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4. EDUCATION 'HOME DELIVERY' IN EGYPT

Private Tutoring and Social Stratification[1]

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the relationship between private tutoring in the pre-university education sector and social class dynamics in Egypt. During the last three decades, tutoring has become an integral feature of the Egyptian education system. Students across all social strata participate in private and group lessons at home, larger study groups, and revision classes with 'star teachers' in tutoring centres. Despite growing disparities in lifestyle, schooling experiences, and opportunities, students' choice of tutors and different forms of tutoring usually follow a common logic. I argue that, while unequal access to tutoring is likely to have a detrimental effect on equity, equality of opportunities has long been undermined by policies of privatisation and an increasing social segregation in the formal education sector.

INTRODUCTION

> The question of education and private lessons is right at the top of the list of Egyptians' concerns, in a place shared only by the struggle to make a living. (…) Private lessons are like brand names. You can find them at all prices to suit every class and segment of society. (Excerpt from Taxi by Khaled Al Khamissi, 2008, p. 111)

The variety of offers in Egypt's heterogeneous and largely unregulated informal education sector ranges from expensive one-on-one private lessons at students' homes to group and mass tutoring in specialised tutoring centres catering for different target groups. The high costs associated with tutoring constitute a heavy burden especially for poorer families, undermining government claims of providing free and equal access to education. While the phenomenon is widely discussed and problematised in Egyptian media and public discourse, scientific (and especially qualitative) accounts of tutoring practices are still scarce. Following a brief overview of the scope and different forms of tutoring that exist in Egypt, two examples are presented to identify the class dimensions of tutoring, its impact on student-teacher relationships and on the social status and professional identity of teachers. The voices and narratives of teachers, students, and parents are at the centre of this analysis.

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Rather than a remedial measure for weak students, private and group tutoring have become a 'normal' and seemingly indispensable part of the education process in Egypt, and prevail across social classes and educational stages. It is no longer a prerogative of the wealthy, as comparatively cheap forms of tutoring like study groups and mass tutoring in centres have enabled the lower classes to participate in this practice as well. While the residents of a middle and upper class neighbourhood of Cairo may have little in common with their neighbours in lower-income or 'informal' areas in terms of income, occupation, lifestyle, and consumption, their strategic choices when it comes to education and tutoring follow surprisingly similar patterns. Regardless of social background and income, most families participate in this informal system and abide by its rules. But are the forms, connotations, associated hopes and aspirations, and the implications of tutoring really the same across different social classes? If tutoring can be interpreted as a strategy of lower-income families to cope with the deficiencies of the public education system, motivated by the hope for upward social mobility through education, how can the prevalence of tutoring practices among upper middle and upper class students be interpreted? Why do parents spend hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of Egyptian Pounds (LE) every month for private lessons even if their children already attend expensive private schools? What kinds of student-teacher relationships are forged by tutoring in different socio-economic contexts, and what is its impact on teachers' status and professional identity? Rather than focusing on its impact on students' achievements and examination success, I am interested in the implications of tutoring for social relations in the education sector and beyond, and in the perspectives of the actors involved, i.e. students and their parents, teachers and the managers of tutoring centres.

Private tutoring, or 'shadow education', as a global phenomenon, albeit with varying local configurations and dynamics, was brought to the attention of scholars and policy makers by Bray (1999, 2003) and others. It has gained increased attention among educational researchers worldwide.[2] However, little qualitative or ethnographic research has been conducted on private tutoring in the Arab countries.[3] The issue is mentioned in a number of publications on education in Egypt, without, however, constituting their focus (e.g. Barsoum, 2004; Cochran, 1986; El-Tawila et al., 2000; Hargreaves, 1997; Herrera, 1992; Herrera & Torres, 2006; Hyde, 1978; Singerman, 1995). In their paper on 'private and group tutoring in Egypt', Assaad and Elbadawy (2004) analysed government census and survey data to find out whether a gender bias exists in the context of tutoring, which they did not find. Tadros (2006) described the effects of economic reforms and structural adjustment policies on the poor's access to education and health services. The study concluded that 'hidden' and informal costs of education, especially through private tutoring, were constituting an increasing burden on poor families, undermining government claims of free and equal access to education. Herrera and Torres (2006, p. 14ff.) interpreted the proliferation of private tutoring as 'the starkest manifestation of unchecked market relations in education' and attributed it to a 'growing neoliberal mentality' in Egypt.

Since the 1970s, education systems have been described as arenas of social reproduction and class struggle, and as serving to maintain and perpetuate class inequalities (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971). It is generally assumed that tutoring contributes to this reproduction of class privileges and social stratification. The assumption is that ‘most forms of private tutoring (…) maintain or exacerbate social inequalities since high-income households are more easily able to afford greater quantities and better qualities of tutoring compared with low-income households’ (Bray, 2009, p. 32). Farag (2006, p. 115) described private tutoring as ‘a form of class struggle taking place on the educational terrain’. Rather than assuming a straightforward causality between access to tutoring and social reproduction, I would like to take a closer look at some of the social dynamics taking place in the informal education sector in Egypt.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter is based on data collected during twelve months of anthropological fieldwork conducted in Cairo in 2009 and 2010 as part of my Ph.D. project. It also builds on earlier fieldwork on tutoring in Cairo conducted between 2004 and 2006 (Hartmann, 2008a, b). While my earlier research focused on tutoring practices in several lower-income neighbourhoods of Cairo, this chapter widens the scope to include tutoring practices in middle and upper middle class contexts. Research methods included participant observation in several centres as well as during private lessons at students’ homes and in a private school. Of the 12 centres I visited in 2009 and 2010, seven were located in lower-income neighbourhoods of Cairo, four in middle class areas of Cairo and one in a poor neighbourhood of Alexandria. Four of the centres in lower-income Cairo were affiliated to mosques, and one was located in a church. Apart from classroom observation – mostly during German and English classes at the preparatory and general secondary level – I conducted semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with students, teachers, parents, and the owners, managers, and staff of these centres. In addition, I attended private lessons at students’ homes, both in lower and upper middle or upper class contexts, and repeatedly visited a private school, where I observed classes and conducted interviews with students, teachers, and members of the administration.

Due to the informal and partly illegal nature of private tutoring, which is prohibited for public school teachers by law but which is nevertheless widely practiced – access to the field, especially to teachers and centres, was initially difficult. Understandably, most teachers were reluctant to talk about their tutoring activities to a stranger, and centre managers were not interested in admitting a researcher into their premises. A few months into my fieldwork, and thanks to a personal contact, I obtained access to a large mosque-affiliated tutoring centre in a lower-income neighbourhood. I had the opportunity to teach German to young adults at the adjacent ‘training centre’, and thus to visit the centre at least twice a week throughout a period of six months. After having established trustful relationships with some of the people working there, and especially with a teacher

of German, I was able to accompany him to other centres and to the private school where he was working. From there, I was able to further expand my network of contacts.

SCOPE AND FORMS OF TUTORING IN EGYPT

Reliable data regarding rates of participation in tutoring are difficult to obtain, and available statistics vary considerably. According to the Egypt Human Development Report 2005, the percentage of families whose children took private lessons in 2005 was 64% in urban areas and 54% in rural areas (EHDR, 2005, p. 56). The 'Survey of Young People in Egypt' (SYPE), conducted in 2009, reported the highest incidence of tutoring among students living in 'informal urban' areas (61.4% as compared to 54.2% in 'urban' and 44.7% in 'rural' areas) (Population Council, 2010, p. 204).[4] While it exists from kindergarten through university level, tutoring is most widespread in the final years of preparatory and especially general secondary level, where pressure on the students is highest because results of the final high school examinations (*thanawiyya 'amma*) are decisive for their further progress in the education system.[5]

Tutoring commonly takes place at students' or teachers' homes or in centres, but also at schools and, especially in lower-income neighbourhoods, in mosques and churches. Lessons are closely oriented at the official syllabus, with a strong focus on examination preparation. Egyptian students and teachers differentiate between 'private lessons' (*durus khususiyya*) which are taught on a one-on-one basis or in small groups, usually in teachers' or students' homes, and classes for larger groups of students, referred to as 'study groups' (*magmu'at*) or 'reinforcement classes' (*fusul taqwiyya*), which take place in tutoring centres, mosques and churches, or at school. At the end of the school year, shortly before examinations, many teachers offer 'final revisions' (*muraga'at niha'iyya*) which often take place in larger venues accommodating several hundred students at once. The fees for these different offers vary according to the size of the group, the students' socio-economic background, the perceived importance and difficulty of the subject, and the reputation of the teacher. While the more affluent families tend to prefer expensive private lessons at home, imparted to small groups of friends or neighbours, or even on a one-to-one level, poorer families resort more often to tutoring centres, and those who cannot even afford classes at a centre rely on the cheaper in-school study groups (*magmu'at madrasiyya*) or tutoring provided by religious and other charitable organisations for free or for a nominal fee.

A combination of factors has contributed to the proliferation of tutoring in Egypt during the last decades. Among these are the structural deficits of the underfunded public education system – with overcrowded classes of up to eighty students, multi-shift schools, and very low salaries which make it impossible for teachers to survive without an additional source of income[6] – an examination-focused teaching and learning culture that fosters rote-learning, as well as the competitive nature of final examinations and university admission policies.[7] The strong examination orientation and 'ritualisation' (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 4) of the education system is at

the core of the tutoring phenomenon. After six years of primary school and three years of preparatory school, Egyptian students are tracked either into general secondary school, which lasts three years and qualifies them for entering university, or, if they achieve only lower scores, into vocational or technical schools specialising either in commerce, industry or agriculture.[8] At the crucial junctures of the education system, especially at the end of the preparatory and secondary stages, final grades determine a student's future options and life chances; the pressure to succeed is therefore very high. Higher education is still associated with upward social mobility, social status, and the Nasserist employment guarantee for university graduates,[9] despite high rates of unemployment and underemployment among graduates today. Indeed, 'university graduates are the only educational group to have experienced an increase in unemployment between 1997 and 2006' (OECD & World Bank, 2010, p. 58).

Policies of educational expansion and democratisation of access in the 1950s and 1960s, when the public education system was rendered free of charge at all stages, meant that upward social mobility through education became a reality for a considerable part of the Egyptian population. However, the state soon lacked the resources to meet the educational needs and aspirations of the fast-growing population, and the quality of publicly provided education started to deteriorate (Cochran, 1986, p. 49 ff.). More and more unqualified teachers had to be hired and school facilities were insufficiently equipped for the masses of students they had to accommodate. This development ultimately resulted in a widespread loss of trust in state-provided education. Under the rule of Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), the privatisation and decentralisation of educational offers was officially encouraged, in line with the demands of international agencies, and especially since the 1990s, increasing numbers of private schools and universities have been established (Herrera, 2008, p. 360 ff.).[10] A heterogeneous educational market has since developed, including comparatively cheap 'Arabic' private schools, which offer the same curriculum as public schools and mostly differ regarding the quality of their infrastructure, more expensive 'language schools', where the national curriculum is (partly) taught in a foreign language, and 'international schools', which offer foreign degrees like the American diploma or the British IGCSE.[11] Those who can afford it can now avoid the pressure of the *thanawiyya 'amma* system by resorting to these foreign diplomas.[12]

Policy Responses

Articles 8 and 20 of the Egyptian constitution of 1971 stipulated that the state should provide all citizens with free education, in order to realise the principle of equal opportunities (MOE, 2008, p. 13). The proliferation of private tutoring not only runs contrary to this declared aim, but actually withdraws valuable resources from the formal education system. Income derived from private tutoring is usually not declared to the tax authorities. Successive Egyptian Ministers of Education have been aware of the problem and have taken a variety of measures in order to curb the prevalence of the practice, without much success. Private tutoring by

public school teachers was prohibited in 1998. Yet, breeches have rarely been sanctioned (World Bank, 2002, p. 42). A legal alternative, i.e. in-school study groups (*magmu'at madrasiyya*), were already introduced as early as 1952, and Law No. 149 of 1986 declared them a mandatory service to be offered at all schools (Herrera, 1992, p. 75). These *magmu'at madrasiyya* take place after regular classes for a small fee, but are usually perceived as being of lower quality than private lessons at home or in centres.

Recently, the *National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt 2007-2012*, an ambitious and comprehensive reform programme, explicitly addressed the issue of tutoring and the equity concerns related to it. Among the suggested remedies are curriculum and pedagogical reforms, a reform of the student assessment system, as well as 'professional development' and enhanced accountability of teachers, with the aim of reinstalling parents' trust in the public education system (MOE, 2007, p.91). The most important measure in this context has been the introduction of a new salary and promotion scheme for public school teachers, the 'Special Cadre Law' (Law No. 155 of 2007), with the stated aim of 'improving the social and financial conditions of teachers' and of linking their promotion to performance (MOE, 2007, p. 43). However, this new payment scheme only applies to teachers who are public sector employees and who pass the specially designed examinations (MOE, 2007, p. 142). It excludes large numbers of teachers who work on short-term contracts and in private schools. The reform has therefore met with a lot of criticism on the part of teachers, who in subsequent protests called for a cancellation of the 'humiliating' assessment examinations and for an unconditional minimum wage for all teachers (cf. Carr, 2008).

'KHALLAS YA USTAZ, EHNA FID-DARS!': A PRIVATE LESSON IN LOWER INCOME CAIRO

When I met Do'aa (all fieldwork names are pseudonyms) in late 2009, she was in the sixth grade of a public elementary school. She was the youngest of six siblings and lived with her family in a small two-room apartment in Masr al-Qadima, a lower-income neighbourhood of Cairo. Her parents were originally from Sohag in the South of Egypt. Her father made a living selling wall paint and her mother was a housewife. Despite her family's dire economic conditions, Do'aa was taking private lessons (*durus*) in English, Arabic and mathematics that year, for which her family paid 150 LE a month, in addition to the official tutoring classes at school (*magmu'at madrasiyya*), which, according to Do'aa were 'compulsory' (*igbari*). Sometimes she took in-school *magmu'at* as well as *durus* in one and the same subject. She told me that 'we have to take *magmu'at* because of the *'amal al-sana* grades, and then we take *durus* in order to really understand the subject matter'. The private lessons in math and Arabic were provided by teachers from her school. She took them in a group of about 10 girls at a friend's house. Every month, she gave 100 LE to her Arabic teacher, who was also the headmaster of her school, and he passed 50 LE on to the math teacher. For the English lessons, which she was taking '*barra khalis*' (literally 'completely outside', i.e. the teacher was not from

her school), she paid another 50 LE separately. In social studies and natural sciences she relied only on *magmu'at madrasiyya*, which cost 16 LE per month and subject.

Do'aa invited me to accompany her to one of her private lessons, which took place in the small, sparsely furnished living room of a classmate's flat. When we arrived, nine girls were already gathered around a small table together with Ustaz Medhat, a young math teacher, who proceeded to explain the subject matter at the usual high speed. After each sentence, the girls rhythmically repeated the main points in chorus. Once in a while, he interspersed his explanations with a question, whereupon the girls eagerly competed to get his attention and answer the question: 'Me, Ustaz Medhat!' Most of the time, they followed his explanations intently, and he made sure that all of them focused and concentrated on the class. Once, when he briefly digressed from the topic of the lesson and started talking about the importance of studying math, not just for school but for life, he was called to order by one of the students: '*Khallas ya Ustaz, ehna fid-dars!*' ('Enough, Teacher, we are in the lesson!), implying that 'this is not school, where you can waste time with idle talk'. After the lesson, Ustaz Medhat told me that he taught the same students at school, where there were about 50 students in one class. In his opinion, the students in this neighbourhood depended on private lessons, because most of them came from a lower class background, fathers had to work a lot and mothers were usually not educated enough to help their children with their schoolwork. And even in the private lessons, he added, groups were too large to really give individual attention to every student (Fieldnotes, 11.11.09).

Education 'Home Delivery': A Private Lesson in an Upper Class Home

I joined Salma and three of her friends on an evening in early April for a private lesson held in her family's spacious apartment in Mohandisseen, an upscale neighbourhood located only a few kilometres northwest of Masr al-Qadima on the opposite side of the Nile. The students had gathered around a large oval table in the dining area, which was furnished in the popular 'Louis XV' style, with heavy chandeliers, gold-framed mirrors, and large pieces of decorative chinaware, just like the adjacent *reception* and the separate *salon*. Salma's father was a successful businessman. Among other enterprises the family owned a hotel and sold real estate in one of the new gated communities in the desert.[13] Salma and her friends were in the third and last year of the general secondary stage at a prestigious foreign school. They attended the *thanawiyya 'amma* track of that school, which meant that they had to study the same subjects and take the same examinations as all other Egyptian students in the 'national system'. Now, in April, final examinations were approaching, so they had basically stopped going to school, as they told me. Instead, they were concentrating on their private lessons at home. The economics teacher, Ustaz Magdi, was a man in his late forties who usually taught at a public school in Giza and had been recommended to Salma and her friends by another teacher. Since the beginning of the school year, they had taken a weekly lesson with him for which they each paid 50 LE per session. Salma

considered 50 LE to be little for a private lesson. She paid 100 LE or more for other subjects, depending on the size of the group and the background of the teacher: ‘This teacher would only take 25 LE from other, normal students’, she explained to me, ‘but we agreed to pay 50 LE, because that’s what we are used to’. Ustaz Magdi revised the subject matter with the help of an ‘external textbook’,[14] asking the students to take turns in answering multiple choice questions from the book. Once in a while, he pointed out the importance of a particular question: ‘This is a nice question which always comes up in the examinations!’ The students, however, did not show much interest in the class nor respect for the teacher: the girls busied themselves braiding their hair, painting their fingernails, and talking on the phone, while one of the boys had headphones in his ears and seemed to be listening to music and the other one demonstratively put his head down on the table. To my surprise, the teacher did not call them to order and did not even intervene when the boys lit up cigarettes during the lesson. The students told me that this behaviour was quite normal, and not merely a form of playing up in front of the guest at the session. Ustaz Magdi appeared insecure and uncomfortable in this environment. The students seemed to be aware of this, taking advantage of the situation. After the lesson was over (and it was the students, not the teacher, who ended it), they told me that it had been boring because it was a revision class and they already knew the subject matter. They thought that Ustaz Magdi was probably much stricter and better able to enforce discipline when teaching students of a social class background similar to his own. Salma attributed his lack of authority during the lesson to the social distance between him and the students and his financial dependency: ‘He doesn’t dare call us to order. With other students, he would just shout and scold them normally, because they are … together, on the same level. But with us he is somehow afraid, he thinks we are better … he is afraid of my father. You know how much we pay him for these lessons’. Salma estimated that before the final examinations of the previous year, her parents had spent between 3000 and 4000 LE a month on her tutoring classes: ‘Last year I took math with two different teachers, for example. One of them was a very good teacher, he knew exactly which questions would come up in the examination, and the other one explained very well, but he did not know the examination questions. So I ended up taking with both of them during the last two months. I had one teacher come here in the mornings and another one in the evenings, because we had to finish the subject matter’ (Fieldnotes, 07.04.09).

Tutoring across Class Boundaries: Differences and Commonalities

Egyptian society is highly stratified and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Economic liberalisation and structural adjustment policies have led to increased social polarisation and spatial segregation along class lines (De Koning, 2009, p. 5 ff.; Singerman & Amar, 2006). Just as lifestyles and consumption patterns differ, the educational experiences of the upper middle and upper classes differ increasingly from those of the poorer majority of society. Despite all disparities, however, I found that students across social class boundaries participated in

various forms of tutoring, including private and group lessons at home, larger study groups and revision classes with ‘star teachers’ in centres, and that their choice of tutors and forms of tutoring often followed similar logics.[15]

The ethnographic vignettes presented above are not meant to establish a simple contrast between tutoring in lower and upper class contexts. Many of the differences between the two examples can be attributed to factors other than the different socio-economic background of the students. Most importantly, they take place at very different stages of the education system: sixth grade of primary school in the first, and the third and last year of general secondary school in the second case.

Naql *Years vs.* Shihada *Years: Tutoring in Different Education Levels*

Whether they took private lessons with their own class teachers or with other, external, teachers, at home or in centres, depended to a large extent on the stage in the education system students were in. When asked about the reasons behind their choice of tutors, students and parents usually pointed out that different logics applied, depending on whether the student was currently in a ‘*naql*’ (transfer) year or a ‘*shihada*’ (diploma) year: In *naql* years, i.e. grades one to five of primary school, one and two of preparatory school, and the first year of secondary school, 60% of a student’s grade in a given subject were determined through end-of-year examinations which were drawn up and graded by the school teachers themselves, and the remaining 40%, referred to as ‘*daragat ‘amal al-sana*’ (coursework grades), depended solely on the class teacher. These *‘amal al-sana* grades were generally perceived to be a ‘weapon’ in the hands of the teacher, a tool for disciplining the students, or, as many students and parents reported, a means of pressuring them to take private lessons with them. In the *shihada* years on the other hand, the final and crucial years of each educational stage (i.e. the last year each of primary and preparatory school, and the last two years of general secondary school), final examinations were centrally issued and graded by the Ministry of Education and there were no *‘amal al-sana* grades. In these years, students and parents felt free to choose private tutors according to merit or reputation rather than being pressured by – or trying to gain an advantage with – the student’s own class teachers.[16] Forms of tutoring chosen ultimately depended on the socio-economic circumstances and educational strategies of each family, as well as on the availability of teachers. Students might choose to take some subjects at a centre and others at home, some in a group and others alone, depending on the perceived difficulty of a subject and their preferences for particular teachers.

EDUCATION ‘HOME DELIVERY’: PEER PRESSURE AND POSITIONAL COMPETITION

During the last two years of general secondary school, tutoring is considered to be ‘compulsory’ and often takes priority over formal schooling. ‘*Mafish ta‘lim fil madaris*’ – ‘There is no education in schools’, was a remark which I frequently

heard, especially with reference to public schools. I was astonished to learn that even the students of expensive private schools, like Salma and her friends, were taking private lessons in almost all of their subjects before the final *thanawiyya 'amma* examinations. They hardly attended their regular classes at school any more, which had become 'superfluous' and a 'waste of time' in their eyes. At the same time, their future options depended much less on their final grades than those of lower class students, due to the resources and connections of their families. For most of them, it had already been decided that they would attend either the American University in Cairo (AUC) or the German University in Cairo (GUC), two expensive private universities, so they would not have to enter the dreaded admission process for a place in one of the public universities which is managed by the central coordination office.

Why, then, do private lessons play such an important role even among privileged students like Salma and her friends? Especially at the *thanawiyya 'amma* level, private tutoring has become an integral feature of the Egyptian education system, which is hardly questioned anymore. Students fear missing something if they do not take part in the ubiquitous practice. According to Mr. Ehab, an English teacher who had been working at a private school in a middle class area of Cairo for 20 years, peer pressure and 'materialistic competition' were important factors motivating students and parents to participate:

> Even some of the best students take private lessons, because their parents think that they will benefit more if they see their teacher at home. Often they ask a particular teacher for lessons, because the student likes this teacher. It also has to do with envy or jealousy between the students. If one student asks a teacher to come to his home, the others want to do the same. Even if they don't really need the private lessons, if their friends do it, they want it, too. 'So Mr. Ehab teaches you at home? I will ask my father to get Mr. Ehab'. It is like saying: 'You are not richer than me, I can afford this teacher, too'. Sometimes this turns into a materialistic competition. (Fieldnotes, 07.04.10)

Private tutoring fulfils various functions apart from purely educational ones. Especially during times of intense pressure, such as before important examinations, it provides a socially accepted opportunity for students to spend time outside the house and to socialise with friends. This is especially important for girls who usually enjoy less freedom of movement than boys.[17]

Employing private teachers at home – especially language teachers – has a long tradition among upper class families in Egypt (Abaza, 2006, p. 127 ff.), though not only among them.[18] Rather than having to venture out into the potentially unsafe space of the street, it allows for students to stay in the 'clean' environment of their homes under the supervision of the family, while the teacher is the one who has to cross geographical and class boundaries. In recent years, the phenomenon of 'home delivery' (*tawsil lil-bayt*) has become very popular among middle and upper class Cairenes. There is hardly anything that cannot be ordered comfortably via phone or Internet today, whether it is fast food from a variety of local and international

chains, or groceries from the supermarket. It does not seem very far-fetched to draw a parallel to the 'home delivery' of education, which is sometimes treated as a commodity that is 'conspicuously' consumed for purposes of prestige and distinction.

Across class boundaries, tutoring is regarded as a positional good: parents invest in it in order to provide their children with a competitive advantage, to get ahead of others in the race for a limited number of places in 'top faculties' and later on the job market.[19] The educational process in itself is devaluated: what counts is only the outcome in the form of a degree ('learning to get a job' instead of 'learning to do a job'). The social selection function of the education system is emphasised rather than its qualification function. As Hargreaves (1997, p. 161) points out when applying Dore's 'diploma disease' theory to the Egyptian case, the importance ascribed to the *thanawiyya 'amma* certificate and the fact that it is indeed decisive for a student's future opportunities, have led to a situation where the final examinations dominate the whole education process ('examination-orientation and ritualisation').

MAKING A NAME FOR ONESELF: 'FAMOUS TEACHERS' AND THEIR STRATEGIES

During my previous research on tutoring in Egypt, which was mainly confined to a few lower-income areas of Cairo, I had gained the impression that tutoring centres, especially those operating in a religious framework, cater mainly to the lower strata of society, i.e. those who cannot afford the more expensive private lessons at home (although even in those poorer neighbourhoods, students took lessons both at home and in centres). I assumed that better-off students would mainly rely on private lessons at home. However, through interviews and conversations with students from affluent families in the upscale neighbourhoods of Dokki, Mohandisseen and Zamalek, I learned that they, too, attended classes in tutoring centres, especially during the last two years of general secondary school. They explained their choices with the availability of their preferred teachers. If, due to high demand, a 'famous' teacher was not available for private lessons at home, students might choose to attend classes with him in a centre. Even then, reservations often had to be made several months in advance in order to secure a place in one of his classes:

> We went in February to reserve places for the classes that started in August. You have to go very early if you want a place with a famous teacher. The places in their classes fill up very quickly. If it is just some teacher, not an important one, you can go any time. (Interview, S. & P., 08.04.09)

The concept of 'famous teachers' (*mudarrisin mash/hurin*) is a crucial one when it comes to understanding the logics and dynamics of the informal education sector.[20] It was used by students, parents, centre managers and teachers across class boundaries. According to students, 'famous teachers' were those who could explain the subject matter well, but most importantly they were the ones who were

able to accurately predict the examination questions. Salma did not like to attend classes at tutoring centres, as she explained, because she was not used to their strict teaching methods and the crowded classrooms. Even centres in her middle class neighbourhood were frequented by a socially mixed group of students, and it involved leaving the protected middle and upper class spaces in which she usually moved. Nevertheless, she went to the final revision classes offered by famous teachers, simply because 'during these final revisions they tell you what will be asked in the examinations' (Interview, Salma, 30.03.09).

While word-of-mouth is without doubt the most powerful marketing instrument in the tutoring business, teachers and centres also used colourful flyers, posters, and graffiti to advertise their services. Teachers' reputation and their social networks are crucial resources in the informal education sector, and their reputation depends to a large extent on the examination success of their students. A German teacher showed me a self-produced textbook which he used in his tutoring classes and sold to his tutees. A table on the last two pages featured his former students' excellent examination results. He consciously used the success rate of his former tutees as a marketing tool for attracting new students (Fieldnotes, 12.12.09). In order to boost their 'success rates', some entrepreneurial teachers might accept only high-performing students into their tutoring classes, while others are selective regarding their students' social background. Before introducing me to his former English tutor, the son of a wealthy politician and member of the ruling élite told me:

> This teacher is famous, so he can choose his students. He used to also teach in centres and at students' homes, but now he only teaches at his own house. And he does not accept just anyone … he only takes students from '[reputed] families' (*Mabeyakhodsh ay hadd, beyakhod talaba min 'ailat!*). Students have to behave well. They have to introduce themselves to him, and then he decides whether he accepts them as tutees or not. (Fieldnotes, 09.03.10)

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE INFORMAL EDUCATION SECTOR

Only a minority of teachers ever becomes 'famous', of course, and the impact of private tutoring on the relationship between students and teachers is ambivalent. Outside the regulated space and framework of the school, this relationship is no longer mediated by the state, but has to be negotiated directly between individual teachers and their 'customers', i.e. students and their parents. In the informal education sector, a teacher's success and income depend mostly on individual skills and personality, entrepreneurship and self-marketing. This may be experienced by some teachers as a form of freedom and empowerment, while others experience it as increased dependence and vulnerability and feel that they are faced with an ethical dilemma: unable to survive on their regular income, they see no other option but to compromise their professional ethics. While some teachers turn into veritable 'stars' and are able to benefit from the system as it is,

others may experience a loss of dignity and (self-) respect when a direct financial relationship is established between them and their students, or students' parents. They feel relegated from the status of a state employee and authority figure to that of a domestic worker. Senior English teacher Mr. Ehab, who taught between two and four private lessons at students' homes each day after school, told me:

> I feel more respected when I teach at school. I don't like teaching private lessons at home. I always have the feeling that 'I shouldn't be here. This is not my job'. I prefer teaching at school, standing in front of a group of students. (…) That is what the job is about, what I am supposed to do. I feel I am better at teaching when I stand in front of a class. At home, I am only there because they pay me, and they think that they need me. (Fieldnotes, 07.04.10)

Aspects of class and power play an important role in shaping the relationship between students and teachers. Most teachers I met during my research came from a lower middle class background. What did it mean for them to depend on the income they earned from tutoring upper class students? The significance of this 'class gap' was especially palpable during the private lesson at Salma's home. Salma and her friends were highly conscious of class distinctions and of their privileged position vis-à-vis the teacher. When talking to me, but also among themselves, they frequently classified schools or centres, and even teachers and other students, as 'clean' (*nedeef*) versus 'not clean' or 'normal' (e.g. 'This is a *clean* centre', or 'In *normal* schools, students don't go to school at all').[21] Ustaz Magdi, who usually taught at a public school in a lower income district, was obviously not feeling comfortable in this situation, but just four lessons a month with this single group of students earned him about the same as his regular salary at a public school. In correspondence with this observation, Farag (2006, p.128) quoted a teacher who complained that 'with the material goal, the teacher loses his dignity; profit-making diminishes status'. A remark by one of Salma's friends captures the ambivalent impact of different tutoring practices on the relationship between teachers and students:

> In the centres, there are about 50 or 60 people in a room, some of these students are absolutely ignorant, they don't know anything, and still, you *have* to sit and understand what the teacher says. Because the teacher knows he is really, really famous, and he knows that you need him, so if you don't do what he says, you will be kicked out after one or two classes. (…) At home you control the teacher more. Because it's just you and him, and yet you get the information you need out of him. (Interview, Rania, 07.04.09)

CONCLUSION: TUTORING, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN EGYPT

Private tutoring developed as a coping strategy to compensate for the deficiencies of an underfunded and overburdened public education system. It also serves as a means for teachers to supplement their meagre salaries, and a strategy for students and parents confronted with the pressures of a strongly examination-oriented education system. In the process, it has turned into a generalised and deeply engrained feature of Egyptian educational culture during the last decades, with effects that go far beyond the learning process itself. This makes the eradication of private tutoring very difficult for policy-makers.

Equality of opportunities, which is still officially upheld by the Egyptian government and laid down in the constitution, has long been undermined by processes of privatisation and marketisation taking place in the formal education system, which have led to increased segmentation along social class lines. A dual education system has in fact emerged, reminiscent of the system that existed during colonial times.[22] Those who can afford it resort to private 'language' and 'international' schools, and increasingly to foreign diplomas, while the poorer majority of students has to rely on the underfunded and overburdened public system. While the majority of less successful and less affluent *thanawiyya 'amma* graduates ends up in overcrowded public university faculties like commerce, law and the humanities,[23] wealthier students whose grades do not allow them to enter their faculty of choice can opt out of the public system and attend private universities. In the highly segmented Egyptian education system, there is hardly any direct contact or competition between students of different class backgrounds anymore (with the exception of a small number of prestigious 'top faculties' at public universities, where students of different class backgrounds might meet). Spatial segregation and the reproduction of social inequalities takes place through the formal education system, but it is mirrored and reinforced in the informal education sector.

In Egypt, as elsewhere, the better-off are generally able to spend more money on tutoring, both in total numbers and as a percentage of household expenditure (World Bank, 2008, p. 190), but does this also mean that they receive higher quantities and better qualities of tutoring? Wealthier students are more likely to receive individually tailored private lessons at home, while less affluent students more often depend on tutoring in larger groups and in centres, and the poorest have to rely on free or very cheap offers by mosques and churches and on study groups at school. However, private tutors commonly adapt their fees to the financial means of their respective 'customers', and prices at centres vary according to target group and location. Students of different socio-economic backgrounds might, thus, be tutored by the same teachers using the same teaching methods and materials, but in separate study groups and at different prices.

While it seems likely that access to higher quantities and better qualities of tutoring – such as individually tailored private lessons rather than mass tutoring – will help students attain better examination results, this is not necessarily the case, especially in a context where tutoring has become the norm rather than the exception. Depending on the skills of the tutor and the student's motivation, it can

be experienced as helpful and enriching, but also as repetitive and boring. It often takes up a lot of students' spare time, leaving them with little opportunity for independent study and leisure.[24]

And finally, successful transition into the labour market does not merely depend on educational attainment. Barsoum (2004) showed that getting a well-paying job, especially in the private economy, is not just a matter of having the necessary qualifications. It also depends very much on family background and on possessing the appropriate social and cultural capital, which De Koning (2009, p. 7f.) refers to as 'cosmopolitan capital'. This capital, which includes fluency in foreign languages, especially English (spoken with the right accent), and familiarity with Western cultural codes, cannot be acquired in the public education system. Those who can afford it therefore send their children to 'language' or 'international' schools, where, apart from enjoying better learning conditions than in the public system, this kind of capital can be acquired. The mere fact of having studied in the public system rather than at private schools constitutes a stigma and is taken as indicative of a student's lower class background. As Marwa, mother of two college-age daughters, pointed out:

> Education is important in Egypt, but it is not the main issue. There are many children who are well educated, who have attended good faculties and received good grades, who are very gifted and intelligent, but their chances on the labour market are low because of their family background. They are from a lower class background, they don't know the right people, and they don't get the necessary letters of recommendation. (Interview, Marwa, 21.10.09)

No amount of tutoring can help students overcome these obstacles. Nevertheless, many parents who lack economic and social capital invest all their hopes and a lot of money into education. Despite all structural constraints, it is their only hope for upward social mobility and a better future for their children. Tutoring is one way of trying to make the best possible use of this chance.

NOTES

1 I am indebted to the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies at Freie Universität Berlin and to the Fazit-Stiftung for funding and supporting my doctoral research and to the CEDEJ in Cairo for hosting me as an associated Ph.D. researcher from September 2009 to June 2010.

2 For an overview of worldwide research on tutoring, see Bray (2009). For an overview of tutoring in Europe specifically, see Bray (2011).

3 Generally, ethnographic accounts of education and schooling in Egypt and the Arab World are scarce. This may partly be due to the restricted possibilities of conducting empirical research in the region, especially with regard to politically sensitive issues and in areas that are, by and large, state-controlled, such as the education sector. Notable exceptions, with regard to Egypt, are Herrera (1992) and the edited volume by Herrera and Torres (2006) which offer valuable insights into the workings of the Egyptian education system based on qualitative empirical data and including the voices of students, teachers and administrators.

4 The term 'informal urban areas' is used in the SYPE report, and generally in the Egyptian context (informal settlements, Arabic: *ashwa'iyyat*) to denote 'unauthorised settlements on areas which were not intended for housing and residence purposes' (Population Council, 2010, p. 1). These

areas are generally characterised by a lack of state-provided infrastructure and a high degree of informality, but contrary to the extreme level of poverty associated with the term 'slum', 'informal urban areas' may include a significant percentage of middle-income or even wealthy households (Population Council, 2010, p. 7).

[5] According to the SYPE report, 80.2% of students resorted to tutoring in general secondary school, compared to 63.7% of preparatory and 57% of primary school students, and only 22% of students in the vocational secondary track (Population Council, 2010, p. 204).

[6] With starting salaries around 140 LE (i.e. around €20 at the 2009/2010 exchange rate), teaching has long been one of the lowest paying jobs in the public sector.

[7] In the 2010 OECD and World Bank *Report on Higher Education in Egypt*, the transition from secondary to tertiary education is identified as one of the main challenges of the Egyptian education system (OECD & World Bank, 2010, p. 29 ff.). For the details of the university admission procedures see OECD & World Bank (2010, p. 142 ff.).

[8] While they are regarded as 'schools of last resort', the technical and vocational streams account for about 60% of secondary school enrolment. These schools are generally regarded as being of lower quality and as using outdated curricula that do not prepare their students for the needs of the labour market (World Bank, 2007, p. 17 ff.). Unemployment rates are especially high among graduates of these schools (Barsoum, 2004, p. 36). Those who can afford to do so, avoid this forced tracking by continuing their education in private schools and universities. Vocational and technical education is therefore also strongly associated with a lower-income background of its students (World Bank, 2007, p. 21). The high 'hidden costs' associated with the *thanawiyya 'amma* system may constitute a deterrent for low-income families who, out of financial considerations, prefer to send their children to technical or vocational schools, where tutoring is less common and less expensive (cf. MOE, 2007, p. 279).

[9] This guarantee is no longer effective. According to Barsoum (2004, p.77f.), the waiting period for a public sector job had already reached more than 13 years in 1997 and personal connections (*wasta*) have become crucial for securing such a job.

[10] According to the OECD and World Bank Report (2010, p. 60f.), 62% of students at the primary stage were enrolled in public schools, 29% in private schools and 9% in religious Al-Azhar schools. At the general secondary level, 92% of students were enrolled in public schools, and 93% in technical secondary education.

[11] Many private schools also operate within an Islamic framework or combine the promotion of 'Islamic beliefs and values' with a profit-oriented business model (Herrera, 2006, p. 39 ff.). Like the affluent élites, the expensive private schools and universities catering to them are mostly concentrated in and around Cairo and Alexandria.

[12] Interestingly, it seems that even in 'international schools', tutoring is becoming increasingly common. Iman Farag called this the 'Egyptianisation of foreign diplomas' (personal communication, 06.04.09).

[13] Since the mid-1990s, there has been a boom of real estate development and construction in the desert land surrounding Cairo. Large numbers of upscale and luxury housing units are being built by private investors, mostly in gated communities with names such as 'Dreamland', 'Utopia', or 'Beverly Hills' (cf. Denis, 2006; De Koning, 2009). Catering to the (future) inhabitants of these compounds is an increasing number of expensive 'language' and 'international' schools and private universities in their vicinity.

[14] These 'external textbooks' (*kuttub kharigiyya*) are written by experienced teachers and sold at stationeries and bookshops for 10 to 20 LE. Students and private tutors mostly rely on these books rather than on the official school textbooks for their examination preparation. *Kuttub kharigiyya* present the subject matter in a more concise and summarised form and include many additional exercises and model examination questions. In addition, private tutors usually sell or give their own 'summaries' or 'notes' (*malazim*) to the students.

[15] While most tutoring centres are located in lower-income neighbourhoods, where both population density and the demand for cheap tutoring are highest and the space available for tutoring in private homes is limited, some centres can also be found in middle class neighbourhoods catering specifically to middle class students or offering tutoring for the students of specific schools. Some centres could quite clearly be identified as commercial, profit-oriented enterprises, while others, especially in lower-income neighbourhoods were operated by (mostly religious) civil society

organisations and provided their services for a relatively small fee. However, the boundaries between these categories tend to be blurred, and it was not always clear whether centres were operated by religious associations or just located within their facilities, whether they were in fact committed to a religious and charitable framework or whether they were rather using such a framework as a way of inspiring trust and of increasing their legitimacy vis-à-vis the state.

[16] The new Comprehensive Assessment System (*al-taqwim al-shamil*), which was recently introduced at the lower levels of the education system and is supposed to be extended to all levels, has replaced the *'amal al-sana* grades with assessment based on ongoing student performance, tests and a 'student portfolio', with the aim of providing 'a more authentic picture of students' performance' (MOE, 2007, p. 88). A primary school teacher told me that he and his colleagues were unhappy about this reform, because they felt that it stripped them of an important tool for controlling and disciplining their students (Fieldnotes, 22.01.10).

[17] I could not find any gender imbalance with regards to participation in private tutoring. It was pointed out to me that many parents prefer to have their daughters tutored at home, either alone or in girls-only groups, while boys would be more likely to attend classes in centres. In the centres I visited, however, I usually found more or less equal numbers of boys and girls. Centre managers tried to uphold a certain level of gender segregation by seating them separately. My observations confirm the findings of Assaad and Elbadawy (2004) who did not detect any gender bias regarding either the likelihood of students' participation in tutoring or families' expenditures on tutoring.

[18] Before the advent of state-provided mass education during the mid-19th century, domestic instruction by private tutors was the common form of education among the upper classes in Europe. Only during the 19th century did education come to be seen as a responsibility of the state rather than the family.

[19] The concept of 'positional goods' was coined by economist Fred Hirsch (1976) and developed by Frank (1985). It draws attention to the social aspects and 'relational value' of consumption as opposed to its 'material' value. Most scholars would agree that formal education usually has a positional element: it is only partly about the skills and qualifications acquired, but also about getting ahead of others in the competition for the best grades, for a limited number of places in higher education and later on the job market. Underlying is the assumption of a zero-sum-game, where 'an increase in the benefits from 'consumption' for one individual is entirely at the expense of benefits to others' (Adnett & Davies, 2002, p. 190). Thus, the positional aspect of education is emphasised when the number of places available at universities is fixed. What matters in this case are not an individual student's achievements and capabilities, but only his or her position within the cohort.

[20] For a more detailed discussion of the phenomenon of 'star teachers' in Egypt, see Hartmann (2008a, p. 65 ff.).

[21] These students spoke German with me and a mixture of German and Arabic among each other, using the German words for 'clean' (*sauber*) and 'normal' (*normal*).

[22] Until 1949, Egypt had a dual system of free elementary schools for the poor, which provided only the most basic skills, and fee-paying primary schools for the well-off. Only the graduates of the latter could continue their education in secondary schools and universities (Starrett, 1998, p. 31). During the colonial period (1882-1922), foreign-language education in foreign missionary schools became popular among the élite.

[23] This is particularly true of the faculty of commerce, which is somewhat disdainfully known in some circles as '*kolleyet al-sha'b*' – 'the people's college', as I was told by a group of private school students.

[24] My data do not allow me to draw any conclusions as to the effect of private tutoring on students' performance at school and on their examination success. Quantitative data or longitudinal studies would be needed. Fergany (1994), however, did not find any statistically significant correlation between private tutoring and student achievement on the basis of two quantitative studies carried out in Egypt, the first by the Ministry of Education in 1990/91 and the second by Fergany in 1994. For a discussion of the difficulties in assessing the impact of private tutoring on student achievement and examination success, see Bray (2011, p. 47 ff.).

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