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Gender and gendered social arenas amongst the Jewish-Egyptian Bourgeoisie in Colonial Egypt during the first half of the 20th century*

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Introduction

Focusing until late on political history, military history and Zionism the social history of Jewish communities in the Middle had been rather neglected. The use of the essential categories of *Mizrahiut* (meaning a constructed oriental culture and characteristics) and "*Oriental*" (Mizrahi) Jewry for the analysis of the historical past of these communities contributed to their amalgamation and for the disregard for the specific characteristics of each community. Though but a few, recent works have begun diverting attention to new questions and alternative frameworks for the analysis and interpretation of these societies' past.[1] Thus, they also reflect an effort to move away from deep-rooted Modernization theories-based assumptions.

The works of Ryzova, Watenpaugh and White[2] present another apparent shift in recent research of Middle Eastern societies. Addressing modernity as an historical life experience defined in relation to and through cultural and social practices, these works propose a new analytic perspective for the discussion of modernity in Middle Eastern context. The focus on practices also emphasizes the role the historical agents played in the construction and appropriation of Modernity.

This article stands within the new framework these works present; sharing a similar perspective on modernity, I will focus on the use of language, residential urban dispersion patterns, and interfaith marriages. I will discuss the role they played in the appropriation of a modern identity and the construction of a shared imagery by the Jewish Bourgeoisie in Egypt under Colonial influence.[3] Relying on the analytic

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[1]Orit Bashkin, *A History of Jews in Modern Iraq: New Babylonians* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2012); Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ruth Kimhi, *Zionism in the Shadow of the pyramids: The Zionist Movement in Egypt 1918-1948* (Tel-Aviv: AM Oved, 2009; Yoram Meital, 'A Jew in Cairo: the Defiance of Shehata Haroun', Middle Eastern Studies 53, 2 (2017): 183-197; Dario Miccoli, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt: An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s-1950s* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), (Editor) *Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature: A Diaspora* (London 7 New York: Routledge, 2017).

[2] Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Press, 2014)**;** Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism & the Arab Middle Class (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006); Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011).

[3] Egypt was never a colony of Britain. Still, the project of the Sues Canal, large-scale infrastructure projects and its entanglement with the world economy brought on an increased presence of British and French companies and official representatives throughout the 19th century. Britain's direct military involvement in the 'Urabi revolt of 1882 and the appointment of a consul-general to Egypt in 1883 marked the beginning of a direct British supervision of Egypt, which culminated in the declaration of a British protectorate in Egypt in 1914. Under these circumstances, colonial power relations - in all but formal definition – shaped Egyptian societies from the mod 19th century onwards. For this reason in

category of gender, I will depict the ways in which gender relations shaped the social arena and the lives of the historical players, albeit in different more complex and at times more subtle ways than those depicted by prevalent stigmas regarding Middle Eastern societies. Drawing from life stories of former members of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Egypt in the 20th century and, this paper will also point to the invaluable importance of this narrative source for social history.

The Sources[4]

Two main pools of historical sources are at the heart of this paper. The first is a partial archive of the Grand Jewish Rabbinate [the Jewish Judicial Institution – L.A.] in Cairo between the years 1924 and 1956.[5] This archive arrived at the library of Yeshiva University in New York in the 1970's, and includes over 9,000 documents recording a variety of activities held or led by the Jewish community. Most of the entries document the activities of the Sephardi Grand Rabbinate,[6] the representative institution of the

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regard the period under discussion in this article as one of colonial social order and control in Egypt, despite formal definitions.

[4] Please note these abbreviations used:

PA private archive, depicts interviews with former members of the Jewish community that were held and documented by the writer. These include two groups of interviews marks as G1 and G2 and are presented in numerical order.

Interviews kept at the Division of Oral History of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem are marked by the abbreviation J-lem (Jerusalem), P35 (Project 35), I no. (Interview number).

Documents from the archive of the institutions of the Jewish community are marked YUA (Yeshiva University Archive) and given by reel and document number.

[5] The changes in the political arena in Egypt had a direct impact on the Jewish community and brought about a reorganization of it in the 1920's. Chronologically in parallel with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Egypt and to the approval of a new constitution in 1922 and 1923 respectively, the Jewish community had also went through a process of reorganization. In 1924, Joseph Aslan Qattaui replaced his uncle as the head lay leader of the community [Nassee]. Starting in 1915 he became directly involved in Egyptian national politics. He was a member of the Egyptian delegation sent to London that year, for the negotiations for Egyptian independence; he was one of the founder of Banq Misr as well as a member of the committee that formulated the Egyptian constitution in 1922. As he was appointed the head of the Jewish community in 1924, he had also served as Egypt's exchequer. As the new head of the community and in light of the changes it had underwent Joseph Aslan Qattaui had promoted the establishment of community committees to run its' day-to-day operations and set its policy. He stressed the importance of members' direct involvement in the community decision-making process and of transparency. Elected representatives chosen from among fee-paying members sat on those committees. This change was at list in part meant to relieve some of the pressure put on the community's elite by members of the up-coming bourgeoisie to share the power of office. Thus, while this change was in line with Qattaui's own perception of modern government and governmentability, it also reflected the change of power within the Jewish community and the rise of the Bourgeoisie as a socio-political power. The establishment of a modern archive was apparently part of these organizational changes. The archive ceased from operations as the community institutions dissolved, following the tidal wave of Jewish migration out of Egypt in 1956. For more information on the archive see the introduction attached to its' 1st role by Yeshiva University Library archival staff (Archive, Role 1).

[6] The term "community" as used in contemporary social discourse differs from the legal and religious term Tae'fa, which also translates into community. On the difference between minority groups and

Jewish community in Egypt, and its' committees. However, as the community diversified demographically and socially, other institutions were established. Thus, the archive includes documentation of the Ashkenazi-Jewish Community,[7] as well as of the *Bnei-Brit* movement's chambers in Cairo (a separate Sephardi and Ashkenazi branch).[8] The archive also holds numerous certificates attesting to the personal status of members of the community, such as travel documents of individuals, couples, and families;[9] lists of donors and those who received donations from the community; and lists of bills paid by the Jewish community for medical services it provided directly or by affiliated organizations.[10]

The second, and with regards to this article the more important pool of sources used here, is a collection of 70 interviews conducted with former members of the Jewish community in Egypt.[11] While all of the interviewees have emigrated from Egypt between 1948 and 1967, some moved to Israel while others moved mainly to Europe, the United States or Australia. The interviews can be classified into three distinct groups: 31 interviews were conducted by the author of this paper over the past four years. All of the interviewees in this group live in Israel today. The second group is comprised of interviews with former members of the community who migrated to Israel as well as to the United States and Europe. These interviews were held in the period stretching from the 1960's to the first decade of the 21st century.[12] The third group comprises of interviews, which were also conducted in either North America or Europe

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communities and the religious Millet system in Middle Eastern societies, (though in Syria and not in Egypt) see a most interesting discussion in White 2012.

[7] A separate Ashkenazi community in Egypt was established for the first time in 1865. Despite the fact that in Cairo it operated in separation from the Sephardi one, both sub-groups of Jewish population were represented before the state by the Chief Sephardic Rabbi.

[8] The *Bnei Brit* chambers will established first by members of the young Ashkenazi members of the Jewish community who deemed the existing community institutions out of reach and under the control of a closed group of Sephardi elite families. In time, members of the growing bourgeoisie joined them and the Bnei Brit chambers became an alternative center of power to that of the Grand Rabbinate and Sephardi community with in the Jewish community.

[9] As the Israeli-Arab conflict grew more intense and as a direct result of the armed conflict between Egypt and Israel in 1948, Jews began migrating out of Egypt. Those who did not have either an Egyptian or foreign passport – a population estimated at 30-50 percent of the Jewish community – applied for Laissez-Paisser [travel permits]. Many of those who were arrested in suspicion of Zionist affiliation on the Eve of the declaration of the state of Israel (estimated at 1,500 men and women) were amongst the first to apply. The majority of those who applied were given the required permits but were denied future return to the country.

[10] While the dominant language of the archive documents is French, there are also many documents in Arabic, as well as some in Hebrew, English, and occasionally Jewish Arabic in Hebrew-Rashi script.

[11] All of the interviewees' names were changed and appear here in pseudonym.

[12] Transcripts of the interviews are kept at the Division of Oral History of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

and have been published in a book edited by Lillian Dammond and Yvette Raby.[13] Significant variance characterizes the selection process of interviewees and the methodology applied by the interviewers. While this variance adds complexity to the work with the interviews as an historical source, the relatively large number of interviews helps reduce the dispositional effect of the single interviewer over the collected material and its content.[14]

While interviews and life stories have become central in Anthropological and sociological research, there is still no consensus regarding their use for historical research. Relying on established methodology, developed over the last decades for the work with narrative sources, this paper pinpoints to the new information they provide, and thus to their importance for the research of the Modernity in a Middle Eastern context. These resources carry specific importance for the research of Middle Eastern Jewish communities, as access to the archives documenting their history is usually prevented.[15] The new information provided by life-stories often pertains to daily lives and social relations which are often out of the reach of historians. Thus, life-stories instigate the recalibration of the historical depiction and analysis and often allow a break from the mega-narrative that dominated the history of the Middle East. While research based on interviews and life stories calls for an in depth confrontation with questions of memory and history and raises the matter of a retrospectively reconstructed memory, relevant methodology for coping with these hardships is available even in Hebrew, as recent publications show.[16]

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[13] Dammond is herself a former member of the Jewish community in Egypt, who upon retiring from work, dedicated her time for the commemoration of this community. See Liliane Dammond & Yvette Raby (editors), *The lost world of the Egyptian Jews: First-Person Accounts from Egypt's Jewish Community in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: iUniverse 2007).

[14] On the work with narrative sources in general and with life stories in particular see Ruthellen Josselson, *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach* (Mofet, 2015 [Hebrew]) ; Ruthellen Josselson & Amia Lieblich (Editors), *Interpreting experience* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), *Exploring Identity & Gender* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994); Na'ama Sabar- Ben Yehoshua (Editor), *Traditions and Genres in Qualitative Research: Philosophies and Advanced Tools* (Mofet, 2016 [Hebrew]).

[15] In the Egyptian case, the full archive of the Jewish Sephardi community in Cairo exists but either the community, the Egyptian state or both have denied access to it until today. Recently the state confiscated the documents and moved it out of the community's facilities. An article on the blog named *Point of No Return: Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries,* published on May 15th indicates that on May 2nd 2017 the Egyptian government gave its' principle agreement to allow access to the communal records. Still it seems there is a long way to go before access will be permitted in practice. Retrieved on May 20th 2017 from http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.co.il/2017/05/at-long-last-egypt-may-agree-torecords.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed:+blogspot/ZpKYs S+(Point+of+no+return).

[16] See footnote 13.

A Bourgeois Community of Migrant: Historical background

In the first half of the 20th century, Cairo and Alexandria were vibrant urban metropoles, buzzing with migration and opportunity.[17] From the 1840 onwards, significant emigration from within the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean basin, as well as from Europe and North Africa contributed to a rapid economic and political change in Egyptian society. The 'Urabi revolt of 1882 brought on the direct British control over Egypt, which along with the mentioned changes instigated a feeling of a radical shift in orientation.[18]

These processes affected the Jewish community, which had undergone dramatic changes as well.[19] Between mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, the community grew at-least 15 times fold: from around 5,000 rabbinic Jews[20] in 1857 to a number estimated at 80 to 100 thousand in 1948.[21] The new opportunities for socio-economic mobility brought on by Egypt's integration into world economy and the need for intermediaries between European institutions and Egyptian public, instigated the rise of a new social stratum, namely a Jewish Bourgeoisie. This new stratum had quickly become the lion share of the community - over 65% of its population were included in or saw themselves as part of this group. By the 1920's, these changes had in fact turned the Jewish community in Egypt into a Bourgeois community of migrants.

Under the influence of colonial dichotomies and bourgeois interests, the Jewish community strove to construct a disconnect between it and the Muslim-Egyptian majority. The breakdown of the Ottoman political framework brought about a shift in the perception of non-Muslim communities. These were no longer considered Millets [religious communities], organic to Egyptian society but rather communities of

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[17] Beinin, *Jewish Dispersion,* 13-41; Nahem Ilan (editor), *Jewish Communities in the East in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Egypt* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2008); Kimhi, *Zionism in the Shadows,* 20-34; Gudrun Kramer, *The* Jews *in Modern Egypt 1941-1952* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1989); Miccoli, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt* and others).

[18] On this feeling of radical change see Orit Bashkin et al. Sculpting Culture in Egypt: Cultural Planning, National Identity and Social Change in Egypt (Tel-Aviv: Ramot, 1999 [Hebrew]): 11-25.

[19] On the history of the Jewish Existence in Egypt prior to the mid 19thth century see for example Ashtor 1944: 26-47; Erlich 2008: 9-15; Goitein 2005: 59-108; Ilan 2009.

[20] Two distinct Jewish groups were in existence in Egypt: The Rabbinic and the Karaite Jews. While the Rabbinic Jews were the majority and though the Karaits were considered by the state as part of the Jewish community at large, they in fact comprised a separate community. As the 19th century progressed so grew the difference between the communities. In general, the Karaite population had a more limited capitalization on the economic and social opportunities that emerged during the period of integration into the global economy. Ilan, *Egypt*: 257-270; Beinin *Dispersion*; 183-206. This distinction between the communities is the reason the Karaits are not part of the discussion herein, though this community calls for further research.

[21] 1948 is considered the year marking peak size of the Jewish community in Egypt, since from that year onwards waves of migration reduced its numbers.

minorities, foreign to it. This shift hastened the conscious process of defamiliarization of the Jewish bourgeoisie from its immediate surrounding. [22]

Though it was demographically marginal in the general population, the Jewish community played a significant role in cultural and economic urban life. Its specific characteristics - urbanism, polyglotism and international socio-religious and economic networks - rendered it especially fit to take the role of intermediary between "native" Egyptian public and British administration and colonial elite. Thus, the changes of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries created a new position for the Jewish population in Egypt under the forming modern social order in Egypt.

In his research on the Jewish Egyptian dispersion, Joel Beinin claims that the hybrid characteristics of this community actually reflected its similarities with general Egyptian culture and society, as they too were an outcome of long-term integration of different socio-ethnic elements.[23]While I agree that the characteristic of the modern Jewish community in Egypt reflected its specific historical circumstances, I suggest that these also made it distinct from the general Egyptian society. As a bourgeois community of migrants that was quick to identify the benefits attached with European affiliations, the Jewish population came to be separate from the Egyptian society it evolved within.

In the analysis of the development of the Jewish bourgeoisie in 20th century Egypt, the concept of *habitus* seems highly relevant. Minted by the influential Pierre Bourdieu *habitus* came to represent the space between the individual's behavior and social constructs, institutions and networks. Bourdieu claimed that people perceive the social world around them, react to it and thus reshape it using a system of embodied dispositions. He also claimed that dispositions reflect experience, opportunities, and lived reality and as such are shared by those of a similar background (in terms of social class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, profession etc.). thus, *habitus*

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[22] On general shift in the relationships between the Jewish population and the Ottoman state and public see Levy (Ed.) 2002, as well as Watenpaugh and his discussion on the creation of the category of minority in Middle Eastern societies under Colonial Rule, Watenpaugh 2006.

[23] In his analysis, Beinin argues that the depiction of the Jewish community in Egypt as separate and distinct from the general Egyptian population is a result of bios in the Israeli Historiography of modern Middle Eastern community and calls for a new approach to the history of these communities. Though I agree with Beinin regarding these bios, I believe his conclusion regarding the Jewish community in Egypt are at least in part not accurate enough. For Beinin's approach and criticism, see Beinin 2007: 9, 14-19).

represents the way group culture and personal history shape the body and mind, and as a result, social order and action.[24]

In his works, Bourdieu suggested that the mental habits and schemes of perception, classification, appreciation, feeling and action allow individuals to find new solutions to new situations.[25] Despite the criticism of Bourdieu's theory - chiefly for being deterministic - I believe that the concept of habitus is instrumental in the analysis of the Jewish Egyptian Bourgeoisie and its' appropriation and construction of a modern identity. As I will show in the next pages, the use of *habitus* draws attention to both the unconscious and conscious, often calculated use the historical agents made of habits, schemes and attributes in the construction of a shared modern identity and production and reproduction of a modern social order.

Focusing in this paper on specific socio-cultural practices, I suggest a use of the concept of *habitus,* which is no limited to its interpretation as an entirely semiotic process.[26] As I ground the discussion in shared routine practices and historical experiences, I also point to the extent to which gender directed the conscious and unconscious decisions, which the historical agents made and shaped their lives. Thus, I draw attention to the impact gender power relation had on the bourgeois habitus of Egyptian Jewry.

The Parisian Beacon: A Hierarchy of Languages

The interpretive perspective formed by the *linguistic turn* emphasized language - its centrality to human consciousness, imagery, and discourse. In the next pages, I will discuss language as a social practice, and its role - in particular the role of the French language - in the construction and appropriation of Jewish Bourgeois modern identity in Egypt during the first half of the 20th century.

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[24] Bourdieu suggested that *habitus* consists of both the *hexis* (the tendency to hold and use one's body in a certain ways, such as posture and accent) and more abstract mental habits, schemes of perception, classification, appreciation, feeling, and action.

[25] Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, translated by: M. Adamson (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990):13. In his book *Le Sens Pratique* Bourdieu claims that *habitus,* as a set of practices, is acquired through certain specific platform of which most important are the family, the school and academia (Elgazi 2011:261). An extensive discussion of education and the its importance for the understanding of this modern Jewish society as well as other Middle Eastern modern societies can be found in my Ph.D. research, soon to be published.

[26] On the criticism of Bourdieu's analysis of *habitus* as a merely semiotic concept see Gadi Algazi, 'Bourdieu – On the Social Field', *Theory and Critique* 38-39 (2011): 265 [in Hebrew].

Two things drew my attention to language as a practice within the context of modernization and modernity in Egypt. The first was the attention and emphasis the interviewees gave this matter. The second were the gaps and inconsistencies between the declarative position all interviewees expressed regarding the French language and their daily realities as they themselves depicted them. As a rule, all of the interviewees – even those who mastered Arabic and used it extensively - have presented French as their mother tongue or language of preference. Indeed, there was not a single interviewee, who did not speak the language fluently.[27] However, the details of their stories tells a more complicated story. In their life stories the interviewees describe a complete emersion with French culture and language. Suzie, who was born in Cairo in the 1930's, said:

> [In] our floor we were the only ones Jewish. The neighbors were Christian. […] We lived in Bab El-Luk on Imad E(l)-Din street, right next to Abbadin palace. […] one was Greek, one from Yugoslavia, one Italian and us. Downstairs lived an Arab lawyer, but he also spoke French. Egypt was an Arab country but everywhere there spoke French, at all the stores, offices, everything was in French. […] We never asked ourselves why. It was as if that was the way it was supposed to be. […] I learnt at the Alliance school […] but all of the other schools also taught in French […] even the Arab schools. […] There was no need for Arabic, only at the markets. […] Even when you went to get a passport you would speak in French and that was a government office.[28]

Charles, whose family migrated from Lebanon when he was eight years old, described his social circles and said 'My friends, family, social group were all Europeans. We all spoke French [...] went to French schools. [...] With my parents, we spoke Arabic. [...] they] spoke only Arabic. [...] With my older brother I spoke French …'.[29] These quotes are two of many others that together presented a cohesive narrative of Jewish bourgeois assimilation with French culture. In practice, however, this narrative of complete emersion was perforated by reality: as the details of their daily lives indicate, the vast majority of the interviewees did need and use Arabic routinely. As most of the families in this study had household servants, and as the servants were generally not fluent in French, Arabic was the

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[27] Even if even with respect to this aspect their stories reflected social hierarchies that were manifested in criticism towards certain accents in French or a sort of mixed grammar resulting from the use of several languages at the same time. In her novel, *Egyptian Novel*, Orly Castel Bloom describes this kind of new grammar coherently and clearly (Orly Castel Bloom, *The Egyptian Novel* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2015): 30-31

[28] PA, G2, Suzie, 12.03.2014, Israel: 1-2.

[29] J-lem, P35, I45, 10.24.1999, U.S.A.: 3.

language of communication with them. Thus, members of the Jewish bourgeoisie – children included - needed to gain at least basic level of fluency in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. In addition to the household staff, women of the Jewish bourgeoisie needed Arabic to speak with vendors and providers of various services (i.e. the laundry girls, the iron man, the ice seller etc.) who routinely came to the house. Men often needed Arabic for their work. Arabic was also often used to communicate with the elder generations of the family among which fluency of Arabic was less common than among those born and raised during the 1920's to 1940's.

The interviews reflect this reality. When describing her home Edith said: 'at home we mostly spoke French, though at times we spoke Arabic with our parents and grandparents',[30] and Benois added '[my brother and I] spoke French more. My mother spoke Arabic with her parents and gradually they began speaking more French'.[31] Rachel described her father and said:

> He had many Arab acquaintances who worked in government offices. He worked at a textile shop and knew many of them there. He ran a big store, very well known. [His name was Felix but] they called him Sa'ad, even though that was not his name, as if he was an Arab, one of them. Among them he would wear a Tarbush.[32]

The fact that most interviewees knew Arabic at least to some extent, did not stand in the way of the coherent narrative they presented and which separated them from the general Arab and Muslim population. French enabled them to attach themselves with modernity, as this came to be synonymous of European culture in general, and French one in particular. As such, this narrative was quite consciously constructed and even today is still maintained.

The interviewees' stories are fascinating for another reason connected with language. Their stories reveal at least some degree of awareness to the use they made at the time of language in order to appropriate, own and move between different identities and imageries. Both at home and outside the contemporaries would zigzag between languages; they would use one language in certain places and with certain people, and another in a different context: 'grandma spoke Arabic but with our parents we spoke French. To the maid we spoke in Arabic. […] grandma lived with us. She had her own room. We spoke to her in Arabic but she understood everything in French. You could not full her. She spoke Syrian Arabic […]

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[30] J-lem, P35, I18, 12.12.1996, U.S.A.: 1.
[31] PA, G2, 08.18.2014, Israel: 4.
[32] PA, G1, 06.19.2011, Israel: 2.

it was very funny' said Jaqueline,[33] and Ze'ev added '[…] strangely enough, at the French Lycee Arabic was not required. My first language was French, my second [...] Italian [...]. People of my generation spoke [both] Arabic and French perfectly well. [Yet] We would never speak to the maids in French nor to [our] parents in Arabic'. [34] Isaac described the differentiation very clearly: 'It was a funny situation. I spoke French with my mother, English at school and with my uncle […] Arabic with my aunt and the servants.[35]

It appears than that use of language was not just a means of communication but also means for social stratification and demarcation. The interviewees' stories clearly reveal the connection between the French language and modernity, and the status that was laced with it. Rachelline said things out and simple '[…] Speaking French was part of being modern. We learnt, lived, grew up in French. […] all our friends spoke French. Those who did not, were regarded as less modern',[36] and along the same lines Armond said

> Many of [the Jews in Egypt] were modern […] in their appearance, language, education […]. I think it would have hurt the Egyptians if we said we were modern and they were not. […] It was relevant for the time though to say that being modern meant speaking French or English, not Arabic, the indigent language. […] Even the Egyptians when they were part of the high society spoke French.[37]

As a socio-cultural practice, language was interlaced with other such practices. Thus, when describing the old Jewish neighborhood, called Haret El-Yahud, Betty used language as a marker of the social inferiority of its' inhabitants: 'The Jews of Haret el-Yahud [...] spoke only Arabic and were not intellectuals' she said.[38] Interestingly enough, Betty intake on the residents of Haret El-Yahud may in fact be a misconception of reality as even those interviewees who lived at the neighborhood were in fact fluent in French. Mirei's comments also reflect the connection that was made by many of the interviewees between the use of Arabic and undesirable social traits and customs:

> […] the Syrian Jews […] spoke Arabic at home. They also spoke French but [they] did not speak Ladino, but Arabic. [For] the Syrian and the Sephardic Jews [to intermarry] [...] it would have had to be a very special [case]. It was like marrying the 'Other'. The Syrian Jews were truly [Arab], their customs and their food was Arab.[39]

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[33] PA, G2, I23, 09.04.2014, Israel: 1.
[34] J-lem, P35, I30, 07.24.1996, U.S.A.
[35] J-lem, P35, I48, 10.28.1998, U.S.A.: 1
[36] PA, G2, Felix & Rachelline, 06.12.2014, Israel: 4.
[37] PA, G2, I21, 08.24.2014, Israel: 7.
[38] PA, G1, I30, 01.14.2014, Israel.
[39] PA, G2, I18, 08.05.2014, Israel.

Positioning the individual narratives one next to the other restructures a multilayered reality, one in which the use of language reflected colonial hierarchies. It also reveals the active use the historical players made of language in order to appropriate modernity to themselves as individuals and as a specific ethno-religious group, thus disconnecting themselves from all that was Arab and thus inferior and non-modern. Under Western European cultural hegemony, French became the common language of Egyptian Jews despite the fact that most of them had no connection to France itself except for in their imagery and self-perception. French was the language taught by at schools; [40] it was the language of many of the newspapers the Jewish population read; and the language in which community administration and institutions held their affairs (unless specific circumstances dictated otherwise).[41] The dominance of French was so great that it remained the *lingua franca* of Modernity in Egypt in general and of the Jewish bourgeoisie in particular, even throughout the period of direct British influence over Egypt.

The interviewees' stories also indicate that at least some of them were aware of the linguistic anomaly that dominated their lives. Their stories also stress the fact that the inferiority attached with Arabic was firstly a matter of a constructed social prestige, as some of the Arabic-speaking families' accumulated great wealth and were considered members of the higher middle class; 'A person could have lots of money and live like an 'Arab' ... A fellah. The two are unrelated. We didn't have a lot of money in our house but we lived properly' said Suzy, and her son, who was present during the interview added 'There were behavioral codes that [one had to follow in order to be] modern, to be European'.[42] It appears then that within the modern and colonial discourse in inter-war Egypt, biased toward Europe and all that was European, the Jewish-Egyptian bourgeoisie – as well as the Christian and Muslim ones - sought to mark its foreignness and did so using language. The continued perceived superiority of French over Arabic can be understood only within the historical and social context of colonial hegemony, and the social hierarchies it set.

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[40] On the war of languages as it was depicted in the history of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* schools but not only there see Rodrigue 1993: 125-134.

[41] The Jewish community's archive also testifies to the importance of French as copies of Jewish marriage contracts and birth certificates were most often archived in French; Meeting minutes were taken in French and most formal community correspondence was kept in this language. (Microfilm Reel 1-4, Lehman Archive).

[42] PA, G2, I29, 12.03.2014, Israel.

Though at first it seems that the use of language was merely a matter of demarcation of one's standing of the dichotomous axis of modernity and backwardness, a closer reading of the interviewees' life stories indicate that it was also a matter of gender power relations;[43] firstly, men were more often fluent in Arabic than women were. Secondly, when women were affluent in Arabic they were usually affluent in the colloquial Egyptian dialect ['Amia] rather than in literary Arabic [Fusha]. While women often picked up the Egyptian dialect from the house staff, men could gain proficiency in it at either school or university as well; while non-Egyptian educational institutions were not generally the choice of preference of most of the interviewees' families, at times they did opt for local education. This choice was based on the desire to ensure the family access to as many opportunities for economic mobility as possible.[44]

This, however, was not the case with girls, for whom Egyptian schools were considered altogether inappropriate. Lucie's story depicts this position quite explicitly: 'we went to the Communite Israelite and there was no high school there, so my parents argued. My father wanted me to go to an Egyptian school so that I will learn Arabic, but my mother insisted on the Lycee Francais. I don't want her to be like the Fellahs' she said.[45]

Another way to gain proficiency in Arabic was through daily interactions. While women's interaction with Arabic speaking people was mostly confined to the house and the realm of the household, as mentioned earlier, men often needed Arabic – both written and spoken - in lines of their professions. Moreover, since it was considered inappropriate for women – particularly young women of the Jewish bourgeoisie - to work outside the house, parents did not see the purpose of having them learn Arabic. Leon said '90% of the Jews spoke either French or English. […] There were two options at the Lycee [French Mission Schools]: one was a course of study in Arabic […] and the other in French. That was where the girls were',[46] and Clara summed things up saying that fluency in Arabic was just not considered necessary for women. In a circular motion, the lack of fluency in Arabic also dictated where and in what surrounding women could feel comfortable either socially or professionally should they have opted to work when they needed or wanted

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[43] This is true with the exception of Syrian and Yemenite Jews, who kept on using Arabic as a common language for longer than other sub groups within the Jewish population,

[44] This pattern of sending one of the boys to a public Egyptian school and another to a European one was prevalent amongst members of the Egyptian Efendiyya as well as described by Lucie Ryzova (Ryzova 2014: 1-19)

[45] PA, G2, I16, 08.01.2014, Israel: 1.

[46] PA, G2, I19, 08.12.2014, Israel: 3.

to. Thus, it seems that matters of gendered roles and social respectability were attached with the choice of language. The analysis of the interviewees' life stories implies that Arabic was positioned not only in contrast modernity but also in contrast to refined bourgeois Femininity.

Spatial Dispersion, Social Hierarchy and Gender

Another arena by which the struggle over modernity was registered was the one set by urban architecture and city lines. As new neighborhoods were being built in Egypt's metropoles along the 19th century, the older parts of the cities came to symbolize disorder, urban chaos, and social backwardness. These were associated with a dysfunctional obsolete Ottoman Muslim state, which should be replaced by a modern one. In the up-coming decades, modernity was to manifest itself not only in a new hierarchy of languages, but also in changes in the physical urban space.

Throughout the 19th century, new neighborhoods such as Ma'adi, 'A'bbasiya, Ismaa'iliya and later Heliopolis, and Zamalek rose rapidly in and around Cairo.[47] Architecturally the new neighborhoods' outlines followed a European model. These neighborhoods did not merely change the landscape of Egypt's metropoles,[48] but also played a part in the struggle for social mobility and the appropriation of modernity. As time passed internal migration from the older areas – first from Haret El-Yahud to Ma'adi and 'Abbasiya and later away from those to even newer neighborhoods – became common among this demographic group. Until recently, this change in patterns of urban distribution of the Jewish population was interpreted as part of the decline in religious affiliation and the rise in class identity.[49] The historical sources of this research point in a different direction. It seems it was an appropriated modern disposition and bourgeois habitus, which tipped the scale in favor of a move out of the old city neighborhoods. As thses neighborhoods became a symbol of Europeanism and as hence of modernity and progress, those who wished to be accepted in the prestigious club of Modernity

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[47] These changes are also relevant to Alexandria, though for lack of time and space I only address Cairo. On the city and the changes it underwent during the 18th to 20th century Middle Eastern societies see Sluglett 2008.

[48] Gudrun Kramer, 'Moving out of Place. Minorities in Middle Eastern Urban Societies, 1800-1914', in Peter Sluglett (editor), *The Urban Social History of the Middle East 1750-1950*, (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2008), 217; Yoram Meital, *Jewish Sites in* Egypt (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1995), 89; Samir W. Ra'afat, *Ma'adi 1904-1962. Society and History in a Cairo Suburb (*Cairo: Palm Press, 1994).

[49] Kramer, *Moving out of Place,* 194, 216-217.

moved on to the new areas and used the move to mark their new position. Living in the new neighborhoods made it easier to claim modernity.

Up until the 19th century, the majority of the relatively small Jewish community resided in Cairo in a neighborhood carrying its name: *Haret el-Yahud*.[50] The internal stratification of the community resembled that of the general Egyptian population: a large majority of people at basic living conditions and a small, rich circle of families, mostly of Sephardic decent, who formed the elite. Economic status notwithstanding, the rich and poor of the community lived in close proximity. As the new neighborhoods developed, those of the community who could afford it tended to leave the Jewish neighborhood situated in Bab el-Sha'ariya in the old nucleus of Cairo. They favored neighborhoods that had a majority of foreign non-Muslim residents or at least the enjoyed such an image. These neighborhoods included Sakakini, D'aher, Bulaq, Bab el-Louk, A'badeen, Ezbakia, Zamalek and Heliopolis. Yet, similar to other ethnic groups, patterns of habitation did not break entirely as the Jewish population tended to cluster together in specific areas and often even in specific buildings following other family members and friends.[51]

The effect of the move to the new neighborhoods on the appropriation and construction of a shared modern Jewish identity is evident in the life stories of interviewees. Almost all interviewees discussed their place of residence – both in it-self and in comparison with other residential possibilities. Betty, whose family moved from the center of Cairo to Heliopolis - one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of the city at the time, said:

> We didn't connect [with the Jews of Haret el-Yahud]. We would go to Haret el-Yahud only to buy
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> matza bread and things for Passover. I remember I used to go with mother in this carriage, and she
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> would sit in it and they would bring things to her. [...] The Jews of Haret el-Yahud [...] spoke only
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> Arabic and were not intellectuals, so we had no connection to them.[52]

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[50] Haret el-Yahud el-Rabbaniyin [the Rabbinic Jews] and Haret el-Yahud el-Karaain [the Karaite Jews] were adjacent neighborhoods in Cairo. The Karaits were considered by the Ottoman Empire and later on by the state as part of the general Jewish public, yet they had their own religious institutions and community facilities. For further reading on the Karait Jews, see Beinin 2007; Ilan 2010; Kimhi 2009; Meital1995: 88-84. In Alexandria Jews lived in several neighborhoods throughout the city. This may have been the result of the relatively small size of the Jewish community there until the middle of the 19th century. A significant increase in the Jewish population in Alexandria occurred in the 19th century because of migration and the new opportunities this port city could offer new comers. The significant foreign presence in the city and the general atmosphere often described as cosmopolitan have been offered as an explanation for the demographic dispersion of Jews in Alexandria (Meital 1995: 135).

[51] Meital, *Jewish Sites*, 37; Greenshields 1980, 120-140.

[52] Betty, Ibid, 6.

Aline said 'it was clear that those who lived there [in Haret el-Yahud] were poor',[53] and Leon, whose father immigrated to Egypt from Jerusalem said 'No one [of the family] lived in Haret el-Yahud but rather in Gamra and Sakakini. Those were neighborhoods with many Jews'.[54] Lucy, with whom I had one of the longest and most intimate interview described her family saying:

> There [in Egypt] I would say we were a medium-high socio-economic family, and that of my husband was from the high middle classes ... Haret el-Yahud was an area of simple people, of miserable and destitute people. They had lowly professions, [they were] daily workers with no education and many children. [In Haret el-Yahud] women didn't work, they had at least 4-5 children. Their schools, too, were simple. We attended a school that charged monthly tuition, albeit symbolically. They didn't [have to pay even than].[55]

Archive documents support the descriptions of urban divides depicted by the interviewees. Following Jewish directives and customs of charity, the Jewish Community in Cairo gave out weekly allowances to some 20 of its most destitute members. This custom was perceived part of the community's responsibility for its weakest members and part of the Mitzvah of *Zdaka*, a directive of communal and private benevolence. Lists of the beneficiaries of this allowance indicate that most did not reside in the new neighborhoods of Cairo. Although the documents offer only an indirect testimony regarding urban spatial divisions, those that are pertinent support the image of Haret el-Yahud as a neighborhood of destitute people.[56]

In light of this consistent image of Haret EL-Yahud opposite to the new neighborhoods, a few interviews are particularly interesting and insightful; these describe Haret El-Yahud differently. Cammy's family lived in Haret el-Yahud right until they had to migrate from Egypt in the early 1950's. While her older brother left the neighborhood following his marriage in favor of a newer one (though close to it on order to maintain his familial ties), her parents chose to stay in the old neighborhood. It seems they opted to stay not because they lacked the financial resources, but because they felt their needs were nicely met there: '[My] family was […] well established […]We lived in Haret el-Yahud but were among the best [off financially]. We had a house, electricity, [running] water.

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[53] PA, G2, I25, 08.28.2014, Israel.
[54] Leon, ibid, 2.
[55] Lucie, ibid, 9.
[56] (YUA, Reel 4 D49, D95, D105).

My oldest brother, when he got married, moved not too far away, but outside the neighborhood' said Cammy.[57]

Celeste, whose family also remained in Haret El-Yahud, was of a very wealthy financial background. When describing her home she said:

> When they started expanding Cairo, people began leaving the neighborhood [... in the neighborhood people] lived in alleys upon alleys, but we had everything. There were schools, like 'Wahaba' and 'Green' […]. There were medical clinics, a WIZO center [Women's International Zionist Organization],[58] a 'Goutte de Lait'[59] center that provided care for mothers and infants from poor families. Everything was given in secret. The clinics were operated on donations and funds given by the wealthiest families. They also built a 4-storey building designated for the poor who could not afford independent housing. Next to this building was a very large clinic that was open all day long […]. After 1946 [...] Jews began to leave the Hara to live in more modern suburbs in which Europeans also lived such as el-A'bbasiya, Sakakini [...]. Everything was set so that [Jews] didn't have to go outside [of the neighborhood], But people began working in new professions, opened shops, were in the stock exchange market and banks, and in the cotton trade. This required them to exit the Hara [neighborhood].[60]

It appears then, that despite the image of destitution of Haret El-Yahud depicted by many of the interviewees, the details indicate that its' inhabitants were not all poor and in need. Rather, it seems that residents of Haret El-Yahud came from a broad range of economic backgrounds, and at least some chose to stay in it even though they had the financial means to leave. This attests to the fact that the choice of residence was at least in part based on social imagery rather than on clear cut financial considerations. The different depiction of Haret El-Yahud in several interviews, which stands in contrast to its' general image, reflects the tensions under which the Jewish Bourgeoisie of Egypt shaped their lives and perceptions. The depiction of the old city neighborhoods and their association with a non-modern Muslim and Arab culture made many opt for a change in place of residence. At times the move away did not even entail significant improvement in living conditions. At least in some respects – i.e. proximity to family, community services, the business district and entertainment venues – it actually meant

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[57] PA, G1, I13,08.22.2011, Israel, 1-2.
[58] WIZO was a non-party international movement within the Zionist movement dedicated to the advancement of the status of women and other social goals]
[59] literally this means 'a drop of milk' the name in French was the name of a project meant to address the wellbeing of mothers and children
[60] PA, G2, I1, 06.22.2011, Israel, 1-2.

the opposite. To fully understand this shift in patterns of urban dispersion, one must take their role in the appropriation of modernity into consideration; the move to the new European neighborhoods was one of the means by which contemporaries could appropriate and construct a modern identity, and enjoy the concrete and immediate benefits it carried. This also explains the preoccupation of the interviewees with the image of the neighborhood they lived in- whether they moved out of Haret El-Yahud or continued to reside in it.

Within the hierarchy emerging from the depiction of the Cairene neighborhoods another, seemingly invisible one comes into life: a hierarchy set by gender. As a public space, the city was divided by gendered codes and norms of respectability and visibility. Thus, there were areas that were perceived as inappropriate for women and others at which women could be present only with male family members as escorts, or in groups. One such space were the markets; as most of the interviewees' household enjoyed the services of in-house staff, the daily shopping for groceries and supplies became the responsibility of (usually male) servants. Thus, respectable bourgeois women could abstain from the bustling markets and the interaction with lower class Egyptian population as well as from the use of Arabic in public places.

The identification of the markets as inappropriate places for women is clearly manifest in the interviewees' life stories. Dalia said.

> There was always a man servant to do the heavy work … We had an ice box at the time with big blocks of ice and that meant that we had to shop every day and that was the job of the manservant. Mother gave him a shopping list and he bought the stuff and came home with it. On Fridays father bought the fish.[61]

In only two cases, the interviewees told a story of a female family member who went out to the markets for food supplies. One was of a grandmother who went out for a special order of products for the Jewish High Holidays.[62] The other was a case in which a mother was accompanied by her daughter to the Jewish district to order specific food supplies. In this case, the mother never left the carriage in which she arrived at the shops. The grocers came out to her and loaded her order on to the carriage.[63]

There were yet other public spaces in which 'decent' women could only present themselves in the company of other women or with a male family member (typically a

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[61] J-lem, P35, I15, 10.21.1999, U.S.A.: 3. See also PA, G2, I30, 01.14.2014, Israel, 7.
[62] Armond, ibid, 2.
[63] PA, G2, I30, 01.14.2014, Israel.

father, bother, husband, or son). Such spaces included the cinema, coffee shops, the promenade, and other areas of entertainment. In contrast to the markets, which were depicted as locus of indigenous Muslim populations usually of lower socio-economic strata and/or fellah origin, these places of entertainment were construed as places for modern time-pass and recreational activity, befitting the stature and prestige of Bourgeois women. In fact, parallel to their function as places of legitimate entertainment for young Jewish men and women of bourgeois families, they also served as the platforms at which one would go to see and be seen. Not surprisingly, these places had Europeanized names: the known café Americaine, café Riche and café Nord Pole; the cinema La Potiniere, the Miami movie house and the Paramount cinema; the pastry shop Loques and the high-end bakery shop and café Groppi; the British Officers' Club as well as many other (less prestigious) Neighborhood Tennis, Sports and Members clubs, and the French literary club Les Amities Francaise. As such, these places were the considered the loci of respectable forms of leisure activity for young women, wives and mothers, as long as they had their husbands' permission and attended them with their children, in groups or under other type of acceptable supervision.

Another place at which un-wed women would not be socially accepted was nightclubs. Though this was considered a legitimate time pass for men – single and married, only a small number of the women mentioned in the interviewees stories attended such places and always with the permission and physical presence of their husbands. In other cases, interviewees described women who attended these places as fast women, a euphemism used to escribe women of loose moral standards.

The interviewees' life stories reveal the physical urban space as one in which gendered norms, boundaries and expectations were set, expressed and replicated. Still it is important to say that such normative gendered segregation was never fully realized. As my previous researches indicate men and women – single and married – could and indeed had interacted without supervision in different places and under different circumstances and settings, throughout the period under discussion.[64] Still those who did so, often acted against general codes of respectability.[65] Reservations aside, the

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[64] Those researches reveal cases of pregnancies out of wedlock, intimate relations and long-term relationships in which men and women of the Jewish bourgeoisie were involved and not on rare occasions. These could only develop in social circumstances that allowed for the physical interaction between men and women.

[65] In part, the realization of a gendered spatial separation depended on economic means, yet as the stories' details reveal it did not depend solely on that.

discussion provided here points to the existence of a gendered spatial division and to the role urban physical space played in the appropriation of gender dependent modernity.

Inter-Marriage, Social Hierarchy and mobility

As Clause Levi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin and many other have shown (הפנייה) marriage – one of the most prominent mechanism for the establishment of kin relations – sets yet another social arena – most probably one of the most important ones - by and in which social and financial capital is produced and reproduced. In light of this, and of the discussion presented thus far, it is interesting to see if and how the social hierarchy reflected in the use of language and choice of residence was manifested by marriage patterns among the Jewish bourgeoisie. As the scope of this work does not allow for a comprehensive discussion of marriage and kin relations, I will suggest a brief discussion on interfaith marriages. Considered as a marginal phenomenon by most interviewees, they presented yet another cohesive narrative of rejection and dis-approvment of instances of such marriages (not even with Karait Jews). A close reading of the stories reveal yet again a more complex reality; one that was set not purely on the basis of religious segregation, but rather in direct relation to social hierarchies and gender relations.

The analysis of the attitudes of members of the Jewish bourgeoisie towards interfaith marriage provides insight that help better understand what it meant to be modern at the specific time and context discussed, and that make the conscious action taken by members of the Jewish bourgeoisie in the process of appropriation of a modern identity, clearer. As stated earlier, 20th century Egyptian metropoles were places of routine interaction between members of different ethno-religious communities. As the numbers of foreigners increased during both World Wars [mainly due to the armed forces presence in Egypt] and as young women's hired-work became more legitimate such interactions grew even more common. Under these circumstances, it is feasible to assume that at least some interactions led to romantic relationships and even marriages. Yet, the archive – though invested in documenting the personal status of the Jewish populace - is completely silent regarding this phenomenon. Granted, the Grand Rabbinate was interested primarily in documenting Jewish (legal and other) proceedings and hence less prone to document marriages held outside its judicial and religious scope. Still, the resounding lack of notice of this phenomenon suggests a

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hidden agenda – conscious or unconscious – that led to this selection of materials to document (or as in this case to overlook).

In striking contradiction to the archival silence, the interviewees' life stories offer affluent examples of such cases. Indeed, the social taboo against inter-faith marriage echoed in their stories, yet almost all of them gave details regarding family members, friends or acquaintances who married out of the Jewish faith. This was particularly true during the period of and after the Second World War. In the vast majority of cases, it was a marriage between a member of the Jewish community – often women – and European or American Christians, and not with local residents of Christian or Muslim affiliation. Jacko's aunt married an Armenian man and Fifi's sister married a Muslim Egyptian, whom she met during her activities at the communist party. But the majority of stories were of women who married American, British or French expatriates or soldiers, like in the cases of Lilianne and Lillette's sisters; Rachel and Cammy's sister in laws and Collet's mother, to name but a few.

When reviewed one next to the other, the individual narratives of the interviewees indicate that while an anti-inter-faith marriage ideal was prevalent, in reality the phenomenon did exist and was tolerated by the Jewish bourgeoisie of Egypt. However, it appears the attitudes toward such marriages greatly depended on the religious affiliation of the marriage candidates – namely if they were of Christian European or North-American affiliation or not. Marriage with any non-Jewish persons was, at least declaratively generally disapproved of. Yet, marriage with European Christians was tolerable and at times even desirable, because it drew the Jewish partner and dependent family closer to the circles regarded as inherently modern. Legitimate spousal relationships with Europeans paved the way for rapid social mobility. On the other hand, marriage with an Egyptian, particularly a Muslim Egyptian, was construed as a fall down the social ladder. It is thus, not surprising that these marriages were much more disapproved of and scrutinized:[66] '[…Inter faith marriage] was not even considered. For sure not [with] an Arab', said Benois[67] and Fifi's sister would not dare marry her Muslim partner until her father died and her mother already migrated from Egypt.[68]

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[66] The community's reaction to Layla Murad's marriage to Anwar Wagdi (and her conversion to Islam) present an interesting example. Though she was a Karait Jew, her actions revoked intense criticism and reprimand amongst the Jewish community.

[67] PA, G2, I22, 08.08.2014, Israel, 4-5.

[68] PA, G1, I4, 06.05.2011, Israel, 4.

In an article on the relationship between gender and colonial policy in India Durba Gosh had presented the use colonial administration made of gender and kin relations in its' efforts to preserve its' power and social hierarchies it set into place. Gosh claimed that the colonial state placed the human body and sexuality under regulation, and thus expressed a clear position against inter-faith (as well as cross ethnic) marriage.[69] Gosh argues such marriages challenged social exclusion, national citizenship and legal rights.[70] Along similar lines, Lora Ann Stoler also argues that the separation of the European body from that of the natives was essential for the preservation of a colonial hierarchy.[71] Though Egypt was never a British colony, I suggest these power relations, as they were manifest by the human bodies, trickled and influenced the attitudes of the Jewish Egyptian bourgeoisie towards inter-faith marriages. Marriage provided means by which they could disassociate from the negative image appropriated to Muslim and Arab culture and population and/or annex themselves onto the European club of modernity.

Conclusion

Following the stance that regards modernity as an historical life experience defined in relation to and through cultural and social practices, I have dedicated this paper to the analysis of three socio-cultural practices of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Egypt of the first half of the 20th century. Focusing on these practices I have pinpointed to the role played by the historical agents in the construction of modernity and modern identity, which in term helped them both create a common denominator for a community comprised mostly of migrants, carve a new place for themselves under the social order formed under colonial power relations. Using language, urban dispersion and inter-faith marriage (among other practices not discussed herein), the Jewish bourgeoisie reinvented itself and paved its' way to the biggest prize offered to those regarded as modern – socio-economic mobility.

As a migrant bourgeois community, the Jewish community developed in ways that separated it from the majority of Egyptian society. Significant parts of this process

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[69] Durba Gosh, 'Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?', *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004), 3, 743, 745-6, 750.

[70] The matter and cross ethnic marriages was also the concern of the state in the southern states of the U.S.A. as late as the 1960's. Until that time, law prohibited such relations.

[71] Laura Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain Epistemic Anxieties &Colonial Sense* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2009).

of defamiliarization were consciously constructed, in light of the concrete benefits entailed with disassociation from all that was Arab or Muslim under the discourse and hierarchy colonial presence prompted. In contrast, discussing the ways and means by which the Jewish bourgeoisie of Egypt appropriated modernity raised quite clear similarities between this stratum and other bourgeois – mostly non-Muslim but not only – bourgeois strata across urban centers in the Middle East. Such similarities are clearly evident in White's analysis of the middle classes in Haleb Syria and in that of Ryzova of the Egyptian Efendiyya. I argue that it was not the shared Egyptian identity that was the basis of those similarities, but rather the wider hybrid Levantine identity, shared by the well to do populace of the urban Middle Eastern mega-cities; one which had evolved as a result of the intense interaction with and in reaction to colonial policy, interest and physical presence.

Discussing language, urban dispersion and inter-faith marriage, the cultural weight they carried becomes clear and reveals the social arena they formed and in which the fight over modernity and the resources it controlled took place. It is by those practices (and others) that the social and cultural hierarchies, created under colonial presence, were manifested, preserved and reproduced. By adopting French as their *lingua franca* and moving out of old city's neighborhoods members of the Jewish Egyptian bourgeoisie publicly marked their place in society and on the dichotomous axis posing Europeanism and modernity together and in opposition to Islam and/or Arab ethnic identity. The unanimous adoption of French, the cohesive narrative presenting the old city neighborhoods as centers of backwardness and destitution and the different reactions towards inter-faith marriages with European or American Christians versus those towards such marriages with Egyptian Muslims, can all be only fully understood in this context.

This context also sheds light on the interchange between these practices and the ways in which they were used in order to maximize mobility. While fluency in French and residence at certain parts of the city were used to mark a social standing and modern affiliation, they were also used as mechanisms of selection of proper marriage candidates, with whom kin relations could increase mobility and capital.

Albeit at times harder to identify and point to, gender defined the boundaries of the bourgeois identity and imagery formed and appropriated by the Jews of Egypt. The arenas in which men and women of the Jewish bourgeoisie conducted their lives and made their choices was defined by gender and gendered power relations. Men and

women of the Jewish-Egyptian bourgeoisie shared in values and habitus. Yet the range of possibilities, behaviors, choices and costs for deviation from the norm differed greatly depending on gender. The perspective offered by gender, helps better understand the historical reality and present it is a less dichotomous manner. Gender explains differences in fluency and use of languages otherwise written down to chance; It helps depict and understand the basis of the newly constructed bourgeois respectability; It stresses the way in which marriage – I this case interfaith marriage – helped pave the road – chiefly of women - to social mobility. This in turn points to the much more subtle change in social relations that the modernity entailed, and thus allow to break away from the mega narrative that presents modernity as a sharp break from all "old' and "traditional".

The final contribution this paper presents is the emphasis on the vitality of narrative sources to the research of modern society and their social history. As the main source for this discussion, the interviews and life stories of former members of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Egypt, provided ample new information and allowed a discussion in aspects otherwise usually out of the scope of historians. In the face of the dominance of many assumptions derived from various modernization theories, the importance of this new knowledge and the questions it allows to raise is multiplied and enables a depiction of a more accurate historical picture.