Migration of Egyptians to Italy: What are the Push-Pull Factors and What Happens to the Family Left Behind?

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ABSTRACT

Migration of Egyptians to Italy: What are the Push-Pull Factors and what Happens to the Family left Behind was submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) at the American University in Cairo School of Global Affairs & Public Policy (GAPP) in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Migration and Refugee Studies. The study was conducted by Karim Zikry and supervised by Dr. Ahsan Ullah.

The migration of Egyptians to Europe is nothing new, as it has been steadily increasing over the past 10 years with migration seen as a solution to Egypt’s growing economic problems. However, when reviewing the analyses already available on the topic, almost all the focus was on the migrants themselves. It was for this reason that the study was based entirely on those family members left behind; their experiences, struggles, opinions and most importantly, their voices needed to be given a chance to be heard when dealing with the issue of Egyptian migration. This study reviewed the reasons as to why Egyptians decide to migrate, as well as the impacts that this decision had on the family that remained behind. While the study used primary sources as the main foundation for its findings, literature was essential in providing the background information needed for this research project.
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Chapter I: Introduction

When I was younger I never realized the true definition of family. Coming home from school when I was just a little boy, I used to take for granted that I would be greeted by my mother with her heart-warming smile, asking me how my day went; or by my younger brother, who was excited that he finally had someone he could play with. I took for granted that my father would come back home after work; that we would all sit at the kitchen table for lunch. As I grew older I started to really understand how important ‘family’ is, and in the summer of 2005 when I decided to flee the nest and pursue my dream of having the ‘real’ university experience abroad I truly realized that the family I had once taken for granted were, in reality, the most important and significant people in my life. This feeling was shared by my parents, who would always fear for the worst if I did not answer their calls. Whenever I felt alone, or needed someone to talk to, I knew I could count on my parents to answer my cry for help, and that familiar comfort is what eventually led me to being able to survive whatever I was faced with; whether it be the mind-numbing cold every unforgiving Canadian winter, or if I was just going through a rough patch in my life, I knew I could rely on my parents and their unconditional love to get me through anything.

An ancient Burmese proverb states that “in time of test, family is best”; it is during the tough times that one really grasps the true value of family. While my conventional definition of a family may not be the same for everyone, whether through bloodline or through relationships built over time, everyone has that special group of people that they consider their ‘family’, whether they are the people who
nurtured them and taught them life’s values; or their close friends who are more like brothers and sisters, who are always there for them whenever they are called upon. It is this unconditional love from the family that led me to the focus of this research project. I wanted to find out how the families left behind coped in their ‘times of test’ and I was especially intrigued by the opportunity to see how they were affected by the migration of one of their family members. The value of having a supportive family that trusts and believes that you will always do your best to make the best of all situations is invaluable; especially when you are in a ‘time of test’ like many migrants are in the beginning of their journey to Europe.

All of the participants that took part in this research process know the meaning of family; some more than others. With all the good things that are associated with ‘family’, (comfort, happiness, unconditional love, etc) the loss of a family member hurts that much more. The pain felt by the unfortunate participants who lost their family member during the migration phase is indescribable. You are not only losing someone very close to you, but, in most cases, you feel as if you have also lost a piece of your own self-being. Gone was that person that you could always rely on when you needed them most; gone was the person who was always willing to lend a helping hand, a person who would always tell you what was best for you, even if it was not necessarily what you wanted to hear. The family and friends of migrants are often overlooked when dealing with the victims of migration; however this thesis hopes to shed some light on those that are left behind, and how they too should be considered as victims, even in those cases that do not involve the regrettable death of the migrant.

Migration from Egypt to Europe has been steadily increasing over the past 10 years; however migration is not a recent phenomenon in Egypt. Ever since the 1970s migration has been seen as a way to solve some of Egypt’s economic problems such
as unemployment, with the Gulf States being the destination of choice. All the Arab
Gulf states had “small population bases in relation to the labor requirements of the
scale of local investment that was made possible by the oil revenues, especially in the
1970s. This condition resulted in large-scale importation of labor”.¹ International
migration had previously emerged as one of the most prominent features of the
Egyptian labor market and the economy, however prior to the 1970s was an option
open mainly to high skilled laborers and specialists such as teachers, doctors and
engineers. “The oil boom of 1973 and subsequent development projects in the oil-
rich countries increased demand for unskilled as well as skilled manual workers. This
situation altered the occupational composition of migrants in such a manner that
unskilled and construction workers formed the majority.”²

However, the 1990s brought with it a sharp reduction in the demand for the
Egyptian labor force in these Gulf States, as the Gulf War and the economic crisis that
ensued, along with the fact that Asian workers offered a cheaper alternative to their
Egyptian counterparts meant that Egyptian migrants needed to find an alternative
destination. “The most immediate consequence of the Gulf crisis was the dislocation
of large numbers of migrants from their countries of residence. In the wake of the
crisis, it was estimated that more than 700,000 Egyptians returned from Iraq, Jordan
and Kuwait”.³ Against the backdrop of widespread unemployment and poverty, and
with the fact that the prospect of emigration to one of the rich oil-producing Arab
countries for work was becoming more and more of an unviable option, emigration to
a European country for people who had once not entertained this option due to

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barriers in language and culture became a more viable option. “The rise of illegal Arab migration to Europe attests to these barriers crumbling in the face of mounting economic hardship confronting Arabs, in particular youth, in their homelands”. This is when irregular immigration to Europe surfaced as a more popular alternative for Egyptians looking for an escape from the hardships faced in Egypt.

This thesis focuses on the migration of Egyptians to Italy, and more specifically, the factors, or reasoning, that has led to Egyptians seemingly willing to risk their lives in order to make it to Italy. Furthermore, a closer look at the ones that are left behind; the family members, will be used in order to show how the actions of one individual can impact the lives of many others. Finally, possible solutions and recommendations both internally and abroad will be discussed in the hopes of finding the best and most viable answer to the ongoing, and growing, issue of the international migration of Egyptians.

1.1 Background

“Egyptian migration to Europe started in the early 19th century, following Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt (1798-1801). At that time, Muhammad ‘Ali, the founder of modern Egypt, sent the first Egyptian mission to Italy in 1813 to study printing arts, and another mission to France in 1818 to study military and maritime sciences in order to establish a modern Egyptian Army based on European standards of that time. Since then, there has been a channel of communication between Egypt and Europe”. More recently, Egyptian migration to Europe has significantly

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increased, with a particular increase in the number of irregular migrants. “The current stream of Egyptian irregular migration to Europe started on the eve of the 21st century with thousands of fresh graduates and poorly educated unemployed youth engaged in irregular migration to Europe either through the Mediterranean Sea via Libya or by over-staying tourist visas”.7

The means of transportation for almost all the migrants from Egypt is by boat, with some making the trip to nearby Libya first, before taking the shorter boat ride towards Italy.8 Egyptian fishing boats only meant for regional waters are favored as the mode of transportation by traffickers as these boats are in abundance, and they are easily accessible to the traffickers whenever they want to make the trip towards Italy. In more expensive trips, larger ships which are able to carry many more people are used, with the difference between the two modes of transportation being nearly double; with many sources stating that the fishing boat trip would cost roughly 15,000 Egyptian L.E. and the larger ship trips costing around 30,000 L.E. although some have stated that their trips cost quite a bit more.9 Many of these boats do not even reach the Italian port, instead, they stop about a kilometer away from shore (with some extreme cases even stating a whole 10 kilometers away10). This leads to panic amongst the confused and frightened Egyptians who are forced to jump off the boat and swim to safety; and with the fact that many of the Egyptians were unaware of this before they set sail, and that some of them did not know how to swim, many of the

7 Ibid
migrants are unable to live out their dream of living in Europe as many drown and become part of a growing list of missing persons.

In terms of international Egyptian migration, a couple of dates in history seem to resurface in many of the readings. In January 2007 Egypt signed a protocol with Italy to regulate immigrant labor. In an international conference that was held in February 2007 in Cairo the Italian Ambassador to Egypt, Antonio Badini stated in his forward that “since the very beginning these wills aimed at reaching a two-fold objective: contrasting the Egyptian irregular migratory phenomenon towards Italy, and, at the same time, offering to the Egyptian citizens concrete and regular job perspectives in the Italian labor market”. Badini continued on to state that “thanks to the solid Italian-Egyptian partnership, together with the willingness to offer a better future to young Egyptians, we have defined an exemplary model of cooperation”. The ‘model of cooperation’ that Badini was referring to was a plan set forth by Egypt and Italy to have a set number of visas, which was initially set at 7,000 but was raised to 10,000 in 2008, available to Egyptians who were seeking job opportunities in Italy. As described by the Italian Ambassador to Egypt:

“The bilateral cooperation resulted in the initiation of a joint database that classified the Egyptian potential immigrants and needs of the labor market in Italy. The Egyptian workers are able to integrative effectively and positively in the new communities when they join those communities in a proper and legal way, the minister asserted, citing the fact that no complaints were filed against Egyptian workers in Italy over the last decade.”

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
However, what ended up happening was that most of these visas went towards regularizing the migrants who were already in Italy, therefore severely limiting the options for those who were still in Egypt. Furthermore, instead of helping those who were in most need and desperately wanted to legally find job opportunities in Italy, the visas allocated to Egyptians were reportedly only given to those who were able to offer bribes to some of the lower ranked officials as the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower, with most reports stating that these bribes were actually more costly than what the traffickers were asking for.\textsuperscript{15} Whether this was truly the case or not, Egyptians believed that their government was showing favoritism towards the ‘elite’ and thus did not look to pursue the regular routes of migration and instead looked towards their alternative options. With the legal measures being more expensive than the illegal route now, many young Egyptians decided that they would just take their chances with the traffickers and not deal with the complications of the corruption amongst certain members of the government.

Fast forward a couple of months and in November 2007 two separate ships carrying irregular migrants sank near the southern Italian provinces of Siracusa and Calabria, resulting in the death of 22 people.\textsuperscript{16} “According to the Foreign Ministry, the first ship left Alexandria with 24 people on board, with 11 of them found dead by the first respondents; the second set sail from Libya with 160 Egyptian passengers of whom 11 died”.\textsuperscript{17} The remaining ‘lucky’ passengers were found either hiding along the Italian shorelines or were saved from the water. This event was one of the more famous ones involving Egyptian irregular migrants, and was mentioned in several of

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid
the sources dealing with irregular migration. While this was certainly not the first time that Egyptians had died chasing their dream of immigrating to Europe, this event was certainly one of the more publicized in Egypt as questions arose of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the protocol signed between Egypt and Italy earlier in the year.

In March 2009 two boats sink over the period of two days off the Libyan coast. The first boat, carrying about 250 people sank 30 km off the coast of Libya with a confirmed 21 people dead. An Egyptian Foreign Ministry Official stated that 10 of the confirmed dead were Egyptian nationals. The second boat, setting sail a day later, was also unsuccessful in reaching Europe as the boat, carrying a reported 400 people sank. The Libyan coastguards were first on the scene, rescuing 23 people that were in the water, but were unable to account for, as the first respondents, more than 350 people who had gone ‘missing’. It was events like these, in which the fate of many human beings were simply unknown, that led to the events in the following month, April 2009, as the Egyptian Government announced plans to establish schools for vocational education in the district of Fayoum, in an attempt to combat irregular migration.

The Egyptian Government teamed up with a development organization by the name of The Italian Cooperation in Egypt with the hopes of offering the people of Fayoum more opportunities in the labor market by teaching them new skills of labor. The Italian Cooperation in Egypt was specifically chosen due to the fact that Italy was one of the most popular destinations for Egyptians seeking to immigrate to Europe,

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19 Ibid.
especially those coming from Fayoum who even have a village by the name of ‘Milano’ due to the sheer number of people who have attempted, either successfully or not, to migrate to Italy.\textsuperscript{21} The hopes of this joint project were that the new schools that were to be established would give the people of Fayoum, especially the young males, an opportunity to attain new skills in fields such as handicraft, giving them the ability to produce their own goods which they could then sell in the market in order to earn a living.\textsuperscript{22} The thought behind this being that the young men in Fayoum only leave towards Italy as a last resort mainly due to the fact that they have been unable to find viable job opportunities in an ever competitive market such as in Egypt. However, with their newly acquired skills from the schools, the joint project would argue that not only would this open up more opportunities for these young men in the job market, but that they could either work independently, or team up with others who have acquired the same skills in the schools to create their own business and means of supporting themselves financially.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

1. The family left behind during migration is the focus of this research and thus the main objective is to allow them the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts on the topic of migration in order to reveal their issues with the hopes of showing that the victims of migration are not only the migrants themselves; but the families they leave behind as well.

2. To get a better understanding of why people decide to migrate, but from the perspective of the family left behind. The reasons as to why people migrate have been well documented; however this research hopes to find some linkages between

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
the reasons stated by the migrants themselves and the ones mentioned by their
families in order to get a grasp of what are Egypt’s most concerning issues.

3. To allow the family left behind the opportunity to share how migration has affected
them personally. As is often the case, the families left behind are not given this
opportunity when dealing with international migration. One of the key objectives of
this research is to shine some light on how their lives have changed due to migration
with the hopes of being able to better understand where their struggles lie and how
best to aid them during their family member’s migration.

4. To offer realistic recommendations as to how the Italian Government and its
Embassy in Egypt can, along with the help of the Egyptian Government, aid the
potential migrants in ensuring them a fair opportunity of legal migration, while also
offering more help to the families left behind.

1.3 Significance of the Research

The topic of Egyptian migration to Italy always intrigued me, so I knew the
focus of my thesis would be central to this topic. Once I started to research the
available information, it seemed evident that most of the studies were focused on the
irregular migrants themselves. Their reasons for leaving, journey, individual
struggles, and how their lives have changed after their migration were all topics that
were researched in great detail, however, what seemed to be missing was the story
from the family’s perspective. Were they a part of the decision making when it came
to the migration? How did their lives change once this decision was made? What
struggles, if any, did they have to go through once their family member decided to
migrate? Did the dynamics of the household change, and if yes, how so? These are just a few of the questions that can only be answered by the family members left behind, and all of these questions add to the understanding of the problematic issue that is Egyptian emigration, and can only help in hopefully finding a viable solution.

The stories of the family left behind seemed to be of equal importance to me, but judging from the information available, which is discussed in greater detail in the section dealing with the academics’ analyses of Egyptian migration, was a topic that took on much less significance when compared to the migrants themselves. It is the notion that the families left behind are usually the ‘forgotten victims’ that eventually led me towards this topic. Rather than focusing on the migrants, I felt that spotlighting the ones that are left behind (family and friends) would differentiate this research project from the many others that focused on Egyptian emigration. Focusing on the ones that were left behind would also broaden the pool of suitable participants, since for every Egyptian migrant that decided to leave the country, there are at least two people who he is ‘leaving behind’. Not only would this allow more people to take part in this research project, but would also open up a lot of the population that would not necessarily have their voices heard in a research that focused solely on the Egyptian emigrants’ perspectives. Such groups include the ‘older’ participants in their late 50s and 60s who are usually not your typical age group when it comes to migrants would be able to participate and have their voices heard. Secondly, and probably most important, women of all ages were also able to give their views in this research project if they chose to. With Egyptian emigrants primarily being men, the views of women on this subject is sometimes viewed as being irrelevant. However, when focusing on the ones that are left behind women are given a forum to share their
opinions, thoughts, and experiences of Egyptian emigration and how their lives have been affected by this issue.

This thesis is divided into five main chapters, including the introduction which has already been covered. The second chapter is a combination of the methodology, the conceptual framework, in which the differentiating between the terms ‘irregular’ and ‘illegal’ migration is explained, followed by the conceptual framework, and finally, a review of the academics’ analyses on the reasons for migration and the impact on the family left behind. Chapters three and four will cover the results of this research, with chapter three focusing solely on why Egyptians decide to migrate while chapter four will cover the impacts of migration on the family left behind. Finally, chapter five will be the closing remarks of the research, in which a summary of the findings will be restated along with the recommendations and challenges faced. The references to the outside information used in this thesis can be found following the closing remarks.
Chapter II: Methodology, Conceptual Framework and Academics’ Analyses of Egyptian Migration

2.1 Methodology

This research is based on primary data sources with the data collection being in phases. Fieldwork was carried out in Cairo. Interviews and focus groups were administered in order to collect data. The first interview was conducted over a year ago with a migrant from Fayoum, who lives in Cairo, and he acted as my guide to the community in Cairo for the most part thanks to his knowledge of the origin and the families located in Cairo who have had a family member migrate to Europe. It was primarily due to his help that I was able to add the perspective of women to this study, as it was through his relationships that I had the ability to be introduced to the three women who partook in this research.

The Sample

A sample size that was statistically representative of the people in Cairo with a migrating family member was unattainable based on the fact that this study was conducted by a single researcher over a short period of time. In addition, it is not necessary to have a representative sample size in a research project that is qualitative in nature. However, through convenience sampling technique, 18 participants were selected for this study. Convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method based on the easy access or availability of the participants was the most effective way to increase the possibility of involving a reasonable number of participants. While the disadvantages of convenience sampling are well documented, with the fact that the easiest participants to obtain may not be representative of the population as a whole; for the purposes of this study I feel this was not an issue, as
regardless of their accessibility, each participant had their own stories and experiences to share about migration.

**Figure 1: Gender distribution of the sample**

As evident by the graph, the participants that were women were outnumbered by the male participants 5:1. The reasons for this could be a number of reasons. Firstly, both focus groups, in which 12 of the 18 participants were a part of, were all males. During the search for participants, it became evident that women were hesitant to not only be in a focus group with men, but were also reluctant to be a part of this study. All three of the women that took part in this study were only willing to share their stories if they were being personally interviewed with no other participants present. With the short period of time available to complete the research, being able to schedule with more women to be interviewed as a part of this study became increasingly more difficult. The opposite seemed to be true for males, who actually preferred the group setting over the one-on-one interview. This could have been because both focus groups involved men who all had relatively the same lifestyles,
with one focus group consisting of men who worked in a number of October City compounds while the other involved Cairo University students. Something else that could be taken into consideration is the fact that there is a higher probability that women would be more uncomfortable than men in sharing their stories and experiences with a male researcher.

Figure 2: Age group of the participants

It was important that due to the fact that convenience sampling was the primary method used for finding participants in this study that I was at least able to find people from different age groups. This was critical because depending on their age and relationship to the migrating family member, each participant would have their own views of migration and the impact it had on their lives. I did not want to have a situation in which, for example, all the participants were the younger brother or sister of a migrant, or even the father or mother of a migrant. While I was not going to deny a willing person the opportunity to be a part of this survey based on their age
or affiliation to the migrant, I did make a conscious effort to try and make sure that I could have as much diversity as possible when it came to the ages of the participants.

Collection of Data

The data collected for this research project was primary – the interviews and focus groups conducted with the participants. An extensive review of the available and relevant literature was also conducted. As stated earlier, when dealing with the primary data collection, the selection of the participants was based on the method of convenience sampling. Furthermore, snowball sampling was also used, as was stated earlier with one participant’s relationships giving me the opportunity to interview three separate women as part of the sample size. Snowball sampling, a method in which research is gathered through the use of a mutual intermediary, was a great way to increase the number of participants for this study. Through these methods the 18 participants were chosen, with 12 involved in two separate focus groups, with the remaining six being one-on-one interviews. The first focus group involved seven men ranging in age from 29-50 who all worked as security guards in October City. They all were individuals who had a family member migrate to Europe and had an interest in participating in this project. The idea behind picking these men as potential participants was the fact that they all had similar jobs, and thus could be seen as being from a similar socio-economic background. This was important because this would allow the participants to feel more comfortable with the others in the focus group, even if they had not known them personally.

The second focus group involved five males all completing their secondary studies at Cairo University. While their particular fields of study differed, the fact that they were all around the same age range and they all had a family member who had migrated to Europe again would make the focus group a much more comfortable
setting. The remaining six participants all preferred to be interviewed personally, and those included the three female participants along with three male participants as well.

Since the primary research was strictly qualitative, a flexible set of questions were used. A checklist constituted by some broad questions was used to cover the following areas:

1. Socio-economic background
2. Migration intentions/reasons of migrating family member
3. Migrating family member’s attitude towards Egypt/Europe
4. Whether or not their migrating family member received information about life in Europe, if yes, from whom/what?
5. If the migration of their family member affected the participant’s life, if yes, how so?
6. If they expect their life to change once their family member returns from Europe.
7. Would they consider emigrating in the future?

The questions were not structured in a way where they all had to be answered in every single interview/focus group. The participants’ observations, discussions, and willingness to share their experiences really directed the way each interview was conducted and which questions were asked. Saying this, the two questions that were asked in every focus group and interview were the reasons as to why their family member migrated, and if that migration impacted the participant’s life in any way. These two questions were essential to the findings of the study and thus needed to be asked.

When dealing with the secondary collection of data it was important to first realize what exactly I was looking for, due to the extensive research done on irregular Egyptian emigration. When selecting the literature that would be used as part of the data it was vital that it dealt with the two questions this study was trying to answer;
why do Egyptians migrate and what the impacts of that migration is on the family left behind. Other than the background information on migration that was stated earlier in this thesis, almost all the secondary data collected had to involve information on one of these two questions. Furthermore, in order to ensure the credibility of the literature gathered, the quality of these sources had to be more than simply journalistic pieces.

Ethical Issues

Adherence to ethical process in research has become an important part of this particular research for a number of reasons. Primarily, this helps to promote the aims of the research, for instance prohibitions against fabricating, falsifying, or misinterpreting research data promote the truth and avoid error. Ethical standards promote the values such as trust, fairness and mutual respect that are essential in research that involves human subjects.

At no point in time during the research process were the participants under the impression that they were forced to do anything they were not comfortable with. The participants had complete control over what they did and did not say, and were at no point in time pressured into answering a question they did not want to. Before the interview and focus groups took place it was made clear that this was completely voluntary, and any information gathered would be under the full consent of the participants. Also, each participant’s identity will remain confidential, as any time their responses are used in the findings their identity’s will remain anonymous by referring to them strictly as a “participant”.

The research has gone through the ethical review process of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval of this research is attached in the appendix.

Challenges
The biggest challenge of this study was the limited time available to conduct the interviews and focus groups. While the 18 total participants were a decent enough number to which trends were seen in the research collected, it would have been beneficial to have had more time and the ability to involve more participants in the research process. There were some instances, like the impact of gender roles when dealing with the wives of migrants and their husbands, in which having more participants would have helped add a lot more detail towards such an interesting topic. This is where the potential of further research would be available, as the impact of gender roles was intriguing when dealing with the social impacts of migration on the family left behind, and the topic itself could be the focus of an entire research project in itself.

2.2 Conceptual Framework: Definitions & Assumptions

Definitions

The term ‘migrant worker’ will be defined based on the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families definition, which states that a migrant worker refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a national.23

Both “irregular” and “illegal” migration deal with the same concept; however it is the difference between the two terms that needs some clarification before we can move any further. On the one hand, “irregular emigration” deals with those individuals that are “not responding to a formal demand for labor and who do not

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fulfill all the legal conditions of entry, stay and employment; and therefore may be considered undesirable by the government of the country in question”. While “illegal emigration” deals with the same type of migration, the term focuses more on the legal aspects of migration, with a particular emphasis on the ‘illegality’ of this type of migration; deeming it as a criminal act by the destination country. This term deals with migration that is in violation of the immigration laws of the destination country’s jurisdiction and can be met by deportation or jail time. It is because of the automatic negative connotation the term ‘illegal’ gives that I will stay away from the term ‘illegal emigration’ as much as possible during the interviews. While both terms may share the same concept, the word ‘illegal’ and its negativity could have led to the participants being unwilling to answer particular questions. If ‘irregular emigration’ is a term that was less understood by some of the participants in this study I used much more descriptive statements, such as, ‘why did they not go through the governmental channels when they decided to migrate” rather than asking why they chose to “illegally” migrate. Trying to take out any objectivity towards the topic, and the negativity the word ‘illegal’ instills, I have avoided using that terminology as much as possible while conducting the focus groups and during the interviews.

Assumptions

Egyptian migration to Europe is certainly not a new phenomenon, with the earliest migrants believed to have been in the early 19th century, from 1798-1801 which followed Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt. However, more recently international emigration has been a viable solution for Egyptians facing economic


hardships. The successful migration of at least one member of the immediate nuclear family meant the financial survival of the rest of the family. The high demand for Egyptian employees in the Gulf Countries in the 1970s provided the opportunity for job seekers in Egypt to migrate and find more lucrative opportunities elsewhere.

“Prior to the oil boom of 1973 and the economic shift in Egypt, labor migration was closely controlled by the state and was confined mainly to highly educated and skilled workers such as doctors and teachers. Restrictions were gradually dropped, and by the mid-1970s the government encouraged migration as a source of foreign currency”.26 However, with the reduction of those migration flows to the Gulf Countries since the 1990s, Egyptians had to find different ways, and locations, to migrate to; which resulted in the irregular migration routes to Europe becoming a much more viable option to the members of a declining labor market in Egypt. When faced with the choices of struggling economically in a country that offers you little hope of any positivity towards a better future or risking your life in order to try and achieve your hopes and dreams of that better future through irregular immigration to Europe, more often than not people will decide that they are tired of ‘settling’ for the life they have in Egypt and would much rather try and put their future in their own hands. When given the opportunity to gain more money by working abroad, someone who is struggling to survive in Egypt financially will view irregular emigration as not only a viable option that will benefit their own lives, but also the lives of their family; which in many cases is the main reason why people decide to emigrate; in order to be able to benefit their families to the best of their abilities.

2.3 Academics’ Analyses of Egyptian Migration

The study conducted was focused on figuring out the reasons as to why people decide to migrate and the impacts of those decisions on the family left behind. By focusing on the family left behind as the participants in the research process, this study hopes to add a new perspective to information that might already be available; especially pertaining to the reasons as to why people decide to migrate. The following section summarizes the academics’ analyses on the two questions this study focused on; what are the reasons people decide to migrate, and what are the impacts of that decision on the family left behind. By presenting the literature that is available, the gap in the information can be pointed out and thus the importance of this research can be defined. Before stating the information available on the reasons why people migrate, a brief introduction to Egyptian international migration will be presented.

“International migration is usually a response to differentials and disparities. When people decide to migrate, it is normally because they want to move away from the constraints and insecurity they faced in their country of origin, and because they consider that better conditions and opportunities exist elsewhere. In the contemporary world, the principal forces that are driving international migration are due to the 3Ds: differences in development, demography and democracy.”

Why are young Egyptians willing to risk their lives in the hopes of immigrating to Europe? Two surveys conducted in 1997 (Eurostat) and 2007 (European Training Foundation) may give some idea of the rising importance of Europe for Egyptians. In 1997, among

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those who desire to migrate, only 6.0% chose Europe as their preferred destination, while this percentage reached 33.7% by 2007.\textsuperscript{28} Since the early 1970s, international labor movement played a pivotal role in the economic “growth and experience of oil exporting countries of the Middle East. In 1975, the number of migrant workers in 10 oil exporting countries in the Middle East was 1.884 million” and given the relative small populations of those countries, showed the importance of labor migration and the opportunities available to, for example, Egyptians who were struggling to find work at home to migrate towards the Gulf.\textsuperscript{29}

Until the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, Egyptian migration networks were focused on the Arab Gulf destinations, Iraq, Jordan, and Libya. Male migration members who had managed to get a work contract abroad were usually able to also secure work contracts to their close relatives. What gave the potential migrants even more opportunities in the Gulf was the fact that as a sign of prosperity “families in oil rich countries imported maids, cooks, gardeners, watchmen, drivers and house servants, whether their services were really needed or not.”\textsuperscript{30} An example of this was seen in Kuwait, where “household workers represented about 20% of the expatriate labor force between 1970 and 1980.”\textsuperscript{31} This ‘demonstration effect’ as Naiem Sherbiny labeled it, in which a family’s status was measured by the number of household assistances they employed allowed even more people seeking job opportunities to be able to migrate towards the Gulf during the 1970s. However, the competition from Asia that Egyptian labor force faces today in the Arab Gulf Countries has narrowed

\textsuperscript{29} Sirageldin, Ismail (1983). “Some Issues in Middle Eastern International Migration”.
the entry door for more Egyptian workers, which, in turn, has made immigrating to Europe a more popular option recently.\textsuperscript{32}

With the basic background of international Egyptian migration already stated earlier, it is important to look at the root causes of why Egyptians are willing to go through great measures in order to achieve their ‘dream’ of making it to Europe. “The irregular migration of Egyptians to Europe is driven by complex factors, including unemployment and the lack of livelihood opportunities, not to mention the demand for cheap labor in destination countries and the lack of regular migration opportunities”.\textsuperscript{33} The reasons why Egyptians decide to migrate can be, for the most part, split into three categories: economical, political, and social.

\textbf{Why do People Migrate?}

Before divulging into the specific reasons why people migrate, it is important to mention why some Egyptians decide irregular migration is their most viable option when compared to the legalized channels of migration. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, in January 2007 Egypt signed a protocol with Italy to regulate immigrant labor. In an international conference that was held in February 2007 in Cairo the Italian Ambassador to Egypt, Antonio Badini stated in his forward that “since the very beginning these wills aimed at reaching a two-fold objective: contrasting the Egyptian


irregular migratory phenomenon towards Italy, and, at the same time, offering to the Egyptian citizens concrete and regular job perspectives in the Italian labor market”.34

The basics of the plan set forth by Egypt and Italy was to have a set number of visas available to Egyptians who were seeking job opportunities in Italy with the notion that Egyptian workers would be able to be integrated effectively in their new Italian communities when they were able to join these communities in the proper and legal way. In addition to this, one would imagine that the mode of travel would be much safer than an overcrowded fishing boat that was the vehicle of choice when dealing with irregular migration. While this all sounds like a positive step in the right direction, what many believed ended up happening, including the majority of the participants that partook in this research, dealt with signs of corruption and nepotism by officials at the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower, who reportedly accepted bribes in exchange of the visas to Italy. What is important to state here is that while the reality of this situation is unclear, the fact that the charge of corruption has been asserted by those who were interviewed in this research project shows their distrust with their government’s handlings of the migration process. This left the Egyptians who believed this corruption was true, and who needed these visas in order to regularly migrate for work in a position where they were unable to compete with those who were bribing the officials, and thus, were forced to find an alternative route to Europe; resulting in irregular migration still being the popular option for the ‘less-fortunate’. With that being said, the reasons as to why people decide to migrate can be separated into three factors; economic, political, and social.

Economic Factors

Economic factors deal with anything that affects the economy such as the money supply, the supply and demand for labor, the inflation rates, and recession to name a few. When dealing with international migration, the biggest reason as to why people decide to migrate involves economic reasons; and the case amongst Egyptians is no different. The high unemployment rate and the low level of social and health services are just some of the leading factors in the decision for Egyptians to choose to migrate. “Slow economic expansion and rapid population growth result in extensive unemployment” and the case is no different in Egypt where the high unemployment rates have definitely been influenced by the rapid population growth in the country. Egyptian ‘brain drain’, a growing problem over the past years, is mainly due to a set of factors related to Egypt (the country of origin) and the countries of destination. Push factors include the low return to education in Egypt and unemployment, while pull factors are the opposite; a high return to education and more job opportunities. Based on a survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in May 2011 economic concerns were the most common responses among the respondents with 73% noting a lack of job opportunities in Egypt (push factor) and 49% indicating the potential to receive higher salaries abroad (pull factor).

“The drastic measures that a large number of Egyptians are taking attest to the dire economic situation at home, said John Salevurakis, an assistant professor of economics at the American University in Cairo. In Egypt, it is common to meet taxi drivers with engineering degrees and office clerks with salaries as low as 150 LE

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($27) a month". Why are the Egyptian youth, who have completed their studies and have collected engineering degrees settling for a job as a taxi driver? The answer is that there is simply no other option for them, as the opportunities in Egypt to find a job have been decreasing over time. In a survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in February 2011, 73.1% of both male and female youth cited low income as a major push factor out of Egypt, while 64.1% also cited the lack of job opportunities. In the same survey, 94.6% of males noted that a major pull factor to migrate was the ability to earn money abroad. Given the ever-increasing population in the country, more and more people are struggling as they compete for a very limited number of available jobs. “People are unlikely to engage in that illegal immigration without some sort of desperation,” said John Salevurakis. “This is something you need to do when you are running out of options, and that speaks not just of the economy but also social options.”

A severe problem that is found in Egypt is that the majority of new graduates are not equipped with the skills needed in the workplace, leaving them alienated and dissatisfied. “Insufficient skill workforce is one of the major constraints affecting businesses. Most of the jobs created domestically or abroad either require no skills or demand high technical skills which the first time job seekers do not possess. The technical skill shortcoming among the secondary school graduates is mainly the outcome of an outdated, rigid and inefficient education system”. In accordance with

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40 Ibid.
the ‘ILO school to work transition survey’, in 2006 roughly 41% of employers that were a part of this survey assessed fresh graduates’ ability to applying knowledge learned at school in the work place as ‘poor’. Furthermore, a similar ‘poor’ rating was given when employers were asked about the practical training provided to the first time employees at school, with 48% of employers describing it as ‘poor’. The difficulties faced by Egyptian employers to recruit qualified workers is based on a system in which the youth, who have recently graduated, are unable to apply the knowledge in the workplace due to a disconnect between Egypt’s educational system and employment prospects. While this is certainly not something that only occurs in Egypt, it has become an increasingly troublesome issue recently.

Since 1990, Egypt’s unemployment rate has remained in the range of 8-11% with the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) stating that in 2010 roughly 9.4% of the population was unemployed. This is not a case unique to Egypt, rather to the Arab region as a whole as stated by Nader Fergany who describes the region as “uniquely characterized by, among other things, the highest (open) unemployment rate among regions of the world. At 15% the unemployment rate of the region is about here times as large as the world average”.47

When looking at official figures one must keep in mind that the definition used for unemployment will be one that keeps the number as low as possible. The unemployment problem in Egypt is more related to labor market insertion (finding the

44 Ibid.
46 CAPMAS
first job) and the youth, rather than the middle aged workers. “One of the
interesting characteristics of unemployment in Egypt is that it is not necessarily
associated with poverty. The bulk of the young and better educated unemployed can
afford a long job search with family support, but the poor simply cannot afford to be
out of work for long and many take refuge in the low-pay informal market.” If the
informal market is not an option, the “large economically active Egyptian population,
frustrated by a sluggish domestic labor market” will respond to the opportunities
abroad, and migration abroad for employment will continue to be a viable option.

While unemployment continues to be a problem in Egypt, the real cause for
concern is underemployment as the working poor still either live under poverty or are
unable to sustain their own lives along with those of their families. With this
dysfunctional labor market, along with the fact that the cost of living in Egypt is
continually increasing, from the costs of finding shelter (whether renting or buying)
having sky-rocketed over the past few years, to the “rising food and fuel prices
exacerbating] the situation. In the last few years, Egyptians saw their real incomes
severely eroded in the face of uncontrollable price hikes of basic necessities”.
It is
becoming harder and harder for people who are unable to find jobs, or are working
with extremely low salaries, to afford having a sustainable livelihood in Egypt. Many
people find it hard just to survive with the income they are being given, and more
people are being put in a desperate enough situation financially in which they believe
their only option of survival is to travel abroad and make a living there. “Illegal

Unemployment Rate Stubbornly High?” Arab Planning Institute: International Conference on the
\[49\] Ibid Page 7.
immigration is a major problem facing us, all those young people with their hope, energy and education can’t find a legitimate job in Egypt so they go looking elsewhere, said Chairman of Nahda University Seddik Afifi”.

In summary, when dealing with the economic factors that lead to Egyptians deciding to emigrate, the two main issues deal with job opportunities and the ability to make money. In Egypt the supply of labor far exceeds the demand, and thus job opportunities are limited and people struggle to find a job. However, in Europe it is argued that there are more jobs available. Furthermore, in Europe the ability to make more money than in Egypt is a strong push factor for the potential migrants in Egypt to make the decision to emigrate. While the economic factors are almost always the strongest reasons as to why people migrate internationally, the political scene in Egypt is also something worth considering.

*Political Factors*

Political factors are directly tied with a government’s interaction with its citizens and encompass things such as the atmosphere of freedom, corruption by state officials and nepotism shown by the government to a certain group of citizens, and the state of fear that the Egyptian government tried to constantly rule its people by. The atmosphere of freedom is a factor that not many researchers seem to mention, however, it plays a significant role in the Egyptians’ decisions to emigrate. At face value, the oppression that is found in Egypt has left many people willing to risk

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everything in order to live in a place where they are granted the freedoms that are unavailable to them in Egypt. Living in Egypt, people are not granted the simple freedoms such as the freedoms of speech and expression; freedoms that should be given to the citizens of a ‘democratic’ state. Anyone that is openly opposed to what the government believes is usually not left to freely express their opinions and are met with either a physical altercation by the government’s police force, or are silenced through other means, including simply ‘disappearing’ in the middle of the night.

When dealing with political factors and how they impact migration, two Egyptian laws must be discussed; the 1997 Land Law and the 2003 Labor Law. The Land Law no.96 of 1992 (which was implemented in 1997) was issued through which the “agrarian land was liberalized. The laws determined a five-year transitional period after which tenants had to return the arable land to its original owners. The tenants had rented those properties for forty years with fixed rents determined by law (seven times the tax – about 100 L.E. per acre) since the issuance of law 157 of 1952”\(^{54}\). According to the new law, the rent suddenly increased to 22 times the tax (about 600 L.E.) and in 1997 the owners were given full rights to determining the rent of the arable land. The rent of one acre of land reached 2000 L.E. and by 2005 the yearly rental value of one acre amounted to an average of 3000 L.E. So in the span of five years, from 1992 when the law was first issued to 1997 when it was implemented, the price of one acre of land had gone from 100 L.E. to approximately 2000 L.E. Furthermore, tenants who were unable to afford these new prices were evicted without receiving compensation for their property or houses.

The implementation of this law was accompanied by violent activities against the tenants (farmers) and continued until 2003, with the year between 1998-1999.

seeing 101 killed, 734 injured, and 688 arrested during that one year span.\textsuperscript{55} While it was internationally recognized that farmers should be liberated from fear and poverty and enjoy their economic, social, civil, political and cultural rights, the Egyptian farmers were placed in an impossible situation in which many of them had to look towards alternative sources of work after realizing that they would be unable to afford the rising prices of the arable land they had been farming, and living on, previously.

The 2003 Labor Law had a similar effect on the Egyptian workforce, even though the people affected were not the same as the land reform law changes in 1992. “The previous Labor Law of 1981 provided that renewal or continuation of a temporary employment contract is considered a renewal or a continuation of this relationship for an unlimited period of time. The New Labor Law (2003) takes a totally different approach in this respect, which allows the multiplicity of renewals of temporary employment contracts. The importance of this innovation is obvious because it allows, for the first time in decades, to employ the employees on a continuous temporary basis, which minimizes to a great extent the number of legal actions brought against the employers for abusive dismissal of their employees.”\textsuperscript{56} This, in theory, meant that suddenly there was no such thing as job security for those who were on temporary contracts, leaving them susceptible to being fired at any time with no compensation or warning. This, along with the land reform laws implemented earlier, left some Egyptians in a state where they were unsure of their lives in Egypt, and had to look towards other alternatives including migrating to Europe in order to ensure the survival of themselves and their families.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
This constant state of fear that many Egyptians found themselves left them paralyzed and unable to express any opinions that may be deemed as contrary to the beliefs of the ruling power without fears of prosecution. “Many Arab countries suffer from a case of cancerous growth of both army and police, along with a sharp deviation of both bodies from their assumed functions within a system of good governance: the safety and security of the citizen. It can be said that the problem does not reside in the absence of societal governance institutions, but rather in their extreme weakness, particularly where regulation and accountability are concerned”.

This state of living, in which people are constantly feeling as if they must watch their step, and that they are not free to live the way they see most fit because of the lack of safety given to them may lead to many people deciding that they would rather die trying to live a free life than to continue living under oppression. “It may be better to live in deserts than to live in gardens under flames of oppression”.

The political factors covered involved the lack of freedoms for Egyptian citizens and the state of fear that many Egyptians find themselves living in. When people are uncomfortable in their own country to express their feelings and beliefs, then what is to stop them from migrating to Europe where, it is believed, they would actually be given more rights as a foreigner than they have as citizens in Egypt. A potential migrant also takes account the social factors when making his decision, as something like migration networks plays a vital role in a person’s ultimate decision of whether they should emigrate.

Social Factors

The third category refers to social factors, such as assistance migrants might get from relatives and friends who preceded them, population growth, social tensions dealing with class discrepancies and unrest in Egyptian history.\(^{59}\) “Perhaps the most influential factor was having a social network in the host country to ease integration into the labor market and provide information essential for day-to-day living in the new environment. Few people are prepared to migrate without having some kind of social support in the host country”.\(^{60}\) Migration networks have always played an important role not only in whether or not a person is willing to emigrate, but also their country of preference. According to a May 2011 survey by IOM, young Egyptians predominately gain their information about migration from their relatives, with 75% noting their relatives as an important source of information.\(^{61}\) In addition to this, more than 80% of the respondents partaking in the survey stated that they knew someone who has migrated (either friends or family) further highlighting the importance of social networks in one’s migratory decision.\(^{62}\) Furthermore, as stated by Ayman Zohry:

“An important factor that plays a major role in stimulating migration streams to Europe is the wealth of successful migrants and return migrants. Remittances of Egyptian migrants who work in European countries are important factors that stimulate a continuous stream of migration. Potential migrants claim that ordinary workers can save an average amount of 6,000 Euro per annum while working abroad (about 40,000 L.E). Potential migrants claim that the savings of one-year work in Europe is more than a lifetime salary in Egypt”.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{62}\) Ibid

\(^{63}\) Zohry, Ayman (2006). “Attitudes of Egyptian youth towards migration to Europe”, study
Building luxurious houses in rural Egypt, marriages, and consumerism behavior of returnees is a strong factor that attracts young men to migrate. When weighing the risk of migration against the expected returns, such as being able to get married, building grand houses in rural areas and being able to support themselves for a ‘lifetime’ the Egyptian youth prefer to take the risk for an assumed better life in the future.64

Rapid population growth is a crucial social problem that has seen more and more people look towards migration as a viable option. “While the doubling of Egypt’s population between 1897 and 1947, from 9.7 million to 19 million, took fifty years, the next doubling took less than thirty years, from 1947 to 1976. Today, Egypt’s population is about 74 million which means that another population doubling occurred in the last 30 years”.65 Even though the previous statement by Ayman Zohry was only five years ago, the current Egyptian population has increased drastically, with 2010 estimates based on data from the World Bank having the number at over 81 million. The annual population growth rate is roughly 2%, which has been the case for more than a decade now.66 The problem with the population increase is the population dispersion, with about 95% of the population crowded into around 5% of the total land area that follows the course of the Nile, with the remaining 95% of the land being arid desert.67

The general lacks of freedom extends to the problem of social status and class in Egypt. The fact that a person is automatically placed into a general social class

Undertaken for the Information Dissemination on Migration (IDOM) Project.

64 Ibid
depending on who their parents are, and with the social-class division in Egypt it is extremely difficult for someone from a ‘lower’ socio-economic background to push themselves up the social “ladder” by working in Egypt. This leads to many young Egyptian men looking towards migration to Europe as their only option to living the life they have pictured for themselves. In Europe, it is argued, someone can start off with a ‘clean slate’, and rather than be shackled by his own socio-economic background like he is in Egypt, he would be able to succeed and make a name for himself through his hard work and determination.

“Egypt has a lot of money but it doesn’t get to the people,” said Mohamed Mahmoud Saeed, a 23-year-old student.68 This statement perfectly describes the problem with the government that many Egyptians feel while living in Egypt. Many people believe that regardless of what they do, they will always not be able to get what they are ‘deserved’ based on the idea that the money in this country is left in the hands of the ‘elite’ few. The gap between the unemployed youth and the emerging rich class increased societal tensions as frustrations amongst the unemployed has reached its tipping point recently.69 This social phenomenon of disparity in income levels, especially in Egypt where the gap in social class is quite evident, leaves people feeling helpless. Furthermore, it is precisely these people that criminal networks such as traffickers are able to take advantage of with the empty promises of a better life in Europe. With the notion that regardless of how hard they worked they would still be in desperate need, people make the choice that they would rather have a ‘chance’ at freedom by migrating to Europe, rather than staying shackled while in Egypt.

Impacts of Migration on the Family Left Behind

While the affects of migration on the migrants themselves have been well documented, it seems like the family left behind have not been given the attention they deserve. The impact on family members left behind can be either positive or negative, depending on the length of time the migrant is away from the household and whether or not they remit money back home. “On the one hand, migration, if accompanied by remittances, can loosen household budget constraints — leading to greater investments in household enterprises, increases in children’s schooling, and higher current consumption. If migration is temporary or circular, the return of the migrant could also bring back valuable skills acquired abroad as well as entrepreneurial potential. On the other hand, the withdrawal of what are usually prime breadwinners from the household’s labor supply pool could either increase the work burden of others or decrease their labor supply depending on the flow of remittances and their use.” The families left behind are greatly affected by irregular emigration, even with the fact that they do not go through all the struggles that the migrant might go through. Based on the information available the impacts felt by the family left behind are three-fold: economic, psychological, and social. Each will be described individually, starting with the economic issues.

Economical

The economic impacts on the family left behind vary greatly depending on multiple factors. Not only does it deal with the migrant’s ability to find a job in

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71 Ibid.
Europe, but also on the length of time they spend away from home, and whether or not they send remittances to their family.\textsuperscript{72} When dealing with remittances, the endogenous migration approach deals with the notion that “sending remittances produces a sense of satisfaction to the migrant worker concerned with the welfare of his/her family”.\textsuperscript{73} With this view, the migrant is willingly sending remittances back home with the hopes of helping the family through times of bad economy, as well as trying to improve their social status in the community back home in some cases. In this approach, the family left behind is not as economically burdened as others by the decision of the migrant to immigrate, and, in some cases, could find themselves in a better economic situation than before depending on how much they are receiving along with the amount of time spent away from home by the migrant.

When dealing with remittances most studies have suggested that it reduces poverty worldwide, with the particular case of Egypt being no different. With an average incidence of poverty of about 20% in Egypt in the mid-2000s, remittances from migrants are estimated to reduce a household’s poverty rate by 8 or 9 percentage points.\textsuperscript{74} This is a sizeable reduction in poverty, however, when one considers that only 3.5% of households receive remittances in Egypt, and that an even smaller percentage of those are to ‘poor’ households, then it is evident that the impact of remittances varies greatly from one household to the next.\textsuperscript{75}

Economically, it seems that the families left behind generally suffer from irregular immigration. Migrants from ‘poor’ families are usually forced to sell their


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. Page 3


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family’s belongings such as their land, jewelry, and other things in order to raise the money needed for someone to pay the necessary amount to irregularly emigrate. The problem here lies in the fact that many families are forced to borrow money, from friends and neighbors, in order to collect the necessary funds. Stories such as the one of Haj Ashmawi, a father who had helped his son irregularly emigrate, are all too familiar as “he had to pay LE20, 000 for the expenses of his son's trip on the understanding that he would pay them back when he reached Italy. Ashmawi continued by stating that "he had to borrow the money because we are poor," he recounted. "But we pay them back in installments."  

When dealing with irregular emigration and its economic impacts, it is important to note the role played by ‘smugglers’ in this situation. In accordance to the IOM, the “smuggling of migrants in commonly understood as the intentional organization or facilitation of the movement of persons across international borders, in violation of laws or regulations, for the purpose of financial or other gain to the smuggler”. The profitability of smuggling is often viewed to the lower risk of detection and arrest attached to it and the large demand for its services. On the other hand, the smuggled people face a high risk as their vulnerability leaves them as easy targets. Firstly, the economic difficulty they face has been well documented, with most of them needing to sell or mortgage their properties to pay for their smuggling fees.  

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78 “The Effective Administration of Criminal Justice to Tackle the Smuggling of Migrants”. UNAFEI.
79 Ibid
While families are seen as providers on the financial aspect of life, their emotional support is perhaps even more important. “Separation is a painful decision with important emotional costs both for those who move and for those left behind. Children’s health, education and overall development depend on the support the family is providing, going beyond monetary aspects”. The “absence of men can create material and psychological insecurity, leading mothers (or children when both the parents are migrating) to pressures and negotiations with wider family members”. As mentioned in Gihan Shahine’s article “Dying to live”:

“Everybody in the village tells more or less the same story. They similarly insist that the young men who disappeared are alive and have been detained by the Italian authorities in holding camps in Italy's Lampedusa and Sicily. The families of those who disappeared say they have received repeated anonymous calls telling them that their sons are alive and were being held in holding camps. People would bet on whether the anonymous calls were being made by sympathetic prison guards, released prisoners, or are just a trick by traffickers who seek to inject hope in potential travelers.”

The psychological issues that the family deals with include, what is mentioned above, as the simple fear of the unknown. With ‘missing’ persons, the families truly has no idea of what has happened to their loved one, and while some family members decide to move on after a certain period of time, some people can never really let go of the hope that their family member is still alive somewhere.

“Children left behind suffer from a wide range of psychosocial problems due to parental migration. The most common psychosocial problems relate to emotional
detachment, but vary due to gender, interpersonal difficulties, attachment to material resources and violence”. In terms of gender, “the coping mechanisms among boys often include externalizing their pain and frustration while girls tend to internalize their suffering” leading to boys being more likely to have problems dealing with interpersonal relationships and effectiveness while girls were more likely to experience low self-esteem and negative moods.

The most common problems when it comes to children’s feelings are that of sadness, abandonment, anger, despair, low self esteem, and a lack of trust, all problems that seem reasonable for a child, especially a young one, whose parent has migrated for work. Once again, all cases are different, and as stated previously a number of factors come into play when dealing with the different psychological problems faced by the children left behind. Children whose parent(s) have abandoned them for a long period of time may suffer from permanent effects and may struggle their entire lives with feelings of rejection and loss, while others whose parent(s) are gone for a shorter period of time may not show the same tendencies. Furthermore, the way they are treated while their parent(s) are gone also plays a significant role in how these children that are left behind are psychologically affected.

Social

86 Ibid.
The third, and final, issue that the family deals with has to do with the social aspect of their lives. The most obvious social effect deals with the loss of a family member to irregular emigration as this is usually when social isolation occurs; either voluntarily or by force. This can be especially intensified when the ones that are left behind are children. Children left behind inevitably grow up in a single headed family or with grandparents and relatives if both parents are migrating.

With most cases in Egypt dealing with irregular emigration deal with men leaving, it is important to focus on the effects on the children who are raised in the absence of their fathers and the women who are suddenly thrust into the “head” role in the family. Before doing so, it is important to remember that every case study will inevitably be different based on a number of factors including, but not limited to: the age of the children when their father migrated, how long the migrant spends away, and the type of relationship the children and/or wives had with their father/husband before he migrated.

The migration of the head of the household could push children towards a position where they their labor supply would be increased in order to “substitute for the lost labor of the migrant”.87 This is particularly true in households that do not receive remittances as the remaining members of the family try to make up for the migrant’s lost income. However, households that do receive remittances aren’t immune to the increase in work, in fact the reduced hours of wage and salary work in these instances is “more than made up by the increases in the incidence and intensity

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of self-employment and unpaid family work induced by an increase in family enterprise activity”.

“The ease with which family members are able to communicate is a significant factor in the well-being of both the migrant and their families”. Being able to connect with your loved ones, regardless of how far away they may be, certainly eases the pain of not having them physically around. In addition to this, the level of support from the extended family is often crucial in influencing how the family left behind is affected. In countries like Egypt, where the family unit is usually one of the strongest ties, the importance of the extended family’s support during the hard times is essential in many cases.

A social impact that is often forgotten, or seen as unimportant, is the empowerment of women when their spouse migrates. In the studies that were conducted, it was found that during the migration process females do tend to gain more decision-making powers and begin to make important decisions dealing with the household, such as the education of their children and the household maintenance of the family. However, it is argued that this is only in the short term as this “is essentially reversed when the migrant returns…resulting in less progressive gender roles and attitudes among migrant households than among households whose men

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90 Ibid

stayed home”. There are two reasons behind this with the first dealing with migrants who are returned from more socially conservative areas like Saudi Arabia, where migrants may have been influenced by the cultural norms. The second reason this may occur deals with the notion that the returning migrant may feel like he needs to assert “the male prerogative after a period of absence”.

With some of the academics’ analyses being reviewed it is important to point out the gaps in the information in order to prove the importance of this study. When looking at the reasons why people decide to migrate, the main area in which the information seems to be lacking deals with the motivational factors faced by the potential migrants. The importance of the ‘social success image’ of the returning migrant cannot be underestimated; especially when considering the state of despair many of these potential migrants find themselves in while living in Egypt. This was discussed in this section, however it often seemed like the image of the returning migrant was not given as much importance as a motivational factor in the information available. Similarly, there seemed to be insufficient information on the impact of the media on potential migrant’s decision to migrate. In the literature that did mention the media there would be very little analysis as to why the media played either a big or small role on the decision to migrate; based on the research conducted by other studies. It would seem that with the media playing such an important role in our everyday lives; whether through printed newspapers, the radio, television stations, or the internet, that they would play an influential role in the decision making process for potential migrants contemplating migration; however, as will be discussed in the results, the opposite is true. While this was stated in some of the research conducted

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before this study, the reason as to why the media did not play an influential role was often not discussed.

The biggest gaps in the information analyzed deal with the impacts of migration on the family that is left behind. As stated throughout this thesis, the family left behind is often not as involved in research focused on irregular migration; as the migrants themselves are often the center of attention. When dealing with the economical impact on the family left behind, while the literature available does a good job in discussing the issues faced by the families; the issue from the perspective of the family themselves seems to be missing. The economical, as well as the psychological and social impacts, seem to be reported from the point of view of someone on the outside looking inwards; it is as if the studies conducted on the manner reported the issues faced by the family left behind from the viewpoint of the researcher(s), and not from the families themselves.

How the family members personally feel about these impacts is something that is desperately lacking in the analyzed literature; especially when dealing with the case of Egyptian families in specific. It is because of this that the impacts reported in the literature are mostly negative in nature; however, as will be seen in the findings, some participants accept these “negative impacts” as necessary in order to reach their goal of a better life in the future. One last thing worth mentioning when dealing with the gaps in the information is the importance of an open and easily accessible line of communication between the family left behind and the migrant. When dealing with the psychological and social impacts of migration on the families that are left behind, the ability to communicate with their migrating family member is invaluable. Again, while the literature available tended to focus on the negative aspects and impacts of
migration on the families left behind, the value of communication was an aspect that seemed missing from the analyzed literature and, as will be seen in the results of this study, the ability to communicate with the migrating family member played a crucial role in how the participants were psychologically and socially impacted by migration. With that being said, the findings of this study will now be presented; starting with the main factors that lead to Egyptians deciding to migrate.
Chapter III: Results of the Research

This study was conducted to understand the phenomenon of Egyptian migration to Europe from the viewpoint of the people left behind. When dealing with an issue as critical as this, I felt it was important to get the point of view of the people who are often forgotten; the family that is left behind. There have been many reports and case studies that dealt with the matter of Egyptian emigration, but what often occurs is that the migrants themselves; from their problems in Egypt, to their issues once arriving in Europe, and everything in between are the focus point, leaving those left behind with little or no ability to share their experiences, struggles, and stories. These results hope to shed some light on the often overlooked family that is left behind, with the hopes that they too can be seen as victims of migration and can be dealt as such; with the Egyptian government creating programs to help these families through their tough times. When a person decides to migrate they are making a decision that will not only affect their personal lives, but also the lives of their loved ones, as for better or worse they will be directly affected by this decision as well.

“Egyptian international migration is temporary, economic (labor) and male dominated”.94 In addition to this, in most cases the migrants are usually a part of a particular age group with “older men realizing that they cannot compete in the labor market”.95 This is proven to be the case in most international migration cases, as stated by Ravenstein’s laws of migration constructed in the 1880s in which one of his

principles was based on the fact that most international migrants were young males.\textsuperscript{96} This leads to the research and case studies on migration usually being focused on a rather specific group of people, with everyone else being left out of the research process for the most part. The biggest difference of focusing on the family left behind as opposed to the migrants themselves is the inclusion of women. Women often have little or no voice when dealing with Egyptian emigration; however their input on the situation is vital when trying to understand emigration from the view point of the ones that are left behind. Furthermore, men who would not normally have their views heard (because they are either ‘older’ or because they have no desire to migrate), but who also have been affected by a family member’s migration, are given an opportunity to speak on the topic when the ones that are left behind are the focus of the research project.

A total of 18 participants took part in this research study, each with their own unique stories and experiences to share. Six personal interviews along with two focus groups, comprising of seven and five participants respectively, were conducted in order to gather the data. The results will be presented in two distinct chapters; the reasons as to why people migrate, and the impacts of migration on the ones left behind. Each chapter will be split into several sub-sections, with each one discussed in greater detail later on. Excerpts from the interviews and focus group discussions are presented in the sub-sections to reflect the different perspectives of the participants.

Why do Egyptians Decide to Migrate?
(Based on Results of Primary Research)

The reasons as to why people decide to migrate have been covered in great detail previously, as evident by the section dealing with the academics’ analyses of the subject. However, being able to ask those left behind why their family member decided to migrate adds a different perspective and viewpoint on the situation, and could shed new light on an existing problem. Economic and motivational factors were the two most common reasons given for why Egyptians decide to migrate, with both being discussed in greater detail later. What must not be understated here is the difference between the ‘want’ and the ‘need’ to immigrate to Europe, which can be explained by the supply and demand theory. Due to the fact that the available amount of labor (supply) exceeds the jobs available in Egypt (demand) the imbalance created leads to people being unable to find viable job opportunities in Egypt and therefore they sense that they ‘need’ to migrate in order to provide for themselves and their families.

It is also important to differentiate between the micro and macro levels of the decision-making process that result in Egyptians deciding to migrate. On the micro level, the focus is solely on the decision-making individual, which in this case is the potential migrant. It is the individual’s values and expectancies of improving and securing survival, wealth, comfort and status that plays, as will be discussed later, an important factor in the potential migrant’s decision to migrate. On the other hand, when looking at migration on the macro level the triadic relationship between the emigrating country, destination country, and the migrants’ associations must be analyzed. It is on the macro level that factors such as income and unemployment
differentials, political repression, ethnic and religious conflicts as well as population
growth impact the decision making process of the potential migrant. As discussed in
the literature review, all of these factors have been mentioned as possible key
components in the decision to migrate, which is why evaluating the micro and macro
levels of migration are vital and will be covered in the results section.

During the research process there were many instances in which the
participants stressed that their family member who immigrated to Europe did so as a
‘last resort’, and that if there were viable options in Egypt they would not have taken
the risk of trying to make it and succeed in Europe. This was also indicated by the
fact that everyone interviewed mentioned that their family member who had migrated
only planned to stay for a few years, and that once they reached a specific financial
goal, would return to Egypt. While the motivational factors may convince more
people to look at Europe as a realistic option, it is the economic struggles that are
faced in Egypt that tend to be the main deciding factor that push Egyptians towards
seeking opportunities outside of the country.

Contrary to some reports, which depict the migrant as an uneducated worker
who is unaware of the dangers of migration; all of the participants indicated that the
migrant knew, at the very least, some of the dangers and risks of their decision to
immigrate. This notion is backed by Ayman Zohry’s 2006 research on 1,552
completed young males between the ages of 18 and 40. In his research, Zohry states
that “most of the respondents are aware of illegal migration and its hazards, but at the
same time they realize that legal migration to Europe is not easy”.97 In addition to
this, 94.7% of the respondents in Zohry’s 2006 research indicated that they had heard

97 Zohry, Ayman (2006). “Attitudes of Egyptian Youth towards Migration to Europe”. Information
about the deported irregular migrants from Italy. The potential migrants are, for the most part, aware of the problems that they may face on their journey and once they arrive to Europe, but with no viable options available in Egypt are still willing to take the risk of migrating to Europe as in the minds of many migrants this is their only opportunity to have a chance at a better future for themselves and their families.

Naysayers will point towards the problems faced by migrants, such as deportation or death in some cases and state that it isn’t worth it. That while the government does have responsibilities to ensure that its citizens are able to find job opportunities and are able to survive, that the people should just stay home and ‘figure something out’. The question here is should people really settle on just ‘surviving’? On just getting enough money for themselves and their families to have a ‘living’ body day to day, with no real hopes or aspirations for the future. Should life really be just focusing on this, having no ability to give ones family more than just the bare minimum while feeling both worthless and powerless to change their dire situations? While people might not be physically at the point of starvation, they could very well be at a point of emotional or mental starvation, and who is to decide which is more important for someone else? Faced with the reality of not being able to support their family, people will go through great lengths, personal struggles and pain to ensure that they have done everything in their power to try and create the best present and future for their family, and if that involves taking on the risks of migration then who is anyone to stand in the way of a man trying to do what is best for him and his family to live life to the fullest of their capabilities, and not have to strive to ‘just survive’.

In these situations the family member’s decision to migrate is not only supported by the family that will remain behind, but in some cases is encouraged; as

Ibid
evident by the notion of social choice. This approach focuses on “the household view of migration as a collective strategy to ensure the economic viability of the domestic unit through the strategic allocation of labor and investments. The household uses available resources in their perceived self-interest. Often, in patriarchal systems, the male head decides at the expense of females and younger members of the family”.99 In the case of Egypt, it usually is the male head who decides to migrate, but with the best interests of his family in mind as he tries to ensure a better life for not only himself, but those he leaves behind.

3.1 Economic Factors

The most prominent issue faced by Egyptians, according to the research conducted, deals with economic factors; both in Egypt (push factors) and in Europe (pull factors). The push-pull migration theory deals with things that are unfavorable about the area that one lives in (push) and things that attract someone to another area (pull). “Since 1990, Egypt’s unemployment rate has remained stubbornly high, in the range of 8-11%”100. This has been the root cause of many of the economic issues faced by Egyptians today. Push factors include the lack of job opportunities, the low wages/salaries in Egypt, and the problematic issue of Egyptians’ real income continually decreasing with the inflation rates having increased rapidly over the past couple years. Pull factors are the opposite, with Europe seen as promising many more job opportunities and the opportunity to gain more money. While 18 participants is a small sample, and by no means meant to reflect the Egyptian population as a whole, the fact that every participant mentioned economic factors is important, and shows the

significance of money and how it plays a vital role in people’s decisions pertaining to their future, and how some people are willing to risk their own lives in order to attain more money. For every push factor in Egypt there is usually an opposite pull factor from Europe, and this will be the way this section is set up, with the push factor being explained first, followed by the opposite pull factor. The first push factor to be explained will be the inability to find jobs in Egypt, followed by the European pull factor of having much more opportunities to find a job.

About 75% (14 of the 18 participants) pointed towards the lack of viable job opportunities in Egypt as a key push factor in their family member’s decision to migrate. From the mother of 2 who stated that her husband, who had just recently returned from Europe, was “forced to leave because of his struggle to find a stable job” (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011) to the younger brother of a migrant who stated that “there were simply no jobs available for my brother once he graduated from college” (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011) the lack of job opportunities was a key component in the decision making process of their migrant family member. What is important to remember here is that not only is the lack of job opportunities for fresh graduates a problem, but that job security is also a growing concern in Egypt.

In both focus groups when job security was mentioned, all the participants had a story of a friend or relative who has recently lost their job. Participants from the first focus group, involving 7 men ranging in age from 29-50 who worked as security guards in October City all knew of someone that had recently lost their job. Two participants mentioned friends who used to work at hotels being let go after the events of the revolution earlier this year, while the others mentioned that they knew people who used to work in their same line of work that were also let go recently. One of the participants in the focus group mentioned that he believed that even more people
would look to migrate now that the job market was shrinking while the group of people looking for a job is always increasing. With companies looking to downsize, and more people looking for jobs than ever before, people will have no choice but to look elsewhere for viable job opportunities (Excerpt from focus group, October 10 2011). This notion was shared by the participants of the second focus group, which involved 5 men currently completing their studies at Cairo University who have had family members migrate to Europe recently. Each of the participants had their own personal stories, from the brother who lost his real estate job to the cousin who lost his job at a local bank, but one particular story really shed some light on how much of an issue the lack of job security has really become recently. Participant #3 shared the story of his father, who was a bank employee for 25 years before he was recently fired for someone who would do his job for less money.

“The fact that the bank could get rid of him so easily makes me worried about my future here and what kind of opportunities I will be able to find for myself once I graduate”. (Excerpt from Focus Group. October 20, 2011.)

The inability to find a stable job could lead to people feeling frustrated and helpless, like the older brother of a particular participant who, after completing his studies and being drafted by the army for his mandatory service was released after 2 years but struggled mightily to find a stable job. He would work in construction, as a taxi driver, and in a local coffee shop but all those jobs were temporary and he was quickly forced to find something else after being let go from all these jobs (Personal Interview. October 2, 2011). This same frustration was felt by Omar, the brother of another participant, who
“Was becoming more and more frustrated with life in Egypt. The lack of job opportunities left him with the feeling of being inadequate; it made him feel like he was not doing his family proud and that it was up to him to make sure that he did everything in his power to try and put the family in a better situation economically”. (Personal Interview, October 14, 2011)

With the direct correlation of finding a viable job opportunity and having the opportunity to gain more income, the importance of having options when it comes to the job market cannot be underestimated. These types of feelings also extend to the ones that were left behind who might consider immigrating to Europe.

“If there are no jobs here and no way to make the money needed to live a suitable life, it would be foolish to not consider Europe as an option”. (Excerpt from Focus Group, quote from Participant #1. October 20, 2011)

This general feeling was echoed by the rest of the participants in this particular focus group, with each of them agreeing with the idea that the lack of job opportunities in Egypt is a great push factor for people to look outside of the country to try and make a living. Participant #2 echoes these frustrations when he states that

“Fresh graduates cannot find jobs here. As a doctor I will struggle to find a job, and even if I do find something the salary that new doctors are given is something that cannot even buy the most basic of needs. I plan on working here as a doctor eventually but I feel like I must immigrate to Europe once I graduate in order to be able to build a life for myself in the future”. (Excerpt from Focus Group, October 20, 2011).
Participant #5 of the same focus group seemed to sum up the situation perfectly when he stated that

“Staying in Egypt certainly has its benefits. Our families and friends are here and this is where we grew up, this is our country, and this is where we are most comfortable. However, there are times when you need to make tough decisions for your future. If there are no opportunities here we cannot just sit on our hands and hope for things to be better. We must go out and make sure we are able to take care of not only ourselves, but our families as well and if this means taking the necessary risks of traveling to Europe for a couple years then that is what we must do”. (Excerpt from Focus Group, October 20, 2011)

The important thing to remember here, and what was mentioned previously as well, is the fact that people do not necessarily want to leave Egypt, but many of them are left in a position where they can either stay here and struggle through life, trying to find a job that may or may not pay them enough for basic needs; or they can take the risk of traveling to Europe, where they will have the opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their families. When faced with desperate situations, more often than not people will decide it is in their best interest to take the risk and immigrate to Europe.

While the lack of job opportunities works as a push factor for many Egyptians when they decide to migrate, the higher chances of being able to attain a stable job in Europe acts as the opposing pull factor. Not as many participants mentioned this as a particular reason as to why their family member decided to migrate, but the idea that “there were jobs that the Europeans are unwilling to do, jobs that we do in Egypt on a normal basis” was something that was mentioned enough times that it seemed
important to make note of (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011). The logic behind this idea is that there is a gap in the European job market with jobs that the locals are either unwilling, or unable to do for whatever reason. This means that there is an opportunity for ‘others’ to be able to find a job in Europe, and this is a big enough opportunity for many Egyptians to leave behind the shrinking job market in their home country and take the ‘risk’ of traveling to Europe.

This thought process is backed by the dual labor market theory, which states that migration is mainly caused by pull factors in more developed countries by assuming that the labor market in these countries consists of two sectors; primary, which requires high skilled labor, and secondary, which is labor-intensive and requires low-skilled workers. Under this scenario, as based by the theory, migration from less developed countries into more developed countries is a result of the developed countries’ need for labor in their secondary market. Since the native laborers do not want to do these jobs a gap in which migrant workers are needed to fill these jobs. These jobs are attractive to migrant workers who, like in the case of Egypt, are unable to find any opportunities in their home country and are attracted by the high wages, in relation to the options available, that these secondary jobs in the more developed countries must offer in order to entice migrants into filling this labor gap.

“As long as you can make it to Europe safely finding a job is easy”. (Personal Interview, October 2, 2011).

Thoughts like these are not only dangerous for the individuals partaking in the migration, or even the family members they leave behind, but for the country as a whole, which loses its citizens because of their frustrations over their lives in Egypt as
well as the dreams of something better in Europe. This phenomenon is known as being part of the ‘brain drain’ in Egypt, and deals with the migration of a large group of individuals with technical skills. The reasons this occurs deals with the lack of opportunities, economic depression, and political instability in Egypt; along with the rich opportunities, political freedom, developed economy, and better living conditions in Europe.

“The risk of going to Europe is worth it when you see how life is here. There are people who have died on their journey to Europe because it was their last resort and there was nothing for them here. When people are willing to die just to leave then the government must realize there is a big problem”. (Excerpt from Focus Group, quote from Participant #5. October 20, 2011)

When dealing with the economic reasons as to why Egyptians decide to immigrate, there is perhaps no bigger factor than the disparity in income levels between working in Egypt and working abroad. This is supported by the neoclassical economic theory which states that the main reason for labor migration is the wage difference between two geographic locations. These wage differences are usually linked to geographic labor demand and supply where the areas with a shortage of labor but an excess of capital have a high relative wage while areas with a high labor supply and a shortage of capital have a low relative wage. Every participant that partook in the research process mentioned money, whether the lack of it in Egypt or the ability to make more in Europe, as a key factor in their family member’s decision to migrate. This fact, along with the idea that people are willing to risk their lives in order to migrate to Europe can best be described by the wage differential theory. This theory is used to analyze the relation between a wage rate and the unpleasantness or risk of a particular job. However, this can also be implemented when dealing with
migration, as the promise of higher wages in Europe makes the risks of traveling worth it to many potential migrants.

The following section deals with the specificities of the wage differential between jobs in Egypt and those in Europe. The first part describes the struggles in Egypt pertaining to the low wages and the fact that the real income of Egyptians has decreased mightly over the past couple of years. Following this will be the pull factors from Europe, which mainly focus on the notion of being able to gain much more money there than in Egypt.

“In the highly commercialized metropolis, cash is an important part of any household’s total income. In Egypt, the rapid commercialization of goods and services traditionally provided at home, together with a growing demand for more modern products, has increased the significance of the household’s cash resources.”

When asked what the main causes were that led to their family member’s decision to migrate all of the participants pointed to their frustration over low wages as a key element in their choice to leave. The mother of two, whose husband had just recently returned from Europe after two years there, explained that her husband was

“Becoming frustrated with the fact that he was becoming more and more unable to afford the basic essentials with the prices of everything rising but his salary staying the same”. (Personal Interview, October 23, 2011)

This was echoed by another participant, a mother of 1, who explained that her husband simply

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“Wasn’t making enough money here [in Egypt]. He would work all day and would still barely be able to afford the most basic of needs. Everything was getting more expensive while his salary would stay the same” so it would become harder and harder to afford things such as food, rent, transportation, and gas. (Personal Interview, October 26, 2011.)

What was evident from both of these participants was that their husbands had decided to migrate in order to try and build a better future for their families, which was something that they were unable to achieve in Egypt. The inability to afford the basics, the things needed for survival, will always drive someone towards looking for alternatives in their life, as their current situation in which they are barely scraping through life is not something they are willing to accept without at least trying to find a better option for not only themselves, but for their families as well.

The dissatisfaction of low salaries was not only limited to husbands, as many people who were still looking to start a life on their own faced the same frustrations of not being able to sustain a suitable lifestyle.

“Omar (the participant’s brother) was becoming more frustrated with life here from the lack of job opportunities to the inability of buying necessities to the lack of money, he felt like going to Europe would make his life better not only in the immediate present but also for the future” (Personal Interview. October 14, 2010)

This feeling was echoed by many others as the stress of supporting a family on a shoe-string budget was a constant cause of frustration for many. Asked about why his brother decided to migrate during our personal interview one participant simply stated that his brother
“Was working too many hours for too little money. He was responsible for supporting the entire family at the time and felt that the only way he could do that and be able to get married was to travel and work outside. He was unwilling to simply settle for the life he had here and was willing to risk everything for a chance at a better future”. (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011)

An important aspect that this particular participant brought up during our interview was the fact that his brother “wanted to make the family proud” by being able to give them a much improved life (Personal Interview, October 30 2011). Ever since his father passed away years ago his older brother had taken over the role of the ‘man of the house’; the person who made it his responsibility to make sure that everyone else was able to afford the things needed to live. For a man that was barely 23 years old and making very little money at his job in Egypt that was a tough burden to have on his shoulders. Sadly this is not the only instance where this is the case as more and more ‘young’ males who are looking to get married and start a family are continually discouraged by the lack of money they are able to attain in Egypt, and thus are forced to look for alternatives elsewhere. This notion is backed by Everett S. Lee in his theory of migration in which one of his characteristics of migrants states that “the heightened propensity to migrate at certain stages of the life cycle is important in the selection of migrants. To some degree, migration is a part of the rites de passage.”

“My brother seemed to get angrier by the day due to the lack of money he was able to get from his job. He was continually frustrated that he could not afford his own place in Cairo and that he had to move in with me in my small room that I was only able to

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get because I was a student at the University (Cairo University). He wanted to be able to afford getting married, finding his own place, and starting a family, all things he felt he could not do if he stayed in Egypt”. (Personal Interview. October 2, 2011)

This sense of being unable, or incapable, of gaining enough money to be able to ‘live life’ rather than struggle through it is an issue faced by many, and was something that all of the participants in this research project pointed towards as a big factor in their family member’s decision to migrate. As stated earlier, with every push factor there is an opposing pull factor, and in this case that would be the ability to gain more money in Europe than in Egypt.

“He (the participant’s brother) would constantly tell me that in Europe he could make enough money to last a lifetime in Egypt. He was willing to risk everything to make it to Europe because in the end it would all be worth it”. (Personal Interview. October 2, 2011)

The single biggest economic factor that leads Egyptians towards making the decision to migrate to Europe is the idea that they can make enough money there in a couple years to be able to live the rest of their lives comfortably in Egypt, and is a factor backed by both the neoclassical economic and dual labor market theories, which were explained previously in this chapter. This is also supported by the economic cost-benefit model which, in its simplest form, shows that “a potential migrant is likely to move if the present value of all future monetary benefits from moving is greater than the monetary costs of moving. It is assumed that the decisive
benefits are the differences in income between the origin and the destination and that the only costs are those of transporting the migrant”.103

This idea is also fuelled by motivational factors, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, but basically what occurs is that people in Egypt who know others who have returned from Europe will always point towards their apparent success by looking at their change in lifestyle from when they first left Egypt to when they returned. The specifics of these motivational factors will be discussed later, but for now it is important to note that on a purely economic level, the ability to achieve more money in Europe than in Egypt is a big ‘pull’ factor when dealing with Egyptians who are struggling paycheck to paycheck, being unable to afford the basic needs and essentials in an economy where prices have inflated at an alarming rate over the past few years. The point at which people feel like they have exhausted all the efforts available in Egypt, Europe becomes a much more viable option, and people become more willing to risk everything and sacrifice a couple years of hardship away from their family and children to try and build a better future (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011).

The dream of being able to achieve more money in Europe, money that can ease the struggles of the present and promise a better future is almost too good of an opportunity to pass up; especially when considering the constant problematic issues that the participants’ family members went through on a daily basis while in Egypt. When asked why her husband decided to leave, one particular participant focused on the fact that he would be able to gain more money there than in Egypt.

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“He could make more money there than here” she says, “If you are able to save money there and bring it back then you will be in good shape. Working there for 1 year is like working here for 10”.

(Personal Interview. October 26, 2011)

Similarly, the brother of a man currently in Italy also noted that in Europe you can make enough money in a couple years to last you a lifetime in Egypt (Personal Interview, October 30 2011). This idea that you could go work in Europe for a certain amount of time and return to Egypt with more money than you could have ever made while working here was something that was brought up by a number of participants, with their stories only differentiating by how many years they believed the money achieved in Europe could last them in Egypt.

An interesting aspect that was brought up during the research process in both the focus groups and personal interviews was the notion that in Europe, unlike in Egypt, you get paid for the work you put in. As stated earlier, many of the participants mentioned that their family members were working too many hours for too little pay, and that they were not being paid what they were deserved based on the working hours they were putting into their jobs.

“He would be able to make money based on how much he worked” stated one participant, speaking about her husband. She continued by saying that “workers in Egypt are taken advantage of, but outside he can work and get paid accordingly. There are also much more opportunities there for different types of jobs so he does not have to settle for being undervalued like he was in Egypt. If he does not like a particular aspect of his job there he can easily look for something else that would better suit him, which is definitely not the case here in Egypt”. (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011)
This was a common theme in many of the interviews, as people felt under-appreciated and under-valued in Egypt and believed the only way they could achieve what they truly deserve is by migrating to Europe. The question here is why do Egyptians decide to migrate to Europe, and in particular, Italy to try and create a better life for themselves and their families in the future? Why do Egyptians overwhelmingly believe that Italy is the top European choice of destination if they were to emigrate? This could be explained by distance decay, which states that the interaction between two locations declines as the distance between them increases. With the fact that Italy offers one of the closest entrances to Europe from Egypt, it comes as no surprise that Italy is a popular destination for migrants. While Italy’s proximity to Egypt plays a role in this decision, the real answer to this question deals with motivational factors, which will be the subject of the next section.

3.2 Motivational Factors

For the purposes of this study, motivational factors are extrinsic in nature and deal with the impact of the assistance migrants might get from family and friends that migrated before them, the media, and the ‘image of the returnee’ on Egyptians’ decision to not only migrate, but where they choose to go. The decision to migrate is not one made on a whim; on the contrary, it is usually something that the migrant has thought about for quite some time. Economic factors can be seen as the initial fire, since they play a pivotal role in making the migrant feel like emigrating is his ‘last resort’ to try and build a brighter future for himself and his family. However it is the motivational factors that act like the fuel to that fire, as potential migrants look towards these extrinsic aspects as a source of optimism that their decision to migrate
is the right one. While as humans we would like to believe that we are all completely independent beings, when it comes down to making life-changing decisions more often than not these decisions are made based on advice given to us from our families and friends; the people closest to us. With that in mind, the first aspect of motivational factors that will be discussed deals with the impact of the assistance migrants might get from family and friends that migrated before them.

When making a life changing decision the assistance given to you from your friends and family, especially those who have been in your position before, can prove to play a vital role. When dealing with the participants of this research project in specific it was evident that migration networks played a crucial role in their family member’s decision making process. When asked if her husband had gathered any information about life in Italy from anyone, one of the participants stated that before making his decision he spent a lot of time speaking with his friends who were in Italy or who had recently returned from there. He asked them many questions, from “what was the best and cheapest way to make it to Italy” to “where he could find a job right away” to “who he needed to get a hold of to find a place to live”. (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011). He knew that he was going to a place where he did not speak the language so it was crucial that he could get all the information he needed before-hand so that he could just focus on getting to Italy, and not have to worry about struggling to find accommodation or a place to work.

“His plan was to only stay for 2 years” the woman says, “so he did not want to spend the first several months searching for a place to live or a place to work. He wanted to get there and start working right away to make sure he could reach his goal in 2 years time”. (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011)
This scenario was almost identical to the one that another woman participant spoke about when describing her husband’s decision making process. In this case it was the husband’s older brother who had gone to Italy before and returned a few years ago.

“He (the older brother) told my husband everything he needed to know” said the woman, “he told him what the easiest way to get there was and what area he could live in that would be the cheapest choice as well as being close to his work area. His brother also gave him a contact number of someone who could help him find a job”.

(Personal Interview. October 26, 2011).

Something that was brought up by this participant that wasn’t mentioned by anyone else was her insistence to her husband to not listen to his friends, but only to his older brother.

“In Egypt a lot of people like to talk about things even if they have no idea about what they are talking about. I told my husband not to listen to these people, and only trust his brother who was someone who has been through the experience and will tell you exactly how everything is. Other people, especially those who have never migrated, will make things sound much better than how they usually are so he needed to only listen to those he could really trust”. (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011)

This particular aspect made a lot of sense, and personally I’m not sure what to make of the fact that all the other participants failed to mention this. Whether or not the people giving the advice have actually gone through the experience themselves seems to be something that should be of great importance to the person contemplating migration, especially given the fact that their decision to go is a life changing one not only for themselves, but for their families as well.
The participants who were wives of migrants were not the only ones to mention the impact of migration networks; on the contrary, the subject was something that was mentioned quite often in the research process. One participant mentions that his brother’s friends had known people who had gone to Europe, and after contacting them he felt even stronger about his decision to migrate (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011). Another participant talked about how his father had immigrated to the Gulf when they were still younger in order to make money. After returning to Egypt following a couple of years in the Gulf their father seemed happier, and less stressed about life’s daily struggles.

“He would always tell us that while it was tough being away from us that it was necessary and that looking back it was the best decision he has made” says the participant, speaking about his father. “When my brother came to the decision that he was going to immigrate to Europe my father could not have been happier, telling my brother that it was these tough decisions that made men out of boys”. (Personal Interview. October 2, 2011).

The impact of a family member, especially someone from ones nuclear family unit, on important life decisions cannot be underestimated, especially in a country like Egypt where the family usually plays a crucial role in peoples’ lives. What needs to be remembered however is that every endeavor and situation is different; so just because someone close to you may have been successful in something does not mean that you are guaranteed to achieve the same success as well; and vice versa. Nowhere was this more evident than with the case of a 43 year old woman who was one of the participants in this research project.
Her story is based on her two sons who both decided to migrate but were faced with two completely different outcomes. Her first son, Khaled, decided to emigrate, and after collecting money by selling off some family jewelry and taking out loans from neighbors was able to afford doing so.

“After a little over a year Khaled returned with enough money to not only repay the debts we owed, but was able to have enough left over to be able to finally get married and start his own family” (Personal Interview. October 5, 2011). Aly, her younger son, started to take an interest in migration after seeing how successful his brother had been while he was there. “Khaled would constantly tell Aly about how emigrating was the best decision he had ever made, which made Aly want to go even more. I told him that we had enough money now but he would not listen, saying that he wanted to be like his older brother and be able to support himself; that he wanted to finally act like a man and take responsibility of himself”. (Personal Interview. October 5, 2011).

Once Aly decided that he was migrating for work, Khaled helped him with everything. He helped him out by giving him some money to afford the trip, told him where he could find cheap accommodation and a job.

“The day Aly left was the happiest of his life” said the mother in a somber tone, obviously still hurt by what happened. “When I didn’t hear from him after the first couple of days I was worried, but Khaled told me not to make a big deal of it. After a couple weeks had passed without hearing from Aly I became really worried, and now, 2 years later I have still yet to hear from him.” (Personal Interview. October 5, 2011).

Sadly, this was not the only instance in the research process in which a participant had mentioned knowing someone that had gone missing after they had started their journey to Europe, however this was by far the most disheartening story
of them all as a loss of a child is indescribable. It is through devastating losses like these that people must understand that while other family members or close friends may have been successful on their migration, does not guarantee that they will achieve everything they dream of. While it cannot be argued that migration networks do have an effect on people, and that knowing someone who has already gone through the process will undoubtedly make migration a much more viable and realistic option, a decision like this is always a risk, and nobody can know exactly how each individual story will end. While the impact of the assistance migrants might get from family and friends that migrated before them seems to be something major, the effects of the media as a motivating factor is apparently the exact opposite.

The role that the media plays in our everyday lives cannot be understated. From the internet to the television to newspapers and the radio, seemingly everywhere we look we are surrounded by a media outlet. It is through the media that we not only know what is going on in our own backyard, but throughout the entire world as well. Given all that, it is rather surprising that the media’s role as a means of information about migration was, according to the research conducted, rather negligible, and in fact the times that the media was mentioned by the participants it was mostly in a negative manner.

“The media likes to focus on all the bad things about immigration” a focus group participant says, “They talk about the boats and how they are unsafe, and how people either die in the water, are caught in Italy or disappear. The media does this to scare people” he continues, “by doing this the media tries to make people think that if you go to Europe you will either fail in achieving your goals or die trying”. (Excerpt from Focus Group, quote from Participant #4. October 20, 2011)
The only other time the media was mentioned was during a personal interview with one of the female participants who seemed to agree with the same sentiments shared by the members of the Cairo University focus group. While brief in her explanation of the media’s influences, or lack thereof, she stated that the “Media propaganda is not to be trusted” and that the media “only tends to show either the best or worst of things, depending on where their best interests are. They rarely show the reality of these situations because real life is boring.” (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011).

This sense that the media tends to show only one side of the situation depending on their interests was an idea shared by all the group members from the Cairo University focus group. One participant stated that “The Egyptian media wants people to stay here. They want them to be scared of traveling to another country so this is why they always choose to report the cases that result in deaths, or people missing. By doing this the media hopes that people will believe that if they immigrate they will only suffer even more, and that it is better to just be grateful and settle for what they can get in Egypt”. (Excerpt from focus group, quote from Participant #1. October 20, 2011)

In addition to this, another group member continued with the same attitude towards the media when stating that “Whenever the media reaches out to talk to the family of a migrant it is always with those who have lost someone. They show their struggle and talk about how their lives are much worse now than before. This is what makes for an interesting story for the newspapers and television, but they never show the other side of things; the families...
who did not have to go through the suffering of losing their loved one and are now doing much better because their family member decided to immigrate”. (Excerpt from focus group, quote from Participant # 5. October 20, 2011)

While the sample size is rather limited, with only a couple participants even mentioning the media, it is important to note how the media’s portrayal of migration is seen by the Egyptian people, and more specifically, the family left behind. Whether this negative connotation about the local media deals particularly with how they cover migration or if it more of a general distrust of local media outlets is unclear; but what is evident is that the impact of the media as a motivational factor when dealing with migration is rather insignificant, with the participants feeling like real, face-to-face interactions with family and friends on the topic of migration is a much more dependable and reliable source of information. With that being said, looking at the role the “image of the returnee migrant” plays as a motivational factor is important because it is this image that will often depict the potential for success in Europe in the eyes of potential migrants.

How the returnee migrant is portrayed is an important indicator in judging how much of a motivational factor it can be on an Egyptian’s decision to migrate. The difference between this and the first factor discussed in this section, the impact of assistance from friends and family is in the nature of how both of these factors impact a person’s decision. With receiving assistance from friends and family, people are given an opportunity to receive information that will ultimately help them in their journey to, and during their stay in, Europe through migration networks. Where the image of the returnee migrant differs is that, for one, not only does someone not have to necessarily know the ‘returnee migrant’ personally, but in some cases the “image” is not even portrayed in a particular person at all, but rather is a culmination of stories
that a person has heard about migrants who have returned from Europe. This is where
the relative deprivation model comes into effect, which is a theory that “posits that
there is an unfavorable gap between (1) what a person feels he is entitle to and what,
in fact, (2) he is receiving that encourages activism. It encourages activism if: (1) a
person is relatively deprived of ‘x’ when he does not have ‘x’ (2) he sees some other
person(s) – possibly including himself at some future time – as having ‘x’ (3) he sees
it feasible that he should have ‘x’.”

Part of this image was discussed in the section dealing with economic factors,
in which the family left behind explained that any hardships or struggles faced during
the time that their family member was in Europe would be worth it because, for
example, working in Europe for a couple years would make enough money to last a
lifetime in Egypt. It is statements like these, ones that portray the relative success of
the returnee migrant, that show how much of a motivating factor the image of the
returnee migrant can be.

“During his time in the army many of his friends talked about their dreams of going
to Europe. My brother told me many stories about how his army friends had gone to
Europe for a year and was able to return with enough money for many years to come
while he struggled in Cairo looking for jobs that would barely make him enough
money to survive.” (Personal Interview. October 2, 2011).

Stories like this are not out of the ordinary; in fact, it is rather common for a
person who is looking to migrate to have at least one rags to riches story about a
returnee migrant. It is this image, of a man who left Egypt struggling to survive only

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304 Faist, Thomas (2000). “The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational
Social Spaces”. Page 44.
to return a couple years later with more money than they could imagine; that is often
one of the strongest motivating factors when people decide to emigrate.

This image can also be structured from family members who have returned
from migration, and in this case the image can act as an even stronger motivator for
other family members to migrate.

“My brother went to Italy about a year ago” says a focus group participant, “he just
recently returned and he was able to repay all his debts that he collected while trying
to pay for his trip to Europe and still has plenty left over. He has promised to build a
new house for our parents and is ready to get married and start a family now. He
says that if he did not go to Italy he would still have been struggling to survive here in
Egypt” (Excerpt from focus group, quote from participant #4. October 20, 2011).

When someone is in a desperate situation, a place where they feel like their
life cannot be much tougher and everyday seems like a harder struggle; this image of
the successful returning migrant can prove to be a major motivational factor with a
big impact on people’s ultimate decision to migrate from Egypt towards Europe in
order to try and build a more successful future for themselves and their families.

Reasons as to why people decide to migrate always differ slightly from person
to person because no one is in exactly the same situation as someone else; however,
generalizations can be made when studying the case of why Egyptians migrate.
Firstly, Egyptian international migration is usually temporary, economically driven,
and male dominated. Furthermore, these males are usually characterized as ‘young’
(under the age of 35) with the ‘older’ males unable to compete in the labor market, as
was stated in Ernest Ravenstein’s ‘Laws of Migration’. With this being said, when
research is conducted on Egyptian migration, it is usually this small group of young
males that is focused on, as they are, generally speaking, the ones who end up migrating. What is sometimes forgotten however is the role of the family left behind, who are able to portray a different perspective on the issue of Egyptian migration. This was the idea behind basing this research project on the family left behind, as while some of their responses may not differ from the migrants themselves, getting their perspective on an issue as vitally important as migration adds a key component that, at times, seems to be missing from many of the available information on the topic.

When dealing with the issue of Egyptian emigration it is important to know the reasons why Egyptians decide to migrate. Research on this particular aspect of migration is abundant, but by focusing on the family left behind this particular research project aimed to add a new perspective. Focusing on the family left behind also allows for a broader understanding of the issues faced by Egyptians that leads to them deciding to emigrate. It also allows the researcher to ask Egyptians who have decided not to migrate how they cope with the problems that their family members who migrated were unable to. From the research conducted the reasons were separated into two main categories; economic and motivational. The fact that economic factors were the most commonly mentioned reasons came as no surprise, as the lack of job opportunities, the low salaries and wages given to many Egyptians, and the ever-decreasing value of people’s real income due to inflation were all clear push factors mentioned by the ones left behind as to why their family member decided to migrate. Similarly, the greater opportunity of getting a job and, of course, the hopes of achieving more money were the major pull factors mentioned by the family left behind, with the chances of receiving more money being, by far, the most commonly mentioned reason as to why Egyptians decide to migrate to Europe.
The motivational factors discussed in this section were three-fold; and dealt with the impact of the assistance migrants might get from family and friends that migrated before them, the media, and the ‘image of the returnee’ on Egyptians’ decision to not only migrate, but where they chose to go. The research found that the assistance that migrants get from family and friends that had migrated before them was a major motivating factor. Migration networks make it easier for the migrants to settle into an environment that is foreign to them, and this makes a huge difference as migrants are given a unique opportunity to have much needed help in finding a job and place to stay in a country that they are not accustomed to. Similarly, the image of the returnee migrant also acts as a strong motivating factor. When people are contemplating migration while struggling to survive in Egypt, the sight, or even mention, of someone who was able to successfully return from Europe could prove to be the final push towards immigrating to Europe. Finally, media outlets proved to be negligible in terms of being a motivating factor. In fact, the few times the media was mentioned it was mostly with a negative connotation, with mistrust being the biggest issue people had with the local media.
Chapter IV: Impacts of Migration on the Family Remained Behind
(Based on Results of Primary Research)

When someone decides to migrate, they are not only making a decision that changes their own lives but also those closest to them; the family they leave behind. It is this particular aspect that is sometimes neglected in the research available on Egyptian emigration. With the focus being on the migrants themselves, the families left behind are often forgotten as also being victims of migration. The impact on family members left behind can be either positive or negative, depending on the length of time the migrant is away from the household and whether or not they remit money back home; however based on the research gathered the receiving of remittances is rather limited at best. With the participants of this research project being the ones left behind, it is the goal of this chapter to shed some light on the issues faced by the families of migrants and to prove that while these families did not go through the struggles of the journey to Europe, they do have their share of problems that they must deal with once their family member emigrates.

The impact of this decision on the family left behind is based more on the type of relationship that particular family member had to those he left behind rather than on the individual migrant themselves. For example, the impact of a man deciding to migrate would be different to his wife and children when compared to his parents and siblings for instance. In this example it could be argued that the man’s wife and children would suffer a financial impact, which is something that the man’s siblings and parents may not necessarily be impacted by. It is because of this that the impacts of migration on the family left behind are more reliant on the relationship itself and not necessarily on any individual characteristics of the migrant themselves. Through
the research conducted the impacts of migration on the family left behind are three-fold; financial, psychological, and social. Each impact will be discussed separately, starting with the financial impacts of migration on the family left behind.

4.1 Financial Impacts

Unlike the reasons as to why people decide to emigrate, in which the economic factor plays a major role in almost every scenario, the financial impacts of migration on the family left behind varies on a case by case situation. However, there are generalizations that can be made while assessing the financial impacts. Firstly, if the family left behind was dependent on the migrant’s income in order to survive, then it would only make sense that they would suffer more financially than a family that was not reliant on the migrant’s salary to live. In cases like these many family members will be forced to go out and find a job in Egypt in order to sustain their livelihoods until their migrating family member returns. Secondly, remittances can also ease the ‘burden’ on the family members that were reliant on the migrant’s money; however were something that was not mentioned by the participants in great detail. Finally, when dealing with the financial impact of migration on the family left behind one must also mention the money that is often borrowed from various sources in order for the migrant to be able to afford to migrate. With the fact that many of these journeys cost an alarmingly high amount of money, money that is sometimes not immediately available, the ability to repay debts is, in some cases, a burden that is carried by the family left behind if the migrant is unsuccessful on their European journey. It is these three components that will comprise this section dealing with the financial impact of migration on the family left behind, starting with the cases in which the family members were dependent on the migrant’s income while in Egypt.
“It was tough at first when my husband decided to immigrate” says one of the participants. “I had to go out and find a job since we were not getting the money we would usually get when my husband was still working here” (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011).

This problem of suddenly finding oneself without the main money-earner in the family around is something that was faced by 5 of the 18 participants (28%) in this research project, with the two wives of migrants standing out in particular.

“During the day I acted like the father to the children, going out and working in order to bring in enough money for us, and then at night I would return to my duties as a mother, making sure that the children had food to eat, that the house was in order, and that the children were generally taken care of” (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011).

These sentiments were shared by another participant, who also started working “to make up for the lack of money they were receiving” after her husband had migrated (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011). Similarly, younger brothers of migrants may also be in a situation where they were reliant on their income while they were in Egypt, and ever since they emigrated had to find different means to take care of themselves. One of the participants, a young male aged 19, spoke about this very situation in which he suddenly found himself as the ‘man of the house’ after his brother had migrated and his father had passed away years before. He stated that he had to pick up a night job that would start after he was done with school just to be able to survive and support his mother.

“It is tough but at least now we have hopes for a better future once my brother returns. Before we were just living day to day with no signs of a better future so the
This notion that the extra sacrifices were well worth it was something that was mentioned by all the participants who had to start working during the migration period of their family member. These people were, in theory, actually in a worse situation than what they were in previously as it was doubtful that they were attaining the same amount of money that their family member used to gain; which in itself was a strong push factor for that family member to migrate as they believed it to be insufficient to their needs. However, the difference now was that these people not only had the desire for a better future, but were filled with hope that once their family member returned they would achieve this. This acceptance of the hardships in the present for the hopes of a better future can be explained as an extension of the value-expectancy model in which the family left behind is willing to go through the struggles and personal issues caused by the emigration of their family member because it is expected that the good times in the future will all be worth it. It is this hope that allows the family left behind to endure any extra struggles and sacrifices that they may have to make in order to fill the financial hole left by the migrant as, in their minds; the benefits they will attain in the future will outweigh any of their struggles in the present.

Remittances would ‘soften the blow’ for the families left behind that are forced to find alternative methods of dealing with the situation of not being able to rely on, what used to be, their main source of income. However, the fact that remittances were rarely mentioned as a way to help ease the negative financial impact of migration on the family left behind was an interesting aspect of this study. The lack of remittances does not seem like an overwhelming concern to the participants
who took part in this research, especially those who were dependent on the migrant’s income while they were still in Egypt. There seems to be two possible reasons as to why remittances were not mentioned a great deal during the research process.

Firstly, when dealing with the family members who did not rely solely on the migrant’s income to survive in Egypt, the notion of bringing up remittances during the interview process would not make much sense. In theory, if the family members did not rely on the migrant’s money while they were in Egypt, they would not be in desperate need for remittances while their family member was in Europe and thus would not mention it as an impact of migration. It could be possible that the participants know people who received remittances from their migrant family members; however, through the research process it seemed that the participants were more willing to share their personal stories rather than those of their friends or something they may have heard from someone else.

The second possible reason as to why remittances were not mentioned more regularly deals with the family members who did rely on the migrant’s income to survive in Egypt but accepted the lack of remittances as a worthy sacrifice for a better future. As mentioned by one of the participants, whose “brother sends back some money but not enough to cover the needs of the family” this is actually “accepted as necessary” in order to assure that his brother would be able to save up enough money for the best future possible (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011). The idea behind this thought process goes beyond just simply accepting the hardships of today for the hopes of a better future, as explained by the same participant.

“If we were to rely on my brother to give us money like he usually does he would not be able to reach his goal in the set time period. We all have to make sacrifices and
ours is to find other ways to survive during the time he is away so that he is able to
save up as much money as possible while in Europe and not have to worry about
taking care of us while he is away. We are all working together to try and make sure
that we have a better future once he returns” (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011).

While remittances were not mentioned as much during the research process,
the high costs of migration, and the ability to pay back those debts, was a topic of
great importance. When dealing with the financial impact of emigration on the family
left behind one must mention the money that is often borrowed from various sources
in order to afford the alarmingly large amount usually needed for people to emigrate.
The high amount of money needed in order to afford immigrating to Europe is
something that, for most people, is not easily accessible, so they are forced to find
alternative methods in order to afford the trip. These methods include selling their
own things, such as family jewelry, or borrowing money from family, friends and
neighbors. By borrowing money the individual accumulates a debt that he fully
expects to repay once he returns from Europe. This is another reason as to why the
family left behind may be more understanding and willing to not have remittances
sent back to them, as they understand that the more money that can be saved the
higher probability that they will be able to afford paying back the debts along with
being able to live that ‘better’ life that many of them dream of.

In addition to this, there was an interesting notion mentioned by the two
participants who were wives of migrants that dealt with borrowing money from
family. As mentioned previously, both wives decided to get jobs once their husband
migrated in order to be able to survive while their significant others were gone.
However, what was not mentioned was the fact that both of the women had asked
their close family for financial help at first, which was something that both of the migrant husbands were strongly against. Said one participant,

“My husband refused the idea of me taking money from the family. Not only would this make him look like he was unsuccessful and struggling in Europe, but he had enough debts to repay without having to worry about even more money he owed” (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011).

These sentiments were shared by the other participant, who stated that her husband would constantly tell her that she had to understand that the struggles of today would all be worth it, and that if there was not enough money from the savings they had that she would have to go look for a job to support their child, because asking the family for money would only make it tougher for them to really enjoy life once her husband returned (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011). Of course, the repaying of debts was an issue that was faced by more than just these two cases, as other participants who spoke of having a ‘better future’ once their migrating family member returned often mentioned having to repay the debts first. While these cases depict a migrant being able to successfully return and pay back all the loans he took out while also being able to live a more comfortable life than before, thinking that this is the case for every migrant situation would be irrational, as in some cases the family left behind are the ones forced to repay the debts, placing them in an even worse situation economically than they were before their family member decided to migrate.

“The entire family collected the money that Omar needed, from our mother selling her jewelry to myself asking people for substantial loans. The understanding was that once Omar returned from Europe we would have more than enough money to repay all these debts.” (Personal Interview. October 14, 2010).
However, once Omar, the participant’s brother, went missing the family had found themselves in an impossible situation. Not only were they struggling previously, but now they were compounded by the fact that they “spent roughly 25,000 L.E. on Omar’s immigration, with 10,000 of those being borrowed from various people” (Personal Interview. October 14, 2010). In order to repay these debts the participant in this interview had to pick up a night job for the sole purposes of trying to gather the money needed to pay back the loans they had taken. This was not the only situation in which the disappearance of a migrant left his family with a financial burden, as explained by the mother of a missing migrant. What differed this situation from the one previously mentioned is that in this instance most of the money borrowed was from the migrant’s brother; the eldest son of the participant being interviewed. As explained by the participant, her eldest son had recently returned from Europe and was the one who urged his younger brother to emigrate for work, and was willing to pay for almost the entire trip from the money he had earned while working in Europe.

“We still had to collect some extra money on our own, so I was able to borrow some money from the neighbors, it was a small amount but we needed it in order to afford the costs of the trip” (Personal Interview. October 5, 2011).

While situations like these are seen as the worst case scenario when dealing with the financial impacts of emigration, the fact that this does occur makes it worthy to note in this research. Furthermore, this research is not attempting to equate the devastating loss of a family member to financial struggles the family left behind may incur, as the loss of a human life far outweighs any economic hardships people may face in terms of being able to recover both physically and emotionally. Situations like these are used to make migrants and their families more aware of the risks taken when
a person decides to migrate; even if they have heard nothing but success stories from people who have previously migrated. There is always a chance that their situation will end differently, and stories of these ‘worst case scenarios’ are used to make people conscious of the potential dangers of migration.

Something less severe than being under financial hardships after the disappearance of the migrating family member is also plausible; and that deals with the possibility of the migrant successfully returning to Egypt but without a sufficient amount of money saved to repay the loans and debts he incurred when starting his journey. While this was not brought up by the participants during the research process, it seems like this situation could easily occur and was worth mentioning. A migrant trying to make enough money for himself and his family by immigrating to Europe faces many potential barriers in his path, and this includes more than just the dangers in the journey to Europe itself in which many reports have indicated deaths and disappearances of migrants at sea. There are also problems that could surface once the migrant makes it to Europe, including not being able to find a well paying job, or spending more money while in Europe than they had previously planned to. It seems that there could be a number of issues that may arise that could lead towards the migrant returning to Egypt with less money than they thought they would, and in these cases they may not even have enough to repay the loans they took out to make the trip in the first place; leaving them and their families the problem of having to find ways to repay those debts. The fact that this wasn’t mentioned during the research process was surprising, given the fact that this is a very conceivable situation when dealing with migration. While the financial impacts of migration on the family left behind are noticeable and can be spotted from afar, it is the psychological impact of
migration that is sometimes the toughest to notice as an ‘outsider’ and is, in most cases, the hardest impact to overcome for the family left behind.

4.2 Psychological Impacts

The psychological impacts of migration deal with changes in the mind, emotions, or behavior of the subject, and are more far-reaching than the financial impacts when dealing with the family left behind. As stated in the previous section, not every participant was impacted financially by their family member’s migration, since they were not seen as the primary source of income in which they relied on. However, when dealing with the psychological impacts, it is safe to say that every family member left behind faces some sort of psychological change, with the exact impact and its level differing from one person to another. The stress felt by these participants towards the well-being of their migrating family member is expected. However, when dealing with the psychological impacts of migration on the family left behind, it is essential to hear from the participants themselves how the migration of their family member has affected them.

Unlike financial impacts, which in theory could be seen from the outside looking in, psychological impacts deal with the mental and emotional aspects of life, which can only be discussed with any sort of validity by the family left behind divulging how they feel. There are situations when you can tell when someone is emotionally unstable, or when they are ‘not themselves’, but to know exactly what is going on with someone they must tell you what is happening, and only then will you know exactly what they are experiencing. This section will be separated into three sections in order to find some similarities in the psychological impacts between participants who share the same migration experiences based on their relationship
with the migrant. The first section will deal with the psychological impacts on the wives of migrants, followed by the brothers of migrants. Finally, the psychological impacts on the family left behind that has lost someone during migration will be discussed.

In both of the interviews conducted with the wife of a migrant the psychological effects on their children seemed to be the focus of the conversation, rather than how they were affected personally.

“It has been a particularly tough time on our daughter” one participant states, “She isn’t able to understand where her dad is and when he will return”. “The first month was the worst, as our daughter would cry out and scream for her father throughout the night as she was not used to not having him around for such an extended period of time” (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011).

This was also echoed by the other participant whose husband had migrated who focused on the

“tough times at the beginning where the children had no idea where their father was and could not understand the situation; that he was going to be gone for a couple of years but would eventually return” (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011).

Placing more importance on how their children deal with their father suddenly not being around, and how it will affect them psychologically certainly seems like the motherly thing to do, and was also mentioned when both participants mentioned the financial impacts of migration on their families. However, what must be noted is that this in itself is a psychological impact. By carrying the burden and extra worry of how their children will be affected by their father’s migration; both participants deal
with an extra level of stress that is a direct consequence of their husband’s immigration to Europe.

As discussed in the previous section, dealing with the financial impacts on the families left behind, both participants stated that they needed to find work in order to make some money in order to survive while their husbands migrated. However, what was not mentioned in great detail was the fact that both participants pointed to the fact that the time they spent out of the house at their jobs affected their motherly duties at home with their children. Once again, both the participants point towards the struggle being ‘shared’ and felt by everyone in the family, giving the sense that at times their own personal struggles and hardships need to be put aside in order to assure that their children are taken care of and not too negatively affected by their father’s migration. Even when the participants spoke about the psychological impacts on their personal lives, they were quick to state that it was also ‘tough on everyone’; seemingly lessening their personal impacts as something normal, or simply a small section of the psychological impacts on everyone else affected by their husband’s migration.

“It is hard to get used to the change, not having my husband around for an extended period of time is emotionally tough as is any case where someone is separated from their loved one. However, I cannot sit and feel sorry for myself, especially since I must make sure that our children are not affected by their father not being around”
(Personal Interview. October 26, 2011)

In the two cases involving a wife of a migrant, the psychological feelings were centered on fear. Fear of living their lives without their husbands physically nearby. Fear for their children, who they did not want to be too greatly affected by their father’s absence; especially given their young age (the children were all under the age
of three) the mothers did not want them to forget, or get used to, a household without their father. Fear for their husbands; hoping that everything would go according to plan and that they would successfully return to Egypt once they had reached their goals. When compared to the brothers of migrants, which will be the next group that is focused on, the psychological effects on the wives was much more focused on other people in the family, and making sure that they were not too affected by the migration. On the other hand, when dealing with the brothers of migrants, especially the younger ones, it seemed like their concerns were mostly based upon the success of their brothers in Europe.

When interviewing the brothers of migrants, along with the fact that they were hopeful that their brothers were doing well, the psychological concerns seemed to be a lot more selfish in nature when compared to the wives. This is not necessarily meant as a negative characteristic of the participants who are brothers of migrants, but rather was an observation made during the research process. With the fact that Egyptian international migration is mostly male dominated, it is understandable that the women and the men left behind would deal with different psychological factors due to their family member migrating. As explained before, the wives of the migrants were more stressed about being able to find a job in Egypt in order to help their family survive while their husbands were away. They were more worried about the well-being of their children, and their husband in Europe of course, than necessarily how successful their husband was in reaching his financial goal. Opposing this, the brothers, especially the younger ones, of migrants usually look towards their brother’s journey as a ‘test run’, or something that they can look towards in making decisions about their own lives in the future.
It could be argued that the psychological effects on the brothers of migrants is lesser than the effects on the wives; since they tend to bear the emotional stress of not only their own problems, but those of their children and other family members; however the psychological impact of migration on the brothers left behind could have a longer lasting effect. Again, this is due to the notion that once the migrant returned, in the situation of the wife, the psychological impacts that were suffered while he was gone would either disappear or be in the process of declining as they try to get their lives back to ‘normal’. Opposing this would be the idea that once the migrant returned in the situation of the brother the psychological impacts could potentially grow, as the fear for the brother’s safety in Europe could be replaced by thoughts of personally making the decision to irregularly migrate based on the brother’s success.

This in itself is a psychological impact of migration as the mind and behavior of the brother who remained behind could arguably be altered based solely on his brother’s experience as a migrant in Europe. When these participants are told by their older brothers about how immigrating to Europe was “the best decision they had made in their life” or how “working in Europe for 1 month gives you more money than 10 years in Egypt” it would only make sense that emigration would become a much more appealing option to them; especially if they are struggling to survive in Egypt and have seen their own brothers, their own flesh and blood, reap the rewards that migration to Europe has to offer (Excerpts from focus group, mentioned by participant #4. October 20, 2011). As mentioned previously, this notion is backed by the relative deprivation theory, in which the awareness of the income difference between neighbors, or in this case brothers, in the migrant-sending community plays an important factor in migration. While it is conceivable that the participants may have heard stories about Europe from other sources, seeing the situation from your own
brother and hearing about his experiences is definitely a bigger factor that can have life-changing psychological effects on a person as the successful return of the emigrant brother may serve as an example for the younger brothers who hope to achieve the same level of success. While psychological effects of migration could act as more of a motivating factor for the brothers left behind, depending on the relative success of their migrating brother in Europe of course, the biggest psychological impact of migration when dealing with the family left behind happens in cases where the emigrating family member disappears; or is lost during the migration period.

“Time stopped for our mother ever since Omar left for Europe. It has been three years since we last saw him but she still holds onto the hope that one day we will all wake up and see that he is back. Her whole life has stopped since that day as she holds onto that hope and is unwilling to move forward with her life” (Personal Interview. October 14, 2010).

This statement from a participant about his mother’s life after the disappearance of his brother during his migration to Europe is just a small example of how the family left behind is psychologically impacted when their family member goes missing. Situations like these cause more than individual discomfort; it is more of a dysfunction on the family and social level (which will be explained later) as the family tries to make sense of what happened; often ignoring what quickly becomes evident as the grim reality, or look to place blame on someone or something for the loss of their loved one. This was the case with one participant, the mother who had lost her son during his migration to Europe. She talked about how her relationship with her eldest son, who was the main motivational factor in her youngest son’s decision to migrate, has become strained ever since the disappearance of her son. She acknowledged that
“At the beginning I blamed Khaled (her eldest) for Aly’s (her youngest son) disappearance. He was the one who filled Aly’s head with these European dreams ever since he had returned from there. Ever since then Khaled has been distant from me; he is still my son and I will always love him but our relationship has definitely been affected by Aly’s disappearance” (Personal Interview. October 5, 2011).

A lot of the time the friends and relatives of the people who are dealing with the disappearance of a loved one in migration do not understand why they are upset because there has been no communal recognition that a loss has occurred; there is no funeral. With no definitive evidence that their family member has indeed passed away, some people will always hold onto the hope that they will one day be reunited with their loved one. They cannot accept the idea that they might have died while on their journey to Europe and without seeing the body of their loved one will always believe that they will one day see them again, regardless of how small the chances of that actually happening are. It is because of this that the family left behind may not receive the community support needed to recover from this traumatic event, and in a way, the family goes missing themselves.

Not only has the absence of the loved one caused an inner rift between the family members in some cases; as seen in the case of the interviewed mother and her eldest son, but in many cases the family ‘stops in time’ with everyone at a stand-still. When they do move forward it is not as a family unit, but more of an individualistic, ‘everyone for themselves’ type thing as described by the participant who explained how he and his mother were dealing with the disappearance of his brother differently.

“During the first year of course I had hope that my brother would return” says the participant. “I wanted nothing more than to wake up one day and see my brother
again. However, now I just wish we would receive a phone call telling us that he has passed away. This would be terrible news to receive, but it would give some closure not only to me, but to our mother. The worst part of this entire experience has been not knowing exactly what happened to Omar; why he simply disappeared” (Personal Interview. October 14, 2010).

As evident by this quote, the participant has been able to move on with his life after he had come to the realization that he would probably never hear from his brother again. However, his mother has still not moved forward and her life has come to a stand-still since the disappearance of her son; causing a rift in the family as they deal with this situation on their own terms, and the best way they individually see fit to do so.

The psychological impacts of migration on the family left behind differ from each situation based on what the ones remaining behind must deal with. When looking at the two wives of migrants that took part in this research project, it seemed that they were more focused on making sure their children would not be too affected by the void left by their father’s migration than dealing with their own personal psychological issues. Their own issues were graded as less important by themselves when compared to the well-being of their children. When dealing with the brothers of migrants the opposite seemed to be true, as it is true that they were concerned for their brother’s well-being but their psychological impacts dealt mostly with self-interests with the hopes of having a better life in the future and using their brother’s experiences as a sort of deciding factor as to whether they themselves should migrate. Finally, the psychological impacts of migration on the family left behind were most evident on the people who had lost a family member. In these cases the family left behind suffered from ‘stopping in time’ and the family unit itself became more of a
dysfunctional group of individual pieces; each dealing with the apparent loss of their family member in their own way and by their own means. The social impacts of migration on the family left behind followed a similar pattern; with similarities seen amongst the participants based on either their relationship to the migrant, or whether or not their migrating family member had disappeared.

4.3 Social Impacts

When dealing with the social impacts of migration on the family left behind, there are three distinct groups which are similar to the way the psychological impacts of migration was presented; the wives of migrants, the brothers of migrants, and the family left behind that has lost a loved one during their migration. Firstly, the two female participants who were married to a traveling labor migrant were faced with the issue of gender roles; something that is a major issue in Egypt especially in the rural areas of the country. Gender roles are a set of social and behavioral norms that are considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex in the context of a specific culture; in this case, the Egyptian culture. As mentioned earlier, the two wives of migrants that were interviewed spoke about having to find a job in order to bring in some money for themselves and their children to survive. The problem here wasn’t the fact that they had gotten these jobs in their time of need; rather that they were expected to stop working once their husbands returned from Europe.

“Once he (her husband) returned from Europe he expected me to quit my job and go back to staying at home. I had enjoyed by job to this point and actually liked the fact that I was not fully dependent on my husband for money. I was able to make a decent salary and like the idea of having my own money, but my husband was completely against the idea. He questioned why I needed my own money, and if his two years in
Europe were even worth it. At the end of the day I decided it would be best if I just quit my job and took care of the children and the house” (Personal Interview. October 23, 2011).

The other participant shared the same concerns, stating that her husband, who was still in Europe, did not like the fact that she started working as part of a cleaning crew in a nearby gym. She said that he “understands” the fact that the family needs money so he is more lenient to the fact that his wife needs to work in order to get money; but he has made it clear that she will be expected to quit once he returns to Egypt. When asked about how she felt about the situation the participant stated that she:

“Liked the idea of being able to make money and not be fully reliable on her husband to bring in money. However, I understand why he wants me to quit since then I would have more time to be able to concentrate on the cooking and cleaning in the house and taking care of our daughter” (Personal Interview. October 26, 2011).

It was evident from both of these interviews that the women wanted to keep their jobs and enjoyed their new found freedoms of not being completely dependent on their husband’s income as their only source of money. Furthermore, both women also liked the fact that they could be dependent on themselves and were able to bring in their ‘own’ money. As stated in the literature review, these women gained more decision making powers while their husbands migrated, and were also able to make important financial decisions as they were able to control how the money would best be used to help out the entire family. However, what was seen in these two cases was that this was generally short-lived; or at least perceived to be so, with the return of their husband usually signaling the end of these newly gained decision making
powers. What is interesting in these two cases is that both females were willing to give up their jobs once their husband returned, even though both of them had stated their pleasure in being able to work and rely on themselves. This compliance towards their husband’s wishes, even if it did not necessarily match their own ambitions and dreams, was something that stood out during the interviews and would have been something worth researching further if the participants had been available.

When looking at the social impacts of migration on the brothers of migrants there are two distinct situations that need to be discussed; the brothers remained behind who are forced to find a job to bring in money for the family, and the brothers that aren’t forced to do so. When dealing with the participants who had to find a way to make some money due to their brother’s migration to Europe, the social impacts were clearly much bigger than the participants who were not forced to work. As stated by one participant:

“Socially life is different now with very little free time between school, studying and work. There is no time to waste on keeping up with friends and having the same social life as before” (Personal Interview. October 30, 2011).

Similar to the two female participants that were discussed earlier in this section, this participant brushes this off as something that is understandable and even acceptable for his current situation. The participant stated that it was not that big a deal as his friends are people who will be with him for life and that they would understand that just because he did not have as much time to see them now did not mean that they were no longer friends. However small of a social impact that this may seem, it is more than what the brothers of migrants who were not forced to work faced. Throughout the interviews it seemed that there were no significant social
impacts on these participants whatsoever. Communication played a big role in this, as the participants were able to be in constant contact with their brother throughout the time they were away in Europe. The role of being able to freely communicate with a family member who is not physically around cannot be underestimated. It is because of the advances in technology involving the internet and mobile phones that the social impact of migration on the family left behind is much less when compared to the psychological and financial impacts of migration. However, when the family remained behind is unable to communicate with their loved ones, as is the case with the participants whose family member disappeared during the migration process, then the social impacts of migration play a much bigger role.

The participants who faced the biggest social impacts were the ones who lost a family member due to migration. As mentioned previously, the fact that many of the participants were able to communicate with their family members abroad made it a lot easier to deal with the situation and made the social impact that they faced almost negligible. However, when you are unable to stay in contact with your loved ones, for whatever reason, you will undoubtedly suffer on many levels; including socially. On the social level it was explained by one participant that his mother would spend days at a time in her room, simply unwilling to do anything or see anyone.

“She lost contact with many of her friends over the past couple years as she put her social life on hold; unwilling to live her life without knowing what happened to her son” (Personal Interview. October 14, 2010).

This was the same scenario with another participant, who was a mother herself who had her own son disappear while he was migrating. While she did not mention specifics about how her life has been at a ‘stand-still’ or how she has been affected
socially, there was just a sense from the way she presented herself and the tone in her voice when she was sharing her story that there was definitely a piece of her that had died when her son disappeared.

When looking at the impacts of migration on the family left behind, three distinct categories seem to arise through the research conducted. Firstly, the financial impacts on the family left behind are major in nature; especially when the migrant was the main source of income for the family. In this case the family left behind must try and find alternative sources of income, and for those who do not have enough savings or do not receive any remittances, the only realistic option is to find a job. The second type of impact deals with the psychological aspects of the family left behind. With this covering the mind and behavior of the participants, this was easily the one impact that every participant could relate to. Whether it was the participants whose husbands were the migrants, and who were continually cautious over how their children were handling the situation; or the brothers of migrants who, in some cases, based their view of migration and their possibility of migrating on the European experiences of their brother, every participant was psychologically impacted by migration. Finally, while the social impacts on the participants seem to be the lowest of all three impacts mentioned, it was important to mention for a number of reasons. First, the issue of gender roles was important to discuss and would have been something worth divulging into further if there was more time and field research available. Second, the importance of communication and the impacts of technology on easing the pain of not having a loved one physically close cannot be understated. The ability to hear your family member’s voice and know they are doing alright is invaluable for the family left behind. With the importance of communication to the
family left behind, it is understandable the lack of any contact can result in some major social and psychological impacts to the family left behind.
Chapter V: Closing Remarks

The phenomenon of Egyptian migration to Europe has increased over the past decade. The involvement of the family left behind was lacking in the analyzed literature therefore, the purpose of this study was to bring to the forefront the perspective of international migration from the family left behind, and how the emigration of their family members affected their lives in Egypt. In addition to this, the impacts felt on the family left behind due to the emigration of their family member could only be established by interviewing those that were left behind and allowing them the opportunity to share their experiences and stories; something that is often not granted to them with research dealing with emigration.

The primary research gathered was separated into two major categories; the main factors leading to Egyptians deciding to emigrate, and the impacts of migration on the family left behind. Based on the research conducted the most prevalent factors leading to Egyptians migrating could be separated into two sections; economic and motivational factors. As opposed to the literature reviewed, political factors were not mentioned as a key push factor in leading Egyptians towards immigrating to Europe. This could be due to a number of reasons, such as the January 2011 revolution which could be seen as a sign of change in the political scheme of the country, and could act as a sign of hope for a better political future. Another reason might be that the other two factors (economic and motivational) were simply more important in the eyes of the participants, and thus the political nature of the country was deemed less of an issue when discussing the reasons as to why Egyptians decide to migrate to Europe.
5.1 Why do Egyptians Decide to Migrate?

As stated earlier, the two main factors mentioned during the research process were economically and motivationally based. The economic factors were the most prominent issue mentioned by the participants, and those dealt with the push factors from Egypt and the pull factors from Europe. The push-pull migration theory deals with things that are unfavorable about the area that one lives in (push) and things that attract someone to another area (pull). The push factors included the lack of job opportunities, the low salaries along with the general lack of the ability to gain more money, as well as the issue of an Egyptian’s real income having decreased at a rapid pace recently due to the inflation rates. Opposite to this, the pull factors from Europe were the job opportunities available there and, by far the biggest factor mentioned by the participants, the ability to make more money. The combination of struggling to survive in Egypt and the idea of being able to make enough money in Europe in a couple years to last a lifetime in Egypt was a point of emphasis with many of the participants when discussing why their family members decided to migrate to Europe.

The motivational factors that were mentioned by the participants of this study was a combination of migration networks, which was discussed as a social factor in the literature review, along with the role of the media and the ‘social success image’ of the returning migrant. Migration networks play an important role as they allow the person willing to emigrate to gain valuable assistance in his journey; whether it is advice on how to arrive in Europe in the cheapest and safest way possible or if it deals with gaining help in finding a job and accommodation in the quickest time possible. The more assistance that a person is able to potentially gain while migrating, the more likely they will decide that the risks of migration are worth taking. In opposite of this, the role of the media was not only negligible in the study, but when the media was
mentioned it was always in a negative context. The local media was seen as one-sided, only portraying the news that would help strengthen the interests of the media outlets themselves. When dealing with migration the participants felt that the local media covered the topic with a ‘fear-based’ approach; covering the stories that ended with the death of the migrants in order to try and make people believe that life in Egypt was their best option and that trying to migrate to Europe would only be met with hardships and struggles.

The social success image of the returning migrant plays a big motivational factor for potential emigrants. The image of the returning migrant is often seen as someone who is more successful than when they left Egypt, with the ability to live a better lifestyle once they returned. This idea that the returning migrant has more money and is able to take care of his family, along with living more comfortably when compared to his life before he migrated pushes people towards considering migration to Europe as a much more viable option; especially when they are struggling in Egypt.

5.2 Impacts of Migration on the Family Left Behind

When dealing with the impacts of emigration on the family left behind three main categories were found based on the study; financial, psychological, and social. While these were the same three impacts covered in the literature review, the research conducted was able to produce additional information about each of the three broad impacts that were not discussed with great detail in the literature available; especially when dealing with Egyptian families that are left behind specifically. Furthermore, much of the available information tend to depict the impacts of migration on the family left behind as negative, and while this is certainly the case in some situations,
what the research tended to show was that, for the most part, the family left behind were willing to accept the extra sacrifices in their present life with the hopes of a better future. This was definitely not the case with the participants who had lost their family member due to migration as they were obviously the people who were impacted much more than the participants who did not lose their loved one.

The financial impacts of migration on the family left behind are based on whether or not the migrant was relied upon as the sole money earner in the family. If this is the case then the ones left behind will obviously be more impacted financially than another situation where the migrant’s income in Egypt was not essential to their family’s survival. The participants who did indeed rely on the migrant’s money to survive were forced to find jobs in order to make up the financial void left by their family member’s migration. While remittances are an option and were discussed as such in the literature review, the fact that it was not something that the participants received made finding a job their only realistic option other than taking out more loans and borrowing money from family; thus increasing their debts that they already owed after borrowing money for the migration of their family member. When dealing with the financial impacts of migration, the families left behind that are most affected are the ones whose family member disappears or dies on their immigration to Europe. This is the case due to the fact that not only do some of these families lose the main source of income for the entire family, but they also accumulate the debts collected in the beginning that made the immigration to Europe possible. In these cases the families left behind actually find themselves in a worse situation economically as their bad economic situation that forced their family member to migrate in the first place is now compounded with the fact that they now owe money. With no apparent way to
repay these debts some families are dug into a financial hole so deep that they struggle to get back to the ‘bad’ situation they were in at the first place.

The psychological impacts on the family left behind differed based on the relationship the participant had with the emigrant; however what became apparent was that communication played a vital role in limiting, or in some cases increasing, the psychological impacts on the ones left behind. Having the ability to connect with the migrating family member was invaluable to the participants as they were able to rest assured that their loved one was safe and doing well. The importance of communication was seen in the respondents who were unable to communicate with their loved ones due to their disappearance. In these cases, the participants suffered from psychological effects such as going ‘missing’ or stopping in time; situations in which people will be unwilling to move forward with their lives before receiving closure about the whereabouts of their loved ones. Similar to the social impacts they face, these particular family members may shut themselves out from the outside world with their behavior changing drastically as their whole attitude towards life is different once their loved one disappears while on their migration to Europe.

The social impacts of migration on the family left behind had two major focus points; the gender role issue and the effects on the participants who lost contact with their family member after they had migrated. The issue of gender roles deals with the relationship between the female participants and their migrating husbands; specifically when dealing with the jobs the participants had to work in order to attain money while their husbands were away. The issue here was with the reluctance of the husbands in allowing their wives to work, but their acceptance of this as something that was needed until they successfully returned from Europe. On the other hand, the female participants had enjoyed their newly found freedom in their jobs where they
were able to become more independent, were able to make bigger decisions pertaining to the household, and were not reliant on their husbands financially. However, the husbands were strongly against the idea of their wives working once they had returned from their migration in Europe and even though the female participants spoke about all the advantages of being able to work, both acknowledged that they would most likely quit because it was ‘for the best’. Given the opportunity to interview more females in this situation would have been ideal as the issue of gender roles was one that stood out during the research process.

The social impacts on the family that lost a loved one during migration were the most evident once again, as the participants spoke about creating this social bubble in which they, or their other family members, were unwilling to speak or interact with anyone, shutting themselves out from the world socially. Similar to the psychological impacts discussed, these family members would almost lose track of time, as they would stand-still while the world continued to move forward; leaving them stuck in the past.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations that will be discussed in this section will be possible solutions in dealing with the issue of emigration, and how to best assure that the family left behind is not susceptible to being put in a worse situation than they were previously in due to their family member’s emigration. Stating that since Egyptians leave due to a lack of job opportunities and low wages that the Egyptian government should look to create more jobs and set a national minimum wage rate would be ideal; however it is not a practical solution due to the abundance of informal jobs in Egypt. Therefore, focusing on how to best assure that the potential candidates for migration
are given a fair opportunity to legally migrate, as well as looking at viable options for
the family left behind will be the focus of these recommendations.

When dealing with irregular emigration it is always important to understand
the reasons why the legal path is seen as an unviable option to these migrants. As
stated in the introduction of this thesis, Egypt signed a protocol with Italy in January
2007 to regulate immigrant labor with the objective, as stated by the Italian
Ambassador to Egypt at the time, Antonio Badini, being to contrast “the Egyptian
irregular migratory phenomenon towards Italy, and, at the same time, offering to the
Egyptian citizens concrete and regular job perspectives in the Italian labor market”.105
However, what ended up occurring was that the access to the Italian Embassy in
Egypt was extremely limited to the potential candidates. People believed that this was
just another sign of corruption and favoritism by the government, with reports
surfacing that the visas allocated to Italy were only given to those who were able to
bribe officials of the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower.106 Once again, it is important
to remember that while the reality of this situation may be different, the fact that some
Egyptians, including those who were interviewed as part of this research project, have
the notion that their government is corrupt is worth mentioning. This distrust towards
“the system” leads towards many of these people searching for alternative paths in
order to migrate. With this being seen as the case, the irregular route was seen as the
only viable alternative for the potential candidates’ emigration.

A recommendation to solving this issue would be to develop a mobile
taskforce as a sector of the Italian Embassy that would be able to visit several districts

105 “Migration Policies: The Importance of Investing in Human Resources and the Role of the Media”
in Egypt, thus allowing direct access to the potential candidates who are looking to fill one of the job opportunities available in Italy. The advantages of this would be that the embassy personnel working in this mobile unit would be able to visit the Egyptian districts they feel have the largest group of potential migrants; such as Fayoum and Assuit to name a couple. In addition to this, the implementation of this recommendation would diminish the advantage that traffickers have as being the one possible means of migration; thus limiting their opportunity to ask for an obscene amount of money from these potential migrants since there would be a legal alternative. Furthermore, by developing this mobile taskforce the Italian embassy, in specific, would be able to ensure that the proper recruitment is occurring for the available job vacancies, as they would be in almost complete control of this process. With the legal option being more accessible to the potential candidates of migration, it would make sense that the other option; the irregular one, would be seen as a much less viable and tempting one, thus limiting the amount of people willing to take that route of migration.

When looking at trying to help the family that is left behind it is important to realize what they struggle from, in the hopes of being able to best find a solution to their problems. With the recommendation of developing mobile taskforces in order to make legal migration a more viable option, the absurd amount of money spent on irregular emigration will hopefully not be as big an issue; thus decreasing the debts that the migrant and his family will need to repay. Furthermore, with the legal avenues of migration the travel towards Europe would be much safer, which would also decrease the chances of a family member being lost at sea during their journey and the family left behind having to deal with the psychological and social impacts of that loss. However, despite all of this it is important that the European governments
involved in the legal migration of Egyptians look towards helping the development of the problem areas; the districts in which most potential migrants come from. By creating centers in which the youth of the district are provided with the ability to gain skills in a variety of fields as well as the ability to be taught a new language, the possibility of the youth finding suitable job opportunities in Egypt would increase drastically. “Of the many burdens Egypt carries, educating her people must rank as a substantial one” and thus one of the main goals of these centers must be towards providing proper education for those in need, especially the youth of the district.  

Furthermore, in trying to help the development of certain districts, the European governments in which Egyptian migrants are located could set up a program in which sending back money in the form of remittances towards the betterment of their own districts could be ‘rewarded’ with some sort of tax exemption. This in particular seems to be something that could prove to be beneficial, as not only would the migrants be benefiting their own family with these remittances, but also their neighbors and friends. This would also depict the European governments as willing to do what it takes to ensure the development of the Egyptian districts in desperate need, creating a good relationship not only with the Egyptian government, but with its people as a whole.

In order to build human development, Arab countries (and Egypt specifically) need to embark on rebuilding their societies on the basis of:

(1) Full respect for human rights and freedoms as the cornerstone of good governance leading to human development.

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Facilitating the rise of Arab women by making all opportunities available to them, and especially those enabling the building of human capabilities, to girls and women on the basis of equality with their male ‘brothers’

“The consolidation of knowledge acquisition and its effective utilization in building human capabilities. Knowledge has also to be efficiently used in all aspects of societal activities, striving towards the maximization of human welfare in the region”.108

While Fergany’s writing of these three points was nine years ago, they are still points that need to be addressed in the Arab world, and in Egypt in particular. While the recommendations based on a mobile taskforce or setting up centers for the youth are important, they will not address the problems of the Egyptian population unless the core issues are tackled, and those are the three points addressed by Nader Fergany. Without full respect for human rights and freedoms, the true relationship between a government and its people will never truly be reached; as the Egyptian Government will always cast a shadow of doubt amongst its citizens, as long as the basic freedoms and rights are not granted to the Egyptian people. Furthermore, the acquisition of knowledge is also a key component in realizing the true potential of the Egyptian people. In order to build human development a strong educational core must be easily accessible for all Egyptian citizens, as only through the true education of the Egyptian people can real development occur in the country.

When dealing with the facilitating of the rise of Arab women, there are two essential requirements that must be met in order to set-up an environment capable of allowing female empowerment. The first point deals with the sanctity of the body and

soul. Violence of women in the Arab world is widespread, and has sadly become one of Egypt's ugly truths as well. This is simply unacceptable and must be dealt with in the immediate future. The second point deals with personal affair codes and the need for them to be more respectful of the rights of women. Major reforms are needed in dealing with marriage rights including the initiating, continuation, and termination of marriage. “Stringent social constraints underpin the weakness of women in the Arab countries. Women are not generally considered independent social agents. A major problem revolves around the derivability of the social position of a woman; particularly a married one, from that of her household, generally dominated by the male head”.109 In general, women are ill-prepared for effective and rewarding participation in public life, which is evident by the higher level of deprivation from education, particularly the types of education leading to high social returns. While the empowerment of women is not directly correlated to migration, it is essential in order to build human development in Egypt. While migration may help in the economic development of the migrant and his family, the only way the country as a whole will be able to develop and reach its true potential is through human development. It is through this human development, with respect for human rights and freedoms, knowledge acquisition, and the environment needed for female empowerment, that can eventually create a situation in which irregular migration to Europe will not be seen as a needed ‘last resort’ by Egyptians in dire need of money in order to support themselves and their families.

References


Faist, Thomas (2000). “The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces.”


Appendix A: Interview Questions

(1) How would you describe your current economic situation? Is this a better or worse situation than when your family member was with you?

(2) What were the main causes that led to your family member deciding that his only option was to immigrate?

(3) What was your family member’s attitude towards his life in Egypt?

(4) How did they think their life would be different once they arrived in Europe?

(5) What procedures did your family member have to go through before he migrated?

(6) Was legal immigration a viable option for your family member? If yes, why did they decide to immigrate irregularly? If no, why not?

(7) Did anyone describe to them how the trip to Europe would be like?

(8) Have you heard from your family member since they left Egypt?

(9) How much did the trip cost your family member? How were they able to pay for this?

(10) How do you think your family member leaving has affected the family/you? Would you ever consider immigrating to Europe?

(11) Do you know of anyone who has returned from Europe? Were they more successful than when they left? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

(12) If someone came to you for advice when making the decision of whether or not to immigrate to Europe, what would you tell them?

(13) Was the decision to migrate made on their own or were they influenced by others?

Appendix B: IRB Approval
To: Karim Zikry (CMRS student); Aheen Ullah (CMRS)
From: Dr. Graham Harman, Associate Provost for Research Administration, Chair of the IRB
Date: October 18, 2011
Re: approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled “Illegal Immigration of Egyptians to Italy: What Are the Push-Pull Factors and What Happens to the ‘Forgotten’ Victims: The Family That is Left Behind?,” and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the “expedited” heading. As you are aware, the IRB made various suggestions, and in my estimation your revised proposal addressed these suggestions successfully. Accordingly, your proposal is approved.

Thank you and good luck.

Graham Harman
Chair, IRB