

# Population Problems in Egypt<sup>(1)</sup>

## The High Dependency Ratio, A Challenge for Economic Development

Egypt shares with other Arab countries the problem of the raised dependency ratio, a problem that results from a variety of factors: 1) the high birth rate, 2) the increasing numbers of the elderly, 3) the unemployment of a large number of young males and 4) a number of women who, for one reason or another, leave their jobs.

The percentage of dependents increased from 58% in 1937 to 66% in 1979, due to the following reasons:

1. Increased education for the young.
2. Decreased number of employed people, six years and above, because of the decreasing death rate.
3. Increased numbers of children below six.

Low Participation of Women in the Labour Force: 1.4 – 1.9% of the total population, compared to 22.7–23.8% for males in 1960 and 1976 respectively.

The actual dependency ratio<sup>(3)</sup> reached 236% in 1960. The ratio was 132% for children, 8.1% for the elderly and 95.9% for the unemployed individuals considered in the labor force. Most of the latter group were females.

During the last ten years, there has been a slow drop in the actual dependency ratio, from 269% to 173%. This is due to the drop in birth rate and the increased participation of women in the work force. However, the gain is insignificant because of the low average income in Egypt: 5% of that in industrialized countries. Although the income seems to have increased in the last 20 years from 49.5 to 143.7 L.E., it has actually decreased due to the increase in prices.

- a) Consequences of the high dependency ratios:
  - Low individual income.
  - Low standard of living.
  - Decreased job opportunities due to low investment.
  - Deterioration of the national economy.
- b) Elements of the problem:
  - High birth rate.
  - Low level of education leading to more unemployment.

- Increased number of the elderly.
- Low individual average income.
- Underemployment of those who work in agriculture with their families.

### Management of the Problem

- Decreasing the birth rate.
- Increasing the education level and industrialization.
- Creation of new training centers for youth to detract them from early marriage.
- Creation of social-care centers where women can be trained for productive jobs.
- Creation of rural industries with adjoint training centers.
- Providing housewives with facilities for outside work: day-care centers for children and adequate maternity leaves.

(1) Condensed from Population Studies, 9th year, no. 61, April - June 1981, **Population Problems in Egypt** by Mohamed El-Motassem Moustapha Ahmed, pp. 31-36.

(2) See "Demographic Structure of the Lebanese Population" by Francois Farah, in **Al-Raida** Feb. 1, 1983, Vol. VI, no. 23, p. 8.

(3) Actual dependency ratio = 
$$\frac{\text{Actual young age dependents} + \text{old age dependents} + \text{no. of unemployed male and female at employment age} \times 100}{\text{no. of employed individuals above 6 years of age}}$$

## Stereotyped Language and Creative Language<sup>(1)</sup>

In this article Claude Talahite<sup>(2)</sup> insists that words are important, in that they are able to fashion people and create a whole world. Every time we take hold of a word we have power in our hands.

According to the author, language may be utilized in two ways: slavish repetition of stereotypes (cliches), or creation of a new language. The first is a passive discourse; the second is active.

Examples of stereotyped language connected with the discourse on women:

"By the side of man", "our women", "honest women", "woman is dangerous", "people will talk".

What do these phrases evoke? What connotations do they imply?

"By the side of man" suggests that woman's place is beside a man, that she depends on him, struggles



for him and cannot live away from him. It is a position of dependence.

**"Our Women"** means "the women of our group"; it suggests a closed horizon, an atmosphere of xenophobia; the adjective "our" suggests a possessive attitude, and the necessity of giving protection to a dependent creature.

**"Honest Women"**: The term suggests a class system dividing people into honest and dishonest. Applied to women, it refers particularly to sexual behavior, which is the main criterion, perhaps the only criterion of her honesty; applied to men, this term means something totally different; it means integrity, truthfulness, upright behavior.

The particular applications of this term set up men and women as two separate groups. Men live their lives outside the home, in the world of business, while women lead a secluded life inside their homes. This Division remains **illogical** as long as women's honesty or honor cannot be separated from men's honor. They cannot do wrong without the complicity of men.

**"Woman is dangerous"** A stereotype used by men alone. It means that she is dangerous to men and clearly affirms that the world is a world of men because men are the only creatures that exist. Woman, because she is dangerous, should be eliminated, expelled from men's world.

**"People will talk"**: A stereotype frequently used by women in conversation, it shows how they are dominated by fear of what people say. People's attitude is their rule of conduct. They do not choose to do something because it is right or wrong, but because it pleases or displeases other people. To these women morality has no intrinsic value; it is merely a show. Whatever they do without being seen becomes legal and permitted; right conduct is a form of hypocrisy.

This last cliché results from women being subjected to the sort of system of supervision described in Assia Djebbar's story, "Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement"<sup>(3)</sup> They live in a state of continuous fear of being heard and seen, which imposes on them silence as a supreme virtue. If they talk, they feel compelled either to whisper or to use stereotyped, traditional and imitative language, actions which keep them from revealing their true selves.

Assia Djebbar, in her book, warns women against maintaining silence, using stereotyped language, and whispering, actions which, she argues, result from fear and cowardice. She invites them to talk plainly, loudly, to choose their words

freely, to present their own point of view, and finally to use creative, instead of stereotyped language. Liberty, one may conclude, imposes personal, creative activity, including personal language.

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1. Abstract of an article by Claude Talahite, **Document de Travail du GRFA** (Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes Algerienne) N0. 7, 1983, pp. 19-30.
  2. See **Al-Raida**, May 1, 1982, Vol. 5, no. 20, p. 5: "Algerian Women in Their Apartment" by Claude Talahite.
  3. See **Al-Raida**, Op. cit.