10-2007

Egyptian Workers in Paris: An Ethnographic Account

Reem Saad
The American University in Cairo AUC, REEMSAAD@AUCEGYPT.EDU

Egyptian Workers in Paris: An Ethnographic Account

By
Reem Saad

Paper Prepared for the

Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa

The Forced Migration & Refugee Studies Program
The American University in Cairo, Egypt

October 23-25, 2007

Discussion Paper
Egyptian Workers in Paris: An Ethnographic Account

Reem Saad
Social Research Center-American University in Cairo
reemsaad@aucegypt.edu

I. Introduction[1]

On both sides of the Mediterranean, labour migration from North Africa to Europe is seen as a problem. At the official levels, this problem is mainly treated from a security perspective with the greatest efforts directed at closing the loopholes through which migrant labour manages to reach Northern shores.

Young men from many parts of the "South" go to extreme lengths and bear great risks to get to Europe. This paper addresses the case of Egyptian labour migrants in France. This research attempts to understand this issue from the point of view of the migrants themselves, and in the context of the now chronic problem of unemployment in rural Egypt. It is obvious that the extent of the problem reaches beyond unemployment for youth, especially those with intermediate education, as the dream of travelling to work abroad is a popular fantasy among this group in particular. With diminishing possibilities of travelling to Arab countries, travel to Europe has recently become an attractive option; the realisation of this dream, however, is proving very costly in many ways.

The particular focus of this study is the villagers of the Gharbiya village of Mit Badr Halawa. This village provides a large number of the clandestine workers living in France, many of whom work in the construction sector and in the weekly food

[1] The research on which this study is based was supported by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty, University Of Sussex, funded by DFID, and the Social Research Center and Forced Migration and Refugees Studies, The American University In Cairo. Thanks go to the above institutions as well as all my informants in Paris, and especially to my husband Nasseif Azmy.

markets in Paris. Apart from Mit Badr, there are a number of other Delta villages whose names recur very often in this connection; Mit Badr remains, however, the most prominent.[2] Migrants from the Delta village of Sibrbay have been studied by Detlef Müller-Mahn. My findings on the networks of the Badrawis (people of Mit Badr) and the dynamics of life in the transnational space are very much in line with Müller-Mahn's analysis.[3]

The group I am dealing with is distinguished by the purpose of migration, which is working to make money that is mainly used to improve one's (and one's family's) living conditions at home. One important feature of this type of migration is that, regardless of the actual outcome, the immigrant considers his stay temporary. The purpose of migration is directly related to gender assigned roles and responsibilities in rural Egypt, where the burden of provision for the family is a major defining attribute of "the real man."

The typical profile of members of the most recent wave of these economic migrants is that they are young men with an intermediate-level of education with a certain amount of training usually in building and construction work. They start as apprentices with wages averaging 40 Euros. Within a year or two they acquire the skills that enable them to become full-fledged skilled workers with daily wages ranging between 70 and 100 Euros. This research draws a preliminary map delineating the characteristics of this group/community, and starts to address the question of why this village in particular stands out as an exporter of labour to France.

This paper is conceptually informed by two lines of thinking. First, this study situates itself within the recent body of scholarship on transnationalism and transnational space. I am here adopting the definition proposed by Basch, Schiller and Blanc who see transnationalism as "… the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" and that "(t)ransmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop

[2] For example, an article in the official daily Al-Ahram on labour migration to Europe, Mit Badr Halawa is singled out as an example of a village exporting its men to France. ("Travellers without return". Al-Ahram 19 April 2004)

[3] I subscribe to the usage of 'space' adopted by Müller-Mahn who, following Bourdieu sees it as a "metaphor for social networks" (Müller-Mahn 2005: 1).

subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them *simultaneously* to two or more nation-states." (2000: 7, emphasis added) The group I am dealing with displays a high degree of simultaneity, where decisions, interests and indeed most aspects of life are carried out within networks that span the two worlds. While simultaneity is often taken as a primary obstacle to 'integration,'[4] I am here more interested in its role as an instrument for perpetuating the flow of migrants and enforcing the existence of Badrawis as a strong group.

The second theoretical influence here draws on work on manhood and masculinity, particularly the view that there are a variety of types and styles of manhood even within the same society. (Loizos 1994; Kandiyoti 1994)

II. Methodology and Fieldwork

This research project relied exclusively on qualitative methods, mainly participant observation and in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted in the men's homes and in public places, especially cafes.[5] I attempted to observe and interview the men at their workplaces. This was only possible in the various weekly markets in Paris, being an accessible and open public space. The other main workplace in which my target group is involved are building and construction sites where access was not easy mainly because my informants were not comfortable having a researcher 'hang around' there.

The major part of the fieldwork was conducted in 2004-2005. We made a one-day trip to the village of Mit Badr Halawa in May 2004. The purpose was to deliver letters to the families of two of our key informants and to take pictures and video shots of certain persons and sites in the village that the people in Paris wanted to see.

It is important here to mention that a number of issues that are relevant to this research could be potentially incriminating. Informants were generally justified in their reluctance to discuss things like "new" ways of arriving to France, or ways of

[4] On the importance of this issue in French society, see Duchesne 2003.
[5] I conducted fieldwork accompanied by my husband Nasseif Azmy, a social worker and artist living and working in Paris. He produced a video document on the subject as part of the same research project.

transferring money to the village. In cases when they were forthcoming with information, I did exercise a degree of censorship in order to avert any possibility of incurring any harm on my informants.

III. Egyptians in Paris: The Official Framework

The most obvious problem that faces any research of this type is the lack of reliable (and even unreliable) data. This is mainly due to the fact that we are dealing with mostly clandestine migrants who are, by definition, not registered. The available information based on official national statistics pertains mainly to permanent legal migration, and estimates the number of Egyptians in France at 36,000.[6] The reliability and usefulness of this figure is contested,[7] even by Egyptian officials. The Egyptian Consul General in Paris, Ambassador Nahed Al-Ashri, said that this figure is greatly underestimated, and that the number could not possibly be less than 60,000; she estimates it to be around 100,000. The official figures emanate from consulate registers which only take account of those who register themselves voluntarily. Ambassador Al-Ashry sees that a long tradition of mistrust has characterised the relationship between Egyptian citizens and their Consulate. Among her top priorities when she assumed office in 2002 was to work towards gaining such trust and building stronger links with the Egyptian community in France. She published an appeal in the Egyptian daily Al-Akhbar, one of the most popular newspapers, strongly urging Egyptian citizens to register themselves with the Consulate in order to benefit from the backing and support of their government. This appeal was addressed to those with and without legal status. She then initiated and hosted a series of meetings with "the

[6] Central Agency of Mobilization and Statistics. Quoted in: "Why Do Migrants Leave their Countries" (2003).

[7] A report issued under the auspices of the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration, questions, in particular, "the reliability of national estimates regarding the total number of Egyptians abroad, especially those related to the permanent or semi-permanent migrants who migrate to non-Arab countries". (Contemporary Egyptian Migration 2003 P.36). A similar point is made by Ayman Zohry and Harrell-Bond in: Contemporary Egyptian Migration: An Overview Of Voluntary And Forced Migration". p. 18-19 Country Background Papers. DRC Working Papers Series. (http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working_papers.html.

Egyptian community" which crystallised in the formation of an "Association for the Egyptian Community in France." [8] (see below)

This type of reaching out is commendable and, in many ways, unprecedented. However, it is only understandable that those without legal status will never register themselves anywhere, especially with their Consulate. An illegal immigrant's worst fear is deportation. This is a long and complicated process which cannot be finalised unless the nationality of the deportee is established. Illegal immigrants (of all nationalities) either get rid of, or hide their passports so that their nationalities cannot be identified. In cases where arrests are made, the person is referred to the consulate of their suspected nationality. If that person is registered with the Consulate, then evidence of nationality is there and deportation becomes inevitable.

It is similarly impossible to know the number of Badrawis. Their estimate of their number is most probably highly exaggerated. A figure that they often mention is 4000,[9] which seems unreasonable, given that the total population of the village is 16,813. (CAPMAS. 1996 General Census) The impression that they are "everywhere" comes from their visibility and increasing monopoly over certain jobs, especially in the construction sector and in the weekly food markets. Because in the village, the normal (or rather ideal) career trajectory of young men is to migrate or try to migrate to France, there is an impression that "half of Mit Badr is here."

In addition to that, the exaggerated estimate by Badrawis of their numbers may be related to the perceived impact of Mit Badr on other places in Egypt. Badrawis think that they are the reason for an increased number of Egyptians in France, and that they are responsible for Egyptians being comparable in numbers to other Arabs (Tunisians, Algerians and Morroccans). While this sentiment may be exaggerated, it is true that Mit Badr occupies a special place within the Egyptian 'community' in Paris.

[8] Interview with Her Excellency Mrs. Nahed al-Ashri Egyptian Consul General in Paris. 9 December 2004.
[9] This is also the figure quoted in a newspaper story on Egyptian migration to Europe. (Al-Ahram 19 April 2004)

IV. Networks

One main attribute of the migration enterprise is that the young man who crosses the Mediterranean does not embark on this undertaking as an isolated individual but as a member of a family and other networks back home and, often, at the other side of the shore. It is almost a truism to say that social networks are important among immigrants. Networks of course exist; what is important is the ways in which these networks operate and the exact purposes they fulfil. A main distinguishing feature of the Mit Badr Halawa community in Paris is the strong, efficient and closely knit networks. Here we can talk of 3 types of networks:

The All-Egypt Network

The most formalised version of this network is the recently launched "Association of the Egyptian Community in France" (*Rabitat al-Galiyya al-Misriyya fi Faransa*), an organisation that resulted from the initiative by Her Excellency Ambassador Nahed Al-Ashri, the Egyptian Consul General in France. (Al-Ahram April 11, 2005) According to her, the purpose of this Association is to enhance the weight of the Egyptian community within French society, as well as in Egypt. The Association started its activities about two years before its formal launching during which time it generally concerned itself with issues relating to the question of Egyptians' integration within French society, as well as issues of concern to the settled Egyptian community such as the establishment of an Egyptian school. It is interesting to note that the elected president of this association is Mr Saleh Farhoud, a prominent figure from Mit Badr Halawa.[10]

Despite the importance of this type of institution and its networking functions, it is not the most relevant for the group we are dealing with, those whose often clandestine status keep them away from any official connections. Also, their concerns tend to be immediate and practical like finding accommodation and work. For them, other types of organisations and networks are more important. I will present the case of an informal institution that serves as a focus (and locus) of strong network links among Egyptian workers in Paris. This is the café in Simplon named: the Association of the Sons of Gharbiyya Governorate.

[10] We tried several times to get an appointment to interview Mr Farhoud but it was not possible.

Although surrounded by many of these, this café is not to be compared to the mushrooming Egyptian cafés in Central Paris, which form a new 'fad' on the Capital's entertainment scene and are frequented mainly by Parisian youth who are attracted to the distinctive atmosphere, and drop in for a mint tea and water pipe. The Simplon Café is a real Egyptian coffee shop *(ahwa baladi)*, although it does not look like one. Rather, as a square room lined with benches (*kanaba*), it resembles the guest room (*mandara*) of a village house than a coffee shop. This all-male space is mainly used for leisure in the same way as a traditional Egyptian coffee shop is: smoking water pipe, playing backgammon, watching TV. In this case, the television is always turned on some Arabic channel, either the Arabic Radio and Television channel showing Egyptian movies, or Jazeera, or a sports channel showing an Egyptian football match. Yet it is not only a place for spending free time and getting a taste of 'home'. It is also a place for exchanging important information (mostly on work and accommodation) and for work appointments. Again, in its function as an information centre, it is no different from the traditional coffee shop at home. The place was founded as an Association to look after the interests of Egyptians. It is rented and run by a man from Mit Badr. Its Cairene founder, Hajj Mohamed Ali, is the owner of a next-door travel agency specialised in Egypt tours. According to Hajj Mohamed Ali, this Association/ Café also facilitates locating suitable accommodation. This is an area where information regarding availability is crucial. More importantly, he says that the association acts as guarantor for tenants, thus overcoming one of the main obstacles that face accommodation seekers in Paris. Interestingly, the Hajj emphasises a moral dimension to this place, as it keeps Egyptian youth away from the temptations offered by French society, especially those that may be in contradiction with principles of Arab morality.

The Consulate-based Association and the Association-based café support different types of mobilisation and networking towards specific ends. However, the greatest majority of network-based exchange of support and information are not institutionalised but spontaneous and ad-hoc. The most pertinent example of mobilisation of Egyptians are cases of death of Egyptians. In such cases, the Consulate pays for the repatriation of the body. However, often Egyptians mobilise to collect money to pay the airfare for someone to accompany the body to Egypt, and they also send a sum of money to the family of the deceased in Egypt. This is

apparently a common and standard practice. The sums collected are substantial with figures ranging from 5000 to 10,000 Euros.

The Mit Badr Network

This network is also about information concerning work and accommodation, but also about obligations towards the village in general. The name of this village is always associated with the idea of the loyalty of its people, mainly because the Badrawis in Paris have shouldered a number of projects in the village, the most important of which is starting to establish a sewage system, in addition to building a school, and a health unit. In fact, the previous Mayor of the village used to make special trips to Paris in order to collect money from Badrawis for these matters. When I asked people either from the village or other Egyptians about why they think Mit Badr is so prominent in France they cite this type of collective action as an illustration that the people of this village help each other and have loyalty to their village. Illustrations of this type of network/collective action:

1. *The Sewage System*

The most prominent so-called self-help project carried out by the Badrawis of Paris for their village is collecting money for constructing a sewage system there. A committee in Paris was responsible for the collection, which was aided with a visit from the mayor of Mit Badr to Paris. According to a member of the committee the biggest part of the payment was imposed on the 'patrons:' the bosses, employers, and business owners. Others made payments according to their abilities. The project was only partly realised due to some administrative complications. But the rest of the money remains in a special account in the bank in Egypt.

Apart from being the most significant contribution of the sons of Mit Badr to their village, this case also illustrates two important features of the Mit Badr community in Paris:

- prominence in the village and in Paris are interlinked. The leadership of the community in Paris (the Shaker. family[11]) and their active role in organising this activity translates into prestige in the village and vice versa.

[11] Pseudonym

- one of the main bases of differentiation of the community, where leadership is almost synonymous with being a "patron" or "boss". He is the head of a business, either in the market or in the construction sector and is someone who has 'papers,' meaning he is a legal resident, another important basis of power.

2. Rotating Savings Associations

Another important example of how networks operate at this level is the rotating savings associations (*Gam'iyya*), which are organised among members of the village. It could of course include other Egyptians who are not from Mit Badr but the greatest majority of participants and the organisers are from the village. The *gam'iyya* is an extremely widespread informal financial institution that exists all over Egypt. In brief, the *gam'iyya* is formed of a number of people who commit themselves to the payment of a fixed amount of money each month. The duration of the g*am'iyya* is usually a number of months equivalent to the number of participants. At the beginning of each month, one of the participants receives the whole sum paid by all the participants in that month. Each *gam'iyya* has a leader whose role is crucial in the smooth working of the *gam'iyya*. The leader should possess a reputation of being a trustworthy person, and has to possess the necessary organisational abilities. Here too we see that "patrons" play a crucial role in the leadership of the *gam'iyya.* Because these are always in possession of liquidity, they are charged with being guarantors of *gam'iyya* participants in case of default.

The Family Network

Here we are referring to what sounds like a clan or mini-tribe, and it is here that we can observe the type of simultaneity that distinguishes this group. A reason that often cited as to why there is such a large number of Badrawis in Paris is "jealousy among the families" in the village itself. Although this issue definitely requires a separate study, it is obvious that this expression refers to the social structure of the village being built around the existence of a number of big families. It is at that level that most activities relating to the migration process take place. The number of people from each family in Paris is taken as an indication of the strength and prestige of this group, both in Paris and in the village.[12]

[12] This type or level of network is the one that is best described in a study on networks and migration: "Beneficial network externalities arise when previous migrants provide shelter and work, assistance in

The family-level network is the context and facilitator in a number of key areas. Sponsoring newcomers is the most important activity that takes place at the level of the family. This practice is not only responsible for the steady flow of newcomers, but also for the increasing strength and magnitude of the Badrawi community in Paris. The ability to bring more family members to Paris is related to the strength of the family, and it is also a factor in increasing its strength through the consolidation of this core unit. The ability to bring more family members is a point of pride, as it is an index of the strength of the family.

As mentioned earlier, the decision to migrate is only partly up to the individual migrant. The decision, and the subsequent steps of the migration process, is mainly a family decision. And here we should note the continuity that exists between the family in the village in Egypt on the one hand, and the family members already in Paris on the other.

The selection of who will go to France is a family decision (meaning household decision). It is at this level that it is determined whose turn it is to go, because an equally important decision is: who will stay to look after the affairs of the family, mainly to oversee the investment of the money that will be sent by the migrant. Family members in Paris will also take part in recommending who should go next; this is based on their ability to judge what kind of work is available for example. They are also the ones who will be responsible for advancing all or some of the expenses of the journey. This practice indicates building an economic dimension into the kinship relationship. Sponsoring a relative's journey creates a patronage bond

What is referred to as "buying the visa" really means all of the expenses of the journey. They say visas now are a lot more costly than they used to be. The figure cited is between 35 and 40 thousand Egyptian pounds or even more.[13] However, they

---

obtaining credit, and/or generally reduce the stress of relocation to a foreign culture…. These personal connections provide potential migrants with information about the labor market in the host country. They offer important data that work to mitigate imperfect information about the labor market in the host country, enabling the migrant to obtain better paid and more stable jobs." (Baur and Gang 2002, p. 1)

[13] Egyptian authorities arrested members of a ring specialised in trafficking Egyptian and Asian youth to Europe from the Egyptian coast using fishing boats. The fee qoted for the trip is between 30 and 40 Egyptian pounds, i.e. a figure very similar to that reported by my informants. (Al-Ahram 23 May, 2005)

always hasten to add that people have stopped coming. This may not be the truth, but this issue is too sensitive and maybe they feel they have to protect the newcomers.

Apart from paying for or contributing to the expenses of the trip, the family-level network arranges for work and accommodation for those newly arrived, at least during the initial phases. Another important aspect of support that is provided by relatives is preparing the new immigrant, even while still in Egypt, in terms of providing him with basic information that facilitates the initial stages of adaptation to living and working in France.

Family members in Paris have a collective obligation towards the family in the village. The way these obligations are fulfilled require a level or organisation and mobilisation. This mainly takes the form of collecting a monthly sum which is sent to the village. There is a committee in Paris to organise the collection, and one in the village to oversee the utilisation of this money. This type of collective action seems to be modeled after a tradition of collective action at the level of the family in the village. And, apart from these monthly contributions, the *zakat* (alms) money is collected in Paris and sent to the village to be distributed in the same way.

V. Investing Earnings

As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of this journey is to earn money for improving one's and one's family's living conditions at home. Earnings spent in Paris are used only to cover basic necessities. The rest is saved and sent back to the village. In a typical sequence of utilising savings, the first thing the migrant does is to repay the money he had borrowed to travel. This takes between one and two years. Then he buys land in order to build a house, and then the building of the house. If all this has been achieved, the next thing is to think of a "project" that he will be running when going home. This can be buying a car to turn into a taxi, or mini truck. There is also an interesting development whereby some people are investing in reclaimed agricultural land in Beheira and getting involved in commercial farming. I was told that there is an area there where many people from Mit Badr have taken land and are investing in farms. All this reflects the culturally assigned expectations that a man

must fulfil, and underscores the fact that for rural Egyptians, economic migration is primarily a male 'journey.'

In all cases, however long the Egyptian immigrant stays, he considers his stay temporary and that he will eventually go back to Egypt. This is not just what people say but is more significantly reflected in their plans for their and their children's future, whereby even those who have all but settled in France have invested in building houses in their village, in addition to other investments in Egypt, mostly real estate. The general pattern is to go back each year with the whole family. The house they built and other second homes in Cairo or on the Northern coast are intended for the use of their children. Whether or not the latter will comply with their parents' plans for them is a different issue.

Whether or not a migrant will stay on in France or will go back is, to some extent, correlated to the type of marriage. If the man is married to a French woman or, more commonly to an Arab woman with French citizenship, this family is more likely to stay on in France, especially if they have children. A more common arrangement among the group I am dealing with is marrying a woman in the village and visiting her and the children for a couple of months every year. In such cases, the man has more definite plans of returning to Egypt.

Impact on the Village

One of the most important consequences of the migrants' remittances and their pattern of investment is the great rise in the land prices in the village of Mit Badr Halawa. Another aspect of change that is more readily visible is the presence of a large number of huge multi-storey houses in a very characteristic architecture that is extremely decorative and very lavish-looking. They are painted in various striking colours, their roofs and facades are tiled and are closed with conspicuous and very huge decorated iron gates. There are two very different ways of talking about the changes in Mit Badr that are due to "French money." On the one hand, Badrawis generally talk of the changes in the village, especially the "new architecture" in positive terms and regard this as a sign of progress.

Others who are not from Mit Badr, however, particularly those who come from an older generation of migrants and who were generally more educated are very contemptuous and cynical about such changes. This group generally regards Badrawis as fellahin upstarts, and see in their new architecture blind and distorted imitation of what they saw in France. An example that is often cited in this context is that of the house that has a swimming pool on the roof, and how this pool is stagnant and full of mosquitoes because nobody is using it.

That a degree of contempt is expressed towards Badrawis by this particular group has to be seen in the context of a situation where members of this older educated generation are now working side by side with those who they deem of a lower status. This is particularly evident in the market place which is witnessing the encroaching monopoly of Badrawis.[14] This situation is best expressed in the following words of a Cairene, university-educated man who came in the late 70's for post-graduate studies and is now an owner of a market stall in a predominantly Badrawi area:

> Before the 80's, those who came to France were the educated class. Now it is different. The types of people who came later are fellahin. They do not compare in terms of culture, education or morals. Especially after the Gulf war France attracted all types indiscriminately. And now all of us in the market are wearing the "yellow suit"- like in the army we all look the same.

Accommodation and Living Arrangements

The typical arrangement is that 4 or 5 people live together in a small flat (averaging about 30 sq. meters). This collective arrangement is not only meant to save on the rent but also on the food expenses, beside of course providing much needed emotional support and sense of belonging. Also, it has to be mentioned that it is here that many arrangements related to work are made. This is because the flat, just like the café, serves as a meeting place for relatives and friends who visit each other frequently. Many evenings are spent with groups of friends and relatives watching Arab satellite television and, inevitably, exchanging information, support and services. On average,

[14] Detlef Müller-Mahn (2000) discusses the dominance of Badrawis in the Belleville market. (Translation from German courtesy of Nicholas Hopkins).

a person pays between 100 and 150 euros a month for rent and bills, and a similar amount on food.

Egyptian labour immigrants tend to cluster together in certain quarters (like Belleville and Simplon) and they often occupy several flats in the same building. In such quarters with a high concentration of Egyptian workers, Egyptian shops opened selling Egyptian products such as tea, feta cheese, fava beans, lentils, tahina, Cleopatra cigarettes…etc. This is one readily visible clue to the Egyptian workers' lifestyle in which they try as much as possible to stick to their familiar world. Apart from food and cooking (see section on Food below), this attribute is apparent in the way they spend their leisure time, either watching Egyptian movies and soap operas on Arabic satellite channels, or listening to Arabic songs and music. On some evenings and week-ends, they may go out to the Egyptian café for a water pipe and backgammon. In summer months, some of them are involved in football tournaments organised between Egyptian workers.

Food and Eating

There is usually a division of labour whereby someone is assigned the shopping, another the cooking and another cleaning up…etc. As many of them work in food markets, the standard meal is composed of cooked vegetables and veal or chicken (halal) and rice cooked in the Egyptian style. They always stock at home Egyptian food such as fava beans, lentils and feta cheese. Most of them take their lunch with them to their working place, usually bread, cheese, or tuna or sardines. The main meal is eaten in the evening and it is composed of the traditional Egyptian meal (vegetables cooked in tomato sauce+ rice+ chicken or meat). Despite the fact that the reason for this type of migration is to save money, and despite the fact that Badrawis are very careful about spending money, they usually do not deprive themselves and tend to eat well and enough food. Of course they drink a lot of tea which they prepare in the Egyptian way, and they buy it and other food stuff from Egyptian shops that have opened in areas in which many Egyptians live. In Ramadan, the menu is more varied and lavish. It is reported that the expenditure on food almost doubles during that month.

Hardship and Vulnerability

The biggest and harshest problem the clandestine labour migrant faces is his inability to go back and forth because of two main reasons. The risk and expense involved in arriving in France would be wasted once he leaves. The other problem is that most of the young men (under 30) who are in France have not performed their military service. Once they reach 30, they can pay a fine and settle this issue, but before that they cannot travel freely. These two obstacles to visiting home intensify the feelings of *ghurba* (estrangement), and make the feelings of hardship and self-pity more acute. Migrants' accounts of their experience are filled with a sad and emotional tone. In general, they stress their vulnerability and are particularly keen to convey a message that they are neither happy nor comfortable in France. This sentiment is linked to the fact that the labour migrant's presence in France is partly due to the family's decision and collective interest. Young men actually yearn to get the chance to travel. Yet they never admit that this was their choice, or desire, but they justify the journey by being 'pushed' to do it by others in the family. Part of the explanation and justification for his journey is to comply with the wishes of the family elders, and to shoulder the responsibility towards other family members, be they younger siblings, elderly parents, or sisters who need to get married. This is what makes stories of hardship and vulnerability compatible with ideals of manhood, for in this case what is stressed is the man's obligation as the family's breadwinner. As mentioned, the burden of provision is an attribute of a real man. This is one sense in which (the dependent) family serves to cast a noble light on experiences that would otherwise seem socially costly and compromising. An important notion here is that of *akl 'eish* (earning daily bread). It denotes a powerful imperative and is almost always used in association with the amount of sacrifice and what one has endure or give up in order to meet that imperative.[15] It is of course not exclusively used in connection with labour migration, but is frequently evoked to explain and justify the amounts of hardship faced.

VI. Conclusion

In the preceding discussion, I have tried to provide a sketch and explain certain features of a particular community of Egyptian workers in Paris. The Mit Badr group

[15] For more details on manhood, labour migration and vulnerability see Saad 2000.

admittedly has special and sometimes unique characteristics. At the same time it shares a lot of features with the community of Egyptian workers regardless of their origin or regional affiliation. The Egyptian workers, in their turn, are very similar to immigrant workers of other nationalities who are in their same position in many ways.

One thing I was particularly keen to show is the very close link that exists between the village of Mit Badr Halawa in Egypt and the Badrawi community in Paris. In other words, this is a gourp that displays a high degree of simultaneity, of being ‘here’ and ‘there.’ This simultaneity is brought about in the transnational space of networks and is the main instrument for the reproduction of this particular type of transnational existence.

References

Basch Linda, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc. Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation - States. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers. 2000

Baur, Thomas and Ira Gang. "Networks and the Duration of Temporary Migration". Ministry of Manpower and Emigration. Emigration and Egyptians Abroad Sector. http://www.emigration.gov.eg/publications/Publication.asp

Duchesne, Sophie; "French Representations of Citizenship and Immigrants: The Political Dimension of the Civic Link" in Immigrants and Minorities, vol. 22, July/November 2003, p.262-279.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "The Paradoxes of Masculinity: Some thoughts on Segregated Societies". In *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies.* Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (eds). London and New York: Routledge. 1994

Loizos, Peter. "A Broken Mirror: Masculine Sexuality in Greek Ethnography." In *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (eds). London and New York: Routledge. 1994.

Müller-Mahn, Detlef. "Ein ägyptisches Dorf in Paris: eine empirische Studie zur Süd-Nord-Migration am Beispiel ägyptischer 'sans-papiers' in Frankrieich" in Michael Bommes, ed., *Transnationalismus und Kulturvegleich*. Osnabrück, Institut für Migrationsforschung und interkulturelle Studien, 2000. pp. 79-110.

Müller-Mahn, Detlef. "Transnational Spaces and Migrant Networks: A Case Study of Egyptians in Paris". *Nord-Sud aktuell* XIX, Nr. 1, 2005, pp. 29-33.

Saad, Reem. "Narratives of Faraway Experiences: Family and styles of manhood in an Egyptian village". Paper submitted to the "International Conference on Family History And Middle East Studies". University of California, Berkeley. April 7-9, 2000

Zohry, Ayman and Barbara Harrell-Bond. Contemporary Egyptian Migration: An Overview Of Voluntary And Forced Migration". p. 18-19 Country Background Papers. DRC Working Papers Series. (http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working_papers.html)

"Why Do Migrants Leave their Countries? Motivations to migrate at the point of departure: The case of Egypt" (2003). Final report for the project. Co-ordinator: Dr Leila Simona Talani.

Contemporary Egyptian Migration. Ministry of Manpower and Emigration and International Organisation for Migration. 2003. http://www.emigration.gov.eg/StaticFiles/Publication/Contemporary_Egyptian_Migration.pdf

Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics. 1996 General Census.