

SCRIPT: “My Egyptian Family Dynamics...”
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This audio feature tells the story of Yousreya Azzam, my grandmother and how her Catholic school-education and lack of awareness affected the way she raised her daughters and why they blame her for their failed marriages and wrong life choices. Especially my mother, Omayma Maher.

NAT SOUND: Cairo Traffic (0-14secs from the start of the nat sound)

It's Thursday, October 31st. I'm on my way to my grandmother's house in Mohandessin. It's time to force her to open up to me about her life, education, and why her daughters are blaming her for their failed marriages.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Late Night Reading - Blue Dot Sessions (:14)

YOUSREYA AZZAM (YA): “My name is Yousreya Azzam.” (:14)

Excuse my grandmother. She's a bit um, audio you shy?

YA: “I had two sisters and one brother. I wanted to go out of the house. I wanted to have my house, my life...to go away.” (:22)

Growing up in a full house while being the eldest of the four children wasn't easy, especially that her own mother wasn't close to her, which is why she jumped at the first arranged marriage opportunity in order to move out of the house.

YA: “And my Mother, she was not my friend...my close. So I wanted to have a life.” (1:00)

Although my grandmother loved being a Catholic school graduate, still, she thinks she got nothing out of it when it comes to actual educational benefits. And since I'm a third generation catholic school graduate myself, I could definitely relate.

YA: “At school, no. They teach us how to be, you know, ethics, etiquette, how to be good people, how to be good girls.” (1:26)

Having graduated from school to get married shortly after - at 19. My grandmother's marriage wasn't exactly happy, but it wasn't sad either. However, her three daughters experiences with marriage weren't the best, like my mother, Omayma Maher, For example.

OMAYMA MAHER (OM): "I got the divorce many years ago, I didn't count. I was married for 11 years. I was the younger one [to get married] got married at a very young age." (1:58)

Like her other two sisters, marriage hasn't treated my mom in the best way. But with all three getting divorces for different reasons, they still had one thing in common.

OM: "Because she was helping me to find out he's cheating, then I get hurt. Then she tells me, he will be good, don't leave him, he will be good. He is young. When you get married, he will be more reasonable. Your father was like that...That's what mom says." (2:28)

Like you heard, the three sisters, Omayma, Amira and Iman all blame their mother for their divorces and wrong life choices. But my grandmother doesn't quite agree.

OM: "I'm sad, I'm more sad because they say that I'm the reason for their divorce. Omayma say that I should say no to to Ahmed when he came to marry her." (3:11)

With all of that being said, even though my mother still can't help but blame her little, she understands that this goes back to the lack of awareness.

OM: "My mother, because she didn't continue her education, Maybe she missed something with us. I don't know what exactly she was thinking, but I'm sure that she will not hurt me. She wants my happiness. So I think she was thinking that it's for my good...not for me to be unhappy, to be sad, to be divorced in the future. I don't think she was thinking about all of it." (3:51)

When it comes to the topic of education and how it relates to life choices, marriage and divorce. Professor Noha Fikry from the Sociology department, who teaches Arab Family Structure and Dynamics had a specific opinion based on professional sociological methods.

NOHA FIKRY (NF): "So I think yes, definitely education plays a very major role in life choices. This is very much dependent on the empirical cases. The best way to actually do this

is very sociological, through following a life history model of a sense, and then you follow the generations along from this person, and you follow the choices that were made. Maybe in the case of specific people, you end up finding people blaming their parents for particular life choices that they have made, or they have been put into.” (4:38)

Professor Noha also believes that education is a culture that ends up constructing a social agent, not just an educated person. Therefore, education is directly related to life choices, including marriage and divorce.

The story you just heard about my family fits right into the stereotypical view of the Egyptian family dynamics. Can you say the same about yours? I learned that once you draw the patterns and see the bigger picture, you can find some really interesting things.

This audio feature was produced by Aya Aboshady for the audio production course at the American University in Cairo taught by Professor Kim Fox in the fall semester of 2019. Special thanks to my mom, my grandmother and Professor Noha Fikry. Music is Late Night reading by Blue Dots Sessions, all the nat sounds were gathered and are owned by me.

MUSIC: FADE OUT: Late Night Reading - Blue Dot Sessions (5:48)