girls with a university degree who have a job and go in and out for work without restrictions," said Mona, a wife in her twenties. As illustrated in chapter two, education is not a competitive goal for girls as they dream of getting married as early as 18 years

old to leave their family house and establish their own families. In addition, once they are married they cannot move outside the house without their husbands' explicit permission even to visit their parents. They are not employed and dream of holding a job that enables them to "see the street and socialize with other people in the community." Most wives complain that they lose connection with their schoolmates upon marriage and feel isolated, marginalized and neglected.

They rather socialize in their houses with their children and their only entertainment activity is watching T.V. In sum, Hekma wives are empowered based on their own definition of empowerment which is the ability to move outside the house, and holding a job. Nevertheless, they are empowered based on the international standards of making choices and taking decision.

Categorizing Hekma wives as empowered by migration and remittances in the absence of their husbands based on the definitions occupying the empowerment field such as making choices, making decisions (Khadafy, 1984; Taylor, 1984; Brink, 1991; Kabeer, 2010; Khalaf, 2008) is not applicable. They are already in power due to the autonomy gained and participation in the household matters. Moreover, they have different criteria of the empowerment they aspire to that spring out of their social and cultural circumstances such as education, and freedom of mobility. Therefore, categorizing them as empowered or not should be according to their own understanding of empowerment rather than according to internationally set criteria concluded from research in other areas with different contexts.

Employment of Sitt El Bayt

Hekma wives do not participate in agricultural work in the field as explained in the previous chapter. They also do not see their extra work in the household as a job they shall be paid for, but rather a duty towards their family. Ariola (2007, p. 853) argues that receiving

remittances is negatively associated with employment in Mexico. In contrast, Binzel and Assaad (2008) Desai and Banerji, (2008) Jamie (2008) and Maharjan et al (2012) argue that migration encourages women to seek salaried employment, even though remittances are negatively associated with hours spent in salaried employment of both men and women. Besides its economic outcome employment has a social value in the eyes of Hekma women as it connects them to their community. In their research in Armenia, Agadjanian and Sevoyan (2013) conclude that if men's migration discourages women's employment, it disconnects them from their community.

On the other hand, wives in Hekma do not seek salaried employment for many reasons. First, they receive remittances and therefore they are not vulnerable to poverty. Second, there are no available jobs at Hekma as it is a small village and women are not allowed to travel to the closest town every day for work. Third, most women have secondary education and the university graduates get married early and their husbands do not allow them to work. Fourth, traditionally, women are brought up on the principle that the public sphere is reserved for men and it is not appropriate for women to be seen in public. Finally, the available jobs in Hekma are only in the agrarian sector and do not absorb the huge number of unemployed males. Although there are schools in Hekma, most teachers are males and the rest of females are from other villages. As a result, wives do not have competitive options that encourage them to seek employment outside the house.

Moreover, an important character of being *sitt al bayt* is being unemployed and staying-home mother. Knowing that it is socially preferred that women stay home, it is also part of the social aspiration of belonging to the middle class. Wealthy families do not allow women to work outside the house out of the understanding that are not in need for money. Adopting this thought,

most misafreen prevent their wives from working outside the house. Most wives as well help in shaping the men-only public sphere as such by waiving their right in employment and enjoying the public sphere for the sake of *sitt el bayt* as a socially higher category than working women. Nonetheless, they blame the village tradition on restricting women's movement outside the house and declined employment opportunities for them.

However, most young educated wives in Hekma (in their twenties) feel that employment is the only way of realizing their aspirations of a having social life outside the house. Salwa was the only employed young woman I met in Hekma. She works at the health unit, and she explained that her job is considered "appropriate" within the moral economy of the village. Women might seek employment if the job is considered appropriate (Binzel and Assaad, 2008). Appropriate in Hekma means a job in a place where there are other women workers, follow fixed working hours (only during the day), and work in the same village. Salwa as well as young women who pursue university degrees are the only ones who are allowed to go out frequently. On the contrary, some wives did not welcome the idea of women's work explaining that even if they have a job, they might have to leave it when their husbands migrate so as to take care of the household. They also complained that they barely have free time after they are done with their housework. Louhichi (1997) found an evidence that wives of migrants often cease work when their husbands migrate because their hours of work in the household significantly increase and to keep remittance flowing. Given that Hekma wives are divided regarding seeking salaried employment, they all agree that it connects them with the community and thus they feel empowered.

Remittances and Power

Migration redistributes roles and power in the household, and women often find themselves in charge of replacing men in performing the everyday tasks in the household. Cash remittances are one of the things that represent a struggle of power especially in extended households. Who can receive them? Who decides on how to spend them? While the literature on remittances is extensive, for the sake of this argument I want to draw on two strands in these debates. Khalaf (2009) and Lopez-Ekka et al (2011) connect control over remittances to the ability to make autonomous decisions in the household. Assad and Binzel (2009) argue that remittance economies lead to financial dependency and vulnerability on the part of the recipients, which, Binzel and Assaad (2008), Desai and Banerji, (2008) Jamie (2008) and Maharjan et al (2012) suggest increase the tendency of receiving families to seek salaried employment. The question that I explore further in this chapter is how the much desired formation of a nuclear family by young women in the context of Hekma can reach economic independence from extended households given the dense of social and familial webs in Upper Egyptian village life. All interviewed wives stated that a separate budget is inevitable to be independent from the extended household. In addition, as my fieldwork in chapter two suggests residential independence is also important for wives to gain control over their husbands' remittances and allow them to make decisions regarding expenditures. In Hekma financial independence is always partial, that is while women eventually become socially independent in their separate households, they remain vulnerable to stress within the context of their marriages and remain economically dependent on their husbands' remittances. Even though, wives are still able to perform their households' tasks under the previously explained social and cultural stress of being unemployed and socially isolated to some extent.

Unlike the findings of Brink (1991) and Taylor (1984) in their field work in rural Egypt that the power women gain in the absence of their husbands is restored after their return, I found that wives do not lose power or control over resources upon the return of their husbands. They rather sustain this power by becoming supervisors to their husbands. They become experienced in managing their households and raising their children. It is also worth mentioning that some wives told me that their husbands praise the decisions they take in their absence. Wives always talk about their skills in saving money and making right decisions concerning their household and investment for the future of their children.

Khadra, Shereen, and Um Hind are good examples of partially independent women. They are describes as such not only because they depend on the remittances they get from their husbands, but also because they run their households and manage their businesses with the help of their male relatives such as sons, brothers and cousins. When I asked Shereen if she considers herself independent, she responded without a moment of hesitation “As long as I do not need anything from anyone, I am independent. I do not beg anyone to spend anything on me. My husband has to send me money because of the children.” She and her husband save their money together, and she knows every pound he has. She is confident that as long as her husband earns money, she is never going to become dependent on anyone else, because according to her depending on her husband is not dependence. In brief, remittances and migration in general allow women to replace men and take charge of their households, where they establish their nuclear family and control their own budget. Given that power is redistributed in the household, women do not lose it upon their husbands’ return. They rather maintain it and feel self-confident and independent.

At the end, this chapter explored the process of remitting as it is considered a social process of negotiation between the remitter and the receiver. Remittances are a great resource of foreign currency for Egypt as it ranks fifth among remittance receiving countries (World Bank, 2012). Remittances also represent the only monetary resource for most households in Hekma, it is important to highlight how they sent and received, who receives them, and their role of redistributing power in the community. The way remittances are sent today is different than twenty years ago when banks were the only safe way of transferring money. Today there are more options of remitting such as money transfer companies, direct transactions and money agents. As explained earlier in the chapter, runners or money agents fill the gap of delivering the money faster and with a nominal fee compared to the bank. This method is considered more convenient in Hekma especially among illiterate people and the elderly as they do not have to handle any written tasks in governmental institutions. Given that runners are trustworthy because they are wealthy and landowners, they control the money of misafreen which in return adds to their power and enhances their social position in the village. Moreover, cargo service is very similar to the money transfer but for a higher fee depending on the size and weight of the item. Buying gifts to a big number of people represents an economic burden on the misafreen's shoulder; however, the misafreen are keen on upholding this tradition because it strengthens their family connections and maintains their relationships with their community.

The methods of remitting are numerous; however, the receiver is one and defined according to the structure of each household. Most wives do not receive remittances directly as they live with their in-laws; meanwhile wives in nuclear families receive remittances directly and separately from their husbands' families. As a result, most wives gain autonomy and power in the absence of their husbands.

Wives' empowerment is structured around three main elements in Hekma, education, salaried employment and freedom of mobility. Although wives of misafreen are considered empowered in terms of the international criteria of women's empowerment as they make choices, participate in making decisions and have an independent budget, they do not consider themselves empowered. This is because they define empowerment differently according to their own social and cultural context. Even though holding a job is considered empowering, the agrarian environment of Hekma does not offer opportunities for young women to join the labor force. On the other hand, some wives prefer to be *sitt al bayt* over working outside the house due to its social indication of being wealthy and belonging to a higher class. Migration redistributes power in the household and assigns new roles to wives in the absence of their husbands. Wives utilize this to gain power and experience in managing the household; therefore they sustain this power after their husbands' return. It is significant to note that a separate budget and residential independence are the main prerequisites of power in Hekma.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONSUMPTION VERSUS INVESTMENT

The links between remittances, consumption and investment has been extensively studied in many countries. Moreover, recent studies connect remittances to the development of sending countries. Yet, the connection between remittances and development is largely understudied in Egypt. As discussed in the previous chapter, remittances can be in cash or in kind. Most studies emphasize the role of cash remittances to the household's economy. Since the basic unit for studying the economy of a country is the household, this chapter focuses on the household economy to analyze consumption and investment behavior in the village of Hekma. For that, I depended on evaluating the expenditures of remittances relying upon recipients' explicit reporting of how remittance income was spent. Therefore, it is important to provide some definitions before explaining the different ways of spending remittances. Household development is understood as a long-term process intended to improve the household's quality of life. Household economy, however, refers to short-term daily activities for survival; unquestionably, these activities will determine future development potential (Taylor, 1999 cited in Jimenez, 2009). Households' heads are responsible for allocating money for consumption and investment. Jimenez (2009) shows that there are different types of consumption based on spending objectives. Ordinary expenditures have a short term impact, such as food, clothing, housing and transport. Meanwhile, expenditures with long-term impact such as education and health care are called investment in human capital, but land and motors are considered investment in physical capital (Jimenez, 2009). Consuming food and investing in education have gained much attention lately, and they will be highlighted later in the chapter.

Furthermore, in an attempt to explain the changes in consumption behaviors of migratory households, researchers compare consumption patterns of remittances-receiving households to non-receiving ones in different countries. Ariola (2007) argues that consumption patterns are different in the two households. Quite the reverse, Zarate-Hoyos (2008), Jimenez (2009) and Koc and Onan (2001) argue that consumption of remittance-receiving households is not significantly different from non-receiving ones.

In sum, most studies (Jimenez, 2009; Bui and Kugler, 2011; Koc and Onan, 2001; Ngyen and Winters, 2011; Zarate-Hoyos, 2008; Quisumbing and McNiven, 2010; Yasmeeen at al., 2011) are based on household surveys which do not precisely explain why remittances are spent in a certain way. Moreover, most studies especially in respect with consumption patterns ignore the local factors (culture-society) and personal circumstances among which decisions of spending are made (Koc and Onan, 2001), therefore ethnographic studies are required to explain these factors in their cultural and social context. The previous chapter discussed the various factors involved in the process of sending and receiving remittances. This chapter discusses the social and economic impact of remittances on consumption in Hekma at the household and the community levels. It explores the various types of consumption as well as investment available in Hekma.

Gendering Remittances Spending

Debates on gendered remittance spending have been subject to a critical revisiting in the past few years. Globally, the trend is that men tend to invest in physical capital (house, land), whereas women invest in education and health care (Kugler, 2011; IOM, 2010; McEvoy, 2008; Ariola, 2007; Rahman et al, 2009; Ennaji et al, 2008). Most of the recent debates have

questioned the impact of these gendered remittances on national economies, especially the privileging of physical capital over human capital investment. Kunz (2008, p. 1403) in her recent work has changed the terms of the debates that have focused exclusively on national economies, and asks “What does “better” use or more effective use of remittances mean? Who determines the criteria for a more or less effective use of remittances?” Bui and Kugler’s (2011) paper title starts with the question “Are remittances in hands of women more effective? Evidence from Vietnam.” They found evidence that money in hands of women has a different effect on the outcome. Remittances under the control of women result in improving health, less employment for the elderly, increased household expenditures in all categories, as well as increased business equipment. Kunz (2008) argues that the effectiveness of spending remittances largely depends on the context and the objective of spending instead of the gender of the spender.

In Hekma both partners, men and women, have three shared dreams for their future education, house, and land. At the same time explicit questions regarding the gendering of investments in the village, provides a more complex picture than the “education, housing, land” list that my informants mentioned categorically in initial conversations. Male recipients tend to invest in building the house, buy land and invest in agricultural cash crops and cars. For example, Abu Rafaat, a father of a misafir in his sixties, invested most of the money sent to him in opening a grocery store because “money brings money,” he said. Abu Rafaat believes that it the most effective way for spending the money is on generating a small business or on buying a car to help him in bringing goods to his store from the neighboring town. Abu Rafaat does not like to spend on the household’s furniture and appliances; he thinks that spending on these things “never ends.” Since most men think of building a house with several floors (for their sons), buy cars and land, many migrants tend to remit to their fathers to give some amount to their mothers

to spend on herself and the household. At times it gets problematic when the son gives instructions to his father on how to spend the money. Many sons prefer not to explicitly instruct their fathers on how to spend remittances because they feel that it is not respectful. Rafaat says, “My father is very sensitive when I instruct him to do something with the money I sent, so I stopped asking. I send some money to my mother secretly to spend on the household and herself, because I know that my father does not give her any money.” Um Rafaat uses the money sent to her by her son to buy household essential, e.g. tables, kitchenware, and blankets. When I interviewed her, she seemed to be uncomfortable with the way her husband spends money, especially because he does not give her “a pound” for the household. She says, “He brings a lot of food to the household because he thinks that it is all what a household might need and forgets about anything else. He does not even bring food to the chickens I am raising.”

Few of the men shared Abu Rafaat’s view on spending. Rida, a wife of a misafir, points out that her husband always asks her to bring fruits and meat to the house. Yet, a good number of the women I interviewed share Um Rafaat’s prioritization of the household. For example, Noura, a wife of a misafir, insists on educating her children not only because this is her husband’s desire, but also because she wanted to give her children the opportunity that she did not have. She said, “I wish there was someone to send me to school, pay my tuitions and does not ask me to do housework.” This does not mean that women do not build houses, buy land, or invest in agriculture, but they tend to prioritize the household. Khadra, for example, sent all of her children to school, built the house, saved money to buy land and recently opened an internet café, which her brother runs for her. She also raises chicken in her yard, and her husband sends her money for buying new clothes for herself and the children. Nevertheless, both parents in Hekma are interested in educating their children hoping for a better future and social position.

Eventually, men and women might have different approaches in spending remittances, but these are not necessarily contradictory approaches. Both are committed to the dream list though the order of priority might be different. What most villagers however agree on, in the words of the old mother of a misafir “women are better in saving and allocating money for investment?”

Are Remittances Invested or Consumed?

Spending remittances is a negotiated process between the sender and recipient (Lopez-Ekra et al, 2011, p 72). This means male senders negotiate with or instruct female recipients on how to spend the amounts of cash they receive. Dealing with remittances as “international wages” (Jimenez, 2009, p. 347) explains that they are spent as any other wage on daily survival consumption. Some households are able to save a little of these wages after their daily expenses are met. The remaining amount is accumulated to be invested. Chiodi et al. (2012) in their study of rural Mexico found evidence that remittances allow for capital accumulation which can be used later in investment. “Productive investment” is defined by Koc and Onan (2001) as spending on building or improving housing, buying land or cattle, and buying consumer goods such as washing machines and televisions. Meanwhile, spending on daily expenses such as food, clothing, and health care and basic subsistence needs is considered “immediate consumption” (McEvoy, 2008; Koc and Onan, 2001; Brown & Ahlburg 1999, p. 326; Adams, 1991, p 705). In line with Koc and Onan (2001) I argue that spending on physical capital or human capital, depends on the socioeconomic status of the recipient, the priorities of the migrant, and the options available for investing. For some people the only way for investing is raising cattle or running a small grocery shop. For example, since the household is run by women in Hekma, they always have a yard where they raise a buffalo, chicken and other domestic animals for their own

consumption. I do not consider investing in goods that are consumed later as investment, especially food but rather as deferred consumption. However, small enterprises, building a house, buying land are considered investment in physical capital. Education and health care are considered investment in human capital (Koc and Onan, 2001).

In Hekma, women (wives, mothers, mother in laws) represent the majority of remittance recipients in the village. However, the money comes with instructions in most cases, women manage to allocate a small amount to enhance the household and raise some domestic animals. Only two of the wives I interviewed showed interest in generating a small business. Many of them expressed a desire of buying more land as a good investment for the future. My informants mentioned that they also would like to buy houses in the neighboring city to enhance their social class and guarantee better living standards for their children. Durables such as washing machines and household equipment have the lion share of remittances in the village. Although some misafreen bring them home from abroad, they represent a major investment in every household. Since most households have domestic animals, and grow vegetables in their fields, immediate consumption of food is low compared to other landless households. These elements will be extensively discussed in the following sections. In sum, remittance recipients in Hekma invest more than they consume. The coming part of the chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is dedicated to the types of consumption in Hekma, and the second one discusses the types of investment and the problems it faces.

Consumption

There is consensus among my interviewees that cash remittances advances their standard of living and therefore their social class rises. Most researchers (de Haas and van Rooji, 2010;

Chiodi et al, 2012; Adams and Cuecuecha, 2010; Ariola, 2007; Wahba and Zenou, 2012; de Haas, 2006; Reichert, 2012) likewise concluded that remittances enhanced the wellbeing of recipient households in various contexts. For example in Tlapanalá, Mexico, Jimenez (2009) shows that remittances are used to buy food and other survival expenditures. More specifically she relied on “Engel’s law in microeconomics which explains how individuals spend their income. “This law states that as income increases, the proportion of income spent on food falls; if the household’s income is low, the expenditure on food is high. In contrast, if income increases, the proportion of expenditure on food falls, expenditure on other goods increases and the household begins to save some proportion of its income” (Jimenez, 2009, p. 332). However, this law does not recognize the personal objectives of remitters and recipients in spending money.

In Hekma, most wives reported that remittances represent a stable monthly income for them besides the agricultural subsidies in case they have agrarian land. Based on my informants’ reporting, most families follow the same behavior of spending and saving regardless of their income size. In other words, the household decides on the amount to be spent on food and the amount to be saved for investment taking into consideration the aspirations of the remitter. In most cases the lion share goes to ordinary expenditures such as food, clothes and medication unless the household is in the middle of building a house or buying land. Most wives also reported that they spent a great portion of their money on the children’s health when they were younger. Since there is no accurate method of measuring the expenditures of households, it is hard to predict the total amount of remittances spent on consumption in Hekma. It differs from one household to another based on the number of misafreen, number of household members, members enrolled in school, and structure of the household. For example, in extended

households with children at school age and more than one misafir abroad consumption of food, clothes and medication exceeds 2000 LE (Egyptian pound) per month now. Meanwhile, nuclear families consisting of only the mother and two children under school age spend approximately more than 600LE per month. Although the strategy of consumption and saving is to some extent the same in most migratory households, there are significant differences between each household in terms of their consumption preferences.

Changing Patterns of Consumption

The flows of money in the village have enhanced the living standards of most migratory families and thus their consumption ability has increased which leads to changing patterns of consumption (Hopkins and Saad, 2004; Bach, 1998; Adams, 1991). Adopting new consumption items is not something new in the twenty-first century. Bach (1998) in her study of Kafr, a village in Lower Egypt, argues that the increased wealth of fellahin and the emergence of the educated class has changed patterns of consumption and led to increasing dependence upon money income. However, her study is in a different time period and context, it suggests that development of the household is an ongoing process which involves adopting new items based on their availability in the market. For example, households were able to purchase buy electronic washing machines twenty years ago instead of washing clothes at the bank of the canal. Now, with the emergence of automatic washing machines, they are everywhere in Hekma migratory houses. Therefore, I argue that consumption patterns are highly influenced by the increased income of remittances-receiving households. In the same vein, Combes and Ebeke (2011) argue that remittances reduce consumption stability of households. In Hekma, consumption patterns are not different only between migratory household, but also between

remittance-receiving households and non-receiving ones which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The new items acquired in migratory households are of a great value as a means of wealth, and they show the consumerism ability of the household (Bach, 1998). Wealthy and landowning families in general, whether migratory or not, splurge with the items they have in their houses. They recognize themselves as the elites of the village not based on education, but rather on the availability of electronic devices, mobile phones, cars, land, and nice clothes. They all add to the social capital of the household.

Female Consumers

Besides their role in the household, women in Hekma are mediators between the misafreen and their community. The things women consume are somewhat different in Hekma, because it related to the absence or presence of men. For example, wives of misafreen never visit the beauty salon if their husbands are not in town. One reason women do not seek these services in the absence of their husbands is that they are afraid to be gossiped about. Traditionally, Hekma women are not preferred to be seen wearing makeup or in nice clothes if their husbands are away, because otherwise people will gossip about their infidelity. Another reason might be the lack of specialty shops in Hekma such as beauty salons, hairdressers, tailors, and other specialty shops because the village is fully dependent on the neighboring town for these services. Since women are not allowed alone outside the house, their access to these services is considered temporarily blocked due to the instructions of their husbands. During my first few visits, I assumed that prices might be higher than wives' capacity, but many wives addressed that prices are good for them. Their access to these services is highly restricted while

their husbands are away, because it is “shameful”. I asked Salwa to explain why it is shameful to look beautiful while your husband is abroad. She said, “We are not used to that. Women should stay home and do not wear makeup while their husbands are abroad.” I attempted to tease out other reasons why women should not take care of themselves while their husbands are away, and Salwa said, “When women look pretty, they might be attractive to other men, which is very shameful here. It was clear that women fear gossip about their reputation because it might lead to divorced. Therefore, they stopped visiting hair salons and wearing makeup and wore the niqab in an attempt to avoid people gossiping about them.

The situation of those wives is very similar to unmarried women who cannot wear makeup or perfume when they go out, because people will say that they are marketing themselves for marriage. Due to gossip, most women prefer to stay home. After few visits I realized that Hekma is a censored community by gossip through phone calls which pushes women to the housework and reduces their engagement in the public sphere.

The Dukan (Grocery Shop)

Two types of shops can be found in Hekma. The formal one is called the dukan (small grocery shop), and the other informal one is the home shop (Hopkins and Saad, 2004, p 236). Although consumption in Hekma is not confined to these types of shops, they are considered a very important feature of the social and economic life there despite their simple structure. During her fieldwork in Upper Egypt, Hopkins and Saad (2004) noted that a large number of these types of shops exist in the village next to one another. They noticed that owners usually hire someone else (female) to sit in the shop while they are in their work during the day. The dukan and the home shop represent a “survival strategy” for most owners. She also noted that the dukan

represents a social spot where people meet and have a small chat with the seller or each other. In addition, women run most of these shops, and their clients are women and children. Informality distinguishes the process of selling and buying in the dukan and the home shop, however the dukan has all the legal permissions to be opened unlike the home shop. Moreover, informality extends to the way transactions happen as most clients (if not all) do not pay in cash. Instead, the seller registers all the transactions in a notebook.

The number of dukans and many home shops in Hekma is small compared to the average consumption and the number of households, especially with the increasing number of children in the village, and their continuous intake of candies and chips. This might explain that people do not spend on immediate consumption. Most of the shops in Hekma do not represent a “survival” source of living for their owners except for one or two. Only men run the shops I visited because women are socially prevented from the public sphere, and clients are either men or children. Moreover, owners do not hire someone to sit in the shop, but rather they run it themselves or a member of the family (usually the younger brother). Informal transactions are the common denominator between dukans and home shops as most of the transactions registered in a notebook as well as the amount due. Clients pay a sum at the end of every month and the rest is added to the next month.

What does the dukan look like? What does it sell? Why the number of dukans is less than home shops? The dukan requires various legal permissions including the license of the place to be opened as well as license from the health ministry. Given all these procedures for opening a dukan, many people prefer to open unofficial home shops. The dukan is as small as a room in the ground floor in the house of the owner with wooden and glass shelves. Most owners have backdoors in their mini markets to access their house as a shortcut. I came across two dukans in

Hekma and they sell similar goods. Dukans offer what sells in the village, for example chips, candy, soft drinks, juice, yoghurt, gum, and exclusively fireworks in Ramadan and Eid for children. They also offer what any household might need for everyday consumption such as detergents, candles, baking ingredients, sugar, oil, tea, and other basic needs. Because the village is small and people know each other, credit selling (al hisab) is very common. The owner keeps a notebook in which he registers the amount due each family every time they purchase something and the family pays a sum each month. This credit might never end, but the owner never doubts that he will be paid because he knows his clients and “trusts” them (Saad, 2004, p 239). However, some people prefer to pay in cash.

People open home shops due to the complicated process of opening a dukan, which is expensive and takes too long. The village size and the infrequency of commercial and health inspection campaigns allowed the emergence of many home shops in Hekma. Home shops sell fresh vegetables and fruits besides groceries in general. Home shops is a social place for old men to sit together, talk and drink tea, and the owner is usually an old man in his seventies. Children, sent by their mothers to buy groceries, play and socialize with other children around the shop area. The structure of the home shop is simple. An old man was sitting on a chair next to his house and beside him, there was a wooden dikka (sofa) stuffed with all kinds of vegetables and fruits. People say that he has a small yard and he sells what he grows and his wife is helping him too for survival. People buy his groceries not only because they want to help him, but also because his groceries are always “fresh and clean.” Many others say that he is “cheaper than going to the souq (grocery market) in the city. I concluded that people have choices regarding what to buy and where. It does not make any difference to buy from an official (dukan) or unofficial (home shop) shop in terms of consumption except for prices. Dukas, especially the

ones selling green groceries are relatively expensive than the informal ones due to taxes, electricity costs and transporting goods from the town to the village.

In sum, consumption in the village is not confined to the above mentioned shops. Many people prefer to shop in the neighboring town where there are more options. Dukans and home shops are not only commercial places, but people consider them social spots as important as the café that are only for men. They also do not represent a survival strategy for their owners. People who open these shops are not necessarily poor or in need for money. “Most people open a dukan for their younger son as to engage them in the households instead of standing on the streets and harass women,” a mother said. Transactions in these shops are based on connections and trust. These social spots are part of the everyday life scene in Hekma that migration and remittances have little impact on.

Migratory Households Have “Something Different”

There are significant differences between migratory and non-migratory households in Hekma. Thanks to remittances, it enhances the living standards of recipients. In his visits to migrants’ hometowns in Sohag, Zohry (2002) describes remittance-receiving households as having “something different” from households that do not have a family member working in Cairo. The difference that migratory households share is the wider range of consumer commodities. Although the setting and context are different, Zohry’s notes are evidence on the role of remittances in enhancing the social and economic living standards of remittances-receiving households. During my walk in Hekma, it was easy to distinguish the more affluent migratory households by their cement and redbrick facades, painted ceilings, colorful ceramics and carpets inside, along an assemblage of washing machines, air conditioned units, water coolers, ovens and other electronic appliances. Clothes, perfume and imported foods from the

Gulf are exhibited and consumed in social settings. Not all remittance-receiving households in Hekma are economically and socially equal. The amount of remittances a migrant is able to send, the differential expenditures and financial commitments within the household account for significant distinctions while retaining “something different.” Um Hind, a wife of a misafir, has no painted walls in her house, the floors are not tiled, and the house is modestly furnished. Um Hind has three sons and one daughter, and they are all university graduates. Um Hind and her husband spent everything they have to afford a better education to their children. “My children’s education is our land and house,” said Om Hind. Spending on decorating the household and furnishing it was not more important to her than achieving her dream of educated children. Given the small size of the village, it was difficult to find households that did not have a single migrant abroad. Non-migratory households often have a daughter or a sister that is married to a misafir who usually sends them the “something different” be it perfumes, Khaliji abayas or galabeyas, shoes, wristwatches, makeup, and many other items. Given the density of the built infrastructure of the village, social ties between households remain close, except for the previously mentioned Kuwaiti villas in the eastern part of the village.

Besides the modern painted houses and nice furniture in migratory households, they are distinguished for the preparations they do before the misafir visits home. The day of the visit is predetermined and negotiated between the misafir and his wife. Most misafreen come during the last week of Ramadan to spend the Eid with their families. Wives helped by their female relatives start unpacking the linens and curtains of the entire house, clean and mop floors. They also decorate the house with artificial flowers and uncover furniture. Non-migratory households never witness these preparations because they do not have any visiting misafreen. They only have the routine clean up before the Eid. Some wives of misafreen raise chicken particularly to

be consumed during their husbands' visit. Children are rarely left out to play on the street while their fathers are home. They are always clean and wearing nice clothes. The household transforms entirely for the visit of the misafir. Wives try their best to please their husbands and ensure them that their dreams are becoming true while they are home. Therefore, they are keen on providing a clean and generous life to their husbands avoiding disputes and problems. This visit sustains connections between husbands and wives, as well as misafreen and their community. Wives are aware that it is once a year, therefore they do not mind to exert extra effort to pamper their husbands as long as it does not last longer than a month. Husbands as well usually expect extra attention during their visit, because it is the only time when they can enjoy family life, and more importantly the money they send. During his stay the misafir must schedule visits to his family members and his friends. He is also keen on spending much time with his wife and children. Both, wives and husbands do their best to ensure each other that they are working hard towards achieving their dreams of a generous family life, educated children and prosperous future.

Investment

Most researchers argue that remittances are often invested (see Ariola, 2007; Chiodi et al., 2012; Cuong and Mont, 2012; Bui and Kugler, 2011; Quisumbing and McNiven, 2010). Wahba and Zenou (2012), Reichert (1993), Yasmeen et al. (2011) and de Haas (2006) argue that most remittance recipients generate small businesses. In Hekma, most recipients invest in physical capital such as building the family house, and expanding their land. However, they also spend on education and healthcare. One of the wives estimated more than 50% of the cash she receives is spent on her children's health and education every month. Other wives also supported her estimation.

In their research in rural Mexico, Chiodi et al. (2012) noted that remittances accelerate cash accumulation. In Hekma, likewise remittances allow for cash accumulation and therefore encourage investment in productive assets. Moreover, people compete in accumulating cash to buy more land and build new houses. As mentioned in the second chapter, it is well established since the rise of the middle class and landowning more land means a better social class in Hekma, therefore people accumulate capital to expand their land and households. Misafreen look forward to buying a house or land in the neighboring town, because it brings more cash when renting them. They rent their houses and flats to other middle class people from Nag' Abdelrahman because prices are much higher compared to Hekma. It is worth mentioning that Hekma people are known to other villages for their wise use of money especially in real estates. The majority of misafreen invest in buying or building houses in Nag' Abdelrahman hoping for a better social life in the urban side and more profitable capital investment. Moreover, building a house in the town is considered a great step towards urbanization for most villagers. That is why most misafreen dream of and compete to achieve a middle class life in the town. The following sections illustrate the types of social and physical capital investment available in Hekma.

Social Capital (Human Capital) Investment

Hekma people invest in their social capital in three ways, migration, education and healthcare. As for migration, tasks are often distributed on male members of the family, so some of them have to migrate to bring cash, while others stay home to cultivate the land, run the household, build the house, and be responsible for many other household chores. Binzel and Assaad (2008, p. 7) noted the same household strategy in their study in Egypt as the household decides to send one member abroad in order to accelerate capital accumulation, while the non-migrant members use the capital to set up a family business. The process of investing the

members of a household is not recognized as investment in the village, because this is how they construct social categories. Instead, this is considered a duty for the prosperity of the entire family. Women are also invested in the household to cook, clean, wash, raise domestic animals, and rear the children.

As for education, previous studies argue that recipients spend most of the remittances they receive on their children's education (Kugler, 2011; IOM, 2010; McEvoy, 2008; Ariola, 2007; Rahman et al, 2009; Ennaji et al, 2008). In Hekma, as noted in chapter 2, rural women who did not have the chance to complete their education tend to send their children to school particularly girls, because they want them to be well-educated and therefore become a source of "honor" to the family. "I will educate my children to the last pound I have," said a misafir in his fifties. It is important to note that my informants showed an irresistible desire to educate their children even if it costs a fortune. It is also remarkable that due to the changes in recognizing educated people as the elites in the village and thus in a higher social class. Therefore, mothers expressed a desire to educate their daughters as equal to sons. In contrast, thirty years ago, Abaza (1987) noted that mothers do not tend to send their daughters to school due to their repetitive failure and because they want them to get married early.

Men in my sample were more concerned about child schooling than women do. In addition, fathers always blame mothers on their children's failure or bad grades. The problem is that the misafreen expect too much from a lonely young wife with basic education. Studying with the children and helping them with the homework is another burden added to the mothers' exhausting everyday housework (Ali, 1998). Karima, a wife of a misafir in her thirties, is a good example of those concerned mothers about their children's education. Her husband always emphasizes that he is ready to educate his children whatever it costs. He always encourages his

sons and daughters to go to school although it is miles away from home. Hence, Karima has arranged for a taxi to take them to school every day. Unlike Karima's husband, Hind's ex-husband dreams of different future for his children. Although they did not have children, every time Hind asks him about his plans for them he constantly says, "I will not send them to school; I will send them to the field once they can walk." His answer was one of the reasons they are divorced now. Some fathers dream of a better future for their children while others do not. Moreover, it is important to note that misafreen who had at least technical diploma seemed to be more inclined to child schooling than fathers with primary education. Some fathers want their sons to pursue a university degree to get a better job in case they emigrated. If the migrant is educated and his sons are educated as well, their chance of getting office work and better salary. Given the above discussion, I argue that education represent a long-term investment at the family level. Many families dream to have a doctor, engineer or even a teacher among their children. Meanwhile, others think of their children's higher education as a good opportunity for a better salary abroad.

Health care is the third type of investment in social capital in Hekma. Generally speaking health services in Egypt are available for everyone in the public sector hospitals against nominal prices, and for rich people in private hospitals for much higher prices. "Why would a rich family come to this health unit? Only poor people come here" said doctor Marwa when I asked her about the economic level of her patients. She was annoyed that her long hours of service in the unit are not profitable as most of the time patients get services for nominal prices because they are poor. Marwa thinks that she is less fortunate compared to her colleges who have private clinics, as they serve rich people and gain more money. I assumed that most people in the village are poor, but she corrected me saying "there are very rich people here, but they trust private

clinics as they provide better services.” It is clear that rich people prefer private clinics not only because they trust their services, but also to show their ability to seek these relatively expensive services. Health is the thing that most people do not hesitate to spend on. Visiting private clinics reflects how the family is careful about its members’ health.

The health unit is one of the branch offices of the ministry of health where basic medical services are provided such as vaccines, family planning services, pregnancy follow-up and other services. There are three doctors who run the unit in Hekma with a number of employees. The unit serves from 8am in the morning until 1pm in the afternoon. Restricted working hours and low prices discourage the rich to seek these services. People in Hekma believe that services are better in private clinics because they charge more money, and doctors are more specialized. The unit also keeps files of its visitors and provides them with free services. Thus the unit became the place where the poor seek free medical services. Therefore, the rich always visit private clinics. I interviewed two doctors working in the health unit who asserted that they were optimistic about working in this village in particular due to its increasing migration rates. They both assumed that people there are exceptionally rich and therefore they will visit the unit very often and pay tickets which go to the doctor’s pocket. Unfortunately, they were shocked that most unit visitors are poor, or old and thus they do not pay for tickets. In better words, the cashier (Nagwa) does not make them pay because she knows them personally and she is sure that they are poor. Doctor Mohammed moved a week after I arrived to the village because he believes that this unit is not “profitable” and he does not earn as much as his colleges do in other villages. The bottom line is that remittances enhance the health of the members of receiving families. Remittances also allow them to seek better services provided by private clinics in Nag’ Abdelrahman and abandon the health unit due to its cheap and unreliable services. On the other hand, these cheap services

always attract people from the lower social class amongst the community. Therefore, upper and middle class people reserve their social class by avoiding the health unit.

Physical Capital Investment

This section presents the types of projects that receivers invest remittance in and the problems they encounter. It is important to note that remittances have significantly led to poverty reduction and allowed for cash accumulation so that recipients can invest in a small businesses. In their study in Egypt, Wahba and Zenou (2012) noted that overseas returnees are more likely to become an entrepreneur than non-migrants; meanwhile, social networks increase the probability of entrepreneurship for non-migrants but not returnees. As discussed before, the strategy of households confines the contributions of misafreen to providing cash, so that the members staying home can invest channel it into small projects. Coming from the culture of the dukkan and home shop, Hekma entrepreneurs do not usually invest in major productive projects. They rather invest in mini markets, specialized shops such as mobile accessories, groceries, cafes and restaurants. Another very common type of no-risk investment that most misafreen prefer is buying houses and buildings with several floors and rent the ground floor for shops. This way they guarantee that a monthly salary from the rentals in the ground floor and the other floors are divided into apartments where they can live and save the rest to their children. Others prefer to buy agrarian land and rent it to other farmers to cultivate it.

Investment however is fraught with difficulties and constraints especially for the misafreen who do not have male relatives to take care of their businesses while they are away. “None can take care of my project when I am away. I prefer to deposit my money in the bank until I come home to buy a land or an apartment,” a misafir said. In addition, lack of infrastructure in Hekma represents an obstacle towards investment. Based on people’s stories,

the restricted social space of the village and its full dependence on the neighboring town, even with the availability of the same goods in Hekma, does not encourage entrepreneurs to waste their time and money in a “non-profitable” village. Another misafir said, “what type of business can be opened here (in Hekma) people do not buy any food from outside. Business in Hekma is not profitable because the village is small and most of its inhabitants depend on Nag’ Abdelrahman in their everyday needs of food, clothes and other supplies. Villagers also visit Nag’ Abdelrahman and other villages very frequently, maybe for several times daily. Therefore, any business in the village will not be as competitive as the town regarding services and variety. Thus the closer the village to the urban, the less services and shops it has.

Moreover, generating a small business in Nag’ Abdelrahman is a challenge because of the competition they have to face with other stores of the same kind. However, some of them do open a store only if they have an experienced male relative who lives in the town to manage it. Most Hekma people have primary education; therefore they do not have any experience in business management especially returnees who have been away for several years. As a result of the previous discussion, many misafreen prefer to save in a bank account until they arrive to invest in land or building more floors in their house.

Urbanization and the Nag’

It also has been assumed that “rural migrants who had urban jobs abroad do not wish to return to their villages and will probably use their savings to establish themselves in Cairo or in other urban centers and thereby contribute to rural-urban-migration and urbanization in Egypt” (Abu-Lughod 1989 cited in Reichert, 1993, p. 48). Moving to Nag’ Abdelrahman or any other town is the dream of some misafreen in Hekma, while others are still related to the village

because of their strong connections with their extended families. As discussed above, Hekma people aspire to invest in buying and building houses in Nag' Abdelrahman as insurance for their children's future. Better services, shopping places, leisure activities and noise are more attracting to villagers who come from smaller villages. Hekma women like to enjoy the public sphere which most of them are deprived from. They also think of enrolling their children in better schools, and enjoying better services. Therefore, wives persuade their husbands to buy apartments in the Nag' where they can move and enjoy an urban and modern life.

Leisure Activities in Hekma:

In Hekma, remaining female members of the household do not use spend remittances on any leisure activities, because they are reserved until their husbands return. Meanwhile, male members enjoy their time the way they please. They often visit Nag' Abdelrahman as it represents a center for leisure and entertainment besides its commercial importance. El Bandar (the urban side) which means Nag' Abdelrahman is where a good percent of Hekma remittances are poured on restaurants, cafés, public parks, hanging out with friends, alcohol shops, and loitering on the street. In addition, the majority of families visit the public park to enjoy their time and spend on food and drinks. For a visit that might happen only once a year, families dress up in nice clothes and ride in their car or in a private taxi. They enjoy the city despite the limits of their consumption even children's consumption of candy are censored by most parents. "I do not buy my children everything they want. If I did, they will never stop asking for more," said a wife of a misafir. These attractions as well contribute to emphasizing preference of the Nag' over the village, which makes the latter "boring" and repellent, which thereby encourages the urbanization move that have been discussed earlier.

Eventually this chapter focuses on the household economy to analyze consumption and investment behavior in the village of Hekma. It provided definitions to the terms used such as consumption, investment, household economy and expenditures and it differentiated between long-term and short-term expenditures. Expenditures with long-term impact such as education and health care are called investment in human capital, but land and motors are considered investment in physical capital (Jimenez, 2009). Moreover, it discussed the assumption that remittances in hands of women result in different outcomes.

Through this chapter I argue that remittances are invested and consumed in Hekma. They are invested in Education and healthcare, houses and land, and consumed in food and household supplies. It also argues that gender has little impact on how effectively remittances are spent, because it depends more on the objectives of the remitter and the possibilities of investment at home. Most families in Hekma spend remittances like a monthly wage on everyday needs and save the rest to invest in raising domestic animals or buying appliances. Others remit to invest in buying a house, land, or generate a small business. Dukans and home shops in Hekma do not represent a source of survival for most families. Due to the lack of infrastructure in Hekma, entrepreneurs prefer to establish their businesses in the town where consumption rates are higher. However, buying a house or land is considered a much safer channel of investment than running a business. In sum, remittance recipients in Hekma invest more than they consume.

Remittances enhance the living standards of receiving families as well as upgrade their social class. Inserting new imported items to Hekma households is considered a remarkable outcome of migration. Imported items such as washing machines, water coolers, televisions, computers, clothes, perfumes and other goods are always celebrated with the arrival of the

misafreen who intend to arrive secretly late at night. They are afraid of being envied by neighbors.

Furthermore, in the absence of their husbands wives are censored through gossip to the extent that they prohibit visiting hair salons, wearing makeup and perfumes and moving outside the house. Therefore all leisure activities are saved until the misafir comes home usually at the end of Ramadan. That is when houses get entirely cleaned up and well furnished, children get dressed up in nice clothes, and wives feel free to wear makeup and perfume.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the impact of male migration on households in contemporary rural Upper Egypt. It explores the following questions: What is the impact of male migration on wives that remain in the village of origin? With migratory males a normalized features in contemporary rural life, what are its effects on the social spaces of the village? How has the remittance economy influenced gendered dynamics between married couples, as well as relationships within households across generations and gender divides? And finally, how have aspirations for a different present and future for households been transformed due to the varied impact of migration?

The gender and migration field has focused on three interrelated domains concerning the impact of male out-migration: (1) the autonomy, decision-making abilities and empowerment of the wives of male migrants (2) the impact of remittances on communities (3) and the links between remittances and consumption and investment. Three arguments emerge throughout the field of gender and migration that are addressed in this thesis. First, male migration has either negative or positive impacts on wives left behind. Second, control over remittances empowers the wives of migrants. Third, consumption or investment behavior of remittances-receiving households is greatly influenced by remittances as it changes consumption patterns and investment possibilities. This thesis engages the above arguments in the context of Hekma, a small village in the governorate of Qena, Upper Egypt. Male out migration is a well-established phenomenon in Hekma where most men migrate to Qatar and Kuwait to work as general laborers and in the service sector. Through utilizing the qualitative methodologies to study this community I came to the following conclusions.

Male out migration greatly influences the social space in Hekma which makes it a distinguished rural village. Young men starting as *tarahil* laborers in the past and turning now to *misafreen* in the Gulf follow their dreams of owning a house, marriage, land and educating the children. *Sitt al bayt* and *misafir* terms are part of the social and economic aspirations that the middle-class of *misafreen* fights for. They also aspire to better living standards for their families back home; however, they experience miserable living conditions in the Gulf. Children's education also represents a priority among fathers and mothers equally especially those who did not have the chance to complete their education. Since the *misafreen* are more able to achieve these aspirations than other young men who work in the village, they became more desired marriage partners. Most families prefer a *misafir* from the same family or any other family than a relative who has a permanent or temporary job in the village. An important fact of preferring a *misafir* over a local worker is the former's ability to provide a separate apartment for his wife be it a separate apartment in his family house or a separate house. Wives always aspire to live in their own house thereby avoiding disputes with their in-laws. The more the economic position of the *misafir* rises, the better his social position amongst his family and friends becomes.

When the husband travels, his wife either stays with her in-laws or returns to her family's house. Wives in separate houses become the *de facto* heads of households through the new roles assigned to them. Therefore they cannot move outside the house without an explicit permission from their husbands. In addition, they are not allowed to work outside the house, and they do not consider their domestic chores worth paying or being considered a "job" but rather a duty they take over until their husbands return. Unfortunately, this lasts for long because husbands come home every year or two for a month and act as guests and do not carry any responsibility towards their children and household.

The change of the social position of unmarried young women to *sitt al bayt* results in expecting new roles and restrictions. Restrictions on women's mobility are positively associated to gossip; therefore women are hardly seen in public. Wives believe that their reputation is ruined and they might get divorced if people gossip about their frequent mobility outside the house. Limiting women's mobility to the domestic sphere is one of the disadvantages of the rising economic and social position of migratory households. Following their aspirations to an upper class lifestyle, most men (if not all) prevent their women from the public sphere and force the *niqab*, even though women maintain social connections with each other and reach out in various occasions.

As mentioned above, the rising social position of migratory households depends on their rising economic position due to remittances. Remittances also represent the only monetary source for most households in Hekma, therefore they play a significant role in redistributing power in the community. Power transfers with money from the remitter to the receiver. This social process involves negotiation and agreement between both sides. Men are always the ones who remit, meanwhile most wives, except a handful number of them, wait to receive their share after the money is distributed between them and their in-laws.

Despite the availability of various ways for remitting such as money transfer companies, and direct transactions, most *misafreen* prefer local money agents known as "runners." Runners or money agents fill the gap of delivering the money faster and with a nominal fee compared to the bank which is more convenient especially among illiterate people and the elderly as they do not have to handle any written tasks in governmental institutions. Runners are considered trustworthy because they are wealthy landowners; hence they have the power of controlling the money of the *misafreen*. This process explains the power directions as well as differences

between social classes in Hekma. It also explains that landownership, capital, big houses and imported items are the criteria of belonging to the upper class. The ability of consuming imported items such as appliances adds to the social position as well. Although buying gifts to a big number of people represents an economic burden on the *misafreen*'s shoulder, the *misafreen* are keen on upholding this tradition because it strengthens their family connections and maintains their relationships with their community. Sending these items is also facilitated through informal private cargo services.

Power inside extended households is divided between the older male and female. In case of nuclear households the wife acquires power in the absence of her husband. The term power here means the ability of making decisions, making choices and controlling resources. This is the equivalent to the definition of women's empowerment by Khafagy (1984), Brink (1991) Kabeer (2005) and Khalaf (2009). Most Hekma wives enjoy these potentials, however they do not consider themselves empowered because they define empowerment differently. For Hekma women, empowerment is manifested in education, salaried employment and freedom of mobility. Regrettably, the agrarian environment of Hekma does not offer opportunities for young women to join the labor force. In contrast, some wives prefer to stay home as *sitt al bayt* category represents one of the middle-class aspirations. Wives utilize their gained power and experience in managing their household; therefore they sustain this power after their husbands' return. It is significant to note that a separate budget and residential independence are the main perquisites of power in Hekma.

Channeling the budget of the household represents a challenge to most families in Hekma. They have to spend on ordinary expenses as well as save some money to be invested to guarantee a better future for their children. Since remittances represent the monetary source of

most families, they are spent as any other wage on short-term impact expenditures such as food and clothes. Meanwhile, some families manage to save some money on the margin to spend on long-term impact expenditures such as education, health care, land and motors. The role of women does not stop at receiving their share of remittances. They negotiate with their husbands how to spend them. Although it has been assumed that women spend money more effectively, my research results do not show significant impact of gender on spending remittances. Spending remittances in a certain way greatly depends on the objectives of the remitter and the possibilities of investment at home.

Migratory families in Hekma invest in extending their households, buying more land, and consume the basic needs as any other household. Some of them also invest in generating a small business in the neighboring town. Opportunities of establishing a business in Hekma are diminishing due to the lack of infrastructure; therefore entrepreneurs prefer to establish their businesses in the town where consumption rates are higher. Despite the lack of small businesses in Hekma, there are dukans and home shops to sell groceries and consumer goods. Although they are a source of cash for their owners, they do not represent a source of survival for most families.

The flows of remittances in Hekma result in enhancing the living conditions of receiving households. A better economic position means a higher social class. Likewise owning imported items such as water coolers, mobile phones, washing machines, computers, clothes and perfumes convey a better social class. Their arrival is always celebrated with the arrival of the *misafir*. The *misafreen* and their families have special preparation for this arrival such as cleaning the entire house, furnishing it, dressing up and preventing the children from playing in the street. Leisure activities are also saved until the *misafir* is home which makes his arrival most waited. The *misafreen* fear envy as much as women fear gossip. They plan to arrive late at night when

nobody is awake to see the loads of luggage they are bringing. They believe that when people see them arriving with loads of bags something bad will happen to them or their children. As for wives, they are censored during the absence of their husbands through gossip to the extent that they prohibit visiting hair salons, wearing makeup and perfumes as well as moving outside the house. Pressure on women in Hekma cannot be translated as a result of the control of husbands over wives, but rather as a response to the social and cultural restrictions imposed on both of them.

The bottom line is that migratory social spaces change constantly which reflects the influence of male migration on space and social and economic life. Everyday life is different in each household, yet some concerns become common denominators among them such as restricted women's movement outside the house, household headship, power, remittances, consumption, and the future of their children. Within the previously discussed circumstances one might think that the younger generation will not become *misafreen*

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