

***Patterns of Marriage and Divorce in North African  
Countries 1970's- 2020's:  
Towards and Agenda for Future Research***

***Mohamed Mohieddin  
Professor of Sociology  
[mmohieddin@gmail.com](mailto:mmohieddin@gmail.com)***

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## **Introduction**

This paper concerns itself with the processes of family formation and dissolution/divorce in the five Arab North African countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia with a focus that is heavily tilted toward the second of these two aspects of family life and transitions i.e., divorce. The paper seeks to describe based on secondary data some of the changes these societies have witnessed over the past few decades in their patterns of marriage and divorce. Furthermore, it provides some very preliminary explanations of the changes in these trends. Finally, and based on the description and analysis of these trends, the paper attempts to develop and propose an agenda for future research on marriage and divorce in North African countries.

Including this introduction, the paper is divided into five sections, the second of which deals with the issue of data sources, its problems and limitations. Section three attempts to describe the socio-economic characteristics and context in which marriages and divorces in North African Countries take place. Section four is split into two sub-sections, the first deals with the marriage while the second addresses that of divorce. In doing so, it uses marriage and divorce rates to describe changes overtime and then attempt to develop some explanations of these changes. The final section of the paper develops a research agenda proposing it focuses on the societal cost of divorce.

The continued importance of marriage and of family has always been at the center of the social organization of Arab countries regardless of the religious affiliation. In the Islamic tradition, family dissolution through divorce is considered “The worst of Halal”. Orthodox Christianity which is the religious denomination of most Egyptian Christians adopts an even more stringent stance on divorce permitting it in very limited number of cases such as adultery, homosexuality, mental disorder among other ones. Even then it is not called divorce, rather it is recognized as “Marriage annulment” in which case the annulled parties are allowed to remarry. In both religions then, this allowance which is automatically allowed in Islam and permitted in Christianity indicates the importance and centrality of the institution of marriage and the continuity of family and exceptional nature of divorce.

It is not merely culture that stresses the importance of marriage. Marriage, and especially consanguineous marriage, plays an extremely important role in the process of reproduction of family/Household. Consanguineous marriage ensures that family property remains within the confinements of the family both within the same generation and/or across generations<sup>1</sup>. In this respect, and speaking in Marxist terminology, relations of production are transformed into forces of production in certain societies. Consanguinity, though declining is still widely spread in all Arab societies and is considered one of its distinctive features.

Endogamous and consanguineous marriage is estimated to comprise 20% of all marriages in the contemporary world. In the Arab region up to half of all marriages, conform to this pattern. Statistics show that average rates of marriage between relatives of 40-50% of all marriages in the Arab world, these numbers may be up to the level of 60% in some societies, as in the Sudan, Mauritania, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia<sup>2</sup>. In the five countries under consideration in this paper available research suggests that rates of consanguinity range between

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<sup>1</sup> marriage between relatives and in particular between first cousins especially parental cousins followed by maternal cousins. Hoda Rashad, Magued Osman and Farzaneh Rouddi-Fahimi. (2005). Marriage in the Arab World. Population Reference Bureau. <https://www.org>

<sup>2</sup> Kaltham Ali Al-Ghanim, (2020). Consanguineous marriage in the Arab societies. Journal of Psychology and Clinical Psychiatry. Vol. 2, No. 6: 166-168. DOI: 10.15406/jpcpy.2020.11.00692

22.6% and 34.0% in Algeria, 20.9% and 32.8% in Egypt, 48.8% in Libya, 19.8% and 28.0% in Morocco and 20.1% and 39.3% in Tunisia. Thus, at least around one fifth of all marriages in four of the five countries are accounted for by consanguineous marriage with an average upper ceiling of about one third of all marriages (33.5%)<sup>3</sup>.

Aside from economics, consanguinity is seen as marriage stabilizing factor reducing the possibility of family breakdown. However, in recent years all Arab countries including those under consideration in this paper, have been witnessing two contradictory trends. On the one there has been systemic decline in marriage rates accompanied by rising rates of divorce.

### ***Data Sources, their Limits and Problems***

Original plan of this paper called for an analysis of family formation and dissolution trends in the five North African countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. However, data availability suffers from formidable hurdles. On the one hand, Data either lack for continuity across a reasonable number of years to allow detecting changes in patterns of marriage and divorce. On other hand, sometimes the data is too old as in the case of Libya to make sense of what has been going on in the past few years which are of major concern to this research. In addition, the data are sometimes presented in percentages (Morocco) or rates per 1000 population (Algeria, Egypt and Libya) or in absolute terms (Tunisia) thus making any sense of it requires the availability of other data parameters which are not necessarily available to allow for example for the calculation of specific rates such as age specific marriage and divorce rates. Our World in Data web site also makes available older data that dates back to the period between 1970 – 2006/2007 with uneven intervals ranging in some instances between 10 and 15 years for four of the five countries (Morocco is missing)<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the data also do not necessarily cover the same years. Finally, some of the statistical data are anecdotal one driven from surveys that are either nationally representative or of limited small non-representative samples as those carried out by graduate students seeking to obtain academic degrees. Table 2 provides just one example of such discrepancy in the data with regard to the simplest indicator of marriage and divorce, namely, marriage and divorce rates.

Aside from the problems related to hard quantitative data, language represents another challenge in more than one way. On the one hand, data and references are presented in three different languages, Arabic, English and French with French dominant in the three francophone countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (Almost exclusively French) while Arabic and English are used in Egypt and Libya making difficult for bilingual scholars to follow. Furthermore, the assumption that there is only one Arabic language needs to be questioned especially in technical terminology. In Tunisia, for example, a researcher describing the various types of divorce speaks of what he called “Rates of Divorce “نسب الطلاق ”إنشاء”. Although he explained what does this mean, it is difficult to understand what he meant by this expression. Lack of standardized terminology constitutes another hurdle to reckon with. Given the above problems the forthcoming analysis must be on the one hand taken with extreme caution and on the other hand the I tend to lean towards focusing on Egypt which I originally attempted avoid at all cost. Prior to proceeding with

<sup>3</sup> See, [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Consanguinity-rates-in-Arab-populations-Minimum-and-maximum-reported-rates-are\\_tbl1\\_26878532](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Consanguinity-rates-in-Arab-populations-Minimum-and-maximum-reported-rates-are_tbl1_26878532)

<sup>4</sup> See, <https://ourworldindata.org/marriages-and-divorces>

data analysis, I attempt to contextualize the phenomena under consideration in their socio-economic context.

### **The Socio-Economic Context of North African Arab Countries**

Arab North African countries are a highly heterogeneous agglomeration of nation states in terms of population sizes, GDP, GDP per capita, state of human, gender and youth development. As indicated in Table 2, the total population of the 22 Arab countries was estimated in 2021 to be nearly around 456,520,777 inhabitants<sup>5</sup>. The population of the five North African Arab countries was estimated in the same year to hover around 204.6 million, thus accounting for nearly 44.8% of all Arab population. There, however, exists marked differences between the five North African countries in terms of population size. Of those 204.6 population Egypt 's share accounts for a little one half (51.0%) while that of Algeria explains another 22.0% followed by Morocco's population accounting for nearly 17.7%. Tunisia and Libya relative population shares account for 5.8% and 3.45 respectively.

**Table 1: State of Data Availability in the Five North African Countries on Rates of Marriage and Divorce**

Country	Years for which data on Marriage is Available	Years for which data on Divorce is Available
Algeria	1970-2007, 2010-2021	2005-2019
Egypt	1970-2006, 2000-2021	2000-2021
Libya	1970 – 2002, 2000-2011	2000-2011
Morocco	2004 - 2014	1960, 2004 - 2014
Tunisia	1970 – 2006, 2014- 2019	2010-2019

Sources: For Algeria,

ديموجرافيا الجزائر 2014؛ محمد الطويل. عوامل إنتشار الطلاق في المجتمع الجزائري: دراسة ميدانية لعينة من المطلقين والمطلقات بمدينتي الجزائر والبويرة. رسالة مقدمة لنيل درجة الماجستير في علم الاجتماع الديموجرافي. جامعة الجزائر، كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، قسم علم الاجتماع: 2005-2006. سامية بن عمر وربيعة بن خليف. ظاهرة الطلاق في المجتمع الجزائري: رؤية سوسولوجية. مجلة العلوم الاجتماعية، العدد 20، سبتمبر 2016: 110-129؛ نذير بوحنيكة. قراءة سوسولوجية لظاهرة الطلاق في المجتمع الجزائري. مجلة العلوم الإنسانية-المركز الجامعي-تندوف-الجزائر، العدد 2: سبتمبر 2017: 149-163.

Foe Egypt. Annual Bulletins of Marriage and Divorce Statistics, 2021. Cairo, CAPMAS, Reference NO, 71=12121-2021.

For Libya, Compiled from several Statistical books for the years 2002, 2007,2012 and 2015. State of Libya, Bureau of Statistics and Census. Statistical Books for the corresponding years.

For Morocco. Anecdotal data was generously supplied by Professor Mokhtar Al Harras. But not enough to warrant serious analysis.

المندوبية السامية للتخطيط، اتجاهات تطور الزواج والطلاق لدى المرأة المغربية. N.D.

HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AU Plan. Femmes et Hommes en Chiffres 2016. 8 Mars Journee International de La Famme.

HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AU Plan. Enquête Nationale Démographique à Passages Répétés 2009-2010: Principaux résultats. Rabat, le 14 mars 2011.

For Tunisia, see

منصف المحواشي، تطوّر ظاهرة الطلاق في المجتمع التونسي: قراءة في المؤشرات الإحصائية ودلالاتها.

Vécus, représentations et culturalité, 3, 2007: 11-37.

Institut National de la Statistique (INS). Divorces prononcés par les tribunaux de 1<sup>re</sup> instance et par anne judiciaire; Mariage selon le groupe d'age de l'pouse; Mariages selon le groupe d'age de l'poux.

According to the World Bank, the total GDP of all countries amounted to 2,447,584 billion U\$ or about 2.88 which substantially less than their relative share of the world population estimated at

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/letter-booklet-2021-world-population.pdf>

5.88 % by three percentage points. By comparison, the African countries which as indicated above account for 44.8% of all Arab population have a relative share of 22.9% of the entire Arab countries' income. Speaking in terms of PPP per capita income, the five North African Arab countries have an average per capita GDPs as measured by PPP of U\$ 10,330 which is less than the combined average per capita income of all other Arab countries which stood at 14,793.9 U\$ in the same year. This amounts to nearly 70% of the said average per capita income of Arab Countries. However, baring non-oil producing countries from the equation yields to a totally different picture. The average income of the non-oil producing countries amounts to about U\$ PPP of 5,279.3 which is about 51.1% of the average per capita income of five North African countries. In fact, Morocco which has the average per capita income of all the five countries enjoys a per capita income that is in excess of non-oil producing countries by a little over one quarter (26.6%).

**Table 2: Socio-Economic Indicators of North African Arab Countries, All Arabs and The World**  
Table 2 About here

Recent literature on inequality in the Arab countries suggests that MENA region at large is the most unequal region in the world where the top 10% of the population gains 61% of the entire wealth. By comparison, according to ESCWA data, 116 million people across 10 Arab countries, or 41 percent of the total population, were classified as poor, while another 25 percent were vulnerable to poverty. This translates to an estimated 250 million people who may be poor or vulnerable out of a population of 400 million<sup>6</sup>. It is worth noting in this respect that poverty increased considerably in the Arab countries during the past decade. Between 2011 and 2015, extreme poverty in MENA has nearly doubled, rising from 2.1% of the population to 5%. It is further estimated that as of 2018, about 18.6 million people were living on less than \$1.90 per day. Additionally, studies have shown that the region's population is particularly vulnerable to poverty<sup>7</sup>.

The countries under consideration in this paper are mostly highly urbanized with an overall average of 59.5% of their population living in cities and urban centers. Libya leads the way with four fifth of its population being urbanized. It is followed by Algeria with 73% then Tunisia, Morocco while Egypt running a distant fifth with merely 43% of its population living in urban areas. Nonetheless, and due to its population size the absolute volume of its urban population is almost equal to the total population of Algeria (44.7 million Egyptians are living in urban areas).

According to the Human Development Report 2020/2021, with exception of Morocco, which is classified as a medium human development country occupying the 123<sup>rd</sup> place among 191 countries, the remaining four are classified as "High Human Development" countries with Algeria leading the way with a HDI value of .745 placing it in the 91<sup>st</sup> place while Egypt and Tunisia are tied in the second position claiming the 97<sup>th</sup> rank with a score of .731. Libya, on the other hand, assumed the fourth spot with an HDI value of .718 permitting it to claim the 104<sup>th</sup> place.

Of overall unemployment the five Arab countries have an average unemployment rate that is 1.74 folds that of the world as a whole (11.5% compared to 6.6%). Compared to other Arab countries

<sup>6</sup> Carnegie, How Poverty and Inequality Are Devastating the Middle East. <https://www.carnegie.org/topics/topic-articles/arab-region-transitions/why-mass-poverty-so-dangerous-middle-east/>

<sup>7</sup> It must be noted in this respect that is now axiomatic that poverty is not merely a matter of income. 7 Things to Know about Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa. <https://borgenproject.org/7-things-to-know-about-poverty-in-mena/>

their combined average rate exceeds that of other Arabs by nearly 2.5%. With Libya having an unemployment rate that surpasses that of Arab countries by 8.6 percentage points. Tunisia also suffers from higher-than-average unemployment when compared to other Arab countries by about 4.1%. Two of the five African countries, namely Morocco and Algeria have unemployment rates that are either identical or slightly above other Arab countries. Egypt enjoys the lowest overall unemployment rate.

Speaking of youth unemployment, the data in Table 1 shows first that without exception of Egypt, in the case of male youth unemployment rate which is lower than the average for all Arab countries, the other four countries have higher male youth unemployment youth pushing the overall average youth unemployment in the five countries by nearly 6 percentage points. Second, the data indicate that across the board female youth unemployment is much higher than that of their male counterparts. In this respect, it is shown that female youth unemployment is double that of males. Further it is nearly 2.56 times its world average compared with only 1.42 times among their male counterparts. Such inequality in access to employment is probably one of the causes of the high rates of divorce among young married female youth.

High unemployment among youth in Arab countries at large and more specifically, in North African countries is accompanied by poor availability of opportunities in post basic schooling opportunities as evident by the proportional share of those not in school, employment or training (NEET). It is noted, however, that the relative share of this category is lower for North African countries for both males and total (including males and Females) than the world average whether with the exclusion of high-income countries or their inclusion. It is further noted that the difference between the average of the total for five countries and that of the world is larger than the difference between the average for males and the comparable world average. This suggests that females in these countries are more likely to fall into the cracks of NEET than their male counterparts.

Thinking in terms of social indicators, the available data shows that the five North African Arab countries are fairing relatively better than the rest of the rest of the Arab countries and that there is a relatively limited range of variations among them. In 2020, the average Arab HDI stood at about .705. By comparison, the five countries HDI was estimated at .721 thus amounting to 1.6 percentage points in favor of the five countries, yet they fell short of the world average which stood at .737 by the same proportion of 1.6 percentage points. It is worth noting in this respect that the overall average of Arab countries includes the HDIs of the oil producing countries which are classified as having “very high development Index”. Excluding these countries pushes the average for the remaining Arab countries to 0.588 thus amounting to a whopping difference of 13.3 percentage points along the HDI<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> There can be very little doubt about the effects of political turmoil witnessed by the Arab countries post 2010 on its human development index. A recent publication by ERF attempted to quantitatively estimate where the six Arab countries of Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Yemen would have been had they remained on their pre-conflict development trajectories assuming that they would have maintained the pre 2010 annual rate of advancement between 2000-2010. The publication used the Domestic Conflict Index (DCI) which uses data on forcibly displaced population (From UNHCR and IDMC) and on conflict frequency and intensity from the Uppsala Conflict Data to address the effects of conflict on Arab human development index. The Study concludes that “had all conflict-affected Arab countries maintained the pre-conflict human development trajectories 2000 and 2010, the Arab region might have achieved an HDI score of 0.7 in 2019, instead of an estimated 0.684”. See, Khalid Abu Ismail, Youssef Chaitani and Manuella Nehme. Conflicts hindering development in the Arab region. Economic Research Forum. February 22, 2022. Available on the Internet at: <https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2022/02/20/conflicts-hindering-development-arab-region/>

The conditions that women experience is an important indicator of development. In general, the Arab region systematically achieved the lowest score on the Global Gender Gap Index. Their combined average score in 2021 report amounted to .543 compared with a world average of .680<sup>9</sup>. The average associated with the Arab African countries stood at .582 account for almost 10 points below the world average. This low ranking is reflective of the unequal distribution, access and control of resources which favors men over women. This inequality is entrenched in social norms which are conducive to GBV and other discriminatory and harmful practices against women, young and adolescent girls such as early marriage FGM among others.

Finally, the status of youth in these countries is especially important. In this respect the data shows that while the over all Youth Development Index (YDI) of Arab countries stood at .657 and that of non-oil producing mostly poor Arab countries was estimated at .568, the five African countries were indicating better performance the two previous groups of Arab countries with an estimated value of .674. As is the case with the other two social indicators (HDI and GGI) considerable variations do exist between the North African Arab countries with countries Tunisia leading the way and occupying the 81<sup>st</sup> rank among world countries followed by Morocco and Algeria running neck to neck claiming the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> spots, while Libya and Egypt are running distant fourth and fifth occupying the 110 and 123 positions. These positions reflect the structural crisis of which youth in these countries are experiencing. This crisis is a compound one covering the span as evident from the data of employment and opportunity, health and welling, education, equality and inclusion, political and civic participation and peace and security<sup>10</sup>. To these within the regional context at large and in the five North African Arab countries and for the sake of localizing the index must be added the domain of family formation and de-formation/dissolution. In what remain of this paper I turn my attention to this proposed dimension.

### ***Trends of Marriage and Divorce in North African Countries***

#### ***Marriage in North African Countries***

##### ***Rates of Marriage***

Over the past few decades universal data on marriage show that marriage is becoming less common in most parts of the world, marriage rates are declining and the relative proportion of people who ever married among males and females has been shrinking. Using two data points for 174 countries for women between the age of 30-34 years between roughly 1985 and 2002, she data showed that in these countries which included China and India where marriage is still largely universal, all other big countries such as Russia, Mexico, USA, Pakistan, Brazil, Japan, Italy, Germany and France among others are have been showing decline in marriage rates. Up until the early years of the second decade of this millennium, the only countries with population of over 50 million people have been showing an increase in their rates of marriage. These include Vietnam, Democratic Republic of Congo and The Philippines<sup>11</sup>.

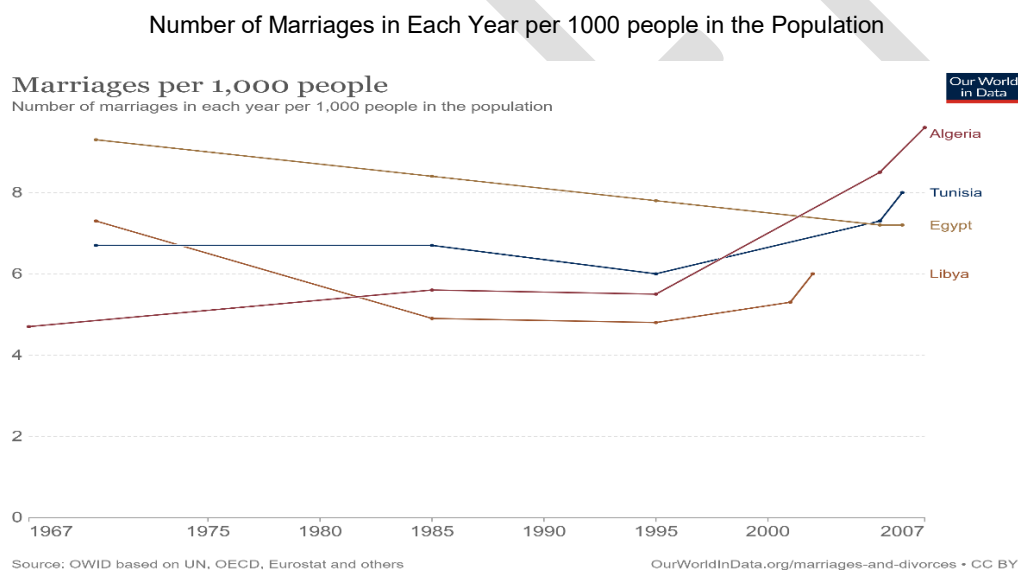
<sup>9</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index, 2021. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For further details on these domains and their measurement indicators see; The Commonwealth. (2020). Global Development Report: 2020. Available on the Internet at: <https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/global-youth-development-report-2020.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> See, Philip N. Cohen. (2013). Is Marriage Declining Globally: Can You Say that? Available on the Internet at: <https://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2013/06/12/marriage-is-declining/>

Over the period stretching from 1970 to the middle of the first decade of the twenty first century and according to data provided by the UN World Marriage Database<sup>12</sup>, the North African Arab countries for which data is available show diverse patterns of marital behavior among the populations of the countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia between 1970 and 2006/07. On the one hand, and as shown in figure 1 Both Algeria and Tunisia are showing similar pattern of steady growth in the number of marriages per 1000 people (up from 5.6 to 9.6 between 1985 and 9.6 per 1000 for Algeria and 6.7 to 8.0 for Tunisia between 1970-2006). Libya on the other hand, displayed a “U” shape pattern whereby its rate of marriage per 1000 people declined from 7.3 in 1970 to 5.6 in 1985 to reach a rock bottom of 4.5 by the advent of 1995. However, it bounced again by 2002 where it had risen to 6.0 per 1000 people. Egypt is the only country that was showing a steady decline between 1970 and 2006. In this respect marriages per one thousand people declined by a little over two points down from 9.30 to 7.2 marriages<sup>13</sup>.

**Figure 1: Marriage Per 1000 People in North African Countries 1967-2007**



More recent data on marriage rates per 1000 people in two of the four countries presented earlier (Algeria and Egypt) indicate that they have witnessed a reverse trend in their marriage rates. In this respect data on Egypt show that effective 2007 marriage rates started to witness an upward trend until 2012 whereby it went up from 8.2 to 10.9 marriages per 1000 people. Since 2013, the downward trend returned to dominate the scene where it went down to 10.5 marriages per 1000 people. By the advent of 2021, the rate of marriage has collapsed to its level of 2008. Algeria, as shown in Table 3 witnessed a more fluctuating rates of marriage where between 2010 and 2013 where it reaches a peak of 10.2 marriages per 1000 people, however, starting 2014 the trend was one of steady decline where it systematically went down 9.9 marriages to 6.4 marriages per 1000 people in 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Based on [UN World Marriage Database](https://ourworldindata.org/Marriages-and-Divorces-by-age-and-cohort) deposited at [https://ourworldindata.org/ Marriages and Divorces – by age and cohort](https://ourworldindata.org/Marriages-and-Divorces-by-age-and-cohort)

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, Op. Cit using data from Eurostat database, United Nations Compilation of marriage rates and marital status from 2008 and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and IPUMS compilation of microdata from censuses around the world reaches a conclusion concerning Egypt that is diametrically opposed to that suggested to that suggested by the data provided by Our World in Data.



**Table 3: Marriages Per 1000 People in Algeria and Egypt: 2010 – 2021**

Year	Algeria	Egypt
2007	---	8.2
2008	---	8.6
2009	---	9.7
2010	9.6	10.8
2011	10.1	10.9
2012	9.9	10.9
2013	10.2	10.5
2014	9.9	10.8
2015	9.3	10.7
2016	8.8	10.1
2017	8.2	9.6
2018	7.9	9.1
2019	7.3	9.4
2020	6.7	8.7
2021	6.4	8.6

Source: For Algeria, compiled by the author from sources listed under table 1. For Egypt, CAPMAS, Op. Cit.

### ***Average Age of Women at Marriage***

In many countries, declining marriage rates have been accompanied by an increase in the age at which people are getting married. Data not displayed here show that in 2017 people in richer and more advanced countries particularly in North America and Europe were getting married at an older age compared to the early 1990s. In Sweden, for example, the average age of marriage for women went up from 27.7 years of age in 1990 to 33.8 years in 2017. By comparison, in several sub-Saharan African countries, the average age at marriage has remained low and unchanged for several years. In Niger, where child marriage is common, the average age at marriage for women has remained constant, at 17 years, since 1990. Saudi Arabia, A Muslim Arab country has also witnessed a change in the age of marriage as Saudi women have experienced about 5 years difference in age of marriage up from 21.7 years in 1987 to 26.6 years in 2017<sup>14</sup>.

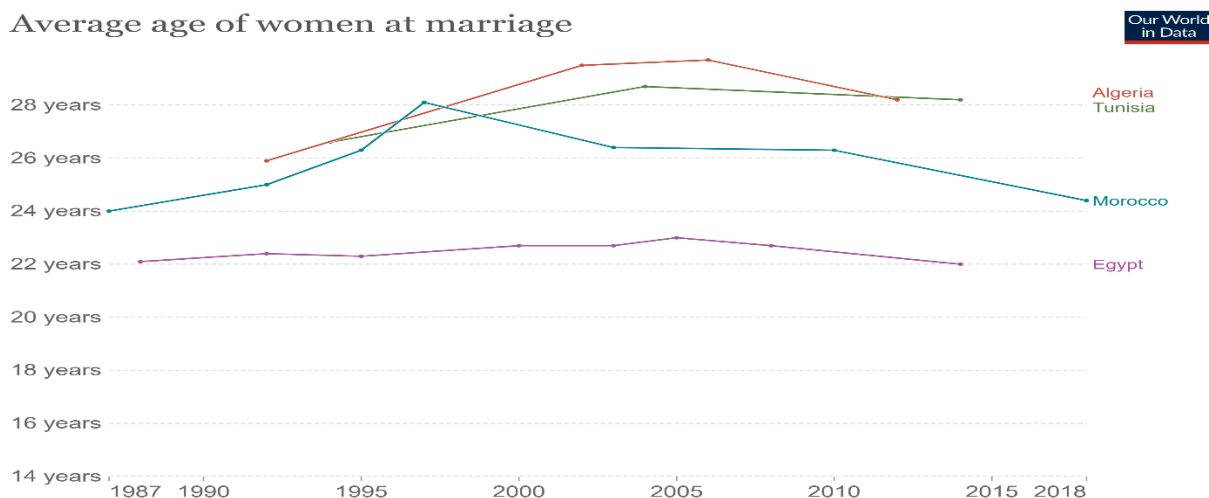
In the North African countries as shown in figure 2 there appears somewhat unique trend. In the three Maghreb countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia the age of women at marriage appear to assume a converted “U” shape with Algeria and Tunisia closer pattern where the age of Marriage went up from 25.90 years to a peak of 29.70 years old between 1992 and 2007. However, by the advent of 2012 it had retreated to 28.80 years of age. Similarly, in Tunisia the age of women at marriage rose from 26.60 years in 1994 to peak at 2004 reaching 28.70 while witnessed a slight drop by 2014 to 28.20 years old. Morocco appears have achieved the highest gain in increasing the women age at marriage where it rose between from 24.0 years in 1987 to

<sup>14</sup> See, <https://ourworldindata.org/Marriages-and-Divorces-by-age-and-cohort>

reach 28.10 by 1997 only to retreat to almost its level of 1987 where it stood at 24.40 years old in 2018. The age of women at marriage in Egypt remained unchanged between 1988 and 2014 where it remained constant at 22.00- 22.10 years respectively<sup>15</sup>.

**Figure 2: Average Age of Women at Marriage in North African Countries**

Figure two about here



Source: UN World Marriage Data (2019) and OECD (2017) OurWorldInData.org/marriages-and-divorces • CC BY  
 Note: For OECD countries figures correspond to mean age at first marriage. For other countries, figures correspond to singulate mean age at marriage, which is an indirect estimate of mean age at first marriage. See Sources tab for a full definition.

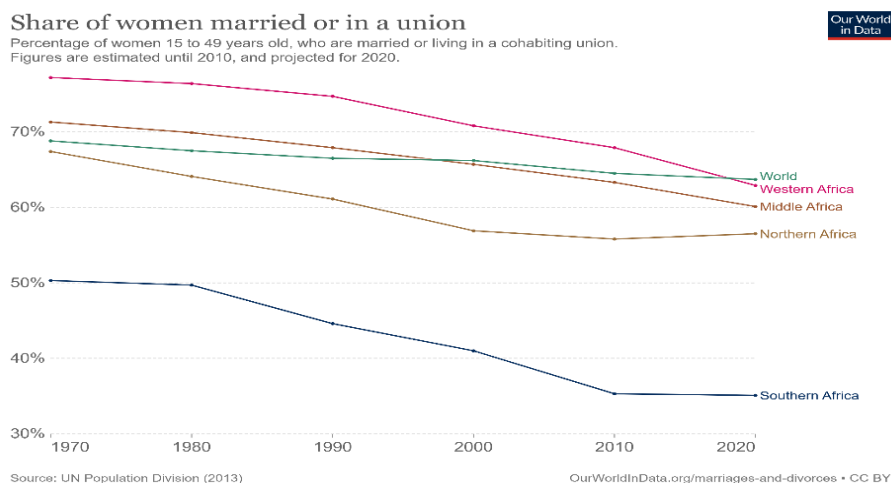
### Marriage and Cohabitation in North Africa

One concomitant result of the global decline in the rate of marriage is the growth the decline in the relative share of women age 15 to 49 years old who are married or living in cohabitation. Figures are estimated until 2010, and projected for 2020. According to The United Nations Population Division the worldwide trend shows a relatively small decline in their proportional share. Between 1970 and 2020, the relative share of those women declined from 69% to 64% by 2020. The data concerned with this phenomenon is only available at the regional level. The data shows that on Average the five African regions (Eastern, Western, Southern, North and Middle) have witnessed about 12.7% decline in the relative share of those women compared to nearly 5.1% for the world as a whole.

Figure 3 compares the detailed change in the rates of women married or living in union in Africa's sub-regions and the world. It is noted from the table that there is no radical departure on the part of North Africa region from the overall average for the entire continent. Nonetheless, there exists a notable difference between North Africa region and both Southern and Western African regions where the two regions witnessed a decline of 15.2% and 14.4% respectively. Eastern and Middle Africa like their Northern counterpart hover around the average. Overall, at any given moment of the past five decades nearly 60% of all women aged 15 to 49 years of age were either married or living in cohabitation. Given the conservative and Islamic culture of North Africa region, it is presumably safe to argue that the overwhelming majority of them were living under marriage arrangements.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

**Figure3: Rates of Married Women or living in Living in Union in Africa by Region**  
 Figure 3 about Here



However, it appears that the phenomenon of not living under marriage arrangements is gaining currency in the Middle East at large and North Africa in particular. The fact that within MENA region, the African wing is considered relatively more liberal, with the exception of Lebanon, by virtue of its geographic proximity to Europe and the deeper interaction with Europe through international migration it also probably safe to assume that it is more common occurrence in North Africa than in the GCC countries, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and the rest of the Eastern Arab countries. There are, however, hardly any systemic studies of the subject but some street literature and even academic literature is starting to accumulate<sup>16</sup>.

### **Divorce in North African Countries**

#### **Divorce Rates**

According to the United Nations “Overview of Global Marriage Patterns there has been an overall increase in divorce rates worldwide since the 1970s. It states: “at the world level, the proportion of adults aged 35-39 who are divorced or separated has doubled, passing from 2% in the 1970s to 4% in the 2000s<sup>17</sup>”. A closer look at the data reveals that such generalization mystifies stark realities. On the one hand, it overlooks the existence of marked differences between countries and it fails to capture more recent changes that took place since the 1990s and up until today<sup>18</sup>.

Taking a closer look into the available data of North African countries 1970 – 2008 only confirms these last two observations. Again, north African countries for which data is available (Egypt,

<sup>16</sup> See for example, We Talked to Arab Couples Who Chose Cohabitation Over Marriage. <https://stepfeed.com/we-talked-to-arab-couples-who-chose-cohabitation-over-marriage-5713>; From Polarization to Cohabitation in the Middle East. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1453kgz>; National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. Marriage Trends in the Middle East: Fact Sheet. [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org)

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs • Population Division. Population Facts. (2011). Population Facts. P.3. Available at the Internet at:

[https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts\\_2011-1.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2011-1.pdf). As cited in Our World in Data. Op. Cit.

<sup>18</sup> Our World in Data. Op. Cit.

Libya and Tunisia) do not follow the pattern that prevailed at the global level. In this respect the data for both Libya and Egypt for the show two distinctive stages with regard to divorce. On the one hand, and as displayed in Figure 4 in the case of Libya, the first stage stretches for the quarter century of 1970-1995 where there was a steady decline in divorce rates down from 2 per 1000 people. By comparison and since 1995 and up until 2002 divorce rates in Libya had remained constant at 0.30 per 1000 people. In the case of Egypt while assuming more or less similar trend to that which prevailed in Libya it happened in steps like shape thus the rates decline from 2.0 in 1970 (the same as Libya) to 1.60 in 1985, 1.10 in 1995 to settle at 0.90 per 1000 in 2005 and 2006. Tunisia's rates of divorce during the period stretching between 1970 -2000, on the other hand, have almost remained unchanged during the concerned period where it stood at 0.80 in 1970 and ended up at the turn of the century reaching 0.90 a decline of 0.20 per 1000 from its level a decade earlier in 1995.

**Figure 4: Divorce Per 1000 People in North African Countries**

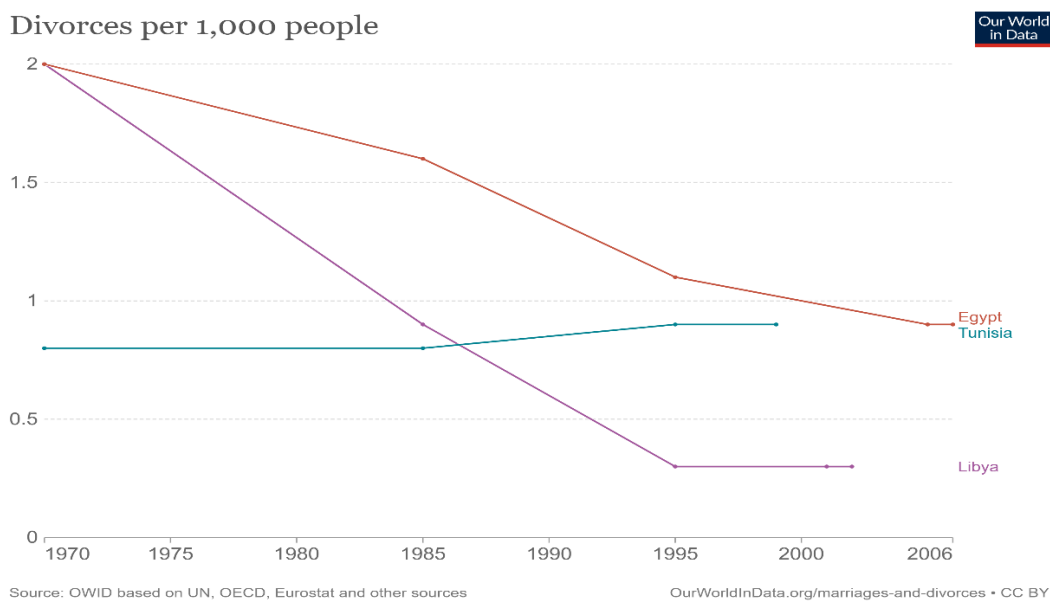


Table 4 gives the details of changes in divorce rates in North African countries between 2000 and 2021. Unfortunately, and awkwardly enough, with the exception of Egypt the sequence of data as evident from the table is broken for the entirety of the first decade for Tunisia, half of the first decade for Algeria and the for the period stretching from 2012-2018 for Libya. It is noted, however, for all of the fur countries that the downward trend of the last three decades of the past century swung in a reverse direction of rising divorce rates. For Egypt and Algeria, the upward trend started to accelerate towards the end of the first decade. This is especially true in the case of Egypt. Data for Libya is a bit more controversial. According to UNESCWA the rated of registered divorces in Libya in 2008 stood at 2.5<sup>19</sup>. It is hard to explain the discrepancy in the between the one reported by the government and the one stated by ESCWA. Figures in the table indicate changes in the rates of divorce of 0.58, 1.30, 0.26 or 2.22 (depending on the source in the case of Libya) and 0.22 for Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia respectively.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCWA. (2013). BULLETIN ON POPULATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN THE ARAB REGION. Sixteenth Issue. New York.

**Table 4: Rates of Divorce Per 1000 People in North African Countries 2000 - 2021**

YEAR	country			
	Algeria	Egypt	Libya	Tunisia
2000	NA	1.20	0.28	NA
2001	NA	1.10	0.31	NA
2002	NA	1.10	0.31	NA
2003	NA	1.10	0.30	NA
2004	NA	1.00	0.30	NA
2005	0.94	0.90	0.40	NA
2006	1.03	0.90	0.33	NA
2007	1.00	0.90	0.50	NA
2008	1.14	1.10	0.54 <sup>1</sup>	NA
2009	1.18	1.10	0.70	NA
2010	1.39	1.80	0.77	1.18
2011	1.49	1.90	0.54	1.46
2012	1.47	1.90	NA	1.19
2013	1.50	1.90	NA	1.23
2014	1.56	2.10	NA	1.27
4015	1.50	2.20	NA	1.29
2016	1.52	2.10	NA	1.34
2017	1.57	2.10	NA	1.30
2018	1.54	2.10	NA	1.43
2019	1.52	2.30	NA	1.40
2020	NA	2.20	NA	NA
2021	NA	2.50	NA	NA

Notes: The figure listed in the table is extracted from official Libyan documents.

Source: Derived from sources documented in Table 1.

### **Factors At Play**

Speaking in structural terms there appears to be some association between political instability and rising rates of divorce. In this respect the four countries starting December 2010 witnessed political and social revolutions that brought about the end of three presidencies in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in order and lead to a change in the political leadership in Algeria. Even in Morocco, where data is almost completely missing, the regime found itself having to make compromises to avoid political turmoil. This political turmoil was not without its economic implications for the four countries. As political instability led to disturbances in the economy rates of unemployment went up thus leading to declining incomes and their well-known ramifications. The dynamics through which these factors impacted families remain largely unexplored in North African countries. In Egypt, for example, unemployment rose from 8.8% in 2010 to 11.9% in 2011 and continued to rise through 2015 where it reached 13.1%. Since then, it had continued to decline but never reached the 2010 level except in 2019 where it accounted for 7.8% of the labor force. It has been on the rise again to around 9.2-9.3% in 2020 and 2021<sup>20</sup>. It is hard to imagine that the impact of COVID-19 on unemployment had been that limited and as such the last two figures must be taken with a grain of truth.

<sup>20</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=EG>

Tunisia displays a similar trend but with higher rates. In the eleven years stretching from 2000-2011 the average employment rate amounted to 13.9%. In the successive 11 years (2011-2021) it had risen to an overall average of 16.1% with a high of 18.3% in 2011 and a low of 15.0 in 2014<sup>21</sup>. Algeria presents a different scenario where unemployment stood at an alarming 29.8% in 2000 to only take a systematic downward trend where it declined to 10.0% in 2010 and maintained that level until 2016 and witnessed a 2.0 percentage points by the advent of 2017 to reach 12.0<sup>22</sup>. Libya has maintained a more or less steady 19% level of unemployment between 2000 and 2021 with the exception of 2020 where it went up to 20.1%<sup>23</sup>.

Legal reforms also played a role in pushing rates of divorce up. In 2000, the Egyptian parliament passed a new law that changed procedures associated with the personal-status law. The law—known as *khul'*—gave a woman the right to initiate a divorce without the consent of her husband if she would give up some of her financial rights. The intentions of the law were to ease the procedures of divorce for women. However, journalistic reports of abuse of the law by women are quite frequent. This legal development did not go unnoticed in neighboring countries, such as Jordan and Palestine, and in countries on the periphery of the Arabic-speaking world, notably Morocco and Algeria, where non-consensual, no-fault divorce was introduced in 2004 and 2005, respectively<sup>24</sup>. Some view the law as contesting discriminatory practices while others regard it as equally discriminating against women as it strips women from their fair post marital entitlements.

Much less is known about micro level factors leading to divorce. However, exploitation of the fruits of labor of women appears to be one of the factors at play in Algeria. According to professor of law at the University of Algiers, Leila Boussaid some women in Algeria do not have control over their salaries. The husband has the salary of his wife to whom he concedes her “pocket money”. If she refuses, he can forbid her to work under any pretext whatsoever. The woman’s money goes into the common fund so to speak and can be used to finance the purchase of a car, major household equipment or a piece of property. “The problem is that these acquisitions are made in the husband’s name.” In Algeria, financial transactions belong more often to the male world. “I have lost count of the cases of women who have built or bought property but who do not appear on the deed of property. In the event of a divorce, they discover that after years of work they are left with nothing”<sup>25</sup>.

Part of the story of rising divorce rates or at least postponing marriage or even abstaining from getting married is that people, especially women, in the Middle East have been increasingly breaking sexual taboos. Receptionists in hotels no longer check that couples sharing a Saudi hotel room are married. Last year the UAE decriminalized premarital sex. A growing enthusiasm for sex toys reflects women rejection of the idea that men should control their sexuality. In Dubai, customs inspectors scour the bags of incoming travelers, particularly women of Arab origin, and seize any sex toys. Most are let off with a warning but under the country’s indecency law they can be fined up to 50,000 Dirhams (U\$ 13 thousand) and put in prison. New platforms launched by

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.macrotrends.net.TUN>

<sup>22</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=AL>

<sup>23</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=LY>

<sup>24</sup> In Islamic law, *khul'* is technically a divorce by the husband in return for compensation paid to him by the wife. According to Hanafi doctrine, a man or a woman may initiate a *khul'* divorce. See, Nadia Sonneveld, Divorce Reform in Egypt and Morocco: Men and Women Navigating Rights and Duties. In Egypt and Morocco Islamic Law and Society 26 (2019) 149-178. And Hoda Rashad, Magued Osman and Farzaneh Rouddi-Fahimi. (2005). Op. Cit. p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ghania Khelifi. (2022). Algeria, where women’s money are in men’s pockets. <https://www.google.com/search?q=algeria%2C+where+woman%27s+money+are&oq=algeria%2C+where+woman%27s+money+are+&aqs=chrome..69i57.81223j0j1&client=ms-android-vivo-rvo3&sourceid=chrome-mobile&ie=UTF-8>

women promote self-pleasure as an act of female liberation. Online videos are filling the sex-education gap by normalizing taboo words such as clitoris (bizr in Arabic). “Love Matters”, an Egyptian platform, challenges the stigma surrounding women’s sexuality. “The tides are turning in the Middle East; we are tackling the culture of shame that governs our bodies and lives and helping women explore their sexuality head. All else fails, councils another website “use your...fingers. They are free-and they aren’t banned”<sup>26</sup>.

There seems that societal attitudes towards marriage and divorce are radically changing in North Africa societies. A post on Facebook provides some food for thought. It reads: “I feel that divorce in Egypt has become a cool thing. It might have already become the original objective of marriage. The title ‘divorced’ is cooler than singlehood and its idiocy...I wonder”. The post received 218 reactions in one week. The central argument that can be detected is that the notion of the continuity of marriage is no longer an integral part marriage. One commentator on the post narrates a chat he had heard in the family court between the would-be divorcee and her sister, brother and the lawyer. The would-be divorcee is saying: To be a divorcee is better than being a spinster. I was hoping to have a baby and I had it. Now I want to be free...”. Another commentator writes: “they asked a little girl who is strongly attached to her mom “what do you want to be when you grow up sweetie?” She answered “I would like to get married, divorced and go to school...”. A third states that the fashion nowadays is “weekend marriage...if the lady had already married before then she takes a boyfriend but not remarry”. Yet another argues that is now considered a form of social prestige and a style of life. Furthermore, divorce is now celebrated with a huge party similar the one taking place at marriage.

The initiator of the post is an orthodox Copt so it was natural that there will be Christian input as well. Commonly known to be a staunch opponent of divorce one intervention wonders about the timing at which the Coptic Church Council will start codify divorce for the general public of Copts and declares her wish that this happens soon so she can obtain divorce. The post initiator writes “divorce is now very common amongst us”. The debate indicates the driver behind the Coptic Church move in this direction. Simply, those who are denied divorce change their religious affiliation from the Orthodox Church to Protestantism or Catholicism. Among Copts living in Australia there have been numerous cases of homicides within the family. The police complained to the head of the Coptic Church there arguing that divorce laws should be relaxed.

Common to most of the comments as well is the notion entertained by several participants is that this generation is different. It is said that both young men and women are not willing to carry the responsibilities that comes along with marriage. Reference is further made to the growth of individualism and the retreat of the notions of sacrificing for the family and children. The would-be man and woman/wife “arrange for divorce prior to arranging for marriage “they only got married to get divorced”. This holds at all social classes and across all religions, one said.

Celebrating divorce and the return to singlehood -transliterated into Arabic as “Singalah” – has even reached the circles of the cream of entertainment celebrities. Recently, and in response to the rumors that he returned to his ex-wife, the famous leading Egyptian singer Amr Diab put a single song into the market with the following lyrics:

These are the values being promoted by the entertainment industry with regards to marriage and divorce in today’s Egypt. First singlehood due to divorce not as a natural stage of human beings but as a social status gained by the breakdown of marriage is something to celebrate. It is described as “it’s the best thing you have done”. Second, “I told you I will be coming and I came” in direct contradiction with the cross cultural, cross religious affiliation notion of the eternity of

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<sup>26</sup> See, The Economist. Sex Toys in the Middle East: Hands Off. January 7<sup>th</sup> 2023. P. 32.

marriage. It is further promised or planned not a random incident to be regretted. Third, marriage is a headache “my mobile did not ring... rang...”. Fourth, divorce is freedom, care free world whereby the person is not accountable to anyone else and that this is worth sacrificing human feelings of longing to others and tender loving care. It is heaven as opposed to the hell of marriage. Fifth, marriage is also pictured as a source of petulance the must be disposed of.

**BOX 1: Lyrics of Amr Diab Song “Single”**

Single	سينجل
<p>I am breaking the news...Now I became single Single Hi...Hi ya singles. I told you I will be coming and I came You were ahead of me and I caught up with you ... A different feeling how lucky you are you should have told Just one day and I envied you...and my mobile did not ring...rang...I am finally done with ringing I will kill my heart if he became anxious of softened</p>	<p>بعلم في النبأ العاجل ... إن أنا دلوقت بقيت سينجل سينجل هاي هاي يا سناجل... قتلكتوا أنا حا أجي وجيت سابقني وحصلتكو... إحساس تاني يا بختكوا مش كنتوا تقولوا... ده يا دوب من يوم بس حسدنتكوا وموبايلي ما رتش... رن ارتحت خلاص م الزن وهخلص أنا على قلبي ... لو قال مشتاق أو حن</p>
<p>Suddenly my world is sweet...Freedom is filling the air I am telling the people to congratulate me and wish you the same My life will suddenly change from hell to heaven had I known from the beginning and I would have not taken that long thinking...I am coming back to myself and doing as I want I am not being considerate of any one and will not love anyone more than myself my mobile did not ring...rang... I am finally done with ringing I will kill my heart if he became anxious of softened I now know you are care and you have put petulance to rest You are right our piece of mind is most important I noticed and learnt also that they tell the single...</p>	<p>دنيتي فجأة بتحلو... حرية ومالية الجو ويقول في خيالي للناس ... باركو لي وعقبال عندكوا لو كنت أعرف م الأول... إن حياتي حا تتحول فجأة من النار للجنة... ما كنتش التفكير حا يطول برجع تاني لنفسي... يعمل كل اللي في نفسي ولا حد أعمله حساب... ولا حا أحبه أكثر من نفسي ده موبايلي ما رتش... رن ارتحت خلاص م الزن وهخلص أنا على قلبي... لو قال مشتاق أو حن</p>
<p>it's the best thing you have done</p>	<p>أتاريكو مش شابلين همز.... والنكد اتزاح واتلم وصدقتوا وعلى رأيكم... راحة أعصابنا أهم حاجة غريبة لاحظتها... وأنا برده اتعلمتها بيقولوا عطلول للسينجل... أحسن حاجة عملتها</p>

Released December 2022.

<https://youtu.be/s1oi7Xq3WMw>

The lyrics of this song stand in direct contradiction with the values reflected in the songs of the 1950's and 60's. Back then Egypt had Faiza Ahmed, nick named “the family singer” who sang for the mother, brother, the father among others who celebrated marriage such as Mohamed Fawzy “Tonight is Thursday night, I will sign the marriage contract and become a groom” or Al-Telbani signing “My son, daughter and their mother are the the three I love the most”. The list of songs stressing the centrality of family and marriage is endless. However, one song stands out in a



crowd that dates back to the early 1960's during the Nasserite era. Written by the renowned Egyptian slang poet Abdel Fattah Mostafa, composed by the great composer Ahmed Sedqy and sang by the female Joyous Trio and the male Melody Trio, the lyrics go on<sup>27</sup>:

### Box 2: Lyrics of the Song of the Joyous Trio and the male Melody Trio (Early 1960s)

Here is a scissor and There is a Scissor	هنا مقص وهنا مقص
<p>The girls: Here is a scissor and there is a scissor there are brides standing in line Carefully selected brides each girl is like an Arab nymph The men: like an Arab nymph The girls: Lashes godly colored with Kuhl, holding the tail of my dress The step revives the longing on the beats of the hearts of lovers Tick...tick...dom The men: facing us the house of Ma'azoon<sup>1</sup> And the Ma'azoon wants Anise and the Anise needs heat that costs a dowry and a present Her bride wealth is wrapped in a hundred and another hundred and still not enough The girls: not enough...not enough The men: we are just out of college and saw the sweet girls Our pockets are yet to be packed with money and we have only our warm hearts ang our hearts are saying: Tick...tick...dom The girls: Tick...tick...dom The men: Here is a scissor and there is a scissor The girls: No, we do not cut The men: The girls are standing on line The girls: the grooms are not standing on line The Men: then tell us that the dowry has been managed The girls: then the living arrangement can be managed The men: First we need an apartment The girls: a nest for two on top of a tree The men: Second, how much will it cost to furnish it The Girls: a sofa, a pottery water Jar and a cup The men: and third The girls: same as number two The men: fourth The girls: we will manage it The men: the salary is limited The girls: we Also have salaries The men: a year or two and will have kids The girls: along with salary raise and a promotion The men: You mean we go to the Ma'azoon The girls: This is the reasonable talk The men: our hearts are saying tick...tick...dom The girls: and our heats are saying tick...tick...dom...tick...tick...dom</p>	<p>البنات: هنا مقص وهنا مقص هنا عرايس ينتصرص وعرايس منتقية... كل صببية وصببية زى حورية عربية ثلاثى النغم «الرجال»: زى حورية عربية البنات: رمش مكحل ربانى ... خد فى ديل فستانى والخطوة تصحى الأشواق على دق قلوب العشاق تك تك دوم ... تك تك دوم الرجال: هنا مقص وهنا مقص هنا عرايس ينتصرص وقصادنا بيت المأذون... والمأذون عاوز ينسون... والينسون فى السخونية توبها شبكة وهدية.. ومهرها صرة فى منديل مية ومية برضو قليل البنات: برضو قليل برضو قليل الرجال: وإحنا يدوب اتخرجنا على الحلويين اتخرجنا لسه لا شغللنا جيوبنا ولا عمرنا إلا قلوبنا وقلوبنا بتقول: تك تك دوم.. تك تك دوم البنات: تك تك دوم ... تك تك دوم الرجال: هنا مقص وهنا مقص البنات: ما نقوصش الرجال: هنا عرايس ينتصرص البنات: والعرايس ما ينتصرصش الرجال: طب قولنا المهر أدبر البنات: والعيشة كمان تدبر الرجال: أولها عايزين شقة البنات: عش اتنين فوق شجرارية الرجال: وتانيها نفرشها بكام البنات: كنية وقلة وكوباية الرجال: وتلاتها البنات: زى تانيها.. الرجال: ورابعها البنات: هنسويها الرجال: دى ماهية على قد الحال البنات: وإحنا كمان لينا ماهية الرجال: سنة والتانية هيجوا عيال البنات: ويا علاوة وترقية الرجال: يعنى نقايس على المأذون البنات: يبقى كلامكم كده موزون الرجال: ديه قلوبنا بتقول: تك تك دوم... تك تك دوم البنات: وقلوبنا بتقول: دوم دوم تك... دوم دوم تك</p>

(1) The notary responsible for the sole function of officially documenting the marriage contract introduced to Egypt by Napoleon.

<sup>27</sup> <https://sabah.rosaelyoussef.com/14413/%D8%A3%D8%BA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B5--%D9%88%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B5>

The above lyrics stress the values of the importance of marriage and primacy over bachelorhood the men just graduated fresh out of college. The girls are ready to share in the cost of living, their material life expectations are simple “sofa, pottery jar and a cup”. Women are expected to give birth and there is also hope in a better future “salary raise and a promotion. Girls/women are seen as partners in a life to be made and not presented on a golden plat. They are also participants in the labor market while mothering their children and men are equally responsible about these affairs and ready to shoulder them. Thus, these lyrics paint a totally different picture compared to the one presented earlier. Extended Family relations are also appreciated. In another song Al-Telbani serenades “I love my mother-in-law; I am thrilled with her and I daily pray God keeps her”. This stands at odds with the recent “Ya Ana Ya Omak”, meaning “either me or you mom”. The context is the mother-in-law at home.

Variations in the lyrics of these two songs are consistent with the findings of recent research on of intergenerational value gaps. As shown in Table The literature divides the modern times generations 1890 – 2025 into ten different groups of which six are of special interest to this paper. Table 5 gives the details concerning the beginning and end dates of birth for each generation who by now have ages ranging between 1 and 77 years old. The cut off points takes into account the experience under which each generation grow, the communication technology they have been using and their value orientations. More specifically, it assumes intergenerational differences in self-perception along issues of patriotism, responsibility, hard-work, willingness to sacrifice, religiosity, morality, self-reliance, compassion and political activism<sup>28</sup>. A microgeneration sandwiched between Generation X and Millennials, this emerging micro generation that spans the end of Generation X and the beginning of Generation Y has gained attention in recent years as some people don’t feel a connection to either age group<sup>29</sup>. The “Xennials” are those born on the cusp of when Gen X-ers and Millennials meet, and therefore experienced world events, and especially technology, in unique ways particular to their age.

**Table 5: Generations Defined**

Generation Name	Births Start	Births End	Youngest Age Today*	Oldest Age Today*
The Silent Generation	1925	1945	78	98
Baby Boomer Generation	1946	1964	59	77
Generation X (Baby Bust)	1965	1979	44	58
Xennials	1975	1985	38	48
Millennials Generation Y, Gen Next	1980	1994	29	43
iGen Z	1995	2012	11	28
Gen Alpha	2013	2025	1	10

(\*age if still alive today)

Source: Michael T. Robinson. The Generations: Which Generation are You? Available on the Internet at: <https://www.careerplanner.com/Career-Articles/Generations.cfm>

<sup>28</sup> For the results see, PEW Research Center. American Trends Panel. (Wave 10). Survey conducted March 10-April 6, 2015

<sup>29</sup> See, <https://www.examiner-enterprise.com/story/lifestyle/2017/12/28/8216-sandwiched-8217-between/16727944007/>

It is worth stating here that these classifications were based on the experience of Western Cultural Generations. Japan and some other societies in Asia especially those who experienced demographic transitions and portions of Europe and will have to adjust the boundaries of their own generational definitions based on major cultural, political, and economic influences<sup>30</sup>. In the Arab societies where we are still baby boomers such classification must be carefully examined. However, the increasing globalization and technological penetration of these societies and increasing cultural interaction, especially for certain social strata and classes allows for partial consideration of such classification.

Researcher in US context are finding major differences across these generations with regards to marriage and divorce patterns. In this respect, the baby boomers also known as “the Me Generation” began to put individual fulfillment ahead of traditional family roles. More women than ever before entered the workforce. This had the impact of creating more dual-income households, which led to greater spending power. It also meant mothers weren’t as omnipresent as in previous generations. With more of a focus on individuality, divorce increasingly became acceptable<sup>31</sup>.

Baby Boomers also had fewer children than earlier generations. Because of this trend, Generation X, those born from 1965 to 1980, is significantly smaller. Baby Boomers often emphasized career over family. It was common for both parents to work. As divorce rates spiked, Generation X was the first generation where it was normal to have divorced parents. The response to this, however, is interesting. Statistically speaking at least, Generation X reacted to the increased divorce rate by staying married. As a whole, more members of this generation waited until later in life to marry or put it off completely. But once they walk down the aisle, they tend to stay married at much higher rates than their parents. Approximately 70% of marriages in the ‘90s lasted at least 15 years. That’s up from 65% for the two previous decades. And this trend continues. Divorce rates are even lower for couples married in the 2000s<sup>32</sup>.

Born between 1981 and 1996, they’re the first generation to grow up almost entirely with computers in schools and homes. Generally raised by involved parents, they also have a reputation for being entitled and self-obsessed. As far as breaking down marriage and divorce by generation, they also continue some of Generation X’s patterns. They too put off marriage until later. Millennials have a 26% marriage rate. Compare that to 36% for Gen X, 48% for Baby Boomers, and 65% for Mature Silents. With the oldest Millennials now in their 40s, we’re starting to get a solid look at their behavior patterns over time. And they paint an interesting picture<sup>33</sup>.

Researcher are also finding that married individuals have the most optimistic views about marriage and are least accepting of premarital cohabitation and divorce while those who are unmarried and have ever or are currently cohabiting are the most pessimistic about marriage and are more accepting of premarital cohabitation and divorce. Attitudes do not differ by generation or gender, with members of Generation X (born 1965-1980) and Millennials (born 1981-2000) and men and women sharing similar views toward marriage and divorce<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> See, Michael T. Robinson. The Generations: Which Generation are You? Available on the Internet at: <https://www.careerplanner.com/Career-Articles/Generations.cfm>

<sup>31</sup> Goldberg Jones. (2022). Breaking Down Divorce Rates by Generation. <https://www.goldbergjones-wa.com/divorce/divorce-by-generation/>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Unfortunately, data at hand does not allow addressing in details the question of whether this pattern holds for North African countries. Nonetheless, the data show that age at first marriages is becoming older on the one hand thus suggesting that North African males and females are postponing marriage until later with Algeria and Tunisia having almost exactly the same average age of marriage for women (28) and men (32). They are followed by Morocco where it was estimated to be 26.3 years for women and 31.2 years of age for men. Of the four countries out of five for which data is available Egypt had the youngest age at marriage for both males and females which stood at 27.5 and 24.7 for females. It thus also had the narrowest age gap between males and females with a little less than 3 years compared with 4, 4.5 and 5 years age difference in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco respectively<sup>35</sup>. Egyptian data on the age of marriage indicate that the average age at first marriage for males has gone up from 28 years and 11 months in 2012 by about 2 years and seven months by 2021 to reach 30.7 years of age. For females the comparable figures were 24 years and one month and 25 years exactly for the corresponding years<sup>36</sup>. Divorce data show a similar trend whereby average age of males at divorce in 2012 was about 38 years and two months compared to 40 years and one month in 2021. By comparison the corresponding figures for women were 31 years and 10 months in 2012 and 33 years and 8 months in 2021<sup>37</sup>.

### ***Towards an Agenda for Research on Marriage and Divorce in North African Countries: Concluding Remarks***

The foregoing brief analysis of the changing patterns of marriage in Arab countries allows for some learnt lessons with regards to our state of knowledge about the state of marriage and divorce in North African countries. The first of these lessons is that there exists no solid body of knowledge on the subject. Serious academic studies are scarce, and if they exist, they are based on anecdotal data and small non-representative samples that do not allow for generalizations. Few studies have resorted in their analysis to national representative samples of the type Households Income, Expenditure and Consumption Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys, let alone data made available by national censuses or vital statistics on marriage and divorce.

A pivotal in this respect revolves around data quality, availability, and accessibility. A recent report by the World Bank on data transparency captures those parameters calling it statistical capacity<sup>38</sup>. The report shows the MENA region having exceeded East Asia and the Pacific as well as sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 but then lagged behind ever since. By 2018, the report says the MENA region was the lowest of all regions. The report also asserts that the weakness of data accuracy, availability, accessibility or the lack of openness to debate about data. While advocating building statistical capacity at the national level in MENA region and the need for a culture of circulation of data, validation and debate of data and results.

The message here is less ambitious. Based on my previous experience with Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), establishing such statistical database on family issues in general and on marriage and divorce in particular should be enlisted as one of the strategic priorities of DIFI in the immediate and foreseen future. This is certainly within the capacity and capabilities of DIFI.

<sup>35</sup> Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017) • Data displayed is for the most recent available data

<sup>36</sup> CAPMAS, Op. Cit. p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>38</sup> See, The World Bank. (2020). How Transparency Can Help the Middle East and North Africa. Washington, DC: World Bank. P.17-18

Immediately related to this is the encouragement of research based on large scale samples derived from national surveys rather than those relying on anecdotal data.

On another front it is proposed here to focus on certain topics for studying marriage and divorce in North African countries. The increasing rates of divorce call not merely for the study of it, but of the study of the dynamics of marital relationships themselves not only during the life of marriage itself, but also prior to marriage. Expectations from marriage by the would-be husband and wife is one black whole that is seldom studied including, material as well as non-material aspects such as romance, intimate relations, time allocation and expected roles among other aspects.

Recently, it was proposed by certain authorities in Egypt including the President himself that a new personal status Law will be implemented calling for establishing a sovereign fund for the protection of the family. The amount that was rumored to be deposited into the fund hovered around L.E. 30,000 (US\$1000). The proposed law raised a broad societal debate over the official and social media. One important aspect of this debate focused on the impact of the Law on the forms of marriage. A majority of those contesting the law argued that it will lead to the spread of customary "Urfi" and Mesiya forms of marriage as well as cohabitation. The impact of proposed legal reforms needs to be taken into consideration as a potential area of marriage research. Much more shocking is the story that originated from Tunisia where a woman announced that she intends to marry two men. Capitalizing on a gap in Tunisia's Personal Affairs Law who announced that she intends to marry two men at the same time and that she will be fair to them stating: "The Tunisian law bans men from multiple marriage but says nothing about women having numerous ones". She further stated that the marriage date is set for the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022<sup>39</sup>. In addition, limited research on sexual orientation in Arab societies suggests that LGTB relationships are gaining currency in Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia among other Arab countries. In 2013 the proportion of those who believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society accounted for 18% in Lebanon, 3% in Egypt and 2% in Tunisia<sup>40</sup>. These figures must have grown since then. In September 2017, a group called "Layla Project" organized the first public appearance of homosexual CSO in Egypt where they raised the Rainbow flag. It worth noting that the group produced four musical albums and was awarded the trophy of the referees and audience committees in the "Modern Music" competition organized by "Radio Lebanon" because of its acclaimed song "Layla's Dance"<sup>41</sup>.

The issue of teen age or early marriage though declining but still in existence is another area where research on marriage should turn its attention. This must be conceptualized as a form of violence against women and girls. Areas of research should focus on the impact of early marriage on health, longevity, schooling and school drop-out as well as life chance for those young girls. The cost of early marriage to the state as expressed in terms of health spending is another area that is worth addressing.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.alarabiya.net/north-africa/2022/12/21/%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9%D8%9F-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86>

<sup>40</sup> PEW. (2013). Global Attitudes Project 2013 Spring Survey Topline Results. . <https://pewresearch.org>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.alarabiya.net/north-africa/2022/12/21/%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9%D8%9F-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86>

Considering divorce, some issues of interest may well be related to looking at divorce as causal variable and not merely as dependent one. In the later perspective, research is concerned with the causes of divorce such as conflicting careers and for women, conflict between career and other expected roles such as motherhood among other variables. In the former dimension, consideration should be given to several dimensions. Consensus in the literature is that divorce negatively affects divorced women income. Hence, the impact of divorce on women's income and the measures adopted to make up for income loss. These measures include programs of social assistance and the extent of dependence of divorced people, especially women on these programs which entails additional cost. In addition, and related to the forgoing point is the risk of falling into poverty as a result of women's income decline. Another issue in this respect has to do with the psychological well-being of divorced people, their self-esteem and feeling of happiness. Along with falling into the poverty trap comes the societal cost carried by the state to support those families that fell into the poverty trap as a result of divorce. Furthermore, the question of how divorce affects total fertility rates and the process of reproducing labor force and human capital constitutes one area of interest that requires further investigation.

Speaking of societal cost, i.e., macro level economic cost of divorce, aspects such as its impact on children of divorcees educational performance including repeated years of schooling and drop out of school and the quality of human capital formation. Another aspect of societal cost has to do with problems of delinquency among children of divorced couples such as drug addiction, smoking, frequency of resorting to violent behavior. Associated with this is the cost of managing delinquent and criminal behavior of children by the state. This includes policing, detention centers and imprisonment and social work services. Additionally, research may well focus on intergenerational family formation and the extent of success of children of divorced people in forming their own families and sustain their continuity. In other words, are children of divorcees more likely to fall into the trap of divorce and how much is this likely to cost us.

The available literature show as well that divorced people are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases and impacts longevity, mental health and physical health among other aspects including hospitalization, cost of medication. The cost of medical care of divorcees as compared to that of non-divorcees is another aspect of concern that warrants attention. Another dimension in this respect is that of the impact of divorce on public housing demand and allocation of construction plots and emergency housing.

In considerable proportion of divorce incidents, the process takes rough path where it becomes subject to legal litigation. Governments have enacted family courts and grants legal services to those unable to pay for such services. This can be colossal cost including wages of judges, court employees and construction of court houses which societies carry its brunt. Finally, Divorce comes along with its environmental cost. As divorce leads to splitting the family, it creates additional demand for housing and hence has its impact on land allocation and use, especially in urban areas. Long with these comes energy and electricity consumption, water as well as food and other natural resources. Cooking for a family uses less ingredients per capita compared to cooking for one person. This holds for energy, electricity and water as well.