

Professional Women and National Development: Women's Response to Migration(1)

In a paper presented by Mrs. Saneya Saleh, from the Department of Sociology — Anthropology — Psychology at A.U.C. she tries to analyze "the inner world view of Egyptian professional women who have confronted the dilemmas of the brain drain phenomenon." In short, she brings out the motives that induced those women to leave Egypt as contrasted with those that preferred to stay.

Mrs. Saleh interviewed eight women who had received their advanced training (Ph.D.'s) in England, U.S.A. and Germany. They were employed in Egypt as university professors in the social sciences or in the humanities departments. All of them belonged to the urban middle class, four were married, mothers of one or two children; three were divorced, and one unmarried.

One of them, whom Mrs. Saleh called "the Rebel" because, after spending one year of teaching in Egypt she chose to go back to the States, declares that she is not deeply rooted anywhere. She feels she is basically a citizen of the world. In spite of the disadvantages that confront a woman in American academic life, she likes the personal freedom over there and her ability to do what she wants to do without having to justify it. "There are many things wrong with America," the Rebel continues, "but there are basic things which I like. What I admire most of all is a sense of law and order and obeying of rules among all, which obviously I don't see in Egypt, especially in the traffic."

People over there rebel against corruption, as for example the Watergate case. What can you do about corruption in Egypt? It is there but what can anybody do about it?"

The other seven returnees, whom Mrs. Saleh calls "the pioneer innovators" do not wish to emigrate because they feel that they are needed here and that they are contributing as pioneers in their fields of specialization. It is true that in Egypt they miss the up-to-date libraries where they can read the most recent books and periodicals in their fields but they are satisfied with the

relative autonomy they are given as university professors. They are happy to see their students develop and are hopeful for a better future.

One of them, an art major, said: "I try to put new values in the students I teach... Of course you need facilities to put on plays but if students are talented, you can do a lot... It is a continuous struggle because I am a woman and it is not a woman's field..."

Another one gave the following complaint: "I am not happy as regards the academic level of Arab universities.. With the big number we are forced to take, it is very difficult to expect a high level of scholarly work.. Everybody wants to go to the university with the result that we have a low academic level and a big class of government employees."

Mrs. Saleh concludes by saying:

"A general feeling of frustration exists among the scientists whose activities were impeded repeatedly, due to the slowness of routine procedures. Their frustrations are all the time acting as pushing factors from Egypt, while their dreams of fulfilling their academic identity pull them toward the States. In between these two forces their love for Egypt acts as a balancing force. The majority of the women professionals do not lose their optimism. They accept the fact that Egypt is not America and hence they are realistic in their expectations. While most complain of the several restrictions on thought and action in Egypt, they are appalled by the crude impersonal relations in America."

Mrs. Saleh finally asks: Is the emigration of scientists and researchers from Egypt a problem or is it the solution of a problem? Should the Egyptian government restrict it by creating a law against the emigration of Egyptian professionals? Is there a contradiction between their emigration and the development projects in the country?

We may here add that Mrs. Saleh's study provides a probing look into a problem faced by developing countries around the world.

(1) Condensation of a paper presented at the American University of Cairo by Mrs. Saneya Saleh, Department of Sociology — Anthropology — Psychology, May 16, 1977.

8. The Lebanese Child Welfare Association runs day-care centers in rural and urban areas; also programs for mothers and young girls including literacy, child care, nutrition and some vocational training.

9. Women's Association for Jabal Amel.

The objective of this association is rural development. It has established a school of nursing in Tebnine where secondary school graduates are trained in nursing. Other projects include 12 rural social centers for training in sewing, embroidery, home economics, first aid, silk weaving, etc.

Conclusion

The data presented in this report were collected

under unusual circumstances, due to the disorganization that occurred during and after the Lebanese war.

Many projects and activities that were launched before the war had to be suspended or greatly reduced.

Already in the early seventies, leaders of the different organizations interviewed hoped to launch in cooperation with the government new developmental projects inspired by basic surveys on women's needs.

A new approach to development projects should be adopted. There is an urgent need for comprehensive and innovative vocational training programs for women, that are income-generating and self-fulfilling, and will successfully replace the traditional ones relying mostly on social and medical welfare and on teaching sewing, embroidery and handicrafts.