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Marital Economies: A Comparative Class Study in Two Contemporary Cairo Neighborhoods

Dedication

To the souls of my father and mother who grew up the insisting on success in me.

To my beloved family:

My husband: Ahmad Sabry

My daughters: Noura and Yosra

My sons: Sherif and Mahmoud

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Abstract

This thesis topic emerged out of my own personal experience. When my daughter engaged many questions came to my mind, such as what is the criterion upon which 'our family' and the groom's family will run the marital expenditures needed for them to start their new life. As it was the first experience to my family I started to discuss this matter with people who belong to my community and who had experiences in that regard to benefit from their past experiences. I primarily noticed that their marital monetary decisions are not identical. Then, I started to widen my discussion to include different social segments; the disparities between their choices was not based only on their different socioeconomic circumstances as I thought. As there were various opinions and beliefs between the older and younger members in the one family. I also noticed that when people make specific choices regarding marital economic imperatives they not only aim to purchase the material function of the commodity, but they portray and represent themselves according to the self-image they previously have or aim to become. Which obviously appear in the different patterns of consumption they practice.

Exploring the driving forces that control their choices was what ignited my curiosity as a researcher. While the process of establishing a new family consists of different social, economic and cultural elements, it was important to problematize my study within the dominant socio-economic and cultural climate in the Egyptian context, which is characterized by the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. In addition to consumption culture that led to the commodification of everything including marriage.

My thesis has attempted to fill a research gap through looking at how new subjectivities are made and remade in two economically and socially distinct areas; Ain-Shams and Al-Rehab city. This is a novelty because most (if not all) ethnographies conducted on the Egyptian household tend to focus on lower income communities. The research enhances the debates in the field by examining

the shifts in “marital imperatives” patterns of consumption among the different segments of the middle-class Egyptians after 2011th revolution, with a particular focus on how these modes of consumption in addition to self- commodification work to constitute new socioeconomic subjectivities and status distinctions in changing urban spaces. This specific focus represents another novelty in my thesis. While the research focusses on the disparate modes of consuming marital imperatives I argue that consumption practices in Egypt deserve more scholarly attention than they have received. This research could be a foundational read for future researchers interested in the topic and many fruitful future research questions can be found in its pages. For example, it may interest those working on urban space, youth, and the social consequences of economic transformation; in addition to urban redistribution in contemporary Egypt.

The ethnographic research methodology was my primary method of collecting data, participant observation and face-to-face interaction with my interlocutors facilitates my attempt to explore how individuals in the two assigned neighborhoods construct, reconstruct and display new subjectivities under the logic of commodification. In other words, it helped me to touch the actuality of the theoretical framework of my thesis.

I have accomplished a comprehensive insight about the way in which the commodification of marriage as a part of the commodification of all walks of life under neoliberalism and capitalist economy affects the process of self-subjectification through two possible mechanisms. first by self-understanding which is mediated by consuming marital imperatives that holds specific social images. In this sense, self-definition depends on the appropriation of the traits of commodities. We know who we are, we judge the quality of our inner experience and we represent ourselves through identification with the things we buy. Second by self-commodification that involves the reorganization of our personal lives and relationships on the model of market relations. This adaptation is well illustrated by the recent practice of “personal branding,” a strategy of cultivating a name and image of ourselves that we manipulate for economic gains. In my research I had

presented several examples of self-branding within the economics of marriage. Both meanings of self-commodification concern the terms in which we define and display ourselves and our well-being.

Money is at the heart of the construction of new subjectivity within the economics of marriage. On the one hand, it is needed for purchasing marital imperatives and on the other hand it is the main destination for self-commodification and obtaining independence especially for the young generations who are suffering from the longevity of dependency on their families. Which negatively affects their freedom to choose their priorities in spending the cost of marriage.

The precarious state of being within the Egyptian neoliberal context has been expanded to contain different social segments such as well-educated young generations which forced a great number of them to invest in themselves; the individuals are constituted as subjects of “human capital.” In sum, some of the motivations that lead the economic choices among Al-Rehab residents was the lifestyle and peer and social pressure while for Ain Shams inhabitants were money, traditions and showing off.

Chapter One

Neoliberalism, Consumerism and the Production of New Subjectivity

This thesis explores the ways in which neoliberalism, capitalism and consumerism affect the distinctive socio-economic decisions and monetary choices that young men, women and their families from low, middle and upper segments of the middle class make to reconstitute, maintain and display their social status in two neighborhoods Ain-Shams and Al-Rehab city.

Astonishment is not the accurate description to capture “Kareem Al-Tyb’s” feelings when he became over a few hours the subject of social media discourse after he had shared a post on a closed Facebook group ‘for young men only’ asking to borrow a pair of shoes a few days before his wedding because he could not afford to buy them. In his narrative to ‘Masrawy’, a well known news website, “Al-Tyb” tells the details of his story from the moment he wrote his demand, the people’s reaction to it, and the reflection of this event on his life.

After an exhausting working day in one of the private companies “Al-Tyb “ returned to his home, but he could not sleep because of his upcoming wedding party for which he still had many obligations that had to be quickly provided. He writes “I brought a pen, a piece of paper, and a calculator and I kept calculating the cost of the remaining things. As any youth in the same circumstances, I had spent my money on the apartment and the other details of the wedding party.” Nothing was left except a small amount of money from which he had to provide clothes and other necessities that cost about LE 6000 within few days. He thought about the things that could be dispensed with or borrowed to reduce the expenditures, “I said to myself I can borrow the shoes from one of my friends”. He immediately called two of his friends, but their shoe sizes were not the same as his. “I decided to open the page of the group that is exclusive to young men and confidential, and I expected that someone could help. The needed shoes will not cost much, some may see it a small amount of money, but the matter is different for the one who is about to marry, I have some money however there are things that are more important and more fundamental.” Hence, he wrote on that closed account about his need for a pair of shoes for his wedding party promising to return them to their owner after the wedding.

“Al-Tayb” did it automatically without consideration “I said there are about two or three who will offer help, and the same number will make fun of me”. Then he left his mobile phone trying to finish calculating his budget for ten minutes before he returned to his mobile checking his Facebook account. What he saw surprised him, “I noticed that the matter took more attention than it deserved, people talked to me from every place, I did not understand if this was for real or just a dream?” Hundreds of supportive comments had poured in with concern, his post captured the attention of people, “I was so happy to the extent that I cried.” Group members from the Egyptian provinces and across the Arab region sent him photos of shoes. “Some of them offered me their suits and the others offered to send me perfumes and many other things, it was more than I could absorb”.

The groom did not sleep that night answering the enthusiastic support offered. “Some said to me you have returned the soul of the 25th January Egyptian revolution.” “Al-Tyb” received his shoes and turned down all the other offers, such as video taping his wedding ceremony for free, offers of cars for his wedding party, ties and belts. The groom told some of his friends about the matter especially after someone had moved the post to other pages with the deletion of his name for confidentiality. “I have not told any one in my family or my bride because I do not know their reaction, they may not understand what happened or they might feel embarrassed, I thought that it was a closed group and we are all young men, so I could not predict that the matter would widely spread.”

After the spread of his story on Facebook, he followed thousands of comments, “thank God it is all nice.” Some girls made fun of him and wondered how he could not buy a pair of shoes for himself. He felt sorry because he could not reply. Some people posted that these circumstances happen to all. The unknown groom praises his future wife and her family, “they supported and reduced the wedding imperatives to make things easy.” He met his future wife a year ago, his heart pounded, and soon he asked her for marriage. He was ready for this step, “I prepared a large part of my apartment, so I can comfortably get married” but the high prices hit and destroyed his expectations “the price of everything has doubled that is why I could not fulfill my marital budget.” He will not keep what happened a secret, he intends to tell his wife after a while when “her reaction will be calmer.”

The groom considered what happened as one of the most important events in his life. He saw goodness still present, and how his story has become a new beginning for helping others “I entered the group today to find a number of donations for clothes for people in need”.

“Al-Tayb’s” case highlights some of the central concerns of this study, including the nature of the emerging phenomenon of the commodification of marriage according to which every single detail related to the economics of marriage is commercialized. “Al-Tayb” like many other educated young men are suffering from the inability to plan their lives due to job insecurity and material precarity. They constitute a new emerging class, what has been termed “the precariat,” whose lives are rendered insecure in the neoliberal present.

Overview: Thesis Question

This thesis attempts to explore the following question: what is the influence of neoliberalism on the production of the distinctive socio-economic subjectivities within Egyptian families in the contemporary urban Egypt from 2011 to 2017? According to Xavier, consumerism “as a socioeconomic system, seeks to produce and shape its subjects according to its logic and needs” (2016, p. 208). “Therefore, social identity derives essentially from the consumer’s patterns or styles of consumption, which personalize and signify him socially” (2016, p. 212). I examine the way in which the individual’s socio-economic subjectivity is produced, reproduced and displayed in two economically, culturally and socially distinct areas, Ain-Shams, and Al-Rehab city. I utilize marriage economic choices, as a metaphor to critique larger socioeconomic consequences resulted from neoliberal transformation, and as a lens to explore the formation of the socio-economic subjectivities within the Egyptians’ daily activities. I investigate the way in which marriage is economically performed within these two different communities. And to what extent the marital economic choices affect, are affected by, and reflect the social status of each group.

This thesis will provide a framework for understanding the effect of the neoliberal changing dynamics such as the new pattern of consumption that resulted from the implementation of globalized market economy by the state, as a distinctive formative category of shaping the normative foundations of all segments of the middle class socio-economic subjectivities and to understand the typical class’ concepts of their economic choices.

I collected narratives from men and women who reside in Ain-Shams or Al-Rehab city from disparate age groups ranging from parents of recently married daughters or sons to youths who newly got married or engaged. In addition to that, some individuals whose work is directly related to the economics of marriage. In selecting my informants, I was keen that most of them, especially those who are in the age of marriage, are educated to the extent that one can describe them as belonging to middle class. So, based on my interaction with the interviewees from the two communities many questions came to my mind: why is it significant to prioritize the themes of consumerism when analyzing the production of subjectivity and its socio-economic dimension? How can young men and women and their families from the two selected neighborhoods determine their priorities regarding the expenses of marriage? Do they understand their socioeconomic subjectivities within the social map? And how is this understanding reflected in their marital economic choices as a part of their economic strategy for status construction and preservation? How marital economic choices reflect the ways in which Egyptian families from specific classes react to the ongoing political, social, and economic radical changes resulted from neoliberalism and market economy during the period 2011-2016.

How does the notion of consumption prevail in the everydayness and the discourse of Egyptian families? How do family members from the different generation deal with the prevailing foundations of the economic status reproduction and display; rooted in the inherited vision of the economic imperatives of marriage? and to what extent can the new generation make changes, in these constants, commensurate with the challenges of the economic changes associated with neo-liberal transformation? How do some Egyptians make their living from the innovative crafts that are created by neo-liberalism through the process of commodification of marriage? How have class and socioeconomic subjectivity become two related concepts within the Egyptian context? How do some Egyptians make their financial choices and how they run their choices as a signifier of their socioeconomic subjectivities? What is the role played by - class in the Egyptian context- as a social pressure in the making of marital economic priorities? How Egyptian middle and upper middle classes shape their economic subjectivities over the years of neoliberal transformation? What are the distinctive economic subjectivities produced within middle and upper middle class Egyptian families and how are they constituted and maintained?

It is noteworthy that there is hardly any literature analyzing the impact of neoliberalism and market economy on shaping the Egyptian urban low, middle, upper segments of middle class 'economic choices. Most scholarly work and ethnographies conducted about the Egyptian marital imperatives have focused singularly on lower income neighborhoods. Thus, this thesis presents a perspective largely missing from social science's research on the contemporary greater Cairo region.

Research Problem, Context, Justification

Post-revolution Egypt was expected to undergo radical changes in both political and socio-economic strategies; however, Egypt has returned to the same policies against which the revolution of 2011 fought, such as authoritarian and neoliberalism. Urban redistribution is one of the consequences of this neo-liberal economic shifts. On the one hand, "it is estimated that by the year of 2020, 66 percent of the greater Cairo will have been living in informal areas" (Abaza, 2005 p.22-23). Furthermore, the economic transformation into free market economy also affects urban planning and housing especially with land scarcity and real-estate speculation. Both private housing market and the governmental housing projects aim mainly at the construction of intermediate and luxurious housing leaving a small room for economical housing. This leads to the proliferation of informal communities around Cairo, such as Ain-Shams.

Ain-Shams is one of the old districts in Cairo. It contains historical sites. It is in the north-east border of Cairo. As many other informal communities, it contains squatters and private buildings. Rural migration, especially from upper Egypt, in addition to the expatriation of poor residents whose settlements were removed by Egyptian authority such as Ishash al-Turjuman, constitutes its population. This means that most of its residents belong to one economic strata characterized by low income and modest social rank. Therefore, in the process of exploring the norms of the socio-economic subjectivities produced in two economically distinct urban areas; Ain-Shams' interviewees could be counted to the low and middle segments, of middle class taking into consideration the very specification of the notion of class in the Egyptian context.

On the other hand, the proliferation of gated communities reflects the growing socio-economic gap between Cairo's old and new constructed neighborhoods. The Egyptian

socioeconomic status has witnessed a dramatic shift during Mubarak's era that is characterized by huge economical gaps between the social classes and an almost vanishing of middle class. These gaps result from different factors: first, the widespread economic corruption, especially in the last decade of Mubarak's rule that had lasted for three decades. Second, the longevity of the governmental regime allows the construction of a class of elites and politician businessmen with enough leverage to allow them to manipulate the state economy. Third, since the late 1980s, Egypt has pushed, if reluctantly, to transform outright to a free-market economy due to huge pressures from the international economy. As a result, high income luxury residential land has been allocated, in addition to governmental local services, to build exclusive golf courses, luxury residential compounds, and gated communities as a form of class separation.

The economic transformation to market-based reforms results in permanent unemployment, intense housing crisis and increased social inequality. With the spread of slums to the heart of Cairo and the state's failure to remove them, new residential areas have been constructed for the new privileged elites. These compounds that are equipped with swimming pools, golf courses and so on, need to be protected from the 'Others', 'the common Egyptian people'; thus, wall construction around these exclusive housing compounds are mandatory. Walled enclosures with private security have become a familiar sight in contemporary Egypt, especially in the well-constructed new settlements, such as New Cairo, Al-Shorouk and Al-Obour. In other words, wealthy Egyptians are building walls around themselves due to deepening inequality and fear of revenge by marginalized people who make up most of the Egyptian population. Thus, walled enclosures essentially stem from a feeling of insecurity giving rise to the new securitization technology that features the contemporary Egyptian security context. Spatial enclosure is one of the defining features of post-modern urbanism such as the fortified enclaves of the elite gated communities and walled suburbs in Egypt. The spread of walled compounds and private communities, in addition to the proliferation of the private security companies by which security is privatized, lead to the spatial fragmentation of the state, and the decentralization of the state governmental sovereignty. Gated communities produce areas of controlled access within the urban territoriality. This creates a form of urban segregation. Furthermore, Gated communities also produce a sense of solidarity between its residents; results from the formation of new lifestyles and subjectivities. As a result, different forms of social and urban pathologies are shaped. For instance, Marafi, 2011 assumes that living in the elites' gated

compounds in which more security procedures are used to protect the residents' properties leads not only to urban segregation but to severe disparity in moral values between the elite residents and the 'Other' people, to the extent that it turns into moral panic towards that "Other".

Wealthy Egyptians have begun to surround their residences with high walls that cannot easily be scaled. They have also started to employ private firms to provide full time security guards to protect their properties. These guards spend the entire night outside these people houses in wooden booths that in the past were only seen in front of the houses of cabinet ministers (Amin, p.117)

Al-Rehab city is one of the Cairo's most integrated and privileged residential gated communities in the New Cairo. It obviously reflects the state's new trend to the commodification of place. It is located ten minutes away from Heliopolis and Nasr City, on the Cairo Suez road, and 20 minutes from downtown Cairo via the first ring road which intersects the Cairo Suez Road. Al Rehab City is a part of New Cairo which contains residential compounds, houses, villas, and world class five-star Hotels and golf courses. Elevated above sea level (50 meters above Mokattam) this residential area is characterized by unpolluted air and a moderate climate all year round. El-Rehab is a fully-fledged community, which creates a comprehensive integrated residential scheme within the New Cairo plan. It covers an area of 10 million m² to accommodate 200,000 residents. There are 10 phases, each covering an area of 220 feddans. Each phase is a complete district offering two kinds of housing arrangements: villas and apartments. All facilities are interconnected throughout the ten different phases to include educational, medical, commercial, sports club, recreational and maintenance facilities. Most of Al-Rehab residents belong to the upper and upper-middle social classes.

Consumption is a core concept in this study, I analyze its impact on the daily life of the interviewees from the two neighborhoods. Xavier (2016, p. 208) notes that "as a socioeconomic system, consumerism seeks to produce and shape its subjects according to its logic and needs.. in our global culture, being a consumer is what ultimately defines the subject." Xavier (2016) also refers to capitalism's totalizing tendency to occupy all walks of life including the colonization of subjectivity itself; through one single imperative "commodification culture".

Comparing two neighborhoods from different socio-economic categories, such as Al-Rehab as a new residential community that is inhabited by middle, upper middle and high-class families on the one hand and those who live in old neighborhoods such as Ain-Shams on the other, is useful to illustrate how marital imperatives for each group reflects the huge disparity that happened between classes in the contemporary urban life in Egypt. The socioeconomic gap that worsened during Mubarak era because of his economic and political ideologies that were characterized by high rates of corruption and crony capitalism. This research explores the dynamics and processes surrounding the formulation of the Egyptian middle and upper-middle-classes' socio-economic strategies and modes of consumption in the neoliberal context.

The deteriorating political and socio-economic status that is reflected in all life courses in contemporary Egypt is not a spur-of the moment. It is a heritage from more than half a century. It started from the early eighties when many provisions that were provided by Nasser's social welfare policies led to Sadat's Open-Door policy which in turn reduced government responsibility of providing basic needs and goods for the Egyptian people, and was further scaled back by Mubarak's regime. Despite the great pressure that food subsidies constitute on the Egyptian economy it remains untouchable because of its direct political impact on popular support. In other words, the more the state's role in providing basic needs was reduced by Mubarak's regime, the more the economic burdens of the Egyptian families increased. In addition, the government tendency towards economic liberalization had a great impact on both political and economic autonomy as foreign debt increased. Within this context, this thesis aims to explore the socioeconomic subjectivities shaped within the Egyptian society in a neoliberal context. My interrogation of the newly constructed socioeconomic subjectivities deals with three main themes: subjectivity as a neoliberal construction, consumerism as a socioeconomic system, and class as a social pressure and classification apparatus. The economics of marriage is my lens to explore, describe, and analyze how these distinctive subjectivities are shaped and reshaped by these themes. These categories are interweaved with other formative elements, such as capitalism and its commodification norm, life style, and collective consciousness of a shared neighborhood to shape the individual's socioeconomic subjectivity.

Literature Review

Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity

It is illogical to investigate the formation of subjectivity in neoliberal context without drawing on Michel Foucault the poststructuralist French philosopher. For Foucault, neoliberalism's distinguishing feature, in the realm of economic activity, is competition, that represents the external ambiance that reshapes the social subjects to become, "entrepreneurs their main investment in themselves". They become subjects of economic thinking:

we have to take seriously the manner in which the fundamental understanding of individuals as governed by interest and competition is not just an ideology that can be refused and debunked, but is an intimate part of how our lives and subjectivity are structure (Read, 2009 cited Foucault p.36)

Neoliberalism can be viewed as a production of subjectivity, as a way in which individuals are constituted as subjects of human capital. It also presents an image of society as a market governed by self-interest and competition (Read, 2009) This justifies the construction of many profession that had not existed before the implementation of neoliberalism and market economy by the state. Regarding, the economics of marriage these include: makeup artist, veil-designer and wedding planner; all these novel professions represent the new subjectivities characterized by self-investment, or the investment in human capital.

Urban Redistribution

In his thesis, Khaled Shaalan focuses on one of the main trends in today's Egyptian upper middle-class lifestyle: namely, the growing phenomenon of residential relocation to the urban desert extensions of Cairo. This phenomenon characteristically entails moving to properties within the proliferating residential gated compounds in those extensions, he contextualizes the emergence of the urban extensions as desired relocation destinations for upper-middle-class Egyptians within the wider context of urban changes to the city in the past decades. This is attributed to self-developed upper-middle-class perceptions about the nature of modern city living and socio-cultural progress. He argues that the relocation of upper middle class immersed with a promise of a lifestyle free of the insurmountable difficulties and inconveniences of traditional middle-class Cairene neighborhoods. The life style that reproduces and safeguards the upper-middle-class status to the mechanisms of the neoliberal free market and creates a new

mode of consumption that dominates the upper middle class's economic choices. In this context, Mona Abaza has conducted important research on the proliferation of American-style shopping malls in Cairo, witnessing a growing consumerist appetite, especially in upper-middle-class areas such as Nasr City. In recent years, these 'temples' of neoliberal consumerism have emerged not only as essential leisure venues for various sectors of the middle class, but also as social spaces where components of a self-constituted 'modernity' can be expressed through certain lifestyle practices. The rise of middle-class culture that modern Egyptian people and their families confront, force them to guarantee a good standard of living for the new family regardless of the economic status of the neighborhood to which they belong. (Singerman and Ibrahim,2001) In her book, *Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern Egypt: Cairo's Urban Reshaping* Abaza examines shifts in consumption patterns among middle- to upper-class Egyptians after independence, with a particular focus on how consumption works to constitute class distinctions and new social relations in changing urban spaces. Abaza rightly argues that consumption practices in Egypt, and in the Middle East more generally, deserve more scholarly attention than they have received. The vast amount of information provided in this book constitutes a significant testament to the dramatic changes in the consumer practices of urban Egyptians in the past decades. It joins the work of other scholars who are carving out the field of consumer studies in Egypt, such as Galal Amin, Walter Armbrust, Anouk de Koning, Farha Ghannam, Petra Kuppinger, Mark Peterson, Nancy Reynolds, Mona Russell, and Relli Schechter. In addition to appealing to scholars of consumption, the book may also interest those working on urban space, youth, gender and sexuality, and the cultural aspects of economic and political transformation from the Nasser period through the early 2000s.

Consumerism as a Socioeconomic Concept

Consumerism is defined as a “a culture of commodification” (Giroux & Pollock, 2011). In his theoretical work *Subjectivity Under Consumerism: The totalization of the Subject as a Commodity* Xavier Marlon (2016) justifies the importance of consumerism as an analytical theme of subjectivity construction in a socio-cultural context by the assumption that: “consumerism is the fundamental doctrine of contemporary capitalism; it defines accurately the profound sociocultural changes affected by capitalism today” (p.9). Xavier writes about capitalism and its colonization and totalization features that aim to occupy all social elements including individual subjectivity. He refers to the argument that many scholars agreed upon that

the commodification of all social and psychological realms is one of the most obvious capitalism's hegemony apparatuses. Furthermore, his assumption that commodification acts as a colonializing force is particularly important to my project: "Although such processes of colonization by capital occur in multiple and complex forms, under consumerism its colonizing force might be summarized under one principle or common denominator: commodification. The theoretical and political perspective on contemporary consumer capitalism (and its imaginary) is that its telos or goal is one of total colonization through total commodification: it represents a totalizing system/ ideology". (p. 208). Xavier's citation to Davis (2003) summarizes another main point around which my thesis is built: "We identify our real selves by the choices we make from the images, fashions, and lifestyles available in the market, and these in turn become the vehicles by which we perceive others and they perceive us. In this way ... self-formation is in fact exteriorized, since the locus is not on an inner self but on an outer world of objects and images valorized by commodity culture. (Davis, cited in Xavier 2016p.212) Therefore, social identity derives essentially from the consumer's patterns or styles of consumption, which personalize and signify him socially. This assumption supports my primary hypothesis that Egyptians from middle and upper-middle classes identify their new socio-economic subjectivities through their marital economic choices which in turn have become distinguishing elements. In other words, the new mode of consumption that people from middle and upper-middle classes acquire within the neo-liberal context constitute and maintain their social status. This occurs within their interaction with the rapid changes of the socio-economic and political conditions in contemporary urban Egypt. I argue that, this can better be comprehended through the lens of their marital imperatives that do not only illustrate the ways in which they react to the socio-economic changes but also to what extent their marital fiscal choices reflect their new socio-economic subjectivities. Xavier suggests that consuming specific products entails dual processes of being for the subject as he simultaneously becomes a consumer and a commodity.

We are both the product and the consumer; we consume, buy the product,
yet we are the product. Thus, our lives become our own creations through
buying; an identi-kit of different images of ourselves, created by
different products. We become the artist who creates the
face, the eyes, the life-style. (Judith Williamson, cited in
Xavier 2016p.212).

Thus, the fabrication of the subject mirrors the fabrication of commodity-signs.

In his book *Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak*, Galal Amin (2012), investigates the formation of the Egyptian society and the state in more than half-century from the Nasserite revolution to the 2011 revolution focusing on the era of President Mubarak. The era was characterized by corruption, poverty, the plight of the middle class, and the deterioration of the Egyptian economy. He directs his penetrating gaze toward the Mubarak regime's uneasy relationship with the relatively free press it encouraged, the vexing issue of presidential succession, and Egypt's relations with the Arab world and the United States. Galal Amin as an active participant in Egyptian intellectual life throughout the era, depicts the Mubarak regime's strategy in both domestic and international domains from historical perspective attempting to explain it. Amin assumes that despite the heavy burden that Mubarak's regime inherited from Sadat's \$30 billion debt, he did not change the Egyptian Economic policy of his predecessor. The policy that is characterized by borrowing from abroad specially from the United States seeking its political support in the aftermath of ceasing the Arab states' aid in a response of the peace treaty with Israel. In his book *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?* Galal Ammin provides an examination of the underlying causes of some changes that happened in the Egyptian society across half a century. He sheds light on the ways in which the Egyptian life style has changed after 1952 revolution in modern times, with special focus on the middle class, patterns of consumption and the Egyptian institution of wedding parties.

In their book, *Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo: A View from the Household* (1991) Diane Singerman and Homa Hoodfar shed light on the importance of the household as a central institution through which the people, their communities, the market, and the state are joined together. The book refers to strategies that *sha'bi* communities utilize in order to accumulate the capital needed for marriage; "the household's needs and demands have great impact on the Egyptian's collective behavior; household and Inter-household relations are central variable. Marital cost as an inter-household economic relation is highly affected by the needs and the demands of household which constitute the prime force behind some decisions such as forced marriage for young daughters and temporary migration to Gulf countries searching for savings for marriage. Marriage is a major expense; many women and men and their parents are working abroad especially in oil rich countries to finance it. In *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (1995). Singerman provides a prolonged discussion

about the reproduction of the family; in which she considers different traditional practices related to it.

Class Politics

Since the scope of the research is limited to the comparison between two urban areas in Egypt, thus the discussion of class according to the Egyptian context is highly significant. The Egyptian economist Dr. Ramzi Zaki (1998) predicted the disappearance of the middle class in the nineties of the last century through his book *Goodbye to the Middle-Class: Reflections on the Third Industrial Revolution and Neo-Liberalism*. The middle class that is predicted by Zaki to disappear is defined in his book as the various social groups that live mainly on salaries earned from government, the public sector, and in services and free professions, even though some of them have additional income from real-estate or second job. This class consists of a larger group of scientists, researchers, university professors and distinguished professionals in medicine, engineering, law, art, army and police; the middle class consists of larger numbers of former jobs, art, administrative and supervisory work, such as teachers and employees in different institutions; the lower level includes large numbers of junior staff and others who work in clerical and bureaucratic jobs. He pointed out that one of the causes of the collapse of that class is that they always suffer from rising prices that outstrip their salaries, changing economic policies throughout the ages, and the implementation of the Open-Door policies, leading to economic collapse and the decline in the rate of education among their children». He also warned of the disappearance of this class. In his book *Crony Capitalism*, Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil sheds light on the new capitalism that has emerged since the 1990s and that is often loaded by a kind of "crony capitalism" during its development as a result of its close relationship to power and the decision-making center. Therefore, many monopolistic centers in important branches of economic activity are formed. The writer points to the large gap in income distribution, wage policies, and the educational process trajectories. The middle class which has been the backbone of the renaissance of Egyptian society since the 1919 revolution, has become impoverished, fragmented and lost a great deal of its power and pride, and has become a very exhausted class; living in a painful moral and material situation. The UN-ESCWA report, "The Middle Class in Arab Countries: Measuring and Changing," defines the middle class as "a social group, comprising professionals in the formal sector with at least secondary education who hold white-

collar jobs; as, managers, government officials, and senior professionals, as well as non-manual permanent workers, supervisors and lower-level technicians. The report points out that these social strata of different professions and people of all trades and all those who derive from them the culture and thought, who depend mainly on what they get from the sweat of their professional and craft work, have been committed to changing the face of Egypt over the past two centuries. They led the revolutionaries of Egypt and led the movements of economic, social, scientific and cultural renaissance across these times, including the emergence of research, studies, curricula and programs that defined the development of Egypt in the modern era. As well as one of their pioneers led the revolutions of Egypt since the formation of these segments of modern society in the era of Mohammed Ali since the Orabi revolution, through the revolution of 1919, and the revolution of July 23. The economic and social structures in Egypt witnessed major changes in that period due to the rapid deterioration of public services provided by the state, the economic pressures on the middle and lower classes, and the Open-Door policies which have led to the proliferation of popular neighborhoods or slums on the outskirts of major cities, and the exacerbation of inequality between rural and urban areas. The report pointed out that this shift is evident in tracking the development of the middle class since independence, through the various covenants of government, and to the revolution of January 25th, 2011. President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970) encouraged the growth of a middle class of professionals, landowners and bureaucrats. While President Mohamed Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) focused on the elite middle-class employers. In the era of the former President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), privatization and liberalization increased, monopoly corruption and capitalism, resulting in a disproportionate economic situation, mostly in the interest of the richer class. The size of the middle class began to shrink and many of them fell into the ranks of the poor. Furthermore, in his essay “What Makes a Social class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups” Bourdieu, illustrates that classes are sets of agents who occupy similar positions in social space and are subject to similar condition of existence and factors. As a result, they are endowed with similar dispositions and develop similar practices (p,6).

In his exploration of Foucault’s reading of neoliberalism Jason Reed (2009) cites Lemke defining neoliberalism as

a political project that attempts to create a social reality that it suggests already exists, stating that competition is the basis of social relations while fostering those

same relations. The contemporary trend away from long term labor contracts, towards temporary and part-time labor, is not only an effective economic strategy, freeing corporations from contracts and the expensive commitments of health care and other benefits, it is an effective strategy of subjectification as well. It encourages workers to see themselves not as “workers” in a political sense, who have something to gain through solidarity and collective organization, but as “companies of one.” They become individuals for whom every action, from taking courses on a new computer software application to having their teeth whitened, can be considered an investment in human capital.

Read, drawing on Eric Alliez and Michel Feher, further argues that “Corporations’ massive recourse to subcontracting plays a fundamental role in this to the extent that it turns the workers’ desire for independence...into a ‘business spirit.’” At this point one can argue that the sense of uncertainty is turned to become a competitive motivation not only for the educated youth who works in multinational corporation but for all worker in the Egyptian labor market governed by neoliberal polices. “Labor is no longer limited to the specific sites of the factory or the workplace, but is any activity that works towards desired ends.” (ibid)

This touches an intrinsic aspect of the life of Egyptian ‘educated youths from both heterosexual genders in general and those who live in Ain- Shams or Al-Rehab ‘who belong to the different spectrums of middle class in particular. They constitute a separate social group characterized by ‘precarity. I borrow this term from Guy Standing which means ‘a condition of existence without predictability or security’. Those who are more likely to suffer from further implications on their future, include the reduction of chances for marriage and parenthood, fewer opportunities to acquire their own housing, and lowered expectations for future consumption (Obinger,2009). In his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Guy Standing (2011) argues that the precariat has emerged from the liberalization that underpinned globalization. Precariat is about class and status- stratification. This precariat is a new class and it is much different from the traditional working class: it is nothing like a new proletariat “a working class of stabilized laborers” (p. 96). It has a distinctive bundle of insecurities and will have an equally distinctive set of demands. In open market societies in which flexible precarious labor is common, much of the insecurity is uncertainty.

Conceptual Framework:

This part of the research highlights how the concepts at play are manipulated to be understood with a degree of sensitivity to the particularities of the Egyptian context. There are central concepts that collectively formulate the answer of my research question. My question evokes a comparative class study; I compare the construction of the socioeconomic subjectivity among those who live in Ain-Shams and Al-Rehab. Most of them belong to different segments of the Egyptian middle class. The study emphasizes on the mode of consumption as a distinctive category for preserving, reproducing and displaying social distinctions in neoliberal context. Thus, conceptualization of class as a fluid and compound category is essential to understand the changes that have taken place in the socio-economic configuration of the members of the middle and upper middle class in the contemporary urban Egypt. Class is fluid as one cannot assign a group of people as belonging to specific social class just because they share the same neighborhood or because they have the same educational degree; class is a compound stratification concept it contains myriad categories elements, and defining characteristics.

Class is the first central concept in my thesis; its highly important to illustrate what constitutes a social class before holding a comparison between these two distinctive socioeconomic neighborhoods. As Bourdieu (1987) puts it, “the agents who occupy neighboring positions in this space are placed in similar conditions and are therefore subject to similar conditioning factors: consequently, they have every chance of having similar dispositions, and thus of producing practices and representations of a similar kind. Those who occupy the same positions have every chance of having the same habitus, a least insofar as the trajectories which have brought them to these positions are themselves similar” (Bourdieu, 1987.p 5). Bourdieu also supports my argument that belonging to a specific social class dictates common practices, similar characteristics and collective consciousness. Marital imperatives as a mode of consumption and a category of difference is one of these common practices through which one can distinguish between one class from the other. The boasting of wealth through consumerism can only sharpen class differences. (Abaza,2005)

Consumerism the second analytical concept in this thesis is conceptualized as the actualization of capitalism’s tendency to total colonization, including the colonization of subjectivity. Its colonizing force embodies in the commodification of all social aspects; it is a

process of mass production of commodity-subjects (Xavier, 2016). This conceptualization facilitates the understanding of the way in which socioeconomic subjectivity is shaped in the contemporary capitalism in urban Egypt. It sheds light on the consumers' pattern of consumption in the two given neighborhoods. A comprehensive and comparative analysis of their disparate consuming choices illustrate to which extent individuals from each socioeconomic group are affected by consumerism's characteristics, such as irrationality and imaginary. The former characteristic means; what is actually desired and dreamed about by purchasing a commodity is the ridiculous, immaterial, and false image manufactured and attached to it. The latter means 'what is consumed is not the materiality of the commodity it is the artificial image that holds social meaning, values and signs of difference that constitutes what (Xavier, 2016 p. 209) as "consumption dream". For instance, when Abeer from Ain-Shams told me that she can agree to sell her Shabka, 'a precious gift from the groom to his bride', in only one case which is purchasing things more important to her, such as Hollywood smile which is a dental makeover which was until recently only possible for millionaires, Hollywood stars and celebrities. Advertising on the social media said "now you too can have that perfect, natural-looking. When Abeer or anyone else purchases that commodity that advertised by celebrities, she/he is promised to be endowed with their characteristics, or partake of their lifestyle. This is exactly what (Xavier,2016p.209) is called "consumption dream".

The third central theme is socioeconomic subjectivity, which constitutes the main point in the thesis. I mean by socioeconomic subjectivity the social identity that is constituted by the economic choices and preferences that individuals make under the principles of the neoliberal and capitalist economy within which services and commodities have acquired signs and social meanings and distinctions. Thus, while purchasing commodities the consumers construct their subjectivities as if they were putting pieces of puzzle together in order to portray their social image. As Xavier (2016) puts it, social identity derives essentially from the consumer's patterns or styles of consumption, which personalize and signify him socially. Furthermore, socioeconomic subjectivity as a distinctive category is conceptualized as an exteriorized identity shaped by collective signifiers and signs collected from different consumed products. In other words, the traditionally conceived self-identity that stems mainly from the inner self conception is denied and substituted by outer meanings, features and signifiers valorized by commodity culture. Subjectivity thus becomes a "pure and random play of signifiers". (Jameson, 1991, p.96)

Marital expenditures, is a crucial investigation category in this thesis that represents a concrete example of how a subject portrays his life through purchasing a group of commodities each of them embraces a social value which collectively completes his social subjectivity (Xavier, 2016).

Fieldwork

Research for this thesis is based on interviews and extended conversations with men and women from two different socio-economic neighborhoods, Ain-Shams, and Al-Rehab city in New-Cairo in the summer and fall of 2017. The age group of my interviewees ranges from youths in the age of marriage whether they were recently engaged, about to marry, or married, to parents who had experienced the marriage of one or more of their daughters or sons. I also interviewed some people whose work related to the ongoing ‘commodification of marriage’ the process that creates many professions and crafts that relate to the economics of marriage, such as makeup artist, veil designer or Henna show. The social dimension of my interviewees: I cannot exactly attribute them to specific social groups just because they live in x or y socioeconomic neighborhoods. However, according to some socio-economic characteristics attached to them and taking into consideration the very norms of the Egyptian social hierarchy, I can argue that most of them belong to low, middle or upper segments of the middle class.

My access to the interviewees in Al-Rehab city was through my personal network as I live in new Cairo since 2006 where I interact with neighbors, acquaintances and friends. My access to people from Ain-Shams was through a man who works in Al-Shams club in which I have a membership. The club is located in, ‘Gesr-Al-Suez’, a neighborhood that is adjacent to Ain-Shams; thus, a great number of its workers are from the nearby neighborhoods such as Al-Matarya and Ain-Shams. Hassaneen is a tennis coach. I have known him for several years and I know that he is from Ain-Shams. When I asked him to facilitate my access to people in his area, he introduced me to his daughter Sharbat who has a network of relatives and neighbors. From then Sharbat has become my guide to interact with families who I visit in their modest homes.

Chapter Organization

In this thesis, marital monetary choices, economic circumstances, and finally the different attitudes between parents and young men/women, collectively constituted the answer of my inquiry about the construction of the socioeconomic subjectivities as it is comprehended within the heterosexual marriage context in Egypt. While not forgetting the role of external formative forces including the effects of neoliberalism, capitalism, and market economy. Most of my interviewees spoke about their real-life experiences whether they were parents, recently married couples, youth from both heterosexual genders at the age of marriage or finally those whose work is directly related to the economics of marriage. Most of them have newly created professions with a close relationship to marital economy.

For clarity I preferred to collect the narratives of the residents in each region in one chapter within which I placed each of my interlocutors' stories separately. I think that the natural flow of their narratives will be more comprehensive and effective. This is also applied to those whose work is related to the economics of marriage.

Chapter two of this thesis is allocated to the ethnographic field work that I have conducted with the interviewees from Al-Rehab. Chapter three mirrors its precedent but it is concerning Ain-Shams. Finally, Chapter four illustrates the way in which the competitive atmosphere in the labor market formulate the worker into living entrepreneurs whose main investment is on themselves their skills and abilities. This new subjectivity encourages them to invent new professions that directly enhance the process of the commodification of marriage. Chapter Five discusses the basic concepts derived from the previous four chapters. It entails a comprehensive discussion of the reproduction of the socioeconomic subjectivities and the way in which the social subjects interact with different elements and circumstances to produce, preserve, and display their identity within globalized world, local realities and personal aspirations. The chapter ends with conclusion notes.

Chapter Two:

Socioeconomic Subjectivities in Al-Rehab City: Gated Communities and Land Commodification

Almatarneh (2013) insists that the last quarter of the twentieth century was characterized by urban redistribution with the rapid spread of proprietary urban communities. The prevailing market economy, associated with the commodification of place, the progressive tendency toward privatization of housing and westernization of urban services encourages private housing entrepreneurs to invest in real-estate development. They rely on new marketing strategies that aim in the first place to reconstitute the consumer's desires and wants through ads which persuade the clients that purchasing a housing unit in one of these gated communities means a successful investment opportunity and a wonderful life style away of the problems of crowded, unsustainable and annoying cities such as Cairo. Therefore, living in a gated community has an irresistible allure by those who can afford it. As (Xavier,2016) puts it:

If mass production required capitalism to produce a mass society of consumers, under total consumerism the functioning and reproduction of the system will depend on the (re)production of desires as a function of unlimited mass production and mass consumption: engineering mass desires represents the control over production not merely of consumers, but of their unlimited demand. To attain that kind of control the system of consumption had to tap into the irrational and imaginary sides of existence, to engineer not mere needs or wants - which are finite and limited, of a more rational nature, and related to use-value - but desires - which are unlimited and related to sign-value and sumptuary value, i.e. to irrational, intangible, imaginary things. Thus, the objects of desires become unrestricted: anything can be the object of desire. The objective, therefore, will be to create and program desire as an unlimited, objectless all-consuming desire as the central mode of psychic functioning of the subjects of a mass society. As Marcuse (1955/1966) noted, this process is equivalent to a form of social control that does not aim at reason and mind - it aims at managing and dominating the gut feelings, the emotional, the irrational, the very foundations of our psychological being: the instincts, the irrational libido (in Jung's sense). Thus, to colonize and control desire means to determine the directions and forms of psychic energy: it is tantamount to controlling the functioning of the psyche, including our unconscious psyche. In this sense, subjectivation under consumerism necessarily involves the colonization of the unconscious – a theme studied in depth by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2004),

who have written profusely about the “machinic unconscious”, the basis for the hegemonic fabrication of subjects as “desiring-machines”

Amongst the largest and most prominent development projects in New-Cairo is Al-Rehab City. A self-sustained residential city and one of community complexes for the upper and upper middle classes.

It is in the east of Cairo, spread over 9.9 million sqm to host 200,000 residents. Al-Rehab is a moderate gated community in the periphery of Greater Cairo, it is characterized by medium-cost of the residential units; thus, it attracts more buyers. It is basically designed to meet the needs of intermediate income families. It contains a variety of villas and apartment buildings, but the latter is the predominant. Al-Rehab is totally gated; however, it is not totally restricted; the outsiders can enter the compound for economic reasons. This is because it includes services such as restaurants, malls, food courts, and multi-purpose halls, which depend as much, or not more, on the outside buyers, as a purchasing power, as well as the residents.

Who lives in Al-Rehab? As mentioned earlier, most of the interviewees who live in Al-Rehab, are well-educated young people. They work in private sectors and international companies, and are paid decent salaries. Most of them belong to the upper-middle class social segment. To speak of the Egyptian upper middle class, as will be done throughout this thesis, they are relatively economically affluent, highly educated with a fluent command of foreign tongues especially English language, Anouk de Konig (2005) differentiated between the upper and lower segments of today’s Egyptian middle class in the neoliberal context:

These relatively recent entrants into the labor market and adult life are starkly confronted with Cairo’s contemporary segmentation of fortunes. New lines of exclusion and inclusion are strongly felt among those who can now look forward to the rewarding jobs in transnational companies and their local equivalents, as well as to the upper-middle class comforts they offer. They are even more pertinent for those young professionals who, in contrast, had hopes and expectations based on their educational achievements but now find themselves among the army of young unemployed, no longer expecting more than a small job with meager pay and long hours, even postponing their dreams of an independent life and the ‘opening of a home’ (starting a family). They are confronted with a labor market where real wages and opportunities in the government sectors are declining, in a context where there seems to be golden

chances for the happy few who are able to speak English at a near-native level, have the right qualifications from the right college or university, and who quite literally embody the right social background.” (Anouk de Konig,2005)

Gated communities offer privileges to a certain segment of the society; so, it is often criticized. This is because it creates segregation in the spatial and social structure of the city. “a privileged, exclusive lifestyle”. Decisions about housing consumption among the upper middle to the upper classes in the Egyptian context are not simply a function of innate individual preferences. Rather, these decisions are influenced by efforts to sell images of Western lifestyles in the contexts of international, national and local policy. The locus is not on an inner self but on an outer world of objects and images valorized by commodity culture. Alternatively, places like Al-Rehab could be sites in which one becomes more truly oneself. The actual lifestyle in such places turns the residents to become calmer, more thoughtful, healthier, and less stressed. In other words, belonging to such places not only concerns the terms in which we identify ourselves but also our well-being. Purchasing an apartment in a gated community provides its owner with similar effects of purchasing a high-quality commodity brand such as Nike; in this sense, self-definition depends on the appropriation of the traits of commodities. the consumer not only is defined by the commodity brand or the images attached to it, but he also enhances his wellbeing by enjoying its fine fabrication and good material. “successful brands impel people to buy” (Davis, 2003.p 45). Here it is seemed that there is a little contradiction with Xavier argument that the irrational, immaterial, and artificial fetish manufactured and attached to the commodity is what is most desired and dreamed about. Hence what is consumed is essentially the promise that the commodity and/or the act of consuming will fulfill a dream, but the mediation of our relation to self and others by acts of consumption also has significant implications. These implications overlap with another form of self-fulfillment and wellbeing that can be reached by purchasing a well-crafted commodity or an apartment in a gated residential area that enhances the consumer self-serenity as Al-Rehab.

The next section introduces the women and men with whom I conducted the research.

The story of Layla

Layla a twenty-four-year-old medical doctor was preparing with her family to celebrate her wedding party in one of the outstanding celebration halls located in one of the recently

constructed hotels that is managed by the armed forces. She belongs to an upper-middle class family. Her father 'Ahmed' graduated from the faculty of commerce and started his practical life as an accountant. As many Egyptian families his father urged him to travel to Saudi Arabia to make some money that might help him to support a new family. His father who has a rural background and two university degrees had temporarily migrated to Saudi Arabia for a few years within which he had some Saudi friends; one of them owned a prominent trading institution in Medina in which he offered a working contract for Ahmed. Before he travelled to Saudi Arabia he got engaged to Layla's mother Dena who was a middle-class university student. After finishing her graduate studies, they got married and moved to live in Medina. It was not long until Ahmed decided to resign from his job in Saudi Arabia and return to Egypt with his small family that then consists of a new young member Layla. After they returned to Egypt they lived in a quite spacious apartment in Ain-Shams. As most of the newly married middle-class youths at that time who were searching for an apartment to live in, there were two main residential areas Ain-Shams or Faisal 'a residential area near The Giza Pyramids where they could find an apartment with a reasonable monthly rent'. After few years, the family members increased as they got a new boy and a girl; Mohammed and Nusa. From day one of being a mother Dina decided to dedicate her life to raise her children well and help them achieve high educational degrees. Through all her educational stages Lila was a brilliant student. She joined the school of Medicine where she met her fiancé Ashraf. The relationship between Dina and Layla had never been just a mother daughter relationship but a friendship. This allowed Dina to know most of her daughter's life details. Dena started to warn Laila that love only is not enough and she must be cautious in choosing the man of her life.

My mother pointed out that, there are some characteristics that ought to be present in my husband, such as being from our 'social class', here she did not only mean the monetary dimension which was not expected to be lesser than the bare minimum that match our social class' economic demands. she mainly 'meant that my future husband is preferable to enjoy some social features suitable for us. For instance, he must belong to a well-educated family, his parents must have high educational certificates and at least his father must occupy a prestigious job that maintains a good social position for his family within the society. In addition to that, the mother warned me that it is unacceptable that any one from the groom's family, who is supposed to be invited to our wedding party, attends wearing a 'gallabiya' the traditional dress of peasants which nowadays has become a sign of lower social rank.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1985) the society is multi-dimensional space within which the individual possesses a group of properties or ‘capitals’ that collectively constitutes the individual social position. These capitals give its bearer different aspect of power according to the very norm of each kind of these capitals; the more forms of capital one possesses, the more he maintains and enhance his position in the social ladder. These forms of capital contain social, cultural, economic and symbolic. In her advice to her daughter, Lila’s mother did not differentiate between the importance of the material and intangible aspects of power, as two sides of the same coin, that her daughter’s future husband and his family ought to possess. Moreover, her warning to Lila entails the different forms of capital that Bourdieu had stated as follow: include economic capital (the fiscal capacity to fulfill what she called the socioeconomic demands of their class), cultural capital (including the importance of the educational degrees that the future groom and his parents had achieved’), social capital (it is unacceptable that the groom’s relatives would belong to lower social stratum even if only by the way they dress; for example “wearing a galabia”), as well as symbolic capital (she preferred that the groom’s father occupy a prestigious job)

Lila’s family moved to live in a quite large apartment in Al-Rehab city when she was in her first preparatory school. The days passed quickly until she had enrolled in the university. In her third year in the school of medicine, Laila told her mother that one of her counterparts loves her and wanted to be her future husband. Fortunately, his family were up to the mother ‘s standards for her daughter husband. His father occupied one of a military services positions and his mother was a doctor and his only sister was in the first year of her under-graduate studies. Thus, there was no need for not telling her father about the matter. Especially, because the future groom had a promising future as a medical doctor. However, being a fresh graduate doctor at that time means that he would face many hardships until he can earn a reasonable salary or own a private clinic after spending many years doing his post graduate studies.

The story of Eman:

Mean is a 25-year-old young woman who lives in Al-Rehab city with her small family that consists of her father who is a Gynecologist consultant, her mother who also works as a

pediatrician consultant and her sister who has graduated from the school of dentistry of one of the private universities in Cairo. Eman had graduated from the German University school of 'business informatics'. She got married a year ago to a fresh graduate medical doctor who is the son of her father's colleague. Eman works in a private firm in which she gets quite a high salary.

The story of Sawsan:

Sawsan a 54-year-old Egyptian housewife who lives in Al-Rehab city in a spacious apartment that is 300-meter square on the first floor of a five-story-building. Her apartment contains a nice garden. She lives with her husband, a retired army brigade engineer, and her young daughter. The daughter is in her first year of national secondary School that is also located in Al-Rehab city. Sawsan has another daughter and a son who are both married. Sawsan started her story by telling me that she is originally from Al-Sayeda where she and her brothers and sisters run their own business. They own a series of shops that sell domestic equipment, home appliances and furnishings. She told me that she and her extended family possess a building in Al-Sayeda in which she owned a spacious apartment where she lived at the very beginning of her marriage.

The story of Sameh:

Sameh is a 25-year-old engineer who specializes in computer science. He graduated two years ago. His elder brother got married six years ago. His father is a doctor who works in the armed forces and he also owned a private clinic in New-Cairo. His mother is an educated house wife. He traveled to India for a year where he worked for a company specialized in software design.

The story of Hadeel:

Hadeel is a well-educated young woman who works in a firm for petroleum services from which she earns a decent salary that allowed her to possess a private car:

I am not married nor engaged, I had started interviewing marriage applicants since the age of eighteen. It was so stressful; from all those I had met there were

only two who I could have completed the marriage project with; unfortunately, I had discovered that they were both inappropriate. One of them, wanted to know exactly how much my salary was, he suggested to put our total income under his control after marriage. then, he will give me a monthly pocket money but in the case that expenses exceed the ordinary rate, my monthly expense will be canceled. In the case of arranged marriage, making material concessions is unwarranted and unjustified, but if the applicant is a colleague and there is an opportunity for understanding and knowing a lot about him, it is possible to make some concessions

The second one, had promised to buy a *tamleek* apartment in El-Tagamo El-Khamis in New Cairo. But he did not meet the promise. He told us that he was waiting until his only sister got married then we can get married and live with his parents in their apartment.

The story of Ibrahim:

A 26-years-old with a bachelor degree in Information Systems, his wife is a 25year-old graduate from the school of arts department of philosophy. Originally Ibrahim was from Shobra but he moved to Al-Rehab with his family ten years ago. His father possesses a workshop for marble, which provides him with a decent income that allowed him to buy an apartment for each of his three sons in Al-Rehab and a car for his elder son Ibrahim. When he was asked about the marital expenditures he answered:

Me and my wife's family did not have a specific plan for the division of the expenditures needed for marriage however the cost of the furniture and home appliance was automatically divided equally between us.

The narratives of my interviewees shed light on some central themes according to which these narratives will be divided and analyzed.

Generational Divisions: How neoliberalism affects the economic choices of marriage among the young generation challenging the dominant beliefs of the old generations.

Lila and her fiancée Ashraf did not want to celebrate their wedding as any typical wedding ceremonies he and Lila had attended. They both believed that this kind of celebration is no more than wasting money and showing off. They were satisfied to invite the very close family members and friends to a musical dinner in a luxury restaurant where they could enjoy

soft music and delicious dinner and desserts. After that they will go directly to their new home to start a new life. For them it would be more enjoyable than an ordinary lavish celebration; in addition, they can save money for more urgent needs of life. They had accepted to celebrate their wedding under the pressure of the groom's father who believes that not "consuming" a typical ceremony would be a social stigma that reflects the economic incapacity of the two families. Lila was not the only one in my interviewees who was not convinced by the importance of the wedding ceremony; Eman, Ebrahim and Sameh had the same point of view. Only Ebrahim could resist the prevailing social considerations and meanings attached to the wedding reception. He celebrated his marriage according to his personal conviction that the wedding celebration is held only for the *esh'har*, meaning everyone must know that the couple got married.

How do Al-Rehab residents choose their new marital homes?

Lila explained why she chose to live in Madinaty after marriage,

My parents thought practically and started to ask me to what extent Ashraf's family will support their son in the required marital imperatives, especially the main bulk represented in the cost of a proper apartment

There was no answer to this question because Ashraf's father who belongs to the military forces acquired many common characteristics that most of his counterparts enjoy, such as being so conservative. That's why Ashraf could not tell his father about our love story until he almost finished his studies. Unlike his father, Ashraf's mother was more flexible and supportive.

My parents started to ask themselves about the second step that must be taken after the two families had met. There is no doubt that monetary requirements must be discussed especially the cost of the flat as the most important demands for marriage nowadays. Ashraf's father offered to allocate LE 600,000 for buying a new apartment for us. Which was an acceptable offer for my parents especially my mother who dreamed that I would live in one of the gated communities that proliferated in the last decade such as Al-Rehab City where I had already lived in with my family. No other monetary issues were discussed in the first visit that ended by recitation of *Fathaa*; a traditional marital ritual that Muslim families are accustomed to do as a first step of engagement. Although, LE 600,000 can barely buy a small apartment in Al-Rehab or its twin Madinaty, my family accepted the offer as they wished to maintain the life style that I used to. Such a price could have allowed them to buy a more specious apartment in other places in the Cairo's old neighborhoods.

Layla's family preference to accept a small apartment in a gated community instead of a more spacious one in anywhere else like Nasr City reflects that they in the first place did not just buy an apartment for its functional purpose or its use value as a commodity but rather they paid for the lifestyle, meanings and promises attached to living in a gated commodity. When I asked Eman about the location of her marital apartment she answered,

My husband's family owned a building in a new residential area called Al-Sades October where they had allocated a roomy apartment for him. However, my father radically refused the idea and suggested that the substitute this apartment by another one in Al-Rehab. This was his basic condition for the completion of the marriage. Fortunately, my husband family accepted my father's suggestion and they bought an apartment in Al-Rehab to become our new home. My father did not want me to live in a residential area far from my family, nor did he want to change the lifestyle I got used to in Al-Rehab.

Sawsan explained why she and her family chose to live in Al-Rehab and nowhere else

I started my life in Al-Sayeda. My husband was one of our neighbors. I did not live there for a long time, we moved to live in Nassr City where we lived the rest of our life until we moved again to settle in Al-Rehab. As you see it is a nice place. We live here in isolation from the noise and chaos that pervaded Cairo's old areas nowadays. As you know, *Al-Sayeda* is an old and not prestigious neighborhood. living there means that you do not belong to the privileged social ranks who prefer to live in the newly constructed districts.

My elder daughter and her husband have graduated from the faculty of Mass Communication. They were colleagues at the university and they are also relatives. He is her cousin 'my brother's son'. When he proposed to her, we thought that there will not be any problems regarding the material imperatives. This is because we are close relatives and the socioeconomic level of the two families is almost equal. The only point of disagreement was the Place of residence after marriage, the groom suggested that the marriage apartment will be in our building in Al-Sayeda where he owned a spacious apartment, but we all refused his suggestion because *Al-Sayeda* is an old crowded and polluted area. My daughter who is raised in Nassr City would not be able to cope in such a neighborhood, so her father suggested that the groom bought a new *Tamleek* apartment in a better neighborhood. We were worried if our proposal would be rejected, especially since the groom's family live in the same building in *Al-Sayeda*. Fortunately, he quickly agreed and bought a new apartment in Nassr City, it was close to our house at that time.

After my son had finished his graduate studies in 'computer science', I wanted him to get married because I believed that the construction of a family is the right path for young men. Marriage will provide him with a healthy environment

for emotional life and will teach him to take responsibilities. I have chosen his bride, so it was an arranged marriage. After he had agreed to marry her we decided to make the next step which was buying him an apartment. His father and I were really astonished when he told us that he wanted to buy an apartment in Al-Rehab city. At that time Al-Rehab was not well known as it is today. I asked him if he wanted to live in the desert? After a short visit to Al-Rehab we all agreed to buy him an apartment there. We were all impressed by the landscape, mall, food court and the restaurants in addition to the lifestyle and protection that the wall and the security system guarantee. After buying the apartment to my son 'It was not as expensive as it had become now' we bought another one for our family and we moved to live in AL-Rehab. Soon we persuaded my daughter and her husband to sell their apartment in Nasr city and buy an apartment instead of it in Al-Rehab; then, we shared the price of the new apartment with my daughter's husband because it is unfair to burden him with extra expenses, especially since he is newly graduated. We have registered the ownership contract equally between the spouses.

When Sawsan mentioned that while she and her husband are originally from *Al-Sayeda* they could not live there for a long time after marriage, nor had they accepted that their daughter live there, and they instead preferred to live in Nasr City then moved to Al-Rehab, she presented a summary of the development of the urban Greater Cairo Region over the years from the eighties until now. As any other commodity, Nasr city was advertised and depicted as a symbol of the new renaissance era during the sixties with a promise of a new lifestyle; for instance, unpolluted wide streets, Green spaces and parks, and endless variety of shops, spaces for leisure, restaurants, coffee shops and cinemas. In sum, Nassr city had become a synonym of 'consumer culture' which attracted the middle-class professionals who returned from Gulf countries in addition to the 'Cairene nouveau riche' (Abaza, 2006) at this point one can add to the latter two categories, the well-to-do Egyptian families who were living in old neighborhoods and wanted to upgrade their social status by purchasing an apartment in Nassr city as Sawsan's family.

Khaled Adham (2005) argues that "since the 1980s, the number of lifestyle and prestigious gated communities has risen dramatically all over the world. Of course, security may be one major reason why people choose to live behind gates. But in the context of Cairo the gating of residential areas has had less to do with this than with a

desire to express an elite, controlled lifestyle and to escape the polluted metropolitan environment” (Blakely & Snyder, cited in Adham,2005 p.25). Adham continues that “more interestingly, some authors have linked the gating of residential spaces to the spread of other architectural building types, such as the mall, another form of privatized semi-public space” (ibid). Abaza (2004) claims that the spread of these new elite compounds resulted from the proliferation of ‘consumer culture’.”

When I asked Sameh where he would prefer to live after marriage, and from where he intended to buy his furniture and whether he minded buying from Damiett, an Egyptian governorate that is famous for furniture industry, most of Egyptian families used to buy the best wooden furniture during the 60’s until very recently before the adoption of the neoliberal economic policies. He answered:

There are specific areas as Al-Rehab, Madinaty where I can live after marriage, however my father has already bought me an apartment in Madinaty. In a gated community the neighbors are usually from high or upper middle classes and this guarantees that their behaviors will be decent, unlike if you live in an old and crowded district, you will find that you are not satisfied. In sum, you will not find any other residential areas that provide you with security, beautiful landscape and elegant lifestyle except those gated communities.

When Sameh specified Al-Rehab or Madinaty as the only residential arias that he hoped to live in after marriage this reflects the huge social disparities resulted from the urban redistribution in the neoliberal context. Upper-middle class Egyptians moved to live in these gated communities after the massive deterioration of all living conditions generally in Cairo and particularly in their traditional residential arias. Furthermore, the key word that summaries the reason behind the upper middle-class preferences to live in gated community is “lifestyle” According to Shaalan:

The Cairo-based upper middle class’ everyday life is an intensive struggle to practice a class-common lifestyle within a space highly contested by many other claims to the character and shape of the public space. The importance of lifestyle as a continuous day-to-day exercise that shapes upper-middle-class agency is thus better understood when contextualized within the wider process of the daily interplay between the multitude of social classes and forces that occupy and contest the Cairene urban space. (Shaalan, 2014, p.232-233)

Hadeel observes that

Concerning furniture, I prefer modern designs, New Cairo and Al-Tagamo Al-Khamis are full of malls where this kind of furniture is sold. For example, Cairo Festival City Mall, American /furniture, etc. For me, I don't think that I'll buy any furniture from Damietta because classic furniture is not my style, and I don't think that anybody still buys any furniture from there."

She also wishes to live in New-Cairo or Al-Rehab after marriage,

If I will get married one day, I would prefer to live in New-Cairo or Al-Rehab where I live with my family; anyone who had experienced living in a compound as Al-Rehab will not be able to live in any neighborhood in the Egyptian old districts, chaos and lack of security affected most of these neighborhoods, even those distinguished ones, such as Zamalek, Al-Muhandseen, or Misr-Al-Gdeeda."

Ibrahim preferred to live in *Madinaty* after marriage not only because his father had bought him an apartment there, but that was mainly because he wanted to enjoy the same lifestyle he used to when he was living in Al Rehab with his family.

Having an apartment encouraged me to think about marriage, but the most important thing I wanted to achieve before marriage was being independent from my father who wanted me to work with him. After I had graduated I had job opportunity in Al-Ahli bank but unfortunately my father refused this job and he insisted that I must work with him. While I had bad experiences with working in my father's workshop I agreed out of my respect to him. There were ups and downs in my relationship with my father; therefore, I left my work with him several times. During these times I worked in many fields; for instance, I worked as a butcher, a delivery agent and a worker in a restaurant where, I got several upgrades in one month to become the manager of this restaurant. The second reason that encouraged me to get married was my ability to depend on myself and gaining money especially my income from working with my father does not achieve a decent life nor is it guaranteed to continue. Comparing with my counterparts I feel no regret for not working according to my educational degree. Any academic certificate has become useless if one does not enhance it with professional courses related to its scientific field.

Ibrahim mentioned that his wife's family possesses a building in Imbaba a crowded neighborhood where they live, and they offered him a spacious apartment there because the bride's mother wanted her daughter to live near to her, but he refused.

It's illogical to accept such offer. Anyone had lived in a gated community as Al-Rehab could not live anywhere else except in Madinaty where my apartment is located. How can I accept to raise my future children in such neighborhood in which the garbage is hanging around the place and the children are walking the streets half naked, in addition to the lack of security?

The *Shabka*: what does it symbolize for Al-Rehab inhabitants?

It is a significant marital expenditure that is allocated for a precious gift that the groom must present to the bride. Basically, she should keep it with her as long as the marriage continues.

In Layla's case, the value of *Shabka* and the *Dowery* was LE 100,000.

My father accepted this amount and said "The *Shabka* is the gift from the groom to his fiancée and he is free in determining its value and for the dowry any amount that the groom's family presents I will allocate the same amount". The *Shabka* cost about LE40,000 it consisted of twin diamond rings; diamond is unique and more elegant than gold, it suits our social class. I think people from lower class are not familiar with this precious stone. All my counterparts who had recently engaged, their *shabka* was diamond. Each family offered LE 60,000 for buying the needed furniture and appliances for the new marital nest. It is clearly noticed that love only was not enough as my mother had previously said. From the first moment I and Ashraf started to choose our furniture and the electronic devices we noticed that our position in the social ladder among other factors dictated a specific standard of quality and equipment that our new home must contain. For instance, we chose a marquetry handmade dining room for LE 45,000, and a French designed *salon* clothed by a French cloth for LE 40,000 etc.

While Layla mentioned that, her *shabka* was diamond twin rings that were more suitable to her and her fiancés' social rank; in addition to, the furniture's standards of quality and design that could not be lesser than what she had purchased for her future home to meet the expectations of their social class, an element is worth considering. Lila is fully influenced by the social dictations that have emerged from the imaginary social image associated with some commodities as socioeconomic signifiers.

When Eman was asked about her *shabka* she replied,

I chose twin diamond rings for my *shabka* we did not ask my groom for a specific value; it is a gift from the groom to his bride. And so was my sister's *shabka*. For me and my sister diamond is more suitable. In fact, I do not prefer wearing gold.

Again, diamond is the choice of Al-Rehab resident's interlocutors, most of them could be considered upper middle class. They derive their distinction from its uniqueness.

Sawsan described Al-Shabka of her daughter and her daughter-in-law as follow,

My daughter's *Shabka* was a diamond ring based on her choice. In addition, it is commensurate with the economic status of the two families. Her wedding was in one of the Military hotels, some famous singers and a belly-dancer 'Dina' were invited to present their shows in the wedding. My son's bride is from a modest family, unlike my daughter her *shabka* was not diamond it was gold and it was cheaper. His wedding also cost lesser than his sister's one.

When Sawsan mentioned that her daughter's *shabka* was different from her son's wife's *shabka* in value and material, and pointed out the disparity of the socioeconomic status between the two brides, this implies that not only the value of the *shabka* is determined based on the bride's socioeconomic status, but also its material. The latter element holds what is called the commodity-sign as an image or representation that reproduces the social status of each bride. The 'consumption dream' attaches to diamond *shabka* differs from the dream associated with its golden counterpart. Consumption dream is a sociocultural signification artificially attached to a commodity with the promises to fulfill a specific lifestyle (Xavier, 2016). The bride who purchased diamond *shabka* is promised to be endowed with the characteristics of upper classes' lifestyle. On the other hand, the golden *shabka* puts its owner in the same social-rank of average people.

When he is asked about *Al-Shabka* Sameh answered:

If I have enough money I will prefer to buy a diamond *shabka* because this is the norm for our class, however my brother brought his wife a gold one. I think the price and the material of it depends on the groom's economic circumstances; some people cannot afford even to purchase a gold *shabka*.

Hadeel insisted that, "My *shabka* ought to be a diamond twin, no one in our social class buys a golden *shabka*."

When I asked Ibrahim about the *shabka* he told me that he does not believe in its importance while he bought a golden one to his bride. He said:

I had allocated an amount of money for the *shabka*, but I could not understand what is the importance of this economic burden while I was in bad need for every pound to cover basic marital expenditures. We have to think more practically and get rid of the illogical traditions that contradict with the economic hardships that every couple face. After my *fiancée* had wear her golden *shabka* in our engagement party in front of the invitees which was the most important function for it; she had to sell it to pay for things more important for our new home.

How do people in Al-Rehab celebrate wedding ceremonies?

After Layla and Ashraf had finished purchasing most of their furniture and electronic appliances they noticed that the rest of their budget cannot enable them to afford a honeymoon abroad as most of their social counterparts always do. They were mature enough to decide to spend their honeymoon in one of the Egyptian resorts on the Red sea shore, such as Hurgada or Sahl-Hasheesh. They also decided to reduce their honeymoon for only a week. Furthermore, they preferred not to have a wedding reception to reduce their marriage expenditures; they also think that the wedding party has become an old fashion, as she mentioned:

My parents and Ashraf's mother also agreed with us that every pound we may pay for the wedding party was better to be saved for any other basic need for our future. Ironically, my groom's father insisted to hold a wedding party in which luxurious food was served. He suggested also to pay for one of the famous singers while he refused to pay extra money to extend our honeymoon. He chose to celebrate the wedding in one of the famous military hotels in New-Cairo which cost about LE100,000. Unfortunately, we all could not have convinced him that it was not important to spend that amount of money in an event that would last only for a few hours. For him it was necessary as he said: "I have social obligations towards my colleagues and bosses at work who have invited me to attend the weddings of their sons or daughters. It would be a shame if my only son who will get married for the first time in his life do not have a wedding reception. Once we accepted to celebrate our wedding as my father in law wanted; there are standards for every single detail that must be fulfilled given social considerations. The place of celebration, the served food and music etc. each one of the aforementioned details has become a profession on its own within the market economy.

Drawing on Amin (2012), celebrating a wedding ceremony in a hotel does not mean holding a party but rather consuming it. Thus, the wedding ceremony had become a commodity within which every single detail has commercialized from the wedding dress to music and dancing that only performed to be recorded in the video tape which has especial importance in documenting the ceremony and clarifying how much it costs.

Furthermore, the discrepancy in views between Layla, her fiancés on one hand and Ashraf's father on the other hand regarding the social importance of purchasing the wedding reception, reflects that the new generation of young people began to formulate their own 'collective consciousness' or 'social imaginary' regarding the economics of marriage, they have become more practical and realistic than the previous generation of parents in their responding and reactions towards the inherited 'social imaginary' and its pressure over them. but so far, they have not been able to achieve tangible changes. At this point I borrow Jung's statement, "universally recognized ideals or feeling, toned, collective ideas" however I would prefer to replace universally by socially to become more adequate for the local context (Jung, 1951/1969, p. 54).

When Eman was asked about the cost of her wedding reception she responded

I neither wanted a wedding party nor was I convinced of its importance. My groom and his family insisted to hold a wedding party in one of the prestigious five stars hotels in New Cairo. The wedding ceremony cost us about LE 160000 in addition to the attached expenses such as, the wedding dress, the makeup artist, the bride's garb that cost LE 400; in addition to the photo session etc. For me all these expenditures are not important; they represent new fashions; we do as people do in our social milieu.

Despite the high cost of the wedding party to the extent that incompatible with the low income of the new family, and that Eman basically was unconvinced of the importance of the wedding reception the party was held without any resistance from her. "we do as people do in our social milieu". This statement reflects the workings of class as social pressure that dictates specific modes of consumption as signifiers of socioeconomic subjectivities. Which explains why their families did not regret spending this amount of money on one-day event.

My sister was engaged to an engineer, who lives with his family in a villa behind my father's in Al-Rehab. Unlike me, my sister wanted a wedding party, she believes that it's a once in a life time event. Our father had never imposed his opinion, he asks us about our wishes; then he did what we wanted. My sister's wedding party cost about LE 200000. I could not afford to buy a dress that suits the bride's sister; so, my father offered to buy me a new one.

At this point, we can notice the paradox of spending thousands of pounds on the wedding parties for the two sisters while they could not afford to buy themselves a *soiree* dress. What is the reason behind such economic choice? In fact, it was not a choice but rather it was an irrational class obligation to allocate huge amount of money to consume specific commodities that hold fake social indications. While the new family lacks many basic needs.

Sameh had arranged the expenditures of marriage in a descending order according to its importance. This order reflects the practical vision of Sameh. His narrative also shed lights on the 'money complex or the importance of the economic capital' according to which he will decide his marital expenditures priorities.

The basic marriage expenditures are: the apartment and its decoration, the furniture and *Al-Shabka* then the honeymoon and the wedding reception, the latter two categories are less important costs. A wedding party is a luxury, I can remember the cost of my brother's wedding party which was LE80,000, it was too expensive. So, if I do not have enough money I will first sacrifice the wedding party. It is possible to dispense with the honeymoon, though it is more important to me than the wedding party. There are many things that are more important than the wedding party. People impose many expenditures on the groom; for instance, the wedding party, *Al-Shabka* and *Al-Mo'akhar* 'a sum of money is owed to the wife in case of divorce' it could be LE300,000 or LE500,000. All these expenditures constitute great pressure on the groom.

People assess the groom based on the cost of the wedding ceremony and the honeymoon. When people see a great ceremony as well as a distinctive honeymoon, their assessment to the couple will differ. I mean, the level of the wedding ceremony and the honeymoon reflects the socioeconomic status of the couple, from the point of view of the people, but for me, for example, I prefer that my wedding ceremony would not to be luxurious, however I have the financial potential for it ', He meant that his father can afford for it.

When Sameh mentioned that people assess the socioeconomic status of a couple who have newly married according to the luxurious level of wedding ceremony and the honeymoon his said was identical to Davis "we identify our real selves by the choices we make from the

images, fashions, and lifestyles available in the market, and these in turn become the vehicles by which we perceive others and they perceive us". (Davis,2003, p. 44)

Hadeel's dreams about her future wedding:

I dream to have a wedding reception; it is not important to cost a lot. I know that setting up the ceremony at one of the army or police hotels will cost a lot. One of my friends held her wedding ceremony in a rented villa near the pool in Al-Rehab city, and cost about 40,000 Egyptian pounds. For me, the wedding cannot be dispensed with because it happens once in a lifetime. But for example, a honeymoon can be compensated when economic conditions permit. A friend of mine made her wedding reception in one of the most prestigious five stars hotel with many famous singers and a belly dancer. Every single detail was perfect. The DJ, the light system, the decoration etc. It cost thousands of pounds. Of course, the wedding was videotaped. The paradoxical issue was that her new home was empty, there were hardly any furniture and household necessities. She and her husband used to watch their wedding 's video frequently; That was enough for them to be happy and satisfied until they had completed their furniture.

As Amin puts it,

only the video film will remain once all the ceremonies are over, and everyone has departed. It is also the only proof of the sum of money spent on the wedding. It is the only proof that for instance, the dancer was really Fifi Abdu or Dina, and not anybody else, that the singer was Amr Diab and not another, for who can contest the truth of the combination of both sight and sound?" (Amin, 2000, p. 114)

When Ibrahim was asked about his wedding reception he answered:

For me the wedding party has only one important function which is *al-esh'har* which means every one of our relatives, friends and even close neighbors must know that I and my fiancés got married. Thus, it is not important how much the wedding reception cost or where it is celebrated. I was eager that my guests gathered in a nice place and served with nice food and drink without extravagance. My vision about my wedding created a problem with my father who wanted to celebrate it in an expensive wedding hall *Dar El-difa'aa* where his partner had celebrated his son's wedding. He did not want to be less than him; the wedding reception didn't have a specific meaning for my father except showing off. Stick to my point of view regarding the cost of wedding ceremony; my father had saved a sum of money which he did not offer to me for other essential marital expenditures.

Peer pressure is a fundamental reason behind marital economic choices. As Ibrahim had stated that his father's only motivation to celebrate the wedding in a prestigious celebrating hall was to imitate his partner. Unlike Ibrahim, who thought more practically of the way in which he preferred to celebrate his marriage and he succeeded in achieving that.

The funny or you can say the tragic situation was on my wedding day when I had forgot to buy a new pair of shoes because I had spent all my money in endless expenditures that I must pay before my wedding ceremony. Under this economic pressure I just remembered that I need a new pair of black shoes while I was wearing my wedding suit. Fortunately, my boss and the owner of the restaurant in which I was working at that time was there. When he noticed that I had panicked, he calmed me down and asked me about the size of my shoes and bought me a new pair of shoes. I will not forget this situation all my life.

This story reminds me of "Al-Tyb" story explained in the very beginning of this thesis. This similarity reflects the great economic pressure that young men are exposed to while constructing their new family. While Ibrahim has a high educational degree, he did not hesitate to accept temporary and part-time work. Many young people, who had graduated into labor markets which may not require years of education, were subjected to insecure, and precarious employment conditions that lack future predictability. New socioeconomic subjectivities stem from these circumstances. This will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

The economic dependency on parents before and after marriage:

While Eman earns a decent salary, she predicates that the family economic support for her and her husband will last for many years after marriage.

My salary can provide me a decent life as an individual person but in reality, I do not live alone I have a husband and a new baby girl. As a fresh graduate doctor, and according to the miserable state of all young doctors in Egypt who spend many years of their lives before they can obtain a reasonable income. My husband almost does not earn any salary, what he gets for a year of work does not exceed LE250. While my salary is too much higher than his, he has never asked how much I earn. Up till now he does not know the amount of money I earn which is allocated to myself. In other words, according to my income, I cannot maintain the standard of living that I used to in my father's home. We depend on the financial aid from our families, it is difficult for any young couple in our generation to get married without family support. The economic support of our families sequentially came one after the other whether in a direct or

indirect way; for instance, my mother and my mother in law regularly bring us some food, such as meat, vegetables, and groceries. Our families will continue supporting us for years in advance even after having our children. Can anybody tell me the cost of the cheapest children custody nowadays? it will not be less than LE 5000.

The economic status of Eman and her young husband reflects the status of precarity and uncertainty about their future. Their high educational degrees did not enable them to maintain the minimum status of economic welfare or independence after marriage. Not only because of the failure of the state economic policies but also and more important the consequences of neoliberal transformation. Thus, one can argue that, the economic choices they had made for their marital expenditures were not based on their income but on their two families' economic capacity.

Sameh stated that,

My father economically supported my brother in his marriage expenditures he bought him the apartment, which constitutes the main bulk. It was in Al-Rehab. He also bought me an apartment in Madinaty which is very similar to Al-Rehab. For me, the minimum place where I could live comfortably after marriage is Madinaty 'Al-Rehab or Nasr City.

My father will also support me, tell me, who can get married individually nowadays without family support. I think my father's support will continue after marriage, that is what he did with my brother. It's true that after marriage one is supposed to remain independent and live according to his economic circumstances, but suppose that one faced any economic hardships, he automatically will ask his family for support and I think they will not refuse.

The continuous expectation of family economic support after marriage is, to a great extent, due to the housing crisis, youth must typically rely for the most part on their parents' saving and their ongoing support not only to start a new home but also for years after marriage. The status of "waithood" means that youths remain unmarried and financially dependent on their families late into their twenties and thirties (Singerman, 2007). This status has developed to continue for years after marriage for many reasons. One can argue that the most significant causes of this phenomenon are the commodification of marriage and class pressure. Huge amount of money is needed for any couple to start a new marital life, this sum of money is usually spent on

unnecessary services and commodities that are socially valued. While if these expenditures were saved and directed to more practical or profitable investments, this problematic phenomenon might be resolved.

Regarding labor market, as a fresh graduate Engineer there might be work opportunities that guarantee a stable, decent salary to support a new family but for example, you cannot depend on it in buying the apartment and the other main costs of marriage. and it will not provide me with the same standards of living as it was provided by my father as an upper-middle class family.

Sameh has pointed out the precarious financial and social state that most of young Egyptian educated men and women suffer from due to market economy. Within which the main struggle is to keep the socioeconomic subjectivity that he was used to be for himself and his future family.

Summary

This chapter had presented comprehensive narratives of five women and men from Al-Rehab city. They pointed out their experiences in selecting specific goods and services related the economics of marriage and the reconstruction of the family whether for themselves or for their sons or daughters who have recently engaged or married. The analysis of their stories has revealed that each story had its particularity, however there are points of similarities and differences among them. And the way in which they form their priorities according to their comprehension of the socioeconomic significance of their choices. Furthermore, the way in which my interviewees explain the reasons behind each choice they made provides insight about the disparate patterns of consumption of each person, or one can say, each consumer, that personalize him socially.

There are some general patterns, but no universal criterion that constitute how the Al-Rehab residents form their socio-economic subjectivities while they are making their marital economic choices.

Throughout the chapter, it was clear that disparities exist between the young generation and their parents who represented the old generation. These challenges stemmed mainly from the

great effect of neoliberalism on the young generations' way of thinking. The economic thinking that dominated all aspects of life. Neoliberalism represents a mode of subjectification, a new production of subjectivity. It entails an extension of the market economy across all of society. As Christian Laval argues, all actions are seen to conform to the fundamental economic ideas of self-interest, of greatest benefit for least possible cost (Christian Laval cited in Read, 2009 p. 32). Of course, marriage is one of those actions, so it is considered an investment by itself. This perspective justifies why most of my young interlocutors from Al-Rehab challenged their parent's idea of spending too much money on the wedding ceremony while they can allocate this expense for a more practical commodity.

Finally, the discourse of the class position and the standards of quality attached to it was evident throughout the chapter. For instance, Lila, Eman, Sameh, and Hadeel thought the appropriate *shabka* for their social status or community counterparts is diamond. At this point, it is worth noting that diamond as a commodity had acquired specific social image across history as it always had been purchased by the elites. Any bride has a diamond *shabka* dream to acquire part of their elegant characteristics or have a share of the elite lifestyle. According to my interlocutors, it is not important how much *al-shabka* will cost, "it is a gift from the groom to his bride", however what they care about was its kind, whether it is gold or diamond.

Chapter Three:

Socioeconomic Subjectivity in Ain-Shams

Ain- Shams is one of oldest informal Cairene districts in the eastern border of Cairo. It overlooks New Cairo, El Mataria, Helmeayat El Zeitoun and Medinat Al-Salam. It was named after the third oldest Egyptian university, 'Ain Shams University', or Ibrahim Pasha University. The name means "Eye of the Sun" in Arabic, referring to the fact that Ain Shams is built on top of the ancient city 'On Heliopolis', once the spiritual center of ancient Egyptian sun-worship. The establishment of the informal community started in the seventies when the Egyptian state economy transformed to neoliberal and free market policies causing radical change in the urban map of Cairo. Historically, Ain-Shams was a sight for both governmental and private housing projects. At that time, both private investment in housing and public-sector construction were governed by quick profit. This led to a severe housing crisis. Only upper and upper middle classes benefited from the state's subsidized apartments; as these classes could afford the relatively high price of those residential units, leaving little room for the low-income citizens. As a result, thousands of apartments remain unoccupied.

Ain-Shams was an established company associated with the Ministry of Housing in 1966 with some others, such as Nasr City, Heliopolis and Maadi to cover the need for east-west urban expansion. (Sims, 2003, p. 11) The area is divided into two parts: the eastern Ain Shams 'El Sharqia' and western Ain Shams 'El Gharbeya'.

As the social base of the state changed in the 1970s, a new class grouping was in place, and the economic movement towards a free market signaled a redirection of housing and urban planning policies. At this juncture, given the scarcity of land, real estate speculation represented an outlet for private investment and quick profit. The main feature among developers of this was the move away from *ta 'jir* (renting) to *tamlík* (private tenure). A construction boom has ensued since the 1970s with real estate prices increasing beyond the means of the average citizen. Land division and construction activities within Cairo's city limits and on the agricultural urban frontier became a main economic activity. Large-scale contractors acquired a good share of the

urban housing market, while small-scale contractors moved to the fringe. The new mode of wealth, grounded in real estate speculation, means that much capital is invested in the ownership of homes, mostly condominiums 'a building or complex of buildings containing a number of individually owned apartments or houses'. Critics of government housing policy point out that public sector construction was guided by the same principles which governed the private housing market. Government construction aimed increasingly at intermediate and luxury housing, while a decreasing number of units were allocated for low-income housing. The beneficiaries of this policy are mainly members of the upper and upper-middle classes with the means to purchase the highly priced but government subsidized units. This construction boom has resulted in the fact that some two million of the country's apartments remain vacant. Rather than suffering a shortage of housing, Egypt is plagued with the phenomenon of apartment hoarding.

The history of Ain Shams' development bears similarities to that of the other communities. However, parts of the area were the sites of government and private housing development projects where mid-range apartment blocks were erected. Government housing makes up the facade of the territory, while the inner areas are a mix of unlawful resident settlements and clusters of privately owned buildings. Located on the northeastern end of Cairo, the territory caught the attention of residents from Upper Egypt, particularly from the governorates of Suhaj and Qena. The early squatters parceled the land and brought in their families and friends. The area grew because of rural migration and the flight of poor residents of Cairo whose shanty towns like Ishash al Turjuman were seized by the government. The familial patterns of organization facilitated the spread of Islamist ideas, while the development of solidarity links among the families and kin groups provided protection to the Islamists and allowed them to function as bases of resistance against the authority.

This chapter entails narratives of five women and men from Ain-Shams: Ali, Abeer, Somaya, Mohammad and Amal. The following part in this thesis presents brief information about them:

The story of Ali and Yasmine:

Ali received a reasonable amount of education as he completed an industrial diploma. However, he did not want to work in accordance with his education because he used to work as a painter with a group of his friends and he was satisfied by the income he gains from his craft.

Yasmine is a 27-year-old house wife who finished her primary education, so she can read and write her name in good hand writing. She has been married for about 5 years. After marriage, she moved to live with her husband Ali in a rented apartment in *Kafr* Farouk in Ain-Shams where he was raised and lived with his extended family. Ali and Yasmine have three children.

Yasmine said that:

Everything came so quickly, I was engaged for only five months before marrying my beloved husband and before moving here. I am from Hadayek Al-Koba, a more privileged residential area near Ain-Shams,” she said. “my husband and another man had asked to marry me at the same time. While the other was richer, I preferred to choose my husband because I was searching for personality not money

The story of Abeer:

Abeer is a 23-year-old pharmacist, who was engaged to a medical doctor who was older than her by 6 years. They both live in the same *Kafr* in Ain Shams. As a well-educated young lady, she could obviously illustrate her and her fiancée’s economic marital preferences.

The story of Amal:

Amal is a 24-year-old who graduated from the School of Commerce two years ago. Before her graduation she was engaged to a well to do banker who was several years older than her. It was an arranged engagement. Even though he did not lack any thing as a perfect husband, she did not like him. After they had split up, she started her career in Egypt Bank. She learned from her first experiment exactly what she wanted in her future husband.

As a young girl my dream did not exceed the wedding ceremony and the white dress. However, after my first engagement had ended I discovered that it is not important that my future husband is rich at the beginning of our marriage. The most important thing is his way of thinking; my first *fiancé* did not want me to have a job. He wanted me to stay at home just to raise children. My work experience enabled me to decide that I wanted to be a wife, and a working woman. My first meeting with my current *fiancé* was in the bank where we both work. It did not take too long until we got engaged.

The story of Mohammad:

Mohammad, a 58-year-old Egyptian banker lives in Ain-Shams with his family. His elder son Mahmoud had graduated from the school of pharmacy a year ago. Now he is 22 years old, and engaged to one of his counterparts in the university, Samar.

The story of Somaya:

Somaya is a 51-year-old widow from Ain-Shams. Her husband died several years ago. He was working in the private sector. While he did not receive much education, he managed to provide his family with a decent life, but after his illness, his wife had to work. She looked for work that suited her and found no work but cooking for some of the families known her husband to help him pay for their daughter's marriage. While they also have another son, she has insisted if a family have boys and girls, the girls have the priority in the expenditures needed for marriage. Furthermore, if the daughter's parents could not cover her marital costs her brothers have to help as they can. I had to spend all the money I had inherited from my father on my daughter's marriage, in addition to a large part of the money that I earned from my work as a cook.

My daughter Safaa is a 33-year-old who graduated from Higher Institute for Social Service. Just after her graduation she became engaged to her current husband who was working in Saudi Arabia as a chef. It was an arranged marriage. One of my neighbors told the groom's mother about my daughter as she was searching for a suitable bride for her son. After a short time, he returned to Egypt and visited us and asked to marry my daughter. His economic circumstances were good.

The narratives of my interviewees shed light on some central themes according to which their narratives will be divided and analyzed.

Generational divisions: how neoliberalism affects the economic choices of marriage among the young generation challenging the dominant beliefs of the old generation.

When I asked Ali about the marriage expenditures he answered,

Marriage cost me a lot, because my wife's family did not buy all the needed marital imperatives. At the beginning of our marriage, we abandoned many things such as the coverlets," and some kitchen equipment. This is because my wife's

family had economic problems that prevented them to carry out their financial obligations and commitments toward furnishing their daughter's house. In our *kafr*, the bride's family is obliged to buy the kitchen. They like to show off in front of each other by the things they give to the bride like the number of blankets, bed sheets and kitchen supplies on the day of the marriage contract. They hang these objects in front of the bride's new home. On the other hand, the groom's family should buy the bedroom and the sitting room. In addition to, the marriage apartment whether it is rented or *tamleek*. I had understood their economic circumstances, so I decided to commit to all expenses of furnishing the marital home regardless to the inherited customs and traditions. Of course, this cost me a lot but bit by bit I could complete all the missing items in our house.

According to Ali's story, he challenged the customs and traditions imposed by old generations in his neighborhood. His understanding of the economic status of his wife's family enabled him to reevaluate the marital economic choices needed to his new life, and to become more practical in these decisions. For instance, when he and his wife abandoned the high number of bed-sheets, blankets and kitchen equipment needed only for showing-off. Thus, the economic survival strategies, within the prevailing neoliberal economic atmosphere sometimes become stronger than the illogical beliefs and the irrational commodity signs whether were inherited by the older generations or were invented by the advertising industry that characterizes the consumer culture.

When I asked Abeer about the dominant customs and tradition of marriage in her neighborhood she replied:

In our *kafr*, people are really stuck to customs and traditions. For example, the bride's family must get her 24 bed sheets, about 6 sets of cooking utensils and many blankets. In addition to, cooking a traditional dinner that includes 20 cooked chickens and 30 cooked ducks etc., for the groom's family. Fortunately, the latter tradition was replaced by another one which is buying a precious and practical gift for the groom's mother such as a full automatic washing machine or a LCD screen. I have always dreamt that one day a strong couple who are about to marry could change these ill traditions. Buy the way, my mother in law insists that we must make this traditional meal, for her family, neighbors and relatives.

She added a story about a girl whose relatives went to visit her after marriage, and she took glasses from the *neesh* to welcome them with some juice, all of them criticized her and her family for not setting extra glasses to welcome her guests. Their traditions dictate that the bride must have a *neesh* full of glasses, but she can't ever use them because it's supposed to be just for

decoration. She added, that anyone who would visit her would open her wardrobe and look at her things, even the private things.

In our *kafir*, showing off is a central theme attached to marriage; for instance, celebrating the wedding is mainly to show off. Bride's opinion about the importance of the *farah* does not matter because of culture, traditions and community pressure that leaves no room for us as a well-educated new generation to change these inherited customs. Even when I try to fight our community, our parents stop us because they also stick to these traditions, like the groom's mother, who will never abandon having the traditional dinner. Of course, the presence of the economic capital facilitates the economic decision making even if this decision is irrational. For instance, my father works in one of the Gulf countries to support me and my sister, but I know that if he isn't there or he does not have enough money to help us we would abandon a lot of things. For example, 5 bedsheets are enough regardless of the reaction of our community.

If we thought together for a second, we will find out that marriages in Europe are more successful because they get married with the cheapest and more practical things. I think the only people who succeed to get rid of these ideas are the ones who got married outside the country. In other words, we do not have the ability to make a change. We are waiting for those strong couples who have this capacity.

Amal has also reported how she opposed her father point of view about 'the delayed dowry' and her father in law opinion about the furniture:

My *fiancé's* father is about 70-year old; so, his thoughts were old fashioned, and he was too much engaged to the inherited customs and traditions. He wanted to agree on all the details during his first visit to our home. For example, he wanted to determine the value of the delayed dowry. And the answer of my father was "If my daughter was not happy after marriage and wanted to break up, I would not ask her husband for any money. I would ask him to do what she wanted

The Islamic law stated the possibility of the division of the dowry into advance and deferred portions. The advanced portion is allocated to the *jihaz* brought by the bride's family- this division appears in all the complete marriage contracts, in divorce deeds, and in separate deeds concerning the obligation of husbands to pay the deferred portion of the dowry (Rapoport,2000). Interestingly, Amal believes that the amount of the deferred dowry reflects the extent to which the groom had evaluated his future wife; her beauty, education and whether she has a job or not, etc. This perspective depicts the bride as a commodity-subject that can be economically assessed. Challenging her father's belief that the delayed dowry is not important

reflects the extent to which she has affected by the commodification culture that best defines consumerism. Everything must become a commodity, follow commodity-logic and market logic. (Giroux & Pollock, 2011). Amal insisted that her marriage contract included the amount she and her family had paid for the marriage expenses as a delayed dowry.

When Amal was asked about the furniture and appliances she intended to buy, she mentioned another disagreement that had occurred between she and her father-in-law:

Although it's not what's normally followed, our two families decided to share the costs of all the furniture and appliances needed for our new home equally, that empowered me to have a say in every single choice related to our apartment. My father in law wanted us to buy the furniture from Damietta and he had insisted that we must purchase a *neesh* and a French *salon* as it looks prestigious when relatives visit us. I wasn't convinced by his opinion and I wanted to be more practical as Damietta is old fashioned nowadays and my apartment is small, so it needs modern and not bulky furniture to make it appear more roomy and spacious. I chose two simple and comfortable living rooms and a dining room with a practical buffet for the cutlery and dining utensils from a gallery in Nasr city.

How do Ain Shams residents choose their new marital homes?

Yasmine abandoned her dream that her husband owned the marital home, although she was convinced that leasing was a direct threat to family stability:

My husband couldn't afford a *tamleek* apartment which is safer; many marriages failed because husbands couldn't afford the high monthly rent for apartments, which became more expensive after the adoption of the new rent law. But I agreed because he is a good person. Yasmine said.

When I asked Abeer about the standard of living she wants to have after marriage and the location of her wedding apartment, she answered,

I am used to a level in a specific standard of living that I can't get under. I won't ever live in an apartment that isn't our property because the new rental law is too expensive and causes a lot of problems that may develop and cause divorce. One of my dreams is to live in an apartment on the Nile or in Masr-Al-Gdeda, but if it didn't work I would be satisfied and grateful to God who brings the best for us.

Somaya told me about the circumstances that forced them to accept that their daughter's apartment be in unsafe area in Ain Shams:

Safaa's husband had an apartment in the western Ain-Shams, consisting of three rooms and a hall. This area differs from the eastern Ain-Shams. It is infamous for drug trading. But we had to accept it because the whole building was possessed by the groom's father. In addition, I and her father did not have enough money that allows us to suggest another apartment in a more secured place for our daughter. However, we live in the borders of Ain Shams near Gesr Al Suez, which is a nice neighborhood."

Safaa's parents accepted that their daughter would live in an insecure neighborhood because they did not possess economic capital that could allow them to suggest a better residential area for their daughter's future home. Unlike the case of Sawsan from Al-Rehab, whose economic status allowed her to encourage her daughter's husband to upgrade his residential neighborhood two times. This illustrate that possessing economic capital facilitates access to other forms of capitals.

When I asked Mohammad about the apartment, the most important marital cost, he answered,

Fortunately, the fiancée's parents agreed that the apartment will be rented '*egar gdeed*' in Ain-Shams which cannot be accepted if there was not a love story between my son and his fiancée. Her parents might not be able to make this concession. They were supposed to demand a *tamleek* apartment, he is lucky.

When I asked Amal about her choice for the marriage apartment she replied:

At the beginning of our relationship, my fiancé did not have an apartment. He wanted to live in one of the new cities; Firstly, I welcomed his proposal but then I thought practically and decided to buy our new apartment in a neighborhood close to my family and my workplace. This is because I wanted to save money and time that would be lost in the daily transportation because we still do not have a private car. The new apartment is in Al-Ameria. It is 100 m2. It is *tamleek*, the payment system is a deposit amount for LE 75000 and the rest in quarterly installments each for LE15000. It is partially decorated. My father has welcomed our choice as he would not accept a rented apartment. He always told me that the most important qualifications of an accepted groom are owning a *tamleek* apartment, and having a good job.

The *Shabka*: what does it symbolize for Ain Shams inhabitants?

It is a significant marital expenditure which is allocated to a precious gift that the groom must present to the bride. Yasmine said “While I did not ask him for a specific *shabka* he bought me two golden rings. Soon, I sold my rings to support him in the daily household chores.”

When Abeer was asked about her *shabka*; she responded,

“*Al-Shabka* is a gift from the groom and its value is not important it is just a reference to the relationship between the couple. If I have the choice I would rather prefer a diamond than a golden one. A small diamond ring is more elegant than a golden *shabka* with the same price. But it is fine if my groom does not prefer to buy me a diamond one. I believe that there are many things more important than *Al-Shabka*. For instance, I want to make a Hollywood smile ‘a new dental composition that makes your tooth look brighter like Hollywood cinema stars. My father did not ask my fiancés for a specific *shabka* with a specific value.”

Comparing to Yasmin’s case who sold her *shabka* to support her husband Abeer had another viewpoint,

The *Shabka* is mine so I would only agree to sell it and return its price to my husband in very specific situations; for instance, if it is his last option to overcome a severe economic crisis. Generally, selling it will mainly be to satisfy a personal need. For example, I can pay for a (Hollywood smile) as I have previously mentioned or pay for a famous singer in my wedding party.

Among many other goods and services, ‘Hollywood smile’ is another novelty in the commodification of marriage that started to spread among the upper classes of the Egyptian society. It has now become a dream of other social segments. I argue most of them are from Upper middle and middle class. When I asked Somaya about her daughter’s *Shabka* she said “My daughter’s husband bought her a precious *shabka*, it consisted of three golden rings and three golden bracelets. We did not ask him for a specific cost for it because it is considered a gift from him to his future wife.”

Everything was perfect until a misunderstanding happened while the two families were negotiating *Al’ayma*, a legal commitment including a list of movables and furniture and everything that was bought for the marital home regardless who had paid for each. The

importance of this commitment is the preservation of the wife's right in all items included. The most important item was twenty grams of gold.

Of course, it was not the weight of my daughters *shabka* nor did we purchase this amount of gold. It only represents financial value that is owed to the wife in case of divorce. After we all agreed upon what should be included in *Al'ayma* my husband and the groom signed on it. Unfortunately, we discovered that they had changed and deleted some items. My husband got very angry and warned that the marriage will not occur unless they rewrite *Al'ayma* as it was.

Mohammad stated that "While the bride's parents did not demand a specific value for the *Shabka* and they will accept it even it was golden twin rings I allocated LE 70,000 for my son's *Shabka*."

When Amal was asked about her *Shabka* she replied:

I don't like wearing gold jewelry. My *fiancé* had offered to buy me twin diamond rings with whatever it costs. I did not want to add more economic burdens on him especially after he bought the *tamleek* apartment as it cost him a lot; so, I suggested a gold *shabka* for LE 20,000. I was satisfied by its value. I can buy a new one in the future when our economic circumstances improve.

How do people in Ain Shams celebrate wedding ceremonies?

Yasmine described her wedding celebration as follow:

The thing that I could not abandon is my wedding party. The wedding he gifted me was beyond my expectations; the decoration was a surprise for me; there were two screens at the beginning and the end of the road in which he was living, and our rented apartment was located. In the middle of the street there were a fountain and a red carpet in front of our "*Kousha*". 'The place where the bride and the groom sit in their wedding party'. I think that our wedding was the last one celebrated on the street. All the following weddings are celebrated in wedding halls." I did not regret the wedding expenditures because it happens once in lifetime and it is the dream of every girl. I got my wedding dress from a famous hairdresser, "Paris". I was fortunate because at that time the Salon made a bridal package consisting of the makeup and the rent of the wedding dress. It was about LE 600

Abeer's dreams for her wedding reception:

Wedding party is very important to me, I could not abandon it, personally, it is something that happens once in life time and cannot be repeated so this event deserves to allocate a quite big amount of money. For me, the wedding party is more

important than the honey
wedding party in a prestigious

moon which I could make-up for. I dream of a great
celebration hall of my choice.

Wedding parties have become costly nowadays, they include lots of things that one must pay for. For example, the bride needs a makeup artist that costs about LE 2000 to LE 3000. This is so important to me because I cannot guarantee the result of the ordinary hairdresser salons specially after raising their cost to the extent that it is about to reach the same range of the makeup artists with a noticeable deterioration of their work quality. That is why I prefer to go to a makeup artist rather than beauty salons.

Wedding planners are not an important aspect in my wedding, it is reasonable to rely on those who are responsible for the celebration hall to make the decoration for the wedding party. Unlike wedding planners, photo sessions and video tapings are so important for documenting the wedding ceremony. So, I want to have a photo session because it's a lifetime memory. Traditionally, the photo session was held in one of the studios, located in all residential neighborhoods; so, it does not cost a lot. In contrast, the modernized photo-session that is much costlier.

Abeer said that she would abandon going to a honeymoon and make a marvelous wedding instead. In her opinion, if she went on a honeymoon she would rather going to a quiet place in which she would enjoy watching monuments like Luxor and Aswan instead of going to a place to sit on the sea shore.

Generally, spending the honey-moon on the sea shore is against my nature. I prefer spending it in historical places whether in Egypt or abroad. It depends on our economic conditions after we finish furnishing our apartment, which I think will cost us a lot. While people will criticize us if we do not spend the honeymoon in a luxurious hotel whether in Egypt or abroad, I do not care. Our budget will set our priorities. This will also be applied in choosing my wedding-dress. I prefer renting it instead of buying a new one to save some money that might help me in more practical expenditures.

When I asked Somaya about her daughter's wedding ceremony she answered:

My daughter's wedding ceremony was in the Shooting Club. It was a surprise from my daughter's husband. We did not ask him for *farah* 'the wedding reception' because we could not afford to share its cost if he had suggested that. He provided that the number of guests was very limited because each family had celebrated *al-henna* separately. If I had the choice I would be contented with the *henna* night as an alternative for the wedding ceremony. My daughter's husband rented her the wedding dress, it was from a famous shop in Masr-Al-Gdeeda as well as the hairdresser in which she dressed and put on her makeup. Before the wedding day she went to a place where she had 'Moroccan Bath' which is a new fashion that brides from different social levels use for skin care before marriage.

Unlike *al farah*, the *henna* night represents an event that cannot be dispensed with according to our customs and traditions. We celebrated this event on the street in front of our home. We rented many chairs and a DJ. The street was decorated with nice pictures painted by colored sand. Fizzy drinks were served. This event was mainly for young women; the bride's friends, neighbors, and relatives. This event cost a lot but as I had mentioned before it was necessary; my daughter was not less than any one of her counterparts. There was another celebration in front of the groom's home where his family live, in which beer, cigarettes and *hashish* were served beside soft drinks.

Somya's belief is that her daughter would be put in an inferior status less than her counterparts if she did not celebrate her *henna* night as it is used to be celebrated in their neighborhood. This reflects the role of the inherited customs and traditions, the neighborhood dynamics and the peer pressure in shaping the individual's mode of consumption and lifestyle at the same time. In addition to, my primary hypotheses that consumption culture has become the main motivation that controls marital economic decision making.

Amal wants a wedding reception in a modest place where she can invite a limited number of close relatives and friends to share her happiness with them.

I know that holding a wedding reception would require lots of planning and commitment to a budget that includes different items such as the wedding dress. I intended to rent my wedding dress. Nevertheless, the rental costs have become so high it would still be much cheaper than buying a new dress. I believe it's very important for a bride to look her best in her wedding and that it is not a very good idea to trust the ordinary hair dresser with the bridal makeup. You must hire a makeup artist for the wedding, even though they would be more expensive, they are more trustworthy as they have better quality materials and have attended professional courses. In addition, makeup artists would worry about their professional reputation. I personally would hire one of my friends who just started his career as a makeup artist, he is the one who did my engagement make up. I would hire him again for my wedding for two reasons. First, I really liked my engagement look; second, being a friend, he will give me a special discount as he did in my engagement. He has also learned how to fix the bridal veil recently because he found brides paying about 600 LE only for the veil designer so he thought it would be better for him to learn this skill and benefit from the extra income. Many other makeup artists are doing the same nowadays. I also have other friends who bought cameras and are working now as freelance wedding photographers. Hiring one of them will be a boost to his career and cheaper for me. I want my photo session to be as simple as it could

be, so I really don't mind if the photo session will be in a public garden and not in an expensive hotel.

The economic dependence on parents before and after marriage:

Mohammad stated that:

When my son told me that he wanted to marry one of his colleagues I immediately agreed especially after knowing that she was from the same social class. She lives with her family in Ain-Shams which means that they will not exaggerate their material demands, especially as my son is a fresh graduate and he depends on me completely. However, I thought that it is better for him not to think about marriage two years after graduating, as he must finish his military service. He may also find a suitable job in one of the pharmaceutical companies. I also had intended to buy him a pharmacy to start his practical life. My plans for him might have changed after his engagement but I think my economic support for him will last forever

We also agreed that every single expenditure from the wedding ceremony, the furniture, and the appliances will be paid equally between the two families. We intend to celebrate the wedding in one of the affordable military hotels

Mohammed's story reflects that he and the bride's family fully dominated the economic and marital choices of the young couple. This is mainly because they are newly graduated, so they depend entirely on their parents.

At the end of our talk, Abeer told me about her general opinions. She started by saying,

It has become very embarrassing to ask my father to buy me the fees for English courses in The American University in Cairo (AUC) to enhance my language skills needed for the labor market. I believe that it is unfair to add another burden to the big amount of money he paid for my education and *gehaz*. After marriage, the material responsibility upon me will turn from my father to my husband, so it will also be so embarrassing to ask him for monetary support.

I bet you will not find any new couples who are not waiting for the economic support from their families that is the *no'ta* 'an amount of money given to newly married couples by their relatives, neighbors or friends after their wedding.

The state of financial dependence on the family negatively affects the young generations in making financial decisions about the cost of their marriage freely without reference to the views of parents, which are often inconsistent because of the different concepts and beliefs among the different generations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the narratives of some women and men from Ain-Shams have been put forward. Their stories have revealed that their consumption pattern of marital commodities and services differ according to their beliefs about the social dimensions that each product or service holds. In other words, their mode of consuming the marital commodities, mainly resulted from their ‘social imaginary’ of commodity signs and its corresponding consumption dreams attached to each commodity or service that collectively shape the socioeconomic subjectivities of its bearers. Whether these signs were inherited from the old generations as a cultural heritage or due to innovative factors associated with neoliberalism and the market economy. For instance, Somaya has stated that “unlike *al farah*, the henna night represents an event that cannot be dispensed with according to our customs and traditions” they celebrate this event on the street to show off in front of all their neighbors. They also had rented a DJ equipped with sound system. On the other hand, Somaya thought that the wedding ceremony was not as important as *al henna* because the number of the invited people would be limited.

Furthermore, like the accounts of the women and men whom I spoke with in Al-Rehab, marital economic choices that the old generation used to make were not taken for granted by the new generation. In contrast, these decisions were contested, reevaluated and negotiated. For instance, Amal bought the simple furniture she wanted.

Moreover, narratives of economic dependence on parents after marriage were frequently brought up. The father of a recent graduate of pharmacy school, who was also newly engaged said, “I think my economic support for him will last forever”.

In contrast, Abeer has an opposite aspiration:

It has become very embarrassing to ask my father to pay the fees for English courses in The American University in Cairo(AUC) to enhance my language skills needed for the labor market. I believe that it is unfair to add another burden to the vast amount of money that he paid for my education and *gehaz*. After marriage, the monetary responsibility upon me will turn from my father to my husband; so, I had intended not to ask my father for extra financial support after marriage.

Abeer's refusal to rely economically on her father after marriage has not been challenged yet. It does not deny the state of dependency and waithood that characterizes the future of the Egyptian well-educated young men and women which I will comprehensively discuss with its subjectification norm in chapter four.

Chapter four:

Neoliberalism a Technology of the Self, as a “homo-economicus” an Entrepreneur of Himself/Herself

Labor is no longer limited to the specific sites of the factory or the workplace, but is any activity that works towards desired ends” (Jason Read, 2009 p.31)

The story of Shokria;

Shokria, is a 45-year-old married woman who had graduated from the school of commerce. She lives in Helmiatt Al-Zaiton a residential area that is very close to Ain-Shams. She runs her private work as a hairdresser, she specialized in hair curing by Protein. Protein treatments boost the hair with a variety of nutrients and proteins to help reconstruct and strengthen hair strands. This kind of hair care has become a new fashion especially among girls who are about to marry; in other words, it has become one of the marital expenditures to which brides from different social stratum are keen to allocate a sum of money.

I had never worked according to my educational degree or even thought of that. There is myriad of people in the labor market who have the same certificate as mine, most of them stay at home for several years before they could find a job. So, I had decided to think out of the box. Therefore, I thought about my primary interest which was hair care. I had started this hobby from a very early age with my friends then it has developed over the years until now. Before the protein treatment appeared, there was another hair treatment named keratein, but it was not as functional as protein. The first person I applied this treatment on her hair was my cousin before her wedding: the result was not so good however it was my starting point for my current profession.

My work enables me to interact with people from different neighborhoods and various social strata. Despite this kind of hair treatment has proliferated among clients from high class communities because of its higher price, the number of brides from popular areas, as Ain-Shams who insist to apply the treatment on their hair are equal, or could be, much more the number of those from luxurious districts. The difference between them that most of clients from the popular areas apply the treatment only once before their wedding day, but clients from the privileged residential arias renew the treatment periodically. Furthermore, clients from the low-income communities always try to convince me to reduce the price that ranging from LE500 to LE 2000 because this amount of money is

considered too expensive to them. The brides from these arias usually pay the cost from their own money regardless from where they got it, as their families still consider this sort of expenditures unnecessary. The widespread of this kind of hair treatment encourages me to leave my work in one of the companies specialized in cosmetics where I was marketing its products to start my private work. The demand for this treatment was mainly by the young ladies who are about to get married, which make it an additional expenditure added to the cost of marriage. This accelerated demand for the treatment guarantees a reasonable increase in my income.

The experience of Shokrya illustrates that the innovation of goods and services attached to the economics of marriage open new horizons of work opportunities for those who can provide them. In other words, for those who can understand the ever-changing market demands and try to adapt themselves in accord with these demands to achieve personal interest. In this regard, (Read, 2009) presents Foucault's insight of how neoliberalism can be viewed as a production of subjectivity and individuals are constituted as subjects of "human capital." Any activity that increases the capacity to earn income, to achieve satisfaction, has become an investment in "human capital". Human capital is a broad concept that includes the individual's skills and abilities as well as the body, mind, and genetic material, which are subject to the same rules of economic capital that aim to maximize the profit from the available resources. Foucault argues while these human resources are limited by nature, these natural limit is something that exists to be overcome through technologies. For instance, plastic surgery and possible genetic engineering make it possible to maximize one's initial investment. While Foucault's reference to the transformation of human capital by using possible genetic engineering is considered an extreme paradigm the case of Shokrya reflects the way in which an ordinary Egyptian woman attempted to invest in herself as a human capital by enhancing her own abilities to enhance her position in the market. "Thus, commodifying ourselves in the interest of maximizing our "exchange value" or "market worth" means that we envision ourselves as marketable objects." (Davis,2003, p.48)

The Story of Satuna:

Recently, I have attended a *henna* party of my friends' daughter. It was my first time to attend a *Henna* party, which was in the bride's family home. *Laylat Al-Hinna* or the Henna Party

is one of the most important customs of the Egyptian weddings. It is also a marital ceremony rooted in the Egyptian culture. *Henna* is considered auspicious in Islamic weddings. It's believed to bring good luck to the bride and the groom, it is for women only and it always occurs the day before the wedding party. The bride and her friends and family gather on the evening before the wedding to apply *henna* on her hands, body and feet as well as the rest of the women invited to the celebration. While It is a historical celebration the way in which it is performed has undergone many changes over time.

Al-Hananah is the woman who kneads, prepares and engraves the *henna* for the bride. In Upper Egypt, *Al-Hananah* is an old woman, echoing the distinctive songs of the bride as she is engraving them. Previously, *Al-Hananah* did not get money for that night, while it was now a career for ladies. The henna night has been commercialized. *Al-Hananah* nowadays has assistants who help her in the new fashion of the *henna* show. The way in which *Hannah* is applied on the bride's hands and feet has completely changed.

A-50-year-old Nubian woman who runs her private business specialized in *Henna* Parties and some other services, most of which related to the bridal preparations that the brides make before their wedding day. Satuna is a *Henna* organizer. She has an office in Masr-El-Gedeeda where she meets her customers who are from different socioeconomic districts and classes, such as El-Rehab or Ain-Shams. 'I asked her about the cost of the *heena* party and whether it differs according to the neighborhood in which the party occurs, and she answered:

I have not lowered my prices after the January 25 revolution because people still have money, but they fear to spend it. When the customer comes to me, the first thing I ask about is where the henna will be held because I do not accept going to places such as Izbet al-Nakhl or some places in Ain Shams that have a bad reputation; as a result, the girls who work with me have never been robbed or harassed or anything like that. The place where people live does not reflect their personalities or social class. Some people after the henna ceremony refused to give us our money, while they pretended to belong to the high social classes. Some of them asked their guests to pay for the henna they had done. And others accused my crew of stealing 2,000 pounds from the guests' handbags.

The labor market is highly competitive. I challenge a lot of competitors in our field, but practically I'm number one in the market. Anyone who seeks perfection in her *henna* celebration chooses us. The economic situation after the revolution and the floating of the Egyptian currency affected our work negatively; it lowered the number of our customers as everything has become too expensive. Sometimes the community puts pressure on people to do things they do not want to do like

the wedding, fearing that the community will see them as inferior. Some people prefer a *henna* party instead of a wedding while others choose to go to a honeymoon abroad. It depends on their economic circumstances and their ability to challenge the social pressures. When I was young, my parents held a henna ceremony before my marriage. From that point on, I decided to work in this field. Our work has developed over the years to satisfy the ever-changing market demands.

To be successful at Me. Inc, my traits, values, beliefs, and so on—the qualities by which I locate myself and where I stand— must be self-consciously adopted or discarded, emphasized or deemphasized, according to the abstract and competitive standards of the market. And since the market is never static, staying “relevant” like the great brands means that these qualities must be constantly monitored and adjusted to retain the desired image. Self-branders, says Peters, should “reinvent” themselves—their brand—on a “semiregular basis.” (Davis, 2003, p. 48-49)

Our work underwent many changes over the years. At the very beginning the *henna* night was a traditional ceremony within which we just mixed the henna and put it in a round tray and decorated it with candles. we colored the hands and the feet of the bride while singing folk songs for this occasion in the presence of her family, relatives and neighbors. The way in which we apply the henna nowadays has become more artistic as we draw attractive inscriptions. It is something new in our business to get a DJ and a show for the bride. In this show the bride wears different clothes related to different cultures, such as Indian *sari* or Egyptian belly dancing suit; each dress has its own show performed by a team of trained girls who encourage the bride and her friends to dance with them. We also offer body-care masks and Moroccan bath and many other things that the bride needs for her beauty before her wedding. All these services I added to meet the market demands.”

The story of Mr. Yasser:

Six months ago, I went with one of my relatives to book her wedding party in one of the most privileged places in New-Cairo which is famous for its luxurious open-air wedding parties where I met the person who is responsible for contracting, Mr. Karim. He was very helpful; thus, when I started my field work and I wanted to talk to some of those whose work related to wedding cost I was sure that he could help me. I went to his office in ‘Sky Resort’ - the name of the place where I met him- and I asked him to help me. He gave me a list of telephone numbers that included four wedding planners and he recommended Mr. Yasser to me. Immediately I arranged a meeting with him. Along my way to meet him I was trying to guess his look, I expected that he is a highly-educated and an elegant person. However, from the first glance I

noticed from his appearance that he is a practical person; his clothes were clean and matching and his overall appearance reflects that his work does not require wearing fancy clothes for his interaction with the clients especially who can afford to celebrate their wedding in classy places, such as 'Sky Resort'. A place like Sky Resort or prestigious hotels employ highly educated young people and they always require that their employees have good appearance and are fluent in the English language. I have clearly noticed that the latter qualification was not available to Mr. Yasser a forty-five-year-old who started his work in wedding planning twenty years ago. He graduated from faculty of commerce from one of the Egyptian universities. When I asked him why he changed his career, he told me that he has never worked according to his educational degree. He began his practical life as soon as he had graduated. He worked with a colleague who was working in supplying lighting units and DJ equipment required for wedding parties, 'these were the only items needed in such events at that time. He added that everything changed from the beginning of the nineties. Many items have added to wedding celebrations; for instance, the decoration has developed to the extent that it contains myriad of choices, in addition to the bride's 'Gerb', the photographer and videotaping. He added,

I planned weddings for all social classes. For example, some of my customers are fruit traders who belong to *sha'by* community, but they have money that allows them to celebrate their wedding in five-star hotels or places like Sky Resorts. They want to make unique and more expensive ideas to display their wealth, one of them wants to enter the wedding in a *Porsche* car. After the nineties, the wedding parties are completely commercialized. Before that date few people can afford to celebrate weddings in five-star hotels; they were elites, celebrities or politicians. Nowadays, most of upper middle class celebrate their weddings in hotels especially after the adaption of wedding packages by the luxurious hotels and wedding halls. These packages allow clients from the upper segments of the middle class to have access to such hotels. These packages contain different categories which makes it easier for clients to choose the appropriate package for his/her budget.

When I asked him about the professions that have been introduced to the wedding cost he said:

there are many, for instance; professions, such as makeup artist and veil designer. The latter profession has been established to become specialized in the bride veil. These two novelty professions were included in the specialties of the hairdresser in the past. Brides from all social classes go to the hairdresser or beauty salon early on their wedding day, where they find all the services needed for their beauty in this special day; sometimes, the bride can also rent the wedding dress from the same place. Nowadays, bridal look is highly commercialized where

every single detail is separated and has become a professional with quite a high cost. For instance, nail care has become a new profession upon which huge enterprises established such as nail SPAs and salons for acrylic nails and so on and so forth.

While the hairdresser with its original form still exists in popular neighborhoods, the way in which it has been developed to keep pace with capitalist innovations and its commodification norm in other areas reflects how the consumerism pattern has become a distinctive element between various socio-economic neighborhoods. Yasser insists that while he knows lots of makeup artists he could not suggest any of them because he thinks that it depends on the personal choice of the bride; a makeup expert who suits one of the brides may not fit the other and so on. When I asked him as an expert in his field about his opinion about why people choose to spend thousands of pounds on marriage parties in the midst of rising prices and inflation, especially after the floating rate of the Egyptian pound, he answered:

People who choose to allocate a sum of money for their wedding parties can be divided according to their intention in doing that. We are all Egyptians, so we know that wedding parties are something rooted in our culture based on comparisons between the relatives, neighbors and friends. Every girl wants to have a wedding like her cousin or anyone of her counterparts. Some people think that their happiness will not be completed without the wedding ceremony, this is usually based on the desire of the bride who usually wants a wedding party as well as a honeymoon. These types of people do not spend a lot on the wedding. Another type of people belong to *Sha'bi* communities but have plenty of money that allows them to celebrate their weddings in five-star hotels; they spend a lot of money, not only to delight the bride and the groom, but to show off and resemble the families of the upper classes in society. The third category is the elites and the celebrities: people from this category are concerned about how their wedding becomes sophisticated and chic to reflect their prominent position in society". It always contains a group of famous singers and belly dancers to entertain their guests who are always from the upper segment of the social ladder. Their wedding occurs in luxurious wedding halls and the bride's dress can be designed by a famous fashion designer as Hany Al-Bheary; in sum, every single detail must be unique.

The story of Rania:

Rania is a 35-year-old lady who works as a makeup artist. She lives with her husband in a villa in Al-Tagammo Al-Khamis in New Cairo. She is a mother of two young boys. She had graduated from Faculty of *Al-Alsun* Ain Shams University in 2003.

I had started my current profession while I was in my undergraduate studies in the year 2000. First, I had started with my friends, relatives and neighbors who had special occasions. At the beginning it was for free until the year 2005 when I started earning money for my work as a makeup artist. My success motivated me to improve my talent by taking professional courses in my field which enhanced my self-confidence and skills. These courses might cost me a lot, but I have considered this expense as an investment. As most of my clients from high and upper-middle classes they are familiar with the finest brands of cosmetics, so I am very keen that all the cosmetics I use in my work are from those brands. People from these social ranks have a fondness for the international brands, for their quality as well as they occupy a large part of their daily discourse. For instance, they wear Nike and many other international brands. They are also interested in "Mac" make-ups and other famous brands in the world of cosmetics. It is not an exaggeration to emphasize that not only the cosmetics must be a brand put also the makeup artist her/ himself. In the midst of the prevailing competitive atmosphere of the labor market, there are few names who had become brands in their fields. In my specialty there are some names that function as brands whose names can easily be found in the social media. Brides from the higher socioeconomic neighborhoods prefer to show-off among her counterparts that the photographer, makeup artist, and the hairdresser etc., are from the most famous names in their domains, exactly as the brands of her wedding dress, accessories and the groom's suit. Branding has exceeded the commodities to labeling human subjects who turned themselves into commodities.

As Davis argues,

To self-brand, therefore, individuals must get in touch with their skills, the “selling parts” of their personality, and any and every accomplishment they can take credit for. Then they must consciously craft these traits into a relentlessly focused image and distinctive persona, like the Nike swoosh or Calvin Klein, even testing their “brand” on the model of the marketers by using focus groups of friends and colleagues. Substance isn't nearly enough; self-branders also need style. According to Peters, “packaging counts—a lot.” Finally, like the famous brands that have become a part of our consciousness, self-branders have to go about enhancing their profile and increasing their visibility through marketing, marketing, marketing. Via self-promotion, they too can become objects of desire. (Davis,2003, p. 47)

Rania added,

makeup artist as a new profession had started to appear in conjunction with the spread of the social media as a catalyst for marketing ourselves. Furthermore, my profession required relentless self-promotion and social relations with those who belong to the social strata that constitute my target clients; who in turn are looking for someone who looks like them socially. Our profession requires attention to appearance, and customers judge us from our clothing style and our makeup. This issue represents the way in which we are packaging ourselves.

The story of Maha:

Maha is a 29-year-old Egyptian unmarried woman. She had graduated from the school of commerce Ain-Shams University, before being a Veil designer she was working in an agricultural firm where she was earning quite a low salary.

I had started my current profession by luck, a friend who was already working as a veil designer, but because she had children she could not coordinate her work with the households. One day she asked me to help her in her profession on the weekends provided that she would train me in the profession. I went with her considering helping her in my leisure time. Gradually, I started to master the profession and my income began to increase until I decided to leave my original job and dedicated all my time to the new profession. I am specialized in veiled brides. To enhance my new career, I had attended specializing course with Lobna Al-Shafeey a very famous name "brand" and a pioneer in our profession.

Maha added:

Our profession is characterized by competition, so the most important qualification needed to become a successful veil designer were perfecting the profession, good customer service and finally good self-marketing. Thank God, the social media had played a significant role in the proliferation of my profession about five years ago and up till now we do not need any sorts of advertisement. What we only need is to create a page on face book. However, social media is a double-edged sword, through which good and bad reputation can be widespread in few seconds.

I follow some procedures to maintain my safety and comfort in my work, I completely refuse to go to the customer's home, I only agree to meet my clients in hotels in which their wedding ceremonies are celebrated. Also, there are specific areas where I refuse to go such as *Al-Haram* or the Six of October city, this is because they are so far from my family home in Misr Al Gdeeda. My sister who works with me and who I have trained accepts to go to those places. However, I prefer working in hotels in New Cairo or Misr Al Gdeeda where I can move from one hotel to the other easily because I serve about three brides per day. While my work occurs in prestigious hotels sometimes my clients are from the nouveau-riche. I do not hesitate to deal with them although they wanted me to make the veil glitterier and I always agree, to make the bride feel happy.

I have never changed the cost from one bride to the other which includes the materials I use in my work. I work as a free-lancer and my business can be

considered an integrated economic project. I have a team work, materials and partners whose work is related to mine. Me and my makeup artists' friends present bridal packages including makeup, veil and many other details related to the bride's look. When the Bride agreed on the package, this will cost her less than if she take each item separately.

The story of Adam:

Adam is a young man in his thirties. He is a communication Engineer in a company for telecommunication in Egypt. He is also a professional wedding photographer whose talent first appeared as a hobby at which he excelled to the extent that encouraged him to turn it from just a hobby to exercise in his leisure time to a professional career. His income from photography is much more than he gets from his work as a communication Engineer. When, I asked him about his client's class category, he replied:

The class category that I target are upper to upper middle class because they can value my work. I do not accept any work except that in decent places. One time I went to cover a wedding ceremony in a luxurious hotel but the social class of the two families was very low and it was apparent in their behavior, but I decided to stay until the end of the ceremony out of respect for my art.'

And when I asked him about the social acceptability of his work as a professional photographer while he is an engineer he answered:

People think that any manual profession is less prestigious than an office career, but I do not care. For me, my work as a photographer is a business that I started individually. It was an investment of my talent; it has become a successful integral economic project with all its aspects: I have equipment, a crew, and marketing system. I have about 200,000 followers on my Facebook page in which I have received good reviews. However, I did not intend to make a career-shift for two reasons; first, I am keen to succeed in my original career as well as photography. Second, as photography is a manual profession it needs some physical fitness. Thus, one day I will have to stop it and continue my work as a communication engineer.

When I asked him how he could develop his talent, he answered:

It is a matter of time management. After finishing my daily work, I used to attend online photography courses, as you know it is a very sensitive art; so, talent only

is not enough. One needs to enhance and improve his abilities. Furthermore, our field is so competitive there are many other famous photographers who display their photos on their Facebook accounts. Clients compare between all these pages and choose between them. The more you are accurate and update in your photos the more you have good reviews and become more desirable.

Summary

This chapter contains the accounts of four women and two men whose work are related to the economics of marriage: Shokria, Satuna, Rania, Maha, Mr. Yasser, and Adam. Their work rang from newly invented professions, to developed ones. All of them reflect how the economics of marriage in general and wedding ceremonies in particular has been commodified in the Egyptian neoliberal context. Their narratives provide significant insight about the role of neoliberalism in shaping my interlocutors' new subjectivities along two axes. First, illustrating how they were constituted as subjects of "human capital." Secondly, clarifying the ways in which they commodified themselves by the reorganization of their personal lives and relationships on the model of market relations and neoliberal economic policies that are characterized by competition and self-interest. This adaptation is well demonstrated by the current practice of "self-branding," a strategy of establishing a name and image of themselves that they manipulate for economic interest.

While most of the people I spoke with in this chapter are well educated persons no one of them have occupied a permanent job that suits his education except Adam. This is because he thought that his new profession as a wedding photographer needs physical abilities which will fade over years. as a result, he had decided to keep his permanent job as a communication Engineer although the salary that he gets from this job is not as much as the amount that he gains from photography. At this point it is worth noting that age and physical ability represent the natural limit of human capital that Foucault believes canto be overcome through technologies. While it might be an exaggeration from him that this limit can be cured through genetic engineering, plastic surgeries are now widely used to enhance the economic value of the body as an integral part of the human capital for some professions, such as the acting career or belly dancing. The latter profession is economically tied to the cost of wedding ceremonies, but unfortunately, I could not speak with any belly dancer.

Chapter Five:
**Socioeconomic Subjectivity as a Social Construction of Consumer Culture
and the Competitive Labor Market.**

The commodification of self would seem to be a contradiction. If a commodity is a product, something that can be bought and sold, then in what sense can the self be commodified?" Joseph E. Davis *The Commodification of Self*.

In this thesis I have tried to discuss two possible complementary conceptions. First, is the self-subjectification which is molded by the patterns of consuming goods and images. In this sense, self-knowing depends on the adoption of the brand of commodities we consume. In other words, we identify ourselves, and we judge the quality of our internal understanding through the Identikits of the things we purchase. Second, the concept of self-commodification includes the reshaping of our personal lives and relationships according to market relations characterized by competition and self-interest. This assumption is well illustrated by the current tendency towards "personal branding," a strategy of creating a name and image of ourselves that we adjust for economic gain and to become more suitable for competition dictated by the prevailing market economies. Both concepts of self-commodification concern the terms in which we subjectify ourselves and our well-being, and each has been facilitated by the liberation of self-expression from specific social and traditional constraints and beliefs. These two concepts are essential for building socio-economic subjectivities in the Egyptian neoliberal context.

This thesis has focused on a comparative class study of the socioeconomic subjectivity shaped, reshaped and displayed by Egyptians in two socioeconomic divergent neighborhoods Al-Rehab city and Ain-Shams in the contemporary urban Egypt in the neo-liberal context. In accordance with my primary argument that living in divergent socioeconomic areas does not necessarily mean belonging to a definite social class it has been found that the formative dynamics by which the residents' socioeconomic subjectivities are constructed differ. However, class is a central dimension in this project in which it is conceptualized as a driving force and a primary classification category that enabled me to understand the workings of its dynamics in the process of the construction, reconstruction and depiction of the socioeconomic subjectivity of each area, considering the stratified nature of the Egyptian society.

As I have previously mentioned, my thesis is a novelty in ethnographic research in Egypt because it concerns the intermediate segments of the Egyptian society while most the previous ethnographies mainly focused on *shaa'by* neighborhoods. In this chapter I will revisit the central themes that were frequently mentioned in the previous chapters in order to summarize the formative foundations of the constitution, reconstitution and presentation of the socioeconomic subjectivities in the two neighborhoods, Al-Rehab and Ain Shams. Reconsideration of these themes will enable me to highlight the points of similarities and divergences in the ways in which the residents in the two districts have constituted their socioeconomic subjectivities while they make their marital economic choices.

The economics of marriage: the commodification of marriage and the class dimension:

It might be significant to revisit Xavier's (2016) citation of Marx, in which the latter pointed out that capitalism is characterized by its totalizing imperative that aims in the first place to occupy all social elements and subordinate them to itself. This orientation works through its logic of commodification. This means everything must be turned into a commodity. Accordingly, marriage was totally commercialized. As I had argued, every single detail related to marriage was turned into a commodity or service and people through their modes of consuming those commodities are shaping their own socioeconomic subjectivities.

Marital economy manifolds different commodities, services and choices which made it an appropriate apparatus to explore how individuals construct their socioeconomic subjectivities through their consumption patterns. People in Al-Rehab and Ain-Shams made disparate selections between different goods and services attached to marriage and the construction of new families. The analyses of their choices and narrative reveals that despite the socioeconomic gap between them there are some similarities of the marital economic choices they made. For instance, they are all convinced that the social meaning attached to *shabka* as a fundamental commodity must be purchased is just a moral value as all interviewed stated the same statement, "it is a gift from the groom to his future wife" they were all agreed that it is not important how much it costs. However, they differed in their vision about its type 'whether it was diamond or gold' and the importance of keeping it, especially as it represents a financial value. The value that

could be allocated for more practical purposes for the bride in an economic climate which leaves no room for not benefiting from its financial value. For Lila it is highly important that her *shabka* ought to be a diamond because of the class expectations. For her, a diamond is a commodity exclusive for upper classes. She has assumed that people from lower classes do not even know what diamond is. It is worth noting that the cost of Lila's diamond *shabka* was a reasonable price that people from the middle and lower segments of the middle class and even from *shabi* communities can allocate for a golden *shabka* that in some cases exceeds this cost. For instance, Mohammed my interlocutor from Ain-Shams, had allocated LE 70,000 for the *shabka* of his son Mahmoud. Thus, the commodity signs attached to a diamond or gold entails class dimension. Eman from Al-Rehab also stated that the suitable *shabka* for her and her sister were also diamond twin rings. She illustrated that she basically does not prefer wearing gold. For Sawsan, from Al-Rehab, the matter differed. She had chosen a diamond *shabka* for her daughter based on the privileged economic status of their family, while the lower priced golden one was for her daughter in-law because the economic status for her family was modest. This stratification vision reflects that not only are the goods and services attached to marriage commodified, but also the bride herself was economically evaluated, and accordingly, the sort and the price of her *shabka* were determined. Here I want to stop on what Sameh said, "no one has the right to intervene, the *shabka* is a gift from the groom by which he evaluates the bride". Here again, while he did not mention the criteria according to which the bride can be evaluated, the value of her gift is predetermined. This narrative illustrates that the bride had turned to become an assessable subject with an exchange value. Amal from Ain Shams mentioned some features according to which the bride can be economically evaluated, and the amount of her delayed dowry determined, such as her beauty, education and whether she has a job or not, etc.

Among my interviewees from Al-Rehab only Ibrahim expressed his opposition to the importance of the *shabka*, especially when there are more important economic imperatives still needed for the new family with a lack of funds. What happened to Ibrahim's wife had exactly coincided with Yasmine, who had to sell her *shabka* to help her husband with the expenses of marriage. The two stories reflect the workings of class that dictate specific consuming scenarios within which the couples are forced to purchase specific commodities only for showing off regardless of the actual needs for the new family. Abeer pointed out that she could exchange her *shabka* by another innovative commodity to fulfill specific dreams, such as having a "Hollywood

smile”, which is a teeth-whitening that has recently spread out among the Egyptian high classes. “For instance, it is believed that by consuming a certain product advertised by a celebrity, the consumer will be endowed with their characteristics, or partake of their lifestyle. I have called this dream the “consumption dream”. (Xavier, 2016, p. 209). Thus, when Abeer purchases an exclusive upper-class commodity, she hopes to share a part of the socioeconomic subjectivity of this class.

Urban redistribution; lifestyle, economic capital and inhabitation dream:

The neoliberal transformation towards the market economy two decades ago maximizes economic growth through the perpetual search for new profitable activities, such as new productive technology, new inventions, new lifestyles, new spaces to conquer. As a result, a major policy shift toward privatization of urban development has occurred. This has resulted in the emergence of "new" urban spaces around Cairo, ‘gated communities’ which contain malls, clubs and green landscapes. The production of these spaces associated with the prevailing consumer society has led to the transformation of the urban economy to satisfy the upper and upper middle-class modes of consumption. The real estate developers use compound factors in their advertising, such as design, planning, and marketing principles to re-shape people’s desires and wants. Advertisements package a place as a commodity, romanticize a lifestyle, and sell it as an attractive place that is free of problems. The utopian consumption dream and lifestyle attached to gated communities has turned these communities to become models of ideal urban life and the home of choice for many.

The role that advertising and marketing play in fostering consumption and influencing housing preferences. Decisions about housing consumption in the Egyptian context are not simply a function of innate individual preferences. Rather, these decisions are influenced by efforts to sell images of western lifestyles in the contexts of international, national and local policy. (Almatarneh, 2013, p. 575) The traditional inner sense of identity and subjectivity - a self which is anchored in inner psychic life, which provides a sense of inner integrity and individuality - is denied and replaced: the locus of self becomes thoroughly other-directed, or extrinsic (Ewen, 1988)

Of course, one could not deny the fact that Al-Rehab and its counterpart residential gated communities offer its residents a unique lifestyle that is not available outside of their walls. This

justifies why all my informants from Al-Rehab wanted to continue their life there whether they are from older or younger generations. Spatial dimension in the economics of marriage is highly significant especially after the commodification of place and urban redistribution. Owning an apartment is the most important and expensive element in the cost of marriage without which no young man can get married. The location of the apartment also has become essential not only for class considerations but also for practicing a desired life style. This was clearly apparent in the narratives of my interlocutors especially, in Al-Rehab. Lila's parents had insisted that their daughter's new apartment ought to be in Al-Rehab or its counterpart Madinaty. This is because they wanted to guarantee the same unique lifestyle that Lila was used to.

The fact that gated communities offer privileges to a certain segment of society is often criticized because it creates separation in the spatial and social structure of the city. However, our findings indicate that developers of gated communities form their marketing strategies based on exactly this factor and thus market gated communities with the claim that they offer "a privileged, exclusive lifestyle (Almatarneh. 2013)

While some of the literature about gated communities has underscored the role that advertising and marketing play in fostering consumption and influencing housing preferences by representing an exaggerating image of utopian lifestyle (Almatarneh. 2013) as my research has shown that individuals do not blindly follow this romanticized lifestyle; most of my interlocutors from Al-Rehab who had experienced living there did not prefer any other residential alternatives. This indicate that their choice is based on a successful residential experience. While it may not promote the consumer dreams that listed in the ads, they had certainly achieved an exclusive and unique life for its residents. As a result, it has become their only option for housing. For instance, Lila's family refused a more spacious apartment in any Egyptian old or even new neighborhood; they only prefer an apartment in a gated community. Eman also has stated that her father insisted that her groom's family ought to buy them an apartment in Al-Rehab as an obligation to accept this marriage. She justified that he did not want her to change the lifestyle she had become accustomed to. Sawsan's experience illustrates that her family were always looking for the more prestigious and appropriate residential location. Their economic capital enabled them to develop their residential location to cope with the ever-changing urban redistribution associated with modern lifestyles and

socioeconomic subjectivities of the residents in these newly constructed urban places. As Sawsan and her family originally belonged to a *sha'bi* community, Al-Sayda, they always wanted to upgrade their social status; thus, they had chosen to reside in neighborhoods, such as Nassr city. As Abaza (2006) had stated, it was dominated by the emergent middle classes who accumulated their capital from migration to oil-rich countries and the Egyptian nouveau-riche. Finally, they have moved to Al-Rehab which entails the promise of a privileged lifestyle, good places and a community of good people and friends, in addition to: health-care, exclusivity, prestige, privacy and security. For Sameh, his father had already bought him an apartment in Madinaty where he himself intended to live. Hadeel's preference to live in Al-Rehab, and her reference to security as a feature of new housing complexes shows how important it is for her to practice a secure lifestyle that is commensurate with her own socio-economic subjectivity and self-evaluation.

To help sell the concept of gated communities, advertisers instill a sense of security of “the physical and financial soundness of their properties”. The buyer’s emotional needs for financial safety are addressed in the ads. Many security-related slogans are found in various gated communities ads, such as, “high security and ultra-luxurious”, “A gated community with controlled entrances”, “24-h security and controlled entry ...” However, no empirical study has yet been conducted to conclude that gated communities are definitely safer than non-gated communities. Therefore, it is likely that developers employ the different types of security measures to promote their product and increase their profitability. Developers make consumers respond to the advertising information and provoke them to take the action of purchasing. (Almatarneh, 2013, p.)

Ibrahim explained that his refusal to live in Imbaba was logical because of the enormous disparities between Imbaba and Al-Rehab, for many considerations such as hygiene, calm, and security; in addition to, its appropriation to his socioeconomic status and lifestyle.

The economic capital and accessibility to other forms of capital:

On the other hand, the old Egyptian neighborhoods, such as Ain Shams were over populated, polluted and unsafe. In this thesis I had not made a comparison between the two assigned neighborhoods to illustrate the huge socioeconomic disparities between them, but I had intended to explore the effects of neighborhood dynamics in producing and reproducing the socioeconomic subjectivity in those two areas. Furthermore, people from Ain Shams might have

the ambition to upgrade their places of residence but they do not have the needed financial capacity. To draw on Bourdieu (1985) he insists that between the different forms of capital, economic capital has a significant importance over the other as it enables the individuals who possess it to have access to other forms of capital that, as I have stated before, collectively constitute his social, cultural and economic subjectivity. For instance, Abeer from Ain Shams stated that she dreamed to live in an apartment on the Nile or in Masr- al-gdeda, but if it didn't work she would be satisfied and grateful to God. Abeer is a pharmacist and her future husband is a medical doctor, which means they have cultural capitals, but at the same time they lack the economic capital that could enable them to live in a more prestigious neighborhood as she had wished. Amal was so practical in her decision about the place of her future apartment. While she had dreamt to live in New Cairo or Al-Oboor city, she finally has decided to live in a middle-class neighborhood located next to her family home in Ain Shams and Roxi square where she and her future husband workplace is located. Amal's decision based on different considerations; economically, she and her future husband do not have a private car; so, if they bought their marital apartment in one of the modern districts in Cairo's borders, the everyday transportation will cost them a lot, in addition to the trouble of crowds and the long distances. Also, the price of an apartment in a new residential district will be higher than its counterpart in an old Cairene neighborhood. Their choice highlights how economic needs often control economic decisions. Both Mohamad and Somaya did not mention any tendency that his son Mahmoud or her daughter wanted to live in a more privileged residential area except Ain Shams. This is because the lack of economic capital which forced Mahmoud to have a rented apartment which made Somaya accept the apartment that is located in an infamous area in Ain-Shams. However, once her daughter's husband had saved a reasonable amount of money from his work in Saudi Arabia, he bought a new home in one of the new constructed cities, Al-Shorouk. Notably, money was at the heart of the residential choices among my interviewees from Ain Shams while lifestyle was the main residential aspiration of the Rehabians which I believe was a major difference between narratives from both neighborhoods.

The new generation in opposition to the traditional perceptions of marital economic imperatives:

One of the most positive themes that was visible throughout my research in both Al-Rehab and Ain Sahams was that young women and the men were trying to challenge the dominant marital economic choices and the social beliefs attached to them. Interestingly, the people I spoke with in Al-Rehab were perhaps more active in challenging those ideologies compared to their counterparts from Ain Shams.

The importance of the costly wedding ceremonies was the highest marital expenditure around which the disagreement between the old and new generation occurs. For instance, Lila and her *fiancé* Ashraf had completely refused the idea of celebrating their wedding in an expensive hall while they were recent graduates and did not have income. Also, they still depend on their families for living. However, Ashraf's father had insisted that it was not acceptable not to hold a wedding reception in one of the prestigious military hotels. He argued that he had leaders and coworkers at work who had invited him to attend their sons or daughters' weddings. Therefore, not celebrating the wedding of his only son would be a very embarrassing situation. He refused his son's proposal to save the cost of the wedding reception for something more practical than the ceremony. Unfortunately, the resistance of Lila and her *fiancé* failed because they could not challenge the parental and social pressure to maintain their old beliefs regarding the importance of wedding parties and the social connotations attached to it. One can attribute their failure to impose their opinion to their economic dependence on their families. As Singerman argues:

In this liminal state, young people remain financially dependent on their families (who, in large part finance the costs of marriage) for far longer than previous generations and they must live by the rules and morality of their parents and the dominant values of society (Singerman, 2007, p.6)

Eman also has stated that unlike her sister she did not want a wedding ceremony, nor had she been convinced by its importance. However, she was forced to accept under the insistence of her fiancé and his family. While Iman gets a decent salary, she admits she cannot rely solely on her income especially because her husband has not earned any money up until that moment, like all new graduate doctors. Interestingly, she was not dissatisfied with the continued financial dependence on her father and her husband's family as she had predicted that this would last for years after her marriage. Not only Lila and Eman had criticized the expensive weddings but Ibrahim also did not obey his father's suggestion to hold a prestigious wedding, however Ibrahim

was more active in challenging his father despite him not being fully economically independent, which sheds light on the ever-changing socioeconomic perspectives regarding marital necessities especially among the younger generations. In her narrative from Ain Shams Abeer was challenging the traditions of her *kafr* that dictate illogical expenditures. For instance, the high number of home equipment which are completely unnecessary or just for decoration. In addition, the showing off practices including the traditional dinner which cost equals the price of a washing machine or a refrigerator are also viewed as illogical. She thought changing these traditions would need to come from strong couples; of course, she and her *fiancé* were not among them. Her narrative underscores the strong roll that neighborhood plays in controlling marital economic choices. However, this role could be invalidated by the harsh economic situation that prevailed in the current Egyptian context. This clearly appears when the individuals from the *kafr* choose to substitute the costly dinner and buy a more practical gift for the groom's mother. However, this example did not constitute a radical change in the inherited traditions it hints that the prevailing economic atmosphere is stronger than the inherited beliefs. The story of Amal from Ain Shams also illustrates how the new well-educated generation has become more mature and practical, especially those whose economic status recommended reevaluation of their marital economic choices and to direct it to obtain the most benefits by the lowest cost.

From this intersection the discourse of the economy becomes an entire way of life, a common sense in which every action--crime, marriage, higher education and so on--can be charted according to a calculus of maximum output for minimum expenditure; it can be seen as an investment. As Christian Laval argues, all actions are seen to conform to the fundamental economic ideas of self-interest, of greatest benefit for least possible cost. It is not the structure of the economy that is extended across society but the subject of economic thinking, its implicit anthropology. (Read, 2009.p.31-32)

Most of the marital economic choices that Amal has made reflect Foucault and Laval's theory that within the neoliberal context, economic thinking has become in the heart of every human activity and aims to a single target that is maximizing the self-interest and minimizing the needed cost. For example, Amal preferred to live in an old Cairene neighborhood instead of a new city for economic perspectives, such as the price of the apartment and the cost of the daily transportation. Furthermore, she had also chosen a cheaper *shabka* to save some money for the *tamleek* apartment which has become a profitable investment nowadays. Even her choice of the makeup artist who is also a Veil designer at the same time and the photographer

from her friends, reflects her economic strategy, which is searching for high quality with the lowest price. This goal deserves challenging the old beliefs that contradict with it.

Neoliberalism and the ideas of human capital, self-branding, precarity, and subjectivity.

It is perhaps useful to draw on Standing's "*Precariat a Dangerous Class*". On the lingual level precariat is a combination between the adjective 'precarious' and 'proletariat', however One defining characteristic of the precariat is distinctive relations of production: so-called "flexible" labor contracts; temporary jobs; labor as casuals, part timers, or intermittently for labor brokers or employment agencies. But conditions of unstable labor are part of the definition, not the full picture. (standing, 2011)

Standing's definition (2011) of the precariat class includes different categories such as people with a relatively high level of formal education who have no choice but to accept jobs that are not commensurate with their educational status. These are the most frustrated groups because they cannot benefit from their educational skills and their educational qualifications have not placed them in the social and economic situation they aspire to. I argue that most of Egyptian educated youths have entered the precariat class or they partly-take from its characteristics in a way or another. For instance, when Eman from Al-Rehab had mentioned that her husband, a fresh graduate medical doctor who had graduated two years ago, almost did not earn any salary. However, he graduated with high GPA. The internship year that follows his graduation from medical school is supposed to give a chance for medical students to have clinical rotations for educational purposes, but unfortunately this is not the reality. Young doctors are exploited by taking night shifts and twenty-four hour shifts with a negligible wage of 250 LE per month. Eman told me that doctors and other hospital staff get meals distributed from the hospital's kitchen, but her husband didn't have the same right. Furthermore, doctors in the internship year are deprived from any healthcare or legal rights as they are recognized by neither the Ministry of Higher Education nor the ministry of Health. This is because of the system of career advancement for doctors enrolled in the Egyptian Ministry of Health, so this category is totally exploited by the state. This situation forces young doctors to seek the private sector and to work with no insurance, infection allowance or malpractice coverage. Young doctors are particularly vulnerable to find themselves in a precariat state as they are deprived from employment security, job security and skill reproduction security. Young doctors usually work

with no contracts sometimes filling “drop outs” for short periods of time giving them no secure income or job or opportunity to gain skills that enhance their career. Layla from Rehab told me that one day her fiancé was supposed to fill in a place for a colleague for a twelve hours-shift and he cancelled other plans for this shift, but after three hours his colleague showed up and the hospital secretary asked him to leave as he is no longer needed and gave him loose change for his time which made him feel very humiliated. Doctors in Egypt are bound by bureaucracy and they cannot advance in their career or get promoted to higher positions without working in governmental hospitals. Working in private hospitals is not counted to their years of experience. That further puts doctors under the control of the Ministry of Health and makes them accept any unfair conditions. In addition to this, Egyptian doctors are hostages to the long years of study and to the bureaucratic challenges of their career. Although many youths may consider a career shift to ensure better living conditions for themselves and their families, a career shift is not an easy option for a doctor. On the other hand, Egyptian youth who have other high educational degrees are fluctuating between working in the private or the public sectors. The former does not offer them a permanent job, good salary or commitments of health care and other benefits, and the latter has severely deteriorated in status throughout 1980s, 1990s and up until now. Contrary to the medical career, many of the university graduates have decided to make career-shifts or refuse to work in accordance with their educational degrees and instead to start, their own business. As Foucault writes summarizing this situation: “Homo economicus, is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself”. (p.27) For instance, Mr. Yasser who had graduated from School of Commerce, had preferred not to work according to his academic certificate. He turned himself into a profit-oriented project when he worked as a wedding planner, the activity that was supposed to increase his capacity to earn income needed to achieve self-satisfaction. As a result, he has acquired a competitive economic subjectivity in the current neoliberal context in Egypt. My interlocutors in chapter four represent different examples of individuals who made themselves, and were made subjects that have exchange value; their stories illustrate how they have invested in themselves and have benefited from the commodification of marriage. Another example of a production of new subjectivity that is embodied is the story of Maha, the way in which she had branded herself is identical to Davis’s description (2003) of the way in which individuals can successfully brand themselves in a way that enables them to compete in the market.

Concluding Notes

The novelty of my thesis stems from being an ethnographic investigation that looks at a socioeconomic comparison between Al-Rehab and Ain Shams youth in a definite moment of getting married. The mainstream ethnographies that have been conducted in Egypt were mainly focused on low socioeconomic and *sha'bi* communities.

Again, neoliberalism is a subjectification force that operates by two mechanisms First, the commodification of all aspects of life. Second, by creating a competitive labor atmosphere based on self-interest within which individuals turn to be entrepreneurs who invest in themselves, drawing on Foucault (Read, 2009). In this thesis I discussed subjectivity as a neoliberalism construction, consumerism as a socioeconomic system and class, as a formative social pressure and an apparatus of classification. While the socio-economic subjectivity of the various segments of the Egyptian middle class is strongly influenced by neoliberal and capitalist economy there are other factors that have been observed to have a role in this regard such as individual characteristics, societal pressure, peer pressure, neighborhood dynamics and economic status.

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