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**The Informal Market of Education in Egypt.  
Private Tutoring and Its Implications**

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### **Biographical Note**

Sarah Hartmann studied Social Anthropology and Media and Communication Studies at the Free University of Berlin and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She gained her M.A. degree from the Free University of Berlin in 2007.

## Note on Transliteration

I have used a simplified transliteration of Arabic terms in this text, in order to make it more readable and to represent the Egyptian spoken dialect as it sounds rather than as it might be written in Arabic. I have retained double consonants, but, in most cases, made no distinction between long and short vowels. I do not differentiate between the different “s”, “d” and “t” sounds, nor between the different “h” sounds that exist in Arabic. An open single quotation mark (‘) represents the consonant “‘ayn”, an apostrophe (’) the letters “hamza”, “qaf” (which is not pronounced in Egyptian dialect) or a glottal stop. I have not assimilated the “l” of the definite article. Names and place names are represented in their most common form of spelling.

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# The Informal Market of Education in Egypt. Private Tutoring and Its Implications<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

Education is generally perceived as a public good which should be provided by the state. In Egypt, where approximately one third of the population is under the age of 15, it is regarded as a crucial task and an important investment in the future of the country. Free and equal access to education has been guaranteed to all Egyptian citizens since President Nasser's socialist reforms in the 1950s. However, due to high population growth rates and a lack of financial resources, the public education system has been struggling to accommodate rapidly increasing numbers of students. While enrollment rates have risen steadily during the last decades, the quality of state-provided services has deteriorated. As a result, the provision of education has increasingly been taken over by non-state actors.

The privatization of education is taking place on two levels simultaneously in Egypt: On the official or formal level, a growing number of private schools and universities are being established, while at the same time a "shadow education system" of private supplementary tutoring has evolved on the informal level and out of the reach of state control. Today, a large part of instruction and learning in Egypt, thus, takes place outside of the official classroom, either at home or in private tutoring centers. These private lessons, which the majority of Egyptian high school students and even a large number of elementary and preparatory school students take in the afternoons and evenings, consume not only much of the students' and teachers' spare time but also a substantial part of the average Egyptian family budget.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly revised version of my Master's Thesis, which I submitted to the Free University of Berlin on July 20<sup>th</sup> 2007. A shorter article on this topic was published in Hüsken, Thomas (ed.), *Youth, Gender and the City. Social Anthropological Explorations in Cairo* (Hartmann 2007). I am deeply indebted to numerous people in Cairo, my "informants", interview partners, and friends, without whom this research would not have been possible. Especially I want to thank "Mr. Hamid", "Iman" and my "host family" in Imbaba. Their hospitality, kindness and openness was overwhelming. I would also like to thank my supervisors P.D. Dr. Thomas Zitelmann and Prof. Dr. Thomas Bierschenk for their guidance and their interest in my research topic. Special thanks to Dr. Thomas Hüsken for his invaluable support and encouragement and to my co-researchers for the fruitful exchange before, during and after our stay in Cairo, to Hamed and Samer for their help in translating my interviews back in Berlin, and to Jette, Tabea and Philipp for their constructive criticism and valuable comments. Finally I want to thank my parents for their support, and Philipp who was always there and went through this with me, for his patience.

This thesis is based on social anthropological research which I conducted in Cairo between October 2004 and January 2005, with an additional two-week period of intensive fieldwork in March 2006. When I first came to Cairo in the fall of 2004, I intended to study the educational opportunities and future perspectives of young women from a lower income background. During the course of my stay, however, my attention was successively drawn to the topic of private tutoring, which many of the people I talked to mentioned in a matter-of-fact way, usually when complaining about the high costs of education. I became aware of the importance and the prevalence of this informal practice which seemed to affect almost every family in Egypt, and I realized that there is a whole parallel education system at work. This issue seemed worth some attention, not only as an interesting phenomenon in itself, but also because it is connected to some important issues and processes taking place in the Egyptian and other societies, such as the privatization and commodification of public services in general. I began to wonder why, even though there seemed to be a largely functioning public education system, most families, even poor people, spent high amounts of money on supplementary lessons.

Why is private tutoring so prevalent in Egypt? In this thesis, I will describe and analyze the phenomenon by focusing on the perspectives of the social actors directly involved, i.e. students and teachers as well as the owners and managers of commercial tutoring centers whom I refer to as “educational entrepreneurs”. What are the different actors’ motivations for offering and attending private supplementary lessons in addition to official schooling? How is the status and societal role of teachers affected by private tutoring? And what is the impact of this practice on the relationship between students and teachers? In order to address and answer these questions, I will take into consideration both the discursive level, as expressed by relevant social actors in interviews and conversations, and the observable level of social practice.

I argue that the phenomenon of private tutoring in Egypt can be described as an “informal market of education” where students act as “consumers” and teachers as well as educational entrepreneurs as “suppliers”. On this market, education is increasingly turned into a commodity, and the quality of education that can be accessed depends to a large extent on the financial means of the individual.

After giving a brief overview of existing literature on the global phenomenon of private tutoring, I will introduce some central terms and concepts (market,



commodification, privatization and informalization) which will form the theoretical framework for analyzing my empirical findings. Furthermore, I will look at the role and the interests of the state in the provision of education and at the discussion about education as a “public good”. In order to allow for a better understanding of the present situation, the fourth chapter will provide a brief overview of the history of modern education in Egypt as well as the current structure of the education system. By introducing two central concepts which come up frequently when talking about education in Egypt – *magmu‘* (sum, final score) and *shihada* (certificate) – I will have a look at the general perception and significance of education in contemporary Egypt.

Before beginning the second, empirical, part of my thesis, I will present the context and methods of my fieldwork, reflecting on some of the difficulties I encountered, and briefly describe the site where my research took place, i.e. the “popular quarters” of Cairo. In the sixth chapter, I will provide an overview of the different forms of private tutoring that exist in Egypt. The “thick description” of two classes shall illustrate the characteristics of these different forms of tutoring and the differences between them. Building on this, I will briefly discuss prevalent cultures of teaching and learning in Egypt and the reactions of the state to the proliferation of private lessons. In the following chapters (seven, eight and nine), I will focus on the main actors on the informal market of education: students, teachers and educational entrepreneurs. On the basis of some exemplary portraits, I will analyze their motivations and strategies for engaging in the tutoring business. I will discuss the financial impact of the practice on students’ families, the implications for the role and status of teachers in Egyptian society and on the relationship between students and teachers. The empirical part will conclude with the portrait of a tutoring center and its manager and a discussion of marketing strategies and the relationship between educational entrepreneurs, teachers and students.

## 2 Private tutoring – a worldwide phenomenon

### 2.1 Definition: private tutoring

When I talk about “private tutoring” in the following text, I refer to classes that take place outside and in addition to formal schooling, in the afternoons or evenings, on

weekends and during the holidays. Private lessons in a particular subject usually take place once or twice a week. They are provided for a fee, closely following and oriented towards the school syllabus, with the goal of improving the students' performance at school and especially the outcome of exams. I do not refer to courses that are completely independent of formal schooling, like additional language courses or music lessons. Since "private tutoring" is the most widely used and established term for the different forms of supplementary lessons, I will use it here, although it should be remarked that, at least in the Egyptian context, not all forms of tutoring are "private" (as opposed to "governmental" or "public") in the strict sense of the word. Tutoring lessons or "study groups" (*magmu'at*) are also offered in public schools for a comparatively low fee (see chapter 6.1.2).

Bray (1999: 17) refers to the phenomenon of private tutoring as a "shadow education system", the size and shape of which are determined by the formal education system, and which exists in its "shadow" without receiving much public attention. The term "informal market of education" which I will use here, in contrast, puts more emphasis on the aspect of commodification, i.e. of education being turned into a marketable good, into the object of a commercial transaction. The use of the market terminology also points at the heterogeneity of educational offers that can be found in Egypt.

## **2.2 Literature on private tutoring<sup>2</sup>**

During the last decades, private supplementary tutoring has become a widespread practice in large parts of the world. The growing prevalence of one or another form of tutoring is reported from countries as diverse as Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Romania or Turkey, to mention just a few examples. However, the scale and shape of tutoring differs considerably from one country to the next. In some Asian countries like Japan or Korea, but increasingly also in North America, it has become a major business – in Japan, some of the highly commercialized tutoring (*juku*) companies are even listed on the stock market (Bray 1999: 23) – whereas in Europe it is usually provided informally by senior high school or university students. In many low income countries, on the other hand, tutoring is offered by impoverished school teachers to their own students, either at home or at schools in

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<sup>2</sup> This is not meant to be an exhaustive overview of literature on the topic, which would be beyond the means and focus of this thesis.

the afternoon. In Egypt, as will be shown, different forms of tutoring have evolved and come to exist next to each other.

In spite of the growing importance of private tutoring and its impact not only on the daily lives of teachers, students, and their families but also on the education systems at large and the economies of the affected countries, it has so far received little academic attention. The most comprehensive accounts of the phenomenon of private tutoring worldwide were drawn up by Bray (1999 & 2003) and published by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). In his analysis, which is aimed mainly at educational planners and policy-makers, Bray gives an overview of the scope and forms of tutoring all over the world and contrasts positive and negative implications of the practice. He states that “the development of private tuition has to be interpreted within an overall trend, that of a gradual privatization and marketization of education” (Bray 1999: 10).

Most of the available literature refers to East, South-East and South Asia (e.g. Kim/ Lee 2001, Kwok 2004, Foondun 2002). There are a few studies dealing with North America (Aurini 2004, Aurini/ Davies 2004, Davies 2004), Great Britain (Ireson 2004, Scanlon/ Buckingham 2004), Romania (Popa/ Acedo 2006) and Turkey (Tansel/ Bircan 2004). Little research on tutoring has so far been conducted in Africa (for an example from Sub-Saharan Africa see Buchmann 2002) and the Middle East. Most of the available studies are provided by educational scientists and economists of education, some of whom have used ethnographic or qualitative research methods, but hardly ever with an anthropological theoretical background or interest.

Literature on private tutoring in Egypt is scarce. In her overview of “Education in Modern Egypt”, Hyde (1978) refers to “coaching” and asserts that “according to *al-Ahram* and other local newspapers, the phenomenon of private lessons has become a characteristic of almost every household containing a student in any of the stages from kindergarten to the university” (Hyde 1978: 52). In a number of more recent articles, private tutoring is mentioned, however without being the focus of the studies (e.g. Fergany 1994, Hargreaves 1997, El-Tawila/ Lloyd et.al. 2000, Barsoum 2002, Megahed/ Ginsburg 2002). A vivid ethnographic account of schooling in Egypt is provided by Linda Herrera (1992) who has dedicated one chapter of her ethnography of a girls’ school in Cairo to the issue of private tutoring. On the basis of several portraits, she describes the various motives of teachers and

students for participating in private tutoring and reveals the hidden dynamics behind the practice.

Depending on the authors' theoretical backgrounds and the context of their studies, the phenomenon may either be described as a structural problem, emphasizing the negative effects on the education system and the society at large or, more optimistically, it may be regarded as an example for the agency and empowerment of the involved actors. An example of the latter perspective is the article on tutoring and teacher professionalism in Romania by Popa and Acedo (2006). They describe the "background practice" of private tutoring as a successful empowerment strategy of Romanian teachers, whose professional authority has been diminished by economic changes and educational reforms. Private tutoring is interpreted as a means of regaining professional autonomy as well as higher economic rewards and of improving the teachers' social status. Similarly, Diane Singerman (1995) emphasizes the agency of the common people (*al-sha'b*) in her monograph on informal ways of political participation in urban quarters of Cairo, and mentions private tutoring as an example of their adept use of informal networks. In her eyes, private tutoring is a strategy of teachers and students for dealing with the insufficiencies of the mainstream education system and thus, despite all structural constraints, for improving their chances of upward social and economic mobility.

In the critical ethnographic accounts of education in Egypt, which were recently published by Herrera and Torres (2006), on the other hand, private tutoring is regarded much more pessimistically as the result of a "growing 'neo-liberal mentality'" in Egyptian society (Herrera/ Torres 2006: 15). Naguib, in the same volume, emphasizes the teachers' dependence on their students for private lessons, which he describes as "financial impotence", and suggests that "by pursuing the objective of giving private lessons (...), teachers sacrifice their mission as educators" (Naguib 2006: 67). To sum up: Private tutoring and its implications for the teaching profession and the relationship between teachers and students have both been described in terms of empowerment and reprofessionalization (Popa/ Acedo 2006), and, quite to the contrary, as impotence and deprofessionalization (Naguib 2006).

In this thesis, I would like to combine an ethnographic approach to private tutoring in Egypt with an analysis of the underlying causes and dynamics of the practice. In the following chapter, I will therefore introduce some theoretical concepts that shall serve as a framework for the analysis of my empirical findings.

### 3 Theoretical framework

#### 3.1 Concepts of the market

According to classical economic definitions, a market is a sphere of exchange of commodities (goods and services) between buyers and sellers, or “consumers” and “suppliers”. Both, the process of buying and selling and the places and institutions where such exchange takes place are referred to as “markets”. Under the condition of perfect competition, which is assumed by classical and neoclassical economic theory, the prices of commodities and the quantity of goods and services available on a market are determined by the law of supply and demand (Lie 1997: 930).

The perfect functioning of a free market requires that all participants are anonymous, consumers have the choice between a large number of suppliers and are well informed about their choices. Such a market is indifferent to social relationships and obligations (Elwert 1985: 513). This ideal is, of course, never completely met in reality. Often, the number of suppliers on a market is restricted, the flow of information is imperfect and competition is distorted by social relations between the participants. While classical and neoclassical economic theory have neglected the historical, institutional and sociological context of markets, sociologists and anthropologists have sought to take into account their “embeddedness”, placing them in a wider context of social relations (e.g. Polanyi, Elwert).

In how far is the definition of a “free market” applicable to the phenomenon of private tutoring in Egypt? Private lessons are offered for money by a large number of competing suppliers, i.e. teachers and educational entrepreneurs. Students and their parents can choose between these different suppliers, and prices are determined to a large extent by the balance of supply and demand. However, the consumers’ choice may be restricted and influenced by external factors. Students and teachers do not only interact on the informal market of private tutoring, but are, at the same time, also part of the formal education system. Thus, social and power relations may play an important role and influence the choice of tutors. Pressure and forms of corruption may occur, although this is not necessarily the case. In the context of private tutoring in Egypt, we are, thus, dealing with a system that has partly taken on the characteristics of a free market.

### 3.2 Commodification: expansion of the market principle

The process whereby social relations, goods or services become the object of commercial transactions is referred to as “marketization” or “commodification” (Elwert 1987: 301). The historical implications of such an expansion of the market principle are described by Polanyi in “The Great Transformation” (2001, orig. 1944). Contrary to the neoclassical concept of “homo oeconomicus”, Polanyi argues that economic processes and markets in pre-modern societies were generally “embedded” in social relationships and “run on noneconomic motives” (Polanyi 2001: 48).<sup>3</sup> According to Polanyi (2001: 79), the free market system did not evolve naturally, as many economists believe, but was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to cater to the needs of the newly emerging forms of large-scale industrial production. The new ideal of a self-regulating market economy, working without any political interventions, led to a radical transformation of society, the traditional economic motive of subsistence being substituted by the motive of gain.

In such a system, in which all transactions are mediated through money, “all incomes must derive from the sale of something or other” (Polanyi 2001: 43). This means “no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.” (ibid.). Not only material goods and products are accordingly traded on markets, but also human labor, land and money, which Polanyi refers to as “fictitious commodities” (2001: 75). This process of commodification, according to Polanyi, leads to the disintegration of human society and the destruction of the natural environment. However, it has historically been balanced by political countermovements, aiming at the protection of society from the adverse effects of economic liberalization (2001: 136).<sup>4</sup> This dialectic development or “double movement”, as Polanyi calls it, has in many countries led to the formation of welfare states and social market economies.

The expansion of the market principle can entail increased competition, with positive implications concerning freedom of choice, opportunities, creativity and

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<sup>3</sup> This argument was followed by the “substantivist school” in economic anthropology (e.g. Dalton, Bohannan, Sahlins).

<sup>4</sup> The rise of political Islamism, e.g. the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, can be interpreted as such a countermovement, combining criticism of the „commercialization“ of society and the spread of corruption, but also of “moral decay” and “Westernization”, with the demand for a return to “traditional” and religious values. (For similar examples cf. Elwert 1985: 514.)

empowerment, but it can also lead to corruption. In two articles published in 1985 and 1987, Georg Elwert discusses the relationship between processes of commodification and the increase of what he calls “venality”, i.e. an expansion of the market principle.<sup>5</sup> Elwert’s main argument is similar to Polanyi’s concept of a historical “double movement”: Modern market economies can only function if the process of commodification, i.e. the expansion of the market principle, is balanced and limited by a sphere of non-market relations guided by moral norms and values, by “generalized reciprocity”. Using a concept that was originally coined by Edward P. Thompson (1963) and later modified by James Scott (1976), Elwert (1985: 509) refers to this sphere as a “moral economy”.

In small communities, exchange relations are usually guided by close relationships and personal trust. In complex modern states, however, the moral economy has been institutionalized: an independent judiciary, welfare services, a public health system and a public education system are all part of this sphere of moral economy. “Institutional arrangements (...) constitute a collective good that substitutes socially constructed assurance for personal trust across transactors.” (Bromley 1999: 692). According to Elwert, trust in certain rules and institutions, especially the rule of law, is essential for the functioning of modern states and market economies. If this trust is lost and the economy is “disembedded”, venality takes over: everything is on sale (Elwert 1985: 509).

### **3.3 Education – a public good? Privatization, informalization and the role of the state**

#### **3.3.1 Education and the state**

At this point, it will be interesting to take a closer look at the role of the state in the provision of education. The public provision of mass education is a relatively new phenomenon. In Europe and North America, it evolved only during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Before that, the children of the upper classes usually received domestic education, i.e. private tutoring. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, education came to be seen as a responsibility of the state rather than the family, although this development was sometimes viewed with discomfort: “Legislation has of late further relaxed family

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<sup>5</sup> Elwert speaks of “generalized purchasability” (generalisierte Käuflichkeit).

bonds by relieving parents from the care of their children's minds, and replacing education under parental direction by education under governmental direction (...)" (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 1876: 717, quoted by Starrett 1998: 25). The founder of pedagogy as an academic subject, German philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), believed that public schooling had to be supplemented by domestic instruction, as "schools do not expand but narrow the mission of education. They make real communication with each individual impossible. (...) It is impossible for the instructor to teach, individualize his instruction, give children close personal guidance, and keep order in a big class." (quoted by Gordon 1990: 164).

Today, the education of the young generation is usually regarded as a crucial task of the state. The international discourse stresses the human right to education and the importance of free access to education for all.<sup>6</sup> The public provision of education should, ideally, guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic background. In economic terms, education is regarded as a means of "human capital formation" and as an investment in the future, turning children not only into loyal citizens of the state but also into productive members of their society. It has come to be regarded as an important precondition for economic development (Akkari 2004: 144).

Most governments have a strong interest in the education system, since it is seen as one of the central agents for socialization and for instilling norms and values in future generations, for promoting identification with a nation, a cultural and a religious community. It is a "site of national citizen building" (Herrera 2006: 27). Education is, therefore, usually organized and provided to all citizens by the state. This goal is, for example, expressed in the "National Plan for Education for All" issued by the Egyptian Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2003:

"Education falls under the direct supervision of the state so that it would ensure the minimum common level of enculturation and socialization as well as enhance national unity and the cohesion of the social fabric. (...) Free education is guaranteed in all stages (pre-university and university) and

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<sup>6</sup> The right to education is stipulated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the UN in 1948, and has been elaborated in the "World Declaration on Education for All" adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990: "An active commitment must be made to removing educational disparities." Since the Dakar conference in 2000, the Egyptian government has added a focus on educational quality, the new Egyptian slogan being "education for excellence and excellence for all" (MOE 2003: 2).



decision- makers on the political and educational levels always assert that free education will continue to be one of our social gains.” (MOE 2003: 8f.)

Every education system is a contested site of overlapping interests and influences, “of political and cultural struggle and cultural transformation” (Herrera 2006: 26). Power relations play an important role. Since the 1970s, education systems have been described as arenas of social reproduction and class struggle, serving to maintain and perpetuate class inequalities (see for example Bourdieu/ Passeron 1977). Other authors have argued against this deterministic view of education and emphasized the agency of students in the production of culture (cf. Barsoum 2004: 14).

In his analysis of the role of Islam in public education in Egypt, Starrett (1998) stresses the contribution of the formal education system to the emergence and empowerment of the Islamist opposition movement (Starrett 1998: 11).<sup>7</sup> For the Egyptian government, always facing the danger of rising political Islamism, education has come to be regarded as an issue of national security (Starrett 1998: 3 ff.). This is visibly manifest in the security measures surrounding educational institutions, especially universities, in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> In 1997, minister of Education Baha Eddin characterized schools as “hatcheries of terrorism” and wrote: “The first aspect of a new educational policy is that education is an issue of national security.” (Baha Eddin 1997: *Education and the Future*, quoted by Herrera 2006: 29). Starrett argues that, while authoritarian regimes may try to use the public education system as a tool for controlling their citizens, the liberating potential of education should not be underestimated: “There was no way to teach a man to read the Bible... which did not also enable him to read the radical press” (Raymond Williams, 1981, quoted by Starrett 1998: 58f.).

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<sup>7</sup> Starrett argues that, while meant to serve as a tool for social control, the public education system has, paradoxically, served to create a social, political and cultural climate which has increased the influence of contemporary forms of political opposition and Islamism.

<sup>8</sup> Strangers, and especially foreigners, cannot enter school buildings or university campuses, which are guarded by armed security forces. Students can only enter their university campus if they present their student ID. I experienced myself how strictly this rule is enforced. Two different aspects might play a role here: The general atmosphere of distrust, where foreigners are often regarded as potential spies, and the fact that universities are indeed often the sites of oppositional and Islamist political activities.

### 3.3.2 Privatization and informalization

Privatization is defined as “the transfer of responsibilities from the state to the private sector of the economy“ (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology 1994: 417). The worldwide tendency towards economic privatization gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. In Egypt, President Anwar Sadat, who had to cope with a severe economic crisis after Gamal Abdel Nasser’s death in 1970, started to open the Egyptian economy to foreign investment with his “Open Door Policy” (infitah). In the mid-1980s, the country faced another economic crisis which led Hosni Mubarak to adopt economic reform policies in line with the macroeconomic stabilization programs and structural adjustment demands of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These reforms included the reduction of subsidies, the partial abrogation of price and import controls and the privatization of some state-owned companies (cf. Kienle 2000: 144 ff.). Rising unemployment, increasing social inequality, and a declining standard of living for a considerable segment of the Egyptian population were the effects of both the economic crisis itself and the structural adjustment policies that followed.<sup>9</sup> Where the state withdrew from the provision of services such as health care or education, other, non-state, actors came in to fill the vacuum (Kienle 2000: 154). These were private entrepreneurs on one hand and religious or charitable organizations on the other hand.<sup>10</sup>

When economists speak of privatization, they usually refer to official government policies, i.e. private companies being contracted to provide public services or state-owned enterprises being sold to private investors. These policies are based on the assumption that the opening of the public sector to private investment and free market competition will lead to greater efficiency and better quality of the services offered. Sometimes, however, the privatization of formerly state-provided services is not a matter of choice. Faced with high rates of population growth, many states, especially in developing countries, lack the resources to provide basic services like health care or quality schooling to their rapidly growing populations. In this case, privatization may also take place on an informal<sup>11</sup> level and out of the reach of state control. In the Egyptian education sector, both a formal and an informal process

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<sup>9</sup> It is hard to distinguish between the effects of the crisis and the effects of the reforms.

<sup>10</sup> For the role of civil society and “private voluntary organizations” in Egypt cf. Sullivan (1994) and Sullivan/ Abdel-Kotob (1999).

<sup>11</sup> Using the term “informal”, I refer to activities that are unregulated and uncontrolled by the state (cf. Portes 1994).

of privatization are taking place simultaneously<sup>12</sup>: An increasing number of private schools and universities are established every year, while at the same time private lessons are traded informally on the market of education.

In his article about the informalization and privatization of conflict resolution in the judiciary system of Benin, Bierschenk (2004) points to the stabilizing effect of informal practices that are “embedded” in an overburdened public system, thus sustaining its ability to function at all. At the same time, these practices withdraw resources from the formal system and thus undermine its potential to work properly, without relying on informal practices: “The system stabilizes on a low level of performance.” (Bierschenk 2004: 190, translation: S.H.).

### **3.3.3 Is education a public good?**

In the context of education, privatization is highly controversial. As has been shown, states usually have a vital interest in controlling the education system. Furthermore, the public provision of education should, ideally, guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic background. Therefore, it is widely believed that education cannot be left entirely to the forces of a free market economy and to private entrepreneurship. However, the nature of education as a public good is contested. According to economic theory, “public goods” are goods or services that are consumed collectively by communities rather than individually by members of the community. They are indivisible and individuals cannot be excluded from their benefits. Another characteristic of pure public goods is non-rivalry, i.e. the costs for providing them are the same regardless of how many people benefit from it (Bradley 1997: 614 f.). Education cannot be regarded as a pure public good since “it is divisible among individuals, individuals are excludable, and the availability and quality of education depend on the size of the school-age population” (Bradley 1997: 616). However, there are good arguments for education to be treated as a public good, even from an economic point of view: The external benefits of education affect the community as a whole and so do the costs of a lack of education. Nevertheless, neoliberal economists argue that only the dynamics of a free market, regulated by supply and demand, can ensure high quality and efficiency of the provided services

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<sup>12</sup> Bierschenk (2004: 190) distinguishes between “regulated” and “spontaneous” privatization.

and encourage innovation and modernization.<sup>13</sup> The opponents of privatization, on the other hand, criticize that “markets have no morals”, and demand that the provision of education should remain independent of considerations of profit. An additional concern is that not only the state, but also private suppliers of educational services might pursue political agendas, e.g. Islamist groups in Egypt (Herrera 2006).<sup>14</sup>

The terms and concepts which I have introduced in this chapter shall serve as tools for the description and analysis of the phenomenon of private tutoring in Egypt. Before examining my empirical findings in the light of these concepts, I will provide a short overview over the historical development of the Egyptian education system and its current characteristics.

## 4 Background: Education in Egypt

### 4.1 Historical development of the education system

Many of the contemporary features of the Egyptian education system can be better understood if we take into account its historical development. The diversity of educational offers found today, and the existence of parallel education systems catering to different social classes, have a long tradition and are rooted in the history of education in Egypt.<sup>15</sup> A modern European-style education system was first introduced by the Ottoman ruler Muhammad ‘Ali (1805-1849) during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He established schools for accounting, engineering and administration to serve his need of well-educated, loyal administrators and army officers for building up a national army. He focused primarily on the higher levels of education and only later added a system of state-run secondary and primary schools

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<sup>13</sup> A lot has been written by economists of education about the role of the state in the provision of education and the pros and contras of privatization (especially about the voucher system), e.g. Friedman (1974), Lott (1987), Chubb/ Moe (1988), Levin (1991), Belfield (2000). However, this debate is restricted almost exclusively to the US and the UK, it deals mainly with the formal education system and does not take informal practices into account.

<sup>14</sup> This is also suggested by the Egypt Human Development Report 2005: “The attempt to provide universal and free public services in Egypt placed the state under considerable stress, with a proliferation of private initiatives to fill the vacuum, transforming many of the welfare rights of the ordinary citizen into marketed commodities and the preserve of those who can afford them. It has also allowed specific groups to exploit the deficiencies by providing alternative welfare services, whose better quality allowed them to indirectly promote partisan ideologies.” (EHDR 2005: 61).

<sup>15</sup> For more elaborate discussions of the history of education in Egypt see for example Hyde (1978), Cochran (1986), and Starrett (1998).

(cf. Hyde 1978: 3).<sup>16</sup> The establishment of a modern education system resulted in the emergence of an educated Egyptian middle class, while the lower classes still relied on the traditional Qur'an schools, called *katateeb* (sg. *kuttab*).<sup>17</sup> A dual system thus evolved, which has persisted, in a somewhat different manner, until today.

During the period of British occupation (1882-1922), investment in education was curbed drastically and secular public schools, which had been free up to this point, began to charge fees. This was partly due to a financial crisis, but also to the British fears of civil unrest. According to Cochran (1986: 16), the educational level of the Egyptian population was kept low in order to prevent uprisings against the colonial power. Education was now fashioned to suit the needs of the British colonial administration. Employment in the civil service was guaranteed to all graduates of governmental secondary schools, a policy that was later taken up again by Gamal Abdel Nasser, albeit applied only to university graduates. However, the majority of children who received any education at all still relied on the traditional *katateeb* and was barred from upward social mobility (Starrett 1998: 31). According to Barsoum (2004: 25), "the limited availability of education created a thirst in the poorer rungs for educating their children". At the same time, foreign schools became popular among the Egyptian elite. The number of "mission" or "language schools" that used modern curricula increased significantly during this period.<sup>18</sup> This system of elite "language schools" (*madaris lughat*) has persisted and continues to play an important role in Egypt today.

With its "constrained" independence of 1922, Egypt regained control over its educational policies. The anglicization of the public school curricula in the 1890s had already partly been reversed by the nationalist Minister of Education Saad Zaghloul in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Barsoum 2004: 26). Arabic was now introduced as the main language of instruction in governmental schools, while education in private language schools continued to take place in English or French (Cochran 1986: 15). The state budget for education was raised drastically and the constitution of 1923 made elementary education for all boys and girls between six and twelve years of age compulsory. Fees for public elementary schools were

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<sup>16</sup> According to Starrett (1998: 27), however, the mode of instruction and curricula of these schools still resembled those of the religious *katateeb* "stressing Qur'an memorization and the use of classical theological texts for memory training and penmanship practice."

<sup>17</sup> Since the new middle class of educated Egyptians presented a threat to the ruling elite, many of the new schools were closed down again by Muhammad 'Ali's immediate successors.

<sup>18</sup> These were foreign missionary schools, but also schools for the Greek, Jewish and other minorities as well as Coptic schools.

abolished in the same year, albeit without much effect on the rates of participation in the following decades (Barsoum 2004: 27f.). At that time, the “dual system” was still in place: Elementary schools that were free of charge provided only the most basic skills and did not qualify students to carry on with their education. The fees for primary schools, which allowed for progression to the secondary level, were only abolished in 1949, when a unified school system at the primary level was finally created (Starrett 1998: 74).

In 1950, Minister of Education Taha Hussein introduced free education on the pre-university level for all Egyptian citizens, stating that “education is a right for people as is their right for air and water” (quoted by the Egypt Human Development Report 2000: 31). The nationalist policies that had begun after independence were continued after the revolution of 1952 and during the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser. In 1962, universal free education was extended to include higher education. General access to free education and President Nasser’s employment guarantee for all university graduates in the public sector, which was announced in the same year, contributed to a rapid increase in enrollment rates in the following decades (Barsoum 2004: 31).<sup>19</sup> However, the state soon lacked the resources to meet the educational needs of the fast-growing population<sup>20</sup>, and the quality of publicly provided education started to deteriorate (Cochran 1986: 49f). More and more unqualified teachers had to be hired and school facilities were insufficiently equipped for the masses of students they had to accommodate. Many schools started to operate in shifts, especially in densely populated urban areas (Barsoum 2004: 34). This trend continued under the rule of President Anwar Sadat (1970-1981).

With Sadat’s “Open Door Policy”, which encouraged foreign investment, also in the education sector, a two-class education system was de facto re-established, similar to the one that had existed during colonial times: While the poor masses now had to rely on the underfunded and deficient public system, the wealthier families could educate their children in an increasing number of private and “language schools” (*madaris lughat*)<sup>21</sup>, which became a prerequisite for getting a well-paying job in the newly-formed private sector of the economy: “The education system now

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<sup>19</sup> According to Barsoum (2004: 31), secondary school enrollment increased by 161% and university enrollment by 180% between 1969 and 1977.

<sup>20</sup> According to Cochran (1986: 57), the annual population growth rate in 1966 of 2.54 % was one of the highest in the world.

<sup>21</sup> “*Madaris lughat*” are schools that emphasize teaching foreign languages (usually English or French) and where subjects such as the sciences are taught in the foreign language.

reflected the mixed economy and divided culture (...) attending a foreign school and speaking a foreign language became the ticket to increased income.” (Cochran 1986: 54 f.) A further privatization of education on all levels has taken place during the rule of Hosni Mubarak since 1981. Especially in the 1990s, neoliberal economic policies encouraged private enterprise, in the education sector as in other branches of the economy (Frag 2006: 115).

## 4.2 The Egyptian education system today

The Egyptian education system is made up of four main stages: primary (*ibtida'i*), preparatory (*'adadi*), secondary (*thanawi*) and tertiary education. In addition, two years of kindergarten (KG 1 and 2) are offered at the pre-school level. Compulsory “basic education” is comprised of six years of primary and three years of preparatory school.<sup>22</sup> After preparatory school, students are tracked either into general secondary school (*thanawiyya 'amma*), which lasts three years and prepares them for university, or, if they achieve only lower scores, into vocational secondary programs specializing either in commerce, industry or agriculture (cf. Barsoum 2004: 36).<sup>23</sup> Vocational schools make up about 60 % of secondary enrollment.

Students of all types of schools have to pass centrally administered and standardized state examinations, the results of which are decisive for their further progress in the education system. Higher education is comprised of two-year technical institutes, four-year technical institutes and universities (four to seven years, depending on the degree)<sup>24</sup>. In contrast to universities, the “higher institutes” (*ma'ahid*) accept students with lower *thanawiyya 'amma* scores as well as students from vocational secondary schools. However, degrees from these institutes are also valued less on the job market, and unemployment among their graduates is higher than among university graduates.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Compulsory education was extended from six to nine years in 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Those who can afford it can avoid this forced tracking by continuing their education in private schools and universities. Even in governmental schools, students can sometimes make up for a low score by paying extra fees (cf. Barsoum 2004: 36). According to one of my interview partners, this so-called “service system” (*nizam al-khadamat*) allows students with low scores to attend classes in the afternoon shift of a governmental school for an annual fee of about 400 to 800 LE (field notes 16.03.06).

<sup>24</sup> World Bank: Egypt – Education Sector Review 2002, part 1: p.9

<sup>25</sup> According to Barsoum (2004: 36), the highest unemployment rate is found among graduates of vocational secondary schools.

In 2003/ 2004, combined basic and secondary enrollment in Egypt had reached around 90 %, according to official statistics (EHDR 2005: 204).<sup>26</sup> About 85 % of students at those levels were enrolled in public or “governmental schools” (*madaris hukumiyya*), 7 % in private schools (*madaris khassa*) and 8 % in the religious system of Al-Azhar schools (EHDR 2005: 206).<sup>27</sup> The latter are publicly funded, but administered by the Islamic Al-Azhar University and open only to Muslim students. In addition to the general curriculum, they put a strong emphasis on religious studies and students generally continue their education in Al-Azhar University (Herrera 2006: 26f.). A variety of different kinds of private schools exists, with tuition fees ranging from a few hundred to several thousand Egyptian Pounds (LE) per year.<sup>28</sup> The lower-level private schools usually do not differ much from the public system, except for being privately funded and administered. They teach the same curricula, and the main difference is that school buildings and facilities are in a better condition and they usually have smaller class-sizes. The most popular form of schools among the affluent urban middle class are private “language schools” which focus on intensive language teaching, usually in English or French.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1970s, a growing number of “private Islamic schools” have been established, attempting to cultivate in their students a “more Islamic – as opposed to Egyptian or secular – identity” (Herrera 2006: 35). In the 1990s, a new type of profit-driven private schools evolved, so-called “investment schools” (*madaris istathmariyya*), offering “high quality education within an Islamic environment” (Herrera 2006: 39). They are set up as investment companies and equipped with such luxury amenities as swimming pools, state-of-the-art computer labs and modern cafeterias, catering to the upper classes living in the new upscale urban communities on the outskirts of Cairo (ibid).

While there are, thus, different types of schools catering to the different social classes, the formal education system in Egypt is still strongly centralized. Curricula, textbooks and examinations are centrally devised and controlled by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Private schools are supervised by the Ministry, regularly visited

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<sup>26</sup> However, these numbers are misleading, as the low quality of public education and high drop-out rates account for persistently high illiteracy rates (Barsoum 2004: 35).

<sup>27</sup> These numbers refer to 2003/2004 and 2002/2003 (Al-Azhar schools).

<sup>28</sup> The exchange rate in 2005/06 was approximately 7 LE = 1 Euro.

<sup>29</sup> Public “language schools” have also been established by the Ministry of Education. They charge tuition fees and are referred to as “experimental schools”.



by government inspectors and required to teach the standardized national curricula, although these can be complemented by additional subjects.

The quality of free public education in Egypt is generally lower, or perceived as lower, than that of private schools and universities, and this is strongly reflected in the opportunities and success of graduates on the labor market. According to Barsoum (2004), knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, and computer skills constitute the “cultural capital” that is most valued and sought-after on the Egyptian labor market, especially in the private sector of the economy. These are exactly the skills which distinguish the graduates of expensive private institutions from graduates of the public system.

Social stratification, which is already reproduced through the two-class system of formal education, is exacerbated even further through the informal practice of private tutoring, which is prevalent in all school types, leaving those students whose parents cannot afford private lessons at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their classmates. The proliferation of profit-oriented educational offers is, thus, taking place on a formal and informal level at the same-time. While more and more expensive private schools are being established, educational entrepreneurs have set up private tutoring centers targeting the lower classes who cannot afford to take private lessons at home.

#### **4.3 The significance of *magmu*<sup>30</sup> and *shihada*<sup>31</sup> – popular perceptions of education in Egypt**

In a letter to the Minister of Education which was published by Al-Ahram Weekly newspaper in 2001, a desperate mother writes:

“All Egyptians were eagerly anticipating the results of the Thanawiya Amma exams. As we all well know, under the revised examination system students - and by extension their families and therefore also millions, literally millions, of Egyptians - now suffer for two long years before they are awarded their high school diplomas, which are the equivalent of their passports into not only higher education but eventually the formal workforce and respectable society!

As a mother of two boys I have been suffering too these past four years to be able to save enough money for my boys' tuition fees and for the private tuition that has become vital to pass the exams. Both their father and I

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<sup>30</sup> “sum” or “final score”

<sup>31</sup> “certificate”

work and we have been saving every extra pound these past years and depriving ourselves of even the simplest "luxuries".

And now the results are out. My eldest son scored 93 per cent on his exams. But we can't rejoice. He won't let us. Because even this honourably high percentage does not guarantee that he join the Faculty of Medicine, his lifelong dream, or any of the most sought after colleges. It seems that economic inflation has also affected grades. And with this new type of inflation, what are families supposed to do? And then we wonder that the country seems to be experiencing a national form of depression."

(Letter to the Minister of Education, Al-Ahram Weekly Online 2001)

Despite rising unemployment among graduates, university education is still perceived as highly desirable in Egypt and prioritized by most families. Competition among students for the restricted number of places in public universities is fierce, and the final *thanawiyya 'amma* exams are of extreme importance to students as well as their parents. According to newspaper accounts, exam time means "a nightmare" and "a virtual state of emergency" for the students and their families (Shehab 1999). The results are passionately discussed every year in the Egyptian public and media.

There is a broad consensus in Egyptian society that the students with the highest scores will study at the most prestigious faculties, which are traditionally the faculties of medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and engineering<sup>32</sup>. Admission to public universities and higher institutes is organized by a central "coordinating office". Each year, all faculties and colleges define quotas for the admittance of new students. The best students of the cohort have a free choice of faculties, places that have not been filled become available for the next stratum of students, and those students with the lowest scores have to content themselves with the "leftover" (Barsoum 2004: 37).<sup>33</sup> This leads to a situation where many young Egyptians study a particular subject not out of personal interest or talent, but mainly due to their final score and according to their relative position within the cohort. The final score, or *magmu'*, is thus decisive for a student's career opportunities, at least for those who are confined to the public education system. Only the most affluent students can avoid this forced allocation by resorting to expensive private universities.

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<sup>32</sup> Other popular faculties that require high scores are Alsun faculty for languages at Ain Shams University and the Faculty of Political Science and Economics at Cairo University.

<sup>33</sup> While in Germany, the admission to universities is regulated in a similar manner, the Egyptian system seems to be much more rigid and the finality of the *magmu'* more absolute. In case of the German "Numerus Clausus", for example, the chances of being admitted to one's faculty of choice can be improved by waiting for a few semesters or choosing to study in a different city, which is impossible in Egypt.

The word *magmu'* is a central term that comes up inevitably when talking about education in Egypt. It is derived from the Arabic root *gam'a*, which means “to sum/ add up” or “to gather”. *Magmu'* can have several meanings, “sum”, “total” or “collectivity”. In the context of education it refers to the final score or grade point average.<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of my stay in Cairo<sup>35</sup>, I conducted a group interview with 15 girls from a lower-income neighborhood, all about 20 years old and in their last year of studying social work (*khedma igtima'iyya*) at a four-year higher institute. When I asked them about their motivations for choosing this particular field of studies, the answer came without hesitation and almost in unison: '*ashan el magmu'* – “because of our final score”. It turned out that not a single one of them had chosen the subject out of interest, for idealistic reasons or because they wanted to work in this field. I was surprised how openly they admitted that they were studying social work simply because of their low scores.

Talking to more and more Egyptians about their career choices after that, I realized that this was a pervading pattern: Dalia<sup>36</sup> (18) was studying history '*ashan el magmu'*, but she would have liked to study medicine, Heba (18) was studying law '*ashan el magmu'*, although she would have liked to study languages, etc. Accordingly, high school students, when asked about their future plans and wishes, usually give vague and stereotypical answers: “It depends on my final score”, “I would like to join a good faculty” (*'ayeza akhush koleya kwayyesa*) or simply “I would like to be a doctor”, which is, in most cases, quite unrealistic and reflects the pervading discourse of medicine being the most desirable career (with boys, “engineer” is probably an equally common answer).<sup>37</sup>

This hierarchy of professions is already reflected in the ranking of subjects at school: After the first year of *thanawiyya 'amma* (general secondary school), students are channeled into a “science” (*'alimi*) and a “humanities” (*adabi*) branch. A number of subjects, Arabic, English, French, and math are compulsory for both groups, but in addition they concentrate either on natural sciences or on humanities (e.g. philosophy, history, rhetorics...). The selection of students into the two branches takes place according to their scores: Only the best students are admitted

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<sup>34</sup> The word is also closely related to the word *magmu'a* (“group”), which is used to refer to “study groups”, i.e. supplementary classes taking place at school or tutoring centers (cf. chapter 6.1.2).

<sup>35</sup> See chapter five for details about the context of my research.

<sup>36</sup> All names in this text (of persons and tutoring centers) have been altered in order to ensure anonymity.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also Saad (2006: 99).

into the science branch. According to Marian, a third year *thanawiyya 'amma* student, she needed a minimum *magmu'* of 90 % to take the science option. As early as 1964, the Egyptian professor Lewis Awad complained that “the State’s exaggerated respect for scientific culture and technology (...) has led to the absorption of the secondary school’s best graduates into faculties of science with their most backward students being sent off to faculties of humanities” (quoted by Farag 2006: 114).

When I asked the above-mentioned group of social work students why and with what aim they were studying at all, once more their reply came almost in unison: *'ashan al-shihada* – “for the certificate”, and some of them indicated with gestures a certificate that is put on the wall. This answer reflects an attitude which is, at least partly, rooted in Nasser’s employment guarantee for university graduates. Although no longer in effect, a popular perception of education still prevails where the field of studies and the actual learning outcome are of secondary importance, what matters is to get a higher degree. For this kind of “credentialism”, which could be observed this in many developing countries in the 1960s and 70s, Ronald Dore (1976) coined the term “diploma disease”. He argued that in these countries, formal education was regarded as the key to a better life because it was the only way of getting a job in the “modern sector”, offering much higher salaries than “traditional” jobs. In addition, a low social status was generally attached to technical and manual labor. According to Dore, a typical symptom of “diploma disease” is a steady rise in the qualifications required for any particular job, i.e. a devaluation of qualifications, due to a rising number of graduates (“education inflation”). The result is a work force of people who are formally overqualified for the jobs they are doing, making it virtually impossible for most of them to find a job that corresponds to their degree: “The butcher will have a degree in economics, the taxi driver will have a degree in engineering. One can earn more money as a taxi driver or butcher in the private sector, but social status is enhanced by having an academic degree.” (Cochran 1986: 65) The teaching process in itself is devaluated, what counts is only the outcome in 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 emphasized rather than its qualification function. As Hargreaves (1997: 161) points out when applying Dore’s theory to the Egyptian case, the importance that is 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 exams dominate the whole education process (“examination-orientation and ritualization”).

Even though the majority of the girls in the interviewed group said they did not want to work after finishing their studies<sup>38</sup>, the certificate seemed to be regarded as a “passport into respectable society” and as a means of improving their standing vis-à-vis their future husbands. Singerman (1995: 164) describes the relationship between diplomas, status and marriage as “marriage mobility”: “The better educated a woman is, the more right she has to demand that a suitor equal her educational achievements and status.”<sup>39</sup> For women in the lower and lower middle classes working outside the house is often not a matter of choice. Although the husband is traditionally considered as the main bread-winner, many women have to take on jobs in order to contribute to the family income. This is especially true for the large number of female-headed households where the husbands are absent or unemployed. In addition, it is generally believed that educated women are better mothers, who will be able to raise and educate their children in a proper way and help them with their schoolwork (thus reducing tutoring expenses).

Being familiar with the context of this extremely competitive education system and the exam pressure that Egyptian students are subjected to, beginning at a very early stage, makes it easier to understand the prevalence and increasing importance of private tutoring.

#### **4.4 The status and role of teachers**

“Congratulations on your magnificent national role. Our hearts do encompass you while full of hope and optimism, for we know that you are fully aware of the greatness of the profession you are practising, a profession whose mention in the holy book of the Q’ran [sic!] is proof of its greatness. May God guide your steps and peace be upon you.” (Message to the teachers by President Sadat in 1973, quoted by Hyde 1978: 97f.)

The education system employs the largest number of civil servants in Egypt. According to the Egypt Human Development Report, close to 1.5 million full and part-time teachers and administrators were employed by the Ministry of Education in

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<sup>38</sup> Only six of them said they wanted to work. Four of them were already engaged and all of them said they wanted to get married soon.

<sup>39</sup> According to Singerman (1995: 164), the educational status of the girl also affects the value of the dowry that can be demanded from the future husband.

2005, i.e. working in the public system alone (EHDR 2005: 69).<sup>40</sup> However, I did not encounter a single Egyptian child or student during my research who wanted to become a teacher. What struck me even more is that the majority of teachers I talked to had not chosen their profession for idealistic reasons or even chosen it at all. Due to the specific nature of the university system, many of them had just been allocated to the faculty of education due to their final score: “‘*ashan al-magmu‘* ”. In the hierarchy of subjects and university faculties, education occupies a rather low position. Hence, it seems that teaching is not an occupation that many graduates consciously choose, but rather one they end up with.<sup>41</sup>

Manal, a 28 year old teacher who had been teaching at a governmental secondary school for girls for six years, told me: “I would have liked to study pharmacy, but my *magmu‘* was too low, so I studied German and education. At first, I did not want to be a teacher, I did not like my job, but I have gotten used to it. It is a hard job though.” (Field notes 12.01.05). Or Abla Zaynab who was 45 and a science teacher at a public preparatory school for girls: “I did not want to be a teacher. My dream was to become a lawyer. Actually, my score was sufficient to enter the faculty of law, but my family was against it, because lawyer is a male profession. Teaching is a female profession, so I became a teacher. I have learned to like my job.” (Interview Abla Zaynab 28.12.04)<sup>42</sup>

However, teaching has not always been associated with a low social and economic status in Egypt. Traditionally, religious scholars and educators enjoyed a high societal status and figured as respected authorities in public and social life.<sup>43</sup> After the introduction of a secular education system, teaching continued to be a prestigious profession often described as being not only a profession, but a vocation, at least in the official discourse (cf. Herrera 1992: 55 and EHDR 2005: 69). According to Farag (2006: 111), the beginning of the devaluation of the teaching profession can be traced back to the “Liberal Age” between 1923 and 1952. As early as 1937, the teacher and school principal Ali Hassan El-Hakei perceived an ambiguity between the alleged appreciation of the teachers’ vocation and the low

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<sup>40</sup> The World Bank Report (2002a: 8) speaks of 3.8 million employees in the entire education system in 2002. Not all of these are teachers, however. A large percentage of the civil servants employed by the MOE are administrative and non-teaching staff, accounting for about one quarter of employees on the primary and preparatory level. (EHDR 2005: 69)

<sup>41</sup> Cf. also Herrera (1992: 58).

<sup>42</sup> All interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into English afterwards.

<sup>43</sup> According to Gregory Starrett (1998: 32), anthropologists of the Victorian age, like Herbert Spencer, already argued “that the social roles of priest and teacher could be traced to a common ancestor”.

social status they actually enjoyed and complained that “in most cases the teacher resorts to a teachers college only after the doors to other colleges have been shut” (El-Hakei: *The Problems of Education in Egypt*, 1937, quoted by Farag 2006: 112).

The major turning point, however, was the introduction of mass public schooling in the 1950s and 60s. The social status of teachers began to deteriorate rapidly when more and more unqualified teachers had to be hired in order to meet the rising demand (Cochran 1986: 49). Until today, many of the teachers who are employed by the Egyptian Ministry of Education did not receive any pedagogical training prior to entering school service.<sup>44</sup>

In 1972, an annual “Teachers’ Day” was established to raise public awareness of the importance of the teaching profession, and outstanding teachers were honored in an official ceremony (Hyde 1978: 97). Nevertheless, it became increasingly difficult for the state to meet this appreciation of the role of teachers with an adequate remuneration for their services. One of the MOE’s goals as stipulated in a recent report is “upgrading the teacher’s image and status in society”, albeit without saying how this is to be achieved (NCERD 2004: 36). The discrepancy between the high importance ascribed to education for the advancement of society and the general low esteem for the teaching profession is still reflected in their salaries today. The fact that teachers receive the lowest salaries of all public and private sector employees (Singerman 1995: 160), has certainly contributed to the low popularity and status of the profession, to its “deprofessionalization” and “proletarianization” (Popa/ Acedo 2006: 100). In addition, “teachers tend to be blamed for society’s inability to reach an adequate standard of development and have become society’s scapegoats” (Farag 2006: 109).

What implications does the proliferation of private tutoring have on the status and role of teachers in Egyptian society? Popa and Acedo (2006) argue that, in the case of Romania, tutoring has helped teachers to improve not only their economic situation, but also their social and professional status. On the basis of my empirical findings, I will analyze whether this holds true for Egypt as well.

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<sup>44</sup> According to the EHDR 2005, only 46 % of employed teachers are graduates of Faculties of Education (EHDR 2005: 64).

## 5 Research setting

### 5.1 Doing research in *Umm al-Dunya*<sup>45</sup> – The challenges of urban anthropology in Cairo

Speaking of the “field” in anthropology, what first comes to mind is usually a remote village somewhere in the periphery, a rural setting with a limited number of inhabitants that allows for a holistic approach and comprehensive description. But what if the “field” is a city or, more than that, a megacity like Cairo with an estimated number of about 18 million inhabitants?<sup>46</sup> Without false modesty, Egyptians refer to their capital, the largest city on the African continent and in the Arab world, as *Umm al-Dunya* – “mother of the world”. Research in such a setting poses special challenges to the anthropologist. Apart from the general hardships of life in Cairo, such as air pollution, noise and constant traffic jams, the anonymity of the city and large trajectories make it difficult to establish and keep contacts. Informants do not necessarily belong to one coherent community. Depending on the research topic, they may be geographically dispersed and belong to diverse social groups and subcultures. While the researcher who arrives in “his” or “her” village is usually introduced to the head of the village and soon known to every member of the community, the situation in a huge and anonymous place like Cairo is quite different. First of all, the boundaries of the “field” have to be defined. Is it a geographically confined area of the city, a specific neighborhood, or is rather loosely determined by the research topic, including people and places in different parts of the city? While I originally set out with the aim of confining my study to a particular neighborhood, I soon realized that this was not feasible given the trajectories of my informants, especially when my network of contacts began to grow.

When I arrived in Cairo in late August of 2004, together with some of my co-researchers from Berlin<sup>47</sup>, we had already decided to rent and share apartments in Mohandiseen and Agouza, two adjacent middle class neighborhoods in the Western part of the city, and to venture out into our respective “research fields” from there.

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<sup>45</sup> “mother of the world”

<sup>46</sup> This number refers to the metropolitan area of Greater Cairo which stretches over the governorates of Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiya. However, no definite number of inhabitants is available and estimations range from 15 to 20 million.

<sup>47</sup> My research project was part of an excursion to Cairo from August 2004 to January 2005 which was supervised by Dr. Thomas Hüsken, Institute of Social Anthropology, Free University of Berlin, and included eight participants. A book has been published as a result of this excursion (Hüsken 2007).



Although most of us were planning to do their research in lower income neighborhoods of Cairo, this seemed to be the easiest and safest solution, as we were unfamiliar with the city and for the majority of us it was our first stay in Egypt. While I was aware of the fact that the classical ethnographic ideal envisages the complete “immersion” of the researcher in the field, sharing the life of her informants as completely as possible, in the course of my research I came to appreciate the relatively high degree of freedom and independence that this living arrangement granted me. At the beginning, however, the most important task and challenge ahead was to “enter the field” and establish first contacts.

## **5.2 Gaining access to the field: strategies and obstacles**

The most difficult part of an ethnographic endeavor is usually the beginning: Initiating contacts, trying to overcome the first barriers of suspicion and sometimes open rejection and establishing relationships of mutual trust. As mentioned above (chapter 1), I had originally come to Cairo with the aim of studying the educational opportunities and future perspectives of young women from a lower income background. Accordingly, I chose a lower class neighborhood located close to our apartment as the site of my research and tried to get to know girls and young women who lived there. I hoped to establish first contacts by simply spending time in the area, going grocery shopping and frequenting the small local shops and boutiques.

Unfortunately, this initial approach was not rewarded with much success. After a while, I had to acknowledge that this way I could easily make the acquaintance of dozens of young men but would hardly meet any female inhabitants. A number of reasons account for this: First of all, I realized that it is regarded as indecent for girls and especially for unmarried young women to spend time “in the street”, i.e. in the public sphere, except if it is for a purpose like shopping or going to school.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, boys and men spend most of their time outside the house, often sitting together in sidewalk coffee shops, drinking tea, chatting and smoking *shishas*<sup>49</sup>. Even when I encountered young women, they were usually much more

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<sup>48</sup> An exception to this rule were female market vendors (usually selling vegetables while fruit seemed to be the domain of male vendors). However, these were predominantly older women and thus did not belong to my preferred “target group”.

<sup>49</sup> water pipes

reserved and reluctant to talk to me than boys or men, which was probably also due to the language barrier.<sup>50</sup>

Given the tight time schedule of my research, I decided to change my strategy and started to visit local NGOs working in the fields of women's empowerment and education, hoping to establish contacts with girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds through them. After having visited a number of different NGOs and projects, this approach, too, proved to be more problematic than I had thought. During my first visit I was usually treated as a welcome guest, shown around and sometimes even introduced to select members of the organization's target group, with whom I was expected to conduct brief interviews. However, as soon as the organizations' directors realized that I was not satisfied with a single superficial visit, and that I was hoping to come back and establish more profound contacts with members of their target group, I was not so welcome anymore. The most extreme case of open suspicion and hostility occurred in a charity organization in the district of Imbaba, one of the first NGOs I visited. During my first visit, I was warmly welcomed and had the opportunity to talk to a group of social work students who were doing their practical training there. Some of the girls were eager to exchange phone numbers and invited me to their homes. After I had already visited two of them at home, I made another appointment at the NGO's office, as I had been told during my last visit that I could come back any time I wanted. However, to my surprise, I received a very cold reception this time and was told that I could not enter the building nor talk to any of the girls anymore without presenting an official research permit, which obviously I did not have nor would be able to obtain easily.<sup>51</sup> One of the girls approached me shortly afterwards in the street, obviously intimidated, and told me that they had been threatened with failing the year if they maintained any contact with me. I could only speculate about the reasons of this sudden change of mind on the part of the NGO's director. It seemed that by establishing private contacts with the girls, I had, unknowingly, transgressed the limits of what was regarded as legitimate research and aroused her suspicion.

This experience made me abruptly aware of the difficulties of an institutional approach and, at the same time, of the degree of distrust that pervades Egyptian

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<sup>50</sup> I got the impression that girls and women of the lower classes usually spoke very little or no English at all, while boys and men with a similar educational background had often acquired a basic vocabulary with the help of internet and films and through previous contacts with foreigners, and they used every opportunity to test their skills.

<sup>51</sup> For the difficulties in obtaining a research permit in Egypt see for example Sholkamy (1999: 127f.).

society. The relationship between the state and its citizens tends to be one of distrust, control and sometimes oppression. The authorities' attitude towards visitors is ambivalent: They are welcome and desired as tourists<sup>52</sup>, but much less welcome as researchers, especially if their research touches "sensitive" topics and could convey a "negative image" of the country. Fear of espionage is also very real in a society that is brimming with conspiracy theories.<sup>53</sup> I encountered a high general level of distrust not only in institutional settings, but also in the private sphere. While most Egyptians I met in the course of my research were extremely friendly and displayed an overwhelming hospitality, I often made the experience that the same people who had just invited me, a complete stranger, to their house and shared a meal with me, warned me from getting involved with other Egyptians, strangers, who according to them "could not be trusted".

### **5.3 "Key informants"**

Given the low general level of trust, one of the most important lessons I learned during my research was the significance of the so-called "key informant", i.e. a person with whom there is a relationship of mutual confidence and respect. I could not have carried out my research successfully without the help of two people who took personal interest in my research topic and went out of their way to help me: Iman, a young university graduate and teacher-to-be and Mr. Hamid, the manager of a private tutoring center. I became acquainted with Iman after having spent some time in Cairo already. I had already become aware of the phenomenon of private tutoring which was frequently mentioned by the people I spoke to, but it was only after I met Iman and she told me more about it that I decided to focus on this specific issue. She had graduated from the faculty of education and was looking for work as a German teacher. Initially, I contacted her because I was looking for a translator, but Iman soon turned out to be much more than that. She was very interested in my research, shared with me her experiences and opinions and introduced me to some other teachers. One day, she asked me if I was interested in visiting a private tutoring

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<sup>52</sup> Distrust of the state against its citizens becomes obvious in the tourist sector: Many regulations aim at preventing direct contact and exchange between foreigners and ordinary Egyptians, "for security reasons", exempting only officially licensed tour guides.

<sup>53</sup> On one occasion, after visiting a private school and trying rather unsuccessfully to conduct an interview with the very tight-lipped director, my key informant, a former teacher of that school, told me that the director indeed suspected that I was an Israeli spy.

center – *Magmu‘at al-Tawfiq*. At the center, I conducted a few interviews and attended a tutoring session. One of the managers of this center, Mr. Hamid, turned out to be very open and cooperative and tried to help out with his rudimentary English whenever translation was needed. His answers to my questions seemed much more honest than what I was used to. Mr. Hamid became another “key informant” and friend and helped me tirelessly, opening many doors and introducing me to more and more centers, teachers and students. My research finally gained momentum and one contact suddenly led to the next. When I returned to Cairo a year later, Mr. Hamid had opened his own tutoring center in another neighborhood which became my home base during another two weeks of intensive research. Teachers were, due to the illegal nature of the practice, often rather hesitant to talk openly about their tutoring practices and earnings.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, some of the teachers whom I encountered, mostly in private tutoring centers, were quite open and shared their experiences and concerns with me.

#### **5.4 Research methods**

Following Elwert’s (2003) suggestion of a „cross-perspective“ approach, I tried to take into account the perspectives of the different social actors engaged in the practice of private tutoring, i.e. mainly students, teachers and the managers of tutoring centers (whom I refer to as “educational entrepreneurs”). In order to gain as accurate a picture as possible of this practice, I employed a combination of qualitative research methods, primarily participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. In order to support my qualitative findings, I tried to critically compare them with quantitative data, if available, and with the findings of other authors. In order to get an impression of the wider public and media discourse, I followed the coverage of issues related to education, and especially private tutoring, in “Al-Ahram Weekly”, an Egyptian English language newspaper.<sup>55</sup>

After having attended preparatory language classes in Berlin and completed an intensive course in Egyptian spoken Arabic in Cairo, in addition to daily practice

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<sup>54</sup> On one occasion, I was openly reprimanded for my indiscreet questions concerning money and earnings. I was lucky that my insistence on these delicate issues was interpreted and excused as cultural difference: “Here in Egypt, we don’t ask people about their salaries like this, we don’t want to cause envy.” (Interview Mr. N. Q.) In fact, this “foreigner’s bonus” proved quite helpful and sometimes I consciously took advantage of it to ask inconvenient questions.

<sup>55</sup> Although published by the government-controlled Al-Ahram group and thus not very critical of government policies, this newspaper is regarded to be of relatively high quality.

“in the street”, I was able to conduct most of my interviews in Arabic, albeit sometimes with the help of a translator. As my vocabulary was still rather limited, this would not have been possible without the patience of my interview partners who provided lengthy explanations whenever necessary. Asking for the meaning of specific words and expressions proved to be an effective research tool in itself and a good legitimation for taking notes during a conversation. With the consent of my interview partners, I could record most interviews on MP3.

I conducted semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with twelve teachers, most of whom I met at the tutoring centers, four directors or managers of these centers and the director of a private school for boys. I witnessed some private lessons at students’ homes and visited five different centers, attending at least one class in each of them. In the end, I even had the opportunity to teach a German class myself in one of the centers. While I hoped to be able to visit more schools in order to get an insight into the workings of the formal education system, as well, this proved to be very difficult. Foreigners in general are not allowed to enter public schools if they do not have a special permit. Even when I visited a private school together with a former teacher of that school, after making prior arrangements with the principal, I was met with a high degree of suspicion and distrust. As mentioned above, social science research is subject to many restrictions in Egypt and qualitative research in a sensitive area like the education system even more so.<sup>56</sup>

In the tutoring centers I visited, I was usually surrounded by a crowd of students who quickly managed to turn the interview situation around, asking me questions instead of answering mine. Nevertheless, I was able to establish closer contacts with some students. Some of them invited me to their homes, so that I had the opportunity to meet their families and get an impression of their personal backgrounds and living conditions. Sometimes, I was even persuaded to stay overnight, an offer which was too tempting to decline. I developed a particularly close relationship with one family in Imbaba, whom I had already gotten to know at the beginning of my stay in Cairo and who became a kind of host family to me, although I usually only visited them during the day and went home at night. Most of the students I talked to were between 14 and 18 years old and, for practical reasons, most of them were female.

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<sup>56</sup> Concerning the difficulties of conducting qualitative research in schools, even for Egyptian researchers familiar with the system, cf. Herrera/ Torres (2006: 5f.).

Of course, the insights gained from this study, which was carried out mostly in lower and lower middle class areas, cannot necessarily be generalized, especially not in a society which is characterized by a strong vertical stratification and sharp differences between the social classes. Nevertheless, conversations with members of the upper middle and upper classes, as well as information I gained from other studies and newspaper articles, confirmed the observations I had made about the nature and prevalence of private tutoring and indicated that this phenomenon concerns the whole society, regardless of class and socio-economic background. My research is not based on a quantifiable sample and the research sites and interview partners were not chosen according to any systematic pattern, but rather through a “snowball system”. However, I found that some arguments were brought forward independently by so many people, that I consider them to be meaningful as part of a pervading societal discourse about the state of the Egyptian education system, about the role of teachers in this system and about the phenomenon of private lessons.

### **5.5 The role of the researcher**

Just as the researcher comes to the field with certain preconceived ideas and expectations, she is immediately confronted with a set of stereotypes and expectations concerning her own role and conduct. Not only does she observe and form opinions about her surroundings, but she also finds herself under the constant surveillance and judgment of the people around her. Research can thus be seen as a continuous process of negotiation, not only with regard to the research topic itself, but also concerning the role of the researcher and the relationship to her informants. The role that is assigned to the researcher in the field largely shapes the flow of information she receives (Elwert 2003: 12).

Every society provides a certain set of roles for strangers. Most “Western” foreigners (*aganib*) coming to Egypt are tourists who follow clear and well-known trajectories and patterns of behavior. They stay for a limited time, visit certain places and buy souvenirs. As I was obviously not a tourist, most Egyptians intuitively put me into the second category reserved for young “Western” foreigners: students who study for a semester at the American University of Cairo (AUC) or spend a few months in Cairo to learn Arabic. The third category that is left for those who do not fit into either of the before-mentioned categories is that of an Israeli spy. The

“professional curiosity” of the anthropologist can easily be interpreted in terms of “spying”. The concept of qualitative or ethnographic research is largely unknown in Egypt where the subject of “Social Anthropology” only exists at the elite university AUC.<sup>57</sup>

When confronted with behavior that does not conform to their role expectations, people tend to produce their own explanations. Listening to my key informants’ explanations of what I was doing when they introduced me to other people helped me shape my own formula: *Ba‘amel bahs ‘an al-nizam al-ta‘allim fi Masr.* – “I am doing research about the education system in Egypt.” When I said this, people usually understood that I was a German student sent to Egypt by my professor with the assignment to write a paper about the Egyptian education system. Nevertheless, the amount of time it took me to complete my task caused some bewilderment and sometimes even pity. I was obviously very slow and my methods very inefficient, and people kept asking whether I had finally finished writing my *bahs* (research). One morning, Mr. Hamid handed me nine handwritten pages in Arabic about the education system and private tutoring in Egypt: He had lost his patience and decided to write my paper for me.

Researchers may be confronted with role attributions that do not correspond with their self-perception. This is especially true for young female researchers in Egypt. There is a strict pattern of moral expectations regarding the appearance and conduct of young unmarried women, including their body and dress, freedom of movement and contact with men. Although or maybe *because* it was not expected from me, as a European, to conform to these norms, I found myself constantly negotiating my classification in the local spectrum of moral integrity.

The fact that I had come to Egypt on my own, i.e. without my family, was already regarded as unusual. My behavior, in many ways, contradicted and broke the rules of conduct for young unmarried women: Not only did I share a flat with a male (as well as a female) flatmate, I also spent a lot of time outside the house, frequently came home late, went on my own to lower income (*sha‘bi*) neighborhoods where few foreigners or even middle class Egyptians ever go, and actively sought contact to strangers, sometimes even men.<sup>58</sup> It is not always easy to find a balance between the

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<sup>57</sup> This is, of course, not only true for Egypt, but similarly for any other country. Even in Germany, most people who are not social scientists have only a rough idea of what Social Anthropologists do.

<sup>58</sup> All of this did, of course, not escape the notice of neighboring shopowners and especially of the *bawab*, the vigilant doorman/ janitor who guards the entrance of every house in the more affluent neighborhoods of Cairo and, at the same time, watches over the moral integrity of its inhabitants.

adaptation to local norms, which is necessary to be accepted and respected by the host society, and the degree of independence and deviant behavior that is necessary to conduct anthropological research. As Elwert (2003: 12) writes: “The researcher’s capacity to act has to be constantly renewed, as a balance between the maintenance of personal integrity (“identity”) on the one hand and professional curiosity on the other hand.”<sup>59</sup>

## 5.6 *Manatiq sha‘biyya* – Cairo’s popular quarters

Like many cities in the so-called Third World, Cairo is a place of sharp contrasts. While I lived in the middle class neighborhood of Mohandiseen, and later Zamalek<sup>60</sup>, I conducted most of my research in the poorer districts of Imbaba, Masr al-Adima, Dar al-Salaam and Ma‘adi al-Gedida. Imbaba is located in the governorate of Giza, on the western bank of the Nile and north of Mohandiseen. Masr al-Adima, Dar al-Salaam and Ma‘adi al-Gedida are located in the governorate of Cairo, on the eastern bank of the Nile. All of these areas, except for Ma‘adi al-Gedida, are referred to by the Egyptians as *manatiq sha‘biyya* – “popular quarters”.<sup>61</sup> They are characterized by a high population density<sup>62</sup>, many of their inhabitants being of rural origin and a low educational background. A traditional and simple lifestyle prevails, which cannot, however, be necessarily equated with poverty or a homogeneous lower class population (cf. Singerman 1995: 11).

About three quarters of Cairo’s inhabitants live in such *manatiq sha‘biyya* or *ashwa‘iyyat* (informal communities). These quarters emerged when more and more migrants moved to Cairo, especially from rural areas in Upper Egypt, and the city quickly expanded beyond its original boundaries. Although not slums in the strict sense of the word, these neighborhoods are characterized by a high degree of informality. Houses are often built illegally, i.e. without a license, on agricultural land; some newer areas lack access to water, sewage systems and electricity. Other services, like public transportation, are completely provided on an informal basis. In

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<sup>59</sup> My translation, S.H.

<sup>60</sup> During my second stay in Cairo, in 2006, I lived in a shared flat in Zamalek, an upper class area and “enclave” of the foreign community where many exclusive clubs and embassies are located, because it is in close proximity of the Goethe Institute where I was interning.

<sup>61</sup> *Al-sha‘b* means “the people” or “the nation”, the adjective *sh‘abi* is used to refer to things or lifestyles that are considered as indigenous or traditionally Egyptian. For a more elaborate discussion of the term *sha‘b* and its connotations see Singerman (1995: 11f.).

<sup>62</sup> Because of their high population density, Egyptians mockingly refer to them as *al-sin al-masri* – “the China of Egypt”.



the absence of the official authorities, social control in these areas is strong and informal institutions make up for the lack of state control (cf. Singerman 1995, Denis 1996).

*Sha'bi* neighborhoods are usually characterized by a very lively atmosphere, much of the inhabitants' life taking place in the bustling streets and narrow alleys which are often lined by small shops and workshops. Chicken, sheep and goats can be found wandering in the streets; many families breed chicken in their homes or on the rooftops. While being aware of the problems and hardships of many of the people living there, I enjoyed spending time in these neighborhoods. I was fascinated by their vibrant atmosphere and the seemingly natural coexistence of tradition and modernity. The close proximity of poverty and wealth, of urban and rural lifestyles, of fashionable cars and donkey carts, struck me as a typical feature of Cairo in general. It was not always easy, however, to be constantly switching between two worlds – the affluent neighborhoods where I was living on one hand and the simple and often “rural” lifestyle of the “popular neighborhoods” on the other.

## 6 The informal market of education in Egypt

### 6.1 The different forms of private tutoring

#### 6.1.1 *Privates/ durus khususiyya*<sup>63</sup>

The most common form of tutoring in Egypt are private lessons that take place in the homes of either students or teachers. They are provided individually or to small groups of students, usually between four and ten, and are comparatively expensive, prices varying according to the educational level and the importance of the subject. Most private lessons take place in the afternoons and evenings, usually once or twice a week, for one or two hours. Due to the small number of students, the student-teacher-relation tends to be rather close, and students get much more individual attention than during regular class hours at school. Some teachers have a special “office” where they provide lessons, or they rent a room in a commercial tutoring center for this purpose.

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<sup>63</sup> The English term *private* is used in Egyptian colloquial language synonymously with the Arabic *dars khususi* (private lesson), just as *section* and *magmu'a* are used synonymously.

### 6.1.2 *Sections/ magmu‘at*

*Sections* or *magmu‘at* (study groups) are classes that are held in front of larger groups of students and can therefore be offered at relatively low prices.<sup>64</sup> This type of tutoring which is becoming increasingly popular, especially among lower-income families, is mostly offered by commercial tutoring centers (*marakiz, sg. merkaz*). The form of instruction is much more teacher-centered and lecture-like than in private lessons, resembling more the classes of mainstream schooling. As an English teacher told me: “Sections are classes, but out of school. With better services.” (Interview Mr. Nader 16.03.2006). The accessibility of the different forms of tutoring depends mainly on the consumers’ financial means. For those who cannot afford the more expensive options, tutoring is also provided by mosques, churches and charitable organizations. *Magmu‘at* are even offered at schools after the regular classes are over. They are taught by the school teachers for a small fee. This official and legal form of tutoring was introduced by the government as a reaction to the widespread existence of illegal tutoring practices. Nevertheless, it seems to be the least popular form of tutoring and whoever can afford it will resort to one of the other options.

The following descriptions of a private lesson at a student’s home and a *section* taking place at a tutoring center, both of which I witnessed during my stay in Cairo, shall illustrate the differences between the two most common forms of tutoring.

## 6.2 Five pounds for the winner – A private lesson at home

“Wonderful, wonderful!” Mr. Youssif rejoices whenever he is pleased with a student’s answer. Sometimes, he even takes the respective girl’s hand and shakes it enthusiastically to emphasize his satisfaction. Together with seven secondary school girls, I am sitting at the living-room table in a small flat in Dar al-Salaam. One of the students has invited me to attend this private lesson at her house. The apartment is humbly furnished, the walls painted in a light pink, some stuffed animals serve as a decoration. Mr. Youssif, the English teacher, is a short middle-aged man with receding hair, rather formally dressed with a striped shirt, suit and tie.

At the beginning of the lesson, Mr. Youssif had taken out a five pound note and declared that this would be the reward for best student of the session. The subject

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<sup>64</sup> I witnessed *sections* with only eight and others with over 100 students, and I was told that in some popular centers, class sizes may even exceed 1000 students.

of today's lesson is a book called "The Spiders" which the students were supposed to read. As usual, this private lesson closely follows the official school curriculum, its focus being the practice of examination techniques. "By the way, this very question was part of the *thanawiyya 'amma* exam three years ago!" Remarks like this show how much emphasis is put on exam preparation. Once again, I am surprised by the speed with which teacher and students go through the subject matter. Questions have to be answered within split seconds, leaving hardly any time for the students to think. Memorization and rote learning are obviously more important than reflection or discussion. Some of the vocabulary that is trained is rather particular and seems to be of little practical value to the students. While some of the girls are quite lively and frequently try to catch the teacher's attention, others are quiet and prefer not to be involved at all. The book they are using for practice is called "The Champion's Series" and was written by Mr. Youssif himself, as he proudly tells me. It can be bought at local bookshops and stationeries, but the students are not allowed to take it to school, since it is not an official school book.

When the session is over, Mr. Youssif invites me to join him for two more classes, which he will teach this afternoon at other students' homes. He tells me that the next group will be comprised of some excellent students. One girl, Wafa', has even been the top English student of the whole district in the final preparatory school exams.<sup>65</sup> Mr. Youssif seems to be as proud about this accomplishment as if she was his own daughter. He says that he tries to form more or less homogeneous groups for his private lessons based on their level of English, but that other factors, such as proximity of the place, the time of the lessons and friendships between the students also play a role in determining the composition of the tutoring groups. Mr. Youssif obviously knows his students quite well and tells me details about their parents and older siblings, whom, in many cases, he has already taught before. He has known some of his students since they were born: "There is a relationship between me and their families." While one of the students takes me to the next class, which is due to begin half an hour later, Mr. Youssif rushes off to the mosque to pray.

The next group is made up of eight girls. Most of them are dressed rather conservatively with large headscarves and long gowns in muted colors. Mr. Youssif introduces them one by one as "Wafa', the future doctor" or "Nahed, the future journalist", and asks them to present themselves in English. The atmosphere in this

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<sup>65</sup> He makes these comments in front of the first group. This kind of ranking of the students seems to be quite common and probably serves to incite the competition between them.

group is much more lively and competitive than in the first one. “Ya mister, ya mister...” The girls constantly try to catch the teacher’s attention. Some of them, like Wafa’, are especially eager to present their knowledge and skills, and indeed their level of English seems to be much better than that of the first group. The sense of competition grows even stronger when Mr. Youssif divides the group into two teams who have to compete in solving the tasks presented in the book. A few times, fierce discussions break out when one group accuses the other of cheating, and there seems to be a constant struggle to impress the teacher. Only when the “*Allah hu akbar*” of the *mu‘azzin* resounds from the mosques, the class is interrupted and the group remains silent for a few minutes until the prayer call is over (Field notes 13.03.06).

### 6.3 The rhythm of chemistry – Mr. Hishams “chemistry show”

It is Monday evening, around 7 p.m. The big lecture room of *Magmu‘at al-Tawfiq*, a private tutoring center in a typical *sha‘bi* neighborhood of Cairo, is filled almost to the last seat with students. Girls are seated on the left, boys on the right side of the room. Upon entering from the narrow staircase, the students have to pass a table where an employee of the center collects the participation fees. After paying three Egyptian Pounds, each student gets an eight page leaflet, color-printed on cheap paper, somewhat similar to a program booklet at the theater. The front page features the title of the lecture: “Excellent Results Series 2005, chemistry, night before the exam revision, first year secondary school, first term”. Below, the name of the teacher, “Hisham Farid”, is printed in prominent letters, like that of a famous actor, followed by two cell phone numbers.

After conducting a few interviews with teachers and employees of the center, I have been invited by the director (*mudir*) of *Magmu‘at al-Tawfiq*, Ustaz Ashraf, to attend this chemistry class, so I take a seat in the last row of the girls’ side of the room. When the lesson starts, I count 110 students, all aged around 14. Three or four young employees urge them to keep quiet and pay attention. When Mr. Hisham<sup>66</sup> enters the room, the chattering stops and 110 pairs of eyes are directed expectantly at the teacher. Mr. Hisham is a slim man of approximately 45 years, with sparse hair

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<sup>66</sup> While teachers are usually referred to as *Ustaz* (or *Abla* for women), the English form of address is not only used for English teachers, but also for teachers of other subjects, especially for “famous” teachers like Mr. Hisham. It is also used in the centers’ advertising materials and seems to be part of teachers’ self-marketing strategies.

and a thin moustache. He is dressed conservatively, wearing a shirt, tie and a lime-colored jersey, but his inconspicuous outer appearance is misleading. As it turns out during the following two hours, Mr. Hisham is not only an experienced and renowned teacher, but also a talented „show master”. His performance is confident and entertaining. He seasons his lecture with funny remarks, so that the room occasionally resounds with laughter. What strikes me most, however, is the musicality and rhythm of this “chemistry show”. Mr. Hisham moves dynamically in front of his audience, writing formulas onto the blackboard and explaining them at the same time in a rhythmical recital through his microphone. From time to time, he chants certain formulas and phrases, which are then repeated several times in chorus by the students who seem to know their cues very well. It is a call-and-response-pattern that reminds me of the songs I have heard Egyptian women sing at wedding celebrations. If I had not known that this was a chemistry lesson, I could have easily mistaken it for musical education. It occurs to me that the way of teaching and studying chemistry (and this is also true for the other subjects at school) strongly resembles the traditional way of studying the Qur’an: the emphasis lies on rote memorization through rhythmical repetition.<sup>67</sup> The students hardly ask any questions, although they are encouraged to write down any questions on a slip of paper which is then passed on to the teacher by one of the assistants.

When I talk to one of the employees of the center after the lesson, he tells me that not all the lectures are as well attended as this one. It is the day before an important exam, so the students want to use this last opportunity for a revision with a good teacher, he says, and Mr. Hisham has an excellent reputation. Mr. Hisham has been working here at the center since it was founded eight years ago. In the mornings, he teaches at a private secondary school, usually only two hours a day, and in the afternoons, he teaches about six hours of classes at tutoring centers and gives private lessons at home. He says about himself that students come to study with him because he is “famous” (*mashhur*) (Field notes 10.01.05).

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<sup>67</sup> As I was told later, Mr. Hisham’s way of “reciting” chemical formulas, the rhythm, the melodies and the way he talked, sounded very much like Shaykh Sha’rawi, a famous Egyptian Qur’an preacher, whose tapes can be bought all over the Arab world. And he had obviously incorporated other citations from Egyptian popular culture, like a verse from a song by the popular *sha’bi* singer Ahmed Adaweyya.

#### 6.4 Cultures of teaching and learning

When referring to a teacher's activity in the classroom and the process of teaching, most people I spoke to in Egypt used the verb *yeshrah/ sharah*, the Arabic word for "explain". The verbs for "to teach" – *yedarris/ darrasa* – and "to explain" – *yeshrah/ sharaha* were used synonymously. This is a significant hint at the way the role of the teacher is generally perceived in Egypt. Teaching and learning is characterized by a strong emphasis on rote learning, on memorization and reproduction of a given body of knowledge, which is prescribed by centrally devised curricula and textbooks. (cf. El Tawila/ Lloyd 2000: 90f.)

Witnessing this "classroom culture" (Herrera/ Torres 2006), parallels to the mode of instruction practiced in the traditional religious schools, or *katateeb*, come to mind.<sup>68</sup> The same method of memorization and recitation that is known from the study of the Qur'an seems to be applied to the various subjects taught in modern secular schools, be it science, math or languages. As Saad (2006: 102) points out, "the sacred authority of texts" seems to be still in place.<sup>69</sup> The main goal of student-teacher interaction is the transmission of information. Students are not encouraged to discuss or question what they are taught, let alone contradict the teacher. The following example from a German class I observed in a tutoring center shall illustrate the nature of the knowledge that has to be memorized and reproduced by the students. The topic of the lesson was *Landeskunde* (German culture and society) and the students had to answer very specific questions about German cities. For example:

Question: "Name a street in Kassel."  
Answer: "Königsstraße."  
Question: "Name three sights in Bonn."  
Answer: "Bundeshaus, Geburtshaus von Beethoven and Schloss Bobelsdorf in der Bobelsdorfer Allee."

The students knew the answers by heart, reproduced them without hesitation and usually recited them in chorus. The teacher made sure that the students did not divert from the answers that were given in the textbook (Field notes 18.03.06).

This dominant "classroom culture" pervades the whole education system, including both formal schooling and classes in tutoring centers or at home. Even at

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. also Starrett (1998: 36 f.).

<sup>69</sup> According to Eickelman (1998: 289) the pervading „cognitive style“ of accurate memorization is particularly strong in North Africa, where it „pervades not only religious knowledge (‘ilm) but also knowledge of secular subjects and skills (ma‘rifa).“

home, when teaching in small groups allows for more individualized attention and more interaction between students and teachers, the basic pattern stays the same: The teacher explains (*beyishrah*) and the students reproduce, although more emphasis is put on understanding and students usually ask more questions than at school or at tutoring centers. However, one has to keep in mind that Egyptian teachers have very little freedom in structuring and conducting their classes, as the curriculum which is devised by the Ministry of Education prescribes exactly what is to be taught in each lesson (El Tawila/ Lloyd 2000: 91). Teachers have to rush through the syllabus in order not to lag behind, and all lessons have to be reproduced by the students in final exams which are administered simultaneously in all schools. Moreover, teachers are under the constant surveillance of government inspectors, who visit the schools and attend lessons frequently, and this increases the pressure on them to adhere strictly to the given curriculum. Under these circumstances, the “classroom culture” described above appears to be a rather rational and outcome-oriented approach to the educational process.

Apart from their skills in “explaining” the subject matter, another important characteristic of “good” teachers is their ability to maintain order in the classroom and control the students. Although officially prohibited by the MOE, corporal punishment, usually in the form of hitting or caning, is still frequently used in Egyptian schools (cf. Farag 2006: 122, Naguib 2006: 69). It is widely accepted and many parents even expect teachers to use it in order to enhance the discipline of the students. It is often believed that students have to fear their teachers in order to respect them:

“I think students need to be hit. At their age, in puberty, they need to be slowed down. They should fear, respect and love their teachers. But if we don’t hit them, they have no respect.” (Interview Ramy, German teacher at a governmental secondary school for boys, 06.01.05)

Alternatively, some teachers resort to verbal abuse or humiliation of students in front of the class. While it seems to be widespread in the formal system, I have not heard of or witnessed any incidence of corporal punishment or verbal abuse in tutoring centers or private lessons.

Schools are microcosms that are formed by society and form society at the same time. As Naguib (2006: 68) argues, the authoritarian character of the Egyptian state is mirrored and reproduced in the authoritarian governance of schools: “The

values that dominate classroom culture – authoritarianism, dominance, control, suppression and submission – permeate school social organization, and society as a whole.”<sup>70</sup> Abdellah Hammoudi (1997) has argued that the authoritarian master-disciple-relation, with its “culture of dominance and submission” is, in fact, a basic socio-cultural pattern characteristic of the Arab world, that is constantly reproduced and pervades all spheres of public life in Arab countries, the political and economic as well as the religious sphere.

But are teachers and students just prisoners of a restrictive system or a cultural pattern? Do all teachers “perpetuate the culture of authoritarianism and despotism” as Naguib (2006: 67) suggests? In every restrictive system, we can also find spaces of relative autonomy and creativity. There are, of course, dedicated teachers in Egypt who use the little freedom they have to engage students in an innovative and inspiring learning process. As in any other country, there are good and bad teachers, popular and less popular ones, and there is a wide variety of ways of dealing with the restrictive framework within which they are forced to work.

## **6.5 Private tutoring and the state**

“Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin recently announced the closure of several private centres providing pupils with extracurricular group tuition on a fee-paying basis. Bahaeddin further vowed not to stop at this, but to close down all such centres, and declared that the ministry will be coordinating closely with all the governorates to see this measure through.

The minister asserted that the centres will be required to pay in full all the taxes they had evaded to date, and that severe penalties would be imposed on teachers giving lessons outside their school premises. The provision of out-of-school tuition, even when the pupils are taught as a group, is considered a form of private lessons, said Bahaeddin, and is consequently illegal.”

(Tadros 1999, Al-Ahram Weekly)

Private tutoring is not a new phenomenon in Egypt. As early as 1983, the Egyptian Minister of Education, Dr. Mustafa Kamal Helmi, acknowledged that “The overspreading phenomenon of private lessons whether in schools or universities has become one of the major drawbacks in the education system.” (quoted by Cochran

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<sup>70</sup> The administrative structure of schools is characterized by a strongly hierarchical system including the director, principle and vice-principles. The administrative body of each school, in turn, is subordinate to the authorities of the local education district or governorate which is, itself, subordinate to the national Ministry of Education (Naguib 2006: 59).



1986: 59). However, while strictly speaking, it is illegal, the practice is largely tolerated by the Egyptian state and obviously hard to control. According to Herrera (1992: 75), “the illegality of private lessons in Egypt was and remains tantamount to the illegality of jay-walking, which is widely practiced because of the low, almost nonexistent legal risk associated with it”. A World Bank Report of 2002 states that “while the Government has taken the policy decision to ban private lessons and tutoring by public teachers (Ministerial Decree No. 592 - 11/98), the practice of tutoring remains unabated” (World Bank 2002a: 42).

As has been discussed above, the official claim of the Egyptian state is to provide all citizens with “education free of charge in all stages (pre-university and university) with a view to realizing the principle of equal opportunities” (NCERD Report 2004: 13). The proliferation of private tutoring not only runs contrary to this declared aim, but it withdraws valuable resources (time and money) from the formal education system. As tutoring is part of the informal economy and the income derived from it is not declared to the tax authorities (except for the official *magmu‘at* taking place at schools), the state loses a considerable amount of tax revenues. The Egyptian government, i.e. successive Ministers of Education, have been aware of the problem<sup>71</sup> and have taken different measures in order to curb the prevalence of the practice, however without much success. The legal alternative, i.e. in-school *magmu‘at*, were introduced as early as 1952, and Law No. 149, passed in 1986, made them a mandatory service of the school (Herrera 1992: 75).

While private lessons provided by teachers at home are officially outlawed, the legal status of tutoring centers is a more complicated issue, as the above newspaper report from 1999 shows. Tutoring centers are often operated by “private voluntary associations” (PVOs), i.e. NGOs, or “charitable organizations” (*gam‘iyyat khayriyya*). According to Sullivan/ Abed-Kotob (1999: 24), self-help and voluntarism (*tatawwa‘iyya*), especially with a religious motivation, have a long tradition in Egypt: “Islamist groups, along with thousands of Christian and secular NGOs, are doing for their societies what the government has long promised but not fulfilled. They have developed efficient social services (...)” (Sullivan/ Abed-Kotob 1999: 24).<sup>72</sup> Generally, the Egyptian government meets any civil society activities

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<sup>71</sup> See for example the “highly publicized statement by the Minister of Education, that schools have become mafias for private lessons” (Naguib 2006: 65).

<sup>72</sup> According to Starrett (1998: 121), Egypt has as many registered PVOs as all other Arab countries combined.

with distrust. The relationship between civil society organizations and the state is characterized by strong government control and sometimes oppression.<sup>73</sup> NGO activities in Egypt are regulated by Law 32 of 1964. According to this very restrictive law, all private voluntary organizations have to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). Any political activism on the part of the registered organizations is prohibited, and the Ministry is provided with far-reaching powers to control, supervise and regulate their workings. The MOSA can refuse permission for their formation, appoint a temporary board of directors or dissolve them at any time (Sullivan/ Abed-Kotob 1999: 25 f.). If they do not register with the Ministry, they run the risk of being closed down. Many centers thus maneuver in a legal grey-zone. As Sullivan/ Abed-Kotob (1999: 39) point out, NGOs in general “continue to skirt legality by bending some of the regulations in Law 32 of 1964. This and many other characteristics of these organizations place NGOs in a tenuous situation between formal and informal.” Even tutoring centers that are approved by the MOSA may encounter problems with the Ministry of Education as the above newspaper report shows. However, all efforts to ban the practice seem to have been in vain, as both student and teachers have increasingly come to rely on these informal offers and the tutoring business is thriving more than ever.

## 7 Students as “consumers” on the informal market of education

Why do students who complain about overcrowded classes in a governmental school pay extra money in the afternoon to attend lectures with up to several hundred students in a commercial tutoring center? Why do parents who already pay high tuition fees for private or “language schools” not hesitate to pay even higher amounts for additional private lessons at home? What is the motivation of students and parents in all strata of the Egyptian society for engaging on the informal market of supplementary education? The following account of a typical female student’s day as well as short portraits of three students from different parts of Cairo and different socio-economic backgrounds shall provide a basis for analyzing students’ concerns, their relationships to teachers and their motivations for participating in various forms of private tutoring.

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<sup>73</sup> At the same time, many so-called “NGOs” are in fact “GONGOs” (government-oriented NGOs), created by the government itself or by government officials (Sullivan/ Abed-Kotob 1999: 25).

### 7.1 When school ends, classes begin... A student's day in Cairo<sup>74</sup>

When Mona wakes up, at six thirty in the morning, it is still dark in the small two-bedroom apartment in Dar al-Salaam, a typical lower class or *sha'bi* (popular) neighborhood in Cairo. Mona dresses quietly in order not to wake up her younger sister Rasha with whom she is sharing a bed. Outside, in the *reception*<sup>75</sup>, she can hear her mother urge Ahmad, the second youngest, to wake up and get ready for school: "Yalla ya Ahmad, you will be late again!!" Mona's elder brother Muhammad is still sleeping in the other bedroom. He has probably spent the whole night in an internet café with his friends and just gone to bed. After having some *ful* and *ta'miyya* – mashed fava beans and falafel – which her mother has bought at a nearby takeaway and warmed up for breakfast, Mona puts on her *higab* (headscarf), matching the long skirt and long-sleeved blouse of her school uniform, and even manages to quickly put on a little make-up when her mother looks the other way. Then she takes her books and heads down the dark and narrow staircase of the building. She greets some neighbors as she walks down the unpaved alley, passes the grocery shop, the chicken vendor and the small boutique that is still closed, before reaching the large street where her friend Basma is already waiting for her. Together, they squeeze into one of the numerous minibuses passing by. Traffic is already heavy; farmers with donkey carts are bringing their produce to the local markets, making their way between honking taxis and over-crowded minibuses. After getting off the bus and taking the cram-full Metro for a few stops, the girls finally reach their school, a governmental secondary school for girls. The school day begins with the *taboor*, the flag-greeting ceremony, during which the whole school gathers in the courtyard every morning before the first class. The students have to stand accurately in line to sing the national anthem, listen to verses from the Qur'an and allow the headmaster and teachers to make the announcements for the day.

Mona is 16 and in the second year of general secondary school. The results of this year's exams already count towards the final score or *magmu'* which, after the

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<sup>74</sup> This account is based on the narratives of different interview partners as well as on my own observations. Mona is a fictitious character who combines the characteristics of a number of different individuals to represent something like a "typical lower-middle class Egyptian school girl".

<sup>75</sup> Egyptian households usually have a *reception*, i.e. a room with a seating accommodation along the wall where guests can be received, served tea and a snack etc. without intruding into the private sphere of the family. In poorer households however, one and the same room often has to serve as reception as well as family living-room.

third and last year of secondary school, will be decisive for her future career opportunities. There are 43 students in Mona's classroom, and sometimes it is so noisy that she can barely hear what the teacher is saying. Anyway, she is not too interested in the lesson herself and prefers to exchange the latest gossip with her friends. She knows that the English grammar rules which the teacher in the front of the class is going through will be explained again and more in detail this evening in her private lesson. Mona remembers that she still has to complete her homework for the tutoring session, which she did not have time to do yesterday.

When school is over, at 2 p.m., Mona returns home to have lunch. She only has half an hour before grabbing another set of books and rushing off again to the *Ahlam Center*, a private tutoring center that is located a few blocks away from her house. For the chemistry lesson at the center, which is taught by a famous teacher, she pays only three Egyptian Pounds, i.e. about forty Euro-Cents, per lesson, which is considerably cheaper than a private lesson at home. Mona gets back home at five and has two hours to relax a little and do her homework, before she leaves again for a private English lesson at her friend Basma's house, which they take together with five other girls, friends and neighbors. For these lessons, which take place once a week, each of them pays 40 LE a month to the teacher, who was recommended to them by Mona's elder brother.

Mona takes private lessons, either at home or at a center, in each one of her secondary school subjects, i.e. in her case Arabic, English, French, math and chemistry.<sup>76</sup> Like most of her peers, Mona wants to go on to university and, if her *magmu'* is good enough, *insha'allah* ("God willing"), she would like to join a good faculty. She knows that her score will probably not be sufficient for the most prestigious ones like medicine, pharmacology or engineering. Her secret dream is to enter the famous Alsun Faculty for languages at 'Ain Shams University, which also requires a very high *magmu'*. However, despite her efforts and all the private lessons she is taking, it is more likely that her score will only be sufficient to join the masses and enter an "ordinary" faculty like *adab* (humanities) or education. Mona is from a lower middle class background and cannot afford to study at an expensive private university. The governmental system is the only choice she has and the higher her final score, the better her chances of entering a good and prestigious faculty, and the better her opportunities on the job as well as the marriage market.

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<sup>76</sup> There are also some additional subjects like computer sciences, religion, sports, music or arts lessons, which do not, however, count towards the final score and can therefore be neglected.

## 7.2 Student portraits<sup>77</sup>

### 7.2.1 Dina

Dina is 15 and in the second year of general secondary school. She lives in Ma'adi, a middle and upper class neighborhood of Cairo. Although she has always been a good student, she has started to take private lessons in all her subjects this year, i.e. in Arabic, English, German, math and chemistry. Before that, she used to study at home, by herself or with the help of her mother, and her results were always quite good: 95 % in primary school, 89 % at the end of preparatory school. But now, she says, she needs an even higher score because, after finishing secondary school, she would like to study at the faculty of pharmacy (*saydala*). "For that you need a very high *magmu'*, about 98 %. The explanations (*sharh*) at school aren't good for getting a high *magmu'*. So I take lessons outside." She takes all her private lessons at home, in groups of about eight students, most of them friends. At school, there are 40 students in her class, and, according to Dina, all of them take private lessons: "It's normal. Everybody does it."

Dina says that she has chosen most of her private teachers because they were recommended to her by friends and some because she knows them from her own school and they have a good reputation. Only one of her private tutors, the chemistry teacher, is also her regular teacher at school. At school, Dina says, students talk during classes or study for other subjects: "Nobody pays attention (*mahaddish murakiz*). So the teacher doesn't bother to teach the whole lesson. He might just explain the subject matter very superficially, without going into any details. He knows that we are all taking private lessons, so why should he bother?" (Interview Dina 18.03.2006)

Dina estimates that her expenses for private tutoring total about 400 LE a month, while school fees at her governmental secondary school are only 50 LE per year. In addition, extra books have to be bought for the private lessons, which usually cost between 10 and 20 LE. The school fees for her younger brother who attends a private primary school are 1500 LE per year. Dina's father, an engineer, has had to

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<sup>77</sup> These portraits of actual students, whose names I changed, are based on interviews and informal conversations with the students, and, especially in the case of Girgis, visits to his family's home.

take on a second job in order to finance his children's education. (Interview Dina 18.03.06)

### **7.2.2 Sumaya**

Sumaya is 16 and in the second year of general secondary school. Together with her parents and three siblings, she lives in a rather poor part of Giza. Her father is a car mechanic, her mother a housewife. Last year, Sumaya started taking classes at a nearby tutoring center. First she was skeptical, because she had heard people say that the teachers at the centers were not good, but then she went there once and liked it. She thinks that the teachers there are much more committed than most of her teachers at school. Also, the center is convenient for her because it is close to her house and the classes are affordable. For a regular *section* at the center, Sumaya pays seven LE, for a revision class (*murag'a*) before an exam eight, with the exception of math, which costs 15 LE. There are discounts (*takhfid*) for students who cannot afford the lessons otherwise.

In Sumaya's opinion, the main problem at school is the lack of time. In her class at a governmental secondary school, there are 48 students. Lessons are very short and teachers do not have time to explain the subject matter properly. There is no opportunity for the students to ask questions in case they have not understood everything properly. She says that at the center, teachers make sure that every student has understood the lesson and, if necessary, they stay on afterwards to explain things individually. "The relation between students and teachers is strong here at the center", she says (*fi 'alaka kawiyya*), "stronger than at school". The majority of her friends take classes here, as well (Interview Sumaya 16.03.06).

### **7.2.3 Girgis**

Girgis is 14 and in the third and last year of preparatory school. He lives in a small flat in Imbaba with his parents and five siblings. Girgis hates going to school and avoids it whenever he can. In his class at school, there are between 50 and 60 students. Instead of doing his homework, Girgis prefers to hang out with his friends, roam through the streets and play computer games in an internet café. While his sisters have to stay at home in the afternoons and evenings, help their mother with the housework and study, he spends most of his time outside the house, just like his

father and his elder brothers. When he failed all of his subjects in the mid-term exams, his parents insisted that he take private lessons. After some time, they found out that, instead of attending the lessons, he often took the money and spent it together with his friends. Worried about their son's future prospects, Girgis' parents decided to ask some of his school teachers to come to their house and teach him on a one-to-one-basis. For these lessons, they pay approximately 100 LE per subject and month.

It is Thursday evening, 7:30 p.m. Umm Kurullus, Girgis' mother, is sitting in the living-room sorting rice in preparation for dinner, two of her daughters are watching TV and trying half-heartedly to do their homework, when the doorbell rings. "Ya Girgis", Umm Kurullus calls out for her youngest son – "Ya Girgis! Where are you? The teacher is here!" Suddenly, there is hectic movement in the small reception, the TV is turned off in the middle of the family's favorite *musalsal* (soap opera), the table is cleaned and the cushions are adjusted. Umm Kurullus takes her tray of rice to one of the small bedrooms, while her daughters take their books and papers. Girgis, who had been sleeping, is the only one who does not seem to be affected by the upheaval. When the teacher enters, everybody except for Girgis, i.e. his mother, three sisters and two cousins, who just came over for a visit, move to the small bedroom, where they stay for the next two hours sitting on the bed and talking in a whisper, in order not to disturb the Arabic class that is taking place in the living-room next door (Field notes 09.03.06).

Like many families in Imbaba, and Cairo in general, Girgis' family originates from a rural town in the governorate of Sohag in Upper Egypt (referred to by Egyptians as *El Sa'id*). Girgis' parents are rather uneducated, his mother barely finished primary school and is practically illiterate. His father owns a coffee shop and a small boutique, which is run by Girgis' oldest brother. Despite their own low educational background and the family's modest lifestyle, Girgis' parents are very concerned about the education of their offspring. If necessary, they invest the little money they have in private lessons, hoping that a good education will, eventually, help their children to lead a better life.

### 7.3 Rates of participation: Who takes part in private tutoring?

At first glance, Dina, Sumaya and Girgis do not seem to have much in common. They live in different parts of Cairo, come from different socio-economic backgrounds and have very different attitudes towards school and learning. Nevertheless, they are all “consumers” on the informal market of education and resort to one form or other of private tutoring in addition to formal schooling – Girgis taking lessons with his own classroom teachers, Dina with other, “famous”, teachers at friends’ houses and Sumaya at a nearby tutoring center. As these examples illustrate, tutoring in Egypt is not at all restricted to weak students who have problems in a particular subject and need to catch up with their classmates, as is usually the case in Germany, for example. Many students, like Dina or Wafa’, the English-champion, take private lessons even if they are already at the top of their class. In a highly competitive education system, tutoring has come to be regarded as an undesirable yet inevitable part of the game, and parents who cannot afford it feel that their children will be at a severe disadvantage. “*Howa da ‘adi* – That’s normal”, as Dina says.

Private tutoring is prevalent in all strata of Egyptian society, except for the very poor, but the forms of tutoring that can be afforded depend on the financial means of the student’s family.<sup>78</sup> While the more affluent usually prefer expensive private lessons at home, imparted to small groups of friends or neighbors, or even on a one-to-one level, the poorer tend to resort more often to tutoring centers, and for those who cannot even afford *sections* at a center, there are official in-school *magmu‘at* or classes offered by religious and charitable organizations. However, the individual choice of tutors and forms of tutoring depends on many different factors, especially on each family’s priorities and educational strategies. As Girgis’ example shows, families from a low socio-economic background might also resort to expensive private lessons at home, even if this means a serious financial burden for them.

Due to the informal, and mostly illegal, nature of private tutoring, it is hard to find reliable data about rates of participation, and statistics vary quite a lot. According to the Egypt Human Development Report, the percentage of families

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<sup>78</sup> The rates of participation do vary according to the socio-economic background of the students. Using data from the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000, Suliman/ El Kogali (2002: 22) show that only 60 % from the poorest quintile took private lessons, compared to 84 % from the richest quintile. However, this study does not differentiate between different forms of tutoring.



whose children took private lessons in 2005 was 64 % in urban and 54 % in rural areas (EHDR 2005: 56). A study published by the Population Council in 2000 found that 67 % of the surveyed preparatory school students had received private tutoring in the week prior to the interview (El-Tawila/ Lloyd et.al. 2000: xvi). According to the same study, the rates of participation in urban governorates and Lower Egypt were considerably higher than in Upper Egypt (81 % and 74 % as compared to 49 %). The phenomenon exists from kindergarten (KG)<sup>79</sup> through university level (e.g. medicine students), but is most widespread in the final years of preparatory and general secondary level, where pressure on the students is highest due to the pending final exams which are decisive for their further progress in the education system. Estimated rates of participation at these levels are over 80 %.<sup>80</sup>

The choice of tutors depends to a large extent on the student's stage in the education system. Since in the lower levels, 50 % of the final grades are determined by the classroom teacher through *daragat 'amal el sana*, i.e. grades for class work and monthly exams, students at these stages are more likely to take private lessons with their own teachers. When it comes to the final years of secondary school and the centralized *thanawiyya 'amma* exams, however, the grades are determined centrally and not by the classroom teachers. Therefore, *thanawiyya 'amma* students and their parents are more likely to choose tutors according to their reputation and exam success record (cf. Singerman 1995: 161 and Herrera 1992: 69).

#### **7.4 Motivations and strategies**

*Fil madrasa mish beyishrahu kwayyis.* – “The teachers at school don't explain well.” This is the answer given almost invariably by students when asked about their motivations for taking private lessons. There are, however, different interpretations as to why teachers fail to fulfill their duties during official class hours at school. Most students I talked to were quite aware of the fact that it is not just the teachers who are to blame for these deficits, but that structural constraints make it difficult for them to teach effectively during regular class hours. Especially at governmental schools, overcrowded classes of usually 40 to 50, sometimes even 60 or 70 students,

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<sup>79</sup> A teacher teaching German in a private Kindergarten told me that parents had approached her asking for supplementary private lessons for their children. She refused, however, because, as she says, she did not have time for tutoring (Field notes February 2006).

<sup>80</sup> For statistical data about private tutoring in Egypt see also Bray (2003: 22), EHDR (2000: 84).

double shifts<sup>81</sup> and poor facilities make teaching and learning difficult for everyone involved.<sup>82</sup> The dense and rigid curricula hardly allow for individual attention and responsiveness to the needs of the students. In addition, many teachers lack the qualifications and often the motivation to engage effectively in the teaching process. Due to severe teacher shortages, many teachers working schools today are underqualified. According to the Egypt Human Development Report 2005, only 46 % of employed teachers were graduates of faculties of education (EHDR 2005: 64).

Given these unfavorable conditions, many students as well as teachers prefer to concentrate their resources and attention on private lessons in the afternoon. Priority setting is important given the double burden of formal schooling and informal tutoring, which wears out students and teachers likewise: “When we come home from school, we are tired and want to sleep, but we have private lessons, so that is a problem for us.” (Interview Amani and Hind 13.03.06) For Dina, it goes without saying that homework for private lessons is more important than homework for school. When asked about it, she first insists that she does not get any homework for school, and then adds that “even if they give us questions, they don’t expect us to do them. Anyway, the teacher isn’t interested in seeing them.” For the private lessons, on the other hand, “you have to do them. If you don’t do them the teacher gets angry at you.” (Interview Dina 18.03.06). Before important exams, many students prefer to stay at home altogether in order to study by themselves or attend a last-minute revision class (*murag’a*).<sup>83</sup> El-Tawila/ Lloyd (2000: 86) report that “the second most common reason for absence was the need to stay at home to study or do homework” and come to the unexpected conclusion that, statistically, “more time spent in school is associated with lower level of performance”. As Dina puts it: “If I stopped going to school and just took private lessons, that would be better.” (Interview Dina 18.03.06).

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<sup>81</sup> According to Herrera (2006: 156), 54 % of government primary schools and 64 % of government preparatory schools in Cairo are “shift schools”.

<sup>82</sup> I had the chance to convince myself of the deplorable state of a governmental school, when one of the teachers I knew took me to his own former school in Giza, according to him the biggest governmental secondary school in Egypt with more than 20,000 students. Although the teacher insisted that this school was one of the best public schools in the country, the classrooms were run down, the paint coming off the walls, and window panes were broken or missing.

<sup>83</sup> When I attended a science class at a governmental preparatory school for girls, I was told that more than half of the students were absent that day. According to the teacher, they had stayed at home in order to prepare for the upcoming exams. They obviously felt that private lessons and individual study would be a better preparation than their official classes at school.

It is often insinuated by students and their parents alike, that teachers deliberately fail to cover the entire syllabus at school. One can frequently hear complaints about students being blackmailed by their teachers, who allegedly threaten to fail them if they do not take private lessons or who simply favor their tutees over the other students. Students report being neglected in class or subjected to corporal punishment more frequently than their classmates if they do not take private lessons (for similar findings cf. El Tawila/ Lloyd et.al. 2000: 27, Naguib 2006: 71, Singermann 1995: 162).<sup>84</sup>

Apart from these negative accounts, however, the students I talked to also frequently mentioned positive aspects of private tutoring. Especially in the higher levels of the education system, many students emphasized the fact that the informal system allows for them to choose their teachers freely, instead of depending on the ones that are assigned to them at school. They also asserted that student-teacher relations are usually much better in the informal than in the formal system (see chapter 8.5). A general lack of trust in the state-provided services seems to prevail, and private tutoring has become a “normal” and integral component of the educational process. The high value attached to education, or rather to certificates, in a very competitive system is another factor that contributes to the prevalence of private tutoring (cf. chapter 4.3).

However, tutoring also provides a legitimate framework for students to socialize and meet their friends in the afternoon. Manal, a 28 year old teacher at a public secondary school for girls, says that in her opinion, private tutoring is, more than anything, “a fashion”. When she was a student herself, i.e. 10 to 15 years ago, students took private lessons in one or two subjects at most, she says, and only if they really needed them, not in all subjects, as is often the case today. In Manal’s opinion, private lessons provide a welcome opportunity for students to meet their friends and particularly those of the opposite sex, especially since most public secondary schools are gender-segregated (Field notes 12.01.05). Mr. Hamid, manager of a tutoring center, confirms this observation: “I think about 50 % of students attend lessons here at the center because they really want to learn something, the other 50 % come in order to meet friends.” (Field notes 09.03.06)

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<sup>84</sup> According to the study by El-Tawila/ Lloyd et.al., 59 % of interviewed students felt that there was unequal treatment of students, and 22 % said that students who took private lessons with their teacher were favored over those who did not.

The deficits of an underfunded education system, a syllabus that fosters cramming and examination-orientation, the competitive nature of university admission policies, the high value that is attached to education and formal certificates, peer pressure and pressure from teachers as well as a general lack of trust in state-provided services are among the most important motives of students and their families for engaging on the informal market of education in Egypt. However, the advantages offered by the informal market of education, i.e. the better quality of the delivered services and the free choice of teachers, as well as the “socializing effects” (Foondun 2002: 20) of private tutoring should also not be underestimated. Especially for girls who might otherwise be confined to the household in the afternoons, private lessons provide a welcome opportunity to meet friends and increase their freedom of movement within a legitimate framework.

### **7.5 Family budgets and household politics**

The example of Girgis’ family illustrates the importance that many Egyptians attach to education (cf. also chapter 4.3) and the large amount of money that they are prepared to spend on it in the hope for better job opportunities for their children and upward social mobility. A short look at some statistical data confirms these findings, not only on the level of private households, but also on a macroeconomic level. According to a World Bank Report published in 2002, total education expenditures in Egypt amounted to 8.8 % of the GDP, a number far higher than the OECD average in education spending. While 60 % of this sum were publicly provided, 40 % were provided by private households. Private lessons constituted by far the largest household education expense, accounting for 1.6 % of the GDP on the pre-university level alone (World Bank 2002a: 26). Private households spent significantly more on private lessons than on admission and tuition fees, transportation, textbooks and other school supplies. This was true for households with children in governmental as well as in private schools (World Bank 2002b: 94). According to the Egypt Human Development Report 2005, 31 % of the questioned families named private tutoring as the most significant problem of the Egyptian education system (EHDR 2005: 57).

Like Dina’s father, many parents are forced to take on extra jobs in order to finance their children’s education expenses. Another strategy for raising additional funds for tutoring and other expenses is the informal system of rotary savings

associations (*gam'iyyat*), which is practiced by most Egyptians. Friends, neighbors or colleagues form such a group and contribute a certain amount of money to a common fund at fixed intervals. Each time, one member of the *gam'iyya* gets the sum of all the contributions. *Gam'iyyat* are usually headed by women and based solely on relations of mutual trust and reciprocity. This is a very effective savings and credit system, especially for those who do not have access to formal banking (cf. Singerman 1995: 154 ff., Hoodfar 1997: 219).

Most of my interview partners estimated that the average family spends between 20 and 50 % of their monthly income on education<sup>85</sup>, depending on the students' stage in the education system. The highest costs invariably occur before the final *thanawiyya 'amma* exams. Mr. Mahmoud, a science teacher who works in one of the tutoring centers, estimates that the average Egyptian family spends between 300 and 1000 LE per month on private tutoring alone. Mr. Mahmoud knows what he is talking about: Although his three children all attend private schools, the school fees being 1500 LE (kindergarten), 1700 LE (primary school) and 2000 LE (preparatory school), respectively, and none of them has reached secondary school yet, he already pays 500 LE a month for private lessons (Interview Mr. Mahmoud 11.03.06).

In spite of the official principle of free education for all, a system has thus evolved in Egypt where teachers are directly employed, and their salaries subsidized, by private households, bypassing the state and the fiscal system. The implication of this development is that the quality of education which can be accessed depends increasingly on the financial resources of the individual family. Socio-economic inequalities in the population are hence reproduced and aggravated by what the EHDR 2005 calls "the black market economy in social rights" (EHDR 2005: 54).

## 8 Teachers as "suppliers" on the informal market of education

Teachers in Egypt have developed diverse strategies for coping with their low status and remuneration, the most important one being the different tutoring practices. In the following chapter, the portraits of two teachers who are involved in the tutoring business shall provide a basis for analyzing these strategies and identifying their motivations for engaging on the informal market of education. The concepts of

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<sup>85</sup> Similar figures are given by other sources, e.g. Bray (1999: 27), Hargreaves (1997: 167).

“famous teachers” (*mudarrisin mashhurin*) and “talent” (*mawhiba*), which are frequently used in the context of tutoring, will be introduced and analyzed. Finally, the effects of tutoring on the relationship between students and teachers and the applicability of the concept of “corruption” to the phenomenon of private tutoring in Egypt will be critically examined.

## **8.1 Teacher portraits<sup>86</sup>**

### **8.1.1 Mr. Youssif**

Mr. Youssif, the English teacher introduced above, is 46 years old, married and has three children, two of whom are still in school. He studied English at ‘Ain Shams University. In addition to teaching, he sometimes works as a translator for radio and television stations. He lives in Shubra, which is quite far away from Dar al-Salaam. However, his professional life is centered in Dar al-Salaam where he teaches at a public school for boys and where he is “famous” among students and therefore recruits the majority of clients for his private tutoring business. He also rents a room in Dar al-Salaam, his “office” as he calls it, where he holds tutoring sessions. While boys usually attend classes in his office, as he says, girls, or rather their families, prefer him to come to their homes.

Once a year, Mr. Youssif organizes an exam for all of his private students, where the best students are awarded a prize and honored in a special ceremony. Mr. Youssif teaches at his school until 2 p.m. every day. After a break of about two hours, he gives three private classes of approximately two hours each, often finishing only late at night. Friday is his only day off. Mr. Youssif says that he teaches only *thanawiyya ‘amma* students, both at school and in his private lessons, because they have reached a good level of English already, and he does not like teaching younger students (Field notes 13.03.06).

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<sup>86</sup> These portraits are based on interviews and informal conversations with the teachers, as well as observations made during private lessons and sections they were teaching at students’ homes, in the case of Mr. Youssif (cf. chapter 6.2), and at different tutoring centers, in the case of Mr. Imad.

### 8.1.2 Mr. Imad

Mr. Imad is 26 years old, engaged, and lives in Giza. He has been working as an Arabic teacher for six years. He studied literature at Cairo University and took a six months graduate course in education at 'Ain Shams University. Although Mr. Imad is still young, he has already established a wide circle of "customers". In addition to working at a private secondary school, he teaches at about seven different tutoring centers all over the city and gives private lessons at home. He has written a book and publishes revision lessons for exam preparation, so-called *murag'at*, in a major newspaper once a week.

Mr. Imad used to work at a public school, but as he says, it was impossible to continue working there and teach at tutoring centers at the same time. The teachers at the centers are well-known through advertisements, and it is forbidden for teachers of governmental schools to work there. He estimates that about three quarters of teachers who teach at tutoring centers come from private schools. Later he admits that there is another reason why he changed from a governmental to a private school: At governmental schools, there are so many teachers that each one teaches only very few classes, sometimes just a single one. Therefore, the number of students that can be recruited for tutoring is limited. At his private school, he teaches many different classes and, accordingly, many students come to him for tutoring. "Students from other classes also attend my private lessons. So the other teachers think that I am taking their students away. This causes a lot of hatred and envy among teachers." (Interview Mr. Imad 14.03.06)

Mr. Imad works at school from 7:45 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. every day except on Saturdays. In the afternoon, he teaches at tutoring centers, a different one every day of the week, and in the evenings he gives up to three private lessons at his home in Giza. Sometimes he finishes at 8:00 p.m., but on other days, especially before important exams, he may be tutoring until 3:00 in the morning. He does not have a day off. Mr. Imad says that he likes working at the tutoring centers, even if he could earn a lot more by just giving private lessons at home. He considers it an honor to be working for some of the most famous centers in Cairo. "One day, this guy from *al-Shahra* called me and asked me if I wanted to teach there. I was so happy! *Al-Shahra* is the biggest tutoring center in Cairo, there are up to 1200 students in one class. They had heard about me through other centers and students." (ibid.)

## 8.2 Motivations and strategies

“You know, many teachers give their regular salary to the *bawab* (doorman) as a tip or to a beggar in the street. Imagine this... I teach in a governmental secondary school and earn 140 LE a month. With private lessons, I can get 200 LE for one single class. And I can make between 7,000 and 10,000 LE a month.” (Interview Ramy, German teacher, 06.01.05)

Both demand and supply factors contribute to the proliferation of private tutoring in Egypt. The combination of a low remuneration and social status and difficult working conditions renders the teaching profession rather unattractive for young Egyptians and results in a high level of dissatisfaction and frustration among teachers (cf. chapter 4.4). Teachers at governmental schools usually earn between 120 and 350 LE, i.e. between 17 and 50 Euros, a month, depending on seniority, a salary that is augmented by some supplements. It is virtually impossible to survive on this income alone, let alone to feed a family. Different strategies of income diversification have become a necessity for most Egyptians working in the public sector. Being a teacher, the easiest and most efficient strategy for gaining a “tax-free” extra income is private tutoring. As the above quote shows, for many Egyptian teachers private tutoring has indeed come to serve as their main source of income.

Nevertheless, teachers can rarely do without a regular job at a school. On the contrary: employment at a governmental or private school has gained an additional function. It serves as a basis of legitimation and a platform for recruiting customers, i.e. private students. “Teachers work at schools in order to become popular (*mahbub*) among students”, as Mr. Hamid, manager of a tutoring center, says (Field notes 11.01.05). And there is another reason: Due to the nature of the informal market of education, a private tutor has to be part of the formal system, as well. This is where he (or she) acquires not only the credibility and legitimation, but also the exact knowledge of the syllabus, textbooks and examinations that are needed for establishing a successful “tutoring business”.

In addition to the economic incentive, which constitutes the most important motivation, engagement on the tutoring market can also have other benefits for teachers. As will be shown in the next two chapters, it can be a way of increasing their professional autonomy and independence, social status and self-esteem, i.e. it can be seen as a means of “reprofessionalization” of the teaching profession.



Teachers employ different strategies in order to succeed on the informal market of education. Income opportunities depend on a variety of factors, starting with the subjects and grade levels that they teach. The “market price” of a subject depends on its importance for final examinations and the final score and on its relative position in the hierarchy of university subjects. The most lucrative option for a teacher would, thus, be to specialize in teaching math or sciences at the *thanawiyya ‘amma* level, where most students resort to tutoring and where lessons are most expensive. It is, therefore, not surprising that there is a lot of competition within schools when it comes to the distribution of classes among the teachers. “Famous” teachers who have a good standing and maybe even a considerable amount of power at their school, usually get the better, i.e. more lucrative levels, as the example of Mr. Youssif illustrates, who teaches only *thanawiyya ‘amma* students. The degree of influence they have on this decision may also depend on their seniority within the teaching body and their relationship with the headmaster (cf. Naguib 2006: 65f.). Competition for tutees at school may even lead to envy and hatred among teachers, as Mr. Imad pointed out.

Private tutors may work either at governmental or private schools. While the material incentive is rather weak, there are other factors that render a public sector job at a governmental school attractive, such as the security of health insurance, a minimal salary and a small pension. Teachers in the public sector are civil servants and cannot be dismissed, only transferred to other schools or government posts (Herrera 2006: 32). While teachers at private schools have less security, their salaries are usually a little higher and, more importantly, the opportunities for giving private lessons are better: Private school students and their families are usually better off and can spend more money on supplementary lessons (cf. Naguib 2006: 66). In addition, as Mr. Imad pointed out, teachers usually teach more classes in private schools than in governmental ones, which means that there is a larger pool of students from which potential tutees can be recruited.

The most important instruments for gaining customers are word-of-mouth and informal networks. A teacher’s reputation, thus, plays a decisive role in determining his success in the tutoring business. While many teachers give private lessons at home, only the most “talented” and “famous” ones teach at the tutoring centers. In order to be hired by the managers of these centers, a teacher has to have gained a certain reputation, a certain degree of “stardom” already (cf. chapter 9.3). While it

may be more profitable to give expensive private lessons at home, teaching at a center is a way of increasing one's reputation and thus one's pool of potential customers beyond the own school and neighborhood. As Ustaz Ashraf, director of *Magmu'at al-Tawfiq*, explains:

“If a teacher here at the center has 20 students in his class, for example, and he gets three LE per student, he earns 60 LE. If he gives a private lesson at home with four students, and he takes 20 LE per student, he gets 80 LE, so he earns more. But by teaching here at the center, he gets to do more private lessons at home. The students from the center tell their friends about him, or some may decide that they prefer to take lessons with him at home. So, in the end, he will earn more.” (Interview Ustaz Ashraf 08.01.05)

Teaching at a “famous” center is also a sign of professional success and a source of pride for a teacher, as Mr. Imad's example shows. It elevates him above the ranks of his colleagues and makes him a “star teacher”.

### **8.3 *Howa mudarris mashhur* – teachers as “stars”**

*Howa mudarris mashhur*. – “He is a famous teacher.” This expression was frequently used by students, managers of tutoring centers and teachers I talked to in Egypt.<sup>87</sup> In a context where the teaching profession in general has suffered from devaluation and “proletarianization”, from a lack of prestige and appreciation, I was surprised to find that some teachers were referred to as “famous”, a category that might, in Germany, be used to refer to actors or musicians, but never to teachers, who are usually not known beyond the boundaries of the school where they teach. This is different in Egypt. Education in general and the skills of particular teachers are widely discussed issues. In the context of private tutoring, we are dealing with a market system, so the flow of information about the quality of the different offers is crucial for both consumers and suppliers. The most precious resource and most important capital that teachers have on this competitive market is their reputation and the network of customers that they have established. Successful, i.e. “famous”

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<sup>87</sup> The same has been reported from China and other East Asian countries, where, according to Kwok (2004: 71), “idol tutors” are worshipped as “*ming shi*” (famous teachers).

teachers can convert this resource, or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1999), into economic capital.<sup>88</sup>

The teachers I encountered in Egyptian tutoring centers all shared certain characteristics: They were self-confident, quite charismatic, and very conscious of their reputation. As Ustaz Ashraf said: *'anduhum mawhibet al-tawsil* – “they have a talent for teaching”. They knew how to explain well (*beyishrahu kwayyis*), i.e. how to convey the subject matter to their students in an efficient and often entertaining way. Ustaz Ashraf explained how talented and “famous” teachers differ from their “ordinary” colleagues:

“Why do students come here to the center? Because here we have famous teachers (*mudarrisin mashhurin*). You know, most teachers in Egypt just get their degree (*shihada*) and start teaching, because they have to, but they don't love their job, and they have no talent for teaching (*ma'anduhumsh mawhibet el tawsil*). Most of the teachers are like this. But there are always three or four teachers at a school, maybe ten percent, who love to teach and who are talented. A normal teacher might, for example, need two hours to explain something, and the students still don't understand. And then there is a talented teacher who only needs 15, 20 minutes and the students understand. And they love him. These are the teachers whom we get to teach here at the center.” (Interview Ustaz Ashraf 08.01.05)

According to Mr. Ashraf, the skills and dedication that make a good teacher, thus, do not depend on training, and only to some extent on experience, but mostly on “talent” (*mawhiba*) which, according to him, some teachers have and others do not. This concept, which seems to be held by many Egyptians, qualifies teaching as a vocation rather than a profession. An example of the skills of such a charismatic “star teacher” was provided by Mr. Hisham and his “chemistry show” (chapter 6.3). Not only does his performance demonstrate his entertainer qualities, the “show” is also a fascinating example of a teacher's responsiveness to the tastes of his “customers”. Mr. Hisham turned out to be a true master in wrapping theoretical subject matter, i.e. in his case chemical formulas, up with elements of Egyptian popular culture.

In general, two main types of teachers could be distinguished at the tutoring centers: The older ones, like Mr. Hisham or Mr. Youssif, had been in the “business”

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<sup>88</sup> In his article “Rethinking the State. Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field” of 1999, Bourdieu distinguishes “diffuse symbolic capital, resting solely on collective recognition” i.e. social esteem, prestige, honor or reputation, from “objectified” or “bureaucratized symbolic capital” in the form of educational credentials and titles (Bourdieu 1999: 65). In this sense, a combination of diffuse and objectified symbolic capital as well as social capital (networks) account for the success of teachers on the informal market of education.

for a long time, they were very experienced and had established a wide circle of customers. They had already taught several generations of siblings of the same families. The younger ones, like Mr. Imad, were very ambitious and worked tirelessly for up to 12 or 15 hours a day, at school, in tutoring centers and at home.<sup>89</sup> This was especially true for those young men who were not married yet, and who were trying to save as much money as possible for marriage.

Some famous teachers gain an additional income by writing supplementary textbooks and study guides (*kutub kharigiyya*). A large market exists for these *kutub kharigiyya*, which are solely aimed at efficient exam preparation, providing exercises, summaries and previous exams for practice. They are sold in bookshops and stationeries and are also used by other teachers of the same subject for their private lessons (cf. Farag 2006: 133). Famous teachers might also publish revision lessons in newspapers, like Mr. Imad does. They usually have a personal assistant, i.e. a student who runs errands for them, assists them with the preparation of teaching materials and helps to produce and distribute advertisements.

While little prestige is connected with the teaching profession in general, private tutoring seems to be a means not only of turning a low-paying public-sector job into a means of gaining considerable extra income, but also of gaining prestige and a certain degree of professional self-confidence. In this regard, my findings confirm the thesis of Popa and Acedo (2006) that private tutoring can be regarded as a strategy for not only regaining a higher socio-economic status, but also professional autonomy and self-esteem. Paradoxically, one of the implications of the informal practice of private tutoring is, thus, that it leads to a “reprofessionalization” of teaching, i.e. increased service orientation and more professional autonomy for teachers (cf. Popa/ Acedo 2006: 99). However, one has to keep in mind that the methodological freedom gained through private tutoring is limited. After all, it takes place within the framework of the mainstream education system, strictly following the official syllabus and focusing almost exclusively on exam preparation.

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<sup>89</sup> During one interview, I tried to explain to a teacher what the situation is like in Germany, where private tuition does exist, although on a much smaller scale. I told him, that in Germany, private lessons are usually provided not by teachers, but by senior high school or university students. When I said this, my interview partner exclaimed: “So what do German teachers do after school?”

#### **8.4 *Ma‘anduhumsh mawhiba*<sup>90</sup> – The absence of female teachers in the tutoring business**

While many teachers at Egyptian schools are female, it struck me that I did not encounter a single woman in any of the tutoring centers I visited.<sup>91</sup> I heard about female teachers who gave private lessons at home, but the private centers seemed to be completely male-dominated. There are obvious reasons why female teachers are less likely to offer private lessons, i.e. mainly a lack of time and energy due to their domestic responsibilities, especially if they have a family. Apart from this, it is socially less acceptable for women, especially for young unmarried women, to spend their afternoons outside home, to visit students or invite them to their own house. The only acceptable possibility would be the official in-school *magmu‘at*. Female teachers are also more likely to be supported financially by their husbands or families and are thus not as dependent on an extra income as their male counterparts (cf. Singerman 1995: 162). When I asked Ustaz Ashraf, why there were no female teachers at his center, his spontaneous response was that female teachers just lacked *mawhiba*, i.e. the talent for teaching. According to him, they just did not possess the natural authority, self-assertive and charismatic appearance and the ability to “explain well”, which characterized their “famous” male colleagues. Mr. Ashraf added that female teachers were likely to stop working as soon as they got married or, at the latest, when they got pregnant. Unlike the headmaster of a public school, he said, he could not just replace a missing teacher, because the students came and paid in order to see one particular teacher, and each teacher had different methods and ways of explaining. He would not employ female teachers as it was too risky for him from a financial point of view (Interview Ustaz Ashraf 08.01.05).

#### **8.5 Private tutoring – empowerment or corruption? The changing relationship between teachers and students**

All of my interview partners agreed that the relationship between teachers and students in the context of private tutoring differs considerably from their relationship at school. School is often quite anonymous due to the large numbers of students and

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<sup>90</sup> “They have no talent.”

<sup>91</sup> Due to the restricted accessibility of schools, the teachers working at tutoring centers were the ones I mostly had a chance to meet and talk to. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that they are not necessarily representative for Egyptian school teachers in general.

a lack of class time. There is hardly any opportunity for individual attention and, as I was told, teachers might not even know their students' names. In contrast, private lessons at home, and even in tutoring centers, allow for more personal interaction between students and teachers. Private tutors usually know their students quite well, and they might even be familiar with their personal and family background as the example of Mr. Youssif shows. The picture which I witnessed in a tutoring center – a group of students gathered around their teacher at a small table, listening with rapt attention to his explanations – evoked associations of a traditional Qur'an scholar and his disciples. The students displayed respect and affection for their teacher, who seemed to be a father-like figure for them.

While it is, in many cases, closer and more personal, the relationship between teachers and students on the informal market of education is also a customer-supplier relation. Unlike at school, students are free to choose their private tutors according to their abilities and reputation, although this is not always the case as we have seen above, and they are free to leave if they do not like what they get for their money. Since the teachers are paid directly for their services and are competing with their colleagues, they care about their performance and adapt their offers to the demands of the market.

Both students and teachers often seem to take their private lessons more seriously than the official classes at school. Students indicated that there is more pressure and more control in private lessons than at school. As Hind, a student, remarked: "There has to be pressure (*dakht*) to make us study." She had stopped going to tutoring centers, she said, because she felt that there was not enough pressure and control, either. Therefore, she had started taking private lessons at home, together with her friends (Interview Hind 13.03.06).

Apart from advantages that tutoring practices might entail, like more individual attention, a closer relationship between students and teachers, and an improvement in learning conditions, the dangers inherent in the commodification and marketization of education have to be taken into account, as well. While some teachers improve their economic situation as well as their social status through tutoring, others may experience their "financial impotence" (Naguib 2006: 66f.) and their dependence on student's money primarily as a loss of dignity and control:

"I think that the relationship between teachers and students has suffered because of this system of private tutoring. The teachers lose control. The

students pay them for their services and the teachers depend on them for their money, so the students have no respect and the teachers cannot control them anymore. The teacher's dignity is offended through money.”  
(Interview Ramy 06.01.05)

A similar point is made by a teacher quoted by Farag (2006: 128): “With the material goal, the teacher loses his dignity; profit-making diminishes status.”

Contradictory statements about the impact of tutoring on the relationship between students and teachers show that the phenomenon can be experienced and interpreted very differently, depending on the angle under which it is analyzed. The different discourses are also reflected in the literature on private tutoring. While Popa and Acedo (2006) or Singerman (1995) interpret it as an act of empowerment and emphasize the agency of the involved actors, other authors regard it simply as a form of corruption. According to Biswal (1999: 223), tutoring can be classified as corruption because “both tutoring and corruption require citizens to pay money to receive a ‘free’ government service”. He uses Klitgaard’s (1991) definition of corruption, i.e. “corruption = monopoly + discretion – accountability” and argues that teachers in developing countries are “monopoly suppliers of their services to the students, have full discretion in what they supply, and (...) are hardly held accountable for their actions.” (Biswal 1999: 223). This seems to be a rather limited and one-sided analysis of what is, at least in Egypt, a complex and multi-faceted social practice. Biswal’s analysis may apply to rural areas in India (an example he uses) where, as he says, state monitoring of schools is weak and teachers are “highly respected”. However, contrary to Biswal’s assumptions, classroom teaching in Egypt is highly monitored and the social status of teachers generally quite low. As has been shown, teachers in Egypt may be monopoly suppliers in the official classroom, but they have many competitors on the informal market of education.

While Klitgaard’s definition focuses on the causes of corruption, another definition proposed by the UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning focuses on its effects, defining corruption as “the systematic use of public office for private benefit that results in a reduction in the quality or availability of public goods and services.” (Bray 2003: 10). Following this definition, Hallak and Poisson (2007: 29) point out that corruption can have a significant “impact (...) on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and, as a consequence on access, quality or equity in education”.

While examples of outright corruption certainly exist in the Egyptian education sector, e.g. when a student gets the answers for an upcoming exam from his private tutor<sup>92</sup>, I did not find this to be the main characteristic of the system of private tutoring in Egypt. A more careful and differentiated analysis of the different tutoring practices seems to be appropriate. In accordance with the definition proposed by Hallak and Poisson (2007), private tutoring in Egypt can have characteristics of corruption or at least “non-ethical behavior”. This is the case, for example, when teachers deliberately teach only part of the syllabus at school or use other means in order to force students to take private lessons with them. However, it is difficult to draw a clear line here between the deficiencies of the mainstream system, like an overloaded syllabus, lack of time and overcrowded classrooms, that prevent effective learning in class and make students resort to private lessons, and deliberate acts of teachers for the purpose of financial gain. Moreover, it is hard to prove whether students get better grades because teachers favor their own tutees or because the students actually learn something during their supplementary lessons and thus have an advantage vis-à-vis their classmates. In most cases, especially where students resort to the services of teachers other than their own classroom teachers, we cannot speak of outright corruption since no direct trade-off between students and private tutors is involved. In these cases, the beneficiaries of the students’ money do not have any direct power over their tutees’ grades.

Private tutoring may be justified as compensating for the deficiencies of the mainstream education system and thus improving the overall quality of education, while on the other hand, it can be seen as unethical in that it contributes to weakening the public system and has a negative impact on educational equity. As Hallak and Poisson (2007: 32) point out, “private tutoring is not an unethical practice in its own right; what makes private tutoring unethical is the condition of its operation and its impact on mainstream education.”

## 9 Educational entrepreneurs

During the last decades, a diversification of offers has taken place on the market of education, as well as an institutionalization of the informal practice of private

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<sup>92</sup> Such a case was related to me by Iman, whose younger brother, according to her, passed his exam only because his teacher had given him the answers in advance (Field notes 13.01.05).



tutoring. While originally, private lessons were only provided by individual teachers at home, a large number of tutoring centers (*marakiz*) have been established by now, mostly in lower and middle class urban areas, offering cheap classes to students who cannot afford to take private lessons at home. In the following chapter, a tutoring center and its manager will be portrayed, followed by an analysis of the motivations and marketing strategies of educational entrepreneurs in Egypt and their relations to students and teachers.

### 9.1 Private tutoring centers in Cairo

Tutoring centers can be found all over Cairo. According to my interview partners, the first centers of this kind in Cairo were opened in the late 1970s, beginning of the 1980s.<sup>93</sup> They are often located in ordinary apartment buildings, being hardly discernible to the outsider. Sometimes they are situated on the premises of mosques. It is impossible to give an exact number of tutoring centers in Cairo. Their concentration varies from one neighborhood to the next.<sup>94</sup> Some centers have several branches, and their sizes vary a lot. One especially large center, located in Boulaq, allegedly has class sizes of around 200 students and may even host up to 700 students before important exams. In other, smaller centers, there might just be 10 to 15 students in one lecture. The target group of the centers are mostly *thanawiyya* 'amma and, to a lesser extent, preparatory school students. Some even offer classes for the primary level. Apart from these lecture-like *sections*, classical private lessons (*privates*) may also take place in tutoring centers. In this case, a teacher rents a room in a center while otherwise the class resembles a private lesson at home. There are usually not more than 10 students in a group, allowing for close interaction with the teacher.<sup>95</sup> While *privates* usually cost 10 to 15 LE per session, *sections* are offered at relatively low prices, usually varying between three and eight LE, depending on the subject and class level.

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<sup>93</sup> Interviews Mr. Ashraf, Mr. Shadi, Mr. Hamid.

<sup>94</sup> Mr. Shadi, director of a center, estimates that there are about 20 centers in the densely populated district of Giza, but only about six centers in Maadi, for example. Mr. Hamid claims that there are 33 centers in one single street of the northern district of Matareyya alone.

<sup>95</sup> These *privates* were also referred to as "at the table", because students and teacher are gathered around a table, while during a *section*, the teacher stands in front of the class and the teacher-centered form of instruction resembles mainstream schooling or even university lectures.

## 9.2 Portrait: Mr. Hamid and his tutoring center

When I first meet Hamid, he is introduced to me as the manager of *Magmu'at al-Tawfiq*. "Mr. Hamid", as he calls himself, is 28 when I meet him, but he could easily pass for 33, and he is still unmarried. He grew up in Dar al-Salaam where he shares a small flat with his parents and three siblings. His father trades in building materials, his mother is a housewife and breeds chicken on the rooftop of their house. After finishing school, Hamid studied physical education at Helwan University. He worked in a shipping company for a while until he got a job teaching physical education at a private school in Dar al-Salaam. After a while, he decided to join the stream of young Egyptian men who try their luck in Saudi Arabia. He worked there as a swimming coach in an exclusive club, but decided to return to Egypt after a few months, because, as he says, he "did not like the Saudi mentality" (Field notes 11.01.05). With the money that he had accumulated, he joined in his cousin's tutoring business and became a partner and co-manager of *Magmu'at al-Tawfiq*. After some time, he took over the second branch of the center, which is located in a neighboring district. "Through special offers and advertisement, I succeeded in attracting many students and making a name for myself in the area." (Field notes 09.03.06). When a conflict occurred with his cousin over financial matters, Hamid decided to leave *Magmu'at al-Tawfiq* and open his own tutoring center. He started looking for suitable rooms and found them in a mosque in another, neighboring district. "Here, people knew my name already, but there were hardly any centers around, so there was not so much competition", he explains his choice (ibid.). At the time of my research, Mr. Hamid has managed to hire about 15 teachers who teach regularly at his center. He usually has two young assistants (*musa'diyyin*) working with him, his younger brother Walid, and Omar, a law student. Sometimes his sister helps out as well. The assistants open and close the center, prepare the rooms before classes, help in the printing and distribution of advertising materials and collect the tuition fees from the students.

Mr. Hamid's center is located in a mosque and occupies the entire second floor of the new white stone building. The rent is 800 LE a month, he says. On the outside of the building, the name of the center is written on a hand-painted sign: "*Magmu'at al-Hakim lil thanawiyya al-'amma*"<sup>96</sup>. The interior of the center still looks unfinished and provisional. In the smallest room, in which Mr. Hamid has set

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<sup>96</sup> "*Al-Hakim Center for general secondary level*"

up his office, the bare walls are covered scantily with black and blue patterned wrapping paper and decorated with a clock, a picture of the Kaaba in Mekka, and a few of the center's colorful schedules and advertising flyers. The only pieces of furniture are a dust-covered wooden desk and a few chairs. In the classroom, there is a blackboard and several dozen chairs which are covered with dusty and ripped plastic foil. There are no desks. Only when there is an exam each student gets a second chair to write on.<sup>97</sup> Although they sit together in the same room, there are separate entrances for girls and boys, thus providing at least the illusion of gender separation. Boys enter through the front door and sit on the right side of the room, while girls enter through the back door and sit on the left side (Field notes, 11.03.06).

### 9.3 Professional background and motivations

The motivations of educational entrepreneurs for engaging in the tutoring business are often somewhat ambiguous. When asked directly, most of my interview partners mentioned altruistic motivations like wishing to help the poor and claimed that their center was, first and foremost, a “charitable project” (*mashru‘ khadami*): “I want to help the students. I want to educate them. That’s all.” (Interview Ustaz Ashraf 08.01.2005) As noted in chapter 6.5, many tutoring centers are affiliated to private mosques or operated by religious private voluntary organizations (PVOs) or charitable associations (*gam‘iyyat khayriyya*), thus forming part of the thriving “parallel Islamic sector” (Wickham 2002) in Egypt. As Mr. Shadi, manager of a tutoring center, explains:

“This center belongs to a religious association (*gam‘iyya*) that offers a variety of social services. Apart from the tutoring center, there is a small health care center, a kindergarten and a library, all in this building and the one next to it. The tutoring center has been here for 15 years. We try to provide services for students at the lowest price, that is our first goal. We are an association with a social and an Islamic motivation to help people.” (Interview Mr. Shadi, 16.03.2006)

Nevertheless, most tutoring centers seem to be profit-oriented enterprises, competing with each other on a free market and using a variety of marketing strategies in order to attract “customers”. Indeed, these categories may overlap, as Islam on one hand

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<sup>97</sup> Mock-exams are sometimes written in order for the students to practice under exam conditions and for the teacher to check their level of knowledge.

and entrepreneurship or profit orientation on the other hand are not necessarily conceived as contradictory or mutually exclusive. According to Sullivan/ Abed-Kotob (1999: 27), many PVOs that are in fact predominantly entrepreneurial in nature “utilize the concept of ‘Islamic NGO’ more as a cover or marketing tool”.<sup>98</sup>

The owners and managers of private tutoring centers do not necessarily have a background in teaching or in the field of education. The educational entrepreneurs I met during my research came from a variety of professional backgrounds. While Mr. Hamid is a physical education teacher and sports coach, Ustaz Ashraf studied at the faculty of humanities (*adab*) and two others are lawyers. Just like most Egyptians, they either did not find jobs in their fields of study or these jobs do not provide them with a sufficient income. Mr. Shadi, who is 37, married, and father of a son, works in a company as a lawyer in the mornings, until 3 p.m., and in the tutoring center in the afternoons, until about 9 p.m. Since no official credentials are needed for opening a tutoring center, the only requirements for success in this semi-informal private sector of the economy seem to be entrepreneurial spirit, a good network of contacts and a clever marketing strategy. Educational entrepreneurs acquire legitimacy by hiring “famous” teachers, “producing” successful students and thus building up a reputation for themselves.

When I contacted Mr. Hamid again, only a few months after I had left Egypt, I was surprised to learn that he had closed down his center, which apparently had not been profitable, and moved to Hurghada, a popular Red Sea resort, to try his luck in the tourism sector, first as a cameraman and then as a snorkeling guide. For Mr. Hamid, the tutoring business was just one of a variety of attempts to make money and lead a decent life under harsh economic conditions. Like so many Egyptian young men, he did not really see a future for himself in Egypt, and his biggest dream was to leave the country and go abroad. He spent his nights in internet cafés trying to get in touch with the world by chatting with strangers from Canada or Japan, watching American movies online and trying to improve his English. He told me that he was hoping to marry a foreign girl and thus be able to obtain a visa, which would otherwise be impossible for him.

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<sup>98</sup> It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether centers are actually run by religious organizations or just located within their facilities. My interview partners made contradictory statements regarding their affiliations to mosques. While some underlined their connection to charitable and religious organizations, Mr. Hamid, for example, said that he was “just renting their rooms”. An Egyptian friend in Berlin later pointed out to me that, in his opinion, most of these centers are operated by the Muslim Brotherhood. This would be an interesting point for further research.

#### 9.4 Between *'alaka usariyya'*<sup>99</sup> and marketing strategies – relations to teachers and students

During an interview with Mr. Shadi, director of *Magmu'at al-Wafa'*, we were interrupted by a girl who entered his office. The following dialogue took place between Hanan, the student, and Mr. Shadi:

Mr. Shadi: Hanan, come in, how are you?

Hanan: *Salaamu aleikum*.

Mr. Shadi: *Aleikum al-salaam*. How are you, Hanan? How is it going?

Hanan: How are you, Uncle Shadi (*'amm Shadi*)? What's new?

Mr. Shadi: *Al hamdu lillah*. (Thanks to God.)

(...)

Mr. Shadi: I knew you would come. You are a hard-working student. A hundred percent. How are the studies going?

Hanan: *Al hamdu lillah*. So-so. *Al hamdu lillah*.

Mr. Shadi: How is your mother?

Hanan: *Al hamdu lillah*. They are all doing well and sending their regards.

Mr. Shadi: Give my regards to them, as well.

(...)

Hanan: I was coming today because...

Mr. Shadi: Arabic.

Hanan: No, math.

Mr. Shadi: Math was cancelled today, but there is Arabic.

Hanan: I took Arabic the day before yesterday.

Mr. Shadi: Take this one today. It's new.

Hanan: *Ya salaam!* (exclamation of surprise)

Mr. Shadi: Yes, it's different from the one you had the other day.

(Interview Mr. Shadi 16.03.06)

As in most areas of life in Egypt, personal relations and networks play a pre-eminent role in the tutoring business. The owners and managers of tutoring centers have to maintain good relations with teachers as well as students and their families. In contrast to formal schooling, students are regarded and, to a certain extent, treated as "customers" on the informal market of education. At the same time, Mr. Shadi emphasizes the fact that parents know and trust him and that the relationship between the center and the students is far more than a mere business relation:

"The students know us. Some of them have been with us since primary school. As I told you, in this building, there is a kindergarten (*hadana*). So

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<sup>99</sup> "family-like relationship"

there are students who have been here in this kindergarten. They know us and stay with us in primary school and preparatory school. There is an attachment. And their parents know the place, there is a family-like relationship between us (*'alaka usariyya*). I have the telephone numbers of all the students. Whenever a new student comes, I take his number, so if there is any problem, I can call his parents and tell them. They know that we keep an eye on their children. If I see a student smoking downstairs after a class, for example, I might call his parents and tell them. So they don't have to worry. The relationship here is close, it's not just about the money." (Interview Mr. Shadi 16.03.06)

The dialogue between Mr. Shadi and Hanan not only shows that a certain familiarity does indeed exist between the student and the manager of the center, but, in the way they speak about the lessons that are offered, also reveals the aspect of commodification: Mr. Shadi tries to "sell" to the student a lesson which she was not originally intending to take. According to Mr. Shadi, two aspects account for a tutoring center's success: A friendly atmosphere, i.e. "good treatment of the students" (*mu'amlā kwayyisa*), and the quality of the services offered, i.e. good and effective teaching by renowned teachers. Where students can choose between different offers, teacher performance and the quality of the delivered services become an important issue, and the managers of commercial centers make sure to employ only the best and most famous teachers. Ustaz Ashraf explains how he recruits new teachers for his center:

"We go to the schools and ask the students: Who do you have in German? Who do you have in Arabic? Who is the most famous Arabic teacher at your school? So they say: *Fulan* (Mr. So-and-so), so we get this *Fulan* and hire him. We ask one, two, three, four students, if the majority says: *Fulan*, we go and get him and make a deal with him." (Interview Ustaz Ashraf 08.01.05)

On the informal market of education, the "market value" of a teacher is determined by his reputation and there is a steady flow of information between students, teachers and educational entrepreneurs about the quality of different teachers:

"We are one community. Teachers, centers, we all know each other. I know the other centers and the teachers who work there. It's like football (*zayy la'b el kora*): Take a player who plays in a small club, for example. If he is good, a big club will go and get him, right? You see, I have a big place. My name is famous (*ismi mashhur*). So there are many teachers who wish to come and work here. It's like a big theater, for example, any artist would love to work there... even if he earned less. If he works there, he will be well-known." (Interview Mr. Shadi 16.03.06)

Or as Mr. Hamid says: “Teachers approach me, because they have heard of the center and I have a good reputation.” (Field notes 09.03.06) Reputation also plays an important role in the negotiation of prices and conditions between the director of the center and the teacher:

“If there is a famous teacher, I will go and say: ‘I’ll give you what you want... Tell me how much you want and you will get it.’ But to another one I might say: ‘I am more famous than you are, my center is more famous than you as a teacher, you’ll get the usual percentage.’ It is between me and the teacher.” (Interview Mr. Shadi 16.03.06)

The revenues from the *sections* are divided between the center and the teacher, whereby the distribution key may differ from case to case. If a student has to pay three LE for a class, for example, the center might get two LE and the respective teacher one. On several occasions, I witnessed heated discussions about marketing issues and price policies. Just like the managers of the centers, teachers are well informed about the prices and marketing strategies of the competitors, which is not surprising, since many of them are employed by a number of different centers at the same time. If centers do not attract enough students, teachers might be dissatisfied with their low revenues and stop working there. In one instance, two teachers working at Mr. Hamid’s center, compared their revenues from different centers. They told Mr. Hamid that they did not earn enough and demanded a larger share of the fees or, alternatively, to raise the fees for their classes. Mr. Hamid who was concerned about the competitiveness of his center, which was new and thus had to be established on the market, declined and insisted on keeping the prices as low as possible.

Competition between tutoring centers is harsh. In order to survive on this highly competitive market, educational entrepreneurs employ a variety of marketing strategies. While word-of-mouth is probably the most powerful marketing instrument in the tutoring business, most centers look for additional ways to attract students. They print colorful flyers and leaflets featuring the names of famous teachers, announcing special offers or just advertising the following week’s course schedule. These flyers are distributed in front of schools at the end of the school day.

“We distribute flyers to students who come out of the schools in the afternoon. I have about 15 boys who work for me, between 14 and 18 years. Their job is to go to schools, when the students come out. They go to all the schools here in the district, from Mounib to Giza, to Midan el Giza, to Cairo University, more or less.” (Interview Mr. Shadi 16.03.06)

In the afternoon, the streets in front of schools are often littered with hundreds of colorful flyers from different tutoring centers. In order to increase the attractiveness of their offer, little giveaways may be distributed to the students or promised to them if they attend a class at the center.<sup>100</sup> It is also common for teachers to announce upcoming *sections* at the end of their own class. After teaching an Arabic *section* at a center, Mr. Imad concluded by announcing some classes that would take place at the center the following day. In the usual manner, the students had to repeat what the teacher told them in chorus: “Tomorrow at 7 p.m., English with Ustaz Muhammad”.

As has been shown, the functioning of a tutoring center is always based on the cooperation between the manager of the center, i.e. an “educational entrepreneur”, who owns or rents the rooms and provides the facilities and infrastructure, and teachers who provide the “contents” and their reputation. Both teachers and educational entrepreneurs have to be flexible and “respond to market needs” (Bray 1999: 40). The educational entrepreneurs usually take care of marketing and advertisement issues. They are responsible for attracting as many students as possible. Although they do not necessarily have a background in education themselves, they are usually good networkers and smart businessmen. Teachers and educational entrepreneurs depend on each other for success. As in most realms of life in Egypt, informal networks play a major role here, not only in acquiring “customers”, i.e. students, but also for the recruitment of teachers. Unlike at school, only the best and most “famous” teachers are employed by the tutoring centers, as a teacher’s reputation will draw students to the center. Star teachers, on the other hand, usually prefer to teach at centers that are already well-known and attract many students. The concept of being “famous” thus plays a decisive role in the relationship between teachers and educational entrepreneurs. In spite of an ideology of “charity” and often religious motivations, the tutoring business in Egypt works, to a large extent, according to the laws of the market.

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<sup>100</sup> I witnessed and involuntarily became part of such a marketing campaign when little calendars, which I had brought as a present for the students, were instantly seized by Mr. Hamid, who had recognized their marketing potential. They were used to lure new students to attend classes at the center: every new student was given a calendar. The idea even came up to print the schedule of the center on the back of those calendars. (Field notes 14.03.06)



## 10 Discussion of findings and conclusion

Lila Abu-Lughod (1989) calls for an anthropology of the Middle East that takes the lives and experiences of ordinary people as a starting point for ethnographic writing and theorizing, in order “to make sense of peoples’ lives and the forces that structure them” (Abu-Lughod 1989: 300). With my thesis, I have tried to provide an insight into a social practice that strongly affects the lives of millions of Egyptians – students and their parents as well as teachers and their families.

I have shown that the proliferation of different forms of private tutoring is determined by a combination of demand and supply factors: An overburdened and underfunded public education system fails to provide quality education to an ever-growing number of students. Structural deficits like overcrowded classrooms and poor facilities often impede effective teaching and learning in public schools. This situation is aggravated by a very dense and rigid syllabus, an emphasis on rote learning and the exam orientation of the education system. Teachers, who are among the lowest paid employees in the public sector, are often unmotivated due to their low salaries and social status as well as their poor working conditions and, deliberately or not, fail to fulfill their duties during regular class hours. While students thus resort to private tutoring in order to cope with the curriculum and prepare for centralized exams that determine their future career opportunities, teachers depend on the additional income offered by this informal practice in order to make a decent living.

Education is highly valued in Egypt and, although the economic situation has led to high unemployment rates even among university graduates, it is still a top priority for most parents. They are willing, or feel forced, to spend high amounts of money on private tutoring, even if this means a serious financial burden for them. While it remains to be shown whether tutoring actually serves to improve students’ performance at school, the practice has been firmly established and come to be seen as indispensable by most Egyptians.

Through private tutoring, a direct financial relationship is established between students and teachers. In addition to paying taxes, private households directly subsidize teachers’ salaries and take over a substantial share of education expenses. Bierschenk’s (2004) analysis of the relationship between citizens, civil servants and

the state with regards to the judiciary system in Benin (cf. chapter 3.3.2) thus applies to the phenomenon of private tutoring, as well:

“The triangular relationship citizen – civil servant – state (the latter in its fourfold significance as regulator, service provider, tax collector and employer) is cut short into a dyadic one, where the citizen pays the civil servant directly for his service – which gradually becomes the precondition for the civil servant actually fulfilling his official duties, even if only selectively. This delegitimizes the collection of taxes, ultimately reduces tax revenues and impedes salary increases.” (Bierschenk 2004: 210)<sup>101</sup>

Looking at private tutoring in Egypt, we are dealing with an informal practice that takes place within a formal system. Despite the prevalence of this informal practice, the state still determines the rules of the game: It controls entry into the teaching profession, sets the curricula, controls examinations and issues degrees. The “shadow education system” cannot exist without the formal system. Informal practices are shaped by *and* shape the formal system at the same time. Although officially outlawed, private tutoring is largely tolerated by the state. As Biswal (1999: 224) points out, it may in fact be easier and more cost-effective for the state to tolerate the “corrupt practice” of private tutoring than to try and eliminate it.

The dynamics of what I call the “informal market of education” in Egypt can be described in terms of a vicious circle or “feedback loop”<sup>102</sup>: As both students and teachers increasingly concentrate their resources and efforts on private lessons, regular schooling is often reduced to a more or less redundant obligation. The informal practice that has evolved as a strategy for coping with the deficiencies of the formal system contributes to the further deterioration of its quality, or at least prevents substantial improvements. The system is reinforced and stabilized on a low level of performance.

Where state-provided services like education or health care are absent or insufficient, the responsibilities of the state are taken over by non-state actors, including both private entrepreneurs and civil society organizations. In Egypt, an institutionalization of the informal practice of private tutoring could be observed during the last decades with the establishment of large numbers of tutoring centers. These centers mainly cater to students with a lower income background who cannot afford to take expensive private lessons at home. A market of informal educational

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<sup>101</sup> My translation, S.H.

<sup>102</sup> Bierschenk (2004: 187) uses the term „Rückkopplungsschlaufe“ (feedback loop) in his account of informal practices in the Beninese judiciary.

offers has thus developed, where students act as “consumers” and teachers as well as educational entrepreneurs as “suppliers”. Lessons are increasingly turned into commodities that can be bought and sold and the prices of which are determined by the law of supply and demand. The process of teaching and learning has, to a large extent, been dissociated from the direct control of the state and from school as an institution and become subject to the laws of the market.

The implications of this development for the status and role of teachers in Egyptian society seem contradictory: On one hand, some charismatic and talented teachers successfully use the greater freedom and autonomy that the informal market of education offers them. These “star teachers”, who often cooperate with educational entrepreneurs to sell their services, also resort to other means of income diversification, for example to producing informal teaching materials and text books or publishing revision lectures in the mass media. While the teaching profession in general has come to be associated not only with a low remuneration but also with a low social status, these “famous” teachers succeed not only in substantially improving their economic situation through private tutoring, but also in enhancing their social status, professional autonomy and self-esteem. This confirms Popa’s and Acedo’s (2006) thesis of an empowerment of teachers and a “reprofessionalization” of teaching. On the other hand, the teaching profession as such suffers from a negative popular discourse accusing teachers of unethical behavior and corruption.

Likewise, the implications for the relationship between students and teachers are ambivalent. On one hand, private lessons allow for better teaching and learning conditions, more individual attention and closer relations between students and teachers. Often, their relationship seems to be at the same time more personalized and more professional than in the formal system. On the informal market of education, teachers care about their “performance”, since competition is fierce and their reputation is the most important capital they have in order to establish a network of customers. Students benefit from the possibility to freely choose private tutors according to their skills. On the other hand, the fact that “education” can be bought and that teachers often depend on their students for this extra income also has negative implications. The hierarchical relationship between students and teachers, which used to be regulated by the state, turns increasingly into a customer-supplier relationship that is regulated by the laws of the market. Some teachers feel pressured and experience this commodification of the student-teacher relationship as a loss of

dignity. Furthermore, students may feel pressured by their teachers to take private lessons. Some teachers, who do not possess “star qualities”, might resort to other strategies in order to gain customers, such as forms of blackmailing or corruption. This confirms Naguib’s (2006) thesis of a degradation of the teaching profession through private tutoring.

Venality and a “free market” of informal educational offers are thus two sides of the same coin. It is not only a matter of different perspectives on the same issue when different accounts of private tutoring are given, but different processes are actually taking place at the same time. However, public opinion in Egypt in general, and the people I talked to in particular, were rather critical of the practice and of a system that makes such a practice necessary. Both teachers and students complained about the double-burden of going to school and taking part in private lessons in the afternoons and evenings, and about the waste of time and resources that is inherent in this system. Even teachers, who could be expected to paint a more positive picture of the situation, since they are, at least financially, its benefactors, often made it clear that they would prefer to teach regular classes at school only, but that the demand for private tutoring as well as the insufficiencies of the public system and their low salaries forced them to offer private lessons.

However, the main implication of the encroachment of the market on the education system is that it places students from lower income backgrounds at a clear disadvantage and increases the inequality of opportunity in Egyptian society. In addition to a “two-class” formal education system, where those who can afford it send their children to expensive private schools and the less privileged have to rely on the overburdened public system, the existence of an “informal market of education” even increases these disparities. Despite the government’s efforts to provide free education to all citizens, the quality of social services that can be accessed in Egypt, and not only there, depends increasingly on the financial means of the individual or the family. “The reliability of behavior that used to be institutionally fixed, is now becoming the object of competing demands and therefore dependent on their purchasing power.” (Elwert 1987: 307)<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> My translation, S.H.

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## Glossary of Arabic terms

<b>A</b>	
<i>abla</i>	respectful form of address for female teachers
<i>adab / adabi</i>	humanities / humanities branch at school
<i>'adadi</i>	preparatory education stage
<i>aganib (sg. agnabi)</i>	“Western” foreigners
<i>'alaka kawiyya</i>	strong relationship
<i>'alaka usariyya</i>	“family-like” relationship
<i>al hamdu lillah</i>	“thanks to God”
<i>'alm / 'almi</i>	science / science branch at school
<i>'ashan</i>	because (of)
<i>ashwa 'iyyat</i>	informal communities
<b>B</b>	
<i>bahs</i>	research
<i>bawab</i>	doorman / janitor
<b>D</b>	
<i>dakht</i>	pressure
<i>daragat 'amal al-sana</i>	grades for class work and monthly exams
<i>dars khususi (pl. durus khususiyya)</i>	private lesson(s)
<b>F</b>	
<i>ful</i>	mashed fava beans
<b>G</b>	
<i>gam 'iyyat khayriyya</i>	charitable organizations
<i>gam 'iyya (pl: gam 'iyyat)</i>	rotary savings associations
<b>H</b>	
<i>hadana</i>	kindergarten
<i>higab</i>	headscarf
<b>I</b>	
<i>ibtida'i</i>	primary education stage
<i>infitah</i>	Sadat's (economic) “Open Door Policy”
<i>insha'allah</i>	God willing
<b>K</b>	
<i>khedma igtima'iyya</i>	social work
<i>kuttab (pl: katateeb)</i>	traditional religious school (Qur'an school)
<i>kutub kharigiyya</i>	supplementary textbooks, study guides
<b>M</b>	
<i>Ma'anduhumsh mawhebet al-tawsil.</i>	“They have no talent for teaching.”
<i>madaris lughat</i>	language schools, i.e. schools that emphasize teaching of a foreign language and where subjects such as the sciences are taught in that foreign language
<i>madaris istathmariyya</i>	“investment schools”
<i>madaris hukumiyya</i>	governmental schools

<i>madaris khassa</i>	private schools
<i>magmu‘</i>	“Sum”, “total” or “collectivity”; here: final score (at final secondary school exams)
<i>magmu‘at (sg. magmu‘a)</i>	study groups
<i>ma‘ahid (sg. ma‘had)</i>	higher institutes
<i>mahbub</i>	popular
<i>manatiq sha‘biyya</i>	popular quarters
<i>mashhur</i>	famous
<i>mashru‘ khadami</i>	charitable project
<i>mawhiba</i>	talent
<i>merkaz (pl. marakiz)</i>	“center”, here: tutoring center
<i>mu‘amla kwayyisa</i>	good treatment
<i>mudarris / mudarrisa</i>	Teacher (m./ f.)
<i>mudarrisin mashhurin</i>	famous teachers
<i>mudir</i>	director
<i>murag‘a</i>	revision (class)
<i>musa‘diyyin</i>	assistants
<i>musalsal</i>	TV soap opera
<b>N</b>	
<i>nizam al-khadamat</i>	“service system” (that allows students with low scores to attend classes in the afternoon shift in governmental schools)
<b>S</b>	
<i>saydala</i>	pharmacy (field of study)
<i>sha‘b</i>	the (common) people, the nation
<i>sha‘bi</i>	“popular”, traditional Egyptian
<i>sharh</i>	explanation
<i>shihada</i>	certificate
<b>T</b>	
<i>taboor</i>	flag-greeting ceremony (at school)
<i>takhfid</i>	discount
<i>ta‘miyya</i>	falafel
<i>tatawwa‘iyya</i>	voluntarism
<i>thanawi</i>	secondary education stage
<i>thanawiyya ‘amma</i>	general secondary school (certificate)
<b>U</b>	
<i>Umm al-Dunya</i>	“Mother of the world” (nickname for Cairo)
<i>ustaz</i>	respectful form of address for male teachers
<b>Y</b>	
<i>yedarris/ darrasa</i>	to teach
<i>yeshrah/ sharaha</i>	to explain

## Appendix 1: List of informants/ interview partners

### Students<sup>104</sup>

Nr.	Name	Sex	Age	School Type/ Class Level	Date of Interview/ Conversation	Place and Context
1.	Dina	f	15	Public secondary school; second year	18.03.2006 and others	Mr. Youssif's private lesson; interview at her grandmother's house
2.	Amani	f	16	Public secondary school; second year	13.03.2006 and others	Mr. Youssif's private lesson; interview and several visits at her house
3.	Hind	f	16	Public secondary school; second year	13.03.2006	Mr. Youssif's private lesson; interview at Amani's house
4.	Sumaya	f	16	Public secondary school; second year	16.03.2006	Interview at <i>Magmu 'at al- Wafa'</i>
5.	Hoda	f	16	Public secondary school; second year	16.03.2006	Interview at <i>Magmu 'at al- Wafa'</i>
6.	Ahmad	m	16	Public secondary school; second year	16.03.2006	Interview at <i>Magmu 'at al- Wafa'</i>
7.	Muhammad	m	16	Public secondary school; second year	16.03.2006	Interview at <i>Magmu 'at al- Wafa'</i>
8.	Girgis	m	14	Public preparatory school; third year	Many times	Informal conversations at his family's house
9.	Marian	f	16	Public secondary school; third year	Many times	Informal conversations at her family's house
10.	Dalia	f	18	University faculty of history; First year	Many times	Informal conversations at her family's house
11.	'Amr	m	17	Technical secondary school; fourth year	17.06.2005	Informal conversation at a friend's house
12.	Heba	f	18	University faculty of law; Second year	16.12.2004	Informal conversations, visit at her faculty
13.	Rania	f	18	University; faculty of medicine; Fourth year	10.03.2006 and 19.03.2006	Informal conversations, visit at her faculty

<sup>104</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

## Teachers

Nr.	Name	Sex	Age	Subject/ School Type	Date of Interview/ Conversation	Place and Context
1.	Iman	f	22	German; looking for a job	Many informal conversations	Translator; various places
2.	Abla Zaynab	f	45	Chemistry; public preparatory school for girls	28.12.2004	Observation of a chemistry class and interview at her school
3.	Ramy	m	27	German; public secondary school for boys	06.01.2005	friend of Iman's; interview in a café (in German)
4.	Ustaz Hossam	m	ca. 50	Arabic	08.01.2005	Interview at <i>Magmu'at al- Tawfiq 1</i>
5.	Ustaz Hisham	m	ca. 45	Chemistry; private secondary school	08.01.2005	Interview and observation of a chemistry <i>section</i> at <i>Magmu'at al- Tawfiq 1</i>
6.	Manal	f	28	German; public secondary school for girls	12.01.2005	a friend's friend; informal conversation at our house
7.	Mr. Mahmoud	m	ca. 55	Chemistry; secondary school	11.03.2006	Interview and observation of a private lesson at <i>Magmu'at al- Hakim</i>
8.	Mr. Youssif	m	46	English; public secondary school for boys	13.03.2006	Observation of three English lessons at students' homes and informal conversation
9.	Herr Mustafa	m	ca. 30	German	14.03.2006	Observation of a German <i>section</i> and interview at <i>Magmu'at al- Hakim</i>
10.	Mr. Imad	m	26	Arabic; private secondary school	14.03.2006 and 16.03.2006	Interview at <i>Magmu'at al- Hakim</i> ; observation of a <i>section</i> at <i>Magmu'at al- Wafa'</i>
11.	Mr. Nader	m	ca. 40	English	16.03.2006	Interview at <i>Magmu'at al- Wafa'</i>

12.	Herr 'Ali	m	ca. 40	German	18.03.2006	Observation of a German <i>section</i> and interview at <i>Magmu'at al-Wafa'</i>
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### Educational entrepreneurs

Nr.	Name	Sex	Age	Name of Center/ Function	Date of Interview/ Conversation	Place and Context
1.	Mr. Hamid	m	28	<i>Magmu'at al-Tawfiq 1 + 2</i> (manager) <i>Magmu'at al-Hakim</i> (director)	Many informal conversations	Various places
2.	Ustaz Ashraf	m	ca. 45	<i>Magmu'at al-Tawfiq 1</i> (director)	08.01.2005	Interview in his office in <i>Magmu'at al-Tawfiq 1</i>
3.	Mr. Shadi	m	ca. 40	<i>Magmu'at al-Wafa'</i> (director)	16.03.2006	Interview in his office in <i>Magmu'at al-Wafa'</i>
4.	Mr. Muhammad	m	ca. 35	<i>Magmu'at al-Fajr</i> (director)	18.03.2006	Interview in his office in <i>Magmu'at al-Fajr</i>

### Others

- Group interview with 15 social work students, all about 20 years old, in the fourth year of their study at a higher institute
- Interview with the director of a private preparatory school – 11.01.2005
- Informal conversations with student's parents, friends and colleagues



## **Appendix 2: Interview guideline students (tutoring centers)**

### **1. The Center**

- Since when do you come here?
- Why do you come here?
- Do your parents want you to come here or do you want it?
- Why did you/ your parents choose this center? How did you get to know this center?
  
- How often do you come here?
- Which classes do you take?
- Do you come on a regular basis or just at certain times (e.g. before exams)?
  
- Do you like coming here? Why/ why not?
- Do your friends/ classmates come here, as well?
- Did you know the teachers who teach here at the center before?
- Are classes here different from school? How do they differ?
- Do you think you learn more here or at school? Why?
  
- Have you ever been to another center?
- Do you also take or have you ever taken private lessons at home?
  - Where?
  - With whom (your own teacher/ another teacher)?
  - Does it differ from the center? How?

### **2. School**

- What grade are you in?
- What kind of school do you go to (public/ private etc.)?
- Where is it?
- How many students are in your class?
- Do you like going to school? Why/ why not?

### **3. Teachers**

- How do you get along with your teachers?
- Who is your favorite teacher? Why?
- Do you think teacher is a good job? Why/ why not?
- Could you imagine becoming a teacher later?

### **4. Future**

- What are your favorite subjects at school? Why?
- Are you good at school?
- What would you like to do afterwards?
- In which profession would you like to work?
- Do you think you will be able to reach this goal?
- (Girls) Would you like to work later on or stay at home? Why?

### **5. Family background**

- Where do you live?
- How many siblings do you have? Are they going to school?
- What do your parents do?

## **Appendix 3: Interview guideline teachers (tutoring centers)**

### **1. The Center**

- How long have you been teaching here at this center?
- How did you get your job here?
- How often do you teach here?
- Why do you teach here at the center?
- Have you ever taught at other centers? Are you also teaching at other centers now?
- How many students are there in one class?
- How much do they have to pay?

### **2. School**

- Do you also work at a school?
- What kind of school? (which level, public/ private)
- Where is it?
- Why do you work here at the center in addition to working at the school?
- Is there a difference between classes at school and classes here at the center?  
What is different?
- Do you prefer teaching here or at school? Why?

### **3. Students**

- Did you know the students you teach here at the center before (from school, from elsewhere)?
- Why do you think the students come here to the center?
- What kind of students come here (good students/ bad students)?
- What do you think how many percent of all students take private lessons at centers/ at home?
- Do the students that come here also take private lessons at home?
- How much is a private lesson at home in your subject (in general)?

- How much do you think an average Egyptian family spends for the education of their children?
  - For school fees?
  - For private tutoring and centers?
- How many percent of their income/ household budget do you think they spend?

#### **4. Personal situation**

- How many hours do you work on a normal day?
  - At school?
  - At centers?
  - Giving private lessons at home?
- How much do you earn?
  - At school?
  - At centers?
  - By giving private lessons at home?
- Do you have children? How many? How old are they?
- Do they go to school? What kind of school? Which grade?
- Do your children take private lessons (at a center/ at home)?
- Do you teach/ help your children yourself?
- How much money do you spend on the education of your children?

## **Appendix 4: Interview guideline educational entrepreneurs**

### **1. The Center**

- How long has this center been here/ when was it opened?
- Are there more centers around here/ in this neighborhood? How many?
- Are there centers all over Cairo or just in specific areas?
- How has the center developed since it was opened? How does it go today?
- How much do students have to pay for the classes?
- How much do the teachers get, how much the center?

### **2. Teachers**

- How many teachers work here?
- Which subjects do they teach?
- How did you get your teachers?
- Do they teach at schools as well? Public or private schools?
- Why do they choose to work here at the center?
- Do these teachers also give private lessons elsewhere/ at home?
- How much does a teacher usually earn
  - at a school (public/ private)?
  - at a center?
  - through private lessons at home?
- What do you think: How many percent of the teachers in Egypt/ Cairo
  - give private lessons at home?
  - teach at a tutoring center?
- Does teaching at a center offer any advantages compared to giving private lessons at home?

### 3. Students

- What kind of students come here? Are they good/ bad at school?
- Why do you think do so many students in Egypt resort to private tutoring?
- Why do parents send their children to get private tutoring? Why to this specific center?
- Why do the students come here?
- Do you think they like coming here?
- Is there a difference between classes at school and here at the center? What are the differences (contents/ teaching methods)?
- How are the relations between students and teachers here at the center, compared to school?

## **Appendix 5: Pictures**

**Fig. 1 Market in Dar al-Salaam, Cairo**

**Fig. 2 Entrance of a tutoring center**

**Fig. 3 Classroom in a tutoring center**

**Fig. 4 “Frau Sarah” teaching a German class**

**Figs. 5 & 6 Pages from an informal study guide**



Fig. 7 Flyer advertising classes at a tutoring center

### Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

#### Der informelle Bildungsmarkt in Ägypten – Privatstunden und ihre Folgen

Bildung wird gemeinhin als ein öffentliches Gut angesehen, das vom Staat zur Verfügung gestellt werden sollte. Auch der ägyptische Staat hat, seit den sozialistischen Reformen Gamal Abdel Nassers in den 1950er Jahren, den Anspruch, allen Bürgern den kostenlosen Zugang zu Bildung zu ermöglichen und somit eine weitgehende Chancengleichheit zu gewährleisten. Doch das staatliche Bildungssystem hat in den letzten Jahrzehnten mit dem Bevölkerungswachstum und rapide steigenden Schülerzahlen nicht Schritt halten können. Angesichts überfüllter Klassen und der mangelhaften Infrastruktur vieler staatlicher Schulen, aber auch aufgrund eines hohen Leistungsdrucks, rigider Lehrpläne und der überragenden Bedeutung zentralisierter Abschlussprüfungen, greifen immer mehr Schüler auf private Nachhilfestunden zurück. Gleichzeitig sind Lehrer, die zu den am schlechtesten bezahlten Angestellten im öffentlichen Sektor gehören, auf das zusätzliche Einkommen angewiesen, welches der Privatunterricht am Nachmittag ihnen bietet.



Die Privatisierung und Kommodifizierung von Bildung findet in Ägypten auf zwei Ebenen statt: Einerseits auf der offiziellen und formalen Ebene, durch die zunehmende Etablierung von Privatschulen und privaten Universitäten; andererseits, und darauf konzentriere ich mich in der vorliegenden Arbeit, auf einer informellen Ebene und jenseits von staatlicher Kontrolle, durch die zunehmende Verbreitung von Privatstunden. Ich bezeichne das so entstandene „Schatten-Bildungssystem“ (Bray 1999) als einen „informellen Bildungsmarkt“, auf dem Lehrer als Anbieter und Schüler als Konsumenten agieren. Eine dritte bedeutende Gruppe von Akteuren in diesem System sind die Inhaber und Manager privater und meist kommerziell ausgerichteter Nachhilfzentren, die in Ägypten in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten in großer Zahl eröffnet wurden. Diese Akteure bezeichne ich als „Bildungsunternehmer“.

Trotz der zunehmenden Verbreitung privater Nachhilfestunden, nicht nur in Ägypten sondern auch in vielen anderen Ländern, ist das Phänomen bis heute kaum wissenschaftlich untersucht worden. Basierend auf einer eigenen Feldforschung in Kairo in den Jahren 2004/ 2005 sowie 2006, analysiere ich es in der vorliegenden Arbeit anhand der folgenden Fragestellungen: Warum sind private Nachhilfestunden in Ägypten so verbreitet?

- a. Wer sind die „Anbieter“ und die „Konsumenten“ auf dem informellen Bildungsmarkt?
- b. Welche Motivation haben die verschiedenen Akteure, Nachhilfestunden anzubieten bzw. an ihnen teilzunehmen?
2. Welchen Einfluss haben private Nachhilfestunden auf das Verhältnis zwischen Lehrern und Schülern?
3. Welchen Einfluss haben sie auf den Status und die gesellschaftliche Rolle von Lehrern?

Um den informellen Bildungsmarkt in Ägypten zu untersuchen, führe ich vorab einige theoretische Begriffe ein. Dies ist zunächst einmal der Begriff des „Marktes“, dessen wirtschaftswissenschaftliche, soziologische und anthropologische Konnotationen ich kurz beleuchte. Was kennzeichnet einen Markt und warum ist es gerechtfertigt, im Fall des untersuchten Phänomens von einem „Bildungsmarkt“ zu sprechen? Anschließend erläutere ich den Begriff der „Kommodifizierung“, d.h. der „Ausdehnung der Warenform“ (Elwert 1985). Ich beziehe mich dabei vor allem auf die klassische Analyse von Polanyi (1944) und auf Elwerts (1985, 1987)

Untersuchungen zu „Venalität“ (Ausdehnung von Käuflichkeit) und „Moralökonomie“. Auf der Grundlage dieser theoretischen Begriffe analysiere ich im empirischen Teil der Arbeit unter anderem, wie sich das Vordringen des Waren-Prinzips im ägyptischen Bildungssektor auf das Verhältnis zwischen Lehrern und Schülern und auf den gesellschaftlichen Status von Lehrern auswirkt. Im zweiten Teil des theoretischen Rahmens beleuchte ich die Rolle und die Interessen des Staates im Bezug auf den Bildungssektor sowie die Diskussion um Bildung als „öffentliches Gut“. Was bedeutet es, wenn Bildung zunehmend von nichtstaatlichen Akteuren bereitgestellt wird? Welche Auswirkungen hat die Privatisierung auf die Chancengleichheit in der Gesellschaft?

Um die aktuelle Situation des ägyptischen Bildungssystems und vor allem das Phänomen der privaten Nachhilfestunden besser verstehen zu können, bietet das vierte Kapitel einen kurzen Überblick sowohl über die historische Entstehung des Bildungssystems wie auch über seine heutige Struktur. In diesem Kontext sind in Ägypten zwei Begriffe von zentraler Bedeutung: *magmu‘* (Summe, Endnote) und *shihada* (Zeugnis). Mit der Erläuterung dieser Begriffe soll ein Einblick gegeben werden in die öffentliche Wahrnehmung und den Stellenwert von Bildung in Ägypten. Das Kapitel schließt ab mit einer kurzen Betrachtung des sich verändernden gesellschaftlichen Status von Lehrern.

Das fünfte Kapitel bildet die Überleitung zum empirischen Teil meiner Arbeit: Darin stelle ich Kontext und Verlauf meiner Forschung dar, beschreibe die angewendeten Forschungsmethoden und reflektiere die Probleme von Rollenzuweisung und Selbstverständnis der Forscherin im Feld. Es folgt eine kurze Beschreibung der *manatiq sha‘beyya*, der für Kairo typischen, durch einen hohen Grad an Informalität geprägten, Stadtviertel, in denen meine Forschung hauptsächlich stattfand.

Das sechste Kapitel bietet einen Überblick über die verschiedenen Formen von Privatstunden, die im ägyptischen Kontext existieren, wobei die „dichte Beschreibung“ zweier von mir beobachteter Situationen deren Charakteristika und Unterschiede veranschaulichen soll. Im Anschluss an diese empirische Darstellung beleuchte ich kurz die vorherrschende Lehr- und Lernkultur in Ägypten sowie die Reaktionen des Staates auf die Zunahme privater Nachhilfestunden. Während sie offiziell verboten sind und immer wieder Versuche unternommen werden, ihre

Verbreitung einzudämmen, hat der Staat kaum Sanktionsmöglichkeiten, da sich diese informelle Praxis weitgehend seiner Kontrolle entzieht.

In den folgenden Kapiteln (7, 8 und 9) werden die wichtigsten Akteure auf dem informellen Bildungsmarkt, also Schüler, Lehrer und „Bildungsunternehmer“ vorgestellt. Auf der Grundlage einiger beispielhafter Portraits werden die Motivationen der verschiedenen Akteure für die Teilnahme an dieser sozialen Praxis analysiert. Welche Strategien verfolgen sie? Welche Implikationen, v.a. finanzieller Art, hat das System für die Familien der Schüler? Welche Auswirkungen hat es auf das Selbstverständnis und den gesellschaftlichen Status von Lehrern? Inwieweit hat sich durch diese informelle Praxis das Verhältnis zwischen Lehrern und Schülern verändert? Basierend auf dem Porträt eines „Bildungsunternehmers“ und des von ihm geführten Nachhilfezentrums, schließe ich den empirischen Teil mit einer Darstellung der Marketingstrategien von „Bildungsunternehmern“ ab und analysiere das Verhältnis zwischen ihnen und den anderen Akteursgruppen – Schülern und Lehrern.

Die zunehmende Verbreitung privater Nachhilfestunden in Ägypten beschreibe ich in der vorliegenden Arbeit als einen informellen Prozess der Privatisierung und Kommodifizierung von Bildung. Der Lehr- und Lernprozess wird aus der Institution Schule, die der staatlichen Kontrolle unterliegt, herausgelöst und zunehmend in den privaten Bereich verlegt. Die Auswirkungen dieser Entwicklung sind ambivalent: Einerseits bewirkt sie einen Zuwachs an Eigenverantwortung und Freiheit für Schüler und Lehrer. Schüler können sich ihre Lehrer auf dem informellen Bildungsmarkt selbst aussuchen und dabei, zumindest theoretisch, „guten“ Lehrern den Vorzug geben. Lehrer können ein Vielfaches ihres offiziellen Gehaltes verdienen und damit ihren ökonomischen und sozialen Status verbessern. Einige besonders talentierte und charismatische Lehrer nutzen zudem die größere Freiheit und professionelle Autonomie, die der inoffizielle Bildungsmarkt ihnen bietet, und entwickeln sich zu regelrechten „Stars“. Während also in einigen Fällen eine „Reprofessionalisierung“ und Aufwertung des Lehrerberufes zu beobachten ist, leiden Lehrer jedoch auch unter dem verbreiteten Vorwurf des unethischen Verhaltens und der „Korruption“. Das Verhältnis zwischen Lehrern und Schülern profitiert einerseits von der Möglichkeit, Unterricht in kleineren Gruppen und unter besseren Bedingungen abhalten zu können als in der Schule. Andererseits kann jedoch die Tatsache, dass dieser Unterricht und damit der Lehrer „käuflich“

geworden ist, das Verhältnis auch belasten. Aus einer staatlich regulierten Autoritätsbeziehung wird eine vom Markt regulierte Anbieter-Konsumenten-Beziehung.

Die Dynamik des informellen Bildungsmarktes in Ägypten kann als eine Art Teufelskreis oder „Rückkopplungsschleife“ (Bierschenk 2004) beschrieben werden. Die Defizite des formalen Bildungssystems haben eine informelle Praxis hervorgerufen, die in das formale System eingebettet ist und zu seiner Stabilisierung beiträgt. Gleichzeitig entzieht sie dem formalen System Ressourcen, nämlich Zeit und Geld, und trägt so zu seiner weiteren Verschlechterung bei oder verhindert zumindest eine Lösung der zugrunde liegenden Probleme. Lehrer werden nicht mehr bzw. nur noch unzureichend vom Staat, also durch Steuereinnahmen, bezahlt, sondern direkt durch die Schülern und deren Eltern subventioniert. Dies bedeutet aber, dass die Qualität der Bildung, zu der Schüler in Ägypten Zugang haben, zunehmend von den individuellen finanziellen Möglichkeiten bestimmt wird. Die vom Staat propagierte Chancengleichheit wird somit de facto außer Kraft gesetzt.