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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

THE MATRIMONIAL CULTURE IN CAIRO'S UPPER MIDDLE CLASS:
Capital, Collective and Consumption

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Egyptology and Anthropology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology

by Mariam Walid Al- Mokadem

Under the Supervision of Dr. Ramy Aly
Fall 2019

Abstract

This thesis focuses on discourses and practices relating to the journey to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class. In other words, I will focus on how members of this social class communicate and perform their beliefs about matrimony. It is a journey to matrimony in Cairo's upper-middle class, with reference to the temporalities a bride undergoes in order to actualize the new ordinary of marriage through suitor selection, matrimonial practices, and consumption patterns. I will investigate the basis on which a bride selects her suitor and the extent to which a bride and groom involve their parents (and in-group members) in the suitor selection process. I will also examine the practices in which families engage to get acquainted with one another, with reference to the social and cultural meanings of such practices. I will additionally inspect the ways in which marriage deals are made, especially in terms of the allocation of matrimonial transactions, and the extent to which the collective plays a major role in the pre-material acquisition process, that is, matrimonial consumption patterns.

I worked as an intern at an interior designer firm in Heliopolis, Cairo, where I met seven couples in the pre-marital material acquisition phase. My ethnographic toolkit is based primarily on un-structured interviews with the brides, supported by observation notes of the preliminary meeting with the interior designer, the bridal home furnishings, and the kitchen utensils shopping. Through this ethnography of the particular, I was able to observe that members of the same social class react differently to matrimony; due to their subjective life experiences. I classified the reactions to matrimony into three typologies. However, none of the nuances undermine the logic of the habitus as class motivated. The different reactions to matrimony show the way through which individuals create a sense of individuality in relation to the structuring structures into which they were born and raised. The couples seem to constitute their identities through the process of hailing in social interactions. In other words, the typologies suggested in this research show that none of the couples initiated a radical change, but, rather, engaged in adaptive strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the discourses and practices relating to the journey to matrimony among Cairo's upper middle class. I propose that marriage decisions among this group are informed by class habitus, a term Bourdieu describes as a socially constituted system of shifting dispositions informed by specific thoughts, perceptions, and actions. Accordingly, class habitus is reproduced within a similar social context. Social class habitus outlines couples' path to wedlock by setting unspoken rules about the selection of the suitor, and the practices and consumption patterns relating to matrimony. In fact, these matrimonial phases serve social class endogamy, whereby social class plays a predominant role in shaping the choices and practices marking the various aspects and stages of the marriage process.

Habitus is created through socialization within the social structures in which people interact, such as family, education, employment, media, religion, and so forth. Because it affects our actions in response to past events and structures that generate current practices and structures, habitus is closely linked to the way in which agents (and their respective interests) interact within social fields. In other words, our society is divided into social fields governed by specific fundamental laws; in a similar vein, agents within these social fields have their own set of dispositions (habitus). As agents participate in the social field only if they have a vested interest in it, habitus is a conceptual tool explaining the relationship between agent and structure within a social field. This is because individuals approach a social field in an unconscious rather than conscious manner. Agency, the capacity of the individual to make free choices and act autonomously, is determined by the ability to act on one's will. This ability is affected by one's beliefs and perceptions, formed throughout the individual's life experiences. One's beliefs and perceptions are imposed by the society, as a result of which they are embedded in the social structure. On the other hand, structure refers to the factors that influence and limit one's choices, such as religion, culture, social class, customs, education, and ethnicity.

In other words, people approach a field through a habitus in which their interests are defined, described by Bourdieu as ‘social libido’, since these interests are socially constructed on the basis of one’s socialization within social structures. Therefore, agents assert their agency through action, which, in turn, is constrained or disinhibited through the agent’s concordance with the conventional values embedded in the social structures which agents navigate.

Existing literature on marriage in Egypt has been covered substantially. Kholoussy (2010), in a study entitled *The Marriage Crisis that Made Modern Egypt*, follows the trails to the start of the marital crisis, a trend which emerged around 1920. Through an ingenious juxtaposition of press and Islamic court records, Kholoussy shows the considerable extent to which gender and sexuality contributed the marriage life during that time period. Kholoussy approaches the marriage dilemma by restating the traditions that unveil an Egyptian ancestry of gender and sexuality as contemporary bodies of power.

Hoodfar (1997), in *Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*, covers the marriage problem in Cairo within the framework of low-income households and their members. The marriage institution and gender school of thought offer a context within which both sexes engage, with each one of them manipulating tradition in a way that furthers their own gains, both within the marriage itself and the community. During this process, asymmetric gender relations and gender ideology, which often disadvantage women, are reproduced. Cultural and religious activities, in addition to financial decisions, should be scoped as a whole and from the perspective of those who experience them. Economic and social conditions in urban Cairo have encouraged a new pattern of interaction for many lower-income families. As a rule, households network on several levels. These networks were formed and dissolved according to economic and social factors, including standards of living, values, and geographic proximity.

In *Changes in the Institution of Marriage in Egypt from 1998 to 2012*, Salem (2015) investigated the path of marriage behaviors in three nationally representative surveys, stretched over the period 1998

to 2012, to determine whether the anxiety of never-marriage and spinsterhood can be rationalized. She also studied socio-demographic changes in marriage practices, at given points in time. All in all, this study found that marriage is highly prevalent in Egyptian society while both never-marriage and divorce tend to be infrequent over time and across all socio-demographic groups.

Salem (2016), in a study titled *Labor Market Experiences' Gendered Effects on Marriage Timing in Egypt*, alluded to the fact that Egyptian men, with favorable labor market experiences, attract a partner and build an independent household more rapidly than other less advantaged counterparts. The male breadwinner notion is, therefore, a power-holding force in laying down the rules as to who marries when in Egypt today. Salem also argued that past studies may have overstated the delaying effects of academics and urban residence on marriage, particularly for women. Furthermore, Salem (2016), in studies on matrimonial transactions shows that the quantity of goods a bride contributes to the marital home is commensurate with her future decision-making power as a spouse. A greater percentage of marriage finances covered on the bride's side carries a net advantage for women, suggesting that parental investments in daughters' marriages is a sign of familial back-up for the bride, thereby reinforcing and magnifying her power. Matrimonial transactions can neither be decreased nor discarded because they convey crucial meanings with respect to class and gender. The celebrations and home visits accompanying a new union comprise conspicuous consumption patterns. In addition, the principal actors strive to maintain the material behaviors prevailing in their social class in order to ensure an advantageous position in the hierarchy of new couples. Matrimonial transactions are greatly gender-specified, closely adhering to the matrimonial traditions and ritualized circumstances marking these events. This signals the dedication of actors to ideals of masculinity and femininity and the uneven roles they would hold within marriage, all while bearing in mind the inherent security enjoyed by women within a marital context.

In short, Kholoussy proposed a historical and legal framework portraying gender roles and sexuality traditions to define the power dynamics of marital relationships. Hoodfar approached the marriage life in low-income households by shedding light on asymmetric gender relations, and the socio-economic interaction within lower-income conjugal households. In line with Salem's research, Hoodfar portrayed socio-demographic changes in matrimonial practices with a focus on the impact of labor market experiences on marriage preference and timing. She also discussed the social and cultural significance of matrimonial transactions in relationship to social class and gender ideals.

This thesis is significant as it builds upon Kholoussy's historical and legal account by discussing the temporalities experienced by a bride and her family through qualitative accounts. These accounts will unpack hidden meanings which may not be displayed through legal documents as they enrich the topic with up-to-date narratives and ethnographic notes. The weight of this thesis is premised upon a discussion of the ways through which capital considerations, collectivistic involvement, and asymmetric gender relations interplay during a matrimonial journey in Cairo's upper middle class, in contrast to Hoodfar's research which tackles asymmetric gender roles and socio-economic problems of the marriage life in lower-income families. This thesis also extends Salem's investigation by examining the roles played during pre-wedding matrimonial expenditures and acquisitions along with the social and cultural meanings embedded in such transactions.

This thesis takes the reader on a journey to matrimony in Cairo's upper-middle class, with reference to the temporalities a bride passes undergoes in order to actualize the new ordinary of marriage through suitor selection, matrimonial practices, and consumption patterns. I will investigate the basis on which a bride selects her suitor and the extent to which a bride and groom involve their parents (and in-group members) in the suitor selection process. I will also examine the practices in which families engage to get acquainted with one another, with reference to the social and cultural meanings of such practices. I

will additionally inspect the ways in which marriage deals are made, especially in terms of the allocation of matrimonial transactions, and the extent to which the collective plays a major role in the pre-material acquisition process, that is, matrimonial consumption patterns.

The Selection of the Suitor

This thesis presents a memoir of how the bride perceives the groom and herself as being compatible, referring to the extent to which they are harmonious in terms of personality traits, economic circumstances, social connections, and educational levels. Marriage, in Cairo's upper middle class, is believed to enable social harmony, endowing individuals with value and purpose within the family, as well as the society at large. The cultural nature of the society leads to differences in the experiences of love and romance. In collectivistic societies, parents play a major role in their children's suitor selection (Benjamin, Marshall, & Fersensci, 2015). Accordingly, individuals will try to reconcile their personal needs with those of familial and cultural expectations. Hence, passion and commitment towards a romantic partner are socially constructed (Benjamin, Marshall, & Fersensci, 2015). In sharp contrast, within a collectivistic society, parental influence is premised on the basis of family allocentrism, defined as the strength of closeness and devotion between family members (Benjamin, Marshall, & Fersensci, 2015). Therefore, the suitor selection is not an activity on which an agent embarks alone. The agent, accompanied by a collective, assigns more weight to pragmatic qualities in a prospective partner; these include economic resources, social status, and most importantly, the positive interaction between the two families, which supersede commitment to a romantic relationship.

On the other hand, in individualistic cultures, such as the Western culture, emphasis is placed upon personal desires and independence. In this sense, agents exercise more control over their own partner selection. In fact, social structures within which agents are socialized offer a cultural setting advocating self-sufficiency and the idealization of romantic love, the supposed basis upon which marriage is founded.

These cultural differences show that an agent in an individualistic society asserts agency in the marriage field through independence, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and romantic love. Conversely, in a collectivistic culture, an agent's agency is constrained by parental influence, parental authority, and a cultural obligation to select the suitor in accordance with one's familial needs which are informed by capital considerations and status symbols.

Bourdieu's theories define capital considerations in a way that allows us to understand the features of a promising marital candidate. In proposing different forms of capital and their impact on one's status, Bourdieu suggests the notion of transubstantiation whereby the material types of capital, representing the economic capital in a restricted sense, are exhibited in the immaterial forms of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In other words, capital can manifest itself in three guises: first, the economic capital directly converted to money; second, the cultural capital manifested in certain circumstances as economic capital, but is mostly manifested as educational qualifications; and, third, the social capital, made up of social obligations and connections. All three guises of capital form a symbolic capital that presupposes itself in the habitus, which is a set of embodied dispositions reflected in the way a given community understands and reacts to the social world (Bourdieu, 1986).

Status symbols are manifestations of capital guises. In fact, Weber (date) argues that a class situation is one in which there is a shared likelihood of procuring goods (Breen & Rottman, 2002). This facilitates gaining a 'position' in life, defined as a set of norms among those who share a common class, and thereby allowing for predictions of future behavior. According to Breen and Rottmann (2002), behavior is a communal action based on a shared belief of affiliation, while actions are motivated by the belief in the acknowledgement of shared interests. In this sense, members of the same class share common life chances that are defined by one's status since class groups do not constitute communities; according to Weber, it is status groups that compose communities (Breen & Rottmann, 2002). Status is defined as

the likelihood that life chances are determined by social honor and prestige. Hence, status groups are connected by lifestyle. Despite the fact that some forms of ownership are connected to prestige, wealth is not solely linked to status; wealth, in fact, is a key indicator of lifestyle differences upon which status depends. Such differences rely on social activities, such as marital patterns and residential areas (Breen & Rottmann, 2002), which are status symbols necessary for remaining within the status group. The dignity of high-status groups is manifested in their distinctive lifestyle and reflected in consumption patterns.

In this sense, suitor selection is a significant criterion that serves marriage as a vital and long-standing cultural institution. In fact, in the Arab world, an individual's decisions are often based on factors aligning with the values and the benefits of the family, while personal satisfaction and desires are secondary to the well-being of the familial values (Fakher, 2018). A 'bad' match between couples is likely to harm the entire family's reputation. Therefore, romantic love should match the existing societal order and hierarchy. As argued by Joseph (1999), in a study on gender and identity in Arab families, each society produces multiple and competing notions of self, revealing more about class, race, ethnicity, religion and gender in that society, all of which show the possibilities and potentialities of forming one's identity.

Aside from the capital considerations and the status symbols aiding suitor selection among Cairo's upper middle class, the gender role habitus of members of this social class also assists in the selection of a prospective partner. Given that habitus is an acquired array of dispositions shaped by one's socialization within social structures, defined by one's economic, cultural and social capital, it is important to be aware that these dispositions define one's gender role or gender-role habitus.

The gender roles are embedded in social structures that contribute to the formation of an agent's habitus. Gender differences are manifested in living conditions, ways of acting, and ways of thinking. Parsons (1942) showed the construction of a female role which represents expressive orientation that is

premised on the basis of maintaining the family systems. The male role, on the other hand, represents instrumental orientations, referring to the primacy of gainful employment. For example, a male in the Egyptian society is committed to providing his family with food and shelter in return for complete authority and expectation of obedience from his wife and family (Naguib, 2015). This shows that the Egyptian society is premised on a patriarchal dimension as of a mode of social life. Amin (2000) argued that “[his] mother represented a whole generation of Egyptian women deprived of any means of earning a living independently... They were raised to regard men as their source of economic security”. This perception highlights that marriage and family formation in Egypt is based on the notion of the husband as a sole breadwinner supporting his wife and children, socially and economically, in return for their obedience and subordination. It is worth mentioning in this regard that Egypt’s new 2013 constitution (approved in January 2014) asserts that the state has a vital role in harmonizing women's family duties with their work, implying that childrearing and domestic responsibility are the sole burden of women that is not shared by men.

Amin (2000) also suggested that “Egyptian women have made great progress in breaking through economic independence; they have gone outside the home to earn a living or to get an education”. This shows that an Egyptian woman’s essential functions have, therefore, undergone radical changes allowing for less subordination and greater mutual respect. Nevertheless, according to Barsoum (2018), in a study on educated women’s employment decisions in Egypt, “women’s employment does not necessarily mean empowerment” (p. 910). In fact, the role of the culture cannot be dismissed since married women take the blame for a less than perfect household, such as neglected children. Amidst this culture of blame, women experience feelings of guilt that can limit the empowering potential of work (Barsoum, 2018). In the same vein, women in Cairo’s upper middle class may make the choice of exiting the labor market due to cultural constructs tied to their roles as housewives.

This shows that the gender-role habitus in the Egyptian society has witnessed socio-economic changes. In fact, habitus is neither fixed nor permanent; rather, it can be changed in unexpected situations or over a long historical period (Navarro, 2006). Therefore, a bride in Cairo's upper middle class enters the marriage field by selecting a prospective partner on the basis of a gender role habitus, whether traditional or contemporary. A traditional gender role habitus is based on the internalization of a man holding primary power, on the grounds that males provide the income sustaining the household. A contemporary gender role habitus is a result of social changes that have allowed women to perceive themselves as equal to their male counterparts.

In brief, suitor selection in a collectivistic society is mostly influenced by the familial and societal expectations, whereas in an individualistic society, an individual has a more prominent role in the selection of a partner. Generally speaking, however, the selection process depends on the extent to which the three guises of capital of both agents (the bride and the groom) are aligned. Moreover, gender roles also prominently influence the selection process. This phenomenon is especially prominent in the Arab world where patriarchy tends to be the norm, assigning men to the role of providers while women are placed in subordinate positions.

The Matrimonial Practices

A couple's journey involves certain events that, according to how the couple and their respective parties conduct themselves, can prove either harmonious or fraught with conflict. Matrimonial practices center on a series of activities and customary practices in which both families engage in order to become acquainted with each other. Such activities and customary practices vary from one family to another and from one case to another. Nevertheless, the matrimonial practices, in Cairo's upper middle class, are premised on the basis of group-think to manifest family allocentrism and hegemonic masculinity as modes of practice. In Cairo's upper middle class, collectivistic values guide social practices and discourses.

Therefore, the notion of a group is defined by close bonds in order to display a sense of unity. In other words, the social dynamics within a community shape the cultural behavior within it, thus informing the content of the values that regulate behaviors, practices, and discourses (Akkus, Postmes, & Stroebe, 2017). The function of family allocentrism is to be loved, valued, and respected (Akkus, Postmes, & Stroebe, 2017). To enable this, groups should possess community values that encourage a certain amount of loyalty towards the group from all its members (Akkus, Postmes, & Stroebe, 2017). Consequently, all groups have distinct sets of community values pertaining to a hierarchal structure within the group and specifying the responsibilities and privileges of each social role (Akkus, Postmes, & Stroebe, 2017).

In this sense, the fathers of the couples in Cairo's upper middle class display hegemonic masculinity as a familial duty attached to their social role. Hegemony may not necessarily mean the use of force; rather, it could indicate ascendancy achieved through culture, institution, and persuasion. The subordination of the brides and their mothers to the father figures in the family is an idea that imposes certain notions of consent and participation by the subordinate groups.

An important matrimonial practice is the inspection of the groom's family, by the bridal collective, in terms of economic, social, and cultural capital, to either accept or reject the union of their daughter and the groom. The groom initially meets with the bride's father to receive preliminary approval to bring his family to the bride's house and meet the rest of her family. This sheds light on the importance of the protective role of the paterfamilias as a social duty, which also reflects in-group hierarchy and a system by which group members regulate adherence to certain standards and norms. This preliminary approval allows the groom's family to visit the bride's family home for high-tea or dinner. In this sense, the father of the bride communicates his approval to allow the groom's family to validate the betrothal of the marriage. This emphasizes the importance of family allocentrism, which is necessary to ensure the maintenance of group loyalty.

During the first or second official visit, a binding agreement is negotiated in the form of an oral contract between the respective fathers of the bride and groom, in the presence of close and trusted male family members, to agree upon the allocation of matrimonial milestones and transactions. Once both fathers agree upon a contract, the union is celebrated by reading the *Fatiha*, the opening verse of the Holy Quran. The *fatiha* ritual is an Egyptian-Islamic tradition held to seek divine blessings for the proposed union. This ritual takes place at the bride's house, which plays host to close relatives and family members over an elaborate dinner.

The *shabka* refers to the diamond wedding rings gifted to the bride, and usually chosen in the presence of the bride, the groom, and their respective mothers. An amount of money is agreed upon beforehand by both fathers as a budget for the wedding-ring shopping. In this social class, the minimum acceptable amount of money is equivalent to a one carat diamond for a solitaire ring in addition to a diamond wedding band. The *shabka* is usually bought from the jeweler of the groom's mother and signals a solid commitment, as it demonstrates that the groom's family is serious about the marriage. The *shabka* is celebrated through an engagement party hosted by the bride's family, a warm-up event prior to the wedding party whereby both families declare their commitment to each other, and during which the bride and groom exchange promise rings (the *shabka*). Among Coptic Christians, the engagement party is further formalized via a Church ceremony called the *nuss ekleel*. In Coptic Christianity, the couple goes to the church to do process paper work to formalize their engagement.

The mahr (the dowry) is an Islamic tradition, where a sum of money is given by the groom to the bride, on a family visit to her house. The dowry is usually presented in an embellished box (or another ornamental container of sorts). Typically, the bridal family uses the *mahr* to cover part of the bride's expected matrimonial responsibilities. It should be paid prior to bridal shopping, to display the groom's commitment to the marriage. Nevertheless, some brides do not receive a dowry in cases where both

families agree to split all matrimonial expenditures between them. One couple justified this arrangement as a way to overcome the financial problems many Egyptians are facing nowadays. Another couple reasons that it is a way to ensure the bride has a say in everything throughout the marriage process, since monetary allowances provided by the bride's family gives them a more controlling role, empowering them as main decision-makers in all matrimonial commitments.

The *katb ketab* is an Islamic legal ceremony where the couple ties the knot and declares their marriage to their community. From a religious perspective, the *katb ketab* signifies that the couple is officially married. However, they are still not allowed to share the marital home as the bride is required to remain at her father's house until the scheduled wedding day. This is due to the fact that, according to the norms, the wedding ceremony is the bride's only acceptable rite of passage to her new life as a wife. The *katb ketab* event may take place days prior to the wedding or on the wedding day itself. Consummation and cohabitation for both Muslims and Christians does not take place until the wedding. Although on occasion, the latter two events, going by either of the religious norms, are combined and held on the same day. However, they may also be separated by several months or years according to the circumstances.

The context of matrimonial practices in Cairo's upper-middle class, as described above, is inspired by collectivity and capital. Collectivity is reflected in the tension between the principles of individuality versus community, when a couple decide to tie the knot. In other words, the collective, under the name of family allocentrism, makes the decision of marriage with caution. The decisions of the bride's family are mainly informed by considerations of the economic, social, and cultural capital (that is, status symbols) of the groom's family, in an attempt to ensure that this union fulfills the checklist of a socially acceptable marriage. This is significant because through the introduction of new members in the family, the identity of class is at stake, as it will be exposed to redefinition, alteration, and adulteration (Bourdieu, 1986). The

latter are produced through occasions, places, and practices to bring together individuals as a homogenous group, in terms of co-existence and persistence of the group (Bourdieu, 1986).

In short, matrimonial practices entail a set of social events, initiated through the patriarchs of both families. They include the *fatiha*, the dowry, the *shabka* (promise rings exchange), the engagement, *katb el ketab*, and the wedding. This framework of events is closely adhered to by the majority, although Coptic Christians may have to follow a similar yet altered pathway, as dictated by their religion and personal laws. Nonetheless, these social practices allow the families to ensure that their guises are on par and that they are a good fit for one other.

The Matrimonial Consumption Patterns

Collectivity, along with various forms of capital considerations, shape consumption practices during the phase of marriage preparation. As far as the bride-to-be is concerned, this phase is characterized by the process of acquiring a range of material belongings for her new home, as well as herself, which is known as the *gihaz*. The collective plays a major role in this pre-material acquisition process and the associated consumption practices, in order to ensure that her possessions adequately reflect her family's economic, social, and cultural capital. Such marital consumption patterns are needed to protect the bride-to-be from any social stigma.

The above phase is usually monitored by the mothers of the couple, while the fathers only contribute to it financially. The process of house furnishing is usually validated by the mother of the bride, who acts as the taste consultant, to ensure that the bride is fulfilling her matrimonial expenditures in a socially acceptable way. Some grooms' mothers attend the bridal shopping as a way to ensure that the bride is furnishing the house in a way that reflects the groom's social standing. However, it is not uncommon for the groom's mother to withdraw from the acquisition process and leave it to the bridal family.

One's class location and class habitus are displayed through a variety of practices situated in different domains of consumption, which symbolically come together to form a whole. This, in fact, constitutes social collectives (that is, status groups) by setting figurative boundaries between different parties holding different spaces in the class structure. The mode of existence of the collective is primarily based on the arena of consumption linked with idealized standards of taste. Put differently, matrimonial spending reflects one's financial and cultural capital in a way that gives rise to the linguistic coherence of a given lifestyle. A unitary lifestyle emerges within each social class to give a sense of distinction aimed at marking the discrepancies in standards among social classes. This transforms taste into a practice conveying a social message that expresses conformity to the social class as a whole. In other words, the social message demonstrates an aesthetic sensibility which orients actors' everyday life practices and choices while liberating the parameters of a social space. This point is confirmed by Bourdieu (1986) where he stated that "the laying down of boundaries between classes is inspired by the strategic aim of counting in or being counted in, cataloguing or annexing". In this sense, matrimonial consumption patterns in Cairo's upper middle class are viewed as an arena of social life in which the possession of economic and cultural capital can be "theatrically" displayed to express co-membership in a societal class. It is an aesthetic moment where home decoration is an opportunity to assert one's position in a social space, to uphold a rank, or to keep a distance (that is, a discrepancy in standards).

In short, this stage involves a close scope on the materialistic purchases made by a couple as an integral part of premarital preparation. It is usually supervised by the matriarchs of both parties, especially the bride's, and is financially mediated by the patriarchs. The goods acquired during this phase are considered, from a societal perspective, to greatly reflect social standing. This is why the matriarchs supervise the process so closely, the better to ensure that their social class membership is passed on to their heirs.

The Principle Site of Investigation and the Methodology

During the course of my work as an intern at an interior designer firm in Heliopolis, Cairo, I have met with seven couples in the pre-marital material acquisition phase. During this internship, I used an ethnography through which I gathered data using primarily un-structured interviews with the brides, supported by observation notes of the preliminary meeting with the interior designer, the bridal home furnishings, and the kitchen utensils shopping.

My ethnographic toolkit included the use of un-structured interviews. These allowed me to get acquainted with the brides first, as well as gain their trust. Further interviews enabled me to examine social complex issues in order to understand how brides define their own actions. The interviews consisted mainly of open-ended questions to allow the bride to indulge in an informal conversation and provide me with a detailed picture of her story, from the day she met the groom, until the actual wedding day. The logic of this method is premised on the basis of allowing participants to express themselves freely and avoid acting in a 'socially accepted way', helping me to unpack the underlying motives, logic, and beliefs that define their own actions. The interview structure was directed by an interview guide, inclusive of topics of discussion. It is important to note that each interview included follow-up questions tailored to each respondent, depending on the direction of the interview.

The use of observations provided insight into details of consumption practices patterns, and the ways with which the pre-marital material acquisition phase reflects the dynamics of previous stages. Preliminary observations regarding the interior designer, home furnishings, and kitchen utensils shopping were significant, as they validated the qualitative interviews with substantial field notes of situations, events, and conversations. The logic of this method is premised on the basis of discovering culturally ingrained social behaviors when agents act in the marriage field of Cairo's upper-middle class. Specifically, I was able to capture the associated consumption practices and patterns. In addition, this

method gave me the opportunity to interact with the subjects in their real-life environment and identify any discrepancies between what their stated actions say they do and actual behaviors.

My work as an intern at an interior designer firm was significant at both a theoretical and practical level. Theoretically speaking, it allowed me to investigate the impact of subjective life experiences on one's habitus. In fact, in order to comprehend "practice", we shall move beyond the collectively motivated habitus, and postulate the subjectivity of habitus. In other words, each agent may approach a social field, provided they have an interest in it, fueled by a subjective habitus and influenced by subjective logic, opinions, views, and tastes. In fact, each individual is a dynamic result of life experiences producing subjective deliberated habitus. Habitus is class-motivated; yet, the subjective life encounters that members of this social class experience may alter their individual habitus.

To further expand on the theoretical level, my work situation enabled me to postulate the extent to which habitus is transferred. Keeping in mind that habitus is easily transferred from one generation to the next, one may question why couples seek the services of an interior designer. This shows that habitus is not a natural process, but, rather, a far more complex one. In other words, taste is not passed on from a generation to another, but, rather, the manner in which taste is acquired is what is transferred from a generation to another. Both young and older members of the affluent class want their spaces to be designed by a professional. This shows that the act of consulting an interior designer is a habit, transferred through habitus, to be able to fashion one's space so that it becomes symbolically perfect. Therefore, habitus may still show discrepancy in standards. In other words, the taste exhibited by people to construct their spaces may differ from a generation to another while the means of construction is transferrable (that is, consultation of a professional).

It is important to note that my interviews were exclusively conducted with the brides rather than their grooms due to their relative absence from the process of pre-wedding material acquisition. This shows that the process of corresponding standards is made by the females of the families. In other words, taste is actualized by the bride, demonstrating that the reproduction of habitus, in terms of fashioning spaces, is gendered.

On a practical level, the principal site was significant, as it gave me access to upper-middle class members. The sample consists of seven couples aged between 23 years old to 33 years old. The subjects of this study belong to the upper-middle class, as they all live in affluent neighborhoods, travel abroad, and have completed their education in expensive private schools and universities. Their financial resources, family connections, prestigious residential areas, bilingual skills, and professional careers have all exposed them to a privileged and cosmopolitan lifestyle.

“Cosmopolitanism is often linked to globalization as David Held notes; a borderless world where cultural capital flows as freely as economic capital, lifting all boats from economic underdevelopment as well as cultural backwardness” (Schwedler, 2010, p.555). Nevertheless, among this social class, cosmopolitanism carries a modified socio-economic meaning. Amin (2000) argued that the Egyptian population has shifted from being a centralized socialist economy, established by Nasser, to an increasingly liberalized economy. This transition accelerated the rate of social mobility, giving birth to investors, business elites, and managers of transnational companies. For example, an army officer, who was considered elite during the Nasser era, left his job to work in an import-export office when Sadat assumed leadership (Amin, 2000). The Sadat era promoted lavish consumption with the open-door policies of the 1970s. This allowed for social mobility, giving birth to a newly rising class, spreading consumerism and materialistic values (Amin, 2000). This social class constituted of old-money people,

investors, business managers of transnational companies and diplomats possessing wealth, enabling them to afford commodities through which they expressed their cosmopolitanism.

The old money social class is linked with wealth despite having undergone downward social mobility due to the confiscation of their assets and property during the Nasser era, leading to loss of most of their wealth. Nevertheless, this class has continued to embrace cosmopolitanism in terms of consumption and representational code. In other words, the social leisure spaces members of this social segment navigate indicate local configurations of cosmopolitan belonging. In fact, in a bygone age, “France, was the measure of all things elegant as many shops catering to the upper-middle classes carry French names and sold latest French products and fashions” (De Koning, 2009, p.224). Examples of social leisure spaces are Groppi, à l’Americain, Délices, Trianon, and Gianola, established in the early 1900s. These social leisure spaces allowed this social group to affirm a strong connection with Paris and other sophisticated European cities (De Koning, 2009).

Investors, business managers of transnational companies, and diplomats are social segments also belonging to the upper middle class as a result of upward social mobility during the Sadat era. In fact, “the urban landscape speaks of the existence of an “other” Cairo that began its boom under the Infitah (the open-door policy initiated in mid 1970s); which encouraged foreign imports and foreign investment in Egypt motivated by neoliberal policies and the search for the integration into global markets” (De Koning, 2009, p.224).

In present-day Cairo, knowledge of foreign languages, particularly English, has come to denote a major split within the social hierarchy which singles out those individuals educated in international schools (De Koning, 2009). By learning one or two foreign languages at expensive schools, attending international universities to receive credentials to justify a social position, consuming transnational commodities to maintain a western lifestyle, people in this bilingual group inhabit the class position into

which they were born and affirm a social status. This shows that this social class is marked by global connections and aspirations. Cosmopolitanism, in other words, is conceived as a set of practices through which Cairo's upper middle class construct themselves as transnational elites through westernized education, easy movement across transnational borders, and consumption of transnational goods. These trappings characterize this social group as a transnational popular culture that is set apart from other social groups.

Similar patterns can be observed in Jordan's West Amman district, which has been experiencing many social, political, and economic changes as the government is investing continuous efforts to attract foreign capital to Jordan. Notions of class and social status are becoming more complex and reimagined as their social class affirmation is connected to "the more desirable dimensions of economic liberalization, that is, by providing them access to the new spaces of glittering global capital, cosmopolitanism, and consumption" (Schwedler, 2010, p.555). In this sense, a Jordanian and an Egyptian definition of cosmopolitanism is modified by the upper-middle class in a way "entailing a sense of being world-wise and well-traveled, multilingual, hip or cutting-edge, and comfortable and fluent in the cultural codes of the world's major urban centers" (Schwedler, 2010, p.555).

This social distinction is typically Egyptian, yet somehow modern at the same time. This is because a cosmopolitan class identity in this social group requires a domesticated religious faith, and to be defined as masculine or feminine according to the local culture codes. It is a class system validating discrepancy in standards through skills, education, knowledge, talent, and, most importantly, the ability to adjust such standards with the identities determined by factors such as religious orientation, gender roles, patriotism, and so forth, all of which are displayed through a set of cosmopolitan Egyptianized styles, despite the fact that the schools they attend allow for mixed-gender spaces. Youth mingle in westernized leisure spaces to show off the latest fashions, and engage in low-key flirting in order to create an inoffensive mixed gender

sociability (De Koning, 2009). Familial supervision is an important aspect of the lives of single upper middle-class women. Curfew is one way to show familial responsibility and accountability to protect the reputation of the family in front of the neighbors. The places upper-middle-class women navigate should be marked as safe, according to the homogenous nature of this social class. Class maps, in this sense, are crucial in positing cosmopolitan status as a civilizational rather than value-changing project. In fact, the upper class still upholds values articulated from their Muslim, Copt, and Egyptian identity that superimpose on their practices and discourses relating to the notion of the familial self and a patriarchal gender role habitus. As argued by Joseph (1999), in a study on gender and identity in Arab families, every society produces multiple and competing notions of self, revealing more about class, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender in that particular society as well as showing the various possibilities and potentialities of selving.

My positionality is informed by the tripartite selves, suggested by Reinharz (2011), who describes a tripartite division among selves in field research. The research self is the one concerned with doing the research; the personal self is the one we bring to the field; and the situational self is the one created within the field (Reinharz, 2011). My positionality as a research self is related to my familial and educational background. My familial background nurtured my interest in investigating the matrimonial culture in Cairo's upper middle class as I was brought up in a family occupied with marriage-related issues, an interest that manifested itself in regular chats and gossipy sessions with my mother, our favorite topics being who had married whom, when, how, and why. This is why my educational background as an anthropology graduate student has allowed me to make use of theoretical paradigms to formulate and examine research questions related to my ethnographic journey exploring the practices and discourses relating to marriage decisions in Cairo's upper middle class. My personal self will help me establish close relationships with the interlocutors as we share the same socio-cultural and linguistic background, not to mention that we belong to the same age group. This is significant as my shared background and age will

allow to me identify and decode meanings. To encourage intense engagements with the participants, I created a situational self as a research and operations intern in an interior designer firm, who is in charge of helping them fashion their conjugal household in the smoothest way while utilizing the collected data for research purposes.

This principle site of investigation is located in Heliopolis, which is important as a location to this social class. In other words, it is a district known as one of the most affluent areas in Cairo. This location allowed the interior designer to be well connected with diplomatic circles which allowed her to access this social class through in-group recommendations (word of mouth), triggered by upper-middle class members' experiences. This made her a trustworthy professional, competent to fashion this social class' spaces.

Despite the fact that this firm was visited by different age groups, it still gave me access to newlyweds. The interviews and the observations of brides, predominantly, and grooms, occasionally, allowed me to observe this social class' taste in curation, the composition of their homes to-be in terms of capital considerations, patterns, and social roles. In fact, the principle site was divided into three levels, according to what constituted acceptable taste (microcosm of habitus). The first level exhibits classic style furniture, as the interior designer says that some brides are pressured to conform to their mothers' tastes, which veer towards velvety fabrics, rich silks, and ornate carvings. In classic interior design, much of the furniture that is selected will either comprise an antique piece or a replication; the second level showcases contemporary style of furniture, a middle ground between classic and modern styles, as contemporary design centers around the now and the future. This style offers a compromise for a bride desiring to furnish her space according to modern tastes without clashing with her mother's favored classic style; and, the third level displays modern style furniture. Modern style furnishings and decor celebrate natural materials,

neutral or earthy colors, and the elimination of unnecessary detailing. This style reflects practicality, a feature that is often selected by newlyweds who are not accompanied by their families.

Typologies

It is important to note that my internship allowed me to recognize marriage as a complex social construct of love, affection, social class, gender, amongst other considerations. In fact, within this social class, people may react differently to the idea of matrimony. Traditional couples follow conventional practices in accordance with what is considered customary. Customary practices are motivated by collectivistic values whereby social relations are sensitive to in-group behavior and adherent to social norms such as the selection of a suitable prospective marriage partner in terms of collectivistic values, while meeting the standards to display family allocentric behaviors, by feeling either honored or ashamed, depending on how the in-group members feel. In addition to this, the setting and consumption of matrimonial expenditures affirms a social position in the society.

Farida and Taymour

This is the story of an engaged couple on the path to wedlock, as narrated by Farida, the bride to-be. Both bride and groom come from a wealthy background and belong to a community of perceived cultural value. Moreover, they have both received quality academic grooming, from the earliest stages culminating in earning prestigious university degrees. Each is, directly or indirectly, dependent on the respective business of their family for financial support. Their families are acquainted with each other through mutual business and have arranged for their heirs to get married. The narration follows their journey from the very beginning, with all its ups and downs. For instance, the bride touches on how smoothly the preliminary meeting of the parents went and how the binding agreement was decided upon, in a most harmonious fashion, with a classic allocation of responsibilities. In addition, she describes the controlling involvement of her mother regarding the wedding shopping and her acquiescence with her

mother's wishes. This conciliatory attitude does not necessarily result from satisfaction with the mother's dictates, but more so out of feeling pressured, since she is dependent on her parents to cover her matrimonial expenses.

Miral and Amir

This journey to wedlock is as close to a fairy-tale as reality gets. Not only is the couple compatible, but their families are also on the same wavelength, ensuring that all has been smooth sailing so far. The couple got to know each other through mutual friends. Surprisingly, they actually turned out to be second cousins, as they would later discover. What drew Miral, the bride-to-be, to Amir, was the fact that he is a dependable man who can support a family. Even more encouraging was the fact that he was looking for a serious relationship, like her. Moreover, their families get along just as well. For instance, Miral's mother is quite fond of Amir, mostly because he reminds her of her husband, Miral's dad. She was so content with the match, in fact, that she was mostly compliant with Miral during her bridal shopping. This is quite unusual in a phase that is typically riddled with clashes of taste between the bride and her mother when picking out items such as house furnishings, kitchen utensils, and the like. Furthermore, both Amir and Miral's fathers are on very friendly terms basically because they are decent men, a solid foundation for bonding. Accordingly, the binding agreement was decided on by both men smoothly and tactfully. On another note though, the one hurdle in the journey was the paperwork the couple had to go through with the Church to formalize their matrimonial milestones. Currently, the couple is waiting for Miral to complete her Bachelor's degree, prior to holding the wedding celebrations.

Carmen and Hady

This narration by Carmen, the bride, tells the story of her journey to marriage to her husband, Hady. The narration emphasizes how similar and compatible views among the families of the bride and groom came into play when establishing an agreeable ambience throughout the marriage preparation

phases. She states that everything went smoothly, with everyone in perfect harmony, explaining that this conflict-free setting was created by the willingness of both parties to establish a middle ground, regardless of any potential differences in opinion. She also mentions that her in-laws respected her and her husband's privacy boundaries, put everyone at ease, and diffused any potential fallouts.

The unconventional couples, on the other hand, deviate from customary practices due to differences in moral values, logic, and views about the social world. One reason for being an unconventional couple may be due to their having been socialized in a way that values individualistic logic since romantic love may result from less dependent family ties. Therefore, as the matrimonial process does not necessarily involve the collective, it may depart from family allocentrism as the couple shows dedication to personal aspirations and needs rather than family interests. Another reason for a couple to show unconventionalism is to be socialized within a traditional environment without conforming to it. Failure to conform to prevailing practices can be motivated by exposure to western values, through education or media. Such unconventionalism is perceived as a form of disobedience to in-group members, which may negatively affect the matrimonial process. This is because the collective may abstain from participation to express disapproval.

Thuraya and Nader

The story follows an individualistic, self-reliant couple, entering the field of marriage. Each of them is working, which has granted them financial independence of their family. This self-sufficiency has granted them sovereignty over many of their life decisions, by loosening their attachment as individuals to their community duties. For instance, it gave them the chance to choose one another and express themselves through this choice, away from family pressures. Not only did they acquire the liberty of independently choosing a partner, but their financial self-reliance has also made them the prime decision makers throughout the marriage preparation phase. Moreover, financial autonomy had made the events

taking place up to the wedding, as dictated by norms, a mere formalization of their decisions, rather than an approval-seeking process. Even though they made their own decisions, the case of Thuraya, the bride, exemplifies the gender discrepancy to which her freedom of choice was subjected. While she was allowed to make her own choices, she still had to obtain her parent's blessing before implementing her plans. In contrast, Nader, the groom, only announced his plans to his family at the last minute, after all the details had been actualized. Thuraya expresses her pride towards her achieved status, but alludes to the role her parent's investment into her upbringing has played in securing her a decent degree and a respected social culture. Despite this sense of pride, she feels the pressure of shouldering the burden by herself, to the point where she is eager to rush through the marriage temporalities for fear of encountering obstacles along the way. This fear stems from her awareness of the lack of a rich social and familial community.

Amna and Aly

This narration recounts the mishaps encountered by Amna and Aly to cement their union. She is a working woman, who grew up in a conservative family, with a father who is a typical 'helicopter' parent. She had met a couple of suitors in an arranged marriage context setup by her parents, before crossing paths with Aly. However, she never clicked with any of these suitors, mostly due to the feeling that she was being pressured into accepting what has been chosen for her, rather than making the choice for herself. Not only was Aly her first self-made choice, but she was particularly drawn to him as he is the complete antithesis of her father in terms of coming from a liberal and interracial family background. Aly asked for Amna's hand twice and was rejected on both occasions by her father. Amna's father considered Aly a slob who wanted to short-change his daughter due to the one year age gap between them. Amna enlisted the help of her uncle, who managed to coax the two parties towards a middle-ground binding agreement. This soothed the mutual tensions and upon proposing a third time, Aly was finally accepted. Despite this apparent acceptance, Amna's

parents indicated that they did not approve of the match. To express this disapproval, Amna's parents were only involved in her bridal shopping at a financial level. Not only that, but her dad also pressured her to upgrade her car amidst the financial strain of Aly's matrimonial responsibilities, to ensure she would not have a chance to ease his load.

The middles are couples following customary practices in terms of involvement of the collective, as middle couples accept and conform to the collectivistic values. Nonetheless, their consumption patterns do not reflect the mainstream matrimonial expenditures. This distinction leads to the splitting of matrimonial expenditures into equal halves, possibly a coping mechanism due to the difficult economic situation in Egypt. To combat the skyrocketing prices hindering the marriage process, the couple's families support one another by equally sharing the burden of the matrimonial transactions. Another reason is the fear of the bridal family becoming a secondary decision-maker to the groom regarding the matrimonial expenditures. Therefore, the bridal family proposes this arrangement to ensure sovereignty in all aspects.

Fayrouz and Adham

The story follows two young lovers who bonded by passing through hardships. They maintained a close relationship by pursuing the same major and choosing to work at the same firm. Their mutual support of each other laid down the foundation for an unbreakable bond. Eight years after they first met, Adham proposed to Fayrouz. Fayrouz's narration focuses on the hardships she and her mother had to overcome during the marriage preparation process. These hardships were mainly inflicted by Fayrouz's future in-laws, but they also had a lot to do with Fayrouz's financial constraints, especially after the loss of her dad. Her mother drove herself mercilessly, without revealing the dire straits she and her daughter struggled with in the eyes of her fiancé's family. The couple sticks closely to their budget without ever

losing joy in each other's company. Working through their issues, the couple is willing to brave the challenges, just for the sake of being together.

Nazly and Malek

The story revolves around how Malek and Nazly got together, overcoming what could be a core issue for some couples and their families. Both of them earned meager salaries that did not cater to their lifestyles, let alone the likelihood of getting married. However, just as they helped their children get by in their daily lives, their respective parents stepped in to cover the couple's matrimonial expenses. Moreover, the bride's narration mentions that her father, while conducting the binding agreement, was keen on winning his daughter a solid position in the marriage power hierarchy that would guarantee her a respected say in the relationship.

The different reactions to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class show that habitus shifts in relation to specific contexts. In fact, habitus is neither fixed nor permanent, and can be changed in response to unexpected situations (Navarro, 2006). Accordingly, one may suggest that Bourdieu's habitus is a monolithic, unified system of socially constructed dispositions, laid out to habituate oneself to fields. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's theory may lack the subjectivity of a habitus, which occurs when the agent poses a dynamic, individually produced habitus shaped by the nature of the values embedded in the social structures within which agents are socialized. In other words, in this study, habitus is the shared expectation within the family as a social unit (with all its dynamics), of what is expected of the bride, the groom, and their respective parents. The socialization of these roles starts from childhood, through the family, continuing into adulthood, through different social institutions such as education, employment, media, and religion.

One's socialization from childhood, through the family (that is, primary socialization), till adulthood through education, employment, media, and religion (secondary socialization), shapes the ways in which the agency thinks and acts. Such is the subjectivity of the agent, defined by the magnitude of the effect of primary or secondary socialization on the agent. The dominance of primary socialization over secondary socialization might be reflected by the traditional couples, who acted according to collectivistic values, as a result of a culturally saturated deliberate decision to limit one's agency. On the other hand, the dominance of secondary socialization is a step on the road to shifting from collectivistic values, as unconventional couples reclaimed their agency to bring about new ordinaries of individualism, within a collectivistic society.

Despite the various reactions to marriage in Cairo's upper middle class, the societal self-image of marriage partners is regarded as one of the most critical and acute signs of community or class sentiments. That is, the choice of marriage partners signifies a test of the standards of what each social class views as adequate, as well as a definitive index of lines of membership.

The limited social fluidity of this social class is demonstrated through the matrimonial journeys I had the chance to scope given that the couples' journeys to wedlock serve social class endogamy. Their journeys are characterized by socially uniform marriage horizons. Marriage requires the meeting between couples, who usually negotiate social spaces that are homogenous in nature, indicating that exogamous marriage is less likely to occur. In addition, personal taste plays a vital role as members belonging to a certain social class are inclined to be attracted to a partner holding a similar cultural position. This contributes to personal attraction in order to produce social confirmation and establish marital stability. Furthermore, the collective of the couples are communities constituting of more than one economic group as the collective possesses value systems ordering matters. In this sense, an agent cannot reclaim agency (navigate a social relationship) unless there is synchronization (or at the least tolerance) of the subjective

perceptions of all the actors involved (that is, the in-group members). This collective navigates a matrimonial journey that carries values, attitudes, and beliefs concerning their lifestyle. In this regard, the couples and their collectives use their economic resources to fashion their conjugal spaces, an arena in which they can assert a sense of distinction since taste is intertwined with class feelings of either admiration or revulsion.

In this spirit, this thesis will take the reader on a journey to explore different reactions to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class, where the reader will encounter the traditional couples who will select the suitor on the basis of suitability of prospects. Marriage partners conform to customary matrimonial practices and will fashion conjugal spaces in a way to confirm a social position. The thesis will also examine the unconventional journeys to wedlock, where couples select suitors on the basis of romance, to replace weak family ties or assert the global self, reclaim agency through financial independence, autonomy and sovereignty, and invest in matrimonial expenditures on the basis of cultural common sense, to lend a sense of continuity to their lives. Finally, the reader will encounter the middle couples, who select their suitors from socially homogenous social spaces, and bargain their matrimonial binding agreements, while looking up to in-group members' approval to be bestowed on their conjugal space, signaling social confirmation.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRADITIONAL JOURNEY TO MATRIMONY

In this chapter, I will cover the key aspects defining most traditional marital journeys in Cairo's upper middle class, with reference to the stories and ethnographic field notes of the subjects I observed and interviewed. I first touch on how the notion of the familial self, (informed by collectivistic values, namely, loyalty to cosmopolitan communal living), strongly influences a bride's suitor choice. The process of selecting a suitor is also informed by a gender role habitus, redefining this social class' cosmopolitan identity. I will then discuss how the matrimonial practices are shaped by socio-cultural premises, which usually lead the bridal family to choose a partner, on the basis of validating a marriage betrothal, through a collective practice. Group-think and the extent to which hegemonic masculinity employed by the fathers together contribute to the legitimization of the marriage process. Furthermore, I refer to the ways the mothers culturally confirm taste through culinary choices and exchanged commodities, to show how the matrimonial process, with maternal and paternal power centers, fulfill alternate key roles in different stages of the process. Finally, I allude to how matrimonial consumption patterns direct the allocation of expenses, on the basis of the couple's expected gender roles, with reference to the key role the mothers play to assert co-membership in a status group (that is, class-habitus).

Farida and Taymour

Farida (the bride: 24 years old) and Taymour (the groom: 28 years old) are a couple from a wealthy background. Farida is the daughter of a well-known real estate company owner. Her father is in business with the owner of an interior design company, who happens to be Taymour's father. Both owners have decided to cement their business relationship by marrying their children to each other. Farida and Taymour met for the first time at a family gathering, where they perceived their situation as that of an arranged

marriage. Both were aware that their families had planned their meeting in such a way as to allow the couple to mingle more closely within a family setting.

Miral and Amir

Miral (the bride: 23 years old) and Amir (the groom: 28 years old) are another couple also from a wealthy background. Miral is the daughter of an owner of a chain of retail stores specializing in school uniforms. Amir, a second cousin of Miral's, met her at a family reunion. He works with his father at his jewelry shop. Although one may assume their union to be an arranged, Miral fell for Amir as she believes he is a real man who carries himself with maturity, a trait she seldom came across in her previous experiences.

Carmen and Hady

Carmen, (the bride: 24 years old) and Hady, (the groom: 24 years old) embarked on a journey to matrimony characterized by similar and compatible views, with their respective families coming into play to establish an agreeable ambience throughout the marriage preparation phases.

I met Farida and Taymour, Miral and Amir, Carmen and Hady at an interior design firm in Heliopolis, a fairly affluent district of Cairo. Farida and her mother shared with me their journey, starting from the prelude of the marriage, till the day they furnished the couple's home to-be. On a separate occasion, I also met with Miral and her mother, who also shared with me their journey to matrimony. Finally, I met Carmen at the interior designer firm, as she was furnishing their second house at the time. In fact, the couple initially got married in a rented house until their actual house was delivered and ready to receive them.

Suitable Marriage Partners

The selection of a suitor in a traditional journey to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class, is premised on the basis of principles of selection and exclusion. These principles are the notion of the familial self and a gender-role habitus. Bourdieu (1987) proposed that the individuals belonging to a group with a particular construction (such as socio-occupational genres indicating position in the relations of production, modulated by financial practices) come with secondary properties in tow, which may serve as the real cornerstones of choice-making.

The Familial Self: *Loyalty to Cosmopolitan Communal Living*

The notion of the familial self is established on the basis of loyalty to communal living, social cohesion, and group harmony. In Cairo's upper middle class, collectivism is a major source of cultural belonging. In other words, as argued by De Koning (2009), familial supervision is an important aspect of the lives of single upper middle-class women, to the extent that the places they traverse should be indicated as safe. Safety is connected to social homogeneity in terms of Egyptianized cosmopolitanism (that is, associated with westernized patterns of consumption, yet upholding to domesticated religious and cultural faith). This is why communal living, social cohesion, and group harmony are premised on the basis of Egyptianized cosmopolitanism. This refers to a particular lifestyle where transnational goods and services become necessities rather than luxuries. This mandates an economic wealth, manifested in a specific cultural capital, to allow a potential suitor to belong to a status group, displaying symbols of symbolic urbanity and modernity *à l'Égyptienne*. Members of this social class construct marital barriers to be able to preserve a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The brides display a tendency to select a suitor in a social space demonstrating social homogeneity. Such opportunities are granted in family gatherings where extensive kin ties are maintained to explore social cosmopolitan marriage horizons. Despite the fact that brides

navigate heterogenous social spaces, a marriage partner is considered in marriage markets that demonstrate homogeneity.

My initial meeting with Farida allowed me to learn more about the ways in which a traditional bride assesses a potential suitor's ascribed status.

It all started when Taymour and I crossed paths at a family gathering. That, my friend, is an arranged marriage brewing. Taymour and I are not at all related by blood, but his father and mine share a practically bloodless brotherhood, that originally sprouted from mutual business. My dad is a real estate business owner and his' owns an architecture company. Throughout their time partnering on projects, my father has grown to believe that Taymour's father's tasteful & aesthetic designs are the only ones that can glorify his constructs by emblazoning them with elevated glamour to flaunt. Not to mention, he is quite a kind and friendly man, just like dad.

The significance and the importance of such marriage horizons are also emphasized by Miral.

Amir & I met at a family reunion party. As it turns out to be, we are sort of related, as our grandmas are actually sisters. I actually found out about it at that family reunion! I saw him before at previous family gatherings, but I always thought that he was just a really close family friend. Turns out we're second cousins, as pointed out by my grandma! Amir's father is a cousin of my father's mother. After that shocking revelation, followed by a lengthy string of other equally embarrassing moments, the peculiarity of it all was becoming more and more familiar, until the both of us grew obscenely comfortable with one another.

The brides (Farida and Miral) perceived their suitor as an opportunity that showcased suitability.

In fact, the selection of the suitor took place in a social environment granting cultural similarity (that is, a family gathering). This social environment is premised on the basis of "endogamous" marriages, tending to generate ideals in societies where there is preference for collectivism, social cohesion, and group harmony, depicting similarities in terms of social hierarchies rooted in high value of "kin solidarity" (Weinreb, 2008). Kin endogamy, in this sense, appears to be ideal. In fact, across the Arab region, the ideal marriage partner for young brides and grooms is often considered to be the paternal cousin (Salem, 2015). This explains why Farida referred to a "bloodless brotherhood" between her father and her father-in-law, while Miral elaborated upon the patrilineal cousinhood between Amir and herself. The brides will

firmly establish themselves as wives in an affinal family through the reproduction of the construction of exchange networks (Weinreb, 2008). This spotlights the importance of the notion of the familial self; in other words, the majority of Egyptian families prioritize the needs of one's family over one's individualistic needs and desires, as the concept of the self is largely subordinate to that of the family (Scroope, 2019). This shows that this social class appreciates and honors traditional family values such as loyalty to family network and communal living. Loyalty to communal living is displayed by conserving cosmopolitanism, to be able to preserve one's identity, by the selection of a suitor capable of contributing to such an identity. Therefore, extensive kin ties are maintained through frequent family gatherings (Scroope, 2019). Kin ties are maintained to enable the individual to explore a homogenous marriage horizon in terms of cosmopolitanism.

Not only do family gatherings maintain kin ties that nurture and preserve a cosmopolitan identity, but the social spaces where brides roam also allow for the selection of a potential suitor serving communal living, social cohesion, and group harmony. In fact, the first time I met Carmen, she expressed enthusiasm to collaborate as a subject of study in this thesis. The eagerness with which she narrated the way she met Hady illustrates the extent to which brides in Cairo's upper middle class embrace the social spaces representing homogeneity.

A piece of cake, easy as pie, or whatever other confectioneries depicting a bump-free ride, is how I would, thankfully, describe my trek to matrimony. Of course, it entailed a few hiccups along the way, but non that had anyone choking to their doom. Which, through the horror stories I've heard from my friends regarding their experiences, doom has proven to be a running theme when it comes to voyaging towards wedlock. I've gotten a bit ahead of myself, here. Let me backtrack a little.

Going on to how I met Hady, my hubby, we crossed paths in uni. We were members of the same club and our friendship flourished from there, as we instantly clicked due to a lot of interests we shared. We'd go out on friendly meet-up's before we became official, until he actually confessed his feelings and we became exclusive. It didn't take him long, though. Not to mention, that later on, as my dad and father in-law grew to know each other more, they came to unveil and realize the fact that they attended the same school together, and were brought up around the same neighborhood, at some point during their youth. They even recognized tons of mutual friends, whom they shared within their

social circles. They turned out to be more alike than different, at the end of the day. This really served building a great bond between them.

Hady, as a potential spouse, displayed cultural and social similarities to Carmen, as the fathers came to realize that they shared a lot in common, as narrated above. This shows that socially homogenous marriage increases the likelihood of satisfaction with the couple's union, as this guarantees the likelihood that the couple will display the same set of cosmopolitan dispositions. These similarities facilitate undertaking the spousal duties together, particularly in running a household jointly and raising children (Leeuwen & Maas, 2005).

Kalmijn (1998), in a study on inter-marriage and homogamy, depicted group identification and group sanctions as modes of discourses through which a suitor is selected to enable internal cohesion and homogeneity of the group. Group identification is premised on the basis of individuals' internalization of a 'sense of peoplehood', leading to the internationalization of the significance of the norms of endogamy (Kalmijn, 1998). Group sanctions show that even if people have not internalized norms of endogamy, they may still refrain from exogamous marriages to avoid social sanctions (Kalmijn, 1998). For example, one possible sanction could be religious, as the Catholic Church has denounced inter-faith marriages for centuries (Kalmijn, 1998). In the context of matrimony, in Cairo's upper middle class, agents may avoid exogamy to identify and affirm their cosmopolitan identity in an urban space.

To be able to show loyalty to cosmopolitan communal living, the selection of potential spouses will be premised on the basis of the resources they have to offer. In terms of socio-economic income and status), this refers to the ability to manifest oneself as a resourceful spouse. At another level, the spouse's cultural resources allow for mutual confirmation of behaviors, world views, and taste. Similarly, the spouse's social connections enlarge the potentialities of the couple to engage in joint activities. Accordingly, economic resources, cultural credentials, and social prestige pave the way for personal

attraction. The traditional brides construct feelings of love towards potential spouses on the basis of their economic, social, and cultural status.

Single men and women operate the marriage market where each individual considers an array of potential spouses, who are evaluated on the basis of the resources. This array of resources is a clear prerequisite in choosing a partner, in terms of family property, financial stability, status, social approval, and, ideally, conjugal affection. The economic well-being is shared by the family members and status is granted to the family as a unit, rather than to its individual members. As a result, the income and status of one spouse contribute to the income and status of the other by raising the income and status of the nascent family. Therefore, females of marriageable age tend to search for a spouse with attractive economic resources. While the selection of the suitor may be based on a preference to marry a resourceful spouse, the role of cultural resources is based on a preference to marry someone who is culturally similar. Similarity of values and opinions leads to mutual confirmation of each other's behavior and world-views. Similarity of taste, just as with similarity in knowledge, creates a common basis for conversation, which nurtures mutual understanding.

The brides' love towards their suitors draws a great emphasis on the importance of the familial self. To elaborate, not only do the brides celebrate the ascribed status of their grooms, measured by the fathers-in-law's status, but they also recognize their achieved status, such as education and occupation, as a result of familial support garnered from the father-in-law's status. In other words, Farida describes her compatibility with Taymour with reference to capital considerations (economic, cultural and social) inherited from his father.

I believe we are quite the match, for our education, economic statuses and societal levels are on par.

Like one another, our parents, through hard work, were able to harvest commendable economic statuses. Not only did they never hold off on spending when it came to our academic progression, but also secured us places within honorable communities. In my opinion, both our families had their priorities set right and straight when it came to investing in raising us. I am

certainly very thankful for my privileged upbringing and for my parent's way of thinking, for it was their mindset that worked their wealth into the priceless enlightened minds they aimed for their children to have, likewise Taymour's parents, as well as hopefully, him & I, in the future. Taymour works as an architect, for his father's company. As I've come to know him more, he seems a civilized and well-educated young man. He received his higher education abroad, in Montreal, Canada and appears to have grown to become highly dexterous at what he does. He leads a comfortable lifestyle and is part of many dependable social circles, thanks to his charming father. Honestly, they deserve to be applauded, because it is easy to be blinded by wealth into thinking that it is eternal, circumstantially growing to believe that education is pointless.

This notion is also corroborated by Miral, who describes Amir's economic competencies as being highly suitable to establish a family, a belief that is instrumental to the prospective family's robust economic position in the society.

Speaking of my hubby, here's a little bit of everything about him too. His name is Amir. He works with his dad running a jewelry shop. He is such a hardworking, dependable and self-reliant man, who is at a point in his life where he would be able to sustain a stable family.

Weber broadened the simplistic concept of a "class", from an objective economic criterion, by adding subjective elements in the form of "status groups", which exist by virtue of the values, attitudes, and beliefs that they hold about their lifestyle. The condition by which a "status group" is defined as a "plurality of persons within a larger group claim a special social esteem, and possible also status monopolies" (Weber, 1958). Shared living, in this respect, is more than a financial class, as it is built on belief systems regulating its matters. In other words, for social relationships to exist, there must be a synchronization of the subjective (that is, Egyptianized cosmopolitanism) perceptions of all the actors involved. According to Bourdieu, a symbolic analysis of status communities suggests that boundaries between social classes can be understood as a distinction between modes of existence (Bourdieu, 1987). Class location and habitus, in this regard, reveal a variety of behaviors situated in different domains of practices and consumption (that is, the consumption of transnational goods and services, while preserving an Egyptianized identity). This shows that in Cairo's upper middle class, members hold a hybrid identity,

informed by the consumption of transnational commodities and the local values perpetuated by religious and cultural norms, such as the collectivism justifying family allocentrism in terms of loyalty to communal living, social cohesion, and group harmony.

Given the above considerations, choosing a partner not only depends on family allocentrism promoting the choice of a partner on the basis of his cosmopolitanism, but also cosmopolitanism raises the need for financial, cultural, and social capital. In order to safeguard this hybrid identity, therefore, one must possess the tools to constitute it. Bourdieu (1987) suggests that one's economic, cultural, and social capital distribute people across social spaces, with regard to the volume of capital they possess, according to the composition of their capital (that is, the manifestation of an economic wealth into an educational credential), which evolve over time, setting a trajectory where an agent is assigned a specific position over an area defining symbolic boundaries. This positioning establishes principles of differentiation that constitute status communities. In this sense, a class habitus establishes conditioning factors, which makes a status community produce similar practices, as their trajectories brought them to the position they are occupying. In simple terms, agents who tend to resemble one another in terms of the volume, composition, and trajectory of capital, tend to come together through social relationships (namely, marriage) to reinforce points of resemblance.

The Gender Role Habitus: *Femininity vs. Masculinity*

Despite the fact that this social class' members identify themselves by their urban and modern patterns of consumption constituting cosmopolitanism, they still hold traditional values regarding gender roles that confirm the hybridity of their identity. This point can be better understood by referring to the 2006 UNDP Arab Human Development Report that states that the prevailing masculine culture and values see women as dependents of men. As a result, men take priority both in access to work and the enjoyment of its returns. This confirms that patriarchal structures are key constraining factors to women's social position in the Arab World (Barsoum, 2018). In fact, Miyata and Yamada (2016), in a study on gender role attitudes and market participation in Egypt, found that "even though women may have a more liberal view and be willing to work, their attitudes do not straightforwardly translate into their labour market outcome (or behavior) in Egypt because of the strong social norms and cultural environment that women face" (p. 890). That is, this social group's brand of cosmopolitanism endows their daughters with high levels of education to accrue their cultural capital and develop a modernized identity, as affirmed by all traditional brides.

Farida validates the possession of cultural capital:

I am certainly very thankful for my privileged upbringing and for my parent's way of thinking, for it was their mindset that worked their wealth into the priceless enlightened minds they aimed for their children to have.

Miral affirms the acquirement of high levels of education.

My parents were super keen on giving me the best life possible. For instance, they have sent me to a highly commendable private school. Plus, not only was my education a high-ranking priority, but they also ensured that any budding talents of mine are nurtured. Hence why, they enrolled me into music classes at age 3. One would say that that's quite too young, however, in my parents' book, if I can sing along to Teletubbies, then I can certainly be groomed to strum a fancy tune on the guitar or play a classical piece on the piano. I'm glad they believed in me though, for if it wasn't for that, I wouldn't be able to proudly say that I can play 4 instruments and read sheet music. Not to mention that I've written a few exemplary pieces, if I do say so myself.

This confirms that, through education, parents grant their daughters a modern identity, allowing them to gain access to a social milieu where they can consolidate a cosmopolitan identity. Yet, such an educational trend seems to be civilizational rather than feminist. In other words, parents are educating their daughters in a westernized social milieu to provide them with advance technical skills while at the same time repudiating western values. In fact, Miyata and Yamada (2016) suggest that in a country where the social norms derive from conservative traditions, the attitude towards labor market participation is not linked to the levels of education, but rather to cultural background. This allows for an understanding of the choices made by the traditional brides when they decide to exclude themselves from the labor market.

For instance, Miral emphasizes her disengagement from the labor market, showing gratitude to her parents who finance her current lifestyle, until she makes the move to her conjugal household.

Currently, I'm finishing up college and waiting on an arts degree. It's a relatively lightweight course, which has allowed me to focus more on growing as a composer. I live with my parents for which I'm grateful, but also hopeful it will change soon, when I move in with my future hubby.

The choice of a suitor is informed by the gender role ideology, as demonstrated by Hoodfar (1997), in a study titled *Between marriage and the market: Intimate politics and survival in Cairo*, citing that a husband is expected to be able to provide at least the standard of living that a woman has enjoyed at her parent's home. In the context of traditional marriage, in Cairo's upper middle class, this shows that a gender role habitus not only indicates gender roles practiced and internalized by the members of this social class, but also indicates that a husband's masculinity is reflected in terms of his capital considerations, as men are aware of their privileged status within the family, in return for financially supporting to the conjugal household. This is the socio-economic gendered status-quo, as men see a direct link between notions of masculinity and their role in the marriage as the principal breadwinner (Hoodfar, 1998).

Gender role habitus among Egyptians is informed and perpetuated by the religious and cultural norms that stress the importance of the family as a social structure and the importance of the female in fulfilling her primary role in creating, upholding, and maintaining this family (Khalifa, 2011). According to a popular Islamic saying, “marriage comprises half the religion”; this indicates the importance of the marriage institution as holding an equal share with the five pillars of Islam, and their attendant rituals, (Khalifa, 2011). According to Islamic beliefs, marriage is the only acceptable institution for sexual relations, producing children, and nurturing a family (Khalifa, 2011). Similarly, from the Biblical perspective, the purpose of marriage is primarily to provide mutual help and guidance, physical and spiritual fulfillment, and the prevention of immorality (Vorster, 2008). In fact, the divine foundation of marriage, in Biblical terms, means that divorce goes against the will of God by violating the oath to commitment which was witnessed by God (Vorster, 2008). Therefore, when planning a family, the well-being of the future children, the marital relation, the church and the society should be taken into account (Vorster, 2008). This religious dimension to marriage is highlighted in Miral and Amir’s case:

Moving on, the next day, we went to our local church to go through the paper work necessary to officialize our engagement. The paper work is signed by Amir and I, both our parents to (ensure their approval), as well as our fathers, later on during the wedding ceremony. We also have to attend a mandatory course at the church, covering some general marital issues couples may find challenging, as well as tips on how to work around them. Another thing we had to do is get a hospital check-up report to ensure that the both of us are healthy and disease free, as well as get an idea about our fertility and ability to conceive. We submitted the health report to the church for approval and were considered officially engaged, then.

If you think that this is a bit much to go through to get married, let me explain. From a religious stand point, divorce is mostly prohibited, unless an affair took place. Hence why the church ensures a marriage is potentially set up for success and free of any foreseen possible disputes, so that divorce is a very last resort or even completely off the table for a couple. Anyway, I’ve been engaged to Amir for 3 years now and we’re going to tie the knot once I’m done with my bachelor’s degree.

It is important to note that in a family where relationships are family-oriented, one's identity is defined in familial terms as it is relational. In Egypt, values are mainly informed by religious principles. In fact, from a Biblical perspective, family should advocate solidarity. The term solidarity here refers to the "mutual compassion, responsibilities, obedience within the culture of functional differentiation between husband, wife and child" (Vorster, 2008).

The selection of the suitor by traditional brides is informed by a gender role habitus dictating a feminine capital, as well as a masculine capital, that a potential spouse should display. In Egypt, brides and grooms are brought up at their parents' home. An implication of such a system is that the agent experiences the Egyptian marriage market in a way where they are less inclined to rebel against parental authority and tradition (Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, & El-Gibaly, 2003). In fact, gender-role acquisition among Egyptian adolescents is characterized by experiencing differential role socialization (Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, & El-Gibaly, 2003). Girls participate in domestic tasks, assuming a greater responsibility in the household as opposed to their male counterparts (Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, & El-Gibaly, 2003). Generally speaking, once an Egyptian girl, regardless of social class, heads towards marriage, she is expected to quit working for a salary, not only because she is considered to have achieved marriage as an overarching goal, but also because she is pressured to become pregnant once she ties the knot (Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, & El-Gibaly, 2003).

These differences in gender roles shed light on the gender role habitus. In fact, the important elements of a successful marriage are suggested by women, who believe that men have to be more educated than their wives because it is the wife's duty to obey her husband (Hoodfar, 2005). Hence, an educated man will command her in a way that preempts the possibility of divorce at a later stage (Hoodfar, 2005). Comparatively, men's opinions mirror the same view, as they highlighted the need to be acknowledged and respected as heads of the household, raising the need to be older and more educated

than their wives (Hoodfar, 2005). This shows that the traditional brides' disengagement from the labor force is premised on the belief of her feminine capital: which is the maintenance of the domestic sphere, while her potential spouse should reflect masculine capital characterized by having a strong character, being wealthy and kindly disposed in order to finance the needs of their conjugal household. In this sense, one may argue that passion has a strong sexual component, as all humans have the same capacity for sexual passion, because of their biological propensity to reproduce. However, while the inner experience of passion may be universal, the expression of passion in relationships may be prone to cultural variability.

In summary, the selection of the suitor in a traditional journey to marriage, in Cairo's upper middle class, is premised on the notion of familial self to demonstrate allegiance to one's communal living. This is informed by cosmopolitanism, urbanity, and modernity. Nevertheless, such modernity is restricted to a civilization project, as brides select a suitor on the basis of a patriarchal gender role habitus perpetuated by social and religious norms. Accordingly, traditional arrangements are greatly appreciated by conventional brides, whereby women assume a submissive role in relation to their husbands' (feminine capital), in exchange for financial support (masculine capital).

This emphasizes the signification of the cultural rationality to enable a discussion of the origins of such beliefs. One must postulate, therefore, the ways in which an agent's familial self and gender habitus are shaped and perpetuated. This postulation will be scoped more closely in the following section, which examines how the matrimonial practices abide by group-think, hegemonic masculinity, and cultural approval of cosmopolitan practices.

Toe the Line

Matrimonial practices in the traditional journey to matrimony among Cairo's upper middle class are characterized by group-think in order to validate the marriage betrothal. In addition, the traditional matrimonial practices display the nature and function of hegemonic masculinity to legitimize the matrimonial journey. Along with group-think and hegemonic masculinity as modes of practices to traditional matrimony, the matriarchs of the family assert their cultural agency to affirm cosmopolitan taste and expertise.

Group-Think: *Validation of the Marriage Betrothal*

The interviews not only enabled to gain a deeper understanding of the couples' suitor selection practices, but it also allowed me to get to become better acquainted with the brides. Such rapport led the brides to show more trust and communicate more details of their journey to matrimony, with regard to their matrimonial practices. In other words, I was able to understand that despite the fact that, in contemporary Egypt, individuals enjoy more decision-making power regarding spousal choice, marriage still entails negotiations among family members given the tendency to marry those within the same social class, religion, and level of education (Scroope, 2019). This shows that habitus is not fixed, but, rather, has the capacity to change over time. Contemporary Cairo has experienced changes in the habitus as two generations ago most marriages were arranged with little input on the part of the individuals who were to be married. Nevertheless, parents preserved and engaged in traditional forms of evaluating the potential brides or grooms and their families' backgrounds and reputations (Sherif-Trask, 2018). Such traditional forms entail that marriage is perceived, by both parents and children, as the union of two families rather than two individuals. In this spirit, Sherif-Trask (2108) highlighted the extreme importance for both families to acquire as much knowledge as possible about one another before a marriage. In this sense,

group-think refers to the physical gathering of both families to get acquainted with one another to display validation of the marriage betrothal.

One important milestone in the matrimonial practices is the first visit where both families get together. The betrothal of marriage is initiated upon the request of the groom, or the father of the groom, to visit the bridal family. Farida describes her marriage betrothal in a way that confirms that the matrimonial practices are conducted in a collective manner to validate and initiate the journey to matrimony. This is why the groom's family make the official visit to the bride's family in order to celebrate the matrimonial betrothal.

Although our families were familiar with one another, Taymour's dad, a traditional man at heart, insisted on doing things traditionally. He arranged a small gathering with my dad so as for Taymour to properly propose.

My dad was over the moon and so was my mom, but she made it clear that we only have over our very close relatives to dodge any green-eyed monsters, if you get what I'm on about. I don't mean I have monsters amongst my family and friends, but truth be told, jealousy is a very potent and home-wrecking weapon and some people get weak and can't keep their hands off it. My mom definitely had a point, there.

The increasing rapport between Miral and myself allowed me to delve in-depth into her journey to wedlock. Across successive interviews, she provided me with details about the day Amir's family met hers in a new setting which was the day of the formal.

Amir called my dad to set a time to visit, along with his family. I was just finishing up my make-up when the doorbell rang. I slapped on my lipstick and ran to the salon as my dad answered the door. After we greeted each other, everyone sat down for the real deal talk.

Amir's dad said that he had already bought a family house and proposed that Amir and I live in their fully finished apartment. He followed this proposal up by saying that this deal is on as long as my parents approve of the house and give their blessing. He said that if they didn't like it, they would negotiate a different place for Amir and I to settle. This was very sweet and courteous of him, as said by my dad.

Carmen's betrothal during the marriage journey also emphasizes the importance of the initial matrimonial practice which is the groom's family visiting the bride's house.

Hady called my parents to set a date to visit and officially ask for my hand. his parents and mine meshed very well together. It was very palpable that they had a great flow of chemistry between one another. The mutual values, views and opinions they shared made them instantly click and as the conversation went-on, they grew to find-out they had a lot of mutual friends in common as well. This really soothed my nerves, as I was a bit on edge regarding his parents meeting mine. The uneasiness stemmed from the fact that my parents and I have heard rumors, through word of mouth, that his dad was quite a controlling man.

The betrothal of the traditional marriage is initiated by the request of the groom, or the father of the groom, to visit the bride's family to arrange matrimonial deals. This proposal day is characterized by parental involvement. The parental involvement is reflected in the meeting of both families to validate the betrothal. In fact, parents usually have power by force of custom, or because they control the resources of the family (Leeuwen & Maas, 2005). This shows that the formation and the celebration of a couple does not concern the young people themselves, but rather the two families.

In fact, Farida, Miral and Carmen display a supplementary traditional value: group-think. This is based on the belief that in closely-connected families, "groupthink" is common, as individuals concerned, that is, the bridal pair-to-be, do not feel sufficiently empowered to challenge the existing consensus. For example, according to Hindu practices, marriage is a bond between families and a promise of continuity in patriarchal family lines with deep religious, social, and institutional significance (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2012). At the beginning of the 20th century, it was extremely rare for any marriage candidate to participate in choosing their own partner (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2012).

In the context of the matrimonial practices in a traditional manner, in Cairo's upper middle class, the family involvement, expressed as group-think, is a practice allowing both families to get acquainted with one another and negotiate a roadmap to the journey of the couple. In fact, one criterion of assessing a potential suitor is ascribed status, which is reflected by the groom's and the bride's family status. In this sense, the groom's family visit to the bride's house is a practice aiming to examine the suitor's ascribed status. This is a product of a cultural norm. In different terms, a greater level of parental influence on partner selection and relationship functionality is still apparent among collectivistic cultures, which emphasize family harmony and the good of the group over the needs of the individual (Benjanyan, Marshall & Ferenczi, 2015). This shows that the matrimonial practices are a series of activities, which involve the collective of the bride and the groom to approve the union of the couple, demonstrating that marriage is not a decision taken autonomously, but rather a choice mandating the approval of the collective.

Rather than emphasizing the romance between individuals, parents encourage children to direct more attention towards pragmatic qualities in a potential partner such as financial resources, social and religious attitudes, and, often most crucially, positive interplay between the two families (Benjanyan, Marshall & Ferenczi, 2015). Group-think is a matrimonial mode of existence premised on family allocentrism, commitment to societal cohesion, and group unity. This explains why the brides accept and respect their familial involvement in the marriage choice; in fact, this involvement is perceived as familial care rather than hegemonic familial authority. Family allocentrism promotes bonding among family members, and may actually give rise to analogous partner preferences in children, similar to those of their parents.

For instance, Carmen demonstrated a shared belief about her suitor, Hady, by referring to her mother's opinion of him.

My parents, especially mother, were very pleased by Hady being my future husband. They felt he was a straight forward, decently mannered man, with the financial capability of starting a family. They also admired his independence when they learned about the business he was starting at the time.

Similarly, Miral's love for Amir was further nurtured by her mother's admiration towards him.

My mom for instance, is really fond of Amir and couldn't help herself sweet talking around him and lavishing him with complements. Not to mention that she'd refill his plate when he'd only finished a quarter of his serving. When mom loves, mom feeds! She had also told me that she thinks he's a perfect match for me as he reminds her of dad. Another thing that charmed her is his taste in people and the fact that we share the same circle of friends. Mom just gets along with him very well, which sets my heart at ease and for that I'm so grateful. My mom is a tough one to crack, so the fact that Amir is on good terms with her is almost a miracle.

I postulated, in the previous section, the socio-cultural origins of selection of the suitor on the basis of devotion to cosmopolitan communal living and conventional gender role-habitus. Group-think appears to be one possible explanation of the brides' suitor preferences. In fact, robust family ties among members may have transmitted the ancestry tradition, where traditional characteristics such as classical gender role behavior in a potential partner are greatly valued. In an environment where affection rules interactions between parents and children, mutual beliefs and morals prevail among them, whereby children exhibit like-mindedness to their parents when it comes to taste in choosing a partner. In such a way, prominent relational interplay between emotional intimacy of family members and readiness to abide by parental messages is established. That is, the tighter the bond between the children and their parents, the more pronounced their inclination to accept parental values. In this light, individuals holding a collectivistic upbringing may experience higher family allocentrism and, consequently, report a narrower gap between their choices for a spouse versus those of their parents (Benjanyan, Marshall & Ferenczi, 2015).

In turn, collectivist robust family ties often mean that selecting a spouse is strongly affected by parental influence, with both children and parents working hand in hand to select an appropriate partner. This higher appreciation of parental involvement in children's decision making, when it comes to partner selection, may sway commitment towards a romantic relationship on the basis of either the approval or disapproval of parents. Nevertheless, parental approval is represented by the paternal figure as, in the Arab world, the father acts as the representative of the family to society at large, personifying the family's beliefs, values, and morals (Mourad, 2010).

Hegemonic Masculinity: *Legitimizing the Marriage Betrothal*

Hegemonic masculinity is formulated in a way that displays a canonized culture regarding men, gender, and social hierarchy (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is perceived as the code of conduct that has historically allowed men's dominance over women to prevail; this is achieved by culturally setting up role practices that are expected of a man to embody the traditional male identity (Connell, 2005). Hegemony, here, does not necessarily mean violence or aggression; rather, it can sometimes convey the notion of cultural and social ascendancy. Masculinity, indeed, is a group of configurations of practice that are achieved in social action; therefore, it can vary among the gender relations within a certain social setting. In the context of matrimonial practices, in Cairo's upper middle class, socially legitimized hegemonic models of masculinity are also at play in families. This is because male gender strategies shape negotiations around the outlay of matrimonial practices by means of consent by the subordinate groups, that is, the respective mothers and the bride.

Farida, for instance, shows that the approval of a marriage decision is her father's role.

After having a few beverages and some friendly small talk, Taymour's father, my dad & my brother excused themselves into another room to go over the binding agreement details. As I sat with my mom and Taymour's mother, I overheard the gentlemen laughing in the other room, which left me contented knowing that things were running smoothly. It was only 15 swift minutes until the gentleman rejoined us. My dad wore a beaming smile on his face as he entered the room and so did everyone else. 'Let's recite Al-Fatiha.' announced my dad gladly, as he put his hands together for the supplication, along with everybody else.

Egypt, as a patriarchal society, functions in a way that serves an unequal distribution of power between men and women, to the detriment of women. Therefore, the fathers of the brides were keen to present their families as male-led social units to reassure the grooms and their parents that the brides have been raised in a family abiding by patriarchal values. It is noteworthy that there is a consensus on the lower value of the women in both families as none of the females attending this gathering objected to their apparent subordinate role. This shows that both families' habitus consolidating mechanisms perpetuates a set of beliefs and practices that normalize the subordinate role of the female members of both families during this stage of the matrimonial practices. This is demonstrated by women reciting the Fatiha without any participation in the negotiations.

Similar to Farida's narrative, Miral has kept away from negotiating her marriage agreement; hence, her submissive stance has allowed her father to assume the position of a hegemonic male who shoulders responsibility for the collective's welfare.

Amir's dad said that he had already bought a family house and proposed that Amir and I live in their fully finished apartment. He followed this proposal up by saying that this deal is on as long as my parents approve of the house and give their blessing. He said that if they didn't like it, they would negotiate a different place for Amir and I to settle. This was very sweet and courteous of him, as said by my dad.

In the Arab world, the father acts as the representative of the family to society at large, presenting the families beliefs, values, and morals (Mourad, 2010). Women carry greater expectations of social compliance and are sometimes seen as particularly vulnerable targets in need of male protection (Scroope, 2019). Any mistake or instance of loss of control by a woman is still sometimes construed as a failure on the part of the patriarch of the family to keep her in line. This is because patriarchal attitudes of machismo are closely intertwined with the concept of honor (Scroope, 2019). This explains the behavior of Farida and Miral in this matrimonial stage, as their behaviors are more situational than dispositional and are controlled by norms and socially accepted gender roles. In other words, the couple's connectedness and social compliance to their fathers, at this stage, is emotional and financial. The emotional social compliance is their psychological dependence on their fathers and their need for their fathers' approval to celebrate the betrothal. The financial and social compliance is reflected in their monetary reliance on their fathers to negotiate the marriage binding agreement, without prior consultation.

The brides and their mothers display social and psychological compliance to the male figure of their family by remaining silent during the male-male agreement. Such compliance, in turn, demonstrates that the bride understands and accepts the socially commanded gender order (that is, the patriarch acting in a culturally accepted hegemonic way). The latter is based on the belief that women are expected to be submissive, amenable, and sensitive, or at least to pretend to be so in the presence of men (Khalifa, 2011). In contrast, men are expected to be the controllers, dominators, and breadwinners, hence the dominant role of the male figure in the public sphere (Khalifa 2011).

Gender roles among Egyptians are informed and perpetuated by the religious and social norms that constantly stress the importance of the family as a social structure and the importance of the female to fulfill her primary role in creating, upholding, and maintaining that family (Khalifa, 2011). This religious importance is highlighted in Miral and Amir's case:

We went to our local church to go through the paper work necessary to officialize our engagement. The paper work is signed by Amir and I, both our fathers to ensure their approval, as well as our fathers, later on during the wedding ceremony. We also have to attend a mandatory course at the church, covering some general marital issues couples may find challenging, as well as tips on how to work around them. Another thing we had to do is get a hospital check-up report to ensure that the both of us are healthy and disease free, as well as get an idea about our fertility and ability to conceive. We submitted the health report to the church for approval and were considered officially engaged, then.

Religion does not only assign to marriage a divine role, but it also reflects gender hierarchy in matrimonial practices. In fact, the religious beliefs validating a couple's engagement nurture and perpetuate hegemonic masculinities.

Inhorn (2012), in a study titled *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies and Islam in the Middle East*, portrays the patriarchy within the Egyptian society as follows:

Patriarchy is characterized by relations of power and authority of males over females which are (1) learned through gender socialization within the family, where males wield power through the socially defined institution of fatherhood; (2) manifested in both inter- and intra-gender interactions within the family; (3) legitimized through deeply engrained, pervasive ideologies of inherent male superiority; and (4) institutionalized on many societal levels (legal, political, economic, educational, religious, and so on).

This shows that the hegemonic masculinity practiced by the father of the family is embedded in social resources legitimizing patriarchy. In other words, the Church legitimizes an engagement with the signatures of the fathers to communicate their approval of the union of the couples. In Egypt, values are mainly informed by religious principles. In fact, from a Biblical perspective, family should advocate solidarity. Solidarity refers to “mutual compassion, responsibilities, obedience within the culture of functional differentiation between husband, wife and child” (Vorster, 2008). This demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity is a religiously idealized form of protection. Not only does the Church, as a religious institution in the Egyptian society, contribute to the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in

marriage practice, but the Islamic tradition also requires the communication of the father's approval of the union of the couple. In a similar vein, Sonbol (2005), in a study titled *History of Marriage Contracts in Egypt*, discussed the contractual nature of the marriage in modern Egypt. This includes the names of the bride and groom, the fathers' names and those of the witnesses to the marriage (males), the dowry, and the bride's status as either a virgin or a previously married woman.

Nevertheless, the contractual nature of marriages in Egypt is not solely based on religious duties, but also legal obligation to officialize the marriage. In other words, Shaham (1999), in a study about marriage contracts in Egypt, shows that governmental activities turned the standard Islamic marriage contract into a civil contract, in which spouses are free to shape the nature of their conjugal relationship. This project shows that the growth of a centralized Egyptian state led to the deep penetration of the legal system in the field of personal status, yet they still resort to Islamic mechanism; as the contractual nature of a marriage in Islamic tradition, similar to the Christian traditions, draws a great emphasis on the importance of hegemonic masculinity; aside from the names of the bride and the groom, the fathers of the couple must sign the contract to communicate their approval to further legitimize the union. Not to mention that the witnesses also should be males. This shows that manhood in Egypt is an "ideal type" exhibiting masculine attributes (Inhorn, 2012). In that sense, matrimonial institutions serve the hegemonic masculinity to continue being a necessary matrimonial practice and discourse to legitimize the union of a couple.

Not only is hegemonic masculinity exhibited by the need of fathers to communicate their approval through signatures or contracts, but also the confirmation of the virginity of the bride in the marriage contract contributes to the understanding of gender roles in Egypt. Although it has been evidentially supported that the presence of an intact hymen or bleeding on the first sexual encounter is not a testament of a woman's virginity, the hymen has a sociocultural importance as a sign of purity and honorable

womanhood. Virginity and women's social reputation are both existent, more in social belief than in any biological reality, which paradoxically ensures their strong reality in molding women's lives (Wynn & Hassanein, 2015). In the Arab world, the entire family's honor; and family means those related by blood through the male line; reside in the conduct of its women (Baron, 2006). In that sense, hegemonic masculinity in Egypt and in this social class, is perceived as providing the family as a whole with a wage, protecting them from any harm, in return of social compliance.

Asserting Taste: *Performing Cultural Capital*

The matrimonial practices in a traditional journey, in Cairo's upper middle class, shows the importance of group-think and hegemonic masculinity. It also displays the important role of the mothers in drawing symbolic boundaries. Marriage, as a social field, is viewed as an arena of showing off economic and cultural capital to affirm co-membership in a social class. In fact, mothers act as social agents in the marriage field, as those in charge of portraying their families' symbolic capital; "the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honorability" (Bourdieu, 1984). The portrayal of the symbolic capital by mothers in the marriage field is important as it communicates, symbolically, a vibe of relief to both mothers that their children are joining a family with a similar set of norms and customs (i.e.- dispositions).

Farida's account of the groom's visit to her house sheds light on the role of her mother, as an agent, asserting and cementing dominant structures by showing off the status symbols of their economic and cultural capital.

Well before the arrival of our special guests, the house was spotless and my mom had prepared a gourmet feast of seafood as well as a fancy tea and raspberry macaroons to follow. Not to mention refreshing cold pressed juices and sun-dried tomato mozzarella appetizers as amuse-bouches for starters. Anyway, on their arrival, my family and I warmly greeted Taymour's family and invited them into the main salon, where Taymour presented my mom an elaborate bohemian crystal bowl, filled with Swiss chocolates. 'Oh, you shouldn't have!' said my mom as she humbly accepted the lovely gift. After

having a few beverages and some friendly small talk, Taymour's father, my dad & my brother excused themselves into another room to go over the binding agreement details. As I sat with my mom and Taymour's mother, I overheard the gentlemen laughing in the other room, which left me contented knowing that things were running smoothly. It was only 15 swift minutes until the gentleman rejoined us. My dad wore a beaming smile on his face as he entered the room and so did everyone else. 'Let's recite Al-Fatiha.' announced my dad gladly, as he put his hands together for the supplication, along with everybody else. 'Congratulations darling. I wish both of you the up most merriment and joy.' said Taymour's mom as she pulled me into a tight hug, before gifting me a diamond pendant as a token of her blessing.

'On to dinner, shall we?' said my dad as he led us into the dining room, where the gathering came to an end by everyone enjoying the colossal spread mom had previously prepared. It was indubitable that the night has been a smooth cruise in hopefully the right direction.

Knowing that the families are already family friends or second cousins, one may think that there was no need for the groom, nor his family, to describe their status or exhibit their guises of capital. Still and all, when it came to marriage as a social field in which both families showed interest, they acted as per their habitus. In other words, both families engaged in conventional practices to display their economic and cultural capital to show respect and courtesy. These conventional practices follow a systematic process

Culinary choices: the food choice is a socially constructed commodity as it is tied to social and cultural meanings. Social class, in fact, dictates socially expected table manners. Cultural capital and habitus explain food selection and protocols. In fact, food preferences are constructed as part of a person's set of dispositions based on variables that include income and social standing. Therefore, cultural capital (i.e. educational qualifications), as a manifested commodity of a certain economic capital, guides one's patterns of consumption and taste. High levels of education (i.e. westernized education), in that sense, allow higher classes members to distinguish themselves through the consumption of luxury items such as "gourmet feast of seafood, macaroons and tomatoes-mozzarella amuse bouche". Such commodities serve as a tool for class distinction, as it is not considered as basic attainable food (i.e. fresh extravagant food and exotic cuisine). In that sense, the bride's mother's main motivation is to use culinary choices as a gismo to reveal a status in the society.

The importance of culinary choice, as a cosmopolitan lifestyle indicator, is also evident in Miral's case.

We prepared a top-notch meal with tons of different appetizers and charcuterie platters, as well as a main course with three different meats; fish, chicken and beef steaks. Not to mention all the side dishes and the mouth-watering variety of desserts we whipped up.

Elaborate bohemian crystal bowl filled with swiss chocolates: the groom's family should reflect, likewise, their symbolic capital through commodities. One commodity is a bohemian crystal bowl filled with swiss chocolates. This commodity is a high-quality flashed glass, filled with the world's finest chocolate. This endowed value of the object reflects a material culture, indicating the grooms' family status. It is a silent trade to articulate the groom's family's high-status position and taste.

This commodity, as a manifestation of one's symbolic capital, was celebrated by Carmen and her family.

Hady and his family, they came with some truly tasteful gifts in-tow. He gifted me a voluminous bouquet of red and white roses, as well as an embellished bonbonniere holding, the most important bit of the gift in my opinion, delicacy chocolate truffles. I do appreciate the sentiment of commitment behind the gifts, but I just as much, appreciate the divine taste of quality chocolate.

The diamond gift: commodities within a material culture are tied to a social meaning. In fact, diamonds have deemed to be signified as a "quintessential symbol of eternal love" (Falls, 2014). This shows that a diamond gift holds a notion of love, courtship and status. Therefore, the mother of the groom communicates her blessing of the marriage by providing the bride with a diamond gift, as a token of her blessing. Diamond, here, evokes social meanings of value and significance, as it constitutes a pragmatic dimension of consumption, for it helps actualize social relationships. It symbolizes the sealing of a conjugal role, showing trust that unfolds relationships to infrastructure constituting social relationships.

Bourdieu (1986) has found distinct culinary tastes among the various classes and class fractions. This shows that haute cuisine may be perceived as a pivotal symbol in asserting social rank and status manifested in the culinary choices of the mother of the bride, and the “swiss” chocolate and diamond present gifted by the mother of the groom to the bride and her family. This sheds the light of the cosmopolitan identity adopted by this social class, as their consumption shows a transnational character to distinguish themselves, symbolically, from other social classes.

These culturally saturated commodities not only show the cosmopolitan lifestyle adopted by Cairo’s upper middle class, but also show that taste is made real by women. In the upcoming section, the reader will encounter “hegemonic femininity” exercised by the mothers of the brides, to force them to consume specific commodities, to display a specific taste that is considered accepted by the social class they belong to.

Instruments of Social Classification

On the most basic level, the exchange of matrimonial goods represents the sealing of a conjugal match, thus legitimizing the union by the fathers of the family. Although financial negotiations occur behind the scenes, it is a very critical juncture. The discussions held are considered binding.

Gendered Division of Matrimonial Expenditures: *Feminine Capital vs. Masculine Capital*

The binding agreement is an oral contract, between the patriarchs of the family, setting out the matrimonial transactions expected from each family. A traditional journey to matrimony, in Cairo's upper middle class, allocated matrimonial expenses in a way that abides by the traditional notions of masculinity and femininity (i.e. the gender role habitus). Knowing that the gender roles habitus, among Egyptians, are informed and perpetuated by the religious and cultural norms that constantly advocate the importance of the family as a social structure and the importance of the female to fulfill her primary role in creating, upholding and maintaining that family (Khalifa, 2011). Men, on the contrary, are responsible for sustaining income to the household to cover the family needs and wants to maintain a sufficient lifestyle, with respect to their social class, in return of obedience (Khalifa, 2011).

This gender role habitus is manifested in the binding agreement's allocation of matrimonial expenditures, as the bridal family is in charge of furniture items, confirming the role of a wife as a housewife; bearing the responsibility of house-care and child-care (expressive role), while the groom's family provides the conjugal relationship with transactions to allow him to uphold his instrumental role.

Farida's account about the binding agreement shows the gendered division of matrimonial expenditures

After Taymour and his family departed, my dad briefed my mom & I on the binding agreement. He informed us that the engagement party, home furniture, kitchen utensils, rugs and curtains will be on us, while the rings, the dowry, electrical appliances, wedding ceremony, home finishing and house are going to be on Taymour's family. 'If God will's darling, you'll be married in 10 months' time. I whole heartedly wish you all the best, love.'

Similarly, Miral drew upon the matrimonial expenses in a way confirming a gendered division of matrimonial transactions.

Amir's dad said that he had already bought a family house and proposed that Amir and I live in their fully finished apartment. He followed this proposal up by saying that this deal is on as long as my parents approve of the house and give their blessing. He said that if they didn't like it, they would negotiate a different place for Amir and I to settle. This was very sweet and courteous of him, as said by my dad. We also allocated the rest of the responsibilities where the house furniture, rugs, curtains and kitchen utensils were on us, while the electrical appliances were on them. We also decided that we'll hold a small celebration at my house to exchange our promise rings and officiate our union. More on that, we agreed not to hold an engagement party and to arrange a wedding party.

Carmen, as well, through her story, indicated that her binding agreement was a classic one.

We agreed on a classic allocation of matrimonial responsibilities. And as for the temporalities of it all, we decided on, a Fatiha event 2 weeks later from their first visit, the engagement a year from then and the wedding one year after that.

Rania Salem (2018), in a study about *Matrimonial Transactions and the Enactment of Class and Gender Difference Among Egyptian Youth*, displays the fact that matrimonial transactions could not be lessened or bypassed, because they conducted important meanings related to gender. Put simply, Salem proposes that matrimonial transactions were heavily gendered, and adherence to matrimonial traditions, and the ritualistic ceremonies that came with them, signaled the actors' commitment to ideals of masculinity and femininity and the uneven roles they would play within the marital context.

In fact, during my observation of Miral's home furnishing, the mother informed me in response to the nature of the division of matrimonial transactions:

Dear, to make it simple, bridal matrimonial transactions are the items that fall off if we flip the house upside down. Anything that harms the household if the wife leaves is considered to be provided by the groom. So, in case of a divorce, she allows the new wife to assert her identity as the housewife.

As per the gender role habitus adopted by this social class, women are believed to be more and better suited for remaining within the family; her primary place is the private sphere, caring for the home, children and husband. In that sense, the gender role habitus shapes life decisions. This shows that the families accept and internalize the gender role habitus; which is based on the cultural notion of women remaining invested in the "home" and no matter what she achieves she needs to have a house, a husband, and children to maintain her allegiance to society and adherence to her gender role. This is why the groom provides the conjugal relationship with the household and its electric appliances, along with the dowry to confirm power, control and authority. This role's main purpose is to discipline and provide economic support for the family. Males who fulfil this role are considered to be power brokers in the relationship, as they make all the decisions for the family, while the bride offers the conjugal relationship with furniture, kitchen appliances, rugs and curtains to confirm her role, as a housewife in charge of the domestic sphere operations.

Hegemonic Mothers: *The Conductor of the Tempo*

Despite the fact that the fathers are the one charge of negotiating the outlay of marriage deals, the mothers still play a significant role. Their social compliance to their husbands is a silent way of articulating that this household is male-led. Nevertheless, through my ethnographic journey, I noticed that mothers are the main decision-makers when it comes to asserting a social status in a social group. In other words, neither the groom nor the father participated at any point in the furniture's selection phase, as it may be perceived a feminine activity based on the popular belief that it is up to women to select home items that reflect the family's social standards. It is evident in this couple's case that men provide women with the funds (the groom provides the bride with dowry and the father provides his daughter with financial support to fulfill their duties informed by their previous binding agreement); and women use their habitus to select socially accepted items to reflect the household's social status. Hence, the mothers were the main decision-makers, if not the only ones deciding how to allocate the money and in what ways.

As the rapport between Farida and I kept growing, it reached a level of trust allowing me, as an investigator, to attend her bridal shopping journey. Based on ethnographic research, I was able to observe the journey of Farida and her mother to fulfilling their binding agreement duties.

At the consultation with the designer, they decided on a master bedroom (with an ensuite bathroom), guest rooms, an additional bathroom, a living room, a dining room, a reception, a powder room, a foyer and a garden as a final space plan for the house.

A couple of days later, the mother, the designer and Farida headed together to the villa for assessment of the place. Taymour's mom came along too as her approval was crucial to seal the deal.

The future mother in law was so sweet the whole time, showering Farida in flattery and compliments. 'I knew everything would be perfect; I wish I had a daughter as classy as you, but thank God I am blessed with a daughter in law like you.' She said, lovingly.

These ethnographic observations were complemented by Farida's narratives about further family gathering.

The day after, my dad received a call from Taymour's father, asking if they can pay us another visit. My dad caught on with the cue as he had anticipated another visit so as for Taymour to dole-out my dowry as well as go over the details for the engagement

party. Once again, my mom was so frantic to set up the greatest high-tea in the history of high-teas for her guests.

Although this time around her excitement was laced with extra spice, since things were growing more serious and official. It seemed like too many steps closer to her dream to see me a bride in white and it had her amped. She pulled out the fanciest tea-set, silverware and platters we owned. The ones she reserved for special occasions in a high security, underground facility. That day, my mother in law gave me my dowry in pounds of gold, contained in an extravagant bowl. I thanked her immensely for the lavish gift. 'One can't put a price on a lovely lady like yourself, darling.' She said.

We also set a date for the engagement party, that day. It was going to be a month from then. I was overjoyed about how things were going and thrilled to see how joyous everybody was too.

The following few weeks were when my bridal shopping spree commenced. First were the rings (shabka), which weren't a hassle at all, for both Taymour's family and mine, dealt with the same jeweler since forever. 'A perk of marrying someone with whom you share a community with' as pointed by mom.

Speaking of Farida's mother, she's been quite the boss when it came to making choices when they went shopping together. The mother always made sure her opinions are heard loud and clear. She basically furnished the whole reception, as well as the powder room. Not to mention she had already chosen the color and fabric of the furniture, probably way before Farida was even born.

She let Farida choose the master bedroom, barely keeping her hands off. She loved what Farida came up with for the bedroom. 'Like mother, like daughter. It seems I passed on my fantastic taste. Job well done, Farida.' She praised, as Farida sighed in relief that things were up to her standards. 'Maybe I should loosen my reigns on you.' Farida's mother joked.

Farida's mother generously handed Farida down her very precious crystal bonbonniere. It held a very dear sentiment as it was not only handmade, but also the very bonbonniere in which Farida's great grandma had received her dowry in pounds of gold too. 'It is handmade, much more precious than crystal nowadays.' said Farida's mother with bragging rights. 'The crystal bonbonniere is the very same one my grandmother had received her dowry as pounds in gold in. It is undoubtedly the classiest way to receive a dowry.' She added.

Now that the house is furnished and ready to go, all Taymour and Farida are waiting on are the very soon wedding to tie the knot.

A social stigma is usually escaped to avoid being excluded from one's community, to preserve one's status with all its privileges. Therefore, a couple's household is a symbol of their status and social class. This is why, in collectivistic societies, families from higher social classes may seek to accentuate their sons and daughters' status through furnishing their house in certain ways. For instance, Farida and Miral failed to demonstrate autonomy over their matrimonial expenditures; as their choices may fail to

reflect the actual symbolic capital of their families. This is why the mother interferes and stops such action from being taken, to protect her daughter from any social stigma.

This is emphasized by Miral's matrimonial shopping trip. Miral's bridal shopping also shows the high level of authority mothers have. Based on ethnographic observation of the kitchen utensils shopping with Miral and her mother, I noted:

After the engagement was official, it was bridal shopping time! Miral told me that she has heard a ton of horror stories about this part of the schpeel, with lots of feuds breaking out between brides and their moms over things like the colour of the curtains or the brand of the bedding! However, Miral and her mom were mostly on the same page when it came to their tastes. She only forced her to do one thing. She generally does not see the appeal in buying expensive chinaware, but the mother insisted that it's a tradition that must be upheld or she'll be deliberately shamed for it by society. She didn't really care about the societal pressure, but obliged anyway to keep the mojo of the moment.

This shows that despite the fact that some forms of ownership are connected to prestige, wealth is not solely linked to status; wealth, in fact, is a key indicator of lifestyle differences, upon which status depends. Such differences rely on social activities, such as marital patterns, and residential areas, which are status symbols necessary to remain among the status group. Taste is therefore, an acquired disposition to "differentiate" and "appreciate", to establish discrepancy of standards, to construct class distinction (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986), discusses the sense of distinction, in a social regard, that it constitutes a space defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members; each class fraction being depicted by a certain configuration of this distribution where it corresponds to a certain lifestyle, through the mediation of the habitus. Therefore, matters of taste distinguish social classes, in terms of aesthetic preferences, showing discrepancy of standards. In other words, the social spaces people navigate function simultaneously as a system of power relations and as a symbolic system in which minute distinctions of taste become the basis for social judgment.

For example, Chan and Goldthorpe (2006), in a study about *Social Status and Cultural Consumption*, propose that a number of 'taste cultures' have to be acknowledged, each of which stands for varying aesthetic values and standards that can be perceived as having, so to speak, functional equivalence as reactions to the varying wants and resources, tangible and symbolic, of individuals in societally, more or less, favorable positions. Thus, from this view point, all taste cultures are to be perceived as being, at least potentially, of even worth and validity: that is as being equally adequate to the social contexts within which they are established and expressed.

From a Weberian sense (1978), in a study about *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, the dignity of high-status groups is manifested in their distinctive lifestyle and reflected in patterns of association and consumption. The status of a family is selected by the mother; which shows that one's wealth determines one's fate and status; those who share similar forms of wealth, related to one's occupation, have access to a status group, and also share status symbols manifested in their lifestyle. In that sense, members of a status group do not necessarily share the same levels of wealth, but rather are capable of maintaining a certain way of life. These considerations may imply that a marriage will unify two individuals internalizing such standards.

Habitus, in this case, appears as a form of collective representations manifested in "the collective repertoire of practical reason within a particular group." In that regard, marital practices are important, as they incorporate a set of collective activities reflecting a power to conserve structures of perception, communication and action which prove useful to us, thereby enhancing agency. Moreover, it lends our lives continuity.

To conclude, the traditional marriage journeys, in Cairo's upper middle class, are characterized by the selection of a suitor on the basis of suitable marriage prospects, with regard to the notion of the familial self, by showing loyalty to cosmopolitan communal living that mandates an adequate consideration of the suitor's economic, cultural and social resources, that permit the conjugal relationship to preserve a cosmopolitan identity. Not to mention that this cosmopolitan identity is a hybrid one; as it is constituted of modernity and urbanity, in terms of consumption of transnational goods, hand in hand with an Egyptianized gender identity, respecting the inscribed femininity and masculinity on our bodies. In that sense, a bride selects a suitor with regard to a gender role habitus, whereby a bride is expected to display housewife traits, while a groom projects trait that assert the ability to bring wage to the conjugal household.

This contributes to social class endogamy, as members of this social class roam social spaces characterized by homogeneity (such as family gatherings to maintain kin ties). These homogenous social spaces are significant to social class endogamy, as the notion of the familial self is embedded in how the family plays an important role in locating the individual in a changing system of social inequality. It is evident that the family perpetuates social inequality over generations, and thereby lends stability to inequality over time. Kocka Jurgen (1984) studied marriage endogamy, *Marriage Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Westphalian Towns*, which shows the importance of one's ascribed status, as what the parental generation may have achieved in the way of material and cultural capital, property, connections, and education through market forces, political power, accomplishment, fortune, and other mechanisms, becomes an ascribed advantage granted to the next generation. This makes the social spaces agents contribute to social class endogamy; as these social spaces restrict the likelihood of meeting a suitor from a different social class, hence societies with limited social fluidity restrict an agent's marriage horizon.

Not only does the selection of the suitor serve social class endogamy, but also the matrimonial practices, leading to the wedding operating in a way encouraging social class endogamy. In other words,

the practices of group-think, hegemonic masculinity and matriarchs asserting cultural expertise, oblige a bride to hand-on her rights of suitor approval to her collective. In fact, Trandis (1989), in a study on family allocentrism, *The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts*, proposes that the notion of the self is liable to cultural variability; as the self is an active agent that condones differential examination, handling and judgement of information from the surroundings, and thus gives rise to differences in social behavior. Put differently, the bride's idea of the self in this social class exists within the limits of the group (i.e. a collective). For instance, even though the Indian constitution has legally prohibited castes, a caste is still a crucial aspect of social identity in that culture (Trandis, 1989).

This, not only engages the collective of the bride in selecting and approving her suitor, but also shows the extent to which hegemonic masculinity, exercised by the father of the bride, validates a marriage betrothal. In other words, parents often play a part in the marriage process. For example, in Sweden, in the 19th century, a daughter, whatever her age was, by law, had to ask her father or a male relative for permission to marry (Leeuwen and Mas, 2005).

The traditional matrimonial consumption patterns, not only confirm this social class' gender role habitus through a gendered division of matrimonial expenditures and hegemonic matriarchs, but also allows a couple to validate social confirmation. In fact, the matriarchs of the families fashion the conjugal space in way to assert cultural similarity to the rest of the group by engaging in consumption patterns displaying their status's lifestyle, to produce social confirmation. Mervat F. Hatem (1999), in a study about the micro dynamics of patriarchal change in Egypt, argues that mothers in Egypt (in the nineteenth century, in particular) socialized their daughters into feminine occupations of embroidery and weaving; which are manifestation of aristocratic domesticity. In other words, feminine capital is constituted of learning social rules and the aesthetics of color; while masculine capital is premised on learning reading and writing as well as manual skills. Daughters in this period learned that continuing education should not challenge her

role as a wife and a mother, setting social and cultural boundaries for women in the Egyptian society. Therefore, consumption patterns should allow for the construction of basis of differentiation (i.e. distinction), as means to serve underwriting social hierarchy (i.e. discrepancy in standards).

Knowing that people react differently to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class, it is important to postulate the extent to which marriage process in this social class follows traditional channels. In fact, the notion of the familial self may be challenged by romantic love. Not to mention that the extent to which group-think and hegemonic masculinity are practiced may be contested if the couple is financially independent, or exposed to individualistic values as a result of socialization in social milieus such as westernized education and media. This may metamorphose traditional matrimonial practices into unconventional ones.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY TO MATRIMONY

In this chapter, I will first discuss the effect of less dependent family ties and the globalized self in a collective-centered society with regard to romantic pursuits. I will then brush over the financial independence enabling a couple to secure a power stance when engaging in matrimonial practices. Furthermore, I will examine the extent to which a male is needed to assert a bridal agency, after which I mention the importance of alignment of the couple's backgrounds and their socially constructed identities while investing in matrimonial transactions.

The unconventional journey shows the extent to which the subjective life experiences may result in different reactions to matrimony articulated through a multiplicity of matrimonial discourses. It is interesting to note that members of the same social class can never go through the exact same experiences in identical order. An agent is, in this sense, socialized within evolving social arrangements, which are the subjective life experiences explaining different reactions to matrimony.

Thuraya and Nader

Thuraya (the bride: 28 years old) works as a graphic designer in a marketing firm. Nader (the groom: 29 years old) is the founder of an advertising start-up. They both met on a trip through common friends. It was love at first sight. Their relationship is built upon valuing self-expression and the realization of personal goals.

Amna and Aly

Amna (the bride: 33 years old) and Aly (the groom: 32 years old) both work at in IT multinational company, where they met and fell in love. They faced numerous hardships and struggles in order to be able to get married. Amna was born into a traditional conservative family, while Aly was brought up in a more liberal family. Amna, a “rebel” in her 30s, went from one battle to another with her family in order to end up with Aly, the westernized liberal young man.

Romantic Love

While traditional suitor selection in this social class is informed by the notion of the familial self and the gender role habitus, unconventionalism springs from individualistic worldviews. In this sense, the selection of the suitor in an unconventional journey to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class is shaped by replacing dependent family ties with romantic love, through which westernized worldviews are also fulfilled.

Domesticated Individualism: *An Expression of Less Dependent Family Ties*

Karandashev (2015), in a study titled *A Cultural Perspective on Romantic Love*, proposes that cultural aspects can dictate romantic love. This is because people may display romantic interest towards one another by virtue of relying on their culture's social configuration and system of notions. Karandashev alludes to the cultural effect on romantic love by highlighting the experience of romance in individualistic, compared to collectivistic, social circles. Put differently, he suggests that the broad experience of romantic love tends to be more prevalent in modern societies, with their individual-centered culture; in contrast, it seems to have lesser value in cultures of a traditional collectivistic background, involving strong, extended family ties (Karandashev, 2015).

Nevertheless, Ting-Toomey (1991), in a study titled *Intimacy Expressions in Three Cultures: France, Japan, and the United States*, argues that romantic love may exist in collectivistic societies, in cases where a family is characterized by less dependent family ties, allowing romantic love to strive for greater individualism. The prelude of the marriage of Thuraya and Nader illuminates the way through which weaker family bonds socialize their members to focus on individualism, that is, the substitution of collectivistic values with domesticated individualism. My first and second meetings with Thuraya gave me the opportunity to discover the extent to which she describes herself in individualistic terms, as a result of domesticated individualism, unlike the traditional brides.

Thuraya's less dependent family ties were expressed, in her account, during our second meeting:

My family is a unique one. I have my mom, step-dad and step-sisters. We aren't quite closely knit, but we're always there for one another when times call for it. Other than that, we're quite independent individuals.

Such a statement portrays her family unit as denying the notion of the familial self, indicating that she was socialized in such a way that helped her internalize individualistic attitudes and behaviors. Accordingly, I was able to discern why she projects an air of unconventionalism; for instance, during our first meeting, she described herself in individualistic ways, unlike the traditional brides:

I've never been one to give much thought to the concept of meeting 'the love of my life', as I've always been my own woman. A strong, independent one if you will. Since I can remember, a love story has never been a thing in my repertoire of notions. I've grown to be the self-reliant, proud, working lady that I am now. You see, I'm a graphic designer who is especially wonderful at what she does. I've definitely built up a tip-top reputation for myself that has gotten me booked for months ahead.

Anyways, with a back-story like that, one would think I'd be forever single and my prosperous career would end with me retiring and becoming a rich, crazy cat-lady. However, to my surprise, about a year ago, I met my first and last, my dear fiancé, Nader

We first met when both of us were on vacation. It was a friends'-group get away. I didn't know him before hand, but we happened to share a mutual friend who invited him to the trip, hence why he was there. The first night, the three of us had planned to go out for dinner, but my friend called it off last minute, saying that he'd sit it out for he was knackered from all the surfing he'd done, earlier that day. So, it was just him and I for the night.

We were going to have our meal at the hotel's restaurant. It was an open buffet with lots of posh nosh to indulge in. We grabbed our plates, filled them up and sat at a table to enjoy our meal. Now, I have to make something clear, I'm not the best at making small talk. Unless its work related or I'm with someone I know, I struggle creating context to converse with humans. Frankly, my social skills are quite retarded, I usually uphold an awkward silence until spoken to. Then, is when I start speaking as if I'm mentally challenged! On the other hand, he seemed pretty sociable. After a while, our chat started to flow very nicely, as I started to feel more comfortable. We started talking about our jobs, then our hobbies, after which we both took a nostalgic trip down memory lane, talking about our favorite childhood memories. It's like fate had set us up for a date!

Individualism and collectivism lead to differences in the ways in which people conceptualize themselves; as a result, these differences significantly impact on how they approach love and what they experience in love. From an individualistic view, each person is a separate entity: in contrast, from a

collectivistic view, the individual is part of more extended relationships. When a bride views herself as having a high sense of individuality, with societal septa keeping her separate from other people, falling for someone presents itself as an opportunity to break through the boundaries and form a social connection. This suggests that love can serve as a bridge connecting people to one another.

Karandashev (2015) studied the experience of love in the United States (an individualistic society) and in Japan (a collectivistic society). The experience of love, in the United States, takes the form of partners' exchange of high levels of intimacy, all the while preserving separate identities. In sharp contrast, Japanese experiences of love, at their peak, involve many duties that are to be fulfilled by the newly-weds, towards their social circle.

Thuraya's individualistic attitude is evident as:

He offered to pay for my food. Although I was very intrigued by the charming gesture, I insisted on paying for myself.

This shows that Thuraya displays unconventionalism towards the notion of the familial self and the traditional gender role habitus, as insisting to pay the check contradicts the notion of femininity, according to the gender role habitus practiced by the traditional brides. Put simply, a bride such as Thuraya with a high individualistic sense of self prefers personal autonomy, the making of sovereign decisions, and independence, unlike a traditional bride who places great emphasis on family cohesion, defined as the strength of closeness and devotion between family members, which nurtures her love and feelings of tenderness towards the groom.

Thuraya is promoting, on the other hand, one's self-interest rather than familial duties. In other words, the individual's rights rather than duties are stressed, as are personal autonomy, self-realization, individual initiative, and decision-making (Dion & Dion, 1993). Therefore, the social construct of self is different in a family characterized by less pronounced family allocentrism, as one's identity is autonomous rather than relational.

A relational identity, unlike a familial one, shapes the way a bride selects a suitor, as she will be attracted to a groom on the basis of his achieved status: education and employment. Therefore, romantic love may emerge as “expressive individualism”, a substitute for less dependent family ties through self-expression and self-realization, as the relationship represents a vehicle for personal growth to replace meeting familial and societal expectations. This is expressed in Thuraya’s account of her love towards Nader:

He is an ambitious and hardworking man, who has built a prosperous, still expanding career for himself. He was financially stable and seemed to be able to support a family, despite the fact that his father died years ago and he lives on his own. All that, topped off with kindness, chivalry, compassion and empathy, I was hooked. Another important thing is that I felt comfortable around his circle of friends and acquaintances. It seemed our assets aligned nicely and that we’d both be wonderful additions to each other’s’ lives in a way that would allow us to grow as a duo and as individuals.

One day, I went to visit him at his office at the advertisement firm he worked in, at the time. I was wooed with his enthusiasm and passion for what he does as I watched him do his thing. It was just the right conditioning for me to say ‘yes’, when he popped the question, out of the blue, during his lunch break. If he strategized that, kudos to him, because it worked! But again, I’m sure it was a fluke, for I believe he was too love struck to think straight.

The trait of independence or self-reliance is not commonly found in a society where family ties are closely maintained. In other words, brides socialized through domesticated individualism are less likely to experience familial involvement, unlike traditional brides. Therefore, in such societies it is customary for individuals to be socialized to consider the well-being of the group over personal needs. In this sense, suitor selection has not been a journey an individual embarks on alone (Bejanyan, Marshall, & Ferenczi, 2015). Romantic love may be more essential in highly individualistic cultures or it may serve to replace less dependent familial ties (Ting-Toomey, 1991). Accordingly, one may assume that in a collectivistic society, a family unit characterized domesticated individualism members act in accordance with individualistic values. Lee and Park (2016), in a study titled *Marriage, Independence and Adulthood among Unmarried Women in South Korea*, showed that the values most frequently endorsed by youth in transitioning to adulthood were individualistic and independence-related criteria,

such as making autonomous decisions not affected by parents and others, establishing an equal relationship with parents as an adult, being financially independent from parents, and, living independently, all of which factors show the extent to which individualism is perhaps the most dominant characteristic of young people's conception of the transition to adulthood.

The domesticated individualism characterizing this couple is further illustrated by their economic capital. Both Thuraya and Nader are described in terms of their occupational positions, unlike the traditional brides who identify their grooms and themselves in familial terms. Thuraya identifies herself as a successful graphic designer, with no reference to any familial contribution to her achievements. She also describes Nader as an independent, hard-worker young man, leading and expanding his own start-up. This shows that Thuraya represents herself, along with Nader, in individualistic terms emphasizing the self, where one's social behavior is guided by the attitudes and the preferences of the individual.

The quality of education of this couple earned them a solid position in the occupational structure, thereby allowing them to assert agency through a relational identity rather than a familial one. Most importantly, the acquired education allowed them to navigate a prosperous career path:

One day, he called and said he needed my help for 'work'. However, I caught on the bluff right away. It was just an excuse for us to stay in touch. He informed me that he thinks I could be a great asset to his new start-up; as our skills go along well; which will help the start-up grow rapidly.

Bourdieu explains that those who have been elevated to positions of power, in the ranks of management, have acquired the cultural capital to do so (Bristol, 2007). Conversely, the informal learning within the workplace, as an independent entity, significantly increased the couple's cultural capital. In other words, their weak familial ties fueled their ability to identify and pursue the unspoken rules of career development in the corporate life. By observing the careers of those within the organization in order to boost one's own job performance, a networking aspect needed to be fostered (Bristol, 2007). In fact, Nader had previously worked at a large advertising and public relations agency, where he established a wide

range of social networks that are now turning out to be the biggest asset of his start-up, as it allows him to access a client base to energize the start-up. Despite the fact that it is the groom's start-up, the bride's skills continue to invigorate its growth.

In this spirit, the couple's social capital is not an ascribed network-based resource, but rather an achieved asset accruing their start-up. In fact, their informal learning, within the workplace, has allowed them to acquire a set of durable networks to build up social support as well as social leverage. Although the couple occupies a position in the workforce that encourages individualism, they still feel somewhat insecure as they lack the needed social capital to expand their start-up. Both families are characterized by lack of social connections that would aid the couple. In addition, their family bonds are not as strong as those expected of a collectivistic society.

In the same vein, Bejanyan, Marshall, and Ferenczi (2015), in a study titled *Associations of Collectivism with Relationship Commitment, Passion, and Mate Preferences*, point to how the environment of an individualistic society offers its members individuality in pursuing a romantic partner. This is achieved by becoming independent of one's parents and tentatively exploring the realm of love and sexuality to obtain a sense of experience.

This demonstrates that a family, characterized by less dependent family ties, gradually reduces the parental authority and influence. This is because the children learn to become accountable for the consequences of their choices. Therefore, not only does domesticated individualism replace the notion of an upper-handed collective during suitor selection, but it also affects the matrimonial practices, as individualistic agents embark on the journey to matrimony unaccompanied, shouldering full financial responsibility for this endeavor.

The Global Self: *The “Inconveniencies” of Transnational Services*

Cairo’s upper middle class depicts itself in cosmopolitan terms through the consumption of transnational goods and services such as education and media. With respect to marriage and family roles, formal education influences the Northern Igbo in Nigeria, for example, as it promotes a more individualistic attitude regarding men's and women's roles within the context of family expectations and obligations (Abidogun, 2007). In fact, a westernized style of education supports social interaction between boys and girls through mixed classes and shared common spaces at school, in a replication of Western education practices (Abidogun, 2007). Westernized education is based on a curriculum that promotes an individualist worldview through judging success based on individual examination grades and individualized career goals that often require separation from the community (Abidogun, 2007). This has strengthened students’ belief in a more individualistic stance than that of their parents, resulting in a desire to decide whom to marry, regardless of the approval of their family, as students’ express general distrust in parental choices (Abidogun, 2007).

Larkin (1997), in a study titled *Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers*, cites the importance of Indian films in unveiling a somewhat underrated aspect of the transnational flow, which gives rise to “parallel modernities”. In other words, Indian films, by virtue of their portrayed traditions, have created a space which largely sidesteps criticism. A “parallel modernity” has emerged by building Nigerian audiences’ appreciation of cultural values beyond maintaining traditional social relations.

My encounter with Amna, the bride, gave me insight into the trials and tribulations she experienced while trying to gain her family's approval to marry the love of her life, Aly. Amna is living in a world that mirrors the notion of "parallel modernity", as she is reworking the transnational media flows disrupting tradition and modernity, foregrounding instead the ability of media to create a "parallel modernity".

I am an employee at a multinational IT company and it was there where Aly and I crossed paths. I didn't take much notice of him at first, since I'm naturally quite introverted. It's really tough to keep track of people you meet when your gaze is on their shoes 90% of the time. Eye contact is really straining for me, so my peepers tend to seek comfort in the ground. It wasn't until we had to pair up for a project that I actually came into normal human contact with him. From there, it was love at first sight. A charm that I couldn't resist was his dedication to what he does and his moral work ethic.

We partnered up for projects several times after our first and got to know each other more. As time went on, we started getting a bit more comfortable around one another. Our relationship started growing from strictly professional, to awkward acquaintances. Then, he'd drop me little compliments about my 'problem solving skills' and would occasionally bring me my morning coffee ever so 'casually', if you catch my drift.

This went on for months, until he finally confessed his love and asked to meet my parents. I was overjoyed! It was the first time that I effortlessly clicked with someone, who mutually shared my feelings. I've been through many arranged marriage situations, imposed on me by my parents and never have I had the kind of chemistry I so luckily had with Aly.

Speaking of my parents, that day, on my way home, I was thinking about how they would take it. My head kept playing every scenario where things could go wrong. One would think that I was overthinking it, but if you knew my parents you wouldn't beg to differ.

Let's take a quick detour to touch up on my upbringing, so everyone can be on the same page. You see, I was raised in a very strict and conservative household, where it wasn't ok for me to hang out with friends often or go out by myself except for school or work. You'd think that this would've compromised my education, since most households in Egypt with highly reserved cultures tend to have a reputation of not paying particular attention to finessing their kids' education and tend to focus more on getting them into a paying job or marrying them away as quickly as possible.

On the contrary though, my parents were very keen on me getting the best education I could and actually enrolled me into highly prestigious schools throughout my life. This was great, however, the stark cultural differences between my school life and my house had my head spinning a lot of the time. I'd make friends at school, but my parents wouldn't allow me to hang out with them outside of school hours and would rarely allow us to get together only if my pals agree come over to my house. It was very confusing.

Tying it all back to Aly, he is on the opposite end of the spectrum, as he was raised in a very unprejudiced environment, which is heavily influenced by the fact that he is born mixed, to a German mother. Hence why he is the polar opposite of my parents and that's what enticed me in the first place. With him I feel like I have the liberty I always longed to have. He made me

feel as if I was living in a romantic Hollywood movie ... which I am very attached to since I was child; as I spent most time on my laptop watching movies and American series to escape the dull monotonic life imposed on me.

Amna's love for Aly is motivated by her subjective life experiences informed by her exposure to a westernized education and a viewing diet of Hollywood movies, instead of going out with friends, due to her father's conservative views. Her habitus has been modified as the dispositions she learned about social behavior were inspired by individualistic westernized models. Her life experiences as a young girl were constrained by parental prohibition to participate in activities shared by her peers; simply put, she went to school and stayed at home watching movies. Her exposure to this western culture allowed individualistic world views to develop. As per her the westernized life experiences she vicariously adopted, falling in love symbolizes the most important aspect for a couple's union, before even considering marriage (Guo & Wang, 2016). Once a woman and a man decide on marriage, they will notify their respective parents, in an outward show of respect (Guo & Wang, 2016). Here, the family is not perceived as the main social pillar of social stability. In this sense, marriage signifies a positive outcome of love and finding a lifelong partner in order to be fulfilled emotionally and physically. Amna and Aly are a couple striving to establish a family unit, where they both have an equal share in their conjugal roles, rather than remain in a state of subordination and domination. This is due to their being motivated by individualistic values where notions of love take center stage rather than family interests.

The above forms the subjectivity of the habitus with Amna approaching the marriage field fueled by westernized individualistic logics, views, and tastes, informed by her cultural capital as well as her life experiences, nurtured by American values regarding love and romance, all of which indicate the extent to which subjective life experiences may result in a multiplicity of discourses. This has made her highly compatible with Aly, who was raised in a westernized environment, internalizing German values. Amna and Aly's families are different in terms of family roles, moral values, and familial duties. Growing up in

a liberal family, Aly was socialized with the knowledge that upon reaching maturity he would be free to do whatever he wanted, as the notions of independence and freedom are respected. Instead of principles of subordination and domination as familial duties, the notion of mutual love and esteem is cultivated. Aly's marriage decision only concerned his parents only for consultation purposes. The opposite is true for Amna, who is expected to submit to her parent's authoritarian wishes. Aly, the westerner, is perceived by Amna's family's style of suitor selection as strange and somehow immoral.

Nevertheless, from Amna's family's point of view, subordination and domination make perfect sense. This is based on the belief that the moral value of the familial self is defined by how closely Amna can fulfill her social and moral obligations, to allow her parents to select her suitor based on his reputation, family background, and profession. Here, feelings are considered secondary.

In short, the suitor-selection experiences of Amna and Thuraya reveal their worldviews as being brides with individualistic senses of self. For instance, Thuraya's independent pursuit of a partner is a means for her to replace frail family bonds. In keeping with Amna's situation, her socialization within westernized social structures has allowed her to internalize individualistic values.

Financial Independence, Autonomy and Sovereignty

The matrimonial practices in a traditional journey, in Cairo's upper middle class, is informed by group-think, hegemonic masculinity, and arrangement of cultural capital by the matriarchs, premised on collectivistic values. Nevertheless, the unconventional journey to matrimony, in this social class, is shaped by individualistic values manifested as a result of less dependent family ties and global selves. Such individualistic worldviews also contribute to the nature and the process of the unconventional matrimonial practices.

Financial Independence

Given that romantic love may appear as a result of domesticated individualism, it is essential crucial to mention that less dependent family ties empower individuals to discard group-think as the approval of the marriage betrothal is secondary to the decisions and actions of a financially independent couple. In this sense, the matrimonial practices transform into unconventional ones, as the collective of the couple is disengaged.

This is apparent in Thuraya's narratives of her parent's and in-law's meeting:

Now that we were official, things were getting on the move. First, his mom and him arranged to come and properly ask for my hand from my parents. Him and I had previously agreed on the allocation of responsibilities, aka the binding agreement, with which we informed our families on the day of the visit. It was a classical format, with a more casual and liberated twist. We were sure to respect and abide by the norms of marriage as prescribed by our cultural and religious backgrounds, while at the same time harboring our preferred upper lead on how things ought to go.

My family is a unique one. I have my mom, step-dad and step-sisters. We aren't quite closely knit, but we're always there for one another when times call for it. Other than that, we're quite independent individuals. On the day, my mom prepared a humble spread for our guests. They arrived, had a bite to eat and we all sat down for a chat and some coffee. You'd think things were a bit too informal for such a special occasion, but there was no need for formalities, as I had briefed my family on what was coming a while back. Moreover, Nader and I were taking the step towards marriage based on the mutual attraction between our personalities and not as a result of a pressuring arranged setting. So, since everyone was already in on the tea, the meet up was simply an official proclamation rather than a build up from scratch.

Anyway, things were a smooth sail. My step-father was quite welcoming, as he saw that Nader was indeed a catch. Overall, our families seemed to sufficiently click and the deal was sealed by everyone agreeing on the date of our engagement. Our families even went out together a couple of times after that and it was a great time for everybody. It just puts you at ease when everybody gets along. And so, the prep stage was launched.

The couple's matrimonial practices indicate that the parents are not needed to validate the marriage betrothal; rather, their involvement was symbolic in terms of satisfying appearances. In fact, the binding agreement was sealed between Thuraya and Nader as independent entities navigating marriage as a social event on their own. This is because individualists often approach negotiations irrespective of group memberships (Hu, Lin, & Cui, 2014). This may be due to the diminished adhesion to family ties so as to remain independent and self-reliant (Hu, Lin, & Cui, 2014). This shows that the *Fatiha* event, attended by both families, was just a formal umbrella for the pre-set agreement between the individualist partners as a routine religious event that all couples need to go through. This represents the couple's ability to take control and responsibility for their decisions and actions.

Group-think is needed to validate the marriage betrothal in a traditional journey to matrimony, one reason being financial dependence on parents; therefore, couples show social and emotional compliance to the patriarchs of the family, who serve as the main providers of the family as a whole. In sharp contrast, Thuraya and Nader assert financial independence in defiance of group-think and hegemonic masculinity. Accordingly, the validation and legitimization of the marriage betrothal of Thuraya and Nader is achieved through "expressive individualism" due to their families' lack of financial participation in their journey to matrimony, thereby eliminating the need for their authorization. For example, Kim, Lee and Park (2016) illustrate that women in South Korea who lack substantial support from their parents, consider marriage as primarily determined by their own choice. This independence grants unconventional couples' freedom of choice during the marriage process, as they are used to making many decisions in their life with the minimum consultation with and help from parents.

Asserting Agency Through Males

Since the traditional matrimonial practices in Cairo's upper middle class are guided by the patriarchs, culturally-defined hegemonic masculinity is displayed and enacted through a set of patterns reinforcing male dominance over women. In an unconventional journey, the notion of hegemonic masculinity is excluded, as shown above by Thuraya, due to her financial independence. Amna, in contrast, is financially dependent on her father, limiting her agency in matrimonial practices due to her father's hegemonic masculinity which suppresses her aspirations to personal autonomy.

Amna's struggles with her parents started when Aly and his family met his bride's family, leading to a sharp cultural clash. This was narrated by Amna through one of her interviews:

I didn't know how my dad would react to me fancying someone so different from our norm, but I took comfort in the fact that I was presenting my parents a hard-working, trust-worthy man who loved me to bits. What else would parents want in their daughter's suitor? He was practically perfect, right?

Wrong! That day, I told my father that Aly wanted to set a date to come visit and ask for my hand. My dad sternly agreed. When Aly came over with his parents, my parents greeted them and they all sat for 'the chat'. Aly had brought a small carton box of chocolates as a gift, which my mom tore apart with her scrutinizing looks as Aly handed it over to her, before she gave a tight smile and a callous 'Thank you.'

While we sat, Aly started to roughly discuss a binding agreement of sorts. He proposed that he wanted to book a 40m² apartment and pay its installments over 4 years. Meanwhile, we'd settle in a rented place, until we receive and furnish the house. He also added that he is going to take full financial responsibility of the marriage expenses as well as the promise rings, but only wanted to split the finances of the small wedding party we ought to hold. A resounding decline was all my father had for him. Not to mention that, while my dad was inviting Aly and his father to the living to discuss the binding agreement, his mother insisted to attend mentioning that such customs are dead and gone. Dad didn't even let him off gently. Instead, he told Aly that he is a slouch to his face and spared nothing in letting him know that he is no fit for this family, as his financial abilities were nowhere near where they needed to be to align with my father's standards. Aly was basically treated as if he was a street rat and left feeling disheartened.

However, he told me that he won't stop persisting, as I am 'a girl worth fighting for', he said. On the same note, I wasn't going to back down either. I had to wait a while until things simmered down, before reintroducing the idea to my dad. Aly had asked if they can meet up again, bringing his family along this time. Dad reluctantly allowed it.

Although he'd agreed to a second meeting, my father greeting Aly and his family was only a hair short of sour. Nonetheless, everyone sat down to discuss the details. This time around, Aly and his family had a different offer to bring to the table. Aly's father said that Aly will still be fully responsible for the whole budget, but that he was going to kindly lend us an extra

apartment of his property, until we can get our own. After that Aly, his family and myself were anticipating the Fatiha. I thought it was quite generous of Aly's father, but as usual, my dad had other views on the matter. He brought everyone's hopes crashing down when he said that no deals are to be sealed prior to him and mom reviewing the apartment. For the second time, Aly left feeling down in the dumps, not to mention, enraged. However, this time around, there was at least a glimmer of hope, since dad hasn't blatantly refused the proposal, yet!

The day rolls around and Aly accompanies my parents to the apartment his dad so graciously and thoughtfully offered, only for them to shun everything about it. They especially couldn't stop going on and on about how it was located in a low-class neighborhood that didn't live up to any decent standard. However, before slamming the door in Aly's face for the second time, my dad had an offer of his own to propose. He told Aly that he'd lend us an apartment of his for no rent in return. He said he won't ask Aly for even a dowry, just the promise rings and the wedding ceremony would be on him. This offer wasn't a charity though, it was on, as long as Aly booked a 150m² apartment in a prestigious housing compound.

Aly felt like dad was coming for his pride with such a deal. He couldn't process the idea of living in his in-law's property, when he could afford his own, regardless of any discrepancy in standards. He refused as politely as his hurt pride allowed him and was faced with my dad telling him that this was the end of any hopes of him and I ever being together. Aly was dumbfounded and couldn't argue, as he retreated with a broken heart.

I know how awfully he must've felt then, for Aly had previously expressed to me his despise towards matrimonial social constructs that value social and financial standards over mutual understanding and love. He believes that as long as both parties' moral values are on par, then no such constructs should stand in the way of them getting together. He values each individual as an equal when it comes to relationships and thinks that whatever needs to be done for things to run smoothly for everyone, is what ought to be done, gender roles and pre-imposed molds aside.

This whole ordeal was too much for me to handle and I slipped into the realms of depression. I'm not trying to be pitiful, but my dad would poke at me with his harsh words, every chance he got. He kept saying that Aly and his family thought lowly of me since I was a year older than my groom-to-be. He'd also went on about how I was a good for nothing, spinster, who is dull enough to take a silly love story in exchange for any cheap token. This really broke me further down.

The cultural differences between the couple's families appeared when approaching the marriage field, as they acted according to their habitus. In other words, both families engaged in conventional practices to display their economic, social, and cultural capital to show respect and courtesy. These conventional practices follow a systematic ritualized process. Nevertheless, Aly's family did not display any of the ritualized procedures expected by Amna's parents. For instance, Aly's family did not offer the elaborate bohemian crystal bowl filled with Swiss chocolates, thus failing to display the groom's high-status position and taste. Furthermore, Aly's mother insisted on actively participating in the proceedings,

refusing to accept the unequal distribution of power between men and women, alluded to as a “dead and gone” customary practice. This signaled to Amna’s father that Aly’s family is a female-led social unit, a notion which violated his patriarchal values.

Amna’s father acts as the representative of the family, presenting the family beliefs and morals. Therefore, he expects from his daughter social compliance, as she is perceived as a vulnerable target that needs to be protected. Amna’s father considered her marriage to Aly as a sign of his own failure as the patriarch of the family. Amna’s father is the agency in action, the one allowed to make free choices and act autonomously, affected by his set of beliefs and dispositions embedded in the social structure. Such structures limit the freedom of action held by Amna within her family according to factors based on culture, social class, customs, and religion. Aly failed to show the correct amount of different forms of economic and, in particular, social, capital. In other words, Aly, as an agent, did not demonstrate the ability to present different forms of capital proportionate to Amna’s position in the social order.

The clash between Aly and Amna’s respective fathers shows that masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of agents. Masculinities are configurations of practices that are manifested in social action, and, therefore, differing according to the gender relations in a particular social setting. For example, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in a study titled *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, show that even a culturally homogenous country, such as Chile, lacks unitary masculinity, since patterns vary by class and generation. This indicates that gender order constructs multiple masculinities. In this sense, Aly’s machismo as perceived by Amna’s father’s is restricted due to age differences and capital considerations.

Aly’s economic capital is manifested in the tiny apartment he wants to buy as the matrimonial residence to be and his father’s apartment in a low-class neighborhood. Despite the fact that Aly is working in a similar position as Amna, he still failed to demonstrate financial ability to provide Amna with an

apartment that meets her father's expectations. According to Amna's parents, this is problematic both financially and socially. In other words, the father's apartment is perceived as inappropriate as it fails to live up to any standard expected by Amna's family. Simply put, Aly's offered economic and social capital would fail to place them, as a couple, in a social network allowing them to possess relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Therefore, Amna's father, as the protective patriarch of this family, will be sending his daughter to a place where she will experience downward social mobility receiving less status and respect.

Despite the fact that Amna's father is a conservative man, limiting her exposure to a social life, he still invested in her education to accrue her cultural capital that shall allow her access to a community of high-status. The latter is at risk of dissolution due to Amna's reduced mode of living in a low status district, a critical factor as status groups are judged by residential neighborhoods. Aly's economic capital is a source of funds for consumption that hinder his ability to finance the status symbols deemed requisite to social honor. In fact, social honor is not attained solely from a certain market situation (Aly's profession in an IT multinational company), but, rather, as a result of social relationships with a community consuming levels of life standards appropriate to a particular status. This may explain why Amna's father imposed on her an arranged marriage that suits his expectations of a suitor-to-be.

Amna is expected to adhere to her father's rules as the patriarchal collectivistic society expects females to act in compliance with expected norms and behaviors referred to as gender roles, any deviance from which leads to stigma (Khalifa, 2011). Nevertheless, Amna would have acted in that manner only if this gender role was her habitus. In fact, the bride's habitus is motivated by American individualistic values regarding love and romance. Therefore, her father's values are increasingly at odds with her sense of individuality, depriving her of her agency. In addition, Aly's failure to provide Amna's father with the needed matrimonial transactions is associated with Amna's stigmatized status as a "spinster" (*anes*: an

ageing bachelorette passing the socially accepted age to get married). Not only does Amna's father link Aly's disadvantaged economic and social capital with his daughter's age, but he is also seeking to deprive her of her agency, her freedom of choice, and action. As a result, Amna can be considered an agency in waiting, frozen in time until her father selects a mate that gives her a ticket to married womanhood, a rite of passage demanded by the society.

Although it could be assumed that Amna's senior position at an IT multinational company may grant her agency, her father, representing hegemonic masculinity, only accepted to proceed with this marriage proposal when her uncle, another patriarch, interfered. Therefore, Amna reclaimed her agency by asking for the help of her uncle to enable the marriage to Aly. Marrying Aly poses an opportunity for Amna to escape her hegemonic father and the socially stigmatized state of spinsterhood. Her relationship with Aly offered her a rite of passage to socially validated adulthood as a married woman, equality, and, most importantly, rescuing her agency to grant herself the ability to act autonomously and enjoy freedom of action. In fact, through Amna's narratives, she was able to resume her journey to matrimony.

One day after work, I was fed up and sought my uncle's help in the matter. He comforted me with a few gentle words, of which I've been starved at home. He was a balm to my raw nerves and once I was calm enough to discuss things level-headedly, he started giving me some much-needed advice.

He said that Aly taking over the responsibility of most of the matrimonial expenditures was quite charming, but that he was overloading himself. He elaborated that if expenses were more classically distributed, Aly might be able to afford booking a 150m² house, which would settle the dispute between him and my dad, regarding us living in an 'up to standards' place. He added that until all installments were paid off, Aly would rent a place for us to temporarily stay at. He would also be responsible for buying the rings, electric appliances, chandeliers and the kitchen, while my family would bare the expenses for house furnishing and kitchen ware.

I thought it was a very reasonable plan and Aly thought so as well, when my uncle discussed it with him. Hence, for the third time, Aly asks my dad for my hand with the new plan in his repertoire. Low and behold, my dad finally agrees and we decide a date for the engagement party. The party was quite humble and modest, held at my place. It was a small-scale celebration partly due to financial restrictions, but also due to dad viewing Aly as a shameful addition to the family, whom he wasn't eager to flaunt, which soured my joy.

To enable a new ordinary and reclaim her agency, Amna resorted to consulting her uncle to allow her to resume her marriage journey. This shows that masculinity in this social class refers to a cultural and moral leadership. Connell (1985) concluded that naturalization of male and female gender identities are defined as hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. These gender models have been internalized by Amna, legitimizing masculine power over socio-cultural spaces. This explains why she approached her uncle, a male figure, to reclaim agency in order to actualize her matrimonial journey with Aly.

The matrimonial practices experienced by the brides show Thuraya's case, where the couple's mutual individualism and financial independence allowed them to self-validate their matrimonial process, with the traditional practices being held as a courtesy, rather than an approval-seeking ritual. On the other hand, Amna's collectivistic background clashed with her and her suitor's individualism, leading to a thornier path than Thuraya's journey.

Common Sense, Gender Roles, and Continuity

Despite the fact that the unconventional couples shift from traditional matrimonial discourses and practices, they still show adherence to gender roles to impart a sense of continuity to their lives.

Social Status and Cultural Consumption

As Thuraya and Nader demonstrated their ability to embark on their matrimonial journey on their own, the matrimonial expenditures were handled by them. I attended their matrimonial shopping as well the furnishing day of their house. In fact, based on ethnographic research, I have noticed that while Thuraya and Nader deviate from mainstream culture of marriage in their social class, they still allocated the matrimonial expenditures as per their gender. In other words, Thuraya financed the engagement party, home furniture, kitchen utensils, rugs, and curtains, while Nader was in charge of the rings, the dowry (handed to Thuraya), electric appliances, wedding ceremony, home finishing, and the apartment itself.

They started wedding planning and house prepping. Since the very beginning, Nader and Thuraya have been determined to be self-reliant when it came to carrying their own financial baggage, hence it made them more capable of budding away from our families and acquiring more freedom making our own decisions. They had in on everything and even graciously tried to help by buying us gifts or giving us advice. And of course, being a lady in our community, my family was inevitably a tad more involved compared to his. However, they were still the prime movers when it came to deciding on things like house furnish, events' dates and venues. What isn't pleasant at all is the crippling stress they feel. Managing budgets is an intense responsibility. For instance, they pressed that they rent out an apartment rather than waiting on the finishing of Nader's house to get married. That spared them about a two year wait and they're going to soon be married. Also, Nader and Thuraya have decided to take advantage of his start-up and her talent as a graphic designer to seal a deal with the interior designer. The deal is to handle the firm's marketing and public relations for a year in return to paying half the price of their matrimonial transactions. Therefore, Thuraya paid half the price of home furniture, rugs and curtains; which she paid using her salary and the dowry. Apropos to Nader, he paid half the price of the home finishing and chandeliers. In regards, of the electric appliances and the kitchen utensils were bought from other shops financed by Nader and Thuraya respectively.

Thuraya and Nader embarked on their matrimonial journey singlehandedly. Nonetheless, they still abided by the gendered division of matrimonial transactions. This sheds light on habitus, dictating a cognitive way of thinking manifested in a set of dispositions allowing engagement with various modes of activities when encountering a specific situation. Salem (2018), in a study titled *Matrimonial transactions and the enactment of class and gender difference among Egyptian youth*, found that matrimonial transactions could neither be reduced or dispensed with because they communicate important meanings related to class and gender. This is because matrimonial exchanges carry built-in safeguards for women within marriage; that is, the ritualistic celebrations and home visits that accompany a new union involve a show of conspicuous consumption, where actors strive to reproduce the material behaviors marking their social class in order to secure a favorable position in the hierarchy of new couples.

The couple, despite being unconventional, still lives by an acquired system (common sense) of schemes that allows for everyday production of action. Thuraya and Nader approach the marriage field through a logic of practice fueled by their habitus to lend continuity to their lives. Hence, their consumption patterns adhere to social and gender standards as they play a significant role in demonstrating a class status and gender ideals.

This is also evident by renting an apartment instead of furnishing with reduced consumerism, as exemplified with Nader's apartment. In fact, Salem (2018) argues that the rational response to prevailing economic constraints would be to reduce matrimonial expenditures; however, this approach would ignore the symbolic meaning, related to society and gender, of matrimonial transactions. In the same vein, social class and social approval hinge on the display of appropriate expenditures around the time of the marriage.

Gender Roles Ideals

Amna's matrimonial consumption journey also adheres to gender roles ideals, albeit in a different manner. Despite being able to resume her matrimonial journey, her agency was still subject to hegemonic masculinity. Through ethnographic notes on Amna and Aly's consumption patterns, I noticed:

Resuming their relationship officially wasn't the end of that either, as Amna's family spared no effort rubbing in the fact that they were oppose to Amna's choice. For instance, instead of doing bridal shopping with her, her parents simply gave her the money and left her out on her own to shop for herself. She obviously was devastated by her parent's reaction, but nonetheless, she was content with the fact that Aly and herself were doing the shopping on their own, since she was sure that my parents' presence would have only added assault to injury, knowing that they'll be on their tails about every detail.

Booking and renting the apartments went well, as well as the shopping. They tried to keep it simple and not go over the top with everything they did, which allowed them to stretch the money they had to accommodate all of their needs, without breaking the budget. One would think that that's more than enough drama before they can tie the knot, but her dad had one more thing in store. Out of the blue, he insisted that she sells her car and buy a new one. She believes he did so to restrict her financially from helping with the installments of the house, but she was obliged anyway to avoid any further problems. For now, however, she is counting the blessings she has.

Essentially, Amna is an agency-in-waiting, struggling to survive as the diffused power over the social field is heterogenous and concentrated mainly in the hands of her father, who is acting as per his habitus. Amna's father's habitus dictates to him the social construct of a father in terms of protecting his daughter from any financial or social pitfalls. The car's installments are reassuring Amna's father that she can navigate a new event on her own: marriage. In fact, Connell (2012) emphasizes that hegemonic models of masculinity are characterized by unequal gender practices, connected to a cultural notion of ascendancy rather than one of violent measures.

Joseph (1999) in a study on gender and identity in Arab families suggests a construct of connective selfhood that, when coupled with patriarchy, produces patriarchal connectivity. In other words, members of Arab families do not experience themselves as separate or autonomous, but rather in accordance with

connective relationships. In particular, patriarchal connectivity means privileging males and seniors in order to legitimize domination by gender and age that particularly direct the lives of females and juniors.

Accordingly, Amna's case, by virtue of perpetuation, signals a normalization of waiting that renders her an agency-in-waiting. This may give rise to a coping mechanism where, in order to recreate other possibilities, Amna must create a "rupture" in the status quo to bring about new ordinaries. To do so, she must adhere to her hegemonic father, who wields an authoritative position over her feminine subordinate agency.

To conclude, unconventional journeys are characterized by romantic love to replace weak family ties, and conform to westernized world views, resulting in compliance with individualistic values while selecting a suitor. This serves social class endogamy, since despite unconventionalism, both brides select a suitor that is proportionate to their social status. In other words, Thuraya and Nader lack traditional family support (unlike Farida, Miral and Carmen). This explains why their romantic love appeared as a way to accrue a newly acquired familial support. In the same vein, Amna's love for Aly is a result of his upbringing in a westernized family environment, as his mother is German.

The matrimonial practices of Thuraya and Nader are depicted as unconventional, as the couple embarked on their matrimonial shopping journey without any financial or moral support. Nevertheless, they complied with the conventional gender-role habitus as they undertook the journey of matrimonial shopping while following a customary gendered-division of matrimonial expenditures. This contributes to social class endogamy, as social actors are implicated in continuous efforts to maintain social prestige through the display of class and gender appropriate performances, through their use of consumption patterns. Furthermore, Amna and Aly's journey to matrimony, through consumption, also serves social endogamy since the resumption of their marital journey necessitated that Aly adjust his initially proposed

deal to meet the expectations of Amna's father. This confirms that matrimonial consumption patterns contribute to social recognition and symbolic mobility.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MIDDLE COUPLES' JOURNEY TO MATRIMONY

In this chapter, I will discuss some aspects that come into play during the union of a middle couple. One of these aspects concerns how the social environment within which potential spouses exist offers them a pool of potential suitors that is generally limited to the social group to which they belong. I also touch on how bargaining over the binding agreement can not only aid couples in shortening the long matrimonial temporalities imposed by Egypt's rocky financial situation, but also grant the bride a secure power stance within her relationship. Finally, I allude to the traditional side of the couples in this group, who value the opinion of the collective by involving them in the process of goods acquisition.

The middle couples show similar discourses to the traditional ones as they select suitors in a way to serve the familial self and the gender role habitus. This is because a partner is chosen from social spaces depicted as socially homogenous. Nevertheless, their matrimonial practices are premised on bargaining, as they do not offer a radical departure but rather an adaptive strategy to financial burdens.

Fayrouz and Adham

Fayrouz (the bride: 24 years old) and Adham (the groom: 24 years old) are a couple representing a young love that had flourished since they were 16. They have stayed close to each other, taking up the same major and working at the same firm. Their mutual dependence and support have laid the foundation for an unbreakable bond.

Nazly and Malek

Nazly (the bride: 24 years old) and Malek (the groom: 25 years old) are a couple fully dependent on their parents, as their salaries as resident doctors, do not cater to their lifestyle, let alone the expenditure attached to marriage. In order to achieve the milestone event of marriage, the bride narrates that their journey to matrimony has been characterized by their familial involvement to financially cover their matrimonial expenses. In addition, the bride's father has played a key role in this matrimonial journey by securing his daughter a position of power in this conjugal union.

Roaming Homogenous Marriage Horizons

Leeuwen and Mas, (2005), in a study on social class endogamy titled *Endogamy and Social Class in History: An Overview*, suggest that one determinant of social endogamy is the likelihood of meeting in the marriage market. In fact, school and the workplace are social spaces that agents roam, acting as important social milieus producing socially homogamous marriages.

During my first interview with Fayrouz, I was able to learn about the onset of her matrimonial journey, one that has been characterized by the bride's sense of pride and joy in her relationship with the groom.

We started out friends, sometime around high school, when I asked him to tutor me in math. When someone fishes out your academic year from the depths of the oceans of doom, it really brings you closer together. We noticed we had budding feelings for one another, when we started tracking each other's class schedules, so we can 'accidentally' run into each other in the hall ways. After thankfully passing my senior year finals unscathed, I was trying to decide on a uni program to join. Since I adored art class to bits when I was younger, I wanted something that would allow my creative bone to shine. Adham told me that he was thinking architecture, and I felt it was right up my alley. Not to mention, I was pretty excited to have Adham by my side, even throughout uni. Although I felt like I loved it, I was kind of hesitant going into it, as I feared my feelings for Adham were clouding my judgment. Now, we both work at an interior designer firm and it definitely proved to me that this career is undoubtedly what I was cut out to do.

In my first interview with Nazly, I was able to discern that she navigates social spaces showing homogeneity, giving her the opportunity to select a suitor from a similar status group.

I met my fiancé, Malek, like all lovers do, at a psych ward, with the romantic wails and whines of our patients, as the background tunes to our blossoming connection. Somehow, amidst the chaotic ambience our job entailed, we started fancying one another. So, after-work coffee-dates it was. Chatting with him, I started realizing how like-minded we are. We shared a lot of the same interests, mainly circling around binge watching true crime stories and biographical documentaries about serial killers, but, on a lighter note, we also shared a passion for cooking and fitness, as well as a few other non-psychopathic, normal

human activities. Add to this, we bonded over the fact that the both of us had quite introverted personalities. Being so, each of us had a tight social circle of friends and acquaintances. However, out of the connections we had, we shared a lot of mutual ones.

From a Weberian lens, economic power is not the same thing as social power as there are instances where social power (or status) does not stem from economic standing (Gane, 2005). Weber asserts that classes are not communities because communities or communal social relationships are based on a subjective feeling of belonging together on either affectual or traditional grounds (Gane, 2005). One such example can be found with the Vattimas middle class sub-caste in India; in the past, they were landlords who practiced close-kin marriage, which has metamorphosed today into sub-caste endogamy. The endogamous marital patterns in this class perceive happiness, education, and employment as the principal criteria of selection. Happiness is important, as the concern with future happiness is the primary motive for increasingly allowing young men and women to communicate with each other before a marriage is decided upon. Nevertheless, happiness is premised on the basis of the education and the occupation of the suitor. In other words, prestige is manifested in their occupation as IT professionals or business consultants, reflecting their degrees from elite colleges (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). For a woman, educated professionals indicate a good match, and such husbands prefer women who are educated as well (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). This is why love marriages, in which young people choose their partners, are premised on the basis of the suitor's education and employment.

In the context of middle couple's suitor selection, Fayrouz's passion for Adham was nurtured in school, which acts as a social space, affirming similar cultural capital (that is, educational qualification). Moreover, Nazly's compatibility with Adham is premised on the basis of "like-mindedness" in terms of educational qualification and occupational position, which made them realize how socially similar they are, as they share the same circle of friends.

Fayrouz's and Nazly's statuses are not affected by the economic opportunities provided by Adham and Malek, respectively, but rather their status situation (within the sphere of social honor). For instance, Adham's status symbols are exhibited in his educational background (cultural capital) and his profession, as an interior designer. These symbols allowed Fayrouz to anticipate that, as an interior designer, he is highly educated, and that as a couple, they would be able to buy their own place with the assurance that they would turn it into their dream home. In this sense, status groups tend to be based on communal social relationships that lean towards closure. Status honor is normally expressed through the fact that, above all else, a specific style of living is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle. Linked with this expectation are restrictions on social intercourse. These restrictions may confine normal marriages to the status circle and may lead to complete endogamous closure, despite any financial constraints. These financial constraints appear in the matrimonial practices phase, as the middle couples are displaying neither a traditional nor unconventional approach to matrimony. In other words, the binding agreement is premised on the basis of bargaining.

The selection of the suitor, in the middle couples' journey, reveals the role played by the social sites roamed by an individual, mostly of an academic or occupational nature, in guiding them to the choice of a partner holding a similar social standing to theirs. Moreover, it alludes to how monetary value is not always proportional to one's cultural value. Although financially strained, the couples mentioned are academically well-groomed.

Bargaining Practice

Customarily, the matrimonial binding agreement in Cairo's upper middle class allocates transactions by associating the conjugal house, its finishing, the kitchen, and electric appliances along with the *shabka*, the *mahr*, and the *wedding party* to the groom. The bridal family, meanwhile, is expected to furnish the house, provide household equipment (that is, kitchen appliances) and pay for the engagement party. Nevertheless, the economics of marriage, in this social class, have witnessed some changes in the actual matrimonial negotiations.

Coping Mechanism with Egypt's Economic Context

While the bulk of the matrimonial expenses has traditionally been borne by the groom, economic hardships experienced by many Egyptians have prompted the bride's family to participate more heavily than has been customary (Rashad, Osman & Roudi-Fahimi, 2005). This may be due to several financial strains making it harder for the groom's family to shoulder the bulk of the marital expenditures. Therefore, the rising costs of marriage may be explained as a result of several factors, the first of which is the rising expectations and consumerism that have accompanied the opening of the Egyptian economy, starting in the 1970s (Rashad, Osman & Roudi-Fahimi, 2005); another contributing factor is Egypt's ailing economy that has arguably undermined the country's stability in the following decades (Hessler, 2017); third, the improved foreign investment returns due to the floatation of the Egyptian pound have had the adverse effect of cutting the value of the local currency in half, resulting in an alarming rise in living expenses marked by record levels in the price of essential commodities such as food, fuel, and public utilities with a corresponding hike as of July 2017 in the annual inflation rate (Hessler, 2017); fourthly, a discrepancy in young people's educational levels and qualifications has given rise to a phenomenon described as 'luxury unemployment' where the highly educated segment of youth exhibit higher levels of unemployment than their less educated peers due to their reluctance to accept jobs that do not match their

educational background (Abdel Ghafar, 2016). According to a 2014 ILO survey in 2014, over a quarter of unemployed youth turned down jobs as they felt such occupations ‘did not match their level of qualification’ (Barsoum, Ramadan & Mostafa, 2014).

The above factors have remapped the pre-material acquisition process responsibilities, as the increasing costs of marriage have changed the traditional norms of pre-wedding material acquisitions by further involving the bridal family economically, in order to safeguard the couple’s socially accepted ascribed status in the wake of socio-economic hardships.

Such differences appear initially during the negotiations to agree upon a binding agreement, as per Fayrouz’s account of the proposal day, requested by Adham’s father.

My mom received a call from Adham’s father, asking to pay us a visit, so Adham can formally propose. It was a humble meet up, at our house, over some coffee, tea and some homemade pastries the phenomenal baker that is my mom made. Adham’s parents were courteous and kind people. However, when we started discussing the details of the marriage process, they had some adamant demands about which they were quite headstrong and relentless.

For instance, Adham’s father insisted Adham and I live in an already furnished apartment, in the family house they’ve bought over a decade ago, to have it secured for their children, to stay at in the future. I have nothing against it, but Adham and I were really excited about this part of the whole thing, and wished we would’ve been able to choose our own house furnish, to have it tweaked meticulously to fit the vision of our dream home. However, not only was Adham’s parents insistent on it, Adham also said that this was the only option he could accommodate financially, at the time.

It was a downer to have the dream house makeover taken away, but my mom and I obliged, as being with Adham was a more superior priority to me than the house of our dreams. Plus, we can buy our own place and make it up, however we want, anytime down the line.

That wasn’t the end of it though, as they had another requirement, that pushed my mom and I out of our comfort zone. They requested an equal sharing of the matrimonial responsibilities, rather than adopting a classically allocated binding agreement. They said that classically, the binding agreement puts a greater financial strain on the groom, and with the rough economic conditions and inflation plaguing Egypt these days, the bridal family has to make considerate adjustments of sorts, to make it easier for everyone to accommodate the expenditures of the matrimonial responsibilities. My mom

and I bit our tongues and falteringly agreed, just to keep things running smoothly, even though we had nowhere near enough money to take up a deal like that.

Adham's family made a clear statement by first confirming that the couple will live in an apartment in the family-owned building, perceived by both Fayrouz and her mother as an outdated arrangement, which shattered the idea of the dream house makeover. Secondly, Adham's parents requested an equal sharing of the matrimonial responsibilities, due to the hard economic conditions and inflation currently plaguing Egypt, which necessitated the bridal family to make a sizeable adjustment in order to accommodate the expenditures of the matrimonial responsibilities. In fact, matrimonial exchanges consume about three years of the average groom's total earnings, requiring parents to organize educational and occupational plans around the objective of marrying (Salem, 2018). Therefore, the Egyptian brides' contributions to marriage costs are on the rise.

In a study titled *The gendered effects of labor market experiences on marriage timing in Egypt*, Salem (2016) found that due to the adverse job market environment and equally daunting matrimonial expenses challenging youth, especially males, have led to the negative societal problem of delayed marriage. In fact, many Egyptians say that the financial responsibility of marriage and providing for a family poses greater difficulties today than in the past (Hoodfar, 1997). On average, two-thirds of the marriage expenditures are undertaken by the groom and his family while the bride's contributions indicate a rise proportionate to her financial income (Salem, 2016).

Singerman and Ibrahim (2003), in a study titled *The Cost of Marriage in Egypt*, state that public discourse in Egypt and in other places in the region has given rise to new worries over the social "cost" of delayed marriage. In other words, delayed marriage is caused by the inability of youth to achieve marriage in a timely manner and secure a suitable marital home. This inability threatens social norms as marriage for any Egyptian couple is considered the sole path to living independently of the family home and engaging in permissible sexual relations.

This shows that the marriage costs in Egypt are rising, causing increasing bridal financial contributions to marriage, or delayed marriage. This is why Adham's family, in order to reduce the delay, urged Fayrouz and her mother to contribute financially to the conjugal relationship. This is because social relationships of status are quite incompatible with the market situation, or what might be called situations of class, for social standing is not simply determined by economic power or interest. Fayrouz's mother's response to the financial pressure placed on her can be easily explained; not only is marriage a major economic project demanding significant family energy and assets, often over a considerable period of time (Singerman & Ibrahim, 2003), but it is also the only channel through which females in Egypt acquire the privileges of adulthood in terms of residential independence and permissible sexual relations. Therefore, Fayrouz and her mother accepted this binding agreement to grant Fayrouz a rite of passage to adulthood.

The Lack of a Male Figure

It is important to note that, in the Arab world, the father acts as the representative of the family to the society at large, personifying the family's beliefs, values, and morals (Mourad, 2010). Women carry greater expectations of social compliance and are sometimes seen as particularly vulnerable targets that need to be protected (Scroope, 2019).

Fayrouz's narration touches on the hardships her mother and she had to overcome during the marriage preparation process. These hardships were mostly inflicted on them by Fayrouz's future in-laws, but also stemmed from Fayrouz's financial constraints, especially after the loss of her father.

What really made us inseparable, was the tragic, sudden death of my father. And although losing my dad was heart wrenching and soul crushing for me, it molded me into a more mature and appreciative being. However, it took me a long time to get to a place of peace, with the whole ordeal, and throughout my moments of weakness and hopelessness, was Adham, who never left my side. He helped me push through the rest of high school, after losing my father. Quite honestly, if it wasn't for him being so supportive of me at that time, I don't think I would've been alive today, let alone pass high school.

You see, my mom and I have been barely going by without help. My dad was the one providing for our family, while mom was a stay-at-home housewife. So, after he passed on, I was left the only provider for the household. We weren't poverty-stricken by any means, but our budget would definitely be in shambles with the strain of Adham's dad's request put on it. However, my mother was very positive and supportive throughout the whole situation. She told me she had a few gold pounds saved from before that she was willing to sell along with a few nick knacks from her jewelry box, to gather enough cash to cover the needed expenses. She told me she'd give up whatever she had to for me to uphold my reputation in front of my in-laws, and has asked me not to mention our struggles to them to avoid any mockery or looks of disgrace.

The loss of Fayrouz's father made her prone to several social and psychological strains. In fact, findings indicate that Arab fathers act as the good provider role, showing that the more positively involved a father has been in his child's life, the higher the child's self-esteem tends to be (Ridge, Jeon, Shami, & Chung, 2018). According to Kohut's self-psychology theory, "the quality of the father-child relationship is an inevitable part of the development of a psychological self-structure" and central to the psychological development for self-esteem (Ridge, Jeon, Shami, & Chung, 2018).

Since fathers in matrimonial practices act as hegemonic males as a form of cultural ascendancy to ensure the welfare of the family as a whole, females are raised to depend on their fathers, an asset which Fayrouz lacks. Hence, not only does she seek a rite of passage to adulthood, she also seeks to enjoy dependence on a male figure by means of marriage. In this sense, Fayrouz is surviving financial hardships (imposed by the binding agreement) to bring about a new ordinary, whereby Adham provides her with positive perceptions of a male figure in an accepting and warm sense. Such masculine traits were positively associated with Fayrouz's self-esteem, enhancing her receptiveness to a lifelong journey with Adham.

In this sense, Fayrouz's mother is the sole protector of her as a bride. This is why she decided to compromise her precious horde of gold pounds and jewelry, in order to raise the money to cover the expected bridal matrimonial transactions, thus protecting her daughter from any social stigma in front of her in-laws. Additionally, being anxious not to seem financially incapable of covering her daughter's matrimonial expenditures, she asked her daughter to remain silent about any financial struggles they are facing, to avoid any social stigma, disapproval, or discrimination against them. In such a way, mother and daughter attempted to conform to the perceived social characteristics that serve to distinguish them from other members of a community (that is, status group).

Granting the Bride Status

Salem (2018), in a study titled *Matrimonial Expenditures and Egyptian Women's Power Within Marriage*, proposed that arbitrary matrimonial expenses decide the level of decision-making a bride holds. Since proportional spending (whereby a higher percentage of marriage costs are covered by the bridal family) carries an advantage for women, it can be argued that parental investments in their daughter's marriage enhance her power. This shows that gendered power dynamics are rooted in the material resources married individuals bring to their conjugal union. The bride's family's bargaining power is at its peak before marriage; hence, the marriage negotiations prior to the wedding are one of greatest significances to the economic and social arrangement of the couple's life. Therefore, by splitting costs of the sum of the matrimonial expenses, the bride's father endows her with decision-making power. Furthermore, the fact that the father of the bride has paid half the cost of the conjugal household deters the groom from ill-treatment and divorce, implying that the bride enjoys an economic power (that is, ownership of half the conjugal house).

In the case of Nazly and Malek, the bargaining rationale was different from the one adopted by Fayrouz and Adham. In fact, the couple's matrimonial bargaining was based on granting Nazly status and power. My first interview with Nazly allowed me to detect the bride's material resources as indicators of gendered power relations.

On the day of the proposal, Malek and his parents arrived with a couple gifts in tow. You know, the usual staples. A chocolate box and a flower bouquet. In the meantime, my mom greeted them with coffee, tea and some mini confectionery pastries. After a light chat, my parents and his' started discussing the details of the binding agreement. His parents were straight and upfront about the fact that Malek wasn't currently financially capable to fund the marriage on his own, and that they were willing to help-out by baring most, if not all, of Malek's share in the matrimonial financial responsibility. Then they proceeded to offer a quite classical binding agreement, as to the allocation of responsibilities.

I thought they were very decent and courteous going about Malek's financial situation and so did my parents, according to what they told me after the visit was over. However, my dad had an alteration to suggest to the binding agreement. He offered a fifty-fifty deal, which Malek's parents readily accepted, since it reduced their financial burden and gave them a bit more peace of mind.

My dad also informed Malek's father that since both families were equally sharing the financial responsibilities, my parents would use the dowry, I receive from Malek. to expand a bit on the budget we set for the promise rings, instead of using it to pay off our share of the deal, as we were bearing half of it anyway. Also, he offered to pay half the cost of the conjugal house so that we get a decent household to grant lifelong welfare. My dad also demanded that our engagement be no longer than a year. And since the budget we had in place wouldn't allow us to hold a wedding so soon, dad insisted we hold a katb ketab event instead, until we can arrange a proper wedding ceremony. He reasoned that as he's grown to learn, out of life experience, that overly lengthy engagement periods rouse many unexpected issues and feuds, that he believed are very much avoidable doing things the way he proposed.

Malek's folks agreed and the deal was sealed, with everyone content with the decisions settled upon. I was quite relieved everything went well. To be honest, I was a little apprehensive about whether or not my parents were going to accept Malek as my groom to-be, due to his financial situation. I thought it would be more of a hassle and that I'd have to struggle hard with my parents to get my way. Thankfully though, it was an unexpectedly peaceful encounter.

After Malek and my future in-laws departed, my dad told me a few enlightening details behind his ways of conduct, regarding the agreement. He told me that he intentionally

insisted on taking up half the matrimonial expenses to warrant that I have a robust, influential status of power with regards to my marriage.

Nazly's father sought to control the use of the capital and to hold an economic power through the matrimonial journey. Through a Weberian lens, the father of the bride suggested an equal share of all the matrimonial expenses (which is unconventional) to affirm an economic action, to exercise power during the matrimonial shopping phase, as well as grant his daughter status and power in her conjugal house, regardless of the prevailing patriarchal social order. The later mandates a wife to obey her husband as a result of economic dependence on the spouse's abundant economic resources, which may make render a wife vulnerable to poor treatment and a disproportionate share of housework. In fact, the ownership of half the house allows her to enjoy an economic power, despite the likelihood of ill-treatment. This shows that female power in the marital relationship emanates from the resources she brings to the relationship. According to conventional matrimonial outlays, the groom's side bears the housing costs, thereby granting the husband control over the housing resource. This suggests that overall payments made by the bridal family will not empower the woman in her marital relationship (Salem, 2018).

This point is supported by Hoodfar (1997) in a study titled *Between marriage and the market: Intimate politics and survival in Cairo*, where she argues that marriage choices and conditions are important survival strategies. Because asymmetrical gender roles are legitimized by legal and traditional norms that assume women's inferiority, the bride and her family resort to certain marriage tactics in order to skirt the legal and social limitations.

The economic dimension of marriage in Egypt has a profound impact on how material costs may impact both marriage timing, economic decision-making, and patterns of cultural and gender norms (Singerman, 2007). The cost of marriage in Egypt plays a greater role in delaying marriages than has previously been supposed (Singerman, 2007). This is because, in the Egyptian mindset, the issues of cost and timing are closely intertwined, amidst frequent references on the various frustrations experienced by

youth due to the financial obstacles preventing them from marrying as early as they would like to (Singerman, 2007).

Therefore, in the bargaining context, the bridal family may seek to reduce the engagement wait-hood period. Nazly pointed out that at present, despite being legally married to Malek, they do not live together. When I asked her to elaborate on the rationale of such a decision, she explained the following:

My father told me the reason he pressed we have a katb ketab event a year from the engagement is to make sure of Malek's commitment to the relationship and to prevent him from self-doubting and second guessing himself, when the actual wedding time rolls around, a bit later on.

Honestly, I think I can trust Malek regardless of whether or not my dad has a grip on him. I know him well enough to be sure of him when it comes to standing by his word. On the other hand, though, I know my dad is trying to look out for me, and since everybody left that day being on good terms I believe my father is handling things quite right.

The *katb ketab* is an Islamic ceremony where the couple ties the knot and declares their marriage to their community. Religiously speaking, the couple is officially married; however, they are prohibited from moving in together yet, as the bride is obligated to remain at her father's house till the wedding day. This practice ensures that the bride's virginity remains intact. According to the social norms, the wedding ceremony is the only accepted rite of passage to her new life as a wife, hence consummation and cohabitation is prohibited until the actual wedding day.

In fact, the social exchange theory is a sociological and psychological theory assuming that social behaviors, in the context of the interaction of two parties, implement a cost-benefit analysis to determine risks and benefits (Rijt & Macy, 2006). This shows why Nazly's father bargained for the *katb ketab*. One reason is to guarantee that Malek will marry his daughter since terminating this relationship would lead to serious financial losses, due to the groom's hefty contributions to the matrimonial expenses. Another reason is that such an event, officially and religiously, affirms the marriage, while at the same time postponing the consummation and cohabitation, until the wedding day. The benefit of this decision is

based on the idea that material constraints result in a period of “waithood”, in which young people remain suspended as they attempt to reach social adulthood (Salem, 2018).

In short, the matrimonial practices draw upon the reasons as to why the classic framework of a binding agreement may be bargained over. The reasons vary from enabling couples to bypass the lengthy waithood laid down by the country’s financial distress, to granting the bride a higher power position within her relationship.

Groupism

Despite discrepancies in traditional matrimonial agreements, Adham's and Malek's families still showed customary collectivistic values. In other words, the families invited their cousins on the day they furnished the house. One cannot deny that the middle couples showed different matrimonial agreement (based on bargaining); yet, the families still abided by the notion of the familial self, as it is apparent that marriage is a family matter.

With the cash the mother so graciously gave to Fayrouz, the couple were able to cover all the basics when they went on their relatively modest wedding shopping spree. They mostly undertook the shopping themselves, as Fayrouz's mother was content as long as they were pleased, and Adham's parents were content as long as they did not exceed the budget. Based on ethnographic observations of the home furnishing, I was able to notice the following:

As for the house, my mom discretely made an arrangement, with one of our close relatives (i.e the interior designer), to finish up the house furnishing. And since she was aware of the hot seat they were in financially, she was very considerate, and gave them a great deal. She charged them quite comfortable rates, in return of Fayrouz working for her somewhere down the line.

Now comes around the thing that got on Fayrouz's nerves the most. Adham's cousins invited themselves over to the house, on the day we went to finish it up. They barged in on every matter and pushed their wants on the couple, as if it was all their business. Fayrouz really didn't appreciate this as their attitude was quite deplorable. She barely held herself back from picking a feud with them, only for Adham's sake.

Adham comforted Fayrouz afterwards though, reassuring her that the word was hers in the matter, and that he'll do his best to modulate his family, to help her settle as comfortably as possible into their family house. He also promised her that he'll burn the midnight oil, to enable himself financially, to get us our own place in the future. That really soothed her raw nerves, after the manic fest we had earlier that day with his relatives.

Anyway, on a positive note, overall, things are falling into place. Hopefully, soon enough, Adham and Fayrouz will tie the knot and their long-lived fairy tale will become a reality.

In a similar context, my observations of the home furnishing of the conjugal household of Nazly and Malek, I was able to detect collectivistic behaviors conducted by the families of the couple:

The marriage preparation phases commenced. Due to the fact that Malek and Nazly had quite jammed working hours, and since each of their parents are the ones financially catering for the whole process, it only deemed right and fair for the parents that they be the ones to orchestrate it.

So, a week later from the day of the proposal, Nazly's mother and Malek's headed off, on their own, to proceed with the house furnish shopping spree. This when the interior designer introduced me to the matriarchs. They went on and bought the furniture, electric appliances and a couple other nick-knacks, like curtains, cutlery, rugs etc.; which they allowed me to join as an intern at the firm.

Nazly's mother can be a bit too opinionated at times, so you'd understand why I was clutching my heart in fear and worry of a potential lady quarrel busting out, and you know how ugly those may get.

Thankfully though, the mother of the bride and the in-law got along with one another amazingly.

After they were done with the shopping, over the course of a few weeks, they set a date with the interior designer to come over for a final consultation.

On the day of home furnishing, both parents had planted both of the family trees in the house that day. The parents had invited all their relatives, dead and alive.

The couple weren't there to attend the family fiesta; as they had to be at the hospital as part of their residency program.

On the contrary though, both families had a blast exchanging opinions and making up the apartment's design. The same couldn't be said about the interior designer and her crew though. They could barely make their way through the crowd and around the house to do their job. However, they got it done nonetheless.

The ethnographic notes on the furnishing day of both couples show that the families' beliefs and attitudes indicate a blurring between the line separating self and members of one's in-group. In fact, large extended families that promote embeddedness are associated with collectivistic cultures because of increased interdependence (Powers, 2013). Within collectivistic cultures, individuals focus primarily on the needs of the group, as they are motivated by socially oriented goals, and identify the collective as responsible for outcomes (Powers, 2013). This explains the invitation of the relatives to attend the home furnishing day as privacy in collectivistic terms is defined as in-group members' involvement with other

people's business. Therefore, an integral part of the setting, situation, or context to which the self is connected, fitted or assimilated is shared and inter-connected with the opinions of other in-group members.

Fashioning the conjugal house is a familial issue as the attendance of the relatives, on the home furnishing day, is a way to receive the approval of in-group members regarding the quality of the furniture and appliances. Therefore, it offers an early opportunity to avoid social stigma. A social stigma is usually escaped to avoid being excluded from one's community, and to preserve one's status with all its privileges. Therefore, a couple's household is a symbol of their status and social class. This is why, in collectivistic societies, families from higher social classes may seek to accentuate their sons and daughters' status by furnishing their house in certain ways.

Given that the couples' respective families are responsible for guiding and financing their children until they get married, they consider it their duty, and also their right, to ensure that the couples are entering the marriage field (that is, adulthood field) with an array of resources. First, the economic capital is manifested through the conjugal house, its finishing and its furnishing. Second, the social capital is exhibited by involving in-group members in the home furnishing process, to ensure that the couples are protected from any social loss of face related to their conjugal space fashioning. Third, the cultural capital is revealed through the taste of the furniture.

Chan and Goldthorpe (2010), in a study titled *Social Status and Cultural Consumption*, assert that the cultural arena, no less than the financial field, is one in which class rivalry and dispute are always existent. The 'dominant classes' of contemporary societies use their high-caliber 'cultural capital', in equal measure with their superior financial capital, in order to sustain their stance of dominance. In Bourdieu's terms, differentiation unavoidably acts as a pathway to underwriting hierarchy. More specifically, members of superior classes are keen on displaying and upholding their high-caliber lifestyle over that of

other classes by assigning to it cultural forms that they can represent as ‘canonical’, ‘legitimate’ or otherwise distinguished’, while preserving an ‘aesthetic distance’ from other forms deemed to be inferior (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2010).

In this sense, the couples are entering the marriage field where all these forms of capital transform into a symbolic capital, giving them an adequate social position in the marriage field. The couples’ parents act, in this way, according to their habitus. In other words, this structured mode of perceiving and appreciating the lived world leads to specific behaviors that serve to reproduce the structural frames that first informed the habitus. Tastes in consumption are patterned according to social class; hence, consumption habits have a symbolic function in signaling class affiliation and class difference (Salem, 2018).

To conclude, the middle couples’ journey to matrimony serves social class endogamy, as the selection of the suitor is perpetuated by the social nature of the social spaces’ agents roam. In other words, agents navigate socially homogenous social spaces, which allow agents to select a partner on the basis of the anticipation of similar social status, with reference to education and employment as status symbols. In fact, Kalmijn (1998), in a study titled *Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns and Trends*, posits that the marriage organizational system emerges from the interaction between three social forces: desire of individuals for certain traits in a partner, the effect of the social circle to which they belong, and the restrictions of the marriage field which they are roaming.

The middle couples show that marriage, in Cairo’s upper middle class, does not follow a dower system, unlike the traditional couples. In fact, a new trend is emerging for two reasons, one of which is the rising costs of marriage that encourage the sharing of matrimonial expenses between the groom’s family and the bride’s family. Another reason is that sharing matrimonial expenses allows the bride’s family to gift their daughter with status and power.

These matrimonial practices serve social class endogamy since the bargaining practice to cope with Egypt's economic situation may increase the bridal contribution to matrimonial expenses. However, this adjustment is made in the spirit of ensuring that the conjugal relationship expresses, through matrimonial transactions, co-membership in a status group. In different terms, bargaining is shaped by the Weberian idea stating that lifestyle is an index of distinguishing status groups, offering an essential way to describe the group perimeters that make up the social conformation. This shows that the bargaining practice does not appear as a radical departure but rather an adaptive strategy to financial burdens. Not having enough money to finance matrimonial transactions gives rise to the creation of an accommodation to protect the union from any social stigmas.

Despite the bargaining practice, the middle couples still behave in collectivistic ways as per their habitus. The latter dictates internalized modes of behaviors that determine how an individual acts and reacts to the world. To receive approval from their in-group members (that is, relatives), their collectivistic behaviors are based on the customary practice that people with high levels of collectivism tend to be more dependent on and less likely to betray the interests or ignore the views of in-group members. This shows that the middle couples' practices are informed by collectivistic values that manifest themselves in the involvement of the relatives to ensure that the conjugal household of the couple meets the expectations of the community they belong to. In fact, the middle couples' matrimonial consumption patterns assist in social class endogamy as their membership in this community gives them access to social privileges the families do not wish to compromise, in order to avoid social stigma that puts their membership at risk. In basic terms, the celebration of the relatives (community members) of the conjugal household's fashion and taste grant their children status and prestige.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JOURNEY TO MATRIMONY IN CAIRO'S UPPER MIDDLE CLASS

A society can be described as a multidimensional space consisting of a number of fields. Any given field, according to Bourdieu, features boundaries constituting of a relational arrangement endowed with a specific gravity imposed on all the agents entering it (Adam, 2006). As we navigate these spaces, each cluster of fields we encounter seems to be specific to distinct social groupings (Adam, 2006). Fields engender and require certain responses, 'hailing' the individual to respond to themselves and their surroundings in specific ways to the point of habituation (Adam, 2006). The field instantiates us as subjects and reproduces social distinctions via the enactment of habitus.

In the context of marriage, an individual enters this social field carrying with him or her a certain habitus. The habitus is a collection of dispositions (that is, an internalized set of structures) derived from a pre-existing set of external structures. The latter consists of social arrangements of institutions such as family, school, media, religion, and so on, where human beings within a specific society interact. This habitus, shaped by an individual's interaction within pre-existing external structures, generates practices, perceptions, and attitudes which are constant without being conscious, determining the manner in which an individual behaves in the marriage field. These behaviors serve to reproduce existing structural frames that originally informed the habitus. Bourdieu affirms that habitus helps individuals act in the marriage field, as it is a socially constructed set of cognitive structures, suggesting the homogeneity of habitus per social class.

Doxa, as an outcome of habitus, is the process by which individuals socially and culturally perceive and behave in an unquestioned manner as habitus leads to unconscious modes of conduct. In basic terms, it is an “unquestioned” truth. Therefore, each social class has its own “doxic condition”, referring to the set of possible discourses and practices within a given field, such as marriage, for exam, thereby giving rise to “common action”.

Though thoroughly individualized, the habitus actually reflects a shared cultural context. The cultural commonalities of a class become inscribed upon the body and are reproduced in personal deportment in the field, which is a constitutive response to already existing social conditions. Culture manifests itself as part of “external” reality, such as artifacts and cities, and as forms of social organization and institutions (Mironenko & Sorokin, 2018). Culture is also a characteristic of the “inner” psychic reality of people, individuals, and communities, representing a psychic phenomenon (Mironenko & Sorokin, 2018). In this sense, culture is a “site of convergent interests” as well as a “powerful category of identity”.

Table 1: Differing Reactions to Matrimony in Cairo’s Upper Middle Class

	Traditional couples	Unconventional couples	Middle Couples
Values	Collectivistic	Individualistic	Collectivistic
Self	Familial	Autonomous/Globalized	Familial
Groom’s Traits	Ascribed more important	Achieved more important	Both
Family Ties	Dependent	Less Dependent	Dependent
Decision-Making	Family-driven	Individual-driven	Family-driven
Finances	Dependent	Independent	Dependent
Matrimonial Expenses Division	Classic	Classic	Bargaining
Conjugal Space Fashioning	Have recourse to in-group members	Self-standing	Have recourse to in-group members

Table 1 shows the extent to which seven couples belonging to the same social class may react differently to matrimony. Realistically speaking, members of the same social class can never possibly share the same experiences in identical order. Since social structures may witness modification in their nature and functioning, these changes may alter the manner in which an agent is socialized through an evolving set of roles and relationships within a particular social domain (namely, marriage). This shows that external social structures may experience changes, in response to which the habitus adjusts itself. Identity goes through a constant process of being redefined, as a purely reflexive capacity, which shows that we may be conscious, contrary to Bourdieu's argument that habitus is also an unconscious formation. However, there is often an opportunity to 'play the game' in more than one way. In this sense, an agent is always prone to changing social structures and subjective life experiences, explaining the subjectivity of the habitus, particularly in relation to the different reactions to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class.

Therefore, the individuality of the agent is not reflected in the "logic of practice" but rather in the "logic of discourse". Worded differently, a journey to matrimony in Cairo's upper middle class shows that subjective life experiences may lead to not only a multiplicity of discourses, but also a common practice (that is, a doxic condition) referred to as social class endogamy or marrying from the same social group. In such a way, the habitus is class motivated, as none of the nuances (that is, the different reactions to matrimony) undermine Bourdieu's logic. Social class endogamy acts as a kind of Egyptianized cosmopolitanism identification and solidarity, which is a logic derived from a common set of material conditions (and its immaterial manifestations) of existence to regulate the logic of practice in response to those conditions.

The suitor selection, in Cairo's upper middle class, is informed by capital considerations. This is because the social construct of love is shaped by the individual's economic, cultural, and social capital. Given that it comprises an assortment of dispositions, habitus shapes one's social standing, which is represented by one's economic capital (that is, material possessions) that predispose itself in a cultural capital, such as educational qualification. The latter shapes one's tastes, cultural norms, and behaviors within various social contexts. These disguises of capital influence one's social capital (that is, social connections), allowing an individual to confirm his or her social position through membership in a community that gives access to socio-economic privileges. All these forms of capital are transformed into a symbolic capital, imparting meaning to one's guises of capital in the marriage field.

These capital considerations, theorized by Bourdieu, can contribute to the understanding of one's status symbols, as suggested by Weber. In fact, status symbols indicate one's status group, which can be defined here as a group of people differentiated on the basis of prestige and honor, determining the rank one holds in a social group (in this context, Cairo's upper middle class).

A member of Cairo's upper middle class enters the marriage field in search of specific status symbols (constituting one's symbolic capital) by navigating family gatherings and socially homogenous social spaces (such as schools and workforces) that limit one's marriage horizon and potentialities. Therefore, a member of this social class is exposed to suitors from a similar social class (status group), thus contributing to the practice of homogamy.

The traditional couples (Farida and Taymour, Miral and Amir, and Carmen and Hady) select suitors in a way that ensures that the suitor is a suitable prospect for marriage, in terms of the notion of the familial self, manifested in loyalty to cosmopolitan communal living and faithfulness, within a traditional gender role habitus. The cosmopolitanism and the gender role habitus constitute a hybrid identity whereby urbanity and modernity are articulated through the consumption of transnational goods

and services, along with an “Egyptianized” view of gender ideals (men as breadwinners and women as housewives).

The middle couples (Fayrouz and Adham, and Nazly and Malek) are oriented with the importance of membership in a status group. Status symbols are expressed in a suitor’s education and employment. Therefore, socially homogenous spaces that these couples circumnavigate limit one’s marriage horizon to suitors who share similar status symbols.

The family gatherings and homogenous social settings attended by the traditional and the middle brides allow them to confide in the capital considerations of the grooms. In other words, Taymour’s compatibility with Farida is manifested in an economic camaraderie as the couple depend fully on their fathers’ businesses, which are, in fact, shared and reciprocal. Furthermore, the couple enjoys a cultural like-mindedness as Farida and Taymour both hold prestigious university degrees. The couple also shares a social togetherness by having experienced, across their life journey, the privileges reaped from membership in a community their parents gave them access to.

Amir’s compatibility with Miral is exhibited in an economic base provided by Amir’s father, as he works in a jewelry shop owned by his father. Similarly, Miral is an unemployed bride depending on her father’s private business. Moreover, the couple lay claim to cultural harmony since Amir is capable of displaying symbolic behaviors (mannerisms) that render him similar to Miral’s father. Also, the couple can rightfully claim social consonance by virtue of Amir being a second cousin to Miral’s family, spotlighting the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness.

Hady’s compatibility with Carmen is demonstrated through the celebration of economic and social resemblance, as the fathers discovered that they had attended the same school, were brought up in the same neighborhood, and share mutual friends within their social circles. Furthermore, the couple attended the same university, lending a sense of harmony to their cultural capital harmonious.

Adham's compatibility with Fayrouz is conveyed through farsighted cultural determination. This is because their chosen profession as interior designers will give them access to a privileged social community, allowing them to envision a prospective, successful economic standing consisting mainly of the formation of their dream conjugal household instead of the current unsatisfactory one.

Malek's compatibility with Nazly is articulated through mutual economic and cultural capital, due to their occupation as resident doctors. In other words, they hold the same university degree, work in the same hospital, and receive the same income, factors which render wholly dependent on their parents.

This shows that Farida and Miral engaged in kin endogamy to cement mutual business interests and secure a union with a suitor showing similar norms and traditions. Carmen, Fayrouz, and Nazly are roaming socially uniform spaces that facilitate the selection of a suitor belonging to the same status group (that is, possessing a similar symbolic capital).

While the unconventional couples may not show loyalty to the family needs, they still correspond to the traditional and middle couples in terms of the criteria of suitor selection, informed and perpetuated by capital considerations and status symbols. In other words, the subjectivity of the habitus is premised on the sociological notion explaining the process accounting for human behavior to "carry forward" existing conventions and rules. This view dismisses the processes of critical questioning or transformation of a certain status quo as well as the role of human cognition in generating action; that is, asserting agency.

The unconventional selection of the suitor is informed by individualistic worldviews, stemming from less dependent family bonds and a global self in addition to internalized values obtained from westernized education and media. Despite this unconventionalism in the process of selecting a partner, the unconventional couples still abide by the doxic condition of social class endogamy.

Nader's compatibility with Thuraya is expressed through economic independence since both the bride and the groom are solely reliant on their salaries; hence, they are in control of their financial

resources. Moreover, they exhibit cultural resemblance. Despite the fact that their weak family bonds are weak and financially independence, they do not deny the quality of education they received through family support. This has allowed them to occupy senior positions in the workforce, as well as establish their own start-up. It should also be mentioned that this couple displays social aspirations due to insecurities arising from a lack of the required social connections that could potentially boost the expansion of their start-up.

Aly's compatibility with Amna is revealed through cultural like-mindedness. This is manifested in their exposure to westernized education that made them internalize individualistic logics. Although Aly, the groom, did not offer to Amna's family a socially acceptable marriage proposal, the couple is similar in terms of economic capital as they both occupy the same position in the same company and receive the same salary.

This shows that Thuraya embarked on a journey to matrimony with Nader, as they share the same economic and cultural capital to tackle the mission of growing their social network (that is, social capital). Despite the fact that Aly did not meet either the economic or social standards of Amna's family, he still exhibits similar economic and cultural experiences. In fact, both comply with individualistic morals, which Aly acquired from his German mother, and Amna through exposure to westernized education and media. The latter exposure made Amna internalize that romantic love is the main motivation to get married. In this sense, media, as an external social structure, fails to comply with the traditional values of Amna's family, accentuating the importance of loyalty to family needs. Similarly, her exposure to westernized education opened her eyes to a new discourse of world views, as westernized curriculums promote individualistic world views which may lead learners to internalize distrust in parental choices. Finally, this couple occupies the same occupational standing and income, despite uncelebrated matrimonial proposals.

The selection of the suitor is informed by a “doxic condition”; as all brides belong to the same social group, approaching the marriage field and selecting the groom to-be on the basis of capital considerations and status symbols. Nonetheless, this “doxic condition” is informed by a variety of discourses relative to each bride’s subjective life experiences.

The set of activities the couples and their families engage in allows the collective, under the name of family allocentrism, to approach the decision of marriage with extreme caution. The decisions of the bride’s family are mainly informed by considerations of the economic, social, and cultural capital of the groom’s family, in an attempt to ensure that this union fulfills the checklist of a socially acceptable marriage. The “doxic condition” of the marriage field pertaining to this social class is informed by collectivistic values manifested in the notion of the familial self and the conflict between group-think practice and expressive individualism.

The notion of the familial self is expressed in the ways in which the couples embarked on the journey to matrimony. In fact, none of the couples validated the betrothal of the marriage without the official gathering of the two families. All the couples upheld the notion of family involvement, seeking to obtain as much knowledge as possible about one another prior to the wedding. This acquaintance of one another in terms of capital considerations and status symbols is achieved through a sequenced set of practices. All these practices contribute, in turn, to the families’ acquaintance of one another in rituals whereby each family’s economic, cultural, and social capital (status symbols) are articulated. This communication of status symbols and capital possessions helps actualize social relationships by affirming trust that unfolds relationships to infrastructure, constituting social relationships in the marriage field in Cairo’s upper middle class. Despite these commonalities, variations in behaviors can be observed.

The betrothal of the journey to matrimony, in Cairo’s upper middle class, is initiated by a request made by the groom, or his father, to the father of the bride, to bring the groom’s family to visit the bridal

family to formally ask for her hand in marriage. The request of permission to marry the bride from her father is a socially established discourse, showing that the bride is subordinate to her father, whose request for marriage transfers her subordination to the new husband.

The groom's family visit to the bridal home is also common in all journeys to matrimony, in Cairo's upper middle class, as the meeting of both families is needed to validate the betrothal by force of custom. This visit is considered a milestone event as both families are evaluated in terms of capital considerations. In other words, the bridal family welcomes the groom's family with a sumptuous tea banquet, to show-off taste, hospitality, and decorum. This is why the culinary choices of the mother of the bride reflect the family's income, good taste, and social standing. Similarly, the mother of the groom is expected to offer an elaborate bohemian crystal filled with Swiss chocolates. The endowed value of this commodity articulates the groom's social understanding of customary gifts exchanged in the marriage field in this social class.

Farida's, Miral's and Carmen's matrimonial betrothal was validated when the fathers of the grooms demonstrated nobility (referring to the groom's ascribed status). In addition, the families and the couples celebrated the betrothal when they discovered mutual friends and traditions. Farida and Miral, in particular, appreciated that their suitors work with their fathers, emphasizing the importance of the notion of the familial self. With respect to Fayrouz and Nazly (the middle brides), despite the variations in their matrimonial agreements deal-making, the bargaining aspect was powered by their families. One may argue that Thuraya and Amna are rebelling against the notion of tying one's identity to family identity; however, Thuraya, despite her financial independence, still engaged her family in the betrothal of her journey to matrimony. Likewise, despite the failure of the initial betrothal, Amna still consulted her uncle to be able to resume her journey to wedlock, indicating her awareness that she could choose to embark on this journey on her own but still preferring to defer to family members.

The traditional and middle couples waived their rights to negotiations and complied with their families' drawing of the roadmap of this journey, despite differences in the allocation of the matrimonial expenses (traditional allocation versus bargaining trend). The traditional and middle couples' matrimonial practices reinforce the "unquestioned truth" of social class endogamy as group-think, hegemonic masculinity, cultural capital in performance, and the bargaining practices constitute modes of thinking and practices that aim to display a specific lifestyle, thereby drawing boundaries between social classes.

Nevertheless, one couple, Thuraya and Nader, has shown deviation from this practice. The binding agreement was sealed between Thuraya and Nader, as independent entities navigating marriage as a social event on their own. This is because individualists often approach negotiations irrespective of group memberships; in other words, unlike other couples, they are in control of their resources. Moreover, the couple's romantic love relationship is seeking to assert greater individualism to replace weak family ties. Although this couple validated the betrothal of their matrimony in the presence of their families, the matrimonial binding agreement was designed by the couple on their own. This results from their control over their financial resources, unlike the other couples who depended on their parents financially.

This highlights that the notion of the familial self is a potent source of affirmation, confirming that members of this social class are subordinates to a family. Therefore, one's identity in this social class is represented as a group member primarily and an individual secondarily. This shows that agents of this social class, when approaching the marriage field, act in a way that emphasizes an "unquestioned truth" (doxic condition) based on the belief that regardless of one's logics, this field should be entered in the presence of the collective. Their habitus created a cognitive process through which agents develop and conform to socially acceptable social identities, deriving from the knowledge of his or her membership of a social group together with the emotional significance attached to this membership. This contributes to the understanding of the significance and implications of group-think. In fact, this practice is doxic as long

as the parents are funding the matrimonial expenses (traditionally or through bargaining). This financial power affirms the parents' social roles: fathers as controllers and sponsors, and mothers as taste selectors. Nonetheless, when the parents do not sponsor the matrimonial transactions, they relinquish their doxic social roles. In this case, group-think is substituted by expressive individualism, as demonstrated by Thuraya and Nader.

Collectivity, along with various forms of capital considerations, shape consumption practices during the phase of marriage preparation. The verbal binding agreement indicates a manual guiding consumption pattern as it allocates matrimonial expenses between the bride and the groom. While the patriarch of the family acts as a financial sponsor of consumption practices, the matriarchs of the family make use of these funds according to their taste. Thus, financials metamorphose into taste by the women concerned (the bride, the mother of the bride, and the mother of the groom).

Taste, in this social class, incorporates a variety of styles that reveal a discrepancy in standards. In this sense, one may postulate the uniformity of habitus, as the extent to which habitus is transferred from one generation to the next, is questionable. The principle site was divided into three levels exhibiting different styles: the classic style is an antique, or a replica of an antique, fashioned by rich silks and overelaborate artifacts. As this style is highly admired by the mothers of the bride, a bride will fashion her conjugal space classically, depending on the extent to which her mother commands her to do so; the second level offered a compromise for the brides and their mothers thanks to an eclectic merging of classic and contemporary elements. That is, contemporary furniture items are inspired by the classic ones, but with softer lines, simple chair legs and subtly patterned arms; the third level is the modern one, which was selected by brides in the absence of their mothers as it is perceived as a commodity lacking value and quality. As it eliminates unnecessary elements, this style cannot withstand the test of time. This removes its aesthetic appeal, as perceived by the collective of the brides and the grooms.

Farida, Miral, Carmen, and Amna abided by the gender role habitus, dictating that grooms provide the relationship with the conjugal household and dowry, endowing them with power over the household, namely the ownership of the house. Fathers fund the bridal matrimonial transactions by providing the bride with the dowry and extra financial resources to fulfil the binding agreement. Mothers, along with the brides, make use of these male-generated funds to fashion the conjugal house. Therefore, habitus is realized by women.

Despite the fact that Thuraya and Nader funded their matrimonial expenses, they still conformed to the gendered division of matrimonial expenses. In other words, Thuraya covered the socially expected bridal transactions (furniture, rugs, curtains and kitchen appliances), while Nader bought the conjugal house, finished it (provision of the kitchen, bathrooms, flooring, and wall paintings) and equipped it with electric appliances. Hence, this couple also abided by the gender role habitus.

This gendered division of matrimonial expenses allows the man to affirm the exercise of power through control over the capital (that is, ownership of the conjugal house). This obligates the wife to obey her husband, as a result of dependence on her spouse's control over the conjugal house. In keeping with the bridal matrimonial expected transactions symbolic of the role of the wife as a domestic manager (housewife), the wife is in charge of all the domestic tasks, mainly child-care, cleaning, and cooking. One may argue that this is a "doxic condition", as it appears as an "unquestioned truth" generating a "monolithic practice".

These matrimonial consumption patterns serve social class endogamy as agents are engaged in continuous efforts to maintain social prestige through the display of class and gender routines to manifest discrepancy in standards, allowing the drawing of symbolic borders between social classes. Nevertheless, the collective of the middle couples bargained a binding agreement that usher in new challenges to the dowry system. In fact, a new trend in consumption practices is emerging in Cairo's upper middle in terms

of the economics of the marriage field for two main reasons: first, the rising costs of marriage in Egypt can prompt the bridal family (voluntarily or involuntarily) to make considerate adjustments to facilitate the expenditures of matrimonial transactions for both parties. This is why Fayrouz's and Adham's respective families shared the matrimonial expenses (except for the cost of the conjugal household) as the cost of getting married in Egypt is becoming exorbitant; second, adjusting the expected costs can reduce the likelihood of abusive treatment by the husband to his wife and grant the bride a higher level of decision-making. In fact, negotiations prior to the wedding are set in place as they set ground rules to the economic and social arrangement of the couple's life in marriage. In other words, Nazly's father bestows power on his daughter, despite her perceived wifely subordination to a husband, deriving from the resources she brings to the relationship. Therefore, Nazly's father decided to gift her power and status by bringing to the conjugal relationship more than the socially expected, to avert the possibility of ill-treatment by Adham. This challenges the gender role habitus of the groom by diminishing his conjugal power.

Collectivistic home furnishing is another moderately common practice constituting the journey to matrimony, in Cairo's upper middle class. Although the matriarchs of the family select items and commodities to correspond socially acceptable standards to the conjugal household, the in-group members play a significant role as taste consultants. The role of in-group members is essential to guarantee a membership in a status group, promoting the doxic practice of social class endogamy. In other words, the day the house is furnished, the cousins and the relatives of the bride and the groom may be invited to approve the selected commodities. This is because admiration of home furnishing by in-group members reassures the family matriarchs that they have selected appropriate furniture items that validate the membership of the couple in a status group and preempt the danger of any social stigma in their social class. In fact, members of this social class roam within socially homogenous social spaces, which is defined in terms of specific standards and ideals. In this sense, criticism communicated by in-group

members regarding the space's fashion may serve to distinguish the couple from other members of their status group.

This practice was displayed by Farida (and Taymour), Miral (and Amir), Carmen (and Hady), Fayrouz (and Adham), and Nazly (and Malek). This doxic habit is challenged by the power dynamics rooted in the financial resources parents bring to the conjugal union. For example, the disengagement of Thuraya's and Nader's families can be explained as a result of lack of financial support provided by any of their family members.

To conclude, the concept of a "monolithic habitus" giving birth to a "doxic condition" per social class is challenged by the subjectivity of the life encounters experienced by the agent. This means that an agent enters the marriage field, along with his or her collective, motivated by a fairly diversified habitus. Therefore, the doxic condition of each social class is not one sole "unquestioned discourse", but, rather, a "multiplicity of discourses", leading to a single "doxic belief": social class endogamy.

Social class endogamy, as an agency in action within a socially constituted order, is translated according to the similarities people share. These similarities are informed by the subjectivity of habitus (shaped by subjective life experiences). Predictability, in this sense, is crucial, as trust unfolds to infrastructures (that is, a solid conjugal relationship). As relationships make us vulnerable to one another, we may exercise the liberty to engage with those who share the same symbolic capital (which is also premised on subjective life experiences). Accordingly, the selection of the suitor, the matrimonial practices, and the consumption patterns are the temporalities of marriage that build or break relationships.

CONCLUSION

As an ethnographer investigating the practices and discourses concerning the temporalities of marriage in Cairo's upper middle class, engaging in casual gossipy conversations about marriage-related topics provided me with the opportunity to explore the workings of habitus. During my journey, I classified the reactions to matrimony into three typologies. However, none of the nuances undermine the logic of the habitus as class motivated. In other words, the different reactions to matrimony show the way through which individuals create a sense of individuality in relation to the structuring structures into which they were born and raised. The couples seem to constitute their identities through the process of hailing in social interactions. In other words, the typologies suggested in this research show that none of the couples initiated a radical change, but, rather, engaged in adaptive strategies.

Cosmopolitanism is often linked with globalization, as a borderless world allows the free flow of both economic and cultural capital. Notwithstanding this assumption, the term cosmopolitanism still holds different meanings among Cairo's upper middle class. Compared to the Nasser era of a socialist economy, Sadat's rule witnessed a liberalized one that accelerated the transition to social mobility. Notions of social class were re-imagined, as Cairo's upper middle class had access to new spaces of glittering global capital (Schwedler, 2010). In this sense, the identity of this social class is attached to patterns of consumption and representational codes enabling them to traverse an urban space of perceived social hierarchies. Their cosmopolitan sense of belonging is premised on the basis of consuming transnational goods and services.

Nevertheless, a domesticated religious and cultural faith plays a significant role in the everyday fabric of life for the Egyptian upper classes. This lifestyle draws symbolic boundaries between social class through acquired skills, schooling, fashions, and the ability to adjust these expectations with the identities encoded on their bodies, such as the religious and cultural expectation related to their gender roles. Their domesticated cultural and religious faith is premised on a patriarchal connectivity. The notion

of patriarchy here concerns certain cultural constructs and structural relationships that confer upon males the prerogative of ordering the lives of those around them (Joseph, 1993). The term connectivity describes the identity of an individual as an extension of a myriad connective relationships wherein all members are both invited and indeed obligated to be involved in the formation of the self (Joseph, 1993). This indicates that the identity of in-group members is built on a collectivist form of existence that perpetuates connectivity by empowering patriarchal figures to rule over women and minors

The binding verbal contract is negotiated by the patriarchs of the family as they are culturally considered the main and sole representative of the family wielding control of the family resources. Cohen (2016), in a study on the father and son dynamics in the Arab societies, confirms that in the traditional Arab family, the father has absolute authority over all members of his household. His authority derives from his status as the provider and owner of the family's assets. The father's supreme position contrasts with the subordinate status of his wife and children, who are socially and economically dependent on him. They are expected to submit to his rule, obey his wishes, and treat him with deference. With the power and authority vested solely in the father, the internal boundaries of the family are clear so that all family members know their place in relation to the others. Seniority of males is a salient feature of the father-son relationship in Arab families to the extent that "while the father is still living, the son can procreate as much as he pleases, but having children of his own does not release him of his duties and obligations to his father; only the father's death can free a son from this authority" (Cohen, 2016, p. 188). This shows that not only brides are subordinate to their fathers, but also, grooms are subordinate to their fathers due to seniority. Group-think is a fairly common practice among members of this social class, whereby families of the bride and groom, in the the name of harmony and cohesion, make decisions about the matrimonial journey and its expenses as a group, spearheaded by its patriarch.

The positions of power are gendered according to masculinity and seniority of age; therefore, even older women hold a certain power in this social class. The mother-daughter relationship also favors seniority. In other words, mothers play a significant role in performing the family's cultural capital with the mother of the bride's taste holding sway over that of the bride when fashioning the conjugal household, affirming the bride's status as a kind of extension of the mother. As social stigma is usually escaped to avoid being discounted from one's community and to preserve one's status with all its privileges, a couple's household is a symbol of their status and social class. This is why, in collectivistic societies, mothers belonging to families from higher social classes may seek to showcase their sons' and daughters' status through furnishing their house in certain ways.

Familial guidance is an important aspect of the lives of single upper middle-class women. Imposing a curfew on female family members is one way to demonstrate familial bonds as protects the reputation of the family in front of the neighbors. Since the places upper-middle-class women navigate should be marked as safe, safe places according to this social class are denoted as those socially homogenous in nature, highlighting the crucial importance of class maps. Spaces denoted as socially homogenous are social milieus considered as marriage horizons. In fact, members of this social class engage in social class endogamy to consolidate a "sense of peoplehood" based on the solidarity perpetuated by Egyptianized cosmopolitanism.

The social endogamy marking this social class indicates that its unmarried members are not overtly chasing opportunities to find a suitable spouse. Rather, young women of marriageable age in this class maintain high visibility in the neighborhood, school, the workplace, and recreational venues, all of which are functional places representing "safe" marriage markets. These marriage markets are perceived as "safe" as they are socially homogenous, hence, the choice of the suitor is restricted to social spaces deemed to be cosmopolitan in nature. This choice is informed by loyalty to communal living as parents play a

significant role in the marriage process. In fact, parents may refuse to host a potential spouse considered unfitting (which is the case narrated by Amna, the unconventional bride). In fact, members of this social class treat marriage decisions with sensitivity, as a marriage partner should consolidate the “sense of peoplehood” to preserve internal cohesion and homogeneity of the group.

The suitors considered as suitable marriage partners are the ones displaying specific traits, all of which are pragmatic in nature. In other words, a prospective partner is selected based on socio-economic and cultural resources (referred to as capital considerations and status symbols). The financial and social status of the suitor is reflected by his socio-economic resources, viewed as guarantees of the future welfare of the new family. On the other hand, the cultural resources are displayed in likeminded values and perceptions, leading to a joint belief in the couple’s overall compatibility. That is, the conjugal pair engage in many joint-collaborate on core tasks, including childrearing, raising the need for cultural similarity in order to promote a harmonious lifestyle that is socially validated.

The ways in which this social class embarks on a journey to matrimony are gendered (masculine) and aged (seniors). The fathers (males and seniors) negotiate marriage deals in a way that serves their Egyptianized cosmopolitan identity. In other words, the matrimonial binding agreement sets a roadmap for the couple’s journey to wedlock by allocating matrimonial expenses among both families. This shows that a marriage decision does not only promote romance and personal desires, but, rather, contributes to social class reproduction. This is because a marriage deal ensures that a couple enters the marriage life carrying material resources that allow affirmation of membership in a status group. The status symbols needed to confirm this membership are the items installed to fashion the designated conjugal space, selected and organized by the mothers to avoid social stigma, perceived to stem from an economically and socially undesirable marriage.

This above highlights the importance of marriage alliances and their attendant decisions in maintaining and preserving membership in a status group. The question of marriageability is premised on a myriad of discourses involving practical and strategic considerations of wealth and status to validate compatibility. In a Levi-Straussian sense, vertical alliances in kinship systems are less important than horizontal alliances as they are based on nurturing relationships of reciprocity and exchange. In other words, the real purpose of cross-cousin marriage is to institute and maintain a system of exchange between groups (Scheffler, 1970). In fact, Dumont (1975) shows the importance of horizontal alliances by linking the kinship principles of hierarchy and marriage alliance to the Indian caste structure, where preferential marriage rules are established to preserve status and hierarchy. In the context of marriage in Cairo's upper middle class, the selection of the suitor, the matrimonial practices, and the consumption patterns serve to preserve an Egyptianized cosmopolitan status maintaining a social hierarchy to which all members contribute. In other words, alliance is a compelling idea where fathers, mothers, and brides enact roles in response to social and cultural expectations that ultimately reinforce group identification and solidarity. Brides select a suitor considered to be eligible in terms of capital considerations and status symbols. Fathers validate and legitimize the marriage decision by negotiating a binding agreement that mandates a level of wealth to accommodate expenditures serving a gender role habitus perpetuated by religious and cultural norms. Mothers also give substance to the binding agreement by selecting and organizing furniture items to fashion the conjugal household.

This shows that habitus is the "unconscious strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever- changing situations ... a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions" (Garnham & Williams, 1980, p.213). In fact, the habitus operates according to the logic of practice, which is a structural variant of a group (that is, social class). In this sense, the coherent logic of

practice of this social class is derived from a common set of material conditions of existence regulating and influencing marriage decisions.

Nevertheless, the matrimonial discourses in Cairo's upper middle class suggest that one's identity undergoes a constant process of redefinition and modification, as a purely reflexive capacity. Hence, subjective life experiences may result in conscious decisions and actions, rather than unconscious ones, as argued by Bourdieu. Therefore, habitus is a class variant enabling manipulation of the matrimonial game in different ways (that is, a multiplicity of discourses); yet, habitus produces an ethos that connects all the practices to a unifying set of dispositions and ideas according to the material conditions and immaterial manifestations of the class. This is because these multiple discourses are articulated by means of adaptive strategies, showing that the interlocutors are "interpellating" their doxic condition.

Interpellation is the process transforming "the individual into a subject" (Althusser, 1971, p.74). Rather than the creation of an autonomous entity, interpellation refers to the production of a subject circulating within and through the field of power-ideology (Davis, 2012). Ideology, through Althusser's lens, is a set of worldviews constitutive of material practices within specific institutions that lead to subject formation and the reproduction of social relationships (Davis, 2019). This is why, despite the interlocutors' differing reactions to matrimony, their identities are still constrained within a system of ideological categories (that is, the ethos that relates practices to unified set of principles). Therefore, in the field of marriage in Cairo's upper middle class, while members may exhibit various ways of playing the matrimonial game, their doxic condition circulates by and through them. This is because their logic of practice is shaped in early childhood through primary socialization by internalizing a given set of material and immaterial conditions. Even if they encounter life experiences that reform their identities, as a reflexive capacity, these reforms will be appropriated to the structural logic of their existing habitus.

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