Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Shahd Saleh

Interviewee: Nazek Nossier

Date: 20/02/12

Place: Interviewee’s office located in the SAPE department (sociology, anthropology, psychology and Egyptology), second floor in the HATEM building at The American University in Cairo

College: The American University in Cairo

Prof.: Dr Kim Fox

Date completed: 21/02/12
Dr. Nazek Nossier:

Is the Associate Professor of Sociology at the American University of Cairo (AUC). She is above the age of 60 and lives in Dokki, Mohandsin in Cairo. She graduated from AUC with a Bachelors Degree in 1963 and continued to do her masters at AUC until she graduated with an M.A. in 1970. Dr Nossier then went on to get her Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1976.

Dr Nossier has no connections to the PAOC.

I found that interviewing Dr Nossier was appropriate because of the topic I selected. I decided to research women and marriage in the Egyptian society. Since my focus discussed society, it was only right that Dr Nossier would be the professor that would help give me answers to the questions I had.

The topics I discussed during the interview were:

- Women
- Divorce
- Egyptian society and culture
- The increasing independence of women
- The reasons behind the need to getting married
Glossary

“I want to get married” – a memoir written by Ghada Abdel Aal about the number of different suitors she encountered.

“Ma’zoon” – a religious figure which conducts marriages in Egypt, making them official.
20 February 2012

Persons present: Nazek Nossier – P

Shahd Saleh – S

Saleh: Hi my name is Shahd and today I’ll be interviewing Dr. Nazek Nossier about women and marriage.

Nossier: I’m Dr Nazek Nossier sociologist, and I live in dokki and age I am above 60.

Saleh: okay… first question I have for you is, why is it expected of girls in the Egyptian society to be married straight after finishing university?

Nossier: (interviewee pause before answer) remember that Egypt is a traditional society and though yes there is more education particularly among females, but still the traditional view of parents wanting to be ascertained and wanting to be sure their daughters will get married at a, in their opinion appropriate age, yes they allow them to go to university pursue a higher education because now it is getting to be an ideal value that people aspire to. But more importantly is that they get married so they do not want them to stay much longer, and remember by the time they finish university it’s like around 22 and that is way above what it used to be 20, 30 years ago.

Saleh: so your saying that because they finish university earlier, (interviewer mistake corrected) more later at the age of 22 they have to get married quicker?
Nossier: (interviewee thinking before answering) not quicker, but I mean to, to parents and to families it’s already passed the age that they themselves got married at. Then it about time they get married and they do not want to prolong it much further.

Saleh: this brings me to my next question, in Egypt it seems that women become spinsters at an early age (interviewee expression change at use of the word) considered to like European or western countries. If they reach the age of like 35 ,36 it, it and they have no husband and have no children the why is that?

Nossier: well I, disagree with part of your question that is calling women spinsters. (Interviewee pausing to continue) I mean a woman my refuse to get married or may not have had a proper match. It is not married just for the marriage sake. With educated women now they become a bit selective you know as to their partner and if they do not find the proper match for them, and choose to you know, go on with a career, (interviewee pauses shortly) spinster is a loaded term, it is a negatively loaded term and yes I have seen TV programs actually, I was once invited to a TV program that was discussing the concept or the phenomenon of growing numbers of spinsters and I, I objected to calling unmarried females a spinster whatever her age may be. Because as I said it is a negative connotation and sometimes you know this description of unmarried females and because of the negativism that it carries pushes girls (interviewee brief pause) into marriages that you know do not succeed. So in my opinion it is worse to being a divorced than being unmarried, especially if there are children involved, because it becomes a burden, and the children suffer with parents separated. So in my opinion it is better if the girl does not find the
appropriate match that she does not get married just for the sake of being married and then you know ultimately perhaps she may get divorced.

Saleh: so why does society pressure women to get married?

Nossier: because we are a conventional society and families, and family formation is an important value in society and also because that you know girls or, or females in general (brief pause) are believed to be, or are believed that they should not be independent, they should not be on their own and therefore has or (interviewee mistake being corrected), have to be supported or have a male next to them. And of course it starts with the father, then perhaps a brother, then maybe an uncle and ultimately should be a husband. So you know this is the driving force that, female cannot be on her own, that there should be a male and at a certain point in age the logical male would be a husband.

Saleh: there was a book that was written “I want to get married” by Ghada Abdel Aal (interviewee interrupts trying to recognize the book) that was written and she is the main character and her main purpose is to find a husband through introductions by her family. Why, why do so many women relate with her when the book came out it sold many copies, why do so many women relate to the fact that they want to get married?

Nossier: (outside interruption) I think perhaps part of the driving force is that you know females, I don’t know if males also brought the book or just females, but perhaps they were curious to find out you know what is she writing about. I don’t know if the book would help them in any way. I have not read the book and perhaps I don’t know what does it contain exactly. It is like memoirs is it?
Saleh: yes it’s more of memoirs of many husbands that her parents introduced to, and …

Nossier : husbands? That she actually got married to?

Saleh : potential husbands .

Nossier: ya ya , okay suitors.

Saleh: yes … um about divorce in Egypt why is there a high divorce rate?

Nossier: (pause before answer) I think divorce results from bad choices that are made. Now the high divorce rate according to research and that research even, was, that I am talking about has been done in the western countries, but when you think about it it could very well be an explanation also for, for the rise in divorce rates. And that is in earlier times when women were not educated and did not have a job and got married, she in a way had to continue barring a life even if she is not too happy about it because she has nowhere else to go. Who’s going to support her? And in many times families just were reluctant to get their daughter back, with her perhaps one or two or perhaps more children. It is a burden, an economic burden. So with women more educated and having a job and in a way independent, could be dependant financially, she has a choice she doesn’t have to, continue in an unsuccessful marriage or in an unhappy marriage. Because one of the reasons you know for previous women to continue was not because not being able to support themselves, but if she can support herself without the need of husband, she chooses to. I mean nothing would force her to continue in an unhappy situation.

Saleh: so, is it also linked with getting married at an early age like you said at 22 is, is quite early to get married.
Nossier: (pause to answer) 22 is early in international standards but in, in traditional society it is not. because the legal age of marriage is 16, okay, according to the law no female, no ‘ma’zoon’, or no you know somebody who is doing the, officiating the contracts, should marry a female before the age of 16, who is younger than the age of 16. (Pause to continue) so, 22 in along these terms is not early. But remember those who wait until they are 22 are probably those that have acquired you know a decent level of education, and probably also is working. Those that get married before that are likely not to have education and are likely not to be you not to have a job. And therefore are usually stuck with their marriage. Whereas those who, as I said you know have a source of income that can make them independent and find that they are unhappy with the marriage probably would get out of it.

Saleh: I have a question, about educated women in Egyptian society; still have the idea that they themselves are eager to get married at an early age even though they are more educated and more aware of the disadvantages of doing so.

Nossier: ya, because again its culture and because again of the use of word spinster for somebody you know who is kind of left behind without getting married. All of these are, are various types of pressure that females experience in a traditional society. And also knowing that, even among educated, I often heard, (pause) females say I want to get married to get away from the control of my father and brother. So she thinks that by getting married you know, she is getting away from a controlling male that has been controlling her life. Not realizing that you
know she is getting into a situation that may not be all that happy or even better than the one she has escaped, of a father and a brother.

Saleh: and my final question would be why is divorce considered a failure in our society? If, if you are unable to continue the marriage?

Nossier: well again because it was believed that, or it used to be that in earlier times females just (pause) were able to bare the unhappiness and invest of their marriage and invest in their children and taking care and you know, were often advised, well it is important to have their father Around and you know bare that unhappiness because of the sake of your children. So, those that end up in divorce are the ones that were not able to make it, and therefore are considered as failures. And usually when it’s in a divorce situation without even finding out what went wrong, quite often the blame is placed on the woman.

Saleh : okay thank you very much for your time .

Nossier: okay ya Shahd.