'Urfî marriage, an Egyptian Version of Cohabitation?**
우르피 결혼 이집트 식 동거인가?

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Key words: 'urfi, muta'h, ishuhar, i'lan, maudhun

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I. Introduction

'Urūfī marriage, which refers to "customary" marriage in Arabic, has always existed in Egypt. Even though its literal meaning refers to customary marriage, the term 'urūfī marriage is more likely to be perceived as "secret" marriage from the contemporary Egyptian socio-cultural context.

According to Abaza,1) 'urūfī marriage was traditionally carried out for practical purposes as it enables widows to remarry while keeping the state pension of their deceased husbands. Or, sometimes, 'urūfī marriage serves the function of matchmaking men and women across classes. By marrying in 'urūfī way, men from upper-class can marry a second wife who belongs to lower-class. In this way, men satisfied their sexual desires but retained their honour by preserving the marriage to their first wife and the community where he belongs to, and keeping their second marriage secret. It is possible to maintain the secrecy of 'urūfī marriage, not only because it is formally unregistered in the courts, but also because the couple typically do not establish a joint home when they are involved in this type of marriage. Rather, they live in their respective houses, and are bound to each other as husband and wife through the unregistered marriage contract and sexual intercourse.

In Egypt, currently, there is a looming assumption that 'urūfī marriage is getting popularity especially among the educated young Egyptians who face economic difficulties at the time of marriage due to inflation and unemployment. It is also said that 'urūfī marriage are chosen by the young Egyptians who want to negotiate between the pressures to keep their respectable image as Muslim and to follow the waves of "liberal" westernisation.

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1) Transliteration of Arabic basically follows the ALA–LC Romanization manual. However, in order to preserve the Cairene pronunciation of Arabic, I replaced j with g and dropped the pronunciation of g. I also omitted diacritics except ʾāyn. All Arabic words, except for proper names and standard English forms are italicised.