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# WORLD EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME RESEARCH

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WORLD EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME RESEARCH

Working Paper

POPULATION AND LABOUR POLICIES PROGRAMME

Working Paper No. 126

CRAFTSWOMEN IN KERDASSA, EGYPT:  
HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION

by

Patricia D. Lynch  
with Hoda Fahmy

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## Preface

This working paper forms one of a series of studies on women's roles and demographic issues emanating from a global research project supported by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. The contributions of women in an Egyptian community to subsistence activities and handicraft production are described as are changes in labour processes which increasingly push women into less rewarding forms of work. The demographic implications of these conditions are assessed.

The authors provide ethnographic evidence on a set of Moslem women craft workers in an Egyptian village regarding women's work and how it relates to childbearing and rearing activities. They contend that the kind of information they provide at the individual and household level is important for providing policy relevant insights into existing impediments to expansion of household production or the involvement of women in the paid labour force, as well as to vocational, health and family planning programmes.

A significant finding of this micro study is the positive correlation between women's involvement in household production and pregnancy, spontaneous abortion and infant death. One explanation given by the women themselves for bearing children is that they feel the need for additional child labour to increase their productivity. Those involved in subsistence craft work, lacking long-term economic security, are unable to plan their lives with regard to childbirth as well as material survival. Again the authors point to the domination of husbands in family planning matters when they are also dominant financially.

Access to income generating work is seen as a key to enabling lower status women to gain security and decision-making capacity. And better basic health care is viewed as essential to lowering infant death rates and female mortality which are inextricably linked to family planning motivation. Relevant education and vocational training programmes are stressed as essential components of any over-all policy to improve the economic and demographic situation.

The authors underline the need for further investigation of the nature of relations within the domestic group to increase understanding of domestic power processes in rural areas and to show how these are linked to divisions of labour, resource allocation, fertility levels and family planning acceptance.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Egypt has one of the longest histories of petty commodity production in the world and yet there is little known of the role which women's labour has played in these productive processes. Because of the long literary history and the particular nature of record keeping, many aspects of production are well documented, especially in comparison to other areas of the world. Yet even recent attempts to direct theories of social scientists to Egypt's past and present have failed to address the question of women's participation in production. A major stumbling block has been acceptance by women as well as men of definitions of work which omit productive activities within the domestic domain, as well as much of women's unpaid family labour in trading and agriculture, from statistics compiled, thus giving an impression that women's contribution to production and "development" is mainly confined to "housework", subsistence and child-rearing.

Work, its definition, recording and measurement in different cultural contexts, is now an important focus of concern in several disciplines, including in particular the non-wage and household activities of women. Anthropologists have been among those social scientists who have been guilty of representing only one-half of the world's population and now share a widespread concern both to improve the conceptualisation and documentation of work<sup>1</sup> and production processes and to give due regard to women as well as men which should facilitate full understanding of the nature of culture and society or the relation between "traditional" society and present processes of change.

Tucker (Tucker, 1976) has mentioned that Egyptian women in the past were known to take over small craft businesses on the death of husbands, and had a significant role in textile production, Egypt's most widespread domestic industry. Staffa's important historical analysis on Cairo (Staffa, 1977) devotes considerable space to understanding the relation between forces of production, distribution, and consumption in craft production, and some attention to the further relation between these and the state, yet she ignores the consequences of organisation upon the basic unit of production, the domestic unit. Baer has produced the definitive work on craft organisation in Ottoman Egypt with no consideration for the role of women (Baer, 1964).

Interest in cross-cultural women's studies has lately increased because of western concern with women's status. A strikingly low participation of women in the work force in the Middle East generally has been noted, although there is a great degree of fluctuation from country to country in official statistics. It is sometimes believed that the participation of women in paid labour will facilitate healthy development and will lower birth rates, which are major problems in these areas (Beck and Keddie, 1978; and Youssef, 1974). Yet others question these assumptions on the grounds that *sources* are very inconsistent and sometimes conflicting (Buvinic, 1976). There is also disagreement on the relation between social values and women's participation. Two of the most prominent anthropologists writing recently take opposite sides on this question. Youssef (Youssef, 1974) finds participation of women in paid non-agricultural labour related to neither economic development nor to the wife-mother role in the Middle East (that is, to marital and fertility characteristics), but to differences in social structure and ideology. Youssef says, "Female employment rates were low because all women were restricted, regardless of age, marital condition, or motherhood state". Peters (Beck and Keddie, 1978), on the other hand, believes that the social structure is equally constricting for both sexes at certain periods in the life cycle or in the domestic cycle, and that economic diversity is the determining factor in differences among the four areas of the Middle East which he studied.

Beck and Keddie (1978) note several important general conclusions based on ethnographic evidence on women in the Middle East. The position of women who consume and do not produce, and the general attitude toward them as childbearing instruments, affect the living standards of the entire economy. They do believe law

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1 Women, Work & Development Series No. 1, ILO, Geneva. The Association of Social Anthropologists meeting (1979) on the topic of work also pointed to the lack of sufficient attention to this area as one of the pressing problems in anthropology.

reform and female education correlate with women's paid employment and lowered birth rate. Women's participation has not kept pace with men's in the change to wage labour that has occurred during industrialisation, and this is a serious problem for women. In this area, studies of indigenous organisation may suggest creative ways to share housekeeping and child-care duties and to seek good part-time jobs or plan new employment. Fuller female participation is needed to lessen the gap which is increasing between incomes of higher and lower classes. In the Middle East husbands often decide if a wife can work for wages, at what kind of a job, and if she can use her wages. Men have a legal as well as a religious right to do so (Beck and Keddie, 1978), a situation which makes women's status precarious. Beck and Keddie also believe that capitalism has had a different effect on women's labour than it has on men's and must be studied separately for this reason.

Buvinic (1976) warns that women's status cannot be inferred from the degree of participation in economic activities alone. This is especially true if we go beyond her more narrow definition of participation as that defined in existing statistics. She calls for a more careful analysis of women's control over specific productive activities, the extent to which these activities are perceived indispensable to society, the possession by women of technical expertise necessary for different types of production, their relative control over the means of production and distribution, and the key variables of a non-economic nature which are related to women's participation.

Few of these issues have been addressed in Egypt, where only 4.8% of the current modern work force is women and 3.6% of non-agricultural employment is female (White in Beck and Keddie, 1978). The work force in small manufacturing establishments is mainly composed of adult males (Mabro and Radwan, 1976), that is, 86.4%, as opposed to 6.1% children under 15 years and 7.4% adult females. Of this figure, 59% are employed in rural areas. According to Mabro and Radwan, 59% of all women who work are in dressmaking, 16% are in spinning and weaving, and 8% in other textiles. No major cottage or household industry exists in rural areas, and the small manufacturing sector in Egypt does not, as in many other developing countries, "provide employment opportunities that lead to a higher participation of the population in the labour force" (Mabro and Radwan, 1976). Little, if any, statistics exist in Egypt on the skill structure for either men or women.

Women's work in one delta village was determined by age, marital status and socioeconomic status of kin group (Morsey in Beck and Keddie, 1978). Female economic contribution is considered supplementary and women do not act as a corporate group in any economic enterprise nor do they have any control over products of their labour. Because male labour is considered more vital it can be assigned a monetary value, and often is, whereas women's work is not, even when it contributes to a product marketed by the husband (Morsy in Beck and Keddie, 1978).

In The Arab Republic of Egypt, "Female activities in the home or in agriculture still constitute a large part of the 'invisible' national income" (Tucker, 1976). Tucker fears an ever widening gap between the public and private sector with women gaining little opportunity to work outside the home. Female contribution to the exchange value of husband's labour is obscured by the fact that the work is wageless (Gran, 1977), and statistics do not include or grossly underestimate many of women's activities (Tucker, 1976). Further, the process of industrialisation has changed the sexual division of labour.

Education, training, and cultural values also inhibit participation of women in the work force, especially in rural areas, where women who travel alone to work outside may be subject to gossip, thus endangering their chances in the marriage market, which no villagers are willing to do, as marriage has a much higher priority than work. Few women are educated or trained for skilled jobs, but where they are, they are allowed more mobility because of the status these jobs bring. Because of the few opportunities for suitable work for lower income and unskilled, uneducated women, they crowd into these areas and thus drive the price of their labour very low.

Whereas skills and production were related to age and experience, not to sex, in home industry producing for local markets, in capital industry production has brought a more rigid division which fails to recruit women for skilled or well paid jobs. They remain increasingly as marginal workers, a pool of surplus labour.

Female participation in paid labour is higher in areas where factory work is limited, but "as factory work



replaces home industry in a given area more women enter the factory but overall participation rate falls ... as home industry contracts displaced female workers are not absorbed by new factory industry — the European pattern of utilizing cheap female labour in the early stages of industrialisation is not currently prevalent in Egypt” (Tucker, 1976).

Nagi (Nagi, 1971) has also stressed the poor position of women in industrial work, with women over 35 being pushed out of the market at increased rates. Nagi explains this is as a “necessary” stage of industrialisation where men have the responsibility for “modernization” and women may rejoin the labour market at a later “stage” of development. Surplus male labour, migration to urban centers, and marriage all lower women’s participation. In rural areas, as household size increases, the number of workers also increases, but in urban areas this situation is reversed. Over time, women’s crude economic activity fell more than did men’s, partly due to the younger population structure. The number of young girls under 15 years employed in industry, especially in family craft business, increased greatly between 1937 and 1960. Illiterate and unskilled women in middle age have suffered most severely from changes in labour structure over time. As laws of supply and demand operate ineffectively in the rural labour market, workers are recruited from the “undifferentiated rural surplus”. Government policies then (1971) were benefiting only an elite of industrial and urban workers (Nagi, 1971).

The problems of measurement of female labour force participation in the Arab Republic of Egypt are severe. Western-oriented in education and life style, government bureaucrats attempt to deal with rural issues which they little understand because of class and cultural differences. Capital and technologically intense industry is fostered by the government and by outside assistance. Structural models for collecting and analysing labour force participation have been adopted which are based on complex western societies little resembling the Arab Republic of Egypt and planning based on these simplistic and erroneous concepts of “work” has proven to be a failure. Present models for collecting labour data on women ignore the complexity of activities women actually undertake, class and status differences in education, training, and socio-economic conditions and how these interact with women’s work, area differences in the recruitment and utilisation of female labour, which in Egypt is great, and attitudes to work which may help to explain women’s desire to participate. Much of women’s work is hidden because of denial or lack of recognition. No definition has been forthcoming to date of what the present productive contribution of Egyptian women might be. Because the family is a private realm which is jealously protected and because the social structure limits women’s interaction in the social realm, small, household production is not easy to quantify or even identify.

Industries which are very small often fall outside the present government structure, and as women in rural areas are primarily employed in this group as unpaid family workers they are not counted in official statistics. Census surveys cannot efficiently identify female workers when neither they nor their husbands consider that they are working, but rather consider they are only “helping out”. This problem also masks female unemployment, as there is no way to identify how many rural women are seeking and unable to find income generating activities.

In fact, a recent estimate has put the figure for small and informal production at 60% of the working population. As production of women is mostly ignored, this figure may be even higher. Up to 95% of rural women are illiterate, depending upon area (Population Census, CAPMAS, 1976) and age, and vocational training for women is almost nonexistent. Training which does exist is mostly handled through the Ministry of Social Affairs, with 2000 centers spread throughout the Arab Republic of Egypt. Extremely limited funding and a focus on social welfare above expansion of production hampers the efficiency of this agency, despite good intentions. Even occasional training programs for women have little relevance to the real lives and values of rural women. For lower income, illiterate, and unskilled women there is literally no opportunity to work inside or outside the village, except in household industries or cottage industries in handicrafts or in petty trade, which occupies the largest number of women. To say, then, that the Arab Republic of Egypt has one of the lowest participation rates of women in paid labour in the world does not really say much about what Egyptian women do.

Relationships between female involvement in work and fertility have also followed models derived from western industrialised society where work means paid labour outside the home. Negative relationships between "work" and fertility are usually assumed, an oversight which we suggest is unwarranted from the evidence in the Egyptian case.

It is clear that there is a great lack of ethnographic evidence relating to the complex problems and issues presented. Working as economists normally do, from existing statistics, is bound to mislead us as to the amount of women's participation in work processes and in activities which contribute to market production. Cultural definitions of work need to be investigated more closely to see their relation to economic change and their implicit assumptions regarding women. The variation of patterns of relations within the household unit and effects of these patterns on attitudes toward and implementation of family planning must be identified. Fertility statistics must be analysed in relation to type of work done and by socio-economic group, according to new and more meaningful categories of activities.

There is a great need for field studies which allow researchers access to households for long enough periods of time to observe women's activities throughout the yearly agricultural and production cycle. More information on local attitudes and values about work is essential. It is only through this means that data compilation may occur which will identify work patterns and their variations according to age, status group, household structure, and family and life cycle. Structural impediments to expansion of household production into small industry and to female involvement in paid labour may be identified and incorporated into more realistic labour policy, including an assessment and adjustment of present vocational training programs for women. These issues affect not only the future lives of women, but the demographic structure and the quality of Egyptian life as a whole.

### Approach to the problem

The study is qualitative and empirical. This means it depends upon anthropological methods of observation and recording under conditions of long term contact to determine women's productive and reproductive roles and their attitudes and concepts regarding these roles. Key informants, observation and structured interviews were used to situate local cases in a wider economic context. A brief description of the case studies is presented in the appendix to demonstrate the complexity of social, economic and ideological factors which determine individual life choices. The study attempts to record the material conditions of life in specific conditions and at one historical moment in Egypt. The location was chosen as a focus of study because it was believed to be representative of certain conditions of development and of change. We believe that intruding links with the world market have effects upon social relations within the area under study and that the nature of social relations, in turn, affects the rate at which capitalisation takes place.

We have differentiated women in the study according to indicators which exist within a culturally homogeneous area. This is difficult where women dress almost identically and where modes of behaviour, consumption, and lifestyle are highly institutionalised to equalise differences. We have chosen groupings which we term classes or status groups according to education, income (where this could be accurately assessed), and property (land, buildings, animals, household furnishings, size and condition, gold jewelry, clothing). We found, however, that there were differences in some cases between our assessment and that of village assistants, and in this case we have noted this difference. We suggest here that purely material indicators are inadequate to describe the social differentiation as it is defined in village terms. For this reason we added a category of *family status* which relates to the position of the natal families of husband and wife as assessed by village assistants and key informants.

We suggest how relations differ by craft and specify those relations which limit mobility in land, credit, and labour. Restraints on commoditisation are noted. Relations in rural or semi-rural areas in subsistence,

traditional, and tourist crafts are different from those in highly industrialised, urban areas where fully capitalised production takes place. We hope especially to note these differences for women.

We discuss the position of women vis-à-vis men in the process of commoditisation and capitalisation both in material and conceptual terms. We believe the aims and attitudes of women differ somewhat from those of men, and that capital development affects women differently from men. This difference is often neglected in theories of capital development. It has been observed that the relative equality of women and men in various spheres changes at different rates through time. It has been suggested that understanding women's position in a given culture vis-à-vis men in the same culture may be the most appropriate way of defining status for women for this reason and because of other difficulties in cross-cultural comparisons in women's position alone (Oppong, 1980). We have accepted this assumption in our study.

The study is relevant to the needs for education and skills to equip women in lower income groups for a role in national development. Education and training for these women who have been hitherto somewhat overlooked by government training policies, if combined with cooperatives and credit schemes, may provide ways for women in these groups to increase income generating skills, life chances, and socio-economic conditions. Results of such programs would certainly be reflected in family behaviour in general and parental roles in particular.

## II. THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT: KERDASSA

### The Community

Kerdassa, the second largest town in Giza governorate, lies 15 kilometre southwest of Cairo, and 6 kilometre northwest of the Giza pyramids. The pyramids dominate the landscape on a clear day and provide the reason for the growing tourist industry in the village.

Historically, Kerdassa was not known as an agricultural village but rather as a village specialising various handicrafts. Although no written records of its history exist, older residents recount its prominence as a center of the weaving industry, where once most of its residents were employed on hand looms. Merchant families of several generations still ply the trade founded by their forebears when Kerdassa was a prominent stop on the desert routes to Tunisia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Since the advent of the British in Egypt a southern trade with Sudan and Chad also flourished and the town still keeps old trading contacts with both eastern and western desert areas, with Libya and with oases such as Siwa, presenting textiles and rugs from these areas for the burgeoning tourist trade.

The town forms a around the egg-shaped nucleus of the original settlement which stood above the flood plain and which, since the first Aswan dam at the turn of the century, has spread outward encroaching onto the flood plain. The lush green of agricultural land and date palms surrounds the town, with its narrow streets and close-built houses. Pathways strewn with garbage, thrown out washwater and animal refuse greatly contrast with the cleaner and more open area surrounding it.

At the entrance to the town on its far side from the pyramids there lies a strip of "bazaars" which have grown in number from two in 1972 to the present 51 in response to increased tourism. In the past several years many new shops have been opened by merchants from the old Bazaar area in Cairo, which has formed a dichotomy of insiders/outside, as local handwoven textiles are more and more supplemented with other bazaar craft products manufactured outside the village.

At least four-fifths of the residents are landless and so must find work in or outside the village in the small factories which have sprung up around Giza. The rest farm their own land, rent, or sharecrop. The minority work

in skilled trades, professional fields, or the nearby government offices. Many small-scale industries may be viewed along the main streets and others which take place within the household can be viewed by wandering along the by-ways and stopping to visit.

### **The Population**

The official government census of 1976 estimated 29,361 residents, 14,294 females and 15,067 males. A survey taken in 1979 by the government census bureau estimated 32,303, which suggests a growth rate of 3.23% annually. The Governorate of Giza suggests a current figure of 52,000, which fits estimates of villagers themselves fairly accurately. The ethnic composition of Kerdassa is homogenous and the religious composition is nearly so. With the exception of a few thousand Coptic rite Christians the population is Moslem, and 23 mosques and one church dot the village. The culture of the area is expressed largely in Islamic terms and Koranic references, although folk practices and beliefs do exist. Time itself is dominated by the ritual of Islam, as the calls to prayer echoing from mosque to mosque around the village structure activities as well as time for reflection.

Migration from Kerdassa is small by Egyptian terms, which may be due to existing employment opportunities, yet a number of young educated males have travelled to other Middle Eastern countries, particularly Libya, to work, returning to settle after they have saved money to marry, an increasingly expensive process. These men come predominantly from merchant and landowning families. It is very rare for women to move away, though some few have married in neighboring villages.

### **The Administration**

Kerdassa is governed by town and governorate councils composed of both elected and appointed members with terms of four years. Since 1965 the office of *oumda* (mayor) has been abolished and the head of the town council is appointed from outside the town by the governor of Giza. Both councils are subject to national guidance and control. The governorate maintains a large compound near the village entrance adjoining the police station, which is also a branch of the central government. The district and governorate also send representatives to the national parliament (People's Assembly) through participation in the national party.

Kerdassa has an agricultural bank which was recently established to supplement the services of the agricultural cooperative. Lending policies are quite liberal and one thousand televisions were financed in Kerdassa last year by the bank. Women can obtain sewing machines only if husbands have established credit with the bank, or they may do this through the Productive Families Unit of the social services center which is run by the central Ministry of Social Affairs. The Productive Families Unit of this ministry has been the major supporter of craftsmen throughout Egypt and is willing to lend money to families to buy materials or equipment to begin any sort of small craft business. However, first it must be established by the social worker that this is a "needy" family, and so this is not a system of credit which can be utilised by the general population. The general budget for this expenditure is only a few thousand pounds for the entire country and it cannot be considered a large-scale effort by the government to boost small production. Most financing for crafts in the village is unofficial. Women sometimes run revolving credit associations, but these are primarily used for weddings or feasts and not productive enterprises.

Women generally do not organize in rural Egypt beyond the extended family level, a serious impediment to attempts to further income generating schemes for women. Women do congregate for weddings and funerals, and for some visiting, but not for other reasons. In some areas of Egypt, community-based self-help groups have

been successful, but generally the lowest income groups who need the most assistance are isolated from information networks and wider organisation, an issue which needs to be addressed.

A development cooperative has been responsible for organising the raising of funds for local schools, roads, and projects. This sort of community cooperation for development is characteristic of the village, where well-to-do residents and merchants are expected to support projects for the general welfare. Women are not represented at the community level and above it, and can only influence decisions on local issues indirectly through family pressure and by appealing to husbands. Nevertheless, they are not unaware of community interests and are generally positive and forceful in their lives and relations with others.

### Communication

Buses and minibuses connect the area with Giza and Cairo as well as surrounding villages at frequent intervals. Newspapers are readily available from a central kiosk and a cinema is located in the governorate complex. An influx of television sets has brought the outside world into Kerdassa and is responsible for accelerating changing social values. Microbus fares are 12 piasters. Goods can be transported on the roof rack, and these travel to and from Giza continually so marketing women and merchants use them often to transport goods. A road connecting the central Pyramids Road was paved four years ago. Donkey carts also provide transport to surrounding areas. Several residents have telephones which can be used by the public for a small fee.

### Power and Sanitation

Nearly all the households in Kerdassa have electric power, which is fed from a transformer located at each side of the village. Because of overload caused by increased building and use of electrical appliances, current is constantly cut off, another situation which merchants bemoan. Most houses have only bare bulb lighting in one or two rooms. Very few houses have actual taps or pumps inside the house for water, but rather use public taps scattered at strategic points about the village. Women and girls carry water from these taps to their homes in large galvanised tins on their heads. If a resident has a pump he is expected to share water freely with neighbors. Despite government efforts to supply clean, drinkable water to every village, we constantly see women washing cooking pots, pans and dishes in the canals. We also see women in the fields adjoining canals washing vegetables before marketing them. Some canals are extremely polluted and all carry bilharzia. Unfortunately no television campaigns have been instigated to stem this serious health hazard.

Pit toilets are the predominant form of facilities and these are of a public and a private nature. Private homes have pit toilets enclosed in individual stalls or located under stairways. Mosques provide public toilets for males only. Toilets range from ceramic-faced and tiled toilets in middle class homes to simple ceramic squares inset in earth in the majority of homes. Some are connected to a central sewage system and water may be poured down them, but some are only dug out. It is difficult to keep these very clean, although cans of water are provided for individual washing (toilet tissue is not used), and recent crowding in villages has the increased hazard. Chickens and pigeons may roost above toilets, adding considerably to bacteria count. Small children defecate in the street or alley in front of their home, squatting close to the house. Animals (dogs, donkeys, gamoosa, cows, sheep, goats) and fowl (ducks, chickens, pigeons) also eliminate both in the alley and in the house, although they are usually confined to certain areas. Cats, chickens, pigeons, and wild birds have free run of the house. Men and children may also use outside areas such as roadsides, canal banks and fields for elimination.

Customs of housekeeping and of handling food, cleaning children, and of human interaction are geared to cultural ideas of cleanliness, rather than to an understanding of bacterial contamination. For example, rituals of

washing after meals are carefully observed, while this is not customary before meals or before food handling. Attempts are made to separate human and animal wastes from food preparation areas but myriad other practices mitigate against the success of this. As pure water has to be carried, sometimes considerable distances, it is used more sparingly and may sometimes become contaminated in transport. Dishes are washed near the doorstep where women squat, stacking pans face down on the earth. Food preparation takes place on the earth floor in the same area where clothes are washed and where fowl and animals congregate and where incontinent young children, who are undiapered, may be present. Carrying open dishes of food or milk from neighboring homes or shops is common. All these practices have a direct effect on health and on child survival. Deep-seated cultural ideals and practices are difficult to eradicate, and so far the government has failed to lead any serious campaign against these dangers, believing that the presence of clean water within walking distance is sufficient.

### Education

There are three primary schools in Kerdassa and one intermediate school with a few classes for secondary school. About one-third of the girls entering first grade finish the first six years of primary school and this figure declines even further in preparatory school and secondary school. We do not have accurate figures for the percentage of eligible children who attend school but would estimate that two-thirds of primary school-age children are in school. While current illiteracy rates for women in rural areas vary between 74-95%, depending upon area and age (Capmas, 1976 and Gadalla, 1978), this is rapidly changing. Currently, however, only upper status women complete secondary school, and these are few, indeed. Attitudes toward education have changed, evidenced by comments by women about their own lack of education and regrets about daughters who did not attend or did not finish school. Many young girls now take studies seriously, attending extra tutoring sessions regularly, and these girls express high aspirations. The free education system begun under Nasser has had a great effect on class structure in Egypt and this effect will increase with the current generation. The system allows parents who can afford to support children not contributing labour to household income to keep their children in school. Free schooling must often be supplemented by tutoring, however, as conditions of overcrowding and double and triple sessions mean that children may not pass examinations which determine participation in the next level. Families may also sacrifice to send girls who are good students to secondary school and even university, where this may mean a brother will not be educated. This will increase the woman's chance of making a good marriage, thus increasing the status of the entire family. Nevertheless, as we show in the case studies, not all families are able to educate daughters, even where sons may be in school.

Adoption of conservative Islamic dress and lifestyle is increasing and may be linked with education and with status (thus income). Women engaged in crafts tell us they do not wish to be encumbered by the more restrictive headveil (hijab).

Vocational training as an alternate education at higher levels is not available in Kerdassa. Boys at upper levels do travel to technical training schools in Giza. This training is planned by the central government through the Ministry of Manpower and is exclusively directed to males. The Ministry of Social Affairs runs a small, intermittent training program through local social centers for female "school leavers", usually teaching them embroidery. This is not a serious vocational training program for income generation among rural women and often transmits skills which have little relevance to their lives or their basic needs for income.

As education has a direct relation to age at marriage and indirectly to fertility through this and other ways (Loza, 1981), it is a dominant issue. Education has been found to be the single most important means through which changes in fertility have been realized in some areas of Egypt (Ibrahim, 1980), but functional literacy has been insufficient to change attitudes (Gadalla, 1978).

Despite recent changes, the majority of women in Kerdassa remain uneducated and, as functional literacy is the only goal being met at present, we cannot expect favourable change in the near future, either for lower income groups, or for all women.

### The Mosque

Although women are not allowed direct participation in the practice of religion generally in Egypt, women in Kerdassa do take an active role in religious life. Although they do not use the mosque as an important place to exchange information, express social and political solidarity, and for recreation, as men do, women do recite the Koran after a death and there are a small number of women renowned locally for this. Whereas men recite on the first day, women use the microphone to recite on the second day. This can be an impressive sight as large numbers of women congregate to practice mortuary rituals. Predominantly older women observe this custom as younger women with children find it difficult to spend considerable time thus occupied. Public meeting houses are supplied for men in mourning, whereas females gather outside the home of the deceased.

### Kinship, Marriage and Law

Individual values and preferences are not given much consideration as a general rule, but rather it is the extended family interests which prevail. Women have less power in decision-making and distribution of resources than do men in this patrilineal kinship system. They do not have the choice of marriage partner as men do, although they have the right to refuse partners. Women's marital and sexual lives are controlled strictly by the male members of her family, and a mother is not anxious to see her daughter's chances for a suitable marriage diminish. High value is placed on chaste, obedient women who are highly fertile and who are strong. All women are expected to marry before twenty and many in this village still marry below 16, although this is the legal age. Age at marriage is rising<sup>2,3</sup>, however, due primarily to rising education levels and the high cost of *mahr*, or bridewealth<sup>4</sup>.

When a woman becomes engaged (*shabkat*) an agreed upon sum is paid to her by the groom's family after this is settled between the two sets of parents. This money is used to buy gold for the prospective bride or copper objects for the household. The woman keeps this but may later be asked to sell some of it if her husband needs money. She is not expected to refuse. Although by law a marriage contract often has "arrears" to be paid on divorce, in practice this money is seldom collected by women who are divorced.

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2 Gadalla shows that although the average age at marriage for women in his survey is 15.9 for rural women 45-49 years, the median age at marriage has risen in villages in his study during the past 30 years from as low as 14.9 to as high as 18.4. Age and area differences, therefore, cannot be ignored, but the general trend is to later age at marriage, usually 17 or over. Gadalla, *ibid.*, p. 77-8.

3 Loza shows that the average age at marriage for her study is between 15.9 and 18.5 depending upon rural or urban setting, and that percentage of marriage under 17 in rural areas is often 30-50%. Loza, *ibid.*, Table A.4.6, p. 150.

4 We term *mahr* here as bridewealth which is passed from the kin of the groom to those of the bride and which forms a societal fund. Actually, *mahr* is "indirect dowry" of the type called by Goody "diverging devolution", that is, part of a "familial or conjugal fund which is passed from holder to heir". In this case funds are paid from the groom's family to the bride through her father and are matched by funds or movable property from the bride's parents to the bride, although many complain that grooms now assume a much larger portion. It is meant to establish a new household, and is called locally "dowry". Goody, Jack, "Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia", in Goody, Jack and Tambia, S.J.: *Bridewealth and Dowry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973, p. 17.

It is the obligation of the bride's family to purchase furnishings for the home of the new couple and they do this with the *mahr*, recording the amount spent. If the man divorces her she is entitled to the furnishings, but if she leaves her husband she is only entitled to take half when she leaves. Other gifts of food, animals, and staples sent to the new household by the bride's family are called *el Asr*.

Virilocality is the rule, although an increasing number of new couples have their own home. Endogamy is practiced in the village, and patrilineal cousin marriage (FBD) is still the preferred ideal. However, many cousins fit into this category as all male relatives on the father's side who are older than the groom are called "amm" (uncle).

Marrying within the village is preferred and informants tell us that no woman marries out unless she has not had a good offer within the village. Mothers have a very prominent role in choosing a bride for their son as they are in a position to gain more information about the qualities of a prospective wife. Women also prefer to marry their daughter locally.

Women are expected to bear many children and sons are very highly favored. [Mortality rates for females in the 0-4 age group exceed that for males (Nour, 1979)]. If a woman bears few children her husband may take a second wife or divorce her. Limited polygamy is present, especially among lower income groups, but only men are allowed multiple spouses. A first wife may refuse to live with a new wife and may divorce her husband if she does not accept the second marriage. Culturally, however, she is expected to allow this and to cooperate with the new wife, and is thought troublesome if she does not.

In some cases women prefer to cooperate with co-wives for their mutual benefit. In the cases of Safeya and Hamida we show examples of this cooperation which allows considerable freedom to women active in production and marketing.

Family law in Egypt is based on religious law (*Shari'a*). Under this law women have not until recently had the right to divorce a husband against his wishes and this is still difficult to implement, although he may divorce her simply by making a verbal statement of this three times. Until recently, a woman who divorced her husband forfeited her right to support; otherwise he was obliged to support her for one year. A recent law has allowed a woman who wishes to divorce one year's support for each five years of marriage and rights to permanent occupancy of the family home. Children legally belong to the family of the husband after a girl is nine and a boy is seven. Husband's have full authority and final decision-making power over wives, including the right to inflict physical punishment. Men often express a belief that women are not morally as strong as men and need to be "guided", although there are differences of attitude on this subject.

A high value is placed on males who are aggressive, strong, and sexually potent, but there is also a value on patience, wisdom, and non-violent action. While there are some tendencies within local interpretations of Islam, especially by religious males, to regard female sexual power as contaminating to men and tending to lead them away from the correct life, women are valued greatly for their beauty, their sexual attraction, and for their nurturing warmth. The society is segregated sexually outside of the extended family, although this is presently diminishing. There is a strong obligation for women to obey their husbands, to perform domestic tasks for them, and to turn their money over to them if they sell produce of the household unit.

A woman has a right to inherit half as much as a man and to pass her property on to her children according to this law, but often a woman cannot claim her inheritance and it passes to her brothers. A woman retains the name of her father after marriage and her daughters take the name of their father, and not their mother. A husband is expected to provide basic support for his wife and if he does not she may appeal to other male members of his family for help. All of these values are enforced with sayings from the Koran, which support the social order, according to specific local interpretations.



The governorate maintains an outpatient clinic within its large compound with a staff of two physicians and a nurse-midwife (*hakima*) for several hours each morning (9 AM–2 PM) to treat ill patients for 10 piasters (10 piasters = 15 cents American) a visit. A program for the Population and Development Project is administered through this clinic. Five female leaders (*ra'idaa rifa*) were appointed by the local council to augment this project on a household level, making visits to pregnant women and those recently delivered, in hopes of influencing them to adopt family planning methods. We believe the doubts of the Population and Family Planning Board about whether these village women represent the village as a whole or whether they are from a privileged group of women in the village are well founded. There is also a problem with the motivation of the female leaders, which is most probably due to the small remuneration which they receive. Women coming with sick children often have to wait a long time, as is true if they visit for family planning, advice, or medication. Our informants also told us that some doctors run private clinics on government property in the afternoons and sell medications which have been supplied for free distribution to village residents.

The village also contains 25 private health clinics (according to informants), some run by village doctors who are very committed to their patients. However, poorer residents often cannot afford the LE1 fee. Many residents are aware of hospital facilities and outpatient clinics in Giza and in Cairo where they can go for health problems, x-rays, or emergencies, often free of charge. There are about four *dayas* (traditional midwives) in the village who are untrained but who deliver the majority of babies. We think it is unfortunate that efforts under Nasser to bring *dayas* under the medical system by training them in basic techniques of delivery and sanitation were eventually abandoned. Village doctors told us that *dayas* will seek their assistance only when they face a difficult delivery. They claim that certain cultural practices which are dangerous to mothers are practiced by *dayas*, such as encouraging mothers to hasten births by straining over long periods. This may promote both pre- and post-partum hemorrhage, which can result in the death of the mother, or which otherwise weakens her. This accusation is not borne up by statistics. Only about 1% of mothers died in childbirth, doctors told us, which, because many local women marry between 13 and 18 years of age, is very low. It is not, however, uncommon for first or even second babies to die soon after birth or to be stillborn. Female mortality exceeds that of males in Egypt, and together with infant mortality is disguised or underreported (Nour, 1979).

Infant mortality rates in urbanised villages in Giza are among the highest in Egypt (CAPMAS Census 1967 in Loza, 1980) and gastro-enteritis may be responsible for this. The major health problem for adults is malnutrition and its many effects, and bilharzia which also still affects 75% of the children and which is responsible for a high rate of chronic renal infection and urinary tract cancer between the ages of 35-40. Abortion, while not common, is practiced. As it is illegal it is especially difficult for low income women to find clinics which will perform abortions at any kind of fee which they could afford. Folk methods are dangerous and painful and involve insertion of a foreign object into the uterus, usually a stem from a common local green plant then binding the abdomen tightly, thus forming pressure from both ends. It is usually an effective method, but resulting hemorrhage may cause death. Most women in the village have no prenatal or post-natal care and many do not recognise the need for it.

There is at least one dentist in the village. The four pharmacies are conveniently located and sell birth control pills for 5 piasters for a month's supply, the same price as in the government clinic.

While we were in the village a program for vaccination of children between the ages of one and four was being carried out by the two clinic nurses who are also responsible for post-natal care for mothers and babies at home. In a village of 52,000 one can see the problem in expecting them to fulfill all these needs.

## The Household

In existing studies the unit of focus has long been the household, which was considered a homogenous unit with undifferentiated interests. Economists and demographers have recently realised that this assumption is inadequate (Long and Richardson, 1980, pp. 158-184). Women are a special case and do not labour under the same conditions as men and are not affected by development in the same way. Decision making power and distribution of resources may differ across lines of sex, age, and life cycle of the household unit. Relations between the sexes have been found to affect the outcome of externally directed family planning policies, as well.

Sex, age, life cycle, and family cycle differences can only be understood by defining the total participation of individual members of the household and by taking into consideration the context within which each individual works. Youssef has accurately called for the definition of changes from wider economic pressures upon household "flow of relations" and for a like definition of changes from within the household patterns upon fertility attitudes and behaviour (Youssef, 1979, p. 24). Youssef suggests that fertility may be a response to workload and therefore female relations with other females are important as well as those with males. Such changes may not be evident until individual participation is well defined according to a much wider set of criteria than those now present in the data.

Studies which include all aspects of women's lives are essential to provide the understanding needed to plan for women's position in future development through work. In defining household responsibility for tasks it may be determined which activities have elasticity and which do not in particular cultural contexts or under what circumstances activities may have elasticity (Mueller in Anker, Buvinic and Youssef, 1982). From this type of in-depth contextual study we may also determine what patterns in the sex based division of labour are associated with high preference for children and which groups of activities are related to kinds of reproductive behaviour and attitudes (Youssef, 1974, p. 24).

The rise of merchant and commercial capital may increase the need for women to produce more labourers and diminish her involvement in other social roles (Youssef, 1974, p. 27), which can be best determined by viewing the social participation of women as a whole. An internal family hierarchy and more narrow division of labour favouring males also affects female influence in decision making including fertility decisions (Youssef, 1974, p. 27). Failures of government attempts to implement family planning programmes may have some relation to lack of consideration of these issues.

### Food Preparation and Diet

Women play an important role in food provision as well as preparation at all levels, with contribution ranging in many cases right from garden to table. Women often pick crops, transport them from the field, process them, then prepare and cook them. Bread making, date preparation, and corn husking are common to most households, although by no means inclusive of all the time consuming tasks executed by women. The coarse, delicious light brown flat loaf, which forms the diet staple, is baked once or twice a week by most of the women in our study. Wheat is purchased in the local *sug* and is locally ground. The process of sifting, mixing, forming, and baking is very labour intensive and takes the major part of an evening and morning. It is often done in groups based on the extended family so as to conserve fuel, and neighbors may also share an oven or use a public *furn* which serves their street. Corn husking and date preparation are equally time consuming, and like all food preparation, require almost no equipment. Considerable skill is necessary, however, for these tasks.

Kerosene is utilised in the *babour*. It is subsidized by the government and therefore costs only 4 piasters per liter. It is perhaps the most essential item of housekeeping. Women are the suppliers of other fuel for cooking. The environment dictates that wood cannot be used for fuel so women gather dry kindling from palm groves or

from the fields and can be seen carrying huge loads on their heads from areas surrounding the town. This task is mainly one assigned to young, unmarried women and girls. Very young girls from seven to ten collect dung from the streets and marketplace and mix this with straw to make cakes of *gella* for the clay oven. If a household has no small daughters to do this women may make *gella* themselves, or may purchase it for 30 piasters per hundred. The constant demand provides potential small income for those who need it.

The combination of the presence of Nile mud from former floods, Nile water, and warm climate with plenty of sun make the Egyptian delta and adjoining areas a generous environment, indeed. Continuous fresh vegetables and extremely long fruit seasons combine to give variety to the diet, dates grow moist and plump on the many palms, and animals bear more than once per year as in more moderate climates. In spite of these bounteous blessings from Mother Nature, the primary health hazard in Kerdassa is malnutrition.

The interesting and tasty variety of the diet masks some basic deficiencies which must be kept in mind. The diet revolves about grain staples such as breads and grain-based main dishes, supplemented with legumes, especially for lower income groups. It is partially in the method of serving and eating food that diet deficiencies are promoted. It is not that essential foods are not present, but that in communal dishes they are not consumed in sufficient quantity to insure a well regulated diet. We also note that several fairly recent changes in dietary habits have especially affected the protein intake of lower income groups. Although it is generally believed that meat consumption has risen in recent times and that it is available to more of the population, we found that this depended on income. Kerdassans eat camel and fowl and rarely fish, and usually consume meat not more than twice per week, and poorer families may eat meat rarely.

In the past corn and wheat formed a basic staple of the Egyptian diet. Combined with broad beans (*fool*), another staple food, it formed a complete protein. Neither beans nor grain alone contain the seven amino acids necessary to qualify as a source of protein. But now corn is used less than before, as use of *bitau* (corn bread) and corn starch has diminished. Although wheat is still used, purchase of bakery bread has increased, and this uses subsidised, bleached flour. There is also, as in most of the world, an alarming increase of sugar in the diet. The Egyptian diet was not previously rich in refined sugars but with the change to modern food habits, natural drinks such as fruit juices, tamrahinde, karkade (a drink from flower blossoms), and fresh sugar juice from cane are being replaced by carbonated soft drinks and sugar syrup drinks. Healthy snacks such as fruit, seeds, and nuts are still present but cheap sugar sweets are also being increasingly offered to children as well as adults.

Most families in Kerdassa eat three meals per day. Breakfast (*al futuur*) is served soon after rising, usually about 8 A.M., lunch (*al ghada*) is eaten between two and three and is the heavy meal of the day, and dinner (*al'asha*) is served around seven. It is very important for the family to eat meals together and they are a time of relaxation and communication as well as of taking nourishment. Deep cultural values surrounding generosity and hospitality define food preparation and serving. No visitor is ever to be turned away hungry and any extended family member present during mealtime must be fed. Women must transport meals to working husbands, brothers, or fathers in the fields or in other parts of the village and must provide cooked food for employed construction workers, craft workers, or apprentices. Women are expected to reheat and serve meals for any late comers. Sick relatives or old parents must be provided for. No feast or ritual is celebrated without communal food. Women often cook and serve together, a time which they use for chatting and exchanging information.

Some examples of expectations for women to prepare and provide food are: a daughter or cousin is expected to assist her mother (or aunt) in meeting a son's obligations to entertain his friends, even if she has her own family and lives elsewhere; mothers, sisters, and wives must entertain friends of males on request; a brother can send guests unannounced to his sister and she should serve them graciously and uncomplainingly as she would for her husband; during the great feast of Ramadan month entire families of relatives may come each day to be entertained and fed; food is distributed on the street whenever a new child is born, circumcised, engaged, married; a daughter shares produce and cooked food with her mother and mother's family if she needs it.

## Laundry

Like cooking, laundry is a distinctly sex-linked task. As water must sometimes be carried from considerable distances, this can be a heavy job, especially before daughters are old enough to assist with this task, which they do as soon as they are able. Each garment is soaked and heavily scrubbed by hand, then rinsed and placed on the roof to dry. Several trips are necessary to complete the several rinses needed, and wash water must then be transported to specified areas of the village for disposal. Because this is heavy work, some women avoid it by throwing bath, wash, and cooking water in the street or in the canal, which contributes heavily to contamination. As clothes are very important and are well cared for, laundries are large and frequent. Women may have to climb unsafe ladders to reach the drying area. Ironing is not usually done at home, but those few garments which require it are sent to the neighborhood *makwagi* (ironer).

## House Cleaning

Women usually rise early to sweep and straighten the house before breakfast and to feed animals and fowl. This task is done perhaps several times during the day, and especially before the family meal in the evening. As many floors are packed earth they are not washed, but a simple hand whisk made of palm fiber is used for sweeping. Both this and the stiff date branch broom require that a woman bend over while sweeping. This task is made more difficult as refuse is not collected in one place by household residents but rather thrown onto the floor or left there from activities taking place. For craftswomen working at home or for wives of craftsmen this can be quite a time consuming and ongoing duty.

## Child Care

No other single activity makes more demands upon the time and energy of women than child care. In addition to purely physical demands involved in reproduction and meeting material needs of large families, Egyptian culture places great value on the quality of family life. Indeed, no other benefits in life are thought to replace in any way those to be gained from domestic life, and domestic life means children. A woman's relation to child care varies over her life cycle, to be sure, and yet throughout her life she is involved in more than a peripheral way.

In Kerdassa children are not just considered another mouth to feed, but are the wellspring of joy for all members of the extended family and even for outsiders. What would be considered extreme patience by westerners may not be looked upon in just that way by Egyptians. Men, as well as women, are directly involved with the care and teaching of children, and uncles and older siblings dote on them. From birth until four or five, especially, when they begin to assist about the house, children are pampered and loved by everyone.

What does this mean to women directly? First, we have observed in our case studies and throughout the village a fundamental difference in care and feeding of young infants from Egyptian urban or western practices. Infants are nursed on demand and are carried about all the time by their mothers, no matter what else they are doing. If the mother is not holding the baby she passes it to another family member.

Infants are not only nursed for nourishment, but for pacification, and nursing usually continues for two years<sup>5</sup>. Introduction of solid foods is slow, so babies make great demands upon mothers when they become four

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<sup>5</sup> Gadalla notes most village women in Egypt accept the wisdom of nursing for two years, as suggested in the Koran (Gadalla, *ibid.*, p. 159). Loza found a mean lactation duration of 21.20 months in rural areas in her study (Loza, *ibid.*, p. 95, Table 5.8).

or five months old. This is a vital matter, as recent research on prolactin has shown that even malnourished mothers will produce milk at the expense of their own bones, teeth, and general health. Prolactin levels adjust to the baby's need, not to that of the mother. African investigations have also shown that undernourished mothers will be infertile while nursing. If properly nourished, women may be fertile during this nursing period.

As Egyptian women bear large numbers of children and lose a high percent by world standards, they spend a great deal of time and physical resources on bearing, nursing and caring for infants. I think the demands of this process cannot be overestimated, especially under the present poor conditions for pre- and post-natal care.

Mothers are allowed and expected to nurse infants at any place and at any time. In social recognition of the importance of this role, garments are designed to facilitate this in public.

The high rate of infant and child mortality is believed to affect attitudes toward childbearing in Egypt<sup>6</sup> and to increase the desire for many children. Social nurturing roles are stressed to insure survival of as many children as possible and so high demands of child care do not cease with infancy. A woman is expected to devote herself to this care and socialisation processes function to insure the cooperation of women of all ages toward this aim. While men also value children and teach and watch them, it is primarily the duty of women to guard against health hazards, to insure emotional security, and to keep children clothed and fed. It is the mother's obligation to provide food for children even after they are grown, and other work roles may not interfere with this function. Wherever women exist and where they congregate we can observe them fondling, feeding, and caring for children.

We see that in rural households women help to grow, harvest, and process much of the subsistence needs. They control marketing of many basic foodstuffs, feed and care for all animals, fowl and provide secondary animal products for the table. Women bear, nourish, and nurture the coming generation, managing this feat with technology which has changed very little in thousands of years. Female contribution to subsistence is, in short, a major one, and is expanded in specific instances to include a significant productive role in activities beyond subsistence needs.

### III. THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

#### Land, Labour and Industry

Land reform measures brought about by the Nasser regime since 1952 have helped to redistribute landholdings to some extent, although mostly benefiting medium-sized landholders and not the landless poor. This had the inadvertent effect of hastening the division of property generally until presently the largest group of landholders (97.5% of all farmers) is farmers holding less than five feddans<sup>7</sup>. If we look at all the households in Kerdassa, we find that:

270 families own less than 1 feddan  
960 families own 1-3 feddans  
11 families own 3-19 feddans  
20 families own over 10 feddans.

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<sup>6</sup> Nour notes that infant deaths account for nearly 50% of all deaths in Egypt. (Nour, *ibid.*)

<sup>7</sup> These figures were supplied by the Family Planning Board. We are unclear about the meaning of the term "family" as used by the Board, it is anthropologically imprecise.

Assuming the population figure from governorate estimates (52,000) and assuming 5 persons per household, we know there are approximately 10.5 thousand households in Kerdassa, of which 9,239 or 88% do not own any land. Not all of the landowners are farmers. Some rent out land or let it in a sharecropping arrangement and smallholders may also rent in or sharecrop the land of others in addition to their own. Whether land is rented out or rented in depends primarily on the family structure (number and type of available labour) and on the stage in the family life cycle (for example, whether the family is made up of a young married couple with small children, a middle aged couple with adolescent or grown children, or an older couple, a widowed, or divorced person with married children).

Land has a high value in the area because of its proximity to the city, because of growing tourism, and because of population expansion. Prime location or fertile land may cost as much as LE 3,000 per kirat. Some farmers have indicated that the only use of land now is "to sell it", but others benefit because of the exemption of this area from cotton growing, and can make a profit raising vegetables for the city.

There is a scarcity of agricultural labour in Kerdassa and the quoted day rate for workers is LE 2, which is higher than the LE 1 usual in Beni Suef, a governorate to the south, and in other areas of Egypt. Five to seven years ago the rate was 25 piastres per day. (a piaster =  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cents American)

The location near urbanised areas gives direct access to an expanded job market. The proximity of several factories, specifically a television and radio assembly plant, a cigarette factory, and an auto assembly plant provides work for many young males mostly at semi-skilled levels, with some overtime and fringe benefits. Tourism provides service jobs and construction work of a less permanent but currently active sort, also with seasonal trends. Transport jobs are the highest paying in the area but drivers are often required to pay repairs and fuel and must raise capital for a truck. Those drawn to government work in Giza and Cairo earn only between LE 24-30 per month at beginning levels and are required to have a university degree. Those in professions do better, but account for a very small percentage of workers. Building trades are in special demand in Kerdassa and command LE 5-6 per day plus lunch. Related skilled trades may command LE 100 per month (carpenters, plumbers, electricians, blacksmiths) and are in short supply due to migration and in demand because of the building boom in local urbanising areas. Skilled tradesmen, including mechanics, may hold industrial positions during the morning and free lance within the village in the afternoon and evening.

Opportunities for women are less diverse than those for men and those existing are generally unacceptable because of social restrictions on female mobility.

A very small minority of women are employed as professionals in medicine, engineering, teaching or nursing and they may travel to the city to work. Because of the very small number of local women with higher education or training most female teachers in local schools travel into Kerdassa from other urban areas. The local and nearby urban bureaucracy employs another small group of educated women.

Very few women take advantage of industry outside the village, although this is slowly beginning to change and young unmarried females are joining the factory labour force in order to earn money to marry. Generally a woman, especially an unmarried one, who travels alone to and from the city and who may come to the village after dark in the short winter days may be the subject of unfavourable gossip. Villagers on the whole do not want to diminish the chances of their daughters in the marriage market, and as this has a much higher priority than work, they do not favour employment outside the village for young women. A few married women do work outside, but this is also difficult because of childbearing expectations and because it demands the presence of another woman in the household to assume domestic responsibilities.

Few women are educated or trained for skilled jobs, but those that are may have more mobility because of the status these jobs bring. For lower income, illiterate, and unskilled women (the vast majority) there is literally no opportunity to work inside or outside the village except in household industries, cottage industries in handicrafts, and in petty trade. The vast majority of women who need to earn income become traders in vegetables, fowl, or small manufactured commodities. Two local women own and operate tourist shops, but are

having trouble competing with more experienced merchants from the city. Other women may invest money in local tourist industry as "silent partners".

Kerdassa is an area of expanding employment, especially if compared to most rural areas of Egypt. It has a history of village specialisation in handicrafts and a much higher than average availability of skills. In this way it is not representative of rural Egypt as a whole. Despite its unusual growth potential, we show in this study that women are unable to find the income-producing work they need. These circumstances are even more grave for women in other rural areas.

Because there are very few opportunities in the village especially for lower income groups, women crowd those areas which do exist and in this way compete with each other, driving the price of their labour very low (Boserup, 1970). Inflationary pressures, which particularly effect this group, and raised expectations of living standards push these women to work to earn cash which their families vitally require. The fact that they are willing to expend so much effort for such small returns, a fact which we document, proves their need to work and their need for cash to supplement family income.

### Agriculture

Although Kerdassa residents do not describe the town as primarily an agricultural one, it benefits from being in a zone exempted from compulsory cotton production. Farmers here are able to make considerable profits by supplying vegetables to the nearby urban areas of Giza and Cairo.

The important local crops are wheat, corn, dates, citrus fruits (oranges, tangerines, lemons), mangoes, potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, greens and animal fodder (*bersim*). Men are mostly responsible for planting, hoeing, transplanting, weeding, and ploughing crops while women plant, harvest and help with hoeing and weeding. Women are responsible also for the care of animals, including feeding them and taking them back and forth to pasture each day. Women exclusively milk cows in Egypt and distribute animal products, which they also prepare. Animals and fowl which are kept in the house are the responsibility of women. Men market buffalo, cows, goats, donkeys and sheep which women have raised, while women sell chickens, fowl, and eggs. Either men or women may shear sheep and sell wool, but women clean (card) wool and spin it, and may also sell it.

Since the advent of perennial irrigation continuous farming is possible and the climate allows this as well. Two major crops may be planted each year and vegetables are planted between these periods. Produce is marketed in three ways: by large truckers, through small wholesale markets (*tsuega*) who buy directly from producers and sell to city merchants, and through the weekly and daily street markets. Unofficial (local) marketing is done almost entirely by women, whereas the more capitalised and organised cash crop activities are run solely by men. Grains circulate only through the weekly *sug* which is connected to a rotating market system involving several villages around Kerdassa, each village having its *sug* on a specific day.

Technology levels are extremely low and farming is highly labour intensive especially for smallholders, who form a majority. There are four tractors in the village and irrigation motors may be rented or owned. The short-handled hoe (*fas*) and simple plow (*mahrat*) still form the primary farming implements for these smallholders, as they did in Ancient Egypt. Extreme subdivision of land has placed more importance on the use of (free) family labour than in the past, especially female and child labour because smallholders cannot afford to hire labour, and migration patterns have accentuated this (Harik, 1979).

Currently, the production of fowl and eggs, which form an important part of local diet and which were always the responsibility of women, is being commercialised by males. As women do not have the available capital, mobility, or networks outside the village to compete with males, they are forced to purchase chickens from new farms for resale in the market at a smaller profit.

## Crafts

Recent improvement in communications and growth in tourism have allowed Kerdassans to capitalise on their location and to build upon traditional skills which served city and export markets in weaving products until the village has presently become an important tourist stop. The major products which the village contributes to this commerce is woven tapestry rugs, locally known as "Goblan" after the famous French tapestries; galabeyas of all description for men and women, and appliqué work. Older more traditional woven products such as cotton, rayon, and wool shawls and handloomed yardgoods, and simpler woollen kelims and blankets are also sold in the shops, especially those of the merchants from the village.

In addition, there are basketmakers who serve numerous surrounding village markets, copper and blacksmiths working as they have done for many centuries, palm fiber industries in profusion, grass mat manufacturers, and split-palm workers (*gereed*). Carpenters and more modern blacksmiths, ironers, repairmen and mechanics operate from tiny shops which dot the village main streets. Our interest in this study is confined to three categories of handicrafts: "*traditional*" handicrafts of weaving, versalia, and tailoring female galabeyas; *tourist* handicrafts of galabeya manufacture, tapestry weaving, and embroidery; and *subsistence* handicrafts of basketmaking, straw mat weaving, and blacksmithing. We investigate the role which women, especially, play in production of some of these crafts. These women who have assumed productive roles in handicrafts in addition to ordinary household duties represent about 10% or more of all village women. We shall see how they do this in different crafts and in different status groups (see cases, Appendix II). The women chosen as case studies in no way represent all the women in the village, but have especially been chosen because, at the same time, they are not extraordinary.

Crafts form an optional income earning activity for various types of people, such as:

- 1) kin of second generation (or more) craft families
- 2) landless families
- 3) lower income and status group families, those lacking education, capital, skills, assets, or connections
- 4) families who lack ability to compete for jobs in more capitalised industry
- 5) "surplus" labour (women, older men, children) from households engaged in other occupations
- 6) relatives of village merchants
- 7) trained or educated males who fail to find work
- 8) employed males seeking part time work

We show through case descriptions of craft families and through a discussion of each craft how life choices differ for households and individuals depending on resources available, on family status, family structure, and family life cycle. Present changes are taking place within producing households under social and economic pressures and these changes may be observed in the life choices of second generation craft producers and in the sexual division of labour (see Amina's case). Households with alternate sources of income from land or from employment in modern industry or bureaucracy may have choices which do not appear in households not thus advantaged (see cases of Amal and Jihan). Modern pressures cause far-reaching social implications on the households of the most traditional crafts producers, such as the blacksmith and the weaver (see Hamida's and Amina's cases).

In addition to crafts which formed traditional occupational groups, some households are responding to current niches created by new product uses, by product adaptation, and by growing tourism (see cases of Safeya, Samira and Nagua). These households may be comprised of uneducated, untrained, poorer segments of society or surplus labour from more advantaged households who could not find jobs for which they were educated. Some may even be members of landowning families who prefer entrepreneurial activities to farming or who may fill certain life cycle segments with modern craft activities (see Jihan's case). Merchant households usually recruit



needed labourers for textiles and weaving cottage industries from relatives or from wives of employees (see Halima's case). We show the restrictions of labour mobility on these craft producers.

Surplus labourers from poorer households seek income especially in less skilled crafts such as date palm or reed industries, rope making, mat making, or basketmaking (see the case of Nasara, Maryam and Nafisa). These women may participate in crafts voluntarily to earn money needed by their families but more usually are expected to participate because of their role as wife or kin.

## Traditional Crafts

### *Weaving*

Egyptian villages and towns have been noted for weaving since Coptic times, that is, for over two thousand years. No written history of weaving in Kerdassa exists, but residents believe that this was a speciality which in the past employed most of the residents. A small number of products which have been manufactured here for many years attest to the varied tastes of the Republic of Tunisia, the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Siwa oasis and the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, which along with Cairo comprised major markets for local products. A number of workshops which are now unused and in disrepair also mark the present decline in the handloom weaving industry.

In spite of this, there are small workshops throughout the village producing wool, cotton, rayon and synthetic products, kelim rugs, and tapestries. There are some differences in both workshop organisation and in market orientation of these diverse products. Local cotton, rayon, and synthetic weaving is dominated by one merchant, the younger representative of a prominent clan of textile merchants who ran the southern and western trade in the past. While three of his uncles still survive, only one provides competition for him. Many small workshops and homes produce for the outlet of this merchant, which enjoys a prominent position on the main street, and which draws most of the tourist trade to the village. He also employs a large number of tailors of galabeyas for women and men, and an extensive cottage industry for decorating these galabeyas.

Most of the looms producing for this family business are owned by the merchant, who provides raw materials and an expert to warp the looms for weavers. Manual jacquard, 4-post, and tapestry looms of both throw-shuttle and fly-shuttle variety are employed in the workshops. Weavers are paid only for their labour, at a small rate based on production. Some work in workshops which he owns, and other employees live in his houses. Under present labour conditions a monopoly which the family may have had no longer exists, but links to producers are numerous and include kinship as well as patron/client relations. The merchant spends a great deal of time, effort, and money retaining and solidifying relations with producers in the village, in the western desert, and in Sharkeya province, where "bedouin" women weave kelims and other products. His interest in the village and in weavers goes beyond pure motivation for profit, although he uses ownership of means of production and kinship relations to exploit producers by keeping wages very low. With the influx of many merchants from outside the village this condition has not improved, of course, as competition increases.

A quite separate cotton weaving industry exists which occupies weavers who work simple pit-looms (*nol al ard*) in their own household workshops. These weavers were prominent in the oldest area of the village, where they still cluster, but very few younger weavers exist in this craft nowadays. Mostly we have older weavers who have done this work all their lives and who produce hand towels and plaid head-wraps, heavy cloths for cleaning, and netting fabrics like versalia and shroud-cloth. These weavers are skilled in their craft and know how to adjust and adapt their own looms. They cling to this unremunerative craft because they like it, because their identity is very closely linked with their work, and because they do not know how to do other work.

These weavers are also merchant-dominated, and while most of them own their own looms, they purchase

raw materials from merchants and sell finished products back to them for a rate (*hitta*) based on production per meter. Some travel to the old bazaar area in Cairo to sell products. Despite the superior quality of their products, which allows them to retain a small market, they are not competing well with machine made and imported products.

When weavers work at home women are expected to dye cotton and to wind bobbins for their husbands, and his production depends on their preparation. All fees which the weaver receives for his labour include the labour of his wife, and she is not paid for this work. If a weaver is forced to hire women outside to wind bobbins in her own home, he pays for this work at a very low rate which is equivalent to 37 cents per day. If weavers work in a workshop rather than at home, apprentices, who are males, are hired to do peripheral jobs. There is a "taboo" against the use of foot pedal looms by women, and so women in Egypt do not weave on this loom and are not employed in workshops.

Independent wool weavers, who weave a variety of products not covered in the study, may be better paid than cotton weavers, and some of them also work as merchants and middlemen. Some merchants do not produce, as they consider it beneath their status to do so. Cultural values have long supported this view. As soon as a man becomes a merchant who does not produce, his wife no longer maintains a productive role in subsidiary activities, but because of her economic position considers weaving bobbins, spinning, or dyeing unfit work for her.

There is a small cottage industry in wool spinning, although this is dying out despite the presence of many herds. Spun wool is now purchased mostly from public sector spinning mills, from specializing villages, or from city merchants who have imported it. Women remaining in wool spinning are mostly older women who earn between 15 cents and 60 cents per day doing this work.

### *Versalia*

If women's role in production is a peripheral one in weaving, it becomes rather a central one in the production of *versalia*. This is a very stiff fabric which comes in many grades and which is used as a lining material in luggage, handbags, and clothing industries. About fifteen years ago cotton weavers and cloth merchants in the village shifted to this industry to fill the needs of the growing readywear clothing and luggage market in Cairo and to escape their declining craft. The craft is organized by merchants linked to small producers in the old bazaar area and the "Muski" in Cairo. Women's labour is heavily utilised in *versalia*, which takes place within the household and which is organised and marketed by male household heads. Women are not paid for this work, although it is heavy, dirty, and time consuming. Household composition and structure determine internal distribution of tasks in production, and our case study shows how one polygamous household takes advantage of an abundance of female labour to run a lucrative business (see Safeya's case). Unlike most of the handicrafts in Kerdassa, this business is not seasonal and has a steady demand and organised outlets. It is a good example of how traditional skills, both productive and management, can be utilised in more modern industries.

### *Tailoring of traditional dresses*

We have termed the production of the customary dress for women in the village a "traditional" handicraft because of its cultural significance and its long existence. This is the only "monopoly" which women have retained in Kerdassa — women produce all the clothing for local women. Local estimates of the number of women employed as tailors have reached as high as 200, a not unreasonable figure in a population of 50,000. Women own their own sewing machines and customers bring fabrics to them to be made up into *galabeyas*, which are then decorated by the tailor, other women who do handbeading only, or by men who specialise in machine embroidering

the yoke in colorful local designs (*tarz*). Women, who generally lack mobility outside the village, do not monopolise the sale of fabric, although there are a few cloth merchants who are women. The imported beads traditionally used to decorate the yoke (*kharaz*) are also brought into the village by men and sold to women. As finish work is shared by men and men control raw materials, the monopoly becomes a doubtful one.

Women in Kerdassa dress noticeably better than in most areas of Egypt, perhaps because of the long weaving tradition of the village and the high importance of cloth generally. Many kinds of fabrics are used and designs are area specific and culturally meaningful. Each design has a name and all women know them. Styles change slightly over the life cycle of women and particular types of cloth and designs are associated with life stages. The most popular and common French velvet galabeya costs currently at least LE 30 (45 dollars), yet nearly all women own such a dress. Even galabeyas made from cotton or polyester have velvet yokes which are decorated. The simpler headscarf (*tarha*) and the formal visiting and mourning garment (*gamis malis*) are also made by local female tailors.

This work is a suitable type for women who are confined to their homes by small children because they can work intermittently, can obtain all materials locally, and because it depends only on neighbourhood links for gaining customers. Women seldom, however, have sufficient credit or income to purchase the expensive electric sewing machines necessary for tailoring and must depend upon money or credit from their husbands. The Ministry of Social Affairs provides machines on very easy terms to women who have completed sewing courses which they run or women may borrow from the agricultural bank, if husbands permit them and if husbands have sufficient credit to meet requirements. As in most cases, this work depends upon the good will of a husband or other male head of household.

Training for this work is managed through an unofficial system where women teach younger women who may or may not be related in an apprentice system. If a young woman thinks she may be interested she attaches herself to a tailor and watches and assists with small tasks as she progresses. This is a very different and less institutionalised form of apprenticeship than that generally practiced in other crafts, where children are expected to work for parents, and while learning, women do not get paid. It is one of the few occupations, however, which is considered suitable work for women of all status groups.

Our three case studies in traditional crafts have very differing degrees of productive activity. Amina has married into a family which has been weaving for many generations. Safeya is part of a polygamous household which was formerly engaged in weaving and in marketing cloth but which has changed to a more modern, related craft. Amal, on the other hand, did not come from or marry into a craft family, but has decided to become a tailor of women's galabeyas in order to earn cash, and she is very active in this work. Cases exhibit the necessity to know family backgrounds as well as wider market and labour conditions before attempting to view strategies of the household unit (see Appendix II).

### **Tourist Crafts**

Kerdassa is well known by Cairenes and other Middle Easterners for its tourist crafts. These comprise galabeyas of every description, mostly for women, tapestry weavings, locally known as "Goblan", and appliqué work. Prior to the last five years there were only two village merchants involved but gradually others began to flock to Kerdassa, especially from Gamalaya and the Khan el Khalili Bazaar in Cairo, until presently there are 51 shops in Kerdassa.

Merchants are becoming more vocal about problems, since the marketing capacity of the area seems to have been surpassed. In present conditions of increased competition a number of things have happened to both the crafts and to the craftsmen producing for this market.

First, quality has declined as merchants try to find the cheapest producer for a popular product.

Oversupply has also driven prices down, and women especially have over produced. Quality control has been enforced by merchants sporadically at best and mostly not at all, and price has been the determinant of what merchants will stock. This fall in quality has in turn hurt sales.

Merchants who lacked marketing and management skills have found themselves in an increasingly poor condition, although some experienced merchants have been able to grow under present conditions. We found that some of the owners from the old Bazaar area were people who had been producers there and who did not possess marketing or management skills. Both these newcomers and inexperienced village merchants find it difficult to compete against those bazaar merchants who have many years of experience selling to tourists and who come from families in this business for hundreds of years.

The seasonal tourist cycle in Kerdassa follows European tourism in the winter and Arab tourism in the summer. The loss of Arab tourists in the past two years because of strained political relations has hurt the galabeya industry especially. Also, because of a scarcity of design skills there has been a tendency for producers to copy each other's work. The cycle between introduction of a new style of galabeya or tapestry and total glut of the market is very short. Major merchants control design skill very closely and are forced to produce large amounts of new styles before releasing them on the market so that they can make a profit and then change to a new design. This requires a considerable outlay of capital. Because small producers in both tapestry and galabeyas often lack skill and because there are no government or other training programs, these producers are only able to copy the designs of others. They are short on ideas for original and innovative new designs which will attract tourists. The paucity of culturally indigenous design ideas is evidenced in the fact that even Japanese and Chinese motifs are presently used in galabeyas.

The influx of outside merchants and products has affected these two kinds of crafts, galabeyas and tapestries, in quite different ways.

### *Galabeyas*

Production of galabeyas for the tourist trade was believed to be the largest source of employment for village women in Kerdassa. The Family Planning Board has estimated that 1500 women are embroidering galabeyas for this market in Kerdassa. Since 1978 a colorful style of "bedouin" galabeya inspired by Siwa Oasis designs developed and became a great favorite in the tourist trade. Women from the village made a good income from this embroidery which was organized in a cottage industry by merchants who paid for and supplied materials and paid women only for their labour. These merchants tried to control quality by not paying women for their work until galabeyas were sold, by refusing poor work, and by fining women the cost of thread for products which were below acceptable quality. Very few people were able to make the varied designs for this galabeya and they were mostly controlled by the major merchant in the village.

With the influx of city merchants came all of the links which these shopowners had built up over the years in the urban bazaar. City producers not only copied the Siwa design and other Kerdassa styles, but they brought with them a great variety of new styles manufactured in small shops throughout the Cairo area. Women in Kerdassa could not compete with this influx of goods produced with better equipment and by male tailors with more experience and skill, and prices for the Siwa galabeya went down. As it declined the quality of work also declined, because women were less and less willing to put large amounts of time into sewing.

At the same time, the number of women who wanted to participate in embroidery grew because of a lack of alternatives for work that could be juggled with demanding social roles. This meant that women who crowded into this one craft competed with each other and drove the price of their labour very low. All these events coincided with a crisis in the world economy which caused a drop in tourist spending.

Currently the market for embroidered galabeyas has declined, although some producers have managed to

survive by expanding their markets to other areas, such as Khan el Khalili and Alexandria. One or two women have also been successful in organising other women and themselves becoming merchants.

Quite a large number of tailors in the village produce many other machine finished styles which fill Kerdassa shops and which have a growing demand. Most of these tailors have been connected with village merchants for a long time and some are very skillful and so have managed to meet competition. With the exception of three women who sew and decorate cheap cotton galabeyas, these tailors are men. Most work in shops in their own homes or in small rented workshops. The merchant supplies materials and pays the tailor for his labour by the galabeyas produced. The quality of some of this work is very good and Egyptian city women are adopting these styles for home and even street wear. Wives may assist these tailors by doing hand decoration such as beading, which is becoming increasingly popular, as are many kinds of elaborate machine decorations. A wide range of materials and designs cater to western, Egyptian urban, and Arab tastes. Prices range from LE 4 to LE 100, with cheaper galabeyas providing the largest and most dependable market. Because some small tailor shops own their own sewing machines, they are free to produce for any merchant. Kinship and patron/client relations may limit tailors' choices, however, and work to keep wages and thus expenses down for local merchants. Low wages, in turn, allow local merchants to claim a larger share of tourist business than city merchants.

Local women have not been able to enter into production of women's galabeyas which are machine made and machine decorated, although they dominate the manufacture of traditional women's wear, because they lack the skill training, management skills, access to credit, and mobility.

### *Tapestry weaving*

Tapestry weaving has existed in Egypt since Coptic times, when it was a highly developed art. It has not been known locally for many years, but has gradually developed and was brought here from other areas of the Delta. In a neighbouring village a school was opened twenty years ago which subsequently became very famous for its artistic tapestries woven by children. Ramses Wissa Wassef, the founder of the school, has since died and his wife and daughters continue to run the school. Haraneya tapestries sell for extremely high prices to a sophisticated international fine art market and producers trained in the school have been prevented from producing for private sale. For this reason, Haraneya never generated any large production in the area, although it did provide a reasonable living for a small number of local residents, many of whom are women. A second generation of weavers, often the children of the first generation, are now being trained in this school.

Haraneya served as a source of inspiration for the area and was greatly responsible for the revival of tapestry weaving. About eight years ago the two Kerdassa merchants decided to begin selling tapestries and provided a few looms, bringing weavers from Sharkeya and Asyut to operate them. These cheap tapestries had a great appeal to tourists from abroad as they depicted local flora and fauna and village scenes in a charming "primitive" style. Gradually Kerdassa weavers developed a number of themes and designs and began to improve the quality of the tapestries, which they called "goblan". As other merchants flocked to the village they used their contacts to spread the production of goblan tapestries, which are now woven in many areas of Cairo and as far south as Asyut and which are sold in Khan el Khalili Bazaar.

Some of the more experienced and skilled weavers in Kerdassa attempt to copy directly from the designs of Haraneya. A few are producing good quality work but many poor products flood the market. Better weavers are beginning to sign their products and to think of themselves as artistic weavers. Only one, however, has taught his daughter to weave. As we show in a case study, wives of goblan weavers can be very involved in production, if indirectly, and even though they do not receive cash for their activities.

Tapestry weavers work for particular merchants who supply them with wool and warping cotton, and they are paid by production and depending upon the quality of each piece. They sometimes do not get paid until a piece is

sold, although their rates are higher than other kinds of weavers. As it takes many years to become a good weaver, most are using skills learned in other weaving occupations.

Some wool is purchased in the weekly market from women who hand-spin it, and then washed and dyed to suit individual weavers, but most wool is imported or from public sector mills. The market could easily be expanded for locally spun wool.

There is great variation in participation in women producing for tourist trade, yet all of this production is small when compared to males. In the case studies, we compare the wife of a tailor producing machine sewn and machine trimmed galabeyas with the indirect participation of the wife of a tapestry weaver, and a woman embroidering galabeyas.

### Subsistence Crafts

We have chosen to term a certain number of handicrafts subsistence crafts because of their close association with household use. In the study traditional handicrafts are those industries which have existed within the village for a long time but which do not relate quite as directly to household function. This distinction is debatable in the cases of smithing or weaving, we admit, and is probably one of degree rather than kind.

Subsistence crafts present in Kerdassa include data palm industries, grass industry, basketmaking, and smithing. There is as yet insubstantial information about similar specialising villages in Egypt which exchange products with each other and which feed into city markets, but a few others are known. Subsistence crafts might be denoted by the small amount of capital involved in production and by fairly low skill levels. These crafts thus provide work for many lower income families who do not have necessary skills, education, or access to jobs in the more modern areas of the economy. All these crafts demand some training and depend upon skills transmitted within the household. They include producers of both sexes and more than one age group. Producers in this category often come from or marry into families which have specialised for three or more generations. Because of the loose nature of organisation, they adapt readily to changes in market conditions and we note this in the case of the mat maker. The lack of written or precise oral history of these crafts prevents us from ascertaining more effectively changes which have occurred.

#### *Date palm industries*

Palm fibres have been extensively utilised for millenia in Egyptian culture, a fact attested to by the number of fragments available from archaeological expeditions. In the past, in fact, their use was probably far greater and more developed than it is today. In some areas uses, styles, and methods of manufacture remain almost unchanged since the Ancient Dynastic Period. Kerdassa's location in the palm-rich delta insures an abundance of raw materials for these industries, which include *gereed*, palm stem products, *leef* or bark fiber industries, and *khoos* or palm stem products.

Each year before the dates grow, farmers trim the outside leaves from data palms, which are then gathered and processed for related industries. The division of labour in this craft is very specialised and production is labour intense. Leaves are purchased by the hundred for about LE 5 and brought via donkey to households which only trim the branches, separate leaves from stems, and stack them for further distribution. The main stem is then sold to local producers of *gereed* or shipped to areas which lack palms. Leaves are sold for many types of baskets and carriers, or to farmers for tying greens for market. During the remainder of the year leaf gatherers may be unemployed. One woman we talked to had taken over this heavy work after the death of her husband and she told us she was sixty or seventy years old. Judging from the age of her youngest child she could not have exceeded fifty, but her poverty and exhaustion had taken a toll not only on her body but also on her spirit. Many

poor women are also employed making palm rope, fiber brooms, door mats and brushes for both urban and rural markets for pitifully small profit.

Palm leaf was used in ancient times for baskets, roofing, and wrapping. It is still utilised in Egypt for some of these purposes and has been adapted to modern markets in interesting ways, as where it is shredded and made into stuffing material for modern furniture. The versatile *maktaf* basket also takes many forms and performs a myriad of functions which change through time. It is used in the household, in the fields, and in the city equally.

Organisation for production adjusts to a wide variation of family needs and family structures. Households of producers are grouped together and each specialises in producing and marketing a small range of products. An extended family may cooperate to run a small "factory" including an extensive cottage industry, and these larger producers have an advantage in their ability to adjust to difficult times. They can travel greater distances when materials are short and make a profit selling these to small producers, as they may own a truck or can rent one more easily. Cottage industries can contract or expand to meet current needs, as workers can be "laid off" at will. Large families with generous supplies of young, strong males also have an advantage as they are more ambitious and flexible in marketing. Older producers and women usually sell their goods to larger merchants, claiming a very small sum for their labour. The flexibility of this industry to the life cycle and structure of the family and the low capital and skill requirements make it an excellent source of employment to meet temporary needs. Demand is constant, although producers are not guaranteed the sale of all products.

Palm leaf baskets are used in the wholesale and retail vegetable trade, for transport of earth and food products by camel and donkey, for export of dates, and for the collection of refuse. In the Kerdassa weekly *suq* leaf products occupy a considerable area. Local specialities are the very large date basket with cover, the commercial vegetable basket (*genba*), the two-handled carrying basket (*maktaf*) which comes in many sizes and qualities determined by use, and carrying baskets for donkeys and camels (*hemla*) which come in pairs. Marketing demands the availability of a cart and a donkey, which many families do not have.

There is a distinct sexual division of labour in *khoos* manufacture. Palm leaves are first dried, then soaked before working. They may be beaten to shreds for the manufacture of sewing twine then twisted between the palms. Unbeaten leaves are braided in a strip of great length which is then finally sewn from the inside with a large iron needle-like instrument. This sewing does not show from the outside and takes a considerable amount of strength to perform. The *zabila*, or flap is then made, or the basket is trimmed with fiber braid and handles are attached, depending upon type. Women may do all processes except sewing, which is always done by men. It is interesting that where females perform all functions except sewing they are never considered to be craftswomen, but are only believed to be "helping" male producers who are known as *khawass*.

The low skill levels necessary to perform the various functions in *maktaf* manufacture allow utilization of a broad range of available family labour, and this is true in all subsistence crafts. It also allows some processes to be accomplished simultaneously with household duties such as watching children. Work can be picked up and put down at will and so is suitable for women occupied with young children or other family tasks. The extreme breakdown of production into low skilled segments makes it suitable for old as well as young, and allows members of a family to replace each other. Technology levels are minimal.

Women do not act as merchants of *khoos* products, although they may sell both materials and products in all stages of manufacturer in the *suq*. Education levels in families involved in all palm industries are low for heads of household. However there is a great variation in education levels for children of producers. While many families have not sent their children to school, some others have sacrificed greatly in order to see children remain in school, and especially sons. In families where children are in school we found a large, active participation on the part of wives. We did not find females working in shops above the household level.

### *Grass industry (hasira)*

Like the other subsistence crafts, hasira mats have a customary usage, both in the household and in the mosque. Mats identical with those manufactured today are found on archaeological sites from the pharaonic period. These mats comprise one of the basic household furnishings for villagers and all mosques formerly covered their floors with these mats, a custom which is changing. Mats may have woven patterns in red or green and come in a range of standardised sizes, or may be made to order. Special order mats are called *amoula* and are prized by villagers.

Large floor looms are needed for mat production and three mats are usually woven at one time. Because of the space necessary for the loom and because there is some level of skill necessary, this craft is less flexible in organisation than palm industries. *Samaar* reeds are not native to Kerdassa, so must be purchased from other delta areas or Fayum. Some outlay of capital is necessary for this industry. Only men weave mats, which is strenuous work and weavers work in teams of three, with a skilled weaver setting the pace and apprentices or less skilled labourers working on each side of him. Little preparation of materials is necessary except splitting off the blossoms from the grasses before use and daily stringing of the loom. Women or children assist in preparing reeds, feeding workers, and cleaning work areas.

Most production is household based, and four mat makers live in Kerdassa. Work is not seasonal and marketing takes place from the household or from the weekly *suq*. There is some urban demand but Kerdassa producers travel to surrounding village markets only. Workshops may employ workers or apprentices outside the family unit, and often do, partly because only male labour is used in manufacture. The industry is presently competing with machine made and plastic imitations which are produced in more mechanised and larger workshops or which are imported. Although not as comfortable, plastic mats wear longer and wash easier, and so are replacing natural grass mats.

### *Basket making*

In addition to the *maktaf*, two other kinds of baskets are produced in Kerdassa, the *sabbat* and the *mishana*. *Sabbat* is a stiff basket made from bamboo-like reeds which grow in many areas of Egypt (*ghab*). The reed is first split with the teeth and a simple wooden tool is inserted and run down the reed to split it into three sections. A two-handled or single-handled marketing basket is then woven from a circular base. Use is more limited than for the *maktaf* and we have noted only two sizes, one for daily marketing and one for transporting goods on the head. Women prepare reeds, manufacture these baskets, and market them, travelling from rural to urban areas to sell them in the streets or selling directly to small variety shops in urban markets.

The *mishana* is a flat, round basket made of henna sticks which has a wide use in the marketing of vegetables and in household storage. They come in a variety of sizes and depths, mostly bowl shaped. It is a strong basket, rather difficult to make because the sticks are stiff and scratch and chafe hands. Villagers say you can tell a basketmaker when you shake hands because of the many callouses. Women and men make *mishana* which are marketed in the village *suq* and in surrounding villages, but which do not have a demand in urban markets.

Both henna and *ghab* must be transported by the truckload to Kerdassa from other delta areas. Baskets require little skill, room, or strength to make and untrained and lower income families find this a good way to earn money. Production is grouped in one area where neighbours cooperate somewhat in obtaining material and in marketing production. Nearly grown children, mostly females, also contribute to production. Despite early denials, we found seasonality, with harvest periods being especially heavy. Most people market their own production, unlike *maktaf*, and marketing is non-commercialised beyond the weekly *suq*, where women are



prominent. Only family members are utilised as profits and capital are very low. A small number of families serve local needs.

### Smithing

Both copper and blacksmithing exist in Kerdassa, although in small numbers and serving only local needs. Changes are taking place in both of these crafts which are more connected to world markets than other subsistence crafts because of the nature of the international metal trade, and because Egypt imports all metals. The role of copper production has decreased since the recent introduction of aluminium, despite its historic role as dowry goods. In the study we concentrate on the role of the traditional blacksmith (*hadad*) only.

The traditional *hadad* serves household and farming needs of the community and for this reason has held a special position in the community. It is the only craft about which we heard stories which can be classified as myths.

Blacksmiths form a separate clan which intermarries to a much greater extent than the general population, and which, by tradition, does not attend school. The modern *hadad afrangi*, on the other hand, is an occupational category which requires training, usually in technical schools. These blacksmiths are literate and require considerable investment in modern equipment. They produce iron goods mostly for the building trades, make fancy grillwork for gates, doors and windows, or stress-bars for concrete foundations. The *hadad afrangi* is usually young and operates from a workshop on a main street, in contrast to the traditional *hadad* who works from his household with low technology levels and utilising household labour, trained through a family apprenticeship system.

A very unusual fact about the traditional *hadad* is the utilisation of female labour in the pounding of iron. Here women work alongside men, wielding heavy long handled hammers in unison with them. In a country where men monopolise the majority of productive tasks, even those usually occupied by women in other cultures and areas of the world, we find this surprising.

The blacksmith builds a coal or coke fire on the ground outside his home and shapes farm and household implements or repairs them with simple technology. His primary equipment is a fixed anvil (*sindal*) and a large stationery bellows (*koor*). Tools include the grasping tool (*talabat*), small hammer (*matra'a*) and the large hammer (*malzaba*). An iron tool is used for stirring the fire (*mukash*). The major products of the traditional *hadad* are made from scrap iron which is either supplied by the customer or by the blacksmith and include both basic household items and basic farm implements. These include: stand for a water jar (*kursi zir*), stand for primus stove (*kursi babour*), the mulokheya knife or chopper (*makhrata*), a long tool for stirring the clay oven fire (*asa hadid*), axe heads (*azma* and *balta*), and hoes (*fas*). The large needle-like tool for *khoos* production is also manufactured by the *hadad*.

The *hadad* markets from both his home and in the weekly market and may send women to travel to other villages selling goods. Women may also hawk goods in the streets. Because it is a skilled craft, a long apprenticeship period is required and these apprentices are recruited only from the family. To date the *hadad* is not an "endangered species" but limited technology and education prevent him from moving into the modern economy. His wages are much lower than those for the modern blacksmith who works in building trades. However, he still plays a vital role in the farming community and derives status from this.

The local myth that the *hadad* was once very rich but that in the heat of a family quarrel between brothers one brother threw all their money into the fire, and so now they do not have very much money, may be founded in the competition between brothers that we witnessed in every small industry. It may also be an attempt to explain the current low income in comparison to the more modern related occupation. We notice in our case study the high incidence of endogamous marriage in two related extended (polygamous) families, the change in attitude toward education, and the breakoff of family members into other occupations, although this is as yet unexplained.

TABLE No. 1

## LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ELEVEN WOMEN

NAMES	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	CONTROL OVER:			33							
	OCCUPATION	PRODUCTIVE ROLE		HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION	EDUCATION	HUSBAND'S EDUCATION	RESIDENCE PATTERN	NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD	LAND	ANIMALS	ELECTRICITY	WATER	OVEN	TV	AGE	AGE AT MARRIAGE	YEARS MARRIED	PREGNANCIES	LIVE BIRTHS	SPONTANEOUS ABORTIONS	CHILD DEATHS	SURVIVING CHILDREN	SONS	DAUGHTERS	CHILDREN IN SCHOOL	USE OF PUBLIC HEALTH CLINIC	PRE-NATAL CARE	POST-NATAL CARE	EVER CONTRACEPTIVE USE	DELIVERY BY DAYA	OWN LABOUR	OTHERS LABOUR	INCOME FROM LABOUR	REPRODUCTIVE CAPACITY	OTHER RESOURCES	BRIDE PRICE (L.E.)						
AMINA	BEADING GALABEYAS	X		FACTORY WORKER	NONE	NONE	EXTENDED	6			X				24	20	4	2	2	0	0	2		2	N/A	X	X			X	X											
SAFEYA	VERSALIA MAKER		X	VERSALIA MERCHANT	NONE	NONE	POLY-GAMOUS	10	1K		X	X			35	20	15	14	8	6	2	6	3	3	2			Ab <sup>2</sup>		X		(SON)	X							40		
AMAL	TAILOR		X	MECHANIC	NONE	-	NUCLEAR-FC	6			X	X	X	X	27	19	8	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	1		X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X					
HALIMA	EMBROIDERING GALABEYAS	X		STOCKKEEP FOR LOCAL MERCHANT	NONE	5 YRS	NUCLEAR	5			X			X	28	17	11	9	6	3	3	3	2	1	2			Ab		X	X			X							100	
NAGUA	EMBROIDERING GALABEYAS		X	MECHANIC/GALABEYA MERCHANT	NONE	8 YRS	NUCLEAR	7			X				27	14	13	5	5	0	0	5	1	4	3				X												200	
JIHAN	TAILOR	X		TAILOR	12 YRS	12 YRS	NUCLEAR-FC	3	8F	X	X	X	X	X	21	18	3	2 <sup>5</sup>	1	0	0	1		1	N/A		X			X	X					X	X					1300
SAMIRA		X		TAPESTRY WEAVER	NONE	8 YRS	NUCLEAR	10			X	X	X		25	20	5	3	3	0	0	3		3	N/A	X	X		X	X												100
NASARA		X		MATMAKER	NONE	NONE	EXTENDED	6			X		X		23	13	10	7	5	2	2	3	1	2	2			Ab		X												150
MARYAM	BASKET-MAKER		X	BASKET-MAKER	NONE	NONE	NUCLEAR	8		X	X		X		34	12	22	15	13	2	7	6	3	3	2	X	X	Ab		X				(DTR)	X							40
NAFISA	BASKET-MAKER		X	BASKET-MAKER	NONE	NONE	EXTENDED	8	11K	X	X	X	X	X	39	11	28	12	12	0	7	5	1	4	2	X	X		X				(DTR)	X		X	X					70
HAMIDA	BLACKSMITH		X	BLACKSMITH	NONE	NONE	POLY-GAMOUS	8		X	X				40	30	10	3	5 <sup>6</sup>	0	4	1	1		N/A		X		X													30
TOTALS									3	4	11	5	6	4					74	62	13	25	37	13	24	14	4	6	5	2	11	4	3	2	3	3						

1. Not applicable
2. Abs For spontaneous abortion hemorrhage only
3. ILE = \$ 1.50
4. Nuclear-FC = nuclear unit within compound

5. One pregnancy in progress
6. Two double pregnancies
7. K = Kirat
8. F = Feddan = 1.04 acres

## IV. CASE ANALYSIS: PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE ROLES

### The Eleven Women

We attempt here to address attitudes, beliefs, and concepts of some women in the village of Kerdassa in their roles as mothers, wives, workers inside and outside the home and in their roles as individuals. The basic life circumstances of the case studies are reviewed in the Table Number 1 (facing page). Descriptions of cases are in Appendix II (p. 43).

All women chosen for case studies are Moslem. Three are between the ages of 20–24, four between 25–29, one between 30–34, and three are between 35–40 years. All are of childbearing age and are married. None of the cases have ever attended school, that is, all are illiterate except one, who has a secondary school education (Jihan). Four women married between the ages of 11–15, six married between 16–20, and one married at age 30. Four families live in nuclear households, two live in polygamous households, three live in extended families, and two reside in nuclear units located in family compounds. None reside in joint households. Eight of the cases own no land, two have between 0–1 feddan, and one has over five feddans. Five women have running water at home and six must carry water for family use. Five raise chickens or animals for family use and food, another raises animals for sale, and four raise no animals or chickens. Brideprice (*mahr*) paid for women in the cases range from LE 0–50 (3), LE 50–100 (3), LE 110–500 (2), to over LE 1000 (1). Two are unreported on this issue. *Mahr* cannot be used as a status marker in this small scale but is rather related to years married and change in brideprice over time. The cases are non-random and were chosen to illustrate particular points of importance. (See case studies in appendix for difference in family types.)

### Household Production and Children

Participation in non-agrarian production (exclusive of subsistence activities) varies from light to very heavy across the sample. The case descriptions, we hope, speak for themselves on this issue and we hope they will broaden current definitions of women's work. As Hoda Fahmy's research showed, women were inclined to put their participation into three different categories:

#### Category 1 – Socially obligatory work

When a woman helps her husband in his craft, this is not considered a fulfilment, but is connected to her sex (female) and social role (wife). It is seen by her as an obligation or a duty and she often expresses her attitude to this work as "exhausting work" or "tiring work". She sees herself as a "helper", not a producer, and is referred to as this by others.

#### Category 2 – Voluntary work

When a husband has a fixed occupation and income, as an employee in a governmental agency for example, even if he works in craft industry as well, a woman feels more free to participate or not, and if she does she expresses much less fatigue and exhaustion, even though she does not get paid.

#### Category 3 – "Real" work

If a woman is involved in a productive activity on her own and she is the main entrepreneur, then this is felt by her to be self-fulfilment. Only then does she use the Arabic term "work" (*shugl*) referring to her distinct role as a producer.

Seven women in the study gained no sense of esteem or personal gratification from productive work done aside from household chores and child care. Of the four who did, all controlled the income from work which they

did, while only one in the former category did. This exceptional women (Nafisa) performs work which she feels is beneath her family status, which may explain the fact that although she controls money she gains no sense of esteem from her work. Some women who had no choice about the work they did, nevertheless felt that either their husbands or others saw them as more competent because they could perform tasks, solve problems, or earn income. Pleasing their husbands was a source of pleasure even to women who took no gratification from work.

Three women who had no control over money earned expressed a desire to do so and three thought this was unimportant. Where women thought they should control their earnings but did not, there seemed to be conflict between spouses. Where women handled income but did not express any attitude that this was important (Halima, Nafisa) there was no discernible conflict, perhaps because spouses agreed on this issue.

Only three women in the study had any choice about the kind of work participated in (Amal, Jihan, Halima). Others were expected to assist husbands whether they desired to or not. Half of the cases desired to work in income-producing employment and half had no desire to do this work. Of the first half three were employed in household production for which they did not get paid. Two were currently unemployed. Only one was fulfilling her desire. Of those who did not desire cash-producing employment, all were employed in household crafts out of necessity, and only one controlled any household income.

Two women were paid for their labour and both controlled the use of their income (Amal, Halima). Two were unpaid but controlled family resources (Jihan, Nafisa). A fourth moved from unpaid to controlling family resources when her husband died (Safeya). Six were unpaid and had no direct control over family income despite high labour inputs.

The most conflict was noted in households where spouses disagreed about decision-making power over resources. Women's major source of complaint was related to very individual life circumstances, although women expressed discontent with marriage to husbands in low status work whether they came from generally low status families or not.

Women who were least inclined to justify themselves in moralistic terms, that is, to stress their superior moral qualities in comparison to others, were those women controlling most resources. Women who experienced a great number of child deaths and who controlled no resources were most likely to express themselves in moral or religious terms (Safeya is an exception to this). All cases were Muslim women whose religious commitment varied through the sample. Few expressed any awareness of wider economic or social conditions, but where this did occur it was related to family status, education, access to political power, wealth, and urbanisation.

Four women preferred extended or polygamous family residence to nuclear residence. One of these preferred to live in a nuclear unit (and did) separate from in-laws, yet wanted her son to remain in her household after marriage. This is not surprising given the difference in decision-making power and household status between young, subordinate wives and mothers-in-law. This informant was young and held a tenuous position in the extended family. Two other women expressed a desire for nuclear residence and both had realised this desire. Female work groups are organised within the extended family, as is assistance and support in times of illness or crisis. Many women, we believe, are rightly reluctant to give up this support.

Only two cases felt it was unnecessary to educate their daughters. Three others had some reservations, believing that lower levels of education (primary or preparatory levels) were sufficient for daughters. Women who expressed a need for the labour of their daughters placed a low value on female education. Most women in the study saw education as the key to new and better jobs, personal development, increased marriage choices, or simply higher status for their daughters. Most of the women, however, believed education was more important for their sons than for their daughters.

It is evident that even where patriarchal norms prevail, in fact, women are expected to provide for themselves and their children when husbands are unable to do this adequately. Women are also expected to bear large numbers of children, to assist their husbands in household industries, to process, prepare, and serve food and in many instances to provide this food even after children have married and set up households of their own. Women

are expected to do this with technological assistance which has changed little over thousands of years, although technology in other sectors of the economy and in male-dominated activities has been upgraded. They also contribute this labour and reproductive capacity with little or no pre- or post-natal care and with a diet insufficient for female needs.

### Fertility and Family Planning

In household production there was a positive correlation between childbearing and participation. We find an average of 8.3 pregnancies for women with heavy productive roles, as against 2.3 for women with weak productive roles, and 6.72 average over the sample as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

There are some problems in attempting to compare fertility statistics for this group by age, the primary one being the small number in the sample. Second, the fact that two of the 11 women are members of polygamous households and in both instances second wives who married late, makes the sample hopelessly skewed. Only one observation is evident from comparing live births and duration of marriage against age, that is that the reproduction of the women in five-year spans remains quite remarkably constant over a 30-year span. Women continue to bear children at a somewhat constant rate throughout the period of marriage and this rate is only slightly lower at both ends of the time span.

There were 74 pregnancies reported overall and 37 of these survived. We also find the highest number of spontaneous abortions and child deaths among more economically active women. Among strongly productive women we find nearly 2 spontaneous abortions on average and 3.3 child deaths, as against the whole sample averages of 1.2 and 2.3. Women in this sample who were not directly involved heavily in production or assisting husbands had no spontaneous abortions or child deaths. This is not necessarily related to work but more probably with preferred family status of these women, with better diet, health care, and the younger age of these women.

The number of infant deaths in our sample is staggeringly high. Two women experienced seven losses each (both very productive women). There were 25 child deaths out of the total 74 pregnancies and 62 live births (two double births). Many of these babies died in the first week (11), nine more died within the first month, and an additional three died within a year. Two children died between one year and five years. Thirteen spontaneous abortions were reported and 37 children survive. In other words, half of the children conceived survive until five years of age and 59% of live births survive until three years. The cost of this wastage to the lives and strength of rural women is appallingly high. We would like to stress the fact that Kerdassa is only 15 kilometers from Cairo and only 10 kilometers from Giza center. Effective ways must be found to decrease this wastage in female and child life. In the study we also find that fear of child death influences attitudes of women toward pregnancy, increasing pro-natal attitudes.

Half of the women stated that they needed children to care for them in their old age. Only two thought daughters might help and all five expected sons to help them. This suggests that women may attempt to provide enough sons to be sure at least one survives to help them when they become older or if their husband should die.

Other reasons which women gave for desiring children are:

To reinforce position in the extended family (power over decision-making, over labour of others);

Enjoyment of children;

Children were a gift of God;

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<sup>8</sup> We recognise the statistical insignificance of a sample this size and offer these figures for comparative purposes only.

<sup>9</sup> Women may keep bearing until one or more sons is produced. They also stated "sons inherit, daughters don't".

The need for a son<sup>9</sup>;

The need for child labour. Conversely, a woman engaged in work where children are of no use desires fewer children.

To gain self esteem. Fulfilment of social expectations brings higher community status;

Pleasing a husband;

Religious belief that it is against the will of God to limit births;

Belief that they are not in control of their productive capacity. This is related to their control over other resources and to general decision-making power.<sup>10</sup>

Women were split (6 to 5) in their desire for large numbers of children. Women who expressed a desire for large families had many pregnancies and those who were distinctly anti-natalist did not, except for Hamida who would have preferred to have more surviving children than she had. The three women who experienced repeated child deaths desired many children.

Only five women had ever used the public health unit. Among those who used it, evaluations ranged from "better than nothing" to "useless". Some attended the clinic for one or two pregnancies then stopped. Several felt that care had decreased in the clinic over time. Several had never been visited by nurses of family planning workers. Some complained about the inconsistent supply of certain brands of contraceptive pills. One case (Samira) gave different answers to two researchers and her results are uncertain. Seven women used private medical care in case of illness, especially if serious. Three could not afford it and usually did without medical care. Two used the public health units in case of illness or emergency.

All women used the *daya* for deliveries, except one who gave contradictory opinions. One other case study had a doctor called in when her delivery proved difficult (Jihan). Both women using doctors in addition to *dayas* were either of higher status than usual or of urban origin. Five other women had been to hospitals for spontaneous abortions which had resulted in hemorrhage. None admitted to attempted abortion, although we know from local doctors and hospitals that women are admitted in late stages of septicemia from abortions attempted at home, and some women subsequently die. If they die, responsible persons are sought and interrogated, a practice which makes women reluctant to seek competent medical advice in cases of infection from attempted abortion. Aside from this hospitalisation for hemorrhage, no pre- or post-natal care was given to cases aside from Jihan, who is getting checkups for a second pregnancy after difficulties in the first delivery.

Only two women had ever used contraceptive methods and both of these had spaced births using contraceptive pills. All knew about pills and some other contraceptive methods, yet most were ill informed as to actual differences or effects. Many preferred to believe local female gossip accentuating negative aspects or effects which often could not be caused by these methods. Attitudes to contraception improved in the one case where the woman was educated. Several women expressed a desire to use pills to prevent births when they had the desired number of children. One woman has become pregnant recently while supposedly taking birth control pills (Samira).

Five women felt that they could decide for themselves whether to limit births. Five believed their husbands should decide and two of these believed it was up to God and their husbands. One other thought God should decide. Only one decided with her husband (Nafisa) and two made no decisions at all. Both women in higher status families thought they could decide (Amal, Jihan). Nasara is an interesting case as she exhibits an instance where changing family circumstances brought about an abrupt change in attitudes toward pregnancy, which may or may not actually be implemented. Nasara's husband has told her that they should not have any more children, but positive measures to limit births have not yet been taken. Women's poor health was not usually a factor in deciding to limit births. Of the five women who thought they could decide to limit their fertility, only two had actually done so, both against the desires of their husbands (Samira, Amal).

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10 Reasons are not listed in order of priority.

Five women expressed a belief that nursing infants prevents pregnancy. We are concerned that in one case of bottle feeding there is a connection between this and the extremely high rate of infant mortality. This is due perhaps to contamination through poor hygiene practices in washing and handling bottles and in transporting water. One woman became pregnant when she believed she could not, because she was nursing and another does not want more children but is not taking any precautionary measures because of her belief that nursing protects her, which it has in the past.

Three women expressed a preference for boys and two of these said it was because sons inherit and daughters do not. This is an important point, stressing differences between actual practice and Muslim family law (*shari'a*) which governs inheritance, and should be further researched. The case of Maryam shows that where few brothers exist a woman may inherit more easily.

All deliveries were at home except for Hamida, who was transported to the hospital after losing four infants soon after birth. Half (five) of the women went to the home of their mother for delivery and a sixth had her mother present in her home. One woman (Maryam) had no female relatives available to assist her at birth. Four women expressed fears about child survival and all of these had experienced child deaths.

From the case studies presented it would appear that there is a relationship between a high productive role and high reproduction in the cases where the women are actively involved in the craft of their husband and indispensable to them. While their actual number of living children may be only slightly above average, for these women the number of pregnancies is extremely high.

One explanation given by the women for bearing children is that they need additional labour to increase their productivity and they cannot afford to pay for expensive wage labour. The attitudes of the women studied also show that poor families who are involved in a craft and who live from day to day economically are unable to plan their lives and are more likely to believe that everything is in God's hands.

We notice that most of the women in the study are dependent financially upon their husbands, despite their strong productive life and are unpaid where they work for their husbands. Husbands in most cases are decision-makers regarding both family planning and other matters, and therefore even where wives feel exhausted from many pregnancies or have strong anti-natal attitudes, they may feel obliged to comply with their husband's wishes and are often reluctant to give opposing opinions. This is most evident in those cases where women are totally dependent, and it is unrelated to the degree of their participation in production. In contrast to these cases, we find women who are very active in productive life but not financially dependent upon husbands. Here we find that attitudes toward family planning are not the decision of the husband. Individual life circumstances and family status influences this more than labour input.

The striking thing in all the cases is the importance of the *daya* in the village of Kerdassa. All women in the study, including those with education and those from prestigious families, favour the *daya* and prefer to have her in attendance rather than a doctor. The four *dayas* in the village have gained the sympathy and trust of the women as they live among them and are able to interact with them and understand needs and desires. Women also prefer to deliver either in their own homes or the homes of their mothers.

In times of serious illness women prefer to go to a public hospital in Cairo rather than to the local public clinic and do so if they cannot afford a private physician. The public clinic, as shown in all the case studies, has failed to fulfil its role. Women who do register at the clinic get discouraged when they find it offers nothing, and in subsequent pregnancies do not even bother to register. This is true in spite of the high number of infant deaths and frequent spontaneous abortions. Many women said the public clinic was better in the past in terms of services offered. Presently, neither medicines nor consultations are given, despite government pressures to implement family planning. Women also reported being unable to buy constant supplies of some types of pills and so were forced to change constantly. Even worse, they are often unable to afford contraceptive devices which are available and so become discouraged. They may pay for more expensive types which are available, or they may stop using any contraceptive device at all. These problems of implementation of desires to limit families

need to be addressed at the national and local levels.

Most women have heard of the pill and loop, and only one or two have heard about the condom. Most have reported bad effects upon health based upon false rumours, which are propagated from neighbour to neighbour because of the lack of any education about real results and effects. No serious effort is being made to spread realistic awareness among women who are presently completely ignorant regarding these devices. Even if women want to use contraceptive devices they may be worried by rumours and so continue to bear unwanted children, believing that contraceptive devices may cause more harm than repeated pregnancies.

Families who have experienced repeated child deaths either through sickness or accidents are the more reticent about contraceptive devices. These women express a strong religious attitude as illustrated in the cases presented. While no woman listed fear of child death among the reasons for having children, we found in the studies that it is a commonly prevalent and strong motivation.

### Women's Status

Status is related, on the community level, to wealth, land, material possessions, occupation, access to power, and to family position and reputation. There is increasing differentiation between groups within the village which is affected by accumulation of wealth in landholding families and is reinforced through increased access of upper status families to education and training, thus new job opportunities in the modern economic structure, access to markets and to increasingly centralised power structures.

Although some status remains in families of particular traditional craftsmen, such as weavers, this status is dwindling because of their increasing impoverishment. Other crafts have had low status for some time, especially those requiring less skill, as this has been culturally defined, and shorter training periods.

*Women's status is not dependent upon labour input, rather the reverse is true in household production where input is related to husband's work.* Low social status in some crafts affects those families who participate in this work, so only women from low status families labour in these crafts. Women's status is generally related to that of their families, and family status affects their exercise of certain powers vis-à-vis husbands, such as decision-making, distribution of resources, control over their fertility, and what work they will do. However, women can increase their status in the community and that of their children through higher education or through work opportunities which bring them income which can be used to educate children, feed, and clothe them. Higher education has its own status and brings increased dowry and marriage choices. Both education and income improve women's power vis-à-vis husbands to implement choices in distribution and control of resources, including their labour and fertility. As education is a function of family status it is *only* through income-generating work that women of lower status can hope to raise status and can break out of the presently existing status reinforcing cycle.

### Evidence of Change

There is evidence in Kerdassa of changes which are affecting women. The movement of men into wage labour should be viewed for its effects on women (see cases of Amal and Amina). These changes are not the same for women in all groups. Where males work by piece work we also see how this work has included the unpaid participation of women and has thrown added expense and responsibility upon the household (see cases of Jihan, Samira, Nagua).

Cross-generational changes generally witness the lower participation of women in productive labour where men work for wages, or where they move to related crafts (see Nasara's case). Unpaid female labour may be



increased, however, in some instances (as with Safeya). Women are more dependent upon males economically where husbands have entered the paid labour force and where women no longer produce as paid or unpaid workers.

The cultural value non-productive women is firmly established in Kerdassa and has been adopted at all status levels. However, we see a change in this value where women need to work because of pressures caused by inflation. Attitude changes have occurred where some women wish to work, and are also evidenced in raised hopes that children, especially girls, will be educated and will work for wages. Differential rates of attitudinal change exist, however, and expectations are not raised in some cases (Maryam). Other women may make the conservative choice to withdraw into the household rather than use education and status to assist in community and female development (Jihan).

There has been a generational rise in age at marriage which is expected to affect fertility statistics of those now marrying.

The demise of traditional crafts has affected the skill structure and usefulness of traditionally valued skills. The apprentice system in the past focused upon a sexual division of labour which is now changing and which favours males in current changes for skill demands. Women need help to adjust this inequality.

Although we often find motivation increases and raised aspirations regarding both work participation and family planning, there are indications that health services have decreased over time. The decrease in health services affects implementation of desires in both areas of production and family planning on the individual level, and slows government aims in these areas as well. The ability for low income women, especially, to implement desires, has been affected by this decrease in services.

### Women's Needs

Planners need to address the failure of the family planning program to reach lower income women. This seems partly due to a misunderstanding about the way in which things in the village get accomplished and lack of recognition of differential access to communication channels, decision-making, and resources. In reassessment of work already done by the Family Planning Board, it would be helpful to look at the categories of women's participation in production more carefully. The nature of relations within the household unit must be investigated further to determine decision-making patterns in rural areas and how variations in these patterns are associated with work patterns, status groups, and fertility levels.

Better basic health care for lower income women is essential in lowering infant death rates and female mortality, and in raising health standards. Family planning motivation cannot be separated from health conditions or from expectations for child survival. Training programs to familiarise local, traditional dayas with sanitation practices and basic health precautions could go a long way in assisting both health and family planning aims, as these dayas serve women in many capacities already throughout their lives and hold their trust and confidence. Programs of this sort are being found successful in other areas of the Middle East, such as North Yemen, and were known in Egypt under Nasser. We suggest reinstigation of this training. *Hakimas*, or nurse-midwives, may be considered outsiders by village women and have been trained along Western ideas regarding nursing or midwifery which do not take into account local traditions and beliefs surrounding childbirth.

Education for rural women needs to take into consideration current economic and labour conditions and real needs for income. Programs are necessary for adult women who are currently uneducated to gain skills and find employment. Firm social commitment and direction of resources are needed to achieve this end. Employment should be realistically designed to minimise impact on current social structure so that women may not feel further pressured from inability to meet social demands. Small, local programs, income-generating schemes, and cooperatives could utilise local women in joint training and production programs.

## V. CONCLUSION

### Summary of Findings

As we have shown, the contribution of women in production is high in Kerdassa in the subsistence economy, and in handicraft production. We have noted certain trends which are occurring and which will affect the status of women. Most important, women are not moving into the modern forms of production in the capitalising economy but are being pushed into increasingly unrewarding forms of labour. Although their labour input remains constant, they receive little reward for this labour and because technological advances bypass areas of production where women participate, they are unable to compete with men in productive capacity. Women are also crowding into the few areas of production which lack of education, skills, or mobility allow them, thus driving the price of their labour down as they compete with each other. We have noted a shift in the sexual division of labour in favor of men, who now do tasks which formerly were considered only women's work, such as in production of women's clothing or in chicken farming. As areas of production become capitalised women's lack of access to capital and credit and lack of mobility prohibit them from retaining control over these tasks. The long-term result of this will be a decrease in the status of women vis-à-vis men as they control fewer and fewer resources.

Rural areas may resist capitalisation because of female inputs, thus resulting in stability of subsistence economy. Women's contributions also keep wages down in other sectors of the economy and allow growth which would not otherwise be possible. This resistance to commoditisation occurs because of:

- 1) the contribution of women to the household and subsistence economy. If male wage earners employed in or outside the village are cyclically or temporarily out of work, the household can subsist through increasing efforts, lowering consumption, and partially withdrawing from market relations (Shanin, 1972). Women's contribution allows merchants and employers in all areas to pay lower wages. In cottage production many costs of production are pushed onto households, thus allowing merchant profits to be higher.
- 2) locally circulating markets in some basic commodities are not connected directly to outside markets. This enables women to buy and sell at prices based on personal relationships as well as on wider market prices. Women may also obtain credit this way. Basic subsistence commodities circulating in this manner are grains (wheat and corn), cheese, fowl, greens, legumes.

In order to prove this prediction precise data might be collected on household expenditures in both local and other markets. Expenditures should be compared between households with differential female participation in subsistence activities, in agriculture, in crafts, and in other occupations. To date evidence is not available in a form which is complete enough for this purpose.

Inflationary pressures are exaggerated on households of small producers where wages and prices of goods they produce are standardised and rise slower than prices for purchased goods. Women in these households are badly in need of cash and work long hours for small returns in order to survive. However, there is some relationship between household size and labour productivity, accumulation, and marketing advantage. Households with large numbers of males may, especially, have an advantage, yet poorer families are able to utilize surplus female labour to increase income. Subsistence levels depend largely upon the number of members producing and this changes over the life cycle of the family. Younger families with large numbers of unproductive children may be at a distinct disadvantage, especially in those groups which lack education and skills.

Women in different status groups had access to different occupations. Status of family determined ability to choose work, labour input, and chances of getting paid for work or controlling money earned from work. Labor of women who assisted husbands was not socially recognized or labelled, by themselves or by others. Where

women were able to choose work, relations with husbands were affected; they had more decision making power over distribution of income and over life choices in general. These women were also able to implement their desires about childbearing. Relations within the household affected fertility patterns of these women, increasing live births, child survival, fertility control, and decreasing wastage. Where women could not choose work or have decision-making power over resources, they did not believe they could control fertility.

Fertility levels had a positive correlation with labour input in household industries, and especially in those in which child labour was useful to women. Where women chose work and controlled income from work and where this work did not utilise child labour, women attempted to limit fertility. Women who had not chosen their work but who performed socially obligatory productive roles in household industry did not see this labour as a way for themselves or their children to gain social status or improved conditions. These women wanted their sons to be educated and not to follow in the work of their family, preferring that they take government posts or work in jobs with stable salaries. Some women saw education as a route open to daughters, too, to social benefits, although others did not see this, believing that daughters would marry young and labour in the same way as they did. Women who saw no hope of improvement were not inclined to limit their fertility.

Only one woman in the case studies had any education. Government training programs designed to assist women in finding income-generating work in Kerdassa had failed to relate to women's real needs or to current demands for skills. Attempts to provide health care and family planning information had also failed to reach lower income groups in the village. Women in higher status groups had access both to communication channels about health care and family planning and to better care. This resulted in higher fertility levels in the most needy group and in higher levels of infant mortality, which also affected women's attitudes to bearing children — women who had experienced repeated child deaths bore many children, or wanted to. While women did utilise public services in the event of delivery difficulties or dangerous hemorrhaging, they preferred urban hospitals to local facilities. All women in the study preferred dayas to deliver their children over either nurse-hakimas or physicians.

Most women wanted many children for a large number of reasons, most commonly to have sons, to provide security for old age, to help with work, or to gain approval of husbands. Even where women were motivated to limit births because they already had enough children, because of work and expense in raising them, because of failing health, or because they did not need them for labour, they had difficulty carrying out their desires. This was due primarily to lack of decision-making power (husband decided) and fear of effects of contraceptives. Where women knew nothing about contraceptives and real effects and differences, they believed negative rumours passed by other women.

### **Policy Implications**

From observations in other areas of Egypt we know that no generalisations can be made which refer to all villages. Village and area autonomy are both marked and utilisation of female labour differs greatly. We have seen a general trend, however, substantiated in Kerdassa, for women to move out of household production when family businesses become lucrative enough so that substitutes may be employed. There are, however, too few areas of production which they can presently move into. As women are also not organised beyond the extended family in Egypt, we believe these two restraints on the expansion of craft industries provide a challenge to planners who are proposing income-generating schemes for women. Women who are heads of households (widows and divorced women, or single women) do not have the option of leaving work and may thus provide a focus for planned inclusion of female labour. Pilot projects should be attempted utilising these women as organisers and foci. The extreme competition between brothers in household industry is also noted. This major fission point in a primarily kinship organised productive system also inhibits expansion of handicrafts. A fourth

consideration in planning for inclusion of handicrafts into the wider economic system is the fact that handicrafts seldom generate enough capital for accumulation and expansion, and so these funds must come from other areas.

The most vital implication of the study in regard to work is the understanding it provides of the lack hitherto of provision of meaningful training schemes for women. We can see here how lack of understanding of real needs of rural women can result in wasted time, effort, and resources. Thus for example sewing courses prepared by government agencies have not trained women to do work which could provide substantial income for them and for their families. A more sophisticated view of demand and regional coordination needs to be addressed by vocational training experts in Egypt, and primarily a firm social commitment must be made and backed to provide rural women with education, skills and projects, which will enable them to fulfil their real potential in contributing to economic development. Failure to fully utilise available human resources to date has increased pressures on single wage-earner families and has slowed both industrial development and the improvement of social welfare for lower income groups. As we see in the study, it also affects fertility rates.

Women's contribution in handicrafts decreases in the move from subsistence and traditional crafts to tourist crafts, which are largely organised and dominated by males. This trend began long ago, however, in some traditional crafts such as weaving, which have moved into workshops outside the household. In this move, male labour is substituted for tasks formerly done by females (spinning, dyeing, bobbin winding, for example). Women have a doubtful monopoly only in the production of women's clothing, where males control distribution of cloth, thread, trim, and beading. We show the resourceful use of female labour in *versalia*, a craft which is derived from weaving, where traditional skills have been used as a base for a new industry which is linked to modern ready-made clothing and luggage production. This is a rare example of how the development of work for women in the modern economy is possible, although lack of education, skills, credit, capital and access to modern technology have generally eliminated them.

Despite the decreased viability of crafts which compete directly with machine production, such as weaving, we see a continued vitality in crafts with strong cultural significance in products and those which are produced from local raw materials. By developing markets for these products and assisting in distribution, government planners could expand this type of work for women.

The dependence on female labour in the subsistence economy for production, processing, and preparation of food, washing, cleaning, serving, producing and rearing children has remained constant or may even have increased due to inflation and male migration. There is increasing class differentiation as women move from producers to consumers and become reproducers of the labour force only. As dependence of females on males is valued in a patriarchal society, this value is realised by those able to do so (see Jihan's case).

The study has attempted to deal with the question of women's productive role not as it relates only to narrow western definitions of work, but in the wider view of women's contribution to society as a whole. It is only in this way, we believe, that we can relate the status of women in relation to men in society to a social reality. We hope that once we have defined women's contribution and their conditions of struggle, both national policies and private opinions which seek to conceal and distort this contribution may be enlightened. It is only then that we can hope for dedication to new policies which include women on an equal footing with men in society, so that all members of society may benefit from this contribution.

Conditions of poverty are exacerbated where women are unable to gain income to meet increasing costs of food and education. Lower income and status groups may also fail to realise their aims to limit family size or may not want to do so, because they see children as a realisable resource to gain future security and assistance otherwise denied them. Alternatively, they may see themselves as simply unable to control fertility as they are unable to control or fulfil other aspirations for a better life. In these conditions general family welfare declines.

Two factors are especially important in blocking these groups from attaining satisfactory life circumstances, including lowered birth rates:

- a) The paternalistic social structure which denies women mobility, credit, or autonomy and which subordinates them to males whose aims do not necessarily coincide with those of females within the household unit.
- b) Government policies, which fail to consider female needs as essential either in employment, education, or training programs, or in basic health care and fertility programs. Although local health clinics do exist they are not assisting this segment of the population to understand methods of family planning, basic health, and sanitation improvement.

The direction of policymakers to increased work opportunities through education and skill training which considers the needs of women will result in raised real incomes, increased autonomy and decision-making influence, and decreased fertility. The dedication of government to eradicating the impediments to this group's realisation of these goals can be done at little increased cost by re-evaluation and adjustment of current aims in both health care and vocational training. This can be begun by refocusing statistical analyses to more well thought out productive categories within lower status and income groups in rural areas and by attempting to understand the dynamics of work atmosphere, type, and level and fertility behaviour, including both desire for children and ability to implement desire.

We offer this study as a contribution to such an endeavour.

## APPENDIX I

### Methods of Fieldwork

#### General Method

The project was a collaborative effort of Patricia D. Lynch, an American anthropologist and PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, England, and Hoda Fahmy, an Egyptian anthropologist possessing an M.A. in Anthropology from the American University in Cairo and having considerable field and project experience, under the auspices of the Egyptian Center for Civilization Studies, Cairo. The project took place from August, 1980 through June, 1981, with the American researcher residing in the village five days per week from October, 1980 through January, 1981, and making shorter trips during the remainder of the year. The Egyptian anthropologist had the previous experience of a year's residence in the village and during the period of her research in March and April, 1981, she made day trips there.

The initial contextual survey for compilation of community and craft data utilised published sources, key informants, local government officials, teachers, businessmen, local leaders and residents, and included a survey of 100 crafts-producing households. Anthropological methods of participant observation and extended interviews were also used, with supplementary photographic recording. The researcher lived in a local household with residents related to the crafts being studied.

Following the initial contextual analysis, choices of cases were made to address specific issues. Women in the case studies represent various household types (nuclear, extended, polygamous), family structures, life cycles, occupational and status groups. The cases are presented in order to show the relationship between women's action choices and life chances and their socio-economic and kinship position, and to stress the complexity of these relationships.

The sample was not taken from a pool of all women in the village. Rather, only married women who were parents and who were employed in craft-production were selected from the survey of 100 craft producing households. These represent approximately 10% of Kerdassa women thus occupied. Single-parent households and unmarried craftswomen were not represented. Further basic material and data was collected from this non-random sample by the Egyptian anthropologist, assisted by two bilingual village assistants through three or four interviews with each informant, in focused interviews using a loosely structured questionnaire designed to be both acceptable and understood by Egyptian informants, and acceptable to the methodological framework.

The cross cultural team worked together closely to develop the integration of the data into the final report, assisted by Nawal Hassan, Center Director, who was closely involved with the project at each stage of its progress from development to report compilation.

The Seven Roles of Women framework for data collection designed by Oppong (1981) and elaborated by Oppong and Church (1981) was utilised in the collection and organisation of data. This model is broad enough to allow a personal assimilation according to differences in theoretical orientation and is adaptable to the necessarily great number of issues and problems which are addressed. The focus is on occupational and parental roles, with some attention paid to conjugal and individual roles. In addition to the Anker (Anker, 1980, 1981) survey questionnaires, we found Connel and Lipton's (Connel and Lipton, 1977) suggestions helpful in collection of village information. Questions were used to generate conversation on specific topics rather than in the collection of specific answers. The project depended largely upon long-term established relationships with particular informants to gain trust and most information was gathered from regular conversation carried out over an extended time period. Hoda Fahmy's previous work and residence in the village proved valuable in this respect.

## Critique of Method

We found insights into the differences between members of the cross-cultural team interesting and valuable. The cooperation demanded close personal introspection of motives, ideas, and theoretical assumptions, involving both project and individual aims. We feel that having to assess the data collection jointly as the project progressed and to discuss the import of data was a benefit to all concerned and to the outcome of the project.

The two village assistants came from the family of residence and proved to be an invaluable facilitation for the work. Without them it would have taken much longer to gain access to and the trust of informants. The fact that we were unable to find bilingual female assistants did change the character of relationships between the American anthropologist and women in the village somewhat, especially before the improvement of Arabic language enabled her to speak without interpretation. Even though informants usually knew the assistants and in some cases were related to them, the nature of conversation between members of a mixed group is somewhat limited. Hoda Fahmy's cultural as well as linguistic knowledge was a great asset in the collection of information on attitudes. The married status of the American researcher and her position as a mother somewhat helped to mitigate this problem as it increased rapport with and the trust of women in the village.

We found two problems with the use of local, untrained assistants, although we would not hesitate to use them again. Lack of training in field methods caused a communication gap which sometimes surfaced inconveniently during interviews. However, through this we learned to review questions and topics for both cultural and courtesy appropriateness. A class problem occurred which, as we questioned many households besides those presented as case studies, surfaces as a general one in the collection of village data. Assistants would ask any question, personal or otherwise, of a poorer producer, not finding this an invasion of the informant's privacy. They found it more difficult, however, to ask any questions of informants from higher status groups than their own. Within the family of residence we also found difficulty in obtaining answers to financial matters, although some of this could be gathered through observation. Long residence in the village helped us gain information about household maintenance, land use, etc.

We noted that many aspects of women's responsibilities are difficult for them to talk about. Some tasks which have low status within the community, women will not discuss. Manual labour generally is not prized, nor is routine, unskilled craft work. Men deny that wives do these tasks even when their work depends upon them and cannot be completed without the process which wives do. Women themselves will not admit to these tasks unless observed in the process of carrying them out, when they will talk about them.

Surveys are difficult because of the time it takes to gain trust and to evaluate informants and answers. When informants do not know the questioner or his reasons for asking, they often give incorrect information.

For all of these reasons, much information was gained through observations. We did find the questionnaire of Anker 1980 useful in collection of basic data about households, family structure, facilities, activities, and income. Its design for a full year's project, while not precisely the design of this research, was also helpful.

For the reason that only marriage and childbearing are sources of status for women and work outside or inside the home for money is not, women are not anxious to discuss these cash-earning activities. This is especially true of subsistence crafts, which have the lowest status, or where women perform tasks for needed money which they consider below their social status. They prefer to hide the fact that they do this work. In this case questionnaires, however well thought out and extensive, fail.

There is also a certain bias in the work because of the privileged position of most key informants. These included members of the village council, government officials, professionals, merchants, and other educated people. These are necessarily overrepresented in the collection of community data. Members of families with whom the American investigator resided are extensively used as sources of information and these were not among the poorer families. They were closely related to the leading village merchant, who provided much information on local production, but we know the issue of family loyalties was inescapable and that both political

and class issues between families, as well as personal ones, prevented us in some cases from gaining an "objective" view of production and marketing, if there is any such thing. We feel the roots of this family in the traditional weaving industry and their prominent position in the tourist trade provided us with benefits which far outweighed drawbacks. Without their kind and patient assistance and care the study could not have been made.



## APPENDIX II

### The Cases: Eleven Women Craft Workers

It should be noted that the names of the eleven women craft workers are not their real names.

#### Amina

Amina is a thoughtful young wife and mother. She has a refreshing cynicism and an ability to view life in a wider context which is unusual, and which made her an informative subject. We also chose her because she signifies much of the change taking place in Kerdassa cross-generationally as it moves from a specialising village into the grip of a capitalised urban-centered international market.

Her house lies in the very oldest section of the village above the flood plain where weavers clustered in times past. Most of the interior has been torn down and is being rebuilt little by little. Presently, only three rooms remain, which house Amina and her husband Ahmed, their two small daughters, and his parents. Amina is twenty-four and has been married for four years. Neither she nor Ahmed have ever attended school. Ahmed was trained in weaving by his father and worked in this craft since he was a child, but has recently been employed by a nearby television and radio factory, where he earns LE 25 per month plus overtime and profit sharing bonuses.

Ahmed's father, Abdel Salaam, is respected both for his good character and because he is a weaver, an occupation which retains some status from former times when it was a lucrative trade which occupied most of the village. He weaves cotton dish towels of very good quality on the small pit loom which occupies half of the front room, and he sells these to a merchant in the center of Gamaleya, the ancient Bazaar area of Cairo. He is proud of his work, but it bothers him that he is old and cannot work long days any more and is only able to earn about LE 1 for two days work, out of which he must pay for dyes. This fee also includes the work of his wife, a small, bent woman who is nevertheless lively and who keeps busy helping Abdel Salaam by winding bobbins and by dyeing the yarn red, black, and yellow. The technology used by the couple is simple but ingeniously effective.

Abdel Salaam also worries that the merchant is trying to cheat him on the price of his towels and asks me to check on the sale price. It is difficult for him to pay for cotton and dyes from his small payment, and he also finds it increasingly hard to travel the very long way on the crowded bus, then walking quite a distance, to sell his towels and to buy new yarn.

Because her husband no longer works as a weaver in the house, Amina has no productive tasks related to his work. She cooks, launders, and cleans for the whole extended family, which takes a lot of time because of the conditions of the house, and she must walk a considerable distance with water from the public tap. She goes to the house of her father, several blocks away, twice each week to bake bread in his oven and enjoys this time to visit with her mother and family members, which she feels she is more free to do now since Ahmed is not at home to watch her movements so closely. Her mother-in-law minds the baby and young daughter when she is on errands, which helps her, but she sometimes prefers to bring them with her.

The family owns no land on either side and Amina does not keep animals, chickens, or ducks, and is not involved in processing food for the household such as dates or corn. She has searched very hard for some sort of income producing work and is very discouraged about her inability to find anything she feels is worth the time she puts in or which she can do. She used to sew gold beads on galabeya bodices for local women, but did not feel the LE 1.25 was worth the two days of spare-time work which was involved, so gave up this work. She still does it for the members of her extended family, however, as she is quite good at it. She also enrolled in a sewing course given by the Ministry of Social Affairs, but found the training in canvas embroidery (petit point) had little relation to her real needs for work and so she stopped attending this course. She regrets this in a way, however, because if she

could have stayed to finish they would have helped her to purchase a sewing machine on credit, which she would like very much to do. Then she could become a tailor, which is the only skill she has. She has no capital or credit to buy the machine on her own, and the demands of her children and household duties prevent her from selling things in the local market. Besides, she has no land to grow things to sell.

Amina's oldest child is two years and two months, and her two pregnancies coincide with her actual number of children. She was registered at the government clinic for both pregnancies because she thought it would be wiser in case she had pre- or post-partum hemorrhage and needed a doctor quickly. She does not intend to be registered for her next pregnancy because "it is useless", and she did not go for checkups while pregnant. When delivery was near she sent for the *daya* (midwife) and went to her mother's home, where she gave birth. Her two deliveries were easy and the *daya* could manage well.

When her children get sick she takes them to the public clinic but says that they do nothing for them and above all she has no trust in them as she feels doctors in the public clinic are not specialised in caring for children and "they prescribe for children what they would prescribe for adults". When her youngest daughter was sick she took her to a private doctor and paid LE 1 for the visit.

When asked if she wanted more children Amina at first said no, that she had quite enough, but she later admitted that she wanted to have a son. "It is not possible to be satisfied with only two daughters, I wish to have one boy at least." Her husband is always asking her, "When are you going to give me a boy?" and her in-laws also press her constantly about the issue. She is actually worried that she will not be able to have more children as she has passed a year without getting pregnant. She is also afraid she might have a third daughter and thinks it would not be good for them not to have a brother to protect them. She has heard about some contraceptive devices like the pills and the loop and says that if God gives her the satisfying number of children she will use the loop in the future. She has heard the pills cause bleeding and affect the liver, but feels the loop is safe as relatives in Imbaba seem satisfied with it. No one from the family planning clinic has ever visited her, but she heard about the need for limiting births from the radio, from television, and from her neighbours.

Amina thinks it is especially important to educate her children well as she suffers from being "only a housewife". Education is an important tool to gain personality and to help in finding an occupation which will bring a fixed income each month. "Children are a support in life" she says, although she adds with some cynicism, "one educates, gets tired, makes sacrifices for one's children and at the end the mother gets nothing back as the girls get married and leave the house and perhaps they may never ask about their parents after they have gone".

She considers her in-laws helpful and kind and is happy to live with them, actually preferring this to living in a nuclear unit. She is also quite happy with her husband, who has many qualities that she views as positive, including kindness, modesty, treating his children well and fulfilling both her and the children's wishes. She has an increased sense of security since he took a job outside the house with a fixed work day and income, and enjoys the freedom and responsibility this gives her. She tries to please him by doing extra tasks like helping him with building and carrying sand for him, which are heavy tasks. She is glad they have electricity in the house but wishes she did not have to haul water such a long way, and she complains about the exhaustion this causes as she must do it several times each day. She tries not to feel annoyed about the work of the household, as she realizes her parents-in-law are old and need help as there is no other female to assist.

Amina is very preoccupied these days by the idea that she must contribute to raising the income of the family by taking on some kind of work. The problem for her is what can she do? It would give her a sense of security and fulfillment to have money which she could spend in any way she liked. She sees that sewing and embroidery are no longer lucrative in Kerdassa and she is searching hard to find some income generating and self-rewarding activity which her commitments and skills will allow her to do.

## Safeya

Safeya is a woman with a strong personality, a strong reproductive role, and a prominent productive life. I have never seen her when she was not working, yet she is always cheerful, alert, and hospitable. She lives under what appear to be difficult and austere circumstances, which in no way dampen her spirit or her enthusiasm for life. Safeya is 33 years old and was married for 15 years to Sha'rawy, a versalia merchant who died as we were doing our research. She was Sha'rawy's obviously favored second wife and the mother of six children, 3 sons and 3 daughters, the oldest of which was 14 years. Sha'rawy was 53 and had been married to Atiat for about 15 years before he brought Safeya to their home. Atiat had only one surviving child at that time, a son, and has since had another daughter. Safeya acts very much the mistress of the polygamous household, a role which Atiat seems to accept gracefully, at least to all outward appearances, and we note in our family photograph that the co-wives stand together and Safeya affectionately rests her arm on Atiat's shoulder.

Sha'rawy's family has been weavers for a long time, and his father is still active and productive. Sha'rawy and his three brothers occupy a large compound near the center of the village where they work and live. About 15 years ago the family decided to enter versalia production as a replacement for the declining handloom industry. As they were also cloth merchants, they used their considerable links in the old Cairo Bazaar to gain new customers for this work, which is linked to the readymade clothing and luggage industry. Since then the handloomed versalia has been replaced by machine made, which they order from Alexandria merchants.

In Safeya's household production is entirely carried out by women, including her co-wife, the wife of her father-in-law, Atiat's 12-year-old daughter, and the help of the younger girls when needed. After his first wife died, her father-in-law married a woman of about 50 years from an adjoining village and this team of women shares the tasks of getting the starch prepared in large ceramic pots over a fire, stirring the cloth into the hot starch, then lifting it out with a stick to stretch on the nail-lined roof racks to dry in the hot sun. The work is heavy and dirty and is done twice each day, taking two or more hours each time. They must rise early to get one load dried so that it can be removed and rolled for storage before another one is put to dry and then removed before dusk, especially in the short days of winter.

The household is a large structure with an open central court and three rooms on the ground floor and one above. Most of these are used for materials and for storage. There are 82 meters of drying racks on the roof and versalia is made in the court and carried up the stairs or to neighbouring roofs to dry. Sha'rawy's only role in the industry was to manage business affairs, arranging shipment to the city and collecting money for the orders, and taking new orders. He also obtained supplies and materials. There are four versalia merchants in the village who distribute the work of many households, and even at the small profit of 2 piastres (2 piastres = 5 cents American) per meter for starching, a good profit can be made. Sha'rawy estimated for us that he sold 200 *tobe* (1 *tobe* = 32 meters) to the *city* per week, including the production of several neighbours.

He and his brothers do not cooperate in their work, however, rather each brother produces and markets for himself. This competition is characteristic of Kerdassa, even where combined and coordinated efforts might be a financial benefit or help to develop a small business. The tendency for brothers to compete often leads to family fission. Although there are no outward signs of conspicuous consumption in the household, village informants insist that Sha'rawy is "wealthy". This may be because of the constant income allowed by the strong demand of this product that is linked to wider market production and because of Sha'rawy's control of this village specialty. In 1977 Sha'rawy and his father traveled to Mecca, a fact proclaimed by the customary bright wall paintings in his house done by neighbours to welcome them home. He took his sister, but did not include Safeya, although she wanted to go.

Safeya is a small, wiry woman, and her wizened breasts seem inadequate for nursing Sabat, 2, who is not a robust child like the young Sha'rawy who is a year older and who was an obvious favorite of his father's. Partly because of the hard nature of the work, it is difficult for Safeya to spend a lot of time caring for her young children,

and they are very boisterous. The household contains a pump for water and it has electricity, but standards of sanitation are not high. They do not keep any animals or fowl, but do own a tiny plot of land which supplies dates to the household. The co-wives claim to share equally in housework, but we note that Atiat and her daughter seem to bear much of the load of routine household tasks, leaving Safeya free to travel to the city to deliver goods and collect new orders, and to sell fabric in the weekly *suq*. We often saw her there with her wares spread in a prominent place just outside the gates to the "new" *suq*, and accompanied by Sha'rawy who visited with his friends while she worked. We observed that the wives did not share the same lifestyle as their husband, nor have the same decision making power over how the family income would be spent, what work they will do, or what leisure they will have. Safeya was provided with little above subsistence. Sha'rawy controlled her movements quite a lot and she checked her plans with him at each step. Although he was often seen with his small son, Sha'rawy admitted he liked to get away from the noisy and chaotic household, and he was considered by informants to be a very hard man. Sha'rawy had paid a brideprice of LE 20 for his first wife, and a price of LE 40 for Safeya, prices which reflect change over time if compared with younger women in the study.

The shock of Sha'rawy's sudden death from asthma was very hard on the family, although Safeya had taken over much of the business some time ago because of his failing health. We were curious to see whether male members of the extended family would allow the women to continue supporting themselves, or whether Sha'rawy's father would assume a managerial role. Women in the village usually fall under the care of a male extended family member. We also wondered what would happen to the polygamous household.

In our following visits we noted that Safeya continued both her selling in the weekly *suq* and her versalia business, with the help of her mother who came for an extended visit, and her co-wife, whom Safeya said she would never leave. She discussed how she accomplished her own autonomy by separating herself from "jealous" members of her husband's family, and how she was able to take only two weeks off after Sha'rawy's death because she feared customers would turn elsewhere for supplies. She says that the money "is the same as before for me and my children" and seems very happy about control of funds, which she is prone to flash about.

Safeya is inclined to idealise her life with Sha'rawy, which affects her attitudes toward children. In all she has had 14 pregnancies, with two children being born alive and dying within the first year, six spontaneous abortions, and 6 surviving children. She does not know any specific reason for these deaths, but said that God had summoned them to be near him and had compensated with other children. She noted that they had severe diarrhea, however. All the children were delivered at home, which she considers preferable to the hospital. She was assisted by the *daya*, in this case a very old woman who is nearly blind but who has had many years experience. Her deliveries were very easy so she could resume normal life after two or three days, during which time her co-wife and neighbours assisted her. One of the six abortions was extremely difficult and she hemorrhaged badly and thought she was going to die. The *daya* suggested she should go immediately to the hospital, so neighbours rushed her to "Om El Musreyyin" in Cairo.

She is registered at the government clinic, where there is a big difference, she says, between the services rendered today and those 15 years ago. The clinic used to dispense medicine without charge, but now they gave very little, not exceeding one or two varieties, and all consultations were verbal as no one cares to examine patients in the overcrowded clinic. Despite this, she thinks the public clinic is "better than nothing" as she cannot pay the 75 piasters for a private doctor. Despite her lack of prenatal care she "never had any problems" with pregnancies. When her children or husband were seriously ill she preferred to go to a public hospital in Cairo where more care is given free of charge.

When Sha'rawy was alive Safeya says she never thought of controlling the size of her family or of taking any kind of contraceptives. She was very happy to have children and said that each child brings his "rizk" (prosperity) with him. Safeya was very conscious of the fact that her husband took her as a second wife because he wanted to have many children and his first wife was already "very old". Her opinion coincided with his and she says that now the best memory she has of her husband is her children. They also help her in her productive role;

“with many children a woman feels supported and not alone”. She thinks that as long as her health allows a woman should have as many children as she can, especially as many die natural deaths or are aborted, as happened in her case and “one can never be sure of the number of children who will survive”. Her husband was happy when she was pregnant and never suggested that they had too many children. She heard about contraceptive pills from some village women, not from the government clinic, and knew that they took away a woman’s energy and might affect her productivity, which is very important to her. She never found the clinic helpful for anything except administering vaccinations to village children.

Safeya thinks that education is good for her children, and especially her two older sons, who are 14 and 12 years. Now that Sha’rawy has died she thinks it is enough to educate the boys only, and has even had to take her oldest son out of school to help her in the business. She hopes to teach her children to be strong and responsible very early in their lives, as her mother taught her when she was a small child and she took her with her to sell vegetables in the streets of Cairo where she “learned independence”. This is why she now feels capable of assuming the role of both mother and father for her children. She thinks education is more useful for boys than for girls because girls marry and usually become involved in the work of their husbands as in her own case. She does not want the boys to lack education as their father did or to work in crafts, but would prefer they have work with a fixed income. She would like her children to be better off than she is and not to suffer from poverty as she does, but also to be as courageous in facing life as she tries to be. She recognises the good care which Atiat takes of her children which allows her to feel secure while she is carrying out her marketing activities.

She hopes to be financially secure from her children, but if the need arises she expects them to assist her when they get older, “of course more from the boys”, as girls will be financially dependent upon their husbands. In her view, Sha’rawy was a good companion and she knows that she was his preferred wife, but has no trouble accepting that he married her because she was clever in business. She did resent the fact that her husband held all the money, including what she earned, and was the sole decision-maker, which especially annoyed her because she worked so hard. She could not buy anything she needed for herself or her children. She did find some reward in seeing him pleased about his work and affectionate towards the children, however.

Safeya desires greatly to be financially independent from her in-laws and says her only link with them is her children. Although she feels it is their duty to help support her now that she is a widow, she tries to prevent the children from asking them for money as she fears they will attempt to control her business and her money. She feels that her role is outside the house, in producing and marketing goods, rather than in the house. She did like prearing the vegetables in front of the TV on her one day off, but found the demands of keeping so much clean laundry for Sha’rawy difficult, as she was compelled to rise very early to get it done. She likes versalia production and finds her greatest joy in market day. Because of the poverty she suffered when she was young she feels that learning about life and earning money and knowing the market gives her a source of security in life. She feels that marketing is “in her blood” and has liked it since she was a child and marketed with her mother. She regards herself successful in her work and capable of running the business. It is because of her confidence and success that she fears the neighbors and her in-laws will give her the “evil eye” which will bring her bad luck. She hopes her daughters will also find satisfaction in the future in the two roles in which she herself feels rewarded, as a mother and as a producer.

## Amal

Amal is a buxom, pretty young woman who has a business of her own as a tailor of the traditional woman’s dress in Kerdassa, the “baladi” galabeya. She is 27 and has been married to Nasr (36 years) for 8 years and has two children, a son 6 and a daughter 1½. The family lives in a very large, prominent house which belongs to her mother, although they have separate quarters. Nasr is unusual in this respect because he is one of the few to

violate the rule of virilocality and it is for this reason and because of the interesting family and class backgrounds of both that we have chosen to look more closely at Amal.

Their spacious household has high ceilings and stone floors and contains a separate *salon* with cushioned *canaba* where guests can be entertained. The *wist al bait* also has a tiled floor and opens onto a garden which separates Amal's living quarters from her mother's. The formidable wooden entrance door is high above the street and is kept bolted so that casual entrance is impossible. Her single brother shares the residence and travels to work in the city. The house has running water, electricity, and an oven, although Amal seldom bakes her own bread, preferring to purchase it from the baker. She does not raise animals, although she does occasionally keep chickens for family consumption. There is a television set and a washing machine. She purchases fuel (dung cakes) when needed, rather than making them, and is very proud of the fact that she purchases everything she needs for the house rather than processing it herself. The family has no land except for a small plot in her name, although Nasr's family owned much property in the past.

Amal works seriously as a tailor, sewing for about four hours in the shorter winter days and about seven hours in summer. Her work tends to be seasonal, as most women buy new dresses for the "small feast" or for Ramadan and for two months prior to this time she is very busy, making three or four per day. The rest of the year her production is about three in two days. Women bring their fabric to Amal and she sews it according to their choice from a variety of local styles, making about 70 piasters to LE 1.50 for each, depending upon the work involved. She has no particular training for this job so finishing skills are not very well developed, which does not seem to affect her business very much. After she assembles the dress it is brought to another tailor for machine embroidery or hand beading on the finely finished bodice.

Amal measures her customers against the cloth they bring, making notches with her scissors which she will follow after they leave and which guide her in cutting the bodice, sleeves, body and bottom ruffle. Sleeves are not added until the customer comes to retrieve the galabeya, and adjustments are made then. Each woman has her own favorite style, fabric, trimming and yoke design. Because of the nature of the work it is difficult for Amal's husband to know just how much she earns, and when she says that she uses the money for household expenses he complains that this is not so. He says she contributes nothing to the house and is always asking him for money and that she keeps all of it for herself. Amal laughs at this and seems not at all concerned. This point of conflict between them may be accentuated because of the strong position Amal holds in relation to her husband and also because she is able to conceal the amount of her income from him.

Both Amal and Nasr come from prominent families. His father was a village strongman whose family was once the primary landholders in the village. He is related to the last *'Omda* (mayor) and the family was very powerful before this office was abolished and their rule crushed by Nasser in 1965. Nasr rejected the tendency of his father to take what he wanted by force and now works as a mechanic on the construction of a giant hotel complex in Giza on a fertile 20-feddan plot which was once controlled by his family. Because he refused to help his father get a job on this building project his father has disowned him and disinherited him. And so he has "married in", so to speak and has broken all ties with his family.

Amal's mother lived for many years in Cairo, where her first husband was in a prominent position on the Ministry of Education. After his death she returned to her family home in Kerdassa and married a weaver of simple means, but later separated from him and now lives with her son in her father's house. She speaks some English and their home reflects their higher status. Her sister is married to a prominent minister and Amal's sister works for him and resides in his city home. Her cousin lives in New York, so family ties beyond the village are strong. Status here accrues to access to power as well as to economic position, and this gives Amal an enviable position in relation to her husband, who also does not have family backing in exerting his authority over her. Her economic independence adds to this situation. Men in the village often express a distrust of women who have independent incomes and say they do not need their husbands and will expel them if they are unhappy.

Her family position is also one of the reasons that she is able to be active in an independent wage-earning

occupation, because without her mother's or husband's cash or credit she could not purchase a sewing machine and other comforts which allow her sufficient time to devote to this work. Nevertheless, Nasr approves of her work because he feels she would otherwise be bored, with no animals to care for. Standards of cleanliness in this household are the highest we encountered in the village and both children are very clean and well fed. Amal and her husband both look strong, healthy, and of above average size.

Although Amal did not register at the public clinic she has had no trouble with either pregnancy; "they were so easy I did not have to go to a private doctor or to a hospital". In both cases the deliveries took place in her mother's home with the *daya* attending her and with her mother helping and caring for her afterward. During the second pregnancy she had some bleeding and felt tired and because she was worried she decided to attend a private physician for a checkup and to get vitamins. When her children are sick she always takes them to a private doctor. She does not have time to wait in the crowded public clinic and considers her time too precious for this, so prefers to pay the fee of 75 piasters and to receive immediate consultation so that she cannot be interrupted from her work.

Amal thinks that her present number of children is enough, especially if both parents are working and wish to educate and care for them properly. She feels that her productive role is very important and if she were to have many children she would be obliged to neglect her work, which would make her very sad. However, her husband thinks that two more children would be ideal. Amal feels that she should be the one to decide this issue since she is the one who has to do all the housework and shoulder all the burden of raising the children, taking on the additional household duties. Men contribute nothing but money to their care, she feels, and should "by no means" decide the number of children a wife will have. The high status of Amal's family and Nasr's poor position in relation to her because he is cut off from family backing combine to keep Nasr in an unfavourable bargaining position and his decision-making power is thus decreased in relation to hers. To date, it has been Amal's decisions which have been taken into consideration in this difference of opinion, a second source of family conflict.

Amal has heard about the pills, the loop, and the condom as contraceptive devices and she took the pills to space her pregnancies but is now under pressure from Nasr to stop. In her opinion the pills represent the safest device, as with a loop a woman may still become pregnant if the loop becomes misplaced and she is not prepared to take this risk. Amal said that the public clinic does nothing to help women who are practicing family planning, although it sells pills for 45 piasters per strip "with added vitamins". She is conscious that not everyone can afford this much. As she is in both cases obliged to pay for her medication, she thinks a private doctor costs the same as the clinic, as it also saves her work time.

Amal feels that university is important for girls as well as for boys in order that they feel "not less than anyone else". Education and especially a university certificate is her first priority for her children. She thinks it wrong to assume that girls are to be married and stay at home, but says it is "even more important" for girls to work. If she works before marriage and continues this after marriage her husband and in-laws will respect her more and will hesitate to criticise and offend her. She feels her daughter would not then be "overly obedient" to her husband in an exaggerated way as is often seen in couples where the woman needs financial support from her husband or is completely dependent upon him. Being independent, with her own source of income through work makes a woman feel psychologically good and the relationship with her husband becomes more free in the sense that she does not feel submissive. Amal wants to establish these values in the mind of her daughter.

Amal hopes that her children can have a better life than she has had. She is sorry she did not go to school or to university and was at times obliged to beg for financial assistance when her family was going through difficult times. She hates the feeling of having to ask for money even from her husband. She is very happy with her work, her parents, and her children, but regrets the conflict with her husband and feels she "does not owe him much respect" as she considers him egotistic and caring only for himself. He spends very little on their children and is very threatened by the fact that she is using her income to build a house of her own on a half kirat of land she

bought and registered in her name. She puts her earnings aside in a box each day so that she may begin building and works hard to save as much as she can, and this has become her primary aim.

However, this is not the only reason she works, as money is not a reward in itself. She would work "even if she were rich". Work makes her happy and satisfied and helps her to forget the world. It is a source of reward and equilibrium in her life. Thus, she avoids anything that makes her depart from working, such as having additional children.

Amal feels proud and happy that she is known in Kerdassa for her capacity to do neat work and in order to keep her high standards she purchases the best equipment to assist her. She has two types of sewing machines, each for specialised functions. She relies on her mother to help her a lot and to relieve her from the duties of child care and housework that would interrupt her, and her appliances also make this easier. She finds her roles as mother and producer the ones which are most rewarding and finds that her purchase rather than processing of food makes her feel nearer to city women and not like a "baladi" woman, which she does not want to be. She would have liked to live in Cairo, yet feels the bad housing conditions would have prevented her from living in a house as pleasant as the spacious one her family now occupies.

### Halima

Halima is a beautiful and respected young woman of 28 years. She is considered polite, uncomplaining, hardworking, and obedient, all highly valued traits in the village. Her husband Mustafa, who is 33, has been married to her for 11 years and works for the chief textile merchant in the village as a storekeeper. They occupy a very small house owned by the merchant which has only two rooms. Water is available from a pump next to the house, and she has electricity inside, but she must go the oven of her neighbor Hanim or bake her bread at the house of her father nearby.

Halima works very hard to keep her home and her children clean and tidy, always sweeping, washing the grass mat in the alley, and scrubbing clothes. This is a difficult task in this older area of town, but she succeeds admirably, and sanitation standards for her family are well above the usual.

Halima has barely recovered from a depression following the tragic accident last summer in which her five-year-old daughter was injured playing with fire and subsequently died. Two months later she lost an infant son, and she has lost another son in the past. Her three remaining children are very precious to her and she watches them very closely. Her two older sons, 12 and 10 years, are both in school and her daughter, Himat, can always be seen at her mother's side or in her arms. Her sons are unusually polite and well mannered for village boys, who are most often pesty and forward. The family is soft spoken and treats each other with respect. Mustafa is known to be a quiet, good man who cares a lot for his family. It is said that he was greatly loved by the father of the merchant he works for, and he has been employed by the family for a long time.

Before the accident Halima used to produce large quantities of hand embroidered "siwa" galabeyas for the merchant, usually finishing one each day. Cut-out galabeyas and yarn were supplied to her by the merchant and she was paid LE 2.50 for each one. During the past two years, however, the price for her labour fell drastically until now Halima only earns 60 PT for each galabeya, so she has reduced her production to one per week. Because her husband works for the leading merchant and because they live in a house which belongs to him Halima cannot embroider galabeyas for the other shops which might pay her a little more for her work.

The money she earns from sewing, which she does "when she is not busy in the house", goes "into her pocket", she says. Although she first claimed that she used all of it for household expenses and not for herself, she later admitted that if she could accumulate enough she purchased gold jewelry. Halima doesn't keep any animals and does not own any land, although her father owns 8 kirat. She does all the household maintenance and food preparation for her own family and she often helps her old neighbor next door, who has no female to help her



with her two grown sons and two grandchildren who usually stay with her. Halima tries to see that Hanim's water jar is filled and the floors are swept. When she uses Hanim's oven to bake her bread she gives some of the bread to Hanim.

The fathers of both Halima and Mustafa were weavers in the old area of the village. Halima's father had many looms producing shawls and headscarves, and he was a merchant as well as a producer. Mustafa's father was a versalia weaver of more simple means, but he was a good friend of her brother who helped to promote the marriage. Halima's brothers were mostly educated through secondary school and her sister finished secondary school, although she herself never went to school. Two brothers work outside the village and one brother still assists her father in weaving. Two other brothers are still in school. Mustafa had only five years of school, but, although his salary is not high, he makes more than some government employees in the village, and his work is regular and stable. Mustafa paid a bridewealth to Halima's parents of LE 100.

They are a nuclear family, yet reside near both natal families and interact much with them. Kinship links provide most of their relationships in life, including those of friendship, assistance, financing, and business. Halima is very sad that her sister is prevented by her mother-in-law from visiting with her, and feels this loss a lot as she has mostly brothers.

In all, Halima was pregnant nine times; she had three spontaneous abortions and three children died in accidents or through dehydration. The local *daya* attended her during her six deliveries and she trusts this *daya*, whom she knows well and who is a neighbor. Two of the abortions took place in the child care hospital in Cairo and the third abortion occurred at home with her neighbor/*daya* taking care of her. She had no problems with the abortion and has had no premature births. Halima had no medical supervision for her pregnancies and has never registered at the local clinic. She heard lots of advice from her neighbors and friends, but after the deaths of her three children she stopped taking their advice and also stopped administering "folk" treatments. She felt embarrassed to go to a male doctor for a consultation. However, after the good care she received during her abortion in the hospital in Cairo, she has decided that next time she is pregnant she will register at the Child Care Hospital there.

Halima refuses to answer the question "what is the ideal number of children you would like to have?" but continually invokes the name of God, saying "it is the will of God". She has never spoken with her husband about the ideal number of children they ought to have, but he is a religious man and is against family planning, saying that "one should not interfere with God's plan" and Halima would not like to sadden him. She has heard about the pill as a contraceptive device but has never thought to use it, especially now with the death of three babies, as she feels she is no longer young and would like to compensate for those that have died. Besides, she has heard that "all devices are bad".

She goes to the public clinic when she or one of her children is sick and was pleased that the examinations and medicine were free; now she has to pay for them. She would like it if they had a female doctor there as she feels it is against her religion to be examined by a man.

Education is more important for boys than for girls, Halima tells us, especially because university education helps boys to get a good job. A girl's education helps her more in terms of developing her personality as most girls stay home after they marry and look after husbands and children. Halima does not have great ambitions for her life, but wishes to please her husband and to raise those children she has well. Her main priority is to fulfill her role as wife and mother, teaching her children to be obedient, polite, quiet, tender and clean, values which she believes most important. They do, indeed, reflect this teaching, and bear out her avowal that they are the ones which she holds for her own life as well.

Although she is especially close to the old neighbor whom she helps with chores and who in turn assists her with her children, Halima generally prefers to do her household duties herself, without asking anyone for assistance. She wishes to stay at home most of the time, using her energy to serve her family rather than in visiting and chatting with other wives or family. She complains that her house gets very dusty because it is open

to the street and requires much work. She likes best baking bread and cooking because she thinks they require creative skills and not anyone can succeed in preparing a fine meal or good bread. Her own creative approach to these tasks shows a deep involvement in them. She enjoys having her own house and not having to share it with in-laws as this makes her feel more free and enjoy staying at home.

She feels fulfilled in her role as wife and mother and does not require much from her husband. The qualities most important to her are that he respect her, appreciate what she does for him, treat her well and does not beat her. He should spend his money on the house and the children. As he has these qualities she considers him an ideal husband. In return she respects him and obeys him and tries in every possible way to please him, not burdening him with demands which he cannot meet, especially for money.

She tries hard to economise, and used to raise chickens so she could sell them and their eggs. Her husband never asked her for this money, and if she needed it she used it for the household, otherwise investing it in gold. She would like to be involved in some activities which could bring her income from working at home, but would not consider working outside. Galabeya embroidery is no longer rewarding, but she would like something similar that she can do while watching television as she would prefer this to gossiping or chatting with neighbors. "It is better to be reserved and not to be interested in people or in talk, especially when it is directed to others". She may need money in the future for her children, as no one knows what the circumstances will be then. Meanwhile, she will not work outside as "a woman's choice should be for her house and children, first and last".

## Nagua

Family pictures attest to Nagua's former stunning beauty, although at 27 and after repeated pregnancies she is still slim and pretty. She has a positive but quiet attitude and a good natured disposition. Nagua and Hamed, who is 35, have been married 13 years and have four girls and a baby son, ranging from 10 to 1½. The girls have adopted their mother's confident air but they are cautious and quiet with strangers.

Nagua's new brick house is close to that of her mother-in-law and it is a cozy, roomy, and pleasant house. The small courtyard is walled in and so has an unusual amount of privacy as one must knock before entering from the street. There is electricity in the house but water must be carried from next door and Nagua does not yet have an oven so borrows one from her neighbour to bake bread weekly or twice weekly. She does have a washing machine, a radio, and two furnished bedrooms which double as sitting rooms. The family has no land and Nagua keeps no animals except chickens.

Nagua embroiders "siwa" design galabeyas for her husband, who runs a very active cottage industry in this dress which originated in Kerdassa, although it borrows designs from the oasis of Siwa. He uses female labour from the neighbourhood; both married and young unmarried women work for him, implementing his original designs, which he markets in Alexandria and in the tourist market in Cairo's Khan el Khalili. Hamed works in Cairo during the day as a mechanic and says he could get overtime by working afternoons in this business, but he prefers the designing which "suits his personality". It is obvious he enjoys this work as he takes a very artistic attitude towards it, spending much time to explain his pharoanic and customary local motifs. He likes to design garments that will appeal to a particular type of customer or to suit people that he knows. Hamed travels to Alexandria once a month to market his galabeyas, where he sells them for LE 5.50 and makes about LE 40 per month on this job after he pays the women for their sewing and subtracts for cloth and embroidery yarn. In Khan el Khalili he can only get LE 5 for the same galabeyas because of stiff competition from other local manufacturers and because merchants prefer inferior work if they can purchase it cheaper. In spite of this, they sell his galabeyas at a very high mark-up, sometimes for LE 15.

Hamed has trouble getting the local women to finish work on time. He supervises the work closely and if they have a problem they come to consult with him about it. He does not pay Nagua for her production, which she

thinks is alright because it is "all the same if she gets paid or not". In fact, she prides herself that she does not take money "as other women do", and anyway "it is all for the family". She knows that Hamed has no money nowadays because he has spent so much on the new house. She usually produces two galabeyas a week, which is not as many as she used to do before the increase of her family and the demands of so many small children. Sometimes if household problems come up she may only be able to make one galabeya in two weeks.

Nagua is considered by village informants to be a very hard worker and an obedient wife and good mother. Her natal family is of moderate means, but respectable, religious, and conservative. Her father, uncle, and cousin are builders. Hamed is criticised in the village because his relatives feel he does not live up to the highest standards of Islamic male behaviour and is not devoted to his family as much as he should be. We note some contradiction in this, as Hamed spends a good deal of time tutoring his daughters and has placed a blackboard in the *wist al bait* just for this purpose. He is very proud of the achievements of Manaal, 10, who excels in schoolwork and who is already very good at embroidery. She does some work for her father and a finer type of needlework for school projects. All their children of school age are in school and Nagla, who is 8, is "muhajiba", that is, she wears the conservative Islamic headcover which is encouraged by her teacher and supported by the family.

Nagua has no education and Hamed attended prep school. As a fringe benefit from the factory where he works the family vacationed in Alexandria. Both work very hard to increase the living standards of their family and they encourage their daughters to achieve in school, providing a home environment where this is possible. As Hamed earns about LE 40-50 per month on his regular job he is well paid by local standards. The bridewealth which he paid to Nagua's father was LE 200, a high rate for that time in comparison to amounts declared by other informants, if, indeed, these reflect real prices.

Nagua was married for three years before she got pregnant and although she was worried her husband objected to her going to see a gynecologist on religious grounds, advising her to "leave it to God's will". She respected his wishes, but when some neighbours advised her to put a large piece of wool near her vagina in order to keep it very warm, she tried this and has had five children in sequence with a natural space between each birth which she attributes to nursing. Although she experienced easy pregnancies with no complications, she did have some fatigue. She did not register at the public clinic and is very vociferous in her preference for the *daya*. The *daya*, she says, has much more "experience" than the doctor and this makes her much "better". At the beginning she used to be delivered at her mother's nearby house, but later she gave birth in her own home with her mother in attendance. Neighbours also assisted and helped to care for her afterwards.

Nagua feels that six children is quite enough but Hamed says this is "up to God". They would both like to have one more boy and then they would be very satisfied. She would have liked to have boys to start with rather than girls, but thinks this, too, is God's will. She has never used any contraceptive device, although she has heard about the pill, the loop, and the condom. It would make her husband very angry if she were to use any form of device as he thinks they are against God's will and so she accepts his wishes and obeys him.

When her husband is sick he can go to a doctor paid for by his company, but she and the children go to the public clinic except in very serious cases, when they go to the hospital. She complains that medicines are not always available but she likes the free consultations. She has heard about family planning devices from neighbours who told her that people visited their homes to make them aware, and they heard it on the radio. She believes that even if a woman wants to use contraceptives, it is the man who is the obstacle.

Nagua holds firm opinions about child-rearing. She tries to keep her children from playing in the street and teaches them to be obedient and clean and to stay near the house. She thinks girls should not be educated beyond preparatory school as they should not "be bothered with" trying to find a job. She prefers that her daughters stay at home, although she wants them to be educated enough to read and write, in case they need to read official certificates, letters from husbands who travel abroad, or things of this sort. She values university education for boys and hopes that her sons might become doctors or engineers.

As Nagua "sacrifices her entire life for her children" she believes they should do something in return for her and boys, especially, are obliged to help her financially when she needs it and when she gets old. She does not see any obligation for her daughters to do the same, as they will be financially dependent upon their families, and she hopes they will be content with their husband and house. If she needs money now, she asks her husband or borrows it from her brothers.

Nagua is happy with her own house and glad she does not have to live with her parents-in-law. She likes her husband very much and thinks that he likes her because she "doesn't make trouble with the neighbours or talk nonsense with them" but closes the door of her house and sits all day with her children. She enjoys household tasks like washing, sweeping, cooking, cleaning, washing up the children, baking bread and raising animals, and she does her tasks without assistance. Her greatest pride comes from seeing her children clean and this makes her husband proud of them and of her "in front of his family and the neighbours".

She usually embroiders galabeyas for 2-3 hours a day if she finishes her routine household and child-care tasks, and finds this satisfying in a number of ways. She likes to contribute her efforts to those of her husband, quoting the proverb, "two hands clap better than one", and finds her husband appreciates her and respects her more because of her contribution. Her production also saves the price of another worker who would have to be hired to do the work. With the money this saves they can spend on the house and on the children and provide more adequately for their needs. She also gets pleasure from the work itself, and "each time wishes to do better than the time before".

She thinks Hamed is a good man who spends his income on the house and children. If she had more money she would continue renewing the house and purchase more clothing for them and for herself. She raises chickens for use because it is also a saving and they are more nourishing than the ones she could purchase.

Both Nagua and her husband try to be good Muslims and she is very proud that her young daughter wears the *hijab*. She is grateful that Hamed shows his appreciation towards her in his kind manner, never making insulting remarks to her or beating her as many other men do. His treatment of her makes her satisfied and happy.

## Jihan

It took us some time after we met her husband to manage to speak with Jihan, who has adopted the conservative Islamic attire (*hijab*) and lifestyle and so is limited in her contact with strangers outside the family. We have chosen her for this reason and because she signifies a select few village women who are in a position to realise the cultural ideal, expressed to us by many cases and informants, not to work. No women works, they say, unless she has to. The fact that a woman works is an implicit acknowledgement that her husband cannot support her according to the patriarchal ideal, and neither husband nor wife desires this. As Jihan used to have a more prominent productive role in the past, we were interested in her attitudes towards work, as well.

Jihan has a secondary school certificate, rare in Kerdassa. This seems to have a correlation with being "*muhajiba*", perhaps because education raises the consciousness of this social choice. There are many different reasons why women in Egypt prefer to do this and neither their reasons nor their behaviour is identical. Jihan and her sisters have chosen to recede into the household rather than play an active role in teaching women or in serving the female community in a wider sense. This choice seems to be the more common one for conservative muslim women in Kerdassa, and as a phenomenon it is increasing. In a community where nearly all women dress "baladi" they are further set off by their nun-like garb.

Jihan is 21 and has been married to Suliman, 27, for three years. He is the son of her mother's brother and Jihan had only to move a few houses to the compound of her husband's family. She has one child, 1 year and four months, and is seven months pregnant with her second child. The family lives in a large nuclear unit at the edge of

his family compound, which is sumptuous by local standards, although small. There is electricity and water in the house, a butagas stove and a refrigerator. They have a television and an electric fan, a salon with gilded furniture, a coffee table and a carpet. The bedroom has a modern bed and wardrobe.

Adjoining the house is Suliman's busy tailor workshop, which employs him and two other full-time tailors, as well as two apprentices. One of these is a relative and one travels from the next village. All the men in Suliman's family are tailors. Suliman works mostly for the leading merchant, who is related to him, but as he owns his own machines and shop he is free to sell to other merchants if he wishes, although kinship ties inhibit this somewhat. He has just moved from a small shop in the village center to one adjoining the house, and he has the newest and most professional tailoring equipment in the village, including three Japanese heavy duty commercial sewing machines with large motors, cutting tables, etc. His layout is efficient for fast production, which is his speciality. The merchant supplies cloth and trimming and Suliman is paid for each galabeya he produces. He can finish and decorate a galabeya in 1 1/4 hours unless the power fails, which is a frequent problem. He is responsible for designing many of the new styles seen in local shops, but he can also copy those styles coming into the village from the city. Skills gained over a lifetime of learning in the family business have helped him to turn out work noted for its fine quality.

Jihan used to work about half of the day with Suliman, "helping" him to trim galabeyas with beads or sequins, or assisting "as she was needed", but "doesn't find much time to do this now" since the birth of her baby. Suliman did not teach her to do skilled jobs of cutting, sewing by machine, or finishing garments. Nowadays, she works actively inside the house, cleaning, washing, cooking, baking and caring for the baby. She appreciates the appliances which make her life easier, especially as she dislikes cleaning. She wants to raise chickens at home but there is not enough space, she thinks.

Jihan comes from a family which is considered "rich", and her mother, especially, is thought to be a strong and respected woman who has retained some status from her Turkish origins. All of her 6 married sisters are *muhajiba*, and one sister has completed a university degree but also stays at home. There is land on both sides of the family. Her husband's family has 8 feddans on which they raise dates and fruit. His brothers share the use of a donkey. Suliman has a *diploma machina* from the technical high school, and a younger brother has just completed secretarial training, but works as a tailor of men's trousers in his spare time. He is building a new house adjoining Jihan's and says when it is finished "any woman will come" and he can then marry. Jihan's brothers have good jobs both in and outside the village. When Jihan and Suliman became engaged he gave her LE 300 in gold, and at their marriage she received LE 1000 in bridewealth.

Jihan did not get pregnant for 1 1/2 years after marriage, and this worried her very much. She went to a gynecologist who performed minor surgery which allowed her to become pregnant quickly. Her actual number of children coincides with her pregnancies. She did not intend to become pregnant immediately after her first baby, and thought she could not as she was nursing. However, she now feels very happy to be pregnant again and is looking forward to the new baby.

Her first delivery was very difficult. The daya in attendance asked the family to call a doctor when she found the case "delicate", so the husband of one of her sisters was summoned to assist her delivery. It was not a premature birth. She did not register at the public clinic and did not have a pre-natal check during her first pregnancy, but she thinks that delivery may have been difficult because of her failure to have medical care, so is under the supervision of a private doctor for this pregnancy. When anyone in her family becomes sick they go to a private doctor, often her brother-in-law.

Jihan would like to have "only" three or four children as she wants to educate them and because life is becoming very expensive. Suliman is very "busy" and "does not have time to discuss such matters" with her, although they did agree on this while they were engaged. She has heard about the pills, the loop, and the condom. In the future when she has had all the children she wants, she plans to use the loop, as she feels the pill are bad for one's health and make a woman very fat. Her husband told her that family planning was her responsibility and not

his. She never went to the public clinic because she can afford a private doctor, but says that nothing is done to educate women about family planning. Women spread false rumours to one another, which she thinks is bad, or prescribe folk treatments. Although she believes girls are affectionate and tender, she would like to have at least one boy to carry on his father's name.

She regrets that she wasn't able to attend a university as her sister did because her parents "married her". She would like her daughter to be well educated through university level in order to fulfill what she was not able to do herself. However, she does not see a university degree as a tool to obtaining work outside the house, which she feels is inappropriate for women. She thinks that Islam does not encourage women to seek work outside their homes and that they cannot properly fulfill household responsibilities if they work outside as this makes too many demands on her. This is especially true if a woman has children and a house to care for. Rather, a university degree gives a woman personality and increased knowledge which makes her respected among others and which enables her to discuss many issues with her husband and his acquaintances. This makes a husband feel proud of his wife.

Jihan thinks that children are the greatest support in one's life. She confides everything to her mother and hopes her daughter will do the same. If God gives her a boy she would like him to marry and live in the house with her. "Of course a mother should rely on her sons when she gets old. This is the least they can do in return for what she has done for them." Boys are important, she says, although they are less affectionate than girls, because they carry their father's name and can inherit, which "girls cannot do according to Islamic Law". We especially note this misinterpretation of law and suspect this is because local practice often contradicts law in inheritance.

Jihan likes to cook, and this is the only household task she finds rewarding. She worries because her husband works very hard and very long hours, and likes to be sure that he eats well. She appreciates that he never scolds her, although she sometimes neglects the house now because she feels tired. He treats her with great respect and gives her considerable freedom, she thinks, such as allowing her to decide what they will eat. She is glad she has a separate residence and doesn't live within the household of her in-laws. She thinks her husband agrees that they can now afford to have her devote her time to looking after the baby and the house as he can hire workers for the shop. She does not believe that a husband respects or appreciates a wife because she assists him in his work, but only because she is a good wife who is obedient, educated, and cares for him. She herself does not value work beyond housework at all, but is content and fulfilled in her roles as wife and mother. Her family position and "wealth" and her ability to decrease her workload with appliances contribute further to her feeling of pride and contentment. She does not wish for more than this. We note that her pregnancies have improved her formerly tenuous position within the extended family, and this will be even more secure if her next birth produces a son.

### Samira

Samira came to Kerdassa just five years ago when she married Abdel Latif, who is a prominent weaver of tapestries. She is 25 now and has three daughters, 4, 3, and 1½. Abdel Latif is also from outside the village but came here as a teenager from Sharkeya province to work in the new tourist industry. Neither one has relatives in Kerdassa, which places them in a somewhat different position from other case studies.

Samira lives in an old workshop which is owned by the leading merchant, which contains 6 tapestry looms on the first floor and a bedroom for apprentices. Two new rooms have been added to the large, flat roof, where the family resides. There is water and electricity in the house although she must carry water upstairs. Samira complains a great deal because of the dangerous conditions under which she lives. There is no rail around the roof, and she must watch her small daughters each minute to be sure they do not venture too near the edge. This adds a constant worry and restricts her movements greatly. There is an oven in the house, but she buys her

bread. She has a butagas stove and a washing machine. She keeps no animals or fowl, and her family has no land.

Samira did not go to school, but Abdel Latif had 8 years of education. His father and grandfather before him were weavers in Sharkeya and he learned to weave kelim rugs and tapestries as an apprentice to his father. His identity is very closely aligned with his work, which he loves, and he says he was born under a loom in the wool, and this work is "his soul". Although the house and looms are owned by the merchant, Abdel Latif runs it and is responsible for teaching and recruiting weavers, as well as for weaving himself. He works between 7 and 10 hours daily and dyes most of the wool used in his shop. He considers himself an artistic weaver and is proud of the fact that he uses only Egyptian materials. Five workers live and work in the house. One is an unmarried brother, and two are apprentices between 12 and 15, who are, he says, "better than sons". Even when he is smoking his water pipe and visiting, he gets up and down to check looms and the progress of the weavers, or to begin a new design. As they are paid per square metre of production they have an incentive to work quickly. In this shop production is very high and may reach  $5\frac{1}{4}$  square meters per month per worker (average is 2 square meters). Prices are negotiated for each piece according to quality of design and finish, and each carpet is carefully assessed by the merchant who discusses each color or change with Abdel Latif. In this way they decide what future products should be ordered.

As Abdel Latif controls six of the approximately 15 tapestry looms in the village, this puts him in a prominent place in this industry, for which the village is noted, and so he makes an above average wage. All material inputs, including loom warping, which is done by a specialist, are supplied by the merchant. Designs and quality of the shop vary from rather poor to very good, depending on the skill of the weaver and his experience, but the large tapestries produced by Abdel Latif himself may sell for more than LE 60 per square meter, and he gets paid about LE 35 per meter for his work. He can execute very good designs of his own, but also copies those of the Haraneyya School, which sell very well. He groups designs into two categories: "faroni" (pharaonic) or "fellah" (farmer) styles.

Although Samira does not weave or dye yarn, she cooks, cleans, and washes for all the workers of the workshop besides her own family. She must serve lunch and dinner and includes additional day workers which may be there. She also runs up and down with tea as they wish. She would like very much to have a house of her own and a safer place for her children, and she pushes Abdel Latif to work very hard to make money for this. If he takes time off she is apt to be grouchy with him. As she is from the outskirts of Cairo, her appearance and aims are slightly different from many village women and rather coincide with her urban upbringing. She does not wear a *tarha* but only ties her hair up in a scarf, and she wears a more urbanised, though still "baladi" style of clothing.

Samira is not looking for work which will pay her a cash income, although she has mentioned that she would like the money. The burdens placed upon her in the household and workshop prevent this. The actual number of her children coincides with the total number of pregnancies. She went to her mother's home in the city for her deliveries, but gave conflicting evidence to the two researchers about who was in attendance. She told the researcher that she was attended by a doctor, but at other times said that a *daya* delivered her. She said she was afraid to deliver in Kerdassa because she has no relatives there. Her husband commuted back and forth to Kerdassa from her mother's during this time. She attended a clinic in Imbaba for her first pregnancy but found this too difficult with the second and third because she had no one to watch the children and had to bring them with her. Neighbours in Kerdassa only help her if she is ill. She does not attend the local clinic, preferring to go to a private doctor as she must pay for medication either way. Her husband encouraged her to see a doctor during her pregnancies, even though the visits cost LE 1 each.

She has heard of the pill and the loop as contraceptive devices, but in her opinion pills are the safest, cheapest, and most reliable method. Samira had worked hard to convince her husband that she should take pills for a short period in order to have time to nurse her baby properly, but she wonders if she is now pregnant again. She is feeling very tired all the time and does not look well. Nevertheless, she had ceased taking the pills under pressure from her husband, who would like to have a son. She would also like a son, but says "I am the one to get

tired in the house with the children, not him". When she last talked to us she seemed very dejected.

She heard about family planning from the radio and from relatives and neighbours in the city. She complains that she has trouble finding the kind of pills she is used to and has to change types all the time, which causes her to feel dizzy. She prefers the more expensive pills which are 45 piasters for a month's supply. "The government should help us in using contraceptive methods and not discourage us", she said.

Samira does not think it is important for her daughters to work when they are grown, but would prefer that they are educated and knowledgeable so that they could make this choice themselves. If they had a university degree, they could increase their choice of areas to live in, whether urban or rural, and this would improve their ability to make other choices in their lives. No one can predict the future, she feels, and sometime they may need to work. Education, she says, should not differ between boys and girls as they both have to struggle to earn a living nowadays. She regrets a great deal that she has not been to school. If she were educated, she says, she would have married a richer man and a man with a fixed income. It annoys her to think that her husband does not have a stable position, but must earn his living "day by day". He forgets about money sometimes, and she has to remind him about it now and then. She appreciates his other good qualities, like his affectionate attitude towards her and his daughters, and the way he reacts when she encourages him or helps him with his work. "When he sees that I am helping him he is so happy that he never refuses me anything. He buys me clothes and gold."

Samira feels she is different in many ways from the village women and she likes this. She rarely has contact with neighbours here. She enjoys the advantages that her nuclear residence gives her away from her in-laws, yet wishes her mother lived closer, as she has little free time and only gets to see her every few months. She also complains that her husband's constant presence at home puts strain on her because she feels she has to keep up an appearance of being always active in front of him. Up to the present she has felt that the best way to raise the living standards for her family is by helping her husband and by encouraging him to work hard. She does not know what she could do to raise additional cash, and she disdains women who sell in the market. She asked us for advice in this respect.

Abdel Latif has had difficulties in the past when he tried to take on outside work to earn more money and recently almost lost his job because of this. As we left he had taken on the responsibility for his employer of an additional workshop and had travelled to recruit new apprentices.

In spite of the conflict between what Samira wants and what she has, this is not reflected in her relationship with her husband, which is still an openly affectionate one. Yet she feels the pressure from this source of conflict and wishes to improve her life and to fulfill her own ambitions more effectively, but she does not know how to do this.

### Nasara

Nasara is a small, pretty woman who appears much older than her 23 years. Although she looks very tired, she always greets us with a big smile and is ready to chat and prepare tea for us. Her hearty laugh thinly conceals her deeper worries and exhaustion, yet she displays the valued traits of reserve about family problems and does not complain to us. She was chosen as a case study because she is representative of many women in lower income families in Kerdassa who are employed in subsistence crafts. We can also see in her life another example of cross-generational change for traditional craftsmen. Life is difficult for women like Nasara who need money but are unable to seek work outside the household because of social and family obligations and because they lack education and skills.

been married 10 years and have three children, two girls and a boy. Her baby daughter is still being nursed and carried about. This family is locally called a "simple" family, which means that neither parents come from families who own property or who are skilled. They live in the old village in a one-room house with an additional



tiny sleeping room. The old house was rebuilt with fired brick and cement and has electricity, but water must be carried a considerable distance, mostly up an incline. Nasara makes frequent trips to do this herself as she lacks grown daughters or relatives who can assist her. The house has a clay oven, where she makes all their bread. She has no animals or fowl, except for one duck.

Both Nasara and Mohamed are from the village and neither has attended school. The two children who are old enough are both in school or kindergarten and the couple works very hard to give their family a better life. Mohamed's father was a cotton and versalia weaver and he learned this craft when he was very young, but because of low wages and decline in the weaving industry, he went to work for a mat maker when he was 8. Mohamed now runs a small workshop in the main room of his home where he employs three other workers, two adult men and one young boy. He works 10–12 hours daily seven days a week on the huge floor loom. Three large mats are produced each day which sell for LE 6 each, and special mats may be made to order. Both the red and green dye used for designs and the reeds (*samar*) are obtained from Fayum by truck, which is rented for LE 40 for the day. About 4,000 *fas* or bunches are bought at a time for LE 400 (10 piasters each). Finished mats are marketed from the house as Mohamed prefers to work on market day.

Nasara is not directly involved in weaving mats, although she assists with preparing the reeds, as does her daughter, 7, and an 8 year-old niece who lives next door. She must live in and around the work of her husband, climbing over the loom which occupies the entire main room of the house. She also has to clean up the dust and debris which is everywhere and prepare tea and food for the workers. She has almost no privacy because of the presence of workers in the house and because the door opens directly onto the narrow and busy street.

Nasara married into the household of her husband's parents and continued to care for his mother after his father died. His mother had severe nervous problems and after she died Nasara's own mother came to live with them. She, too, has nervous problems. Because of this and because of the burden placed upon Mohamed by the death of his only brother recently from cancer, the family is considered to be unlucky as well as poor. Responsibility for the wife and five children of his brother has fallen on Mohamed, who is respected as a hard worker and a good family man.

Nasara does not seem to be able to take much responsibility and does not participate in any cash-raising activities. Her husband's production, however, depends upon her preparation of reeds for the looms, and while the younger girls are in school she must do this. She tries to see that her daughter and son attend school regularly, which is not easy, as she has no family available to assist her, and her mother is no longer able to help much. Hasira mats are used by all local inhabitants, yet there is severe competition between the four local producers and increasingly from important plastic imitations which are popular because they wear longer and wash easier, although they are not as comfortable or suited to the environment. The family owns no land and has no access to food staples which Nasara might process. This strains the budget of the single wage earner.

Because grass mat weaving demands some skill, Mohamed must take a long time to train his apprentices, who are not related to him. He has no unpaid family labour available except in preparing reeds as his son is not yet old enough to work. Women do not do mat weaving in Egypt. As the prices for mats are highly standardised they do not rise at the same rate as the cost of food and goods which this family must purchase. Although they live without luxuries and have no radio or TV, their life becomes increasingly pressured. The cramped living quarters accentuate all Nasara's problems.

We have not been able to explain the unusually high brideprice which Mohamed paid to Nasara's family (LE 150) considering the financial conditions of both families.

In all, Nasara has had seven pregnancies, including two spontaneous abortions and two babies who died before reaching one month from diarrhea. The *daya* attended her in her own house for five of her deliveries, which were very easy. She did register at the clinic and had a pre-natal checkup. She explained that she must make a quick recovery after birth in order to look after the other children as there is no one to help her, but more importantly in order to help her husband earn his living. While repeated pregnancies exhaust her and "take away

her energy", she feels obliged to continue having children to provide labour to help her husband. After seven pregnancies she feels her health is affected and every effort tires her. The two abortions were very difficult with heavy bleeding which she could not stop, so she went to a hospital in Cairo to receive care.

When she or her children feel sick she goes to the public clinic, a private doctor, or to a public hospital in Cairo depending upon the availability of money and the seriousness of the case. The only contraceptive she has heard about is the pill but she has heard it causes bleeding. She used these herself for a short period after her abortions but experienced heavy bleeding at that time, so now leaves everything "in God's hands", saying that "God knows the situation and we have to follow his will in everything". She feels that she does not have enough energy to have any more children and does not want more but is afraid of using other contraceptive devices which she knows nothing about as neighbours told her they affect women's health. Since the added responsibility for his brother's children her husband does not want more children and so told her to "do something" so she will not get pregnant. She says she has received no advice concerning family planning methods from the public clinic, where they only sell pills but do not consult on the problem. She hears people discuss family planning when she listens to the radio each morning. She believes she is not able to get pregnant now because she is nursing her baby daughter, but does not know what she will do when she stops.

Nasara wants her children to attend school because she knows that education brings them prestige and increases their probabilities of finding a good job. Sons should be "fully educated" — "I want to see him with the highest certificate possible", she says. As for her daughters, she thinks it is enough for them to complete preparatory school education (8 years), which is "more than enough" as they "will have to await an early marriage like me". She approves of early marriage for girls because she fears that if they do not they may be thought "wicked, ugly, or incapable of housework ability" and bad rumours will be spread about them. Yet she does not want them to be "ignorant".

She thinks that her husband's work is unhealthy and would not like her son to be a *hoosari*. She hastens to add that this was not his original profession or the one he inherited from his father. Besides exhausting him, it does not pay much and she would have "dreamed" to marry a man with another profession. What can she do now, she says, and believes this is God's will and her fate, and she must comply with it.

She complains that the many responsibilities "thrown on her back" exhaust her, and that the straw is everywhere and impossible to keep cleaned up. Her husband scolds her all the time for her inability to keep the house and the children clean. She does not pay much attention to their appearance, or to her own. We noted that the diet in this household is very poor and think she may also suffer from severe dietary insufficiency, which may increase if they must bear all responsibility for five more children. At this time, she does cook for them often. She hates helping her husband with his work, although he is always urging her to do this, as it means she must interrupt her other household chores. She envies women who sell goods in the market and get to keep the money, as her husband does not pay her for her work. She wishes she could be involved in something that would bring her money, but thinks her husband would beat her if she tried to do something like this, as he feels it brings shame on him if others see that his wife must work. Then people would think they were poor and he could not support them. Nasara feels she is allowed no decision-making power in the household, but that her husband decides everything. Despite all her problems she tries to accept her *nassib*, or her share in life, but she hopes that the *nassib* of her daughter will be a much better one and that she will marry a "richer" man.

### Maryam

Maryam attracted us immediately because of her warmth and the serenity which she exudes. Although one could say she has a marked fatalistic attitude to life, she also seems to have a strong sense of self-esteem and a contentment with life which is reflected in her whole family. She has a very strong productive and marketing role and shares the family business of basketmaking with her husband, Farag. Both parents came from Kerdassa,

and Farag is Maryam's "ibn khalti", the son of her mother's sister. After 22 years of marriage they have six living children, 3 boys and 3 girls. Maryam married at twelve and has had 15 pregnancies, but these statistics have not dimmed the spirit of this small, thin, but still attractive woman of 34.

When not marketing she can always be found at home making baskets, usually on the sunny roof where the family congregates to work together. She and Farag and her older daughter, 16, are engaged in the manufacture of *sabbat* and *mishana* baskets, popular as shopping baskets in the village and in the city. Ghab, a plant like bamboo, is purchased from Sharkeya province for about LE 30-50 per truckload for the *sabbat*, depending upon seasonal fluctuations. Baskets from ghab are of two sizes and sell for between 50 piasters and LE 1.50. The *mishana* is a round-bottom basket made from henna sticks. It is widely used locally and prices for these baskets are between 30 and 80 piasters, but Farag is the only one who makes the *mishana* because the sticks are very hard on the hands. Henna sticks also come from Sharkeya and cost LE 15 per load.

Maryam and Farag market together, travelling with their donkey cart to the weekly *suq* in their own town and to the market cycle of surrounding towns. Maryam denied seasonality in this craft but our observations over a year's time showed that her busy season is during the fall date harvest when she must market six days each week. The rest of the year she travels to market about twice a week. Marketing is a time consuming task which takes from just after breakfast until three or four in the afternoon, so Sabaah, 16, must take over all household and child-care tasks during this time, and she does this with considerable skill. Maryam does not feel she can take the baby with her to market, as many women do, so she also leaves him in charge of Sabaah, who feeds him with a bottle.

The nuclear household is located near the edge of town and has been newly rebuilt. Like many village houses, it appears to be in the process of being built, partly due to the high cost of building materials and because it has to adapt to changing family needs. There are three rooms on the ground floor and the oven is on the roof. There is electricity and water is carried from across the street. Neither family owns land, and they have no TV. Besides the donkey, they raise only chickens.

Maryam never went to school and only two of her six children attend school. Her older son greeted me in English as he returned from preparatory school. Her daughter who is 8 has had 3 years of primary school.

Despite the fact that they work together, Farag handles all the money, which she thinks is alright because she says he needs it for their family. She says his job is hard, and admits her own is similarly so. When Maryam's father died "leaving nothing" except his house, Maryam used her share from its sale to help her husband build their new home. She received her inheritance because she has only one surviving brother. She is considered an ideal wife in local terms for this act of confidence and generosity as it is known that she did not need to do this, and most women keep their property separate. She is also admired for her obedience to her husband and for her hard work.

Maryam and Farag must work long hours each day just to make money to provide basic necessities, and they have almost no surviving family on which to rely in hard times. When she married Farag her brideprice was LE 40. When she was first married she had not begun her periods but after they started she was pregnant nearly every year. Seven babies have died shortly after birth and she has had two spontaneous abortions. She never considered limiting the size of her family.

All Maryam's children were delivered at home by the local *daya*. Some of those who died were healthy upon arrival but on the seventh day after birth (the '*sebou*') they died. She did not know the reason, but the *daya* and some other people told her that this must be the result of the "evil eye". She was unable to nurse so chose an expensive brand of powdered milk. We have wondered if there is a link between bottle feeding and the high infant mortality rate in this family. Maryam was convinced after several deaths that it was the result of the "evil eye", so she did not buy new clothes for the arrival of her next babies but dressed them in very old ones and put a charm (*hegab*) and other objects on the baby to help ward off the "evil eye". When she did this her babies began to survive.

Both Maryam's parents died when she was young. Her mother died in a public hospital, so when she was five months pregnant and began to bleed strongly and was transferred to a public hospital in Cairo for a "D and C" to complete the abortion, she believed that she, too, was going to die like her mother.

On the whole, her deliveries were very easy. She does not have the money to go to a private doctor and if her children are ill on marketing days they must wait until she returns before she can take them for care. This is necessary, she says, as the market income is needed each day just for food. "What can you do", she adds. She finds the public clinic "useless", and usually asks the pharmacist about a sickness and buys whatever he recommends without consulting a doctor. She says that "anyway it is done this way in the public clinic as the doctor does not examine the patient".

She feels very tired from so many pregnancies and she knows they drain her health but believes that "it is God who will decide" if she will get pregnant again. Her husband does not think that poverty and a large family are related but believes each child brings his "rizk" (prosperity) and one should not interfere with this *rizk*. He also thinks that "it is God who must decide". He wants many children as the more he has the more rich and powerful he will feel. While Maryam respects her husband's opinion she prays to God to stop giving her children. She has heard about the pill and the loop but believes the pill because bleeding and the loop may cut the womb, so they are both bad. She learned this from the experience of her neighbours.

Maryam does not want her daughters to go to school, believing both lower and university education are inadvisable for them. She thinks a girl's place is at home and what they learn at school is not helpful to their real lives. Sometimes they learn "poisonous" ideas such as freedom, she says. They think they should not do anything in the house then. Besides, this may be bad for the reputation of the girl as she is seen out of the house all the time and she will be gossiped about and criticised by the community. This may prevent her from finding a suitable husband. She adds, "What is the importance of a school education for a girl if anyway she will be married and be obliged to be confined to the house?".

As for boys, she feels they should complete their education, and if God allows, might even enter university and obtain a degree. A boy is different than a girl as he must bring money home to support his family and for this he must find a good job. She wishes her boys to be government employees so they would have fixed salaries each month and because it is clean and respectable work. She does not want them to take over their father's work as a basket maker because it is too tiring and one has to work too hard for very small economic reward. She would like her daughters to marry government employees, too, and especially hopes they will not marry a peasant (*fellah*) and be in her position, tired all their lives. She wants her daughters to be able to stay at home, just raising children and not being forced to help their husbands in their work.

She expects financial assistance from her sons when they are grown and when she becomes older. "Of course it is their duty to assist their mother financially, otherwise why did I worry so much about giving them a good education." She does not expect the same of her daughters as their money will be in the hands of their husbands. Now she has to ask neighbours to help her if she needs money.

Maryam likes her husband and tries to treat him with respect, as he treats her. He says she has "a heart of gold" and because she is an orphan and has no one but him he must be nice to her. She feels it is her duty to help him in his work, and this way she saves the expense of workers which they would have to hire to do this work. She says she only works because she has to, and if she paid workers she would have even less to live on. Carrying baskets to nearby villages along the dusty and difficult roads is not easy and exhausts her. Although she considers Farag a good family head, caring for his house and children foremost and not spending his leisure outside the house, she wishes she had not married a basket maker. She sees life as a continuous struggle. She tries to be an understanding wife, hardly asking him for anything, even when she wishes for a new dress or clothes for the children. Her aims are modest, simply to raise her children and to feed them properly. Sometimes she is glad that they do not have many relatives, as this makes her closer to Farag "and their hearts compassionate upon each other".

Maryam acknowledges the heavy household and child-care role Sabaah carries and knows if it were not for her she could not work so much, because the other children are very young. She worries about what she would do if Sabaah should marry and leave her. "Her other sisters will have to take over" Maryam says with her usual accepting smile.

We see no conflict in Maryam's life despite all its difficulties. Her deep religious faith has assisted her to overcome all her worries and troubles, and she modestly finds pleasure in "accepting God's plans".

## Nafisa

Nafisa is the daughter of one of the five brothers responsible for so many changes in the weaving industry in Kerdassa and who were the main organisers of weaving during the present century. Her father is very old now, perhaps 85, and is no longer active in the trade to Sudan, Chad, and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, although he still maintains an office in the center of the old Bazaar in Cairo. Her father had three wives, and Nafisa is a daughter of his second wife, who has been separated from him for a considerable time. Her mother lives in the village with one married son.

The status of the family as a whole is very high, both because of their important role as merchants and weavers in the past and because her cousin operates the largest and most lucrative tourist trade in textiles in the village. A number of her father's children have gone to work for this cousin, while others have dispersed into other occupations. Nafisa's marriage to a basket maker must have been a difficult thing for her, as merchants generally disdain manual labour here. She is now 39 and has been married to her husband for 28 years. She has almost no contact with most of the members of her father's family and has no claims for assistance on him. Her marriage choice may have been limited by the separation or divorce, but at any rate, her husband is considered greatly beneath the status of the family of her father.

Nafisa lives in an extended family with her husband and five children, 17 years to 5 months. Her oldest daughter, 17, has returned to the house of her father with her one-year-old son after her divorce, a practice rather uncommon in the village as a whole but somewhat a pattern in this family. Daughters are not always welcomed back when they have trouble with their husbands, especially on a permanent basis. Nafisa expresses disappointment that her daughter married young rather than finishing school. A fourteen-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter are in school now. Neither parent has been to school.

The family lives in a modest home amongst a cluster of *khoos* workers and merchants. There is both electricity and running water in the house, along with a TV and an oven. Nafisa cares for the donkey they use in their marketing and raises chickens in the house. Farag's father owned a reasonable amount of land, but because he had so many brothers it was subdivided into small portions and he has only 11 kirat now. He lets this land out "b'nuss" (by half), the most common customary arrangement for sharecropping, although in this case he supplies fertiliser and so collects more than half of the crop or sale price. As joint reckonings are no longer the custom, he has trouble knowing precisely what the crop yields are.

Farag comes from three generations of *maktaf* craftsmen (*khawass*). He specialises in only two of the many local products made from palm leaf, a two-handled carrying basket and a donkey-carrying basket which comes in pairs. He works at home, employing one young male worker to help him. Nafisa performs three of the four processes in basket making, but is considered only a "helper", although his production depends upon the rate of her work. Although the only process which she does not do is sewing up the braided strips, she is not considered by the community to be a craftsman as is her husband. Even where heads of households are women who may have taken over a family craft business they are not referred to by an occupational title but may be said to be assisting a son, brother, etc.

Twice a week Farag markets his products, taking his donkey cart to the village market or to those in

surrounding villages. He must compete with the merchants in his village, some of whom have extensive cottage industries in *khoos* products. Nafisa has denied that she accompanies him to market, but we have seen her there. However, she does not travel to the surrounding villages with him.

The brideprice paid by Farag for Nafisa was LE 70, which may be compared with that of her daughter, which was LE 700. Nafisa was married at the age of eleven and has had twelve pregnancies. Seven babies died before reaching the age of one month and she had no spontaneous abortions. Besides her mother and neighbours, a *daya* always attended her deliveries, which were very difficult. When her daughter gave birth the *daya* also attended, but because complications arose a doctor was summoned and she was eventually moved to a hospital for delivery.

Nafisa does not like going to the public clinic as she feels they give no care to patients and do not give out any medication. During her first two pregnancies she was registered at the public clinic but decided it was useless and so stopped attending after that. She thinks the number of children she has is enough. At the moment she is nursing her baby and in the past she has always become pregnant once she stops nursing, so this time she intends to have a loop inserted. She has discussed this with her husband and he agreed as he can see her health is not good. She thinks that pills affect the health and therefore the loop is better. Like "everyone", she says, she has heard of family planning from the radio.

Nafisa is very explicit about her regret that she did not give her eldest daughter an education and that she "married her" very young. She says with sorrow, "Look, here is the result. She has had very bad luck and if she didn't have her father's home to return to what would be her future without any education or work?" The constant reminder of this "bad example" reinforces Nafisa's goal to educate both her remaining sons and her daughters. She wants to give them education which will be useful and directs a lot of her energy to this goal. "This is enough", she says, "let us not repeat the tragedy." Besides the radical change in Nafisa's attitudes toward education, she now thinks it might be useful for girls to work so they would not be dependent on others for financial support.

Nafisa wants her children to realize things which were impossible for her. Although she thinks her husband a good-hearted fellow who cares for her and fills her needs, she would have preferred to marry a government employee so she would not have had to work so hard for such little reward. She wants her daughters to marry government workers and believes their lives would then be better than hers. At the same time, she realises her position as the daughter of a respected merchant has given her certain privileges that other women do not have. As one would expect in this instance, her husband trusts her and gives her responsibilities. He sees she is honest and manages the household well, and does not let his children want for anything, and so he lets her decide what to do with the household budget.

She says she is not really able to think whether her life with her husband has been "fulfilling" or not. It is too late now to think this way as she is old now, she feels, and her *nassib* (fate) has been fulfilled. She would have preferred not to marry so young so she would first have understood life better and perhaps then have had the courage to refuse. She thinks this even though he is "worth marrying" and treats her very well.

Nafisa gets the greatest pleasure in raising and caring for children. She would have liked very much to have been allowed to stay at home just to do this and not to be forced to have the responsibility of helping her husband with all the stages of work, as she must do now. She knows that this is her duty and she tries to do it well, and is grateful she does not have to prepare meals or tea for workers. When they do have workers they "must manage on their own". Nafisa's divorced daughter does most of the work inside the household, such as cooking and cleaning, and helping care for the younger children.

Nafisa's acceptance of a life which is not one which she would have preferred and which she finds beneath expectations, given her family standing, gives her a modicum of peace and minimises any conflict which might otherwise be present.

## Hamida

The household of the traditional blacksmith (*hadaad*) is an interesting one both because it is a polygamous one and because it is part of an endogamous clan. The living conditions of this family are the harshest in our study and the productive role of women the heaviest. The house, which is an ancient structure very little of which is left standing, lies at the outskirts of the village just before the date palm grove. The family lives mostly outdoors, little protected from either sun or cold. These "traditional" blacksmiths are somewhat separated from the community and intermarry with other blacksmith families who are related and who live either locally or in adjoining villages. Apprentices are also sought from the family rather than from outside, thus endogamy is occupation-related. The community acknowledges the important service the blacksmith provides to farmers and householders, making and repairing essential tools and furnishings, and they are the only craft that we know of recounted in local myth.

Hamida is 40 and has been married to Orini, 45, for ten years, and is the mother of one three-year-old son. She is his second wife, her co-wife having borne four children. Besides the two wives and their children, the joint household contains an orphaned son of an uncle, 12. One married daughter has moved away. There is electricity in the house but no water and no oven. Water must be brought from the blacksmith family across the street, to whom they are related, and they use the oven of other neighbours. The women keep many animals, presently four goats, two sheep, and two calves. Hamida married into this household from a village some distance away, where she claims to be a daughter of Orini's grandfather.

Hamida's productive role is extraordinary in Egypt, where men do so many tasks in crafts which are reserved for females in other countries (e.g. spinning). Anywhere in the world, smithing is rarely part of women's work. Both of Orini's wives actually swing hammers along with men in order to pound hot iron into shape. Women also operate the bellows, while other males carry out the more skilled tasks and maintain the fire. Orini is presently training his nephew and an older son to do this work. Because it takes a long time to train a blacksmith and because they do not wish to share their "secrets" with non-relatives, apprentices are not taken from outside the family. Occupational title here adheres to the family as a group, including female members. All are called *hadad* or *hadadeen* (pl).

Actual firing and production is done for three or four hours daily. Coal is purchased from a market center at the edge of the city and transported by rented truck or bicycle. If they run out they cannot work until someone fetches coal, and they sometimes have to work evenings to make up for this. Some products are manufactured from scrap which customers bring and some are made from scrap which they have. Although the co-wives claim to share all tasks, we note that Hamida goes to market while her co-wife carries a heavier load of cooking, laundry and domestic tasks. Before her recent operation Hamida used to sell in the village streets, walking about to hawk wares and travelling to surrounding villages, but she is now limited to selling in the weekly *suq*.

No one in the family has attended school and this is considered customary, although an uncle's son is in school and they are very proud that he is the best student in his class. Informants tell us that in spite of the difficult nature of the work it is not difficult for these smiths to obtain wives, as the work is considered essential to the village. We have no information on how many wives are recruited outside the family.

The brideprice paid for Hamida was LE 30, and Orini had paid LE 10 for his first wife. It is reasonable to believe that she was taken as a second wife for her working potential. Both wives look older than their years, tired, and dirty. Hamida had two sets of twins, but both deliveries were difficult and all babies died. She sought medical advice for the first time after she lost her second twins and a goiter operation was recommended. After this was performed her present, healthy son was born. Her deliveries were all at home attended by a *daya* prior to the last, which was in a public hospital in Giza. The difficult work may lead to lowered fertility in this case or to spontaneous abortion. Inadequate diet may also lower fertility. Sanitary standards in what remains of the household structure are very low.

Neither woman has registered at the public clinic and all the co-wives' children were also delivered by the *daya*. When children are ill are taken them to the clinic, as since the co-wives cannot afford a private doctor or even a public hospital where they are obliged to pay tips, but they do not like the clinic very much. Hamida wants more children and hopes she will get pregnant as soon as she stops nursing her son. Her husband would also like her to bear more children. She has heard about the pill and the loop but thinks that they are very bad for the health. She thinks the doctors in the public clinic neglect poor patients, and for her the *daya* is "better than one hundred doctors".

Hamida wants her son to be educated "until the end", that is, until obtaining a university degree. She tries to save some of the money her husband gives her for this because she feels it is not so important to her husband and when the times comes he may not find the money for school fees. He may prefer his son to help him in his work. She sees education as the way to save him from being a blacksmith and she exerts every effort in this direction. She expects him to help her in the future as this is his duty, and "why else would a mother get so tired raising him?"

Hamida complains constantly about her work in smithing, which she feels is exhausting and difficult and is not rewarding materially. If she had had a choice she would have preferred not to marry a blacksmith, but "everything in life cannot be adapted to one's own will, this is a *nassib* (fate) and one has to adapt to it and accept it". She believes that if one does something with hate she will become sick, so she has made a great effort to like this work, and thinks she has succeeded. Now it is easier for her to work near a very hot fire and to manipulate the iron. She says the work is not limited by hours, and she must work very long days. She also gets satisfaction from the admiration and appreciation of her husband, which is for her a great reward. Her husband does not earn much and relies on her because otherwise he would have to hire another worker. She finds that the more she works and helps him, the more she gains his love. She knows that her husband married her so that she could help him in his work, and that he wanted one wife to bear children and take care of the house and one wife to help him in his work. When we talked to him, he said that he thinks it is preferable for a woman to help her husband rather than to seek outside work, and that he likes having Hamida help him very much. Hamida admitted later that she does not take responsibility for household tasks and that this is the sole responsibility of her co-wife who bakes bread, cooks, washes, and looks after the children and animals. Hamida does not even do the daily marketing for the family.

Hamida wishes she could earn a lot of money, which she would then use to get a rest from her very difficult work of smithing. This is the main aim of her life.



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