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‘Between Hopelessness and Ambivalence’:

**Young Egyptians, Secondary Schooling and the Arab
Spring in Urban Cairo**

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Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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Summary

This thesis is based upon ethnographic fieldwork carried out in and around three secondary schools and *Tahrir* Square in urban Cairo between October 2009 and December 2011. It explores the lives of young Egyptians at the time of their secondary schooling and the Arab spring through examining the contradictions and ambivalence of the coming of age for middle class young people inside the school and in the wider everyday life in urban Cairo. This thesis seeks to understand, by examining the social theory on the tension between structure and agency, the way through which disciplinarian interventions enable youth's articulation of critical dispositions and forms of resistance.

This thesis, whilst it embarks by looking at the deterioration of the formal schooling system in Egypt after thirty years under Mubarak's rule, examines the extent to which the everyday educational studentship circumstances had constrained the sorts of subjects that Egyptian youth could become and which would constitute them as young and educated in contemporary Egypt. Whilst education, in its broader meaning, emerged as being undeniably crucial for young Egyptians' project for social mobility, secondary schools are presented not as venues for socialisation or reproduction of inequalities but rather as an ambivalent and contradictory resource.

The young Egyptians who were the subjects of this thesis negotiated meritocratic aspirations at the intersections of their transversal educational circumstances, and the norms of patriarchy and subordination of their wider everyday life. The forms of exclusion and tension about the future have affected young Egyptians' articulation of their critical dispositions of hopelessness and ambivalence. Their engagement in the *Tahrir* riots and occupational actions and demanding their right to the city, manifested their emerging political consciousness and capacity to produce new spatial meanings and practices.

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Glossary

<i>adadiya</i>	preparatory stage
<i>adalaat igtima'ia</i>	social justice
<i>afeed el balad</i>	benefiting the country
<i>asalam alikom</i>	peace be upon you
<i>asha</i>	the last evening prayer
<i>ashwaiyyat</i>	Informal settlements
<i>awez aseeb el-balad w asafer bara</i>	wanting to leave the country and go abroad
<i>barak allah fek/feke</i>	God bless you
<i>be-ism allah elrhaman elrahim</i>	in the Name of God the Merciful
<i>be-ism allah mashallah</i>	thank God
<i>b-izn allah</i>	God willing
<i>el-balad</i>	bad situation
<i>el-balad de msh mehtagalna</i>	this country doesn't need us
<i>Al-kofar</i>	the infidels
<i>elsahwa al eslamia</i>	Islamic revival
<i>fekh</i>	Islamic principles
<i>hadith</i>	Speeches by the Prophet Mohamed
<i>haram</i>	forbidden by religion
<i>hijab</i>	veil
<i>horia</i>	freedom
<i>ibada</i>	practices of piety
<i>ibtidaa'iyat aama</i>	primary leaving certificate
<i>iddarra</i>	educational district office
<i>ied</i>	feast
<i>iesh</i>	prosperity
<i>iftar</i>	Ramadan breakfast
<i>infitah</i>	open economic policies
<i>insha allah / b-izn allah</i>	God willing
<i>intifada</i>	uprising
<i>karama insania</i>	human dignity
<i>kefaya</i>	enough
<i>koshary</i>	an Egyptian dish of rice, macaroni and lentils

<i>kotab</i>	a small school, attached to the mosque, that mainly teaches the Quran and basic literacy skills
<i>kufr</i>	blasphemy
<i>mabrouk</i>	congratulations
<i>mawa'd el rahman</i>	Ramadan charity meal
<i>mohbat</i>	frustrated
<i>moltzmeen</i>	committed
<i>monaqaba</i>	wearing a <i>neqab</i>
<i>motaharera / motahareren</i>	being free from strict religious obligations
<i>moltazima</i>	a good Muslim young woman
<i>mosharkety fel syasa</i>	engagement in politics
<i>neqab</i>	a veil that covers the whole body including the face
<i>nizam</i>	regime
<i>sankaha</i>	fooling around
<i>sohor</i>	Ramadan last daily meal before fasting
<i>taghyeer</i>	change
<i>tahkik-elzat</i>	self-realisation
<i>takreem</i>	honouring
<i>tanwiri</i>	enlightened
<i>taraweeh</i>	Ramadan night prayers
<i>tarbeya</i>	upbringing
<i>tatheer</i>	cleanse
<i>thanaweya-aama</i>	General Secondary Education Certificate Exam
<i>umma</i>	the Muslim community or people
<i>wa Islamaah</i>	A famous book of Arabic literature on the Islamic history
<i>wa alykom esalam wa rahmet allah</i>	peace be upon you too and God's mercy and
<i>wa barakato</i>	blessings
<i>wallahi Elazim</i>	I swear to God the Almighty
<i>wasta</i>	nepotism
<i>wnabi</i>	for the Prophet's sake
<i>ya ngeb haohom ya nmot zayouhom</i>	Either we avenge their rights or we die like them

Notes on transliteration

Since almost all Arabic words in the text are Cairo spoken colloquial expressions, I have chosen a transliteration system that reflects local pronunciation, following the system adopted in *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* by El-Said Badawi and Martin Hinds (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1986). I have however simplified the transcription of the Arabic alphabet, in order to make it more easily accessible to readers who are not familiar with Arabic. I thus use:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| • [a] for ا and ع | • [sh] for ش |
| • [b] for ب | • [d] for ض |
| • [t] for ط and ت | • [k] for ق and ك |
| • [th] for ث | • [gh] for غ |
| • [g] for ج | • [f] for ف |
| • [h] for ح and ه | • [l] for ل |
| • [kh] for خ | • [m] for م |
| • [d] for د and ذ | • [n] for ن |
| • [z] for ز, ذ, and ظ | • [w] for و |
| • [r] for ر | • [y] for ي |
| • [s] for س and ص | • ['] for ء |

Long vowels are represented by double vowels (e.g., aama); double consonants are similarly represented by double consonants in the transcription. Proper names and place names have been written according to their usual spelling in English.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction, rationale and argument

It was early morning in December 2009 when I headed to the Al-Haditha¹ experimental school² in the nearby Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam neighbourhoods in southern Cairo, one of the three schools where I conducted the core part of my field work upon which this thesis is based. I passed through the school gate and signed in the visitors' log. The morning assembly was about to start, so I stood on the side with a group of teachers and the school's deputy who was assigned to supervise my time and interaction with the students and teacher in this particular school. The morning assembly programme was the one followed in all Egyptian state schools, starting with a chanted reading from the holy Quran by a male student, and ending with everyone singing the national anthem, and saluting the flag. Students attending the morning assembly were mostly primary stage (grade 1 to 6) and preparatory stage (grade 7 to 9) students, as well as a few secondary stage grade 10 students, fewer 11 graders, and no students from grade 12³. Most students attending experimental schools belonged to middle class families who chose to register their children in schools of this type, hoping for a better quality education as compared to the general state schools.

After the morning assembly and shortly after arriving in the principal's office, the school deputy asked me if I could take charge of one of the 11th grade classes to

¹ Throughout the thesis, I have anonymised the names of all schools and the private tutoring center.

² Experimental schools are state schools in Egypt that charge some fees and offer instruction in some subjects (mainly Mathematics and Science) in English.

³ Students' ages range from 5 to 11 years for primary stage, 12 to 14 for preparatory, and 15 to 17 for secondary.

replace an absent teacher⁴. The school deputy walked me to the class and informed the students who had met me before that I was replacing their absent teacher. By then, students were engaged in different activities, which made me decide not to interrupt them, but rather observe. There were about fifteen female and male students sitting in a class space that was designed for forty students. A group of five female students were sitting together studying mathematics; another group of about six male students were gathered in the corner of the class watching a sports video on a laptop and laughing and yelling from time to time, while the rest of the students were sitting on their own, busy with either their mobile devices or MP3 players.

However, there were a couple of male students (Shawky⁵ and Mohamed) whom I had met before in the school, sitting in the front row of the class where they were playing an astonishing game. From their moves it seemed that they were playing darts. Moving closer I found that they were using Mubarak's photo, that was hung on the wall, as a dartboard and were throwing the darts at Mubarak's face. They kept playing and laughing until I approached them and asked what they were doing. *"We are bored and just passing the time by playing darts,"* Mohamed said while smiling. Trying to understand what they had in mind, I said *"But you are throwing darts at the president's photo!"* They looked at each other and seemed unsure how to answer my question, then Shawky said *"Yes, what's the problem? We [referring to all the students] are used to it. If you look carefully at the photo you will find many holes in it."* I looked at the photo and noticed that Shawky was right. It was not the first time I had encountered this group of students, and I think both young men realised that I wanted to know more. After some silence and hesitation, Mohamed said *"He [referring to Mubarak] deserves it."* Shawky added: *"Yes, he deserves it; can't you see what he did to the country?"* I asked them why they thought Mubarak deserved their anger. *"You don't know? He is the reason for the entire bad situation in Egypt. Why does a president stay for almost 30 years?!"* Shawky asked nervously.

⁴ Replacing absent teachers throughout my field research provided me with opportunities to interact with students.

⁵ Throughout the thesis, I have anonymised the names of all my informants.

Mohamed added: “*Because of all the corruption that happened during his time we are not sure of our future, even if we pass the thanaweya-aama [general secondary leaving certificate] successfully*”. Whilst both young men were willing to talk more, I realised that by having such a conversation in public I could be exposing them (and myself) to trouble. Both Shawky and Mohamed come from educated families living in Sakr Qurish. It is one of the new residential areas established close to the Al-Basatin, Dar-elsalam, and Maadi areas. Both had been enrolled in the Al-Haditha experimental school from grade one onward. Their darts game was the first encounter, during my field research, with young people’s critical political stance.

In February 2011, not too long after the darts game incident, I was in Tahrir Square in the middle of a large crowd of Egyptians of all ages and social strata. The main demand of the crowd was that Mubarak should resign the presidency and that the entire “regime” (*nizam*) be removed. By then I had just finished twelve months’ fieldwork in three secondary schools and the neighbourhoods of Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam. Drawing upon all the details of my twelve months’ fieldwork of group discussions, interviews and observations inside the schools and in the narrow lanes of the informal neighbourhoods, I resumed my field work. The second part of my fieldwork was not in the Cairo secondary schools, which were closed for the rest of the academic year, but in and around Tahrir Square.

The above extracts from my field work, starting at the morning assembly, then the students’ darts game, and ending with the crowd in Tahrir Square, reflect the major themes covered in this thesis: school discipline and the failure thereof, young Egyptians, and their aspirations and engagement in *taghyeer* (changing) the political regime. The incident of the darts game revealed the extent to which young people while navigating the contradictory and ambivalent circumstances of their coming of age and aspirations had developed a critical stance against Mubarak’s regime.

This thesis is based upon ethnographic fieldwork carried out in and around three secondary schools and Tahrir Square in Cairo between October 2009 and December 2011. It explores the lives of young Egyptian secondary school students before and during the Arab spring. It is an exploration of these young Egyptians' experiences, practices, values and aspirations as these intersect with the school structure, and the nation state.

1.1.1 The thesis argument

It is due to the increasing volume of educated unemployment and the growing socioeconomic disparities among Egyptian youth, that the Egyptian politicians, intellectuals and researchers (El-Bialawi 1996, Badran 1996, 2009, Esmat 2008) had debated the meaning of education for the new Egyptian generations and the role of the schooling system in contemporary Egypt. This debate intensified during the last few years of the Mubarak regime, as despite the notable improvement in the labour market conditions and Egypt's recent economic revival since 2004 (Assaad and Barsoum 2007), the youth continued to be the most disadvantaged group in terms of unemployment and lower earnings. With the considerable socioeconomic and cultural changes in Egypt from the late 1970s onwards, education became even more perceived by the state as playing a significant role in preparing the modern citizen who can contribute to Egypt's neoliberal project (El-Bialawi 1996) and in maintaining the country's national security (Baha-Eldin 1996). Islamic revivalists wanted schools to play a significant role in maintaining an Islamic identity for the new generations (Herrera 2006), which made the state adopt a rather strong official Islamic discourse (Starrett 1998). For the majority of Egyptians, education continued to be the means for competing for a good job, achieving financial stability and personal independence, forming a family, and even for social mobility and better living standards (Hoodfar 1997, Barsoum 2004, Singerman 2007).

I argue in this thesis that education has been, in various modalities, at the centre of Egypt's nation-building projects⁶ and, later, of its economic and democratic reform projects⁷. This has gone alongside the increased islamisation of education. Despite the schooling system's strong disciplinarian, nationalist and Islamic orientation, I argue that the lack of investment, together with the lack of employment for graduates, has undermined the educational structure. Young people navigate, amidst tension, forms of exclusion and ambivalence, a schooling system that they no longer have faith in, and meritocratic aspirations that they have become hopeless about. As a result, I argue, young Egyptians carve out spaces of disaffection and critique, whilst at the same time they maintain some commitment to the value of education as a tool for social mobility (albeit recognising the importance of *wasta*⁸ [nepotism] and the limitation it poses).

The argument I develop throughout the thesis falls within the theoretical debates concerned with the tension between structure and agency (Bourdieu 1974, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990; Foucault 1979, 1981; De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991, 1996; Butler 1993, 2006) and the ways in which disciplinarian interventions might facilitate the articulation of critical dispositions, political consciousness, and resistance (Scott 1985, Adu Lughod 1990, Mahmood 2005, Bayat 2009). Whilst I am grounding my research in the educational field, it is not my aim to explore how schools in Egypt serve as venues for socialisation or how notions about meanings of nation, gender, religion, and other affiliations are transmitted through formal schooling, as most accounts about Education in Egypt have endeavoured to do. Instead I follow analyses (Levinson and Holland 1996, Kaplan 2006, Jeffery et al 2008) that show the extent to

⁶ Schooling in post-colonial Egypt has been deployed towards building the modern nation and achieving social mobility (Starrett 1998; Hoodfar 1997; Pratt 2005). This role of the state school system constituted a significant element of the Nasserist nationalist project, to which mobilising previously marginalised groups (Bier 2004) and ensuring government-guaranteed employment for all graduates (Barsoum 2004) were central.

⁷ In order to achieve "sustainable growth of the economy and consolidat[ion of] democracy and freedom, as well as a successful dialogue and competition with other countries in an era of knowledge-based economies and globalization" (MOE 2007: 16).

⁸ *Wasta* is argued (Barsoum 2004, Assaad 1997) to play a vital role in the Egyptian job market.

which the education field in the global south and schools in particular could be a source of “ambivalence” and “contradictions” (Jeffrey et al 2008:198).

The “secondary school” in the cities of the global south and in the Egyptian context is an urban phenomenon⁹ (MOE 2011) representing an important element in the state’s economic reform project, as an attempt by the state to prepare citizens who can fit with the requirements of the labor market. Despite the significance of the secondary school to the state’s economic reform project, no real attention has been dedicated by social scientists to the secondary school in the Egyptian context. For this reason, I focus in my thesis on the educational sites of state secondary schools in urban Cairo’s Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam informal neighbourhoods. *Thanaweya-aama* (grades 10 to 12) students who are enrolled in secondary schools in those particular neighbourhoods belong to lower-middle and lower-income families supporting their young people to achieve high scores in the *thanaweya-aama* exams and reach the college of their dreams. Since the massive expansion of the Egyptian education system in the 1970s, the *thanaweya-aama* exams and certificate have represented a bottleneck for Egyptian youth aiming to access higher education and obtain the university degree that is supposed to qualify them to join the labour market.

The government of Egypt had been talking for years about reforming education towards supporting the requirements of the post-liberalisation era. My ethnography shows that despite the official reformist discourse, secondary schools while reflecting the state’s disciplinarian politics are incapable of fulfilling the state’s agenda in preparing young Egyptians for a neoliberal market economy. As a result, schools are experiencing an increase in student rates of absenteeism, and the flourishing of strong private tutorial practices.

⁹ According to the Egyptian MOE’s 2011/12 statistical book, urban secondary school classrooms represent around 77% of the country’s total number of such classrooms.

The secondary school students' absenteeism and the flourishing of private tutoring are essential themes in this thesis for understanding the structural conditions of secondary schooling. My ethnography shows that while students' school attendance dropped to approximately 15% and even less in grades 11 and 12 in Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam secondary schools, all students enrolled in private tutoring classes that emerged as the main alternative pedagogical possibility. As such, schools turned into venues for registering for exams and the whole of the teaching and learning processes were done outside school venues. With the significant deterioration in the secondary schools' performance and the flourishing of private tutoring, students and families chose to drop school attendance and pay the extra cost of private tutors. The informal private tutoring system has also emerged as the informal market for the poorly paid teachers employed by the government to earn a better income. Private tutoring has been mainly provided through home-based arranged groups of students or through tutoring centres established by groups of teachers or local businessmen.

My interest in the state school lies in the fact that it is not only intended by the state as a utility for discipline and at the same time a ground for supporting economic reform, but is also a site for cultural production of particular subjectivities. With the Egyptian students' everyday opposition to state schooling and the flourishing of the private tutoring market, "complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power" (Abu Lughod 1990: 53) are at play within the site of the school, striving to thrust the entire education system towards more inclusion and less hegemony. My thesis, whilst exploring the deterioration of formal schooling in Egypt after thirty years under Mubarak's rule, particularly examines the extent to which the *thanaweya-aama* everyday educational circumstances had constrained the sorts of subjects that Egyptian youth could become and in the meantime constituted them as young and educated in contemporary Egypt. My thesis examines the complexity of the coming of age for middle class young Egyptians inside the secondary school and in the wider everyday life, exploring various young people's experiences, practices,

values and aspirations in navigating their life chances, challenges and meritocratic possibilities.

The *thanaweya-aama* students' ambition to succeed in passing these exams was inherently paired with despair and frustration because of their uncertainties and fears of failing. In the meantime, young people's aspirations for success and self-realisation had "developed into teleologies of the subject in their own right in a world where notions of progress and consumption increasingly frame people's economic and personal horizons of expectation" (Schielke 2009: 172). With hopelessness about achieving future success, young people have engaged in a political position through an obviously cynical attitude in discussing inequity and corruption. As such, what is being increasingly contested is whether education as a resource can continue in its current form in order to constitute a ground for achieving neoliberal economy.

In short, this thesis aims to show that disciplinarian practices and deterioration of the schooling system, tensions about the future, and forms of exclusion had affected young Egyptians' sense of ambivalence and hopelessness, and enabled the articulation of critical dispositions, and for some of them, triggered engagement in the Tahrir riots and occupational actions, demanding their "right to the city".

The following section presents a brief but critical discussion of the theoretical and conceptual approaches around the themes central to this thesis.

1.2 Theorising schooling and agency

Looking at the history of educational anthropology, while the world was preparing for the 21st century, Levinson and Holland (1996) note that it “grew largely out of culture-and-personality studies, and thus lacked a legacy helpful for conceptualizing the effect of history, power, and social structure on educational processes” (1996:20). Bénéï (2009) maintains that political anthropology had abandoned education as a process of social control and reproduction. Such abandonment started a shift in the 1990s with the renewed anthropological interest in the nation-state:

Formal education was envisaged as one of the most potent state institutions penetrating everyday life, operating as both a prerequisite for its stability and a powerful means of national integration. This close relationship to, and bearing on, notions and practices of nationality and citizenship in turn generated a dynamic field of studies of education among anthropologists (2009: 45).

Bénéï (2009) asserts that within the renewed anthropological research trend, schooling has emerged as a crucial political theme that is subjected to competing views and monopolisations by different political stakeholders within a given nation-state. Whilst the theoretical and conceptual approach of this thesis embarks with an overview on socialisation and reproduction theories of schooling, it mainly benefits from the renewed anthropological interest in the tension between structure and agency within the field of education. As argued by Levinson and Holland (1996): “schools have proven themselves a contradictory resource for those who would fit the young into a particular vision of society. Not surprisingly, schools and education often become sites of intense cultural politics” (1996: 1). Similarly, the Jeffreys (2008) draw attention to the importance of moving beyond the binary choices propagated in contemporary social science and development literature as to whether or not education reproduces social inequality, supports democratisation, or transforms societies. The Jeffreys call for the need for more attention to “the ambivalent, contradictory and partial social change” (Jeffrey et al 2008:198) in the nature of schooling.

I start the discussion of the theoretical and conceptual approaches of this thesis with the social theory that viewed schools first as venues for cultural transmission and social mobility, and second as venues for the reproduction of class inequality.

1.2.1 Schooling from socialisation to reproduction

From an anthropological perspective, the field of "education" is much broader than schooling. While education, in its broadest meaning, refers to the entire formal and non-formal experience of the person, "formal education" means intended instruction through formal learning experiences, and schooling is a formal educational practice that is usually carried out in a separate confined place away from ordinary life and conducted by someone who is usually specialised in whatever s/he is expected to teach (Anderson-Levitt 2005: 989). This separate place is generally called "school", and the state school that is being examined throughout this research is what Levinson and Holland (1996) referred to as the "state organized or regulated institution of intentional instruction" (1996: 2).

Both schooling practices and the school institution were analyzed until the early 1980s by sociologists, anthropologists and educationalists as a significant means of socialisation and social production. In this view, schools were perceived as determinants of accessibility to socially valued knowledge, economic success and social status. Margaret Mead, in her classic "Coming-of-age in Samoa" (cited in Hemmings 2006) perceived state high schools as prime sites for adolescent coming-of-age. Levinson and Holland (1996) with reference to Durkheim (1956) suggest that schools as institutions of intentional instruction in their different forms around the world were assumed to be instrumental to the shaping of young generations and the establishment of the modern state.

I have been personally involved for years in efforts supported by international donors for improving the quality of and access to pre-university state education. Such perspectives and efforts in the global south have always been influenced by commitments to ideals that state education should be accessible and of quality,

assuming schools to be sites of cultural transmission and upward mobility. During the 1970s, sociologists of education such as Althusser (1971), Apple (1979), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and several others called for a radical critique of the social effect of schooling. By the end of the 1970s the “reproduction theory” had emerged to explain how schools served to reproduce rather than transform existing structural inequalities (Levinson and Holland 1996:6-7).

Althusser (1971), referenced in Giroux (1983), suggests that schools represent an essential and important social site for reproducing capitalist relations of production. For Althusser, the school carries out two fundamental forms of reproduction: the reproduction of skills and rules of labour power, and the reproduction of the relations of production. Thus, the subject for Althusser is the “individual’s self-consciousness as constructed” (Ashcroft et al 1981: 221) by the state’s institutions, notably the school.

Althusser's theory of ideology on one side emphasises the material aspect of ideology as manifested in the architectural features of school buildings and the daily material practices through which individuals within the school carry out their daily experiences and embody aspects of the social division of labour. On the other side, ideology for Althusser is distinct as values and representations concretely manifested in school practices that constitute the unconsciousness of students and persuade them of the limitations and conditions of their existence (Giroux 1983).

While Althusser’s ideology was more concerned about the economic or material elements of reproduction, Bourdieu emphasises the importance of social networks along with cultural capital and symbolic capital in the analysis of the role of schooling, and provides a set of conceptual tools for understanding structures that attempt to shape young people’s strategies. Cultural capital might be in the form of “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” referred to by Bourdieu as an “embodied state” (Bourdieu 1986: 243). It is mainly linked with the process of

embodiment, the acquisition or cultivation of characteristics. It is a process that requires time, effort and investment by the person. The state of embodiment can be understood through the school discipline practices that I explore in Chapter 3, so that students might embody certain disciplinary and gendered dispositions as a result of being for a long time in the schooling space, practices and rituals. Cultural capital, for Bourdieu, can also exist in formal educational qualifications, defined as the “institutionalized state”, as in the case of *thanaweya-aama*. Adopting Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital might mean that by passing through *thanaweya-aama* to higher education and obtaining a university degree, students may acquire tastes and styles distinct from other young people who have not been able to obtain similar educational credentials.

Those who join and graduate from the top ranking schools, according to Bourdieu, acquire the capacity to define and legitimize high-culture genres such as engineering or medicine, and other highly valued genres (cultural, moral, artistic standards and styles), and may have high degrees of symbolic capital, whereas graduates of other genres may enjoy little symbolic capital (Anheier et al 1995). Notions of cultural and symbolic capital might be useful for understanding the reasons for continuous investment in education, and the over-estimation of the transformative power of the school (Jeffery et al 2005:3-4) in spite of its poor outcomes for the young people’s employability and potentials for social mobility. This analysis might apply in the case of secondary schooling discussed in this thesis. Despite the rapidly increasing rates of unemployment, families in Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam paid the high cost of private tutoring in order to support their young people to pass the *thanaweya-aama* bottleneck and go on to higher education.

Schooling, within Bourdieu’s works (1974, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990), exercises a kind of “symbolic violence” on non-elite students (Levinson and Holland 1996:6). Symbolic violence means the way in which individuals contribute towards creating their own socioeconomic limitations and “subordination by gradually accepting and internalizing those very ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them” (Connolly and Healy 2004: 513). Recipients of such symbolic violence develop a

sense of the limits of their social position. As these limits become embodied in a person's "habitus", he or she learns to act according to those limits. The notion of habitus means that, with the effect of socialisation and embodied history, individuals consciously or spontaneously self-censor their actions according to the structural expectations. Bourdieu argues that "no doubt agents do have an active apprehension of the world. No doubt they do construct their vision of the world. But this construction is carried out under structural constraints" (Bourdieu 1989: 18). As described by King (2000), "for Bourdieu, social agents are 'virtuosos' (1977:79) who are not dominated by some abstract social principles but who know the script so well that they can elaborate and improvise upon the themes which it provides and in the light of their relations with others" (King 2000:419). This thesis's discussion of the non-elite *thanaweya-aama* students' actions, aspirations and dispositions does not confirm their entrapment to limitations that were predetermined by their habitus.

The concept of social space for Bourdieu's "cultural reproduction theory" is linked with social hierarchy and how it is inscribed in the physical world (1989: 13). Representations and practices determined by agents' habitus act for Bourdieu as a basis for establishing his concept of social space; as it displays one's place and allows for acknowledging the places of others in the physical milieu. Social space for Bourdieu is also conceptualised as the symbolic relations of power through which cultural and social capital are recognised and mutually acknowledged among agents. As such, the structure of the school's social space is constituted through the reinforcement and reproduction of these symbolic relations of power between students and teacher and among students coming from different social backgrounds. Hence, the school's social space is a set of relations which manifests itself in physical space, taking the shape of a distinct organisation of agents and assets (1989: 12). The different elements of the school's physical space and the positioning of the different agents in relation to one other and to the physical elements are appropriated by the state authorities according to how such authority wants these symbolic relations of power to function within the school institution. The discussion in Chapter 3

concludes that the physical details of the three schools of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam area were organised by the Egyptian educational authorities to transmit specific nationalist and religious meanings aimed at reproducing the disciplined loyal Muslim citizen.

The cultural reproduction theory is critiqued (Levinson and Holland 1996:7) as relying on highly deterministic models of structure and culture, as well as presenting a simplistic view of the state and how schools (as structures) are used as a utility for control. A further critique lies in the fact that “subjects were imagined as beings ‘interpellated’ by ideology and without agency” (Levinson and Holland 1996:14).

Bourdieu’s notions of symbolic violence and habitus became very influential in the analysis of the role of the school and the schooling culture in influencing and even framing young people’s trajectories. *The Culture of Arab Schooling* (Herrera and Torres 2006) presents a number of school ethnographies through which Egyptian schools’ culture of oppression and despotism is a reflection of an oppressive state (Saad 2006, Naguib 2006). Egyptian state schools in the *The Culture of Arab Schooling* ethnographies are oppressive institutions as manifested through the authoritarianism of the school management and “breeding the personality of the oppressed” (Naguib 2006: 77-79) through teachers’ behaviour and the authoritative school culture. Herrera and Torres argue that there are too many problems of structural pressures, lack of resources, and deteriorating material conditions for Egypt’s schools to provide what they term “humanistic education” (2006: 191). The ethnographies of *The Culture of Arab Schooling* are critical of the Egyptian schooling system, teachers and education policies. Whilst advocating that schools following the Freirian framework (Freire 1970) should be the sites where young people “can dream, express intellectual curiosity, form community, and prepare for the future” (Herrera and Torres 2006: 13), students in these studies have no real voice.

Other studies on the Egyptian and Turkish state education systems (Cook 2000, Starrett 1998, Pak 2004; Kaplan 2003, 2006; Herrera 2006) suggest that policies,

curricula and actual instruction are translations of what kind of knowledge is deemed legitimate by the state. In both cases, the state has deployed Islam in ways that serve its existence and legitimacy. In Egypt, religious instruction has ensured “the values of loyalty to the nation and to its goals, which correspond to the goals of religion and its struggle in opposition to imperialism” (Starrett 1998:67). In Turkey, “Islam is equated with the Turks, and Islamic civilisation becomes a mirror image of Turkish history (Kaplan 2006:116).

The Egyptian state incorporated Islam as an academic subject into the school curriculum in an attempt to manage public religious morality. It is a process that Starrett (1998) has described as the “functionalisation” of religion by which religion becomes packaged and delivered to the public. Islamic reformism’s engagement with education in Egypt has taken various forms, from involving students and teachers in various revival acts (Herrera 2006), to involvement in the everyday schooling rituals and religious practices (Saad 2006: 97), to establishing Islamic private schools (Herrera 2006), to establishing social networks for provision of educational services between other services (Ismail 1998), and to involvement in Islamic pietism and ethical self-fashioning practices (Mahmood 2001).

Starrett argued that the state’s attempt to control religious revivalism through religious studies within schools did not work; rather, it created public discontent and criticism of the state, and at the same time worked as a point of departure for further exploration of religious resources, particularly those away from the state’s control (Starrett 1998:179).

1.2.2 Schooling and social transformation

The post-colonial history of Egypt confirms a forceful project of reproduction through a massive expansion of schooling, and the significant connection between youth and students within which notions of the role of education to reproduce students as the youth and the future of the nation were central (Aamar 1992, Abdalla 1985, Wickham 2004). As such, schooling in Egypt has become an important

element in the state's project of modernization (Aamar 1992, El-Bialawi 1996, Badran 1996, 2009).

Several critical social and educational studies (Mickelson et al 2001, Jeffrey et al 2004, Ganguly-Scrace 2007, Jeffrey et al 2008) have explored how education and schooling practices intersect with the emergence of the modern state. Mickelson et al (2001) are particularly interested in understanding the effect of education expansion on the status of women in Israel and South Africa as multiethnic nations. They conclude that there is an absence of a deterministic relationship between schooling expansion and an improvement in equitable living standards. Mickelson et al (2001) explore different theoretical approaches to education, gender and the state's neoliberal project. Most relevant to this thesis are first, the "functionalist or modernization theories" (Mickelson et al 2001: 3), highlighting the significant contribution by education to economic growth and political stability; and second, the "fragile state theory" (Fuller 1991 cited in Mickelson et al 2001:5), emphasising the state's attempts to appear modern and responsive to the needs of the masses however reluctant they may be to cut the benefits of the elite. Mickelson et al (2001) with reference to Fuller (1991) state that in the context of the fragile state, schooling is fundamentally structured to serve the legitimacy and stability of the regime rather than an equitable provision of education. As a result, education might be broadly accessible, but of low quality and with no genuine willingness to serve the needs of the most vulnerable groups (2001:5).

In "Education and Empire", Herrera (2008) is interested in the international educational reform trends in Egypt, focusing on post-liberalisation notions of democracy, child rights, global citizenship, participation and gender equity. Herrera concludes that the education sector, including its teaching profession, is in crisis:

Yet global educational reforms have been mired in conflicting visions for economic and social reform and entrenched in seemingly irresolvable paradoxes of simultaneously promoting democracy, free markets, and security. When children and their parents bypass the school for private educational services,

when the teaching profession is tainted with criminality, when curriculum reform for global citizenship education stirs public outcry and fuels conspiracy theories, when schools enforce exclusionary Muslim-only policies, and when policies are enacted to appease national security and war on terror prerogatives, no matter the cost to democracy, one cannot help but conclude that the education sector, including its teaching profession, is in crisis. (2008: 370-371)

Ibrahim (2010), in examining the ways in which foreign assistance and international stakeholders have historically influenced Egyptian education, argues that:

Today Egyptian education reflects the influences of all these transformations. It is characterized by a series of schisms: between modern secular education and religious education, and between traditional teaching and learning modes, an extreme version of French centralisation, a deformed version of British inspection and exams, a socialist legacy of “free” and equitable access to education, and Western capitalist (neoliberal) notions of privatisation and active-learning pedagogies. It is no surprise that Egypt has no clear educational philosophy but a collection of contradictory policies and practices. (2010: 510)

Both Herrera and Ibrahim are sketching a hopeless image of Egypt’s education and its reproduction goals. On the one hand it is severely affected by the syndrome of the fragile state with a deteriorating education quality, a situation that calls for international interventions; and on the other hand it is suffering, due to the latter [international interventions], from considerable fragmentation and contradiction. Private tutoring is one of the most debated phenomena as a symptom of Egypt’s educational “crisis”. Several studies on Egyptian education have become interested in the private educational services or “private tutoring”, which is the educational market where students are the clients and teachers are the service providers (Herrera 2008). Herrera wonders whether this is the end of education and of the teachers’ profession. Due to the Egyptians’ heavy investment in private tutoring, the World Bank 2002 reported that 9% of the total Egyptian Growth Domestic Product (GDP) went to education (Bray 2006). Hartmann saw it as an informal practice that is materialising within the formal education system. It is an expansion of the market rules of competition between service providers that may contribute to a better quality service. However “where the logics of the market pervade all spheres of life, the incidence of blackmailing and venality rises, especially when underpaid civil servants are desperate for additional sources of income.” (Hartmann 2007: 13).

The private tutoring practice has been addressed in other parts of the world (Bray, 2006; Bray, 1999) as “private supplementary tutoring”, “out-of-school education”, or “shadow education”. As in Egypt’s case, it exists in other countries because of the mainstream education system and follows it (Bray, 2006: 515). It becomes more prominent at transition points when students are about to move to the next educational stage; however, it applies to all students regardless of age and grade. Different practices of private tutoring are seen as connected to future life chances for students. These practices also affect and shape the livelihood of the tutors themselves since it becomes the main source of their income. Private tutoring practices involve the contradiction of being illegal and sometimes criminalised, yet it is still not banned and is even acknowledged as an unavoidable practice. In other words, the fragile state education system publicly denounces the illegality of private tutoring, yet informally allows this as the only possible solution, due to its own incapability of filling the gaps that led to the emergence of private tutoring in the first place. Private tutoring practices in fact create employment for a large number of people who are out of work, and are considered the main source of income for many poorly paid teachers.

Another important symptom of the fragile state education system, with the rapidly increasing rates of educated unemployment, is the failure to meet the promise that schooling eventually leads to social mobility and equality. Accounts on the move from school to work and young people’s transition to adulthood (Herrera 2010, Shielke 2009a, Singerman 2007, Barsoum 2004) emphasize the extent to which the less privileged youthful cohorts of Egyptians “remain excluded, alienated, economically vulnerable, and perpetual adolescents” (Singerman 2007: 5). Barsoum (2004) argues that Egyptian young women coming from poor families receive a cheaper quality of pre-university education. They consistently obtain low scores in the *thanaweya-aama* exams, and therefore receive a lower ranking in their higher education. Consequently, they are less privileged in the labour market. Singerman (2007) discusses the phenomenon of “waiting unemployment,” by educated young

people. Many young people in Egypt experience “waiting adulthood” or “waithood” as they negotiate their prolonged adolescence and remain single for a long period of time while trying to save money to marry. Employment and marriage are negotiated simultaneously, and decisions and plans for one of these affect the other. “Waithood” places young people in an adolescent, liminal world where they are neither children nor adults” (Singerman 2007:6). Being in this liminal state, young people are financially dependent on their families who are also carrying the financial burden of unemployment and delayed marriage. Young people at this stage are subjected to pressures to live by the social norms and morality of their families, which expose them to fraternised relationships, and hence expose them to more alienation “as they live a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ reality” (2007: 6). Shielke (2009a), similarly, argues that young Egyptians’ ambitions for success and self-realisation, for wealth and power, are paired with despair and frustration due to their challenging circumstances and because their individualistic ambitions can come into conflict with local trajectories and with communal and familial values. Herrera (2010) discusses young people modest yet hopelessly out of reach goals of employment and forming a family (2010: 141). Forms of injustice manifested in unfair schooling and *wasta* (nepotism) in employment, and the absence of political and economic policies for addressing youth exclusion are leading to unbearable pressures on young Egyptians.

Several studies cited in Jeffery et al (2008) claim that in the 1990s and early 2000s increased investment in education in the global south has been combined with a considerable jump in educated unemployment among both urban middle class young people and those coming from poor backgrounds. Whilst governments in the global south, following the conditions of the economic adjustment programs, decreased government jobs, they failed to generate employment opportunities for educated young people. The fact that young men are more affected than young women by educated unemployment, as suggested by studies discussed in Jeffery et al (2008), significantly manifests the “gendered schooling and employment strategies” (2008: 746) in the global south. Jeffery et al argue for the diversity of

“young men’s trajectories and cultures” (2008: 746) in negotiating unemployment, and maintain that the habitus of the various forms of social inequality “do not determine” (2008: 746) the ways young men undertake such negotiations. However, young men’s ability to negotiate their economic circumstances is shaped by their individual social, racial and/or religious histories and contexts.

Despite the significance of the secondary school to the Egyptian state’s economic reform project, limited attention has been dedicated by social scientists to secondary schooling. I discuss in Chapter 4 the fragility of the Egyptian schooling system, after thirty years under Mubarak’s rule, which was manifested in high rates of student absenteeism and the flourishing of the private tutoring market. By arguing that the secondary school is an important model of governance as part of the state’s economic and democratic reform projects, I signal the contestation facing the Egyptian state secondary school and the centrally led reform efforts. The Arab Spring images of street actions declared the failure of the efforts of reforming the existing state’s models of governance (Fawaz 2009). Bayat cites what he describes as a “strong argument” by Ayeb (2011) and El-Mahdi and Marfleet (2009), suggesting that “neoliberal policies have played a key role in the revolutionary dissent” of the Arab spring (2012: 112).

In Chapter 7, I explore the February 2011 protests by the Egyptian students (from Cairo’s informal neighbourhoods) in front of the Egyptian state’s Ministry of Education (MOE), demanding their “right to the city”¹⁰ (Lefebvre 1996) and to quality education. Such an image in front of the MOE proclaimed the failure of Egypt’s neo-liberal state education system. Young Egyptians had brought to Tahrir and the MOE protests their disappointment with state schooling, frustrations about forms of subordination, and their sense of hopelessness about the future. Notions of “cultural production” and “production of space” that I explore in the following

¹⁰ The concept of the “right to the city” was first presented by Henri Lefebvre in the 1960s in the context of the claiming of citizens’ rights to produce and appropriate urban spaces, through access, occupation and use, in ways that would meet their needs (Fawaz 2009).

section are useful theoretical approaches for analysing and understanding the scene of young people protesting in front of the MOE.

1.2.3 Schools as venues for cultural production

Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*, by introducing the notion of "cultural production" "signalled a break from mechanistic 'social reproduction' ... towards a new appreciation of the role of cultural processes" (Gordon 1984: 105). Willis conducted an ethnography of working class "lads" in a town in the West Midlands which he referred to as "Hammertown" and through which he studied a group of 12 working-class boys during their last year and a half in secondary school and their first few months at work. While Willis's analysis of the "lads" strategies does not dismiss the view of schools as sites of the reproduction of class inequality, it rejects the structuralistic mechanical notions of such reproduction (Gordon 1984). Willis (1981), in defending the notion of "cultural production", argues that it means that agents within the school can creatively use the different aspects of school culture in navigating and occupying new positions, and becoming involved in oppositional actions. Willis (1983) confirms the lads' agency by arguing that:

Cultural production, then, insists on the active, transformative nature of cultures, and on the collective ability of social agents, not only to think like theorists, but act like activists (1983: 114).

Accordingly, the notion of cultural production allows for a more in-depth understanding of youth trajectories and strategies in reacting to and negotiating the school, familial and communal discourses, circumstances, relationships and obligations. Building upon Willis's insights, Levinson and Holland (1996) and Jeffrey et al (2008 and 2005) argue that education is a contradictory resource: "while opening up opportunities to undermine established power structures, it drags marginalised young people more into structures and ideologies of dominance" (Jeffrey et al 2008:210). While acknowledging Willis's useful emphasis on the notion of cultural production, Dimitriadis argues that "yet the young people in his world remain largely faceless. We have little sense of particular life courses, or of valued local social networks, or of the institutions young people traverse" (2001: 30).

In the context of this thesis, the notion of “cultural production” is particularly useful in understanding students’ navigation of schooling discipline and their penetration of the daily routine. As I have shown, paying attention to young people’s negotiation of their future aspirations and uncertainties, as I do in Chapter 5, and to their navigation of forms of exclusion, as seen in Chapter 6, allows one to understand their sense of hopelessness, ambivalence and engagement in oppositional actions.

Lefebvre (1991) critiques the reproduction theory for perceiving space as a “static object”, a “void”, a “container” or a “platform” for social relations (Brenner 1997: 140). Lefebvre instead is interested in space as a spatiality product that is linked with societal coexistence and historical experiences (Lefebvre 1991: 416-17). For Lefebvre, space is the observable base upon which all human activities must take place. Lefebvre (cited in Aitken and Herman 1997) is concerned about the “production of space”, by emphasising that it is “a social morphology that is integrally tied to lived experience” (1997: 65).

Following Lefebvre’s concept of space, schooling spatiality in the context of this thesis is filled with tensions and competition over what the school space should be. Such competition is not over a physical space, but about the reality represented by such space (Molotch 1993: 888). As explored in Chapter 3, the school spatiality is perceived by the Egyptian state as an official space being produced as an “abstract space” (Lefebvre 1991) that, like other abstract spaces, should represent the state’s “triumph of homogeneity” (1991: 337). However, chaotic behaviour, absenteeism and unruliness, which were explored in Chapters 4 and 6, manifest young people’s actions for redefining the meaning of the space of the school so as to reflect their disappointment and frustrations. It might be suggested, following Lefebvre, that the space of the school is neither a venue for cultural transmission nor one for the reproduction of citizens, but an interwoven set of factors of “geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life” (Molotch 1993: 888), produced through the coexistence and lived experiences of the various agents involved.

Levinson, Foley and Holland's (1996) critical ethnographies, in examining the notion of the cultural production of the educated person, show how the meaning of education is always negotiated by human agency within and around the school and in the meantime decentres the privileged elitist conception (1996: 23-24). For example, in an ethnography of Taiwanese junior high school students, Shaw (1996) examines how the school's authoritarian culture comes into conflict with the subjectivities of young people within the capitalist and cosmopolitan everyday urban life. Taiwanese students have emerged to dismiss the schooling discipline and challenge its hierarchy, measuring it against their own radical subjective criteria which are constituted within urban youth subcultures.

Levinson's study of the Mexican junior high school discusses how the appropriated school identity has been affected, "blurring the recognition of class and ethnic differences in regional popular culture, and reconfiguring local perceptions of difference according to the distinction between "schooled" and "unschooled" (Levinson and Holland 1996: 28). The ethnography, however, has noted that some students have developed a cynical and ambivalent position towards the exclusionary schooled identity that promotes the state versus their intimate local cultures.

Other ethnographic studies (Demerath 1999, 2003; Jeffery et al 2008) in other contexts¹¹ in the global south reaffirmed the value of education for young people as a basis for social advancement, civilised behaviour, social recognition and respect in a modern age, and also that education provides youth with "self confidence to overcome forms of inequality". However, the same ethnographic works also recognised the ambivalent nature of education. Youth, mostly in recognising their educated "modern selves", would try to distant themselves from manual work, associated with "dirt and dust". Schools were found to be reflective of the larger political regime's authoritarianism and tended to reproduce a "culture of surrender, dishonesty, and hopelessness", leading to the production of a new form of "youth culture of distrust and violence". By denying youth their subjective lives and determining their success or failure, schools were found to be "alienating youth" and

¹¹ India and Papua New Guinea.

contributing to the production of individualists and oppositional subjectivities. Schools were found to be incapable on their own of enabling young people to compete for employment opportunities either in government offices or in the privatised job market.

In the two ethnographies on the Taiwanese and the Mexican contexts, schools are conceptualised as venues for the cultural production of the educated person by highlighting the students' oppositional, cynical and ambivalent subjectivities. Similarly, in this thesis, I explore in Chapters 4 and 6 the *thanaweya-aama* students' chaotic and unruly behaviour, and sense of hopelessness about their future potential. The Nepalese and Turkish cases that I discuss next, are more concerned with how the school venue is turned into a site for competing political and ideological differences, and hence represent the school not as a site for socialisation but rather as a resource for contradiction and ambivalence.

The Nepalese school system (Caddell, cited in Bénéï 2005) emerged as an instrument for state legitimisation through promoting its development model (Bénéï 2005: 77). In the meantime different ethnic groups use the school for promoting alternative agendas. The Turkish centralised educational system (Kaplan 2006) was targeted, following the 1980 coup, by religious nationalists, secularists, and the military. The three interested parties in Turkey worked to introduce their competing views through the school curricula (Kaplan 2006: xvi). However, in the Nepali context, Caddell argues that the prominence of the school comes from perceiving it as a venue linked to notions of development and progress. Hence as competing development reforms or revolutionary-oriented groups work on winning the public support to their views, the school in Nepal, as in the Turkish case, becomes an unavoidable venue for manifesting those competing views and relations with the state. Kaplan examines the emergence of children's subjectivities and novel subject positions due to exposure to everyday schooling politics in the Turkish context (2006). Such complex interaction between competing nationalist and developmentalist discourses and interest groups within the Nepali and Turkish

school affects ambivalent and contradictory schooling practices and cannot be regarded as a disciplining venue for what can be perceived as the ideal citizen. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 3, Egypt's state secondary schools were turned into sites for competing discourses of the official Islamic view manifested through curricula and schooling practices versus a powerful reformist Islamic morality.

The Egyptian state's attempts to control public religious morality went beyond controlling the content of text books and religious instruction. Herrera (2006) gives an example of response by the female students (in one of Cairo's Islamic private schools) to the heavy-handed state security actions to reinforce the new state policy for school female students' uniforms (1994)¹². Some female students at the preparatory stage (age 12 to 14) decided to take this matter, in their school, into their own hands by organising demonstrations, mobilising their parents to file court cases against the state, challenging the authority of their own school, and insisting on discussing who has the right to have the final word on how they should practise their religious morality (Herrera 2006:41-49). This last example of female students' contestation to the schooling discipline represents a viable link to discussing the theoretical framework for agency and resistance.

1.2.4 Agency and resistance: Between hopelessness and ambivalence

Foucault's theory of "Subject and Power" suggests a theoretical frame for understanding the students' agency within the schooling institution. In his early work, "Discipline and Punish" (1979), Foucault is particularly interested in the modernising shift away from the "sovereign power" of old regimes to the "disciplinary power" of modernity (Caldwell 2007: 774) whose concern is "not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to

¹² In 1994, a new policy was issued by the Egyptian Minister of Education prohibiting primary school girls from wearing headscarves (*hijab*) inside the school and obliging every older girl (in preparatory and secondary stages) to provide a written note to the school signed by her guardian approving her wearing of the headscarf inside the school (Herrera 2006).

punish more deeply into the social body” (Foucault 1979 cited in Leask 2012: 59). In this view, the school, as the main disciplining and modern institution, resembles the “carceral continuum that constitutes the contemporary disciplined society” (Foucault 1979:297), teachers are assigned the roles of “technicians of behaviour” and “engineers of conduct” (Foucault 1979: 294), and “the individual subject is a reality fabricated by ... discipline” (Foucault 1979:194).

In this view, it appears that Foucault separates agency and power (Caldwell 2007) and in effect creates a powerless image of the human subject and its potential. “The subject is therefore a diffused historically constituted entity, a site of power within discourse, always subsumed or determined by power and apparently unable to step outside itself to unmask or deface this power” (Hayward 2000 cited in Caldwell 2007: 775). Hence, human agency is reduced to acts of resistance and characterised as a counter-action to power while being locked within predetermined discourses of power (Caldwell 2007).

Foucault at a later stage became particularly interested in the ambiguous meaning of “subject”, pointing out that individuals are both subject to and the subject of power and suggesting that in this double sense of being subject, individuals find an enduring form of power.

Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates or makes subject to (Faubion, ed. 1994: 331).

Subjectivities, following Foucault’s dual sense of subject, have come to reflect both the activity and passivity of human experience. As rational human beings we are supposed to act; however, as individuals marked by our identity we become subjected to scrutiny and discipline by the authority (Middleton 2005:479).

Foucault’s later notions of governmentality and multiplicity of power relations came to dismiss the oppressive top-down nature of power and emphasised the subject who takes actions and is engaged in strategies as an “immanent cause” rather than a complete effect of “some transcendental power” (Deleuze 1988 cited in Leask 2012: 64). The subject in this view is conceptualised as “self-fabricated” and agency is

shown to be “ontologically central” (Leask 2012:64). However, Foucault’s theory of power continued to be critiqued that as long as the self is constituted within dominant discourses, it is unlikely that an alternative notion of the self can develop (Caldwell 2007).

The concept of the *everyday* has been used to counter “uni-directional” (McNay 1996: 61) theories of determination and reproduction “and also the legacy of post-structural thought that evacuates agency through positing its dispersal across various discursive positions” (McNay 1996: 62). De Certeau in *The practice of everyday life* (1984) “was explicitly critical of both Bourdieu and Foucault, that they view subjectivity as a reflex of broader structural processes – discourse, *habitus* – that determine subject position and generate action independently of the reflexive subject” (Mitchell 2007:91). The notion of “everyday” rejects subjects’ submission to traditional dominant determining norms and highlights their capacity and creativity (McNay 1996).

When I investigate young Egyptians’ navigation of forms of patriarchy and subordination of their wider everyday life in Cairo, I build on De Certeau’s notion of “tactics” that he describes as “an art of the weak” (1984: 37). De Certeau is interested in micro-level actions and measures which individuals deploy every day for subverting disciplining powers. He claims that *everyday* life is made up of “tactics” that are activated by the absence of power and must play within the imposed territory and therefore manoeuvre “within the enemy’s territory” (De Certeau 1984:37). Through the notion of tactics, De Certeau provides hope of a rescue from the heaviness of the panopticism of modern society (Napolitano and Pratten 2007: 9). Apparatuses of surveillance in De Certeau’s account are in the “cracks between panoptic procedures [through which] that he sees hope for redemption” (Mitchell 2007:93). De Certeau suggests that everyday tactics on the one hand make use of the existing “cracks” within the given structures of power, and on the other hand cause “cracks” in the very foundations of these structures (De Certeau 1984: 37-39).

Mitchell (2007) suggests that De Certeau's notion of everyday "must be seen in the context of an overall pessimism about modern society, modernist projects and modernity more generally" (2007: 91). Mitchell maintains that the "everyday" notion does not generate an articulate theory of agency, resistance and subjectivity and that it suggests a theology for redemption rather than a social theory (2007: 91). McNay further suggests interpreting the "everyday" notion as a utopian concept that is understood as a "metaphor for the essential indeterminacy of society" (McNay 1996).

Whilst Bourdieu views agency as being constrained by the existing structures and their given temporal and spatial conditions, and Foucault treats agency as an indirect effect of discourse of power, De Certeau treats agency "as transcendent features of the person, conceived as an eternal soul, endowed with the capacity for agency in the very essence of their being" (Mitchell 2007: 102). Mitchell concludes that De Certeau seems to suggest the "agency of tactics as not only a realisation of human nature, but also as actions that are morally good" (Mitchell 2007: 103). De Certeau is critiqued for an essentialised view of agency which suggests that the tactics of the morally good resist the strategies of the immoral powerful structure (Mitchell 2007). However, De Certeau is suggested as offering a framework that is helpful in understanding the survival tactics that are found in "the practice of governance, since his analysis shows how the "weak" make use of the "strong" and create for themselves a sphere of autonomous action and self-determination" (Napolitano and Pratten 2007: 9).

De Certeau's notion of "everyday tactics" provides this thesis with a useful theoretical frame for examining everyday young people's oppositional acts at the school venue. I explore students' everyday opposition through which they subverted the school disciplinarian system by both making use of the existing cracks and causing further cracks in the old collapsing body of the schooling system. Moreover, the notion of "everyday tactics" is particularly useful for understanding young people's everyday oppositional actions throughout their engagement in the Arab

Spring Tahrir riots during which young people employed numerous individual and collective tactics of resistance.

Similar to De Certeau's notion of "everyday tactics" or "art of the weak" (1984: 37), Scott's (1985) elaboration of "*weapons of the weak*" also opens up the possibility of seeing the operation of power in everyday practices (Mitchell 2007). According to Scott, powerless people rarely have the resources or opportunity to resist structures of power openly, and thus massive protests movements are not likely to occur. Instead, more common everyday forms of resistance emerge through the acts and ordinary weapons of the powerless, such as "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (Scott 1985: 29). It is also worth emphasising Abu-Lughod's (1990) important contribution of warning against romanticising resistance by suggesting attention should be paid to "the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power" (1990:53), and arguing for understanding resistance as a "diagnostic of different forms of power" (1990:42) which allows moving beyond the binary of resistance/subordination.

Post-structuralist feminist thought has contributed significantly to theorising agency and the constitution of subjectivities. Judith Butler suggests the concept of "performativity", through which she argues that the repetition of norms "is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (Butler 1993 cited in Kohli 1999: 321-2). Kohli (1999) argues that Butler's notion of "performativity" works against the feminist and liberal-humanist traditions that honour the taken-for-granted orientation of the autonomous and rational self. Kohli further argues that the notion of performativity "offers critical educationalists an opportunity to better understand how educated subjects come into being – how the body is 'schooled' into particular identities, subjectivities – even as they may be resisted or transformed" (Kohli 1999: 321-2).

Butler further develops the notion of the historical agency when she asks: “Is it possible to inhibit the norm in order to mobilize the rules differently?” (Butler 2006:532). In other words, the subject can strategically submit to the norm in order “to make room for an alternative agency” (Butler 2006:533). Such a strategy was suggested by Butler as a “creative deployment of power” by arguing that “there are, after all, other things to do with rules than simply conforming to them. They can be recrafted” (Butler 2006:533). Butler’s notions of “performativity” and creative use of power, by escaping the taken-for-granted sovereignty, allows for a nuanced theorising of the human subject and agency. It is particularly useful in this thesis for analysing cases of young people’s everyday ambivalence that was manifested in simultaneous submission and opposition to social norms and schooling discipline and how such ambivalence contributed to their constitution as subjects.

Saba Mahmood (2005), whilst suggesting that Adu Lughod (1990) was still locked within the same terminology of subordination and resistance, argues that even passivity and docility may be a form of agency (Mahmood 2005). Mahmood suggest that the binary model of subordination and subversion imposes an analytical framework of progressiveness that becomes hard to escape towards understanding different forms of agency that do not fall naturally within the boundaries of such progressiveness (2005:13). She conceptualizes agency not as a reflection of resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for actions founded and activated by particular relations of subordination (2005:18). Thus Mahmood suggests that it is crucial to separate the notion of agency from goals of progressive politics (2005:14).

Mahmood has suggested, in her study of the Mosque movement in Cairo, that “the liberatory goals of feminism should be rethought in light of the fact that the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in light of other desires, aspirations, and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject” (2001:223). Accordingly, Mahmood argues that the terminology of the Western

liberal framework is not sufficient to analyse the ethical self and moral subjectivities among Muslim women of the mosque movement (2003: 859). Mahmood argues for the importance of examining the conceptual relationship between the body, self and moral agency as constructed in its local context instead of relying on a progressive frame of analysis (2001: 223). Mahmood further argues that in order to examine certain moral practices, it is crucial to consider the desires, motives, obligations and goals of those to whom these practices are important (2001: 225). Mahmood (2009), in her critique of the liberal notion of agency, has emphasised the “exercise of critique” and the extent to which “critique” is truly “an achievement of secular culture and thought” (2009: 861). Mahmood “tried to pull apart some of the assumptions that secure the polarisation between religious extremism and secular freedom wherein the former is judged to be uncritical, violent, and tyrannical and the latter tolerant, satirical, and democratic” (2009: 861).

Schielke (2009b) finds that whilst Mahmood offers inspiring directions for the anthropological study of religion and morality, and that moral subjectivity is important, “there is a risk – especially when morality and piety come together – of favouring the complete, the consistent, and the perfect in a way that does not do justice to the complex and often contradictory nature of everyday experience” (Schielke 2009b: 526). Bayat (2003, 2007) and Schielke (2009a, 2009b) examine young people’s engagement in piety, morality and ethical self-fashioning practices, and the involved ambivalence and fragmentation. They explore how young people negotiate notions of Islamic ethical practices and modernity and note the ambivalence of young people in Egypt between religious moralities and their subjectivities as youth. While wanting to be good Muslims, young people fantasize, build expectations and develop disappointments related to aspirations for wealth, success and excitement (Schielke 2009a:172). They “swing back and forth from partying to prayers” (Bayat 2003:1). Youth navigate their way through the conflicting liberal and Islamic discourses by creating their own “hybrid identities and realities as demonstrated by their new cultural forms and expressions” (Bayat 2003:1).

Through his exploration with young Egyptians in rural Egypt and his interest in subjectivities and morality, Schielke (2009b) argues for the ambivalence and fragmentation of the modern self. In this sense, different orientations of the self occupy the same culture and are manifested in the life experience of the individual either simultaneously or periodically. Schielke suggests that “an anthropological study of morality and ethical subjectivity has to take this inherent ambivalence as a starting-point. Rather than searching for moments of perfection, we have to look at the conflicts, ambiguities, double standards, fractures, and shifts as the constitutive moments of the practice of norms” (2009b: 537).

The emergence of young people’s spatial strategies is evident in several studies cited in Jeffery et al (2008) to be influenced by the opportunities arising for movement and networking. Studies by Simone (2001) and Osella and Osella (2000) discuss the extent to which “young people’s efforts to rescale their strategies often involves reaffirming rather than rejecting ‘traditional’ solidarities based on family, kinship, or religion”(Jeffery et al 2008: 751). Simon and the Osellas suggest that, with increased rates of unemployment and the prolonged state of “waithood”, young people in West Africa and India are capable of drawing upon kinship relations and religious networks in negotiating entry into new economic networks where the potential for employment and social mobility exist. In Chapter 5, I discuss young Egyptians’ negotiations of future potential opportunities through capitalising on available relationships and networks. Despite being strongly critical of the influence of “*wasta*” in affecting their chances for equitable employment opportunities, they did not deny that they might themselves seek “*wasta*” to find a job. They also expressed their hopes of finding a job in one of the Arabian Gulf countries with the help of relatives already living and working there.

The role played by educated unemployed young men from poor backgrounds in the process of political change is evident in studies explored in Jeffery et al (2008).

“Rather than being apathetic prisoners of their habitus, as Bourdieu’s theory rather suggests, young men from marginalised backgrounds often win significant victories through their political activity, and occasionally their actions and strategies undermine powerful structures” (2008: 749). Cole (2004) cited in Jeffery et al (2008) emphasizes gender politics among the educated unemployed in arguing for the distinctive capacity of young people in challenging structures of power.

Social scientists (Herrera 2012, 2011, Schielke 2011, Hirschkind 2011, Ibrahim and Hammelman 2011) have embarked on documenting what they describe as youth engagement at a pivotal moment in Egypt’s history; that is, the 25th January revolution which I also document in Chapter 7 through the voices of three young revolutionaries. Before, during and after the 18-day Tahrir occupation, young people were engaged in public spaces through virtual forums, real-time street protests, occupational practices, and innovative artistic expression. Young people’s engagement in Egyptian history-making from January 2011 onwards poses critical questions requires further exploration in order to understand the dynamics of such engagement, potential future development, and impact. Herrera (2012) concludes that “in the absence of critical and collaborative educational endeavors, the fear is that a dreaded counterrevolution, with its regressive and antidemocratic tendencies, may very well prevail in Egypt” (2012: 349). I discuss in Chapter 7 the notion of counter-revolution that became a public discourse among young revolutionaries and activists shortly after the fall of Mubarak.

1.3 Thesis structure

After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 sets the context for the ethnographic chapters of this thesis by first providing a historical overview of the education system in contemporary Egypt from Nasser’s nationalist state, and Sadat’s science and faith one, to Mubarak’s economic adjustment policies. It then looks briefly at the Egyptian education system. The third section of the chapter looks at the political economy of Cairo and also at the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam neighbourhoods. The fourth and last

section describes the various methods of data collection which I used during the fieldwork.

Chapter 3 considers the Egyptian school's nationalist and economic reform agenda under the Mubarak regime. I specifically look at the secondary school system of discipline and embedded citizenry, and Islamic discourses towards production of the loyal Muslim citizen. The school space and everyday practices are discussed on the one hand as a product of the dominating state attempting to maintain an Islamic flavour, and on the other hand as a means to subordinate young people with the aim of producing citizens for the neoliberal market. The chapter pays attention to the extent to which the school space is gendered particularly towards producing the good Muslim girl.

By continuing inside the boundaries of the secondary school, Chapter 4 looks at the downfall of the schooling system from three angles. First: with a highly hierarchal and authoritative education system and at the same time less investment on the part of the state, schools and teachers are out of control and no real teaching is happening in the schools. Second: students' everyday practices of chaotic behaviour and carelessness about the school are creating cracks in the old dysfunctional body of the school. Third: absenteeism through which students voice their disappointment with the schooling system and contribute to the commodification of education. However, the fourth part of this chapter crosses the physical boundaries of the school into the private tutorial centres that are emerging as an alternative system and as a sign of the dysfunctioning of the school and in the meantime a manifestation of the commercialisation of the education system through which teachers are selling their services and students are emerging as customers in the education market.

Partially stepping outside the school into the wider everyday life of young Egyptians, Chapter 5 explores how students negotiate meritocratic aspirations and

hopelessness about the future due to the unfair market conditions, corruption and *wasta* networks. The notion of hopelessness and the fact that they are not taken seriously (the notion of uselessness) turns the ideas of some young people into aspirations for changing (*taghyeer*) the system itself.

Chapter 6 looks at young people's gendered responses, beyond dysfunctional schooling, to forms of discipline, patriarchy and subordination, and how they live with such everyday complexities inside and outside the school. I am particularly looking at cases of boys' unruliness and girls' ambivalent positions. I consider how young people negotiate age and gendered hierarchies and explore opportunities for claiming their youthfulness through everyday tactics.

Chapter 7 explores notions of resistance through the fascinating narratives of three young people's involvement in the street actions of Egypt's uprisings of 25th January and beyond. In particular, the chapter discusses young people's emerging political consciousness and their production of new spatial meanings and practices.

CHAPTER 2

Historical overview, the socioeconomic context, and research methods

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the context for this thesis by first briefly exploring the history of education as part of the political project of post-colonial Egypt from Nasser's nationalism to Mubarak's economic reform. Following this, in order to set the socioeconomic context for this research, I discuss the political economy of Cairo and its middle-classness and informality, particularly that of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam districts. I then explore the current state schooling system in Egypt, and its relevance to this thesis. Finally, in the last section of this chapter I describe the various methods of data collection which I used during the fieldwork.

The contemporary characteristics of the Egyptian education system can be better understood if we take into consideration its evolution over many years. The intricacy and fragility of today's education system have a long tradition in the modern history of Egypt. The following historical overview does not aim at giving a fully-fledged historical account of state schooling in Egypt. Rather, it has two distinct aims: first, to emphasize how education and the massive expansion of schooling continued to be utilised for supporting legitimacy of the ruling regime, political stability, and the state's modernisation project; second, to trace the emergence of students as a target of state appropriation and control, and in the meantime as significant players in the anti-regime actions and movements.

With the British colonial rule of Egypt (1882) that followed a harsh financial crisis, schooling was organised only to meet the needs of the British colonial administration. The limited number of secondary school leavers had guaranteed employment as civil servants (Cochran 1986). The majority of Egyptian children, due

to the limited education budget and the reluctance of the colonial authorities to expand access to education, continued to attend the *kotab* (a small school attached to the mosque that mainly taught the Quran and basic literacy skills) (Starrett 1998). Foreign and private language schools flourished, for educating the Egyptian elite (Barsoum 2004). Students played a pivotal role in the 1991 anti-colonial strikes and marches that eventually led to independence in 1922 (Starrett 1998). The establishment of the Western-style schooling system, while significantly minimising the role of religion in education, nonetheless supported the diffusion of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which was established in 1928 (Langohr 2005). With the incomplete independence of 1922, Egypt restored control over its educational system: firstly, by reversing the Anglicisation of the public school curricula (starting from the 1890s) back to Arabic as the main language of instruction (Cochran 1986), and secondly, by gradually abolishing school fees (Barsoum 2004). By 1950, all pre-university state schooling had become free for all Egyptian citizens (Hartmann 2007).

2.2 From Nasser's nationalism to Sadat's "science and faith"

State schooling in post-colonial Egypt was deployed by the Nasserist regime, following the 1952 coup, towards achieving its nationalist goal of reproducing Egyptian national identity¹³ and hegemonic notions of citizenship (Pratt 2005). Central to the Nasserist post-colonial project to reshape the Egyptian national identity were "attempts to re-order gender and class relations by mobilising previously marginalised groups, such as women, peasants and the urban poor" (Bier 2004:100). The expansion of education was one of Nasser's instruments in the pursuit of these goals.

¹³ A national identity that entailed embracing the Nasser (1954 – 1970) regime's ideologies of socialist economy, pan-Arabism, and the battle for territorial sovereignty. It was a largely gendered, class and religious process seeking to produce an essentialised and homogeneous national identity, entailing the control of internal differences within the nation. It had an anti-imperialist and anti-western national identity (Starrett 1998).

All Egyptians under the Nasser regime were granted the opportunity to advance to higher education by achieving the primary leaving certificate or *ibtidaa'iya aama*, and entering the new “preparatory” stage or *adadiya*, which could then lead them through the *thanaweya-aama*, and hence into guaranteed government jobs. The *thanaweya-aama* exams emerged as the bridge to social mobility, and Egyptians rushed into education in the hope of upward mobility. *Thanaweya-aama* also emerged under the Nasser regime, due to its objective nature, as a reinforcement of the legitimacy of the regime as it was arranged to ensure equal opportunity for all state secondary school students to transition to higher education (Hargreaves 2010). Education, complemented by Nasser’s policies of guaranteed employment by the state for all graduates, became a vehicle for social mobility, and educational achievement led to increases in the standard of living of individuals (Hoodfar 1997: 43). The considerable expansion in the number of state schools after the 1952 revolution (Starrett 1998) was followed, in 1962, by a considerable expansion in higher education (Barsoum 2004, 31).

In order to achieve its goal for reproducing the Egyptian national identity and notions of citizenship, Nasser's regime worked on controlling all forms of religiosity and political activism. In 1954, Nasser gave orders for the Muslim Brotherhood¹⁴ to be dissolved and for thousands of its members to be arrested (Munson 2001:490). From the 1960s, Al-Azhar¹⁵, which throughout its history represented a traditional view of Islam and mostly stood against religious reform (Abaza 1999), became fully controlled by the state and went through a massive state-led reform in 1961, and then a dramatic expansion of its institutions across Egypt, particularly for pre-university religious schooling in the 1970s (ACPSS 1995:27-58). Despite the anti-

¹⁴ The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in March 1928 as a small youth movement. It grew dramatically to become the largest organisation in Egypt towards the late 1940s. During the 1930s and 40s the brotherhood started to play a significant role in mobilising the public towards supporting the Palestinians and the withdrawal of the British troops from Egypt. The Brotherhood has since spread to every state in the Islamic world and claimed the allegiance of millions of people from virtually every segment of society (Munson 2000), thus becoming the most influential modern Islamic reformist movement in the Islamic world throughout the last seventy-five years (Rashwan 2000).

¹⁵ The Al Azhar Institute was founded in Egypt in the eleventh century by the Fatimid. It is the world's oldest Islamic “Sunni” university for formal training of the Sunni *Ulama*, to serve as teachers, preachers, judges, scholars and administrators not only for Egypt but for the entire Islamic Sunni community (ACPSS 1995:27-58).

colonial role played by students prior to the 1952 revolution, the Nasser regime worked on depoliticising the students' movement, and political activism became completely dominated by the state's youth organisations. However, the Egyptian army's 1967 defeat put an end to such domination. In 1968, university students and workers demonstrated against the corruption within the Egyptian army which had led to the 1967 defeat and had obliged Nasser to penalize several high ranking military officers, thereby allowing for a narrow margin of political liberalisation (Abdalla 1985).

The motto of Sadat (Nasser's successor) was "Science and Faith" (Starrett 1998), which launched the Egyptian historical combination of modernisation with religiosity. The hope was that Sadat's project would enable Egypt to become incorporated into the international market while at the same time projecting an Islamic identity. Starting with Sadat's *Infitah* (1974) (open economic policies), the rushed neo-liberal economic policies were manifested everywhere, from imported commodities to lucrative construction including high-rise buildings that served as homes for the middle class, as well as for business space, and hotels (Amin 2000). With the rise of oil prices in the mid-1970s, Egyptian labourers travelled to neighbouring countries (most importantly Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iraq). The earnings of these labourers in the oil countries provided the main financing for a fast-growing construction development of informal areas (Sims 2003). By the early 1980s, more than 100 squatter communities¹⁶ had developed, with some six million inhabitants, signifying the starkest side of the growing socioeconomic disparity in Cairo since Sadat's *Infitah* in 1974 (Bayat 1996:3).

With this *Infitah*, which encouraged private and foreign companies, the education system reflected "a mixed economy and divided culture" (Hargreaves 2010: 251).

¹⁶ According to the Global Report on Human Settlements (2003), the demographic growth of Cairo did not stop, despite the weak post-war economy. Migration from other parts of Egypt to Cairo continued, and the natural expansion of Cairo reached its highest levels. Significant agriculture and desert areas around Cairo were subdivided and sold during the 1967 – 1974 period. These include Dar-elsalam, Basatin, Embaba, Boulaq el Dakrour, Amrania - South Giza, Zawia el Hamra, and others (Sims 2003).

Graduates of the re-established private language schools were employed by foreign companies, which offered salaries about twice as high as local private firms. At the same time, graduates from state schools took low-paid jobs. The *thanaweya-aama* mechanisms used by Nasser “to meet aims of national social conformity were used instead by Sadat, to meet aims of national economic improvement” (Hargreaves 2010: 251).

While the middle and upper-middle class Egyptians enrolled in different types of private schools¹⁷, the intensified demand by the majority of Egyptian families for formal education, from Nasser’s time onward, soon became a burden for the state. It became worse in the 1970s, with the increased demand due to a fast growing population and a very weak post-war economy (Amin 2000). Consequently, an increasing deterioration in the quality of schooling started to manifest itself in unqualified teachers, insufficient facilities, high class-density, and multiple-shift schools (Hartmann 2007; Barsoum 2004; Cochran 1986). Private tutoring came as the main strategy for about 60% of students, to fill the gap left by the deteriorating quality of teaching and learning in state schools (Hartmann 2007; Assaad and Elbadawy 2004).

Youth activism, reactivated in the late 1960s, gained momentum in 1972–1973, and leftist university students’ demonstrations demanded that Sadat should fight to reclaim the occupied Sinai (Abdallah 1985). In 1970, Sadat returned the Muslim Brotherhood to public life (Wickham 2002:113), and encouraged the university student Islamic activists as a strategy to diminish the university students’ leftist movements (Wickham 2002:43). The Islamic militant groups (Al-Gam’a Al-Islamia and Jihad), who were against what they perceived as an unfaithful corrupt state,

¹⁷ Private schools in Egypt flourished under the British rule and continued after the revolution to serve elitist Egyptian families. These private schools included general language schools, Islamic private schools and international schools following different foreign schooling systems (Cochran 1986; Herrera 2006; Hartmann 2008).

emerged from within the Islamic university students' movements in the late 1970s¹⁸. These militant groups, inspired by Shiekh Omar Abdel Rahman, mainly challenged the legitimacy of the state for not being an Islamic state and not following the Islamic Sharia'a that represents for them the only legitimate rule of God on earth¹⁹ (ACPSS 1995, Bayat 1998, Zeghal 1999, Wickham 2002).

Leftist university students worked very closely with worker movements to prepare for the January 1977 bread riots, the largest that Egypt had seen since 1952. Opposition to the Sadat regime by both the leftist and Islamist groups began to increase after the Camp David Accords and the peace treaty with Israel. In 1979, university administrations were allowed to interfere in student elections and to establish, with the Egyptian police, the "university guard" which was given the authority to operate inside university campuses to ensure their security. The real function of the "university guard" forces was to control students' political activism. The voices of student opposition were even more firmly silenced following Sadat's assassination in October 1981 (Abdalla 1985).

2.3 Mubarak's economic reform

Starting in the early 1980s, "when the growth of the public sector wage bill became unsustainable,the government responded by eroding real public sector wages and extending the waiting period for government jobs" (Assaad 1997:85) in compliance with the conditions of the economic structural adjustment programmes. The gradual withdrawal of the government from fulfilling the commitment of the guaranteed

¹⁸ University student Islamic activists were encouraged by the state, in the early 1970s, as a strategy to diminish the university students' leftist movements (Starrett 1998; Wickham 2002).

¹⁹ The confrontation between the militant groups and the state was heightened in the aftermath of the assassination of Sadat (1981) and dramatically continued during the early 1990s. In addition to the state, the militant groups also attacked non-Muslims, tourists and secular Tanwiri Islamic thinkers (Wickham 2002, ACPSS 1995, Bayat 1998, Zeghal 1999).

employment for graduates, with the increased demand for higher education, soon contributed to a drastic jump in the unemployment rates for educated people (Galal 2002). Between 1981 and 1991, rural poverty doubled and urban poverty increased more than 1.5 times. By the early 1990s more than half of Cairo and adjacent Giza were classified as either “poor” or “ultra-poor” (Bayat, 1996:3).

In the aftermath of Sadat’s assassination in September 1981, Mubarak’s regime and the militant Islamists started a fierce war which lasted until the mid-1990s (Bayat 1998:155). During that period, the Islamic militants attempted to control the universities and secondary schools. In 1993, the state launched a series of acts of suppression against Islamic militants and the Muslim Brotherhood and denounced the latter as an illegal organisation (Wickham 2002:214). By the early 1990s, upon realising that the schools and colleges of education were falling into the hands of Islamic militants, the state pursued a harsh strategy to regain control over national schooling. The state pursued a strategy aimed at the screening and scrutiny of students at education colleges who were being prepared as teachers, and removing Islamist teachers and administrators from schools (Herrera, 2006:25-32).

In the meantime, in order to maintain an Islamic façade the state had tolerated the Al-Azhar senior Ulama’s censorship, which was targeted at the intellectual production of many of the *tanwiri*²⁰ (enlightened) figures,²¹ which exposed them to accusations of blasphemy (*kufr*) by the militant Islamists (Abaza 1999). Mubarak’s regime also allowed what is described as a “parallel Islamic sector” (Wickham 2002) in the form of “private mosques, Islamic voluntary organizations, and Islamic for-profit commercial businesses” (Wickham 2002:97).

²⁰ The *tanwiri* (enlightened) trend emerged with the early modernisation reformist wave of Al-Azhar in the 19th century with the Azharite scholars who studied in Europe from Sheikh Rifa’a Al-Tahtawy (1801 – 1873) to Taha Hussien (1889 – 1973) who became the Minister of Education during the 1950s (Abaza 1999, ACPSS 1995). The *tanwiri* Islamic trends in contemporary Egypt are mostly concerned with the total separation between state and religion, and the modernisation of the religious discourse to better suit the requirements of modern society.

²¹ Farag Fouda, Naguib Mahfouz, El-Ashmawi, Nasr Hamed Abu-Zied, and El-Qmni among others.

In order to put its reformist²² agenda to work and despite being officially banned, the Muslim Brotherhood pursued a variety of strategies aimed at the “Islamisation of social arenas and the appropriation of the public sphere” (Ismail 1998:200) through joining the parliamentary elections, controlling the professional syndicates, and establishing social-service networks (Ismail 1998:200-01). Members of the Brotherhood and other Muslim investors influenced by the brotherhood reformist agenda established Islamic private schools from the mid 1970s. While these schools provide the same educational services as the state schools do, they were keen to create an Islamic schooling environment, and to reinforce a powerful Islamic identity (Herrera 2006:33-49).

Egypt also started, from the mid 1990s, to experience a forceful trend towards Islamic pious practices, or what some literature calls “the piety movement” (Mahmood 2005). It is a reformist trend that claims to be a reaction against the belief that religiosity and Islamic knowledge have become inferior in everyday practices in favour of modernisation and secularisation. Islam, within this trend, is mainly an adoption, both individually and collectively, of pious religious morality while maintaining a consistent and clear stance on the everyday life aspects such as proper behaviour, outlook, fun, charity, relations, and use of money (Mahmood 2001:204). It is a trend that is manifested in the practices of the women's mosque lessons (Mahmood 2001), listening to recorded religious sermons (Hirschkind 2001), and other pious practices including increased attendance at mosques and collective prayers, the widespread use of the headscarf as the standard way of dressing for almost all Muslim girls and women from all social strata, and the public powerful discourse of the prominence of Islam in all aspects of life and everyday practices (Schielke 2009a). This pious Islamic trend, which attracted most Egyptian Muslims, represented a forceful discourse within the field of education. The schools' everyday rituals, practices, festivals, and symbols manifested the compelling pietistic discourse

²² The primary reformist agenda of the Brotherhood is focused on opposing the corrupt Western influence, and promoting the wellbeing of Muslims, and the proper Islamic morality in everyday actions (Munson 2001). The Brotherhood's reform of society is a bottom-up reform that begins with the awakening of the faith of the individual, the family, the local community, and the entire society, so that it will be just a matter of time until the whole state “become truly Islamic” (Wickham 2002).

and of the prominence of Islam. For example, unofficially, veiling became unquestionably the female students' uniform and the very few unveiled students were advised by their peers and teachers to wear a veil.

Reading the history of the complex relationship between Egypt's post-1952-revolution state and religious revivalism reveals that one of the top priorities of the state was to handle religious revivalism in a way that would support the regime's legitimacy. Between religious revivalism and the growing demands and challenges for improved services, education in Egypt became – from the mid-1970s – one of the central debates associated with the influence and the appropriate role for Islam and, in the meantime, neo-liberal education reform. The expansion of private Islamic schools (Herrera 2006) and the increased role of Islamic NGOs and civil society entities in the provision of non-formal education programmes and subsidised tutorial services in Egypt (Ismail 1998) all coincide with Egypt's neo-liberal trends in reforming its state education system which are aimed at “preparing all children and youth for healthy and enlightened citizenship in a knowledge-based society, under a new social contract based on democracy, freedom, and social justice”²³ (MOE 2007).

Under Mubarak's regime, education, especially primary education, was meant to show the extent to which Egypt was responsive to global expectations, hence educational discourses focused on achieving economic improvement and strengthening democracy. The goals of universal access to basic education and literacy had been inspired by the Jomtien 1990 “Education for All” programme

²³ The Egyptian state's vision statement within the current five-year strategic plan (2007-2012) shows that the Ministry of Education in Egypt is committed to reforming the pre-university education system in Egypt, in order to promote equity and to serve as an innovative model in the region, through: (1) providing high quality education for all, as a basic human right; (2) preparing all children and youth for healthy and enlightened citizenship in a knowledge-based society, under a new social contract based on democracy, freedom, and social justice; and (3) adopting a decentralised educational system that enhances community participation, good governance and effective management at the school level as well as at all administrative levels (MOE 2007).

(Zaalouk 1995). Mubarak's regime claimed it was emphasising quality of education as well as equitable access to basic education. Increased dialogue with Europe and the US necessitated an emphasis on foreign languages, which led to the boom in private language and international schools.

Despite the jargon of social justice repeated by Mubarak education reformist discourse, a 2010 survey of young people in Egypt found that the university was dominated by urban middle class young people. Those coming from poorer households represented a smaller proportion of university students. Less than 60 percent of the young people surveyed believed they would be able to find a place in the labour market as a result of their education. Whilst poorer young people tended to enrol in religion and law, those coming from wealthier families joined the schools of engineering, economics and commerce (Population Council 2011).

The second Palestinian *Intifada* in the year 2000 triggered students' political activism that had been silenced for over a decade. Such reactivation continued to gain momentum as a result of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2002 and 2003. Tens of thousands of Egyptian students demonstrated in Tahrir Square against the Iraq war on 20th and 21st March 2003 in the largest demonstrations that Egypt had seen since the bread riots of 1977. The *Kefaya*²⁴ movement, which emerged in 2004, demanding an end to the Mubarak regime and rejecting the preparations that were under way for Gamal Mubarak to succeed his father as president, attracted hundreds of Egyptian youth. For the first time, with significant youth participation, the *kefaya* demonstrations demanded that Egypt's president should step down. "When *Kefaya* held its first demonstrations, at the end of 2004, a handful of bloggers both participated and wrote about the events on their blogs" (Hirschkind 2011: 1). Subsequently, hundreds of young bloggers started to attract both official and general public attention to their blogging on the corruption and brutality of the

²⁴ In August 2004, a petition was circulated which demanded fundamental constitutional and economic reforms, but most importantly direct presidential elections with competing candidates. The 300 signatories of what became Kefaya's founding declaration called for democracy and reform.

regime. The call for a national strike on 6th April 2008 in solidarity with the textile workers²⁵ in *al Mahala al Kobra*²⁶ was picked up by bloggers, and was joined by an astonishing number of workers and students across Egypt. The strike turned into the largest anti-regime mobilisation in years, and led to violence in *Mahala al Kobra* and the arrest of several young activists (Hirschkind 2011, Shehata 2008).

To conclude this historical overview: since 1952, Egypt's education system has been deployed by the three consecutive regimes as a means of confirming their legitimacy and supporting their political agendas. During such a critical period in Egypt's history, its youth emerged as a significant element of the Egyptian equation, either by being a target of appropriation and control or as a significant player in the anti-regime oppositional actions. Massive expansion of schooling following the 1952 coup came at the expense of quality of education. Under Mubarak's rule, schooling was left to the forces of a free market economy as manifested in the massive expansion of private schooling, the boom in private tutoring, the deterioration in the performance of the state schools, and a highly stratified admission to higher education.

In order to set the socioeconomic context for this research, I discuss in the following section the political economy of Cairo and its middle-classness and informality, particularly that of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam district.

²⁵ It is one of the largest textile factories in Egypt with thousands of workers who have been instrumental since 2006 in the anti-government protests against the economic reform policies.

²⁶ A city in the Gharbia governorate in lower Egypt.

2.4 Greater Cairo, middle-classness, and *Ashwaiyyat*²⁷

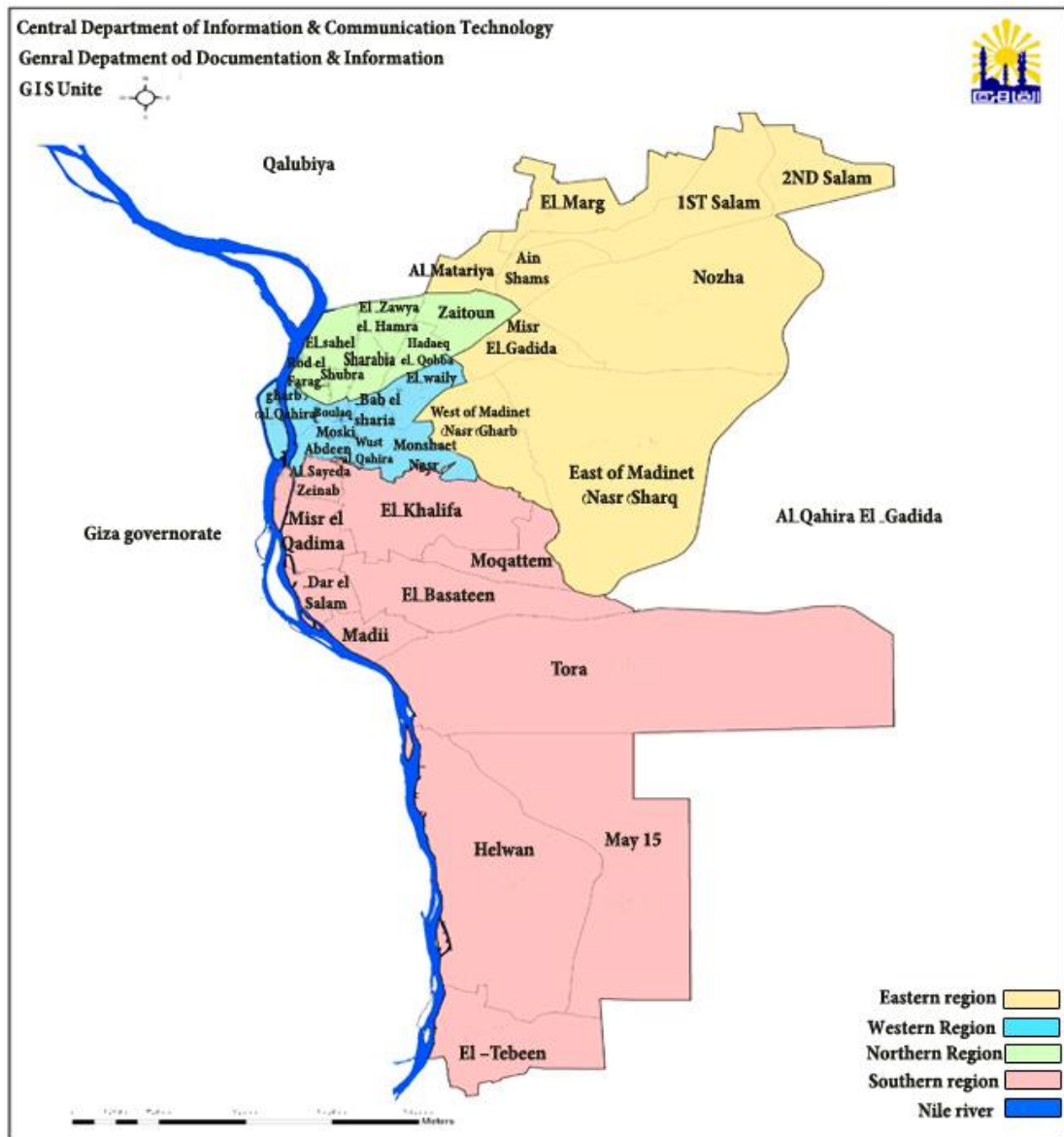


Figure 1: Map of Cairo Districts (Source: Central Department of Information and Communication Technology).

Cairo is the capital of Egypt, and an important political and cultural focal point in the region. Cairo (*al qahira*, “the victorious”) is situated on the Nile at a point where the flat flood plain, constricted by desert hills both to the west and the east, begins to

²⁷ Informal settlements.

opens out into the Nile Delta. It was founded in the 10th century, adjacent to Fustat, an Islamic city established in the early days of Islam in the 7th century. By the 14th century, under the Mamluks, Cairo had become an unrivalled metropolis in the medieval world, controlling the regional trade and known for its concentration of wealth and luxurious palaces and mosques. From the 19th century, with the French invasion, the rule of Mohamed Ali and his successors, and the British colonial rule, Cairo began, to a large extent through dependence on Europe, to enter into a process of economic growth and modernisation. Following the July 1952 Revolution, Cairo's expansion accelerated under Nasser's socialist and highly centralised rule. Part and parcel of such accelerated expansion was the informal urban development that has become the main feature of Cairo's growth since then (Sims 2003).

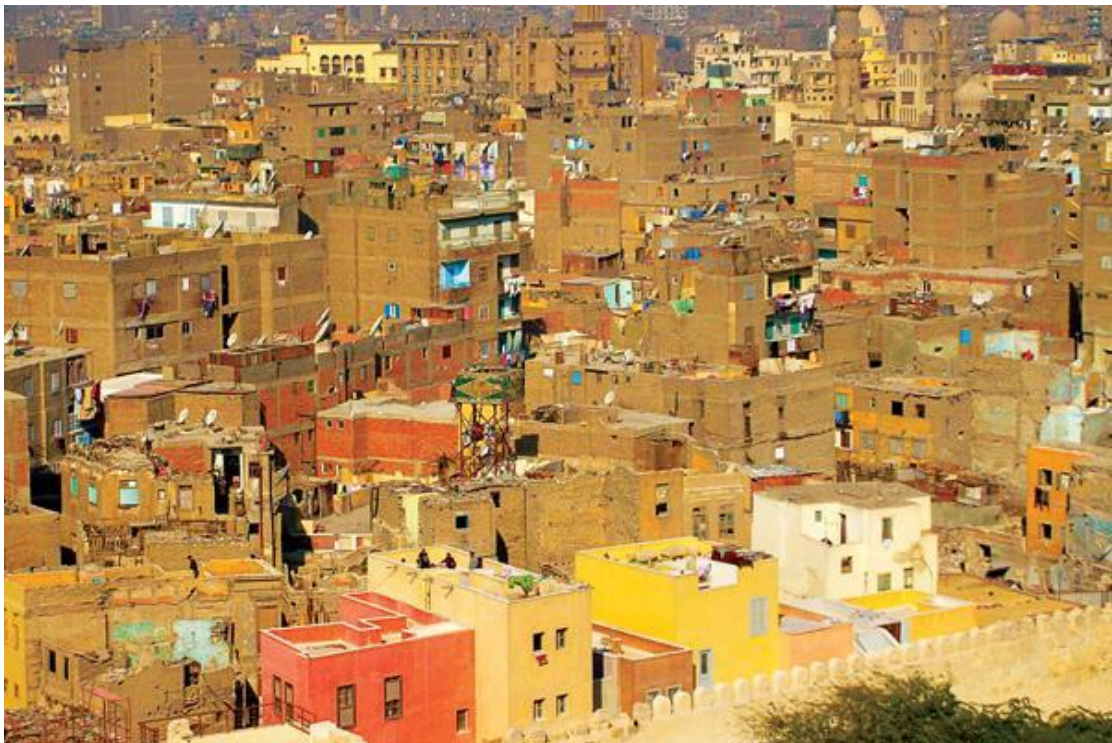


Figure 2: Informal urban Cairo. (Source: Al Ahram Weekly, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/4969/24/Living-on-the-edge.aspx>)

Since the economic policies of the 1970s, urbanisation has started to diffuse throughout Egypt, mainly through inter-provincial migration. Greater Cairo at the end of the twentieth century was experiencing a trend in urbanisation that is inconsistent with the administrative definition of cities, a sort of unplanned

urbanisation of concentrations on its borders. Such an urbanisation pattern points to a shift from a universal, state managed and planned urbanisation to a more private and uncontrolled one. It denotes a diffusion of urbanity over a vast area beyond, but close to, greater Cairo, with the latter preserving its position as a highly centralised capital. With such a trend, Egypt was witnessing the contradiction of a massive urban diffusion and at the same time an economic and social polarisation of very poor concentrations and very rich gated communities (Bayat and Denis 2000).

The unplanned urbanisation in Cairo represented not only concentrations of population but also the needs, concerns and potential urban-type conflicts which would directly involve the state. Unsurprisingly the state refused to acknowledge the existence of these informal concentrations as urban, since doing so would mean a commitment to provide expensive urban services such as sewerage, paved roads and running water. The strict official definition of what constitutes an urban unit and the invention of the concept of *ashwaiyyat* as a political category is meant to produce new spatial divisions which exclude inhabitants of over 20 per cent of all Egypt's and half of greater Cairo's population²⁸, who reside in the *ashwaiyyat*, from urban participation and the right to the city. *The ashwaiyyat* are the opposite to the "normal" city with its modern facilities and people who are somehow similar to those of the élite of the upper and upper middle class. Thus, *Ashwaiyyat* are those neighbourhoods where buildings have no permits, where streets have no formal names, where men wear traditional clothes, where women sit and socialize in front of their homes in the alleyways and where adults are largely active in the informal economy (Bayat and Denis 2000).

²⁸ According to the 2006 census, Cairo has approximately eight million inhabitants. The percentage of the Egyptian population living in Greater Cairo, which includes the governorates of Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiyah, increased by 2006 to 25 percent of the total population of Egypt, with approximately nineteen million inhabitants. "The population of Cairo is characterized by its youth. Over 33 per cent of the population of Greater Cairo is under 15 years of age" (Sims 2003: 3).

From the 1970s, Cairo's middle class had been the primary beneficiary of expanded public facilities and employment. The role of the state was redefined to manifest a significant decline and deterioration in the public sector and institutions in favour of a wide range of private alternatives dedicated to serving the middle class. Cairo's middle class has become increasingly divided between those who are "cosmopolitan" and can afford to pay for private arrangements in all fields of life, and those who are "localised" and have no choice but to live with the declining public services and institutions. The labour market no longer awards middle class lifestyles to graduates of the state educational system. These more "localised" state educational institutions and degrees have their counterparts in the exclusive private institutions that provide cosmopolitan skills and qualifications, which represent crucial assets in the labour market. Graduates with languages, cosmopolitan capital and *wasta* are able to fit the jobs in the up-market spaces that have expanded rapidly during the 1990s. The upper-middle class professionals with cosmopolitan capital who joined internationally oriented workplaces fit these national narratives as mediators between local and global, and as representatives of an Egypt that is up-to-date with the global (Koning 2005).

The majority of young people I encountered during my research came from lower middle income families striving for social upward mobility. Most of these families and their young people were experiencing in their everyday life the stark contradiction of living in Cairo, and being involved in the economic and social polarisation between the very poor, deprived of basic services, and the very rich. Provoked by such polarisation, young people were longing for more equitable living conditions. In the following section I look more closely at Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam, where they lived.

Dar-elsalam (previously part of the old Cairo district) is one of the largest informal concentrations in Cairo established over both agricultural and desert land. The majority of residents of Dar-elsalam are informal workers and artisans who work in the old Islamic Cairo and government employees with a mix of different socioeconomic levels. Dar-elsalam is known for being extremely crowded, with many market areas, narrow roads, limited infrastructure and insufficient services.

The roads are crowded, noisy and dusty, with huge piles of garbage on both sides, with a stinking odour and thousands of flies. One has to pick one's way through the crowds of people and the heavy chaotic traffic of buses, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, donkey carts and horse-drawn carriages. On both sides there are coffee shops, food shops for *koshary*, fish and meat, and the loud noise of a mix of Quran chanting, TV programmes and Egyptian songs both old and modern. People of different ages find their way through the chaos, but women are the majority, or so it seems. There is no one building pattern in the area. A medium-sized old house of one or two stories is found besides a recently-built tall narrow six-storey building. Some houses are too old, deteriorated and ugly and others too poor to be called a house: they are no more than huts. Along the pavements, shops of different sizes are inserted into the ground floors of houses. The shops are run by men or women or both in some cases. Handcarts selling fruit and vegetables are pushed by country men who come from neighbouring governorates early in the morning and who will leave as soon as they are finished. At street sides and corners, women sit on the ground – sometimes with their children around them – selling vegetables and fruit, cleaning materials, or sweets and snacks for children. Some of those women, especially the fruit and vegetable sellers, have had a long journey, while others are from the neighbourhood.

The front doors in the two neighbourhoods are open for most of the day. Most conversations take place in front of the houses. Men are usually away from the scene during the day and some of them reappear at night in coffee houses, smoking shisha and killing time. Women sit most of the time in front of their houses or at the

street corners selling their merchandise, chatting and sometimes eating together and other times quarrelling. Bayat (2012) describes it as follows:

Informal communities, slums and squatter settlements rely greatly on outdoor public space which inhabitants utilize as places of work, sociability, entertainment, and recreation. Simply, poor people's cramped shelters, as in Cairo's Dar-el-Salam neighborhood, for instance, are too small and insufficient to accommodate their spatial needs. With no courtyard, no adequate rooms, nor any spacious kitchen if there is any at all, the inhabitants are compelled to stretch and extend their daily existence onto the public out-doors spaces: to the alleyways, streets, open spaces, or rooftops. It is in such outdoor places where the poor engage in cultural reproduction, in organizing public events—weddings, festivals and funerals. Here, out-door spaces serve as indispensable assets in both the economic livelihood and social/cultural reproduction of a vast number of urban residents (Bayat 2012: 115).

At the time of my research, Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam was being served by 196 schools: 97 state schools and 99 private. Twenty two of these were secondary schools (16 state and 6 private) (MOE 2009). Enrolling in general secondary education entailed the parents bearing the cost of private lessons (an average of 10,000 Egyptian pounds per student per year) for each of the three years of the secondary education cycle. With this high cost, the majority of the three secondary school students of my research came from families that at least could afford such a financial burden. Students from very poor families, as mentioned by three school social workers, were no more than 10%.

2.5 The state education system in Egypt

Basic national education in Egypt, consisting of 6 years of primary schooling and 3 years of preparatory schooling, is compulsory and free. Retention of students in state schools has been an educational priority in Egypt. A few specific policies exist to encourage the flow and retention of students in the education system. For

example, in Egypt, in primary schools, students in grade 1 are automatically promoted to grade 2, regardless of how they perform in the final exam. Students in other grades of the primary schooling (grades 2-5)²⁹ will be automatically promoted to the next grade if they fail twice in the final exam.

From general preparatory, students' transition to secondary school can be in one of two ways, based on their final year preparatory (grade 9) exam results: 1) those with scores above a cut-off point may opt to enter general or technical secondary or vocational secondary schools; 2) those with scores below the educational authorities' decided cut-off point must join technical / vocational secondary to continue their education. The technical / vocational track at secondary level is considered socially and educationally inferior to the general track.

There also exist various types of private schools with tuition fees ranging from a few hundred to several thousand Egyptian pounds (LE) per year. Private schools' buildings and facilities are in a better condition compared to those of state schools and they usually have smaller class sizes. The most popular form of private schooling among the wealthy urban middle class is "language schools" which focus on language teaching, usually in English or French (Hartmann 2007). Other than the so-called international schools that offer foreign education (American Diploma, GCSE, IGCSE, French Baccalaureate, and German Abitur) all private schools teach the same national curriculum that is usually complemented by additional subjects. Private school students follow the same national examination system; however, they are also required to take tests in some subjects in the required foreign language.

Students intending to join general secondary school must declare their desire to enter either the Science or Art stream when they take their basic education exit examination at the end of the 9th grade. Within the Art stream, five subjects are

²⁹ If a student in grade 6 fails the final exam twice, she or he will then automatically be promoted to vocational preparatory school.

mandatory to study: history, geography, philosophy, psychology and economics, in addition to one science subject which the student selects from the scientific stream subjects. Within the Science stream, five subjects are mandatory: chemistry, biology, geology, mathematics and physics. In addition, the student selects one Art subject from the Art stream's subjects. The six subjects studied by students in each stream are called the O-Level subjects. They have the option to study an additional subject, with the aim of adding a grade to their *thanaweya-aama* scores, and this one is called an A-Level subject.³⁰

The *thanaweya-aama* is the most important exam in the academic life of a student, as it serves as a university entrance exam. The score that the student receives on the *thanaweya-aama* is the only determining factor for university and faculty eligibility. Prestigious faculties such as medicine, pharmacy and engineering usually require a very high score. As the number of available university places is much lower than the number of *thanaweya-aama* students, competition between such students is fierce, particularly with respect to joining the best faculty. The total score for each student on the exam is the sum of his/her scores in both the obligatory and optional subjects, for both the second and third year of secondary school, excepting national studies and religion. While every student needs to receive a pass grade for these two subjects, these scores are not included in the total score.

If a student fails the exam in the first year he/she is eligible to take it, he/she has a second chance in the summer of that year to take the exam. If he/she passes the exam during the summer, only 50% of the total score achieved on the failed subjects is added to the total score. A student also has the option not to sit the exam in the first year and to postpone it to the following year. If a student chooses this option, then he/she will receive as an exam score the exact mark he/she achieves in the exam. Because of this, students who find themselves unprepared for the exam do not attend the first year and retain their right to pass the exam in the following year

³⁰ A-level subjects are selected from a limited list of subjects. Students scoring higher than 5 out of 10 in such subjects are eligible to add points to their *Thanaweya-amma* score.

(receiving the full marks they achieved) instead of taking a chance on obtaining a good score in the first year.

Following the launching of the five-year strategic plan (2007-12)³¹, the Egyptian Education authorities started a country-wide education reform process, with the support of a number of international stakeholders, by which all Egyptian schools go through an improvement process that leads to a state-required accreditation by a newly established educational accreditation authority against the endorsed national educational standards. The school improvement processes start by conducting a school self-assessment through which the school assesses its own performance against the educational national standard indicators. The results of the school's self-assessment should lead to the development and implementation of a school improvement plan that aims at addressing the gaps in the school's performance and to capitalise on its strengths.

2.6 Research methods

Taking my first steps into the field work, I was aware that ethnographic methods enact a dialectal balance between subjectivity and objectivity (Clifford 1986:13). Hence, I recognised that my personal position as a native Egyptian, and my experience as someone who has been in close contact with the field of schooling, were central to the research process and that I should watch my positionality carefully in order to ensure an objective distance and representation of the young people as the main informants and of other informants within and outside the schools.

³¹ In presenting its National Strategic Plan for 2007-2012, the Egyptian state confirmed its commitment towards ensuring a modern pre-university education system that "promotes the sustainable growth of the economy and consolidates democracy and freedom, as well as a successful dialogue and competition with other countries in an era of knowledge-based economies and globalization" (MOE 2007: 16 of the Executive Summary).

My position starts as being a native Egyptian born into an Egyptian Christian family in a small city in Upper Egypt. Except for attending a Franciscan missionary primary school, I attended normal Egyptian education until grade 12. My *thanaweya-aama* scores did not allow me to join one of the top colleges. I chose, however, to study Education and English, and obtained my first university degree in Education and English language. I was employed by the government of Egypt in 1985 as a teacher for English as a second language in a middle school in Upper Egypt. From the age of sixteen I volunteered with different community, Christian and ecumenical activities and organisations serving marginal groups in Upper Egypt. I left my teaching job after one year and served at several local developmental and educational organisations in Upper Egypt before moving to Cairo (1995) when I started working for international organisations. My Masters in Anthropology and Sociology (2003) at the American University in Cairo was meant primarily to enable me to learn new skills and concepts that might help in my profession in the development field. My encounters with contemporary social theory and practice have taken me in a related but somewhat different direction, and made me genuinely curious about the nature of the work I am involved in as a development practitioner and the ways in which it impacts lives.

In 2006 I joined the American Institutes for Research³² (AIR) as a member of the Egypt Education Reform Program (ERP) team that is funded by USAID and works in partnership with the MOE. The ERP was an integrated educational programme that worked to strengthen community participation, professional development, decentralisation, standard-based performance, and monitoring and evaluation in order to increase the quality of educational outcomes for Basic Education students (grades 1 to 9). As a member of the ERP team, I was involved in the everyday issues related to educational policy and practice in Egypt both at the national and school level. My exposure to the schooling system in Egypt coincided with the decision to

³² A behavioural and social science US-based not-for-profit organisation.

pursue my doctoral studies as an anthropologist and led me to explore the production of youth identities at schools in Egypt.

With the help of a colleague in ERP, I met Mr. Gamal, the director of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam *iddarra* (educational district office) in early October 2009 to explore the possibility of conducting my field work in schools located in the two neighbourhoods. Mr. Gamal, a 50 year old, was originally a social studies teacher and was recently promoted to his management position. He sat in a pleasant small office on the second floor of the *iddarra* building located in the new Maadi neighbourhood in southern Cairo and adjacent to Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam. I briefed Mr. Gamal about my research and handed him an Arabic translation of a brief about the focus of the research. Mr. Gamal, while not showing much interest in my research topic, acted very cooperatively due to the good relations he had with the programme and my ERP colleagues working with the *iddarra*. He called one of the key *iddarra* officials to join us to help in nominating schools as locations for my research. We eventually selected four secondary schools: a boys' school, two girls' schools, and a mixed experimental school, as these, according to Mr. Gamal, were representative of all the socioeconomic segments in the neighbourhood. Mr. Gamal called his secretary and asked her to prepare letters for his signature, one letter for each of the four nominated schools. I do not claim that the selection of the schools was done rigorously. While all the state schools were suitable insofar as both female and male students were represented, I was lucky that the *iddarra* officials were cooperative and allowed me to visit the schools despite the obvious tension they normally have about the presence of researchers in schools. Tension about such a presence in schools is mainly connected with the official suspicion about the eventual usage of the collected data by the researcher.

The next day, I started visiting the nominated schools, accompanied by an official from the *iddarra*, to introduce myself, my research and my research methodology.

Mr. Gamal's advice was that if on my first visit I was accompanied by an official from the *iddarra*, the schools' principals would be less nervous. I visited both the Nasser School for Girls and the Haditha experimental school in one day. Mr. Ahmed (the *iddarra* official) introduced me "as the researcher" and in the meantime as a member in the ERP. Both schools had heard about ERP but never participated in any of its activities as ERP did not work with *thanaweya-aama* schools. I made sure in this first visit to schools to stress that I was only in the schools for my research and it had nothing to do with my work with ERP. However, I made sure, while explaining my research methodology, to propose different schooling activities that I could support during my presence in the school if that would be acceptable. Both the Nasser School for Girls and the Haditha experimental were welcoming and cooperative and I chose both for my research. My first visits to schools and the security procedures involved, and particularly the insistence of one of the schools for me to obtain a security clearance, drew my attention early on to schooling disciplinary practices and how schools were treated by the state as disciplining venues through the everyday rituals and practices that I explore in Chapter 3.

Writing field notes and data analysis started as early as my first meeting with the *iddarra* head, during which time I was allowed to go to the schools. After each meeting or visit, I went home where I live with my family in New Cairo (the western part of Cairo and about one hour's drive to Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam) and turned my field notes into typed or handwritten journals.

Around mid-January 2010, I decided to add a third school (for boys), due to the high school students' absenteeism rate in the experimental school. I visited the Moustafa Kamel Boys' School in order to introduce myself. However, I was informed that the questions I was raising through my research were connected with Egypt's national security and that I could not do my research in the school unless I first obtained national security clearance for my research. They also confirmed that the district

director's approval was no substitute for the security approval. While continuing my research in the other two schools, I worked on obtaining security clearance for my research.

I submitted a request to the MOE's security department which forwarded it to both the National Security and the military security authorities. Despite the fact that both authorities approved my research, I was told that since I was undertaking my research at a foreign university, I should obtain the approval of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). I had to go to the latter and to explain that I was not handing out any questionnaires or collecting any statistical data. I was finally given a letter informing the MOE's security office that I did not need their approval since I was not collecting any statistical information. I was called for an interview in February 2010 with the head of the MOE's security department who issued a letter approving my research. The final letter addressed to the four schools confirmed that I was allowed by security authorities to conduct my research under the supervision of the school principal, the school security officer and the social work supervisor, and that I was not allowed to hand out questionnaires, collect statistical data, or be a distraction to the educational processes.

During the first term (October to December 2009) I spent three days every week between the Nasser Girls' School and the experimental school. The high rate of student absenteeism, particularly in the experimental school, represented a real challenge. It was difficult to stay connected with the same group of students on a regular basis and every time I went to one of the schools I saw new faces. In Chapter 4, I explore the phenomenon of student absenteeism, through which I had learnt the extent to which students have given up on secondary school. During that period I focused on understanding everyday life within the two schools through classroom observation, observation of other schooling norms, participation in teachers' meetings, and focus group discussions with students.

The ethnographic approach of Amit-Talai and Wulff (1995) on “how a situated group of young people create and circulate ephemeral yet powerful meanings that play a significant role in determining their educational experiences” (Demerath 2003:152) was a key ethnographic approach to understanding the schooling experience of young people in the three secondary schools in Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam. I was attentive, following Amit-Talai (1995), not to become trapped in a simplistic romanticisation of young people as being free and safe from the real pressures of the adult world, but to acknowledge their diversity and differences in navigating the pressures from school, family and economic conditions.

Tension about *thanaweya-aama* was a common theme from day one of my fieldwork. Students were desperate to talk about their struggle with studying, private tutoring, and everyday discipline at school. Gradually, some students started to develop an interest in talking to me individually, and some teachers started to seek my input into some of the activities they were responsible for. However, some students were hesitant to be in contact with me and some teachers remained suspicious about me and the reason for allowing a stranger into the school and granting him the right to be in contact with students.

By December 2009 I became well connected with the schools, particularly the Nasser girls' school. This school, which had recently been accredited by the first national educational accreditation authority, wanted to make use of my presence by involving me in extra-curricular activities. The leader of the school's improvement team and the psychology specialist approached me to prepare a series of seminars on topics of interest to students. Larger events were organised by the school and were mostly attended by many students and teachers. Other smaller and more frequent events were organised for smaller groups of students. Topics of seminars concerned generational tensions, transition from school to work, time management, freedom versus norms and traditions, friendship and peer relations, and social

responsibility. I was also invited to attend other seminars that were organised by the Nasser girls' school and other schools to which a guest speaker was invited. Such events helped me to connect with the students and were a venue for insightful discussions and debates. Through what I had learnt during the seminars I facilitated and others I was invited to attend, in the 3rd and 4th chapters of this thesis I explore students' views of success, future aspirations, sense of hopelessness, and *taghyeer* (change) that developed as common themes during the seminars and discussions.

During the first few weeks of school ethnography for my fieldwork I mainly focused on classroom observation. I went to one of the schools in the morning and was directed to attend an identified list of classroom lessons. I sat for hours at the back of classrooms observing teachers teaching Arabic language, history, biology and English language lessons. With the aim of teachers being to direct all classroom teaching to prepare students for exams and with the limited classroom interaction between teachers and students and also between myself and students, I soon realised that in addition to observing classroom lessons I should focus more on the "informal realm" of schooling (Amit-Talai 1995, Winkler 2011) in order to grasp the thrust and entirety of the schooling experiences of the young Egyptian.

Such evolvement in my ethnographic approach happened gradually and was influenced by the mutual trust that I had established over time with students, teachers and other school staff. I started to focus more on understanding students' engagement in extracurricular activities, peer relations, student- teacher interaction, student networking and everyday actions, and the arena of private tutoring. All these informal arenas, despite being not formal schooling, are, however, "in tension with" (Winkler 2011: 13) and framed by it. Upon becoming too involved in the everyday life of the three secondary schools, I came to realize, given the structural conditions of secondary schooling in Egypt (to be discussed in details in Chapters 3 to 6), that formal schooling under such conditions is likely to shrink, thereby giving more "informal realm" schooling space to the young people for "creating and sustaining intersubjective relations, and producing value" (Winkler 2011: 13).

At first students did not know what to call me or how to perceive my role in the school. With the ambiguity about my role and given the age difference, they kept calling me Mr. M. I was keen not to be seen as another teacher and the role I was granted by the school administrations was helpful in this regard. I started to be asked by the school administrations either to fill the gap caused by an absent teacher, or to help in handling the chaotic situation, particularly in the boy's school, by sitting with groups of students and helping to maintain discipline. Every time I was asked to do so, I was keen to act informally and with no disciplining authority. I was ready with a topic of discussion around one of my research themes which, while it was relevant and interesting to students, had never been the sort of discussion encouraged by their school teachers. Another role I was granted by the school administrations, as explained earlier, was to facilitate group discussions on topics of students' choice. This role provided me with the opportunity to connect with individual students who wanted to further explore the topics individually with me. Whenever I walked into a class or a student gathering, I reintroduced myself and the topic of discussion and students were given the choice to stay or leave. In order to ensure informed consent by students, at the end of each informal or an organized discussion I left a blank sheet of paper with a volunteer (one of the attending students) so that any of the students who might wish to talk further to me individually could sign her/his name and indicate the days they would be at the school. Upon receiving the names of those interested to talk to me in person, I approached them directly and made sure that it was their choice to request to talk to me and that they were not pressured to do so. Some of the students, who first expressed an interest to talk to me person, later either changed their minds or stopped appearing at the school. As time passed, however, relationships were gradually established with a number of students.

Mr. Youssef (a biology teacher at the Nasser girls' school) became very interested in my research and helped me to go beyond the school to the local community. We

(Youssef and I) developed the idea of holding a camp for students during the mid-year break, which was an excellent opportunity to connect with students and teachers away from the rigid everyday school schedule. After the mid-year break during the second term (from mid February 2010) and upon obtaining my security clearance, I started to focus on the Moustafa Kamel boys' school in addition to the Nasser girls' school. Once I had started to spend more time in the Moustafa Kamel School and experienced how chaotic the school was, I realised the degree of deterioration which schools had reached. I explore in Chapter 4 what I had observed of the forms of everyday student opposition to the schooling system, and in Chapter 6 the unruly tactics they deployed while navigating forms of exclusion.

In order to understand the everyday wider context of young people's lives, my fieldwork went beyond the school boundaries. After several attempts with no success, finally during the second term I was able, with Mr. Youssef's help, to spend time in the El-Eman private tutorial centre. Building stronger relations with students and teachers within the schools had granted me access to other sites such as coffee houses, as well as going on long walks and attending night gatherings with teachers and parents. Through spending time at the private tutoring centre, and night gatherings at coffee houses, in the 4th chapter I explore the theme of the collapse of the Egyptian schooling system and the failure of the education reform which was considered an important element in Mubarak's economic reform.

With the coming of a new Minister for Education and the application of stricter measures concerning student absenteeism, a few more students started to attend the two schools, and I was able to hold a series of interviews with a number of students. Through interviews with Hadia, Noura, Amina and Ahmed, I explore in the 5th chapter young people's negotiations of their fears of failure and risk of exclusion, and in the 6th chapter their sense of ambivalence. In late summer 2010, I spent several Ramadan nights in Al-Basatin and Dar Elsalam which were most insightful in

relation to the complexity of young people's lives in the informal urban neighbourhoods. With the start of the academic year 2010/11, I went for quick visits to both schools to see the students and teachers who generously shared with me their experiences and aspirations.

I thought I was coming close to the end of my fieldwork. However, with the 25th January protests and then the occupation of Tahrir Square, the downfall of Mubarak, and the incidents that followed, I went back to my fieldwork. At first, particularly when I was in the Square during the 18-day occupation, I had my family with me, and it was not very clear whether I was there as a researcher or a protestor. Despite not meeting the familiar faces of the young people of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam schools, there were many other young faces. The day after the removal of Mubarak, we all worked together to clean the Square. I created accounts on both Facebook and Twitter to stay connected with events. The *thanaweya-aama* students' Facebook page ("the thanaweya-aama students' revolution") and their call for protests in front of the MOE acted as a link between my research and Tahrir. I joined the Facebook page and followed all the preparations for the protests and joined their march from Tahrir to the MOE and spent the day with them.

I kept joining most of the events that followed the downfall of Mubarak in and around Tahrir until the bloody clashes of Mohamed Mahmoud Street in November 2010. I met many new faces from all ages and social strata. I connected with three young people: Amro, a *thanaweya-aama* student; Karim, a student at a private secondary vocational school; and Mona, a university student and film maker. I had a series of interviews with the three of them, who generously shared with me, as I explore in the 7th chapter, their aspirations as well as their experiences and values in engaging with the revolution. Both Amro's and Karim's narratives as *thanaweya-aama* students enriched the themes of young people's hopelessness and ambivalence which I explore in the 5th and 6th chapters.

Throughout my fieldwork I was attentive to the fact that my familiarity with the field as a native Egyptian and knowledge of the Egyptian education system and Egyptian society would be both supportive and challenging at the same time. It was the same struggle that all native anthropologists face in entering the field and situating themselves in a way that will ensure the proper representation of all informants and research circumstances. The fact of being familiar with schools in Egypt and inside bureaucracy was an important factor to keep in mind.

In the following chapter, through exploring the three schools of my research, I look closely at the secondary school physical space and the system of discipline, as well as the embedded citizenry and Islamic discourses attempted by the state for the production of the loyal Muslim citizen.

CHAPTER 3

Re/production of the loyal Muslim citizen

3.1 Introduction

I arrived at the principal's office of the Moustafa Kamel School for boys after passing through the school gate and signing the visitors' log. It was a morning in December 2009, one year before the eruption of the Egyptian revolution actions in January 2011 that resulted in the downfall of Mubarak's regime. After greeting the principal and another person who happened to be present in the office, I handed the principal a letter from the head of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam "*Iddarra*", introducing me as a researcher from one of the universities in the UK. The principal looked sceptical while reading the letter. He handed the letter to the other person, who introduced himself to me as a history teacher at the school. Upon reading the letter, the history teacher started to interrogate me about my research and the reasons why I had decided to do my PhD abroad, and whether it was true or false that all the information I would learn about during my research would be placed in the hands of a foreign university. The teacher's advice to the principal, based on that quick interrogation, was that allowing me into the school would be a matter of "national security", which meant that I would have to go back and seek the approval of the national security authorities, otherwise I would not be allowed into the school. The history teacher's statement was an early insight into my field work, that issues and information related to schools and schooling in Egypt at that particular time were a matter of "national security".

In this chapter I explore the Egyptian school space and everyday life during the 30th year of the Mubarak regime before its fall in January 2011. In particular, the chapter looks at how the state secondary schools within the Egyptian context were spatially and temporally produced by the Egyptian state as "abstract spaces" (Lefebvre 1991) functioning as a disciplining system (Foucault 1979) that would attempt to re/produce the loyal Muslim citizen for a neoliberal economy within Egypt. In

looking at the secondary school space, therefore, my intention is to understand the extent to which the school's physical and social space is a retranslation of the claimed invisible reproducing of relationships of power (Bourdieu 1971) within the school – or whether perhaps it actually manifests at least in some aspects a different set of emerging power relations – and the extent to which it is somehow ambivalent (Jeffery et al 2008: 209) in nature.

I would like to look first at the notion of “national security” that was raised by the history teacher in the Moustafa Kamel School. The other two schools had allowed me to enter them while knowing that I was working on obtaining a security clearance. However, the boys’ school insisted that I should obtain this before I could be allowed into the school. I therefore had to go to the Security Department of the Ministry of Education to apply for security clearance. Upon receiving it, I was told informally that my application had been sent and cleared by a military authority and two national security authorities. A first interpretation of the notion that “issues and information about schools are a matter of national security” was that exposing information about schools constituted a threat to the country.

Understanding the notion that “schooling is a matter of national security” should take into consideration how the upbringing role of the state’s mass education had evolved within the post-colonial state of Egypt, from the Nasserist Egyptian national and pan-Arab identity, to Sadat’s state of “science and faith”, to Mubarak’s emphasis on the Muslim citizen who is capable of fitting into the state's economic reform agenda. The one common theme between the three consecutive political regimes related to the schools' upbringing goal was that of preparing the loyal citizen for the regimes’ political twin agendas of “religious legitimacy and political authority” (Starrett 1998:6). Mubarak’s state of emergency started working towards achieving its educational agenda under politically volatile circumstances between the state security forces and the Islamist militants. Facing the claims that high schools were being used for recruiting members for Islamist militant groups in southern Egypt, Baha Eddin³³ “introduced the concept of education as a cardinal component of

³³ Minister for Education under Mubarak’s rule from 1991 to 2004.

national security, on [a] par with the military” (Herrera 2006: 27). Following the introduction of this concept, the government pursued a forceful campaign aimed at controlling every element of schooling. Thirty years later the notion of “national security” is still remembered and used. Whether this notion is still valid or not remains to be explored in the sections that follow in this chapter, and in the following chapter.

In this chapter I am specifically looking at the secondary school system of discipline, and embedded citizenry and Islamic discourses. The school space and everyday practices are discussed on the one hand as the product of a heavy-handed authoritarian state, and on the other hand as a means for subordinating young people, with the aim of producing citizens for the state’s economic reform. The chapter pays attention to the extent to which the school space is particularly gendered towards producing the good Muslim young woman. In doing so, I am exploring life within state secondary schools in the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam neighbourhoods. I am looking at school and classroom daily practices and rituals, students' and teachers' narratives, actions, events, discussions, and chats.

Three state schools in Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam neighbourhood were the entry gates to this research: Moustafa Kamel General Secondary School for boys; Nasser General Secondary school for girls; and Al-Haditha (modern) mixed (girls and boys) experimental school.

The young people enrolled in the three schools were from families that had received some education. They could, however, be the first or the second generation in their families to go to secondary school with the ambition of continuing on to higher education. Some of the parents had achieved university level education, while the majority had reached a secondary vocational education. Most of these families either could or were willing to make the sacrifice to pay the cost of general secondary education that entails also paying for private tutoring.

3.2 Secondary school: the physical space

The Moustafa Kamel School for Boys was the largest boys' General Secondary School in the area, in the sense of the size of the campus (43 classrooms), serving around 2,140 registered students, and 147 teachers and administrators. The school was formed of several old and new buildings surrounding a wide open space that included a football field. I found that the school was always noisy, many classes were not really functioning, and many students (mostly 10th grade students) were in the playground, on the stairs, and in the corridors all the time, shouting and running. Teachers assigned for daily supervision were chasing students to bring them back to their classrooms and trying to find solutions for classes without teachers. In many cases, I was an easy solution to the problem of an absent teacher. In the middle of such a chaotic situation, in fact, standing in for a teacher was the only way for me to come into direct contact with students.

The Nasser Secondary Girls' School was another large school in the neighbourhood, consisting of three main buildings (with a ground and 3 upper floors) forming a U shape around a large playground. The school included 48 classrooms, over a hundred staff, and around 1,600 students. It was divided into sections, each of which was dedicated to a particular subject area. Each section included a number of class rooms, a teachers' room and relevant facilities for the specific subject, such as science labs or a computer lab. In addition to the subject-related sections, there were rooms for the library, the education quality team, the social workers, the psychology specialists, administration staff, deputies, and the school principal.

In terms of discipline, I found that the Nasser school was much more disciplined and quiet compared to the Moustafa Kamel School. The former was ranked high on the *Iddarra* level and had a good reputation.

Figure 4: Nasser Girls' Secondary School. Photo of one of the main buildings of the School, taken by a student and posted on the school's Facebook page.



Both the Nasser and Moustafa Kamel schools are located in the middle of the New Maadi area, a lower middle class neighbourhood which on one side is close to the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam informal areas, and on the other side is adjacent to the luxury Maadi neighbourhood with its villas and towers overlooking the Nile. Students living in the Al-Basatin area had to walk for an average of 20 minutes to reach their schools. Dar-elsalam students had to use public transport or otherwise walk for around an hour. Some students lived in the New Maadi area where the two schools are located.

The Al-Haditha experimental school was a large state language school for both girls and boys. It included all three educational stages: primary, preparatory and secondary, serving a total of 1,650 students. Being different from normal state schools, it teaches more advanced English language, while both Maths and Science are taught in English, and it requires the students to pay annual fees. It belongs to a category of schools called experimental schools, established by the government as language schools. It was formed of two big buildings and a large playground located on the motorway opposite the new Maadi area. Most of the students enrolled in the school were from the educated families of the new Maadi neighbourhoods and a small percentage came from the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam areas. While life in the

secondary section of the school was not as chaotic as the Moustafa Kamel School, I found that still the teaching and learning processes had mostly been put on hold.

The three schools had many common physical features. All the schools had been built on a wide piece of land and consisted of several large buildings surrounding a wide courtyard and overlooking the residential area. Recalling the Foucauldian notion of the “carceral continuum that constitutes the contemporary disciplined society” (Foucault 1979:297), each of the school’s buildings and open spaces were surrounded by a high concrete and brick fence and gated by two huge iron gates which were guarded. One gate was for students and the other for school staff and visitors, with a security checkpoint at the latter. School visitors were required to sign in the record book kept at the security checkpoint. They had to record the visitor’s name, ID number, telephone number, profession, and the purpose and time of the visit.

Another common feature was the football area – or volley ball court in the case of the girls’ school. Students spent their break-time in such sports areas, either playing or just enjoying the open space. A few teachers and other school staff could be seen in the middle of the crowd during the break, watching the students. In some instances, the teachers were taking part with the students in a sport match or joining groups of students for a chat.

It was more common to see male students practising sports than female students. Contrary to the state's vision for reforming and modernising education (MOE, 2007), female students’ participation in sports, and other activities such as music and dancing, was generally surrounded by concerns about consistency with Islamic modesty and morality (Herrera 2006, Starrett 1998). Physical education classes for girls were mostly turned into other taught subjects, or the girls were mostly sitting in the shade in a corner of the playground doing nothing.

The school’s small mosque was another common place in all schools where some teachers and a few students would go for prayer. While the school timetable was not

arranged to accommodate the prayer times, nonetheless the school mosque was considered to be an important element of the school's physical structure. Both the local community and some of the teachers were keen to provide for the needs of the school's mosque, such as carpets, furniture, and regular cleaning.

The classrooms in all three schools looked almost the same. They were mostly wide with large windows on the two side walls, and a blackboard occupying the wall facing the students. The wall at the back was usually used to hang some of the students' works. The experimental language school had better furniture, cleaner walls and fewer broken windows, and ceiling fans had been installed in the classrooms. Due to the scarce resources allocated by the government for school maintenance, the wall paint, board paint, windows, lighting and furniture in the other two schools were in a poor condition.

At the Nasser Girls' School, following the school improvement recommendations in relation to applying active learning, the students' desks were arranged into small squares, a U shape, or two rows facing each other. Teachers said that arranging furniture in these ways allowed for more interaction between students. Small squares allowed students to be divided into smaller groups, while the U shape and the facing rows allowed for interaction between all the students instead of just following the teacher. When 11th grade students were discussing the rearrangement of the classroom, they said: *"teachers continue the same way of teaching without allowing interaction between us (students). Sitting this way looking at each other prevents us from following the teaching and we get very distracted"*. In contrast, the other two schools were keeping students' desks arranged in normal rows facing the blackboard.

The arrangement of the girls' school into sections or departments allowed female students to move from one section to another, according to their daily schedule. When the bell rang at the girls' school announcing the five minutes break between two school periods, the school was noisy while most of the students were outside

the classrooms, in the corridors and on the stairs, heading towards their next destination. Ten minutes later, after all the students had reached the destination of their next class, the school was quiet again. The case was different in the other two schools (the boys' one and the experimental mixed school) where the administration had decided to keep students in fixed locations, whereby they spent the whole day in the same classroom, while teachers from different subjects moved between classes. Despite the strict arrangements in the boys' school, the school was noisy all the time regardless of whether it was class time or a break.

3.2.1 Mr. President in the classroom

The first thing one noticed in all the classrooms in the three schools, above the blackboard, was the “iconographic” (Kaplan 2006: 181) representation of a large photograph of Mubarak, flanked by the Egyptian flag and the national oath. A student commented: *“This picture of Mubarak must have been from a photo taken 30 years ago because he looks very young”*. The young man’s observation on Mubarak’s photo was not without sarcasm on how the state had wanted to promote a youthful image of the old president who had been ruling Egypt for the last 30 years.



Figure 5: Photo of Mubarak in the classrooms flanked by the Egyptian flag and the national oath.

The national oath stated:

I swear to God to be loyal to the Arab Republic of Egypt, and, to the best of my ability, to preserve and defend it against every enemy and invader, and to be a good model in my ethics and actions.

Following the 2005 Egyptian presidential elections, the government stamped every effort by the state as being part of the elected president's programme. The educational authorities embarked on an ambitious educational reform and a national strategic plan (MOE 2007). Creating an accreditation system for Egyptian schools against the educational national standards became one of the main reform priorities. The first thing one observed upon walking into classrooms of the Nasser School was a printed version of the school's vision and mission that were also hung on either side of Mubarak's picture, the national oath, and the flag. The school quality improvement and accreditation processes started with developing the school's vision and mission³⁴. The Nasser's school vision stated that:

Nasser School is an educational institution that aims at achieving high quality education and preparing a scientifically, behaviourally, and professionally advanced generation, capable of being creative, solving problems, and facing the challenges of the future through effective community participation in following the national educational systems and standards.

The school mission statement was:

Nasser School is committed to working through an effective school management based on principles of transparency and objectiveness and a sustainable professional development for all staff. The school aspires to become a cultural, social and sports hub, strengthening its communication with society and attracting students by supporting the different activities and by the use of modern technology for developing their skills in order for them to become good citizens who are capable of facing today's challenges.

In addition to having the school vision and mission hanging in all the classrooms, there were mottos on educational improvement, mixed with religious quotations of

³⁴ The school vision and mission were main elements required by educational accreditation authorities as part of the school improvement processes.

Quran verses and “*Hadith*” (Speeches by the Prophet Mohamed), on the schools walls, bulletin boards, and even on the school fence outside. Educational improvement mottos were based on concepts related to community participation, the role of the school’s “Board of Trustees”, the role of the teacher, and good governance, taken from the Educational National Standards document. Religious quotations emphasised the Islamic morals of “upbringing” (*tarbeya*) related to sex segregation, the hijab dressing code for girls, and culturally acceptable behaviour, all emphasising the image of the good Muslim citizen.

The Nasser school was among the first group of schools in the *Iddarra* and the whole of the Cairo province that became involved in the government educational reform processes of quality improvement and accreditation. The school obtained its accreditation certificate in August 2009, indicating that the school had met at least 75% of the Egyptian Educational National Standards. It was scheduled by the *Iddarra* to apply for accreditation in the year 2008. Both Mostafa Kamel and Al-Haditha were scheduled to apply in 2010 (at the time of my field work). As an accredited school the Nasser school was expecting monitoring visits any time by accreditation authorities. The three schools were struggling to meet the Ministry's expectations while facing the challenges of minimal resources to meet basic school needs including human resources. The management in the three schools had to involve almost all teachers and staff in order to meet the Ministry's expectations. A social worker at the Moustafa Kamel School for boys asked me if she could take some photos for my interviews and group discussions with students. She explained that the photos could be useful for the school improvement file which she was responsible for as part of the accreditation process. She explained further that the photos and some of my notes could be used as proof that the school provided counselling services to students on their future studies and career. Based on this incident and other discussions it became clear to me that the school accreditation process in many schools was a matter of preparing files and arranging documents without being serious about taking action towards real improvement.

Talking to students at the Nasser school about their school's vision, mission and accreditation, I found that they were aware to a great extent that the whole accreditation process was just about completing paper work and files rather than a real school improvement. Students made fun of the whole process of state-led school improvement, while drawing my attention to dirty walls, broken windows and broken furniture. Leila (an 11th grade student) said:

Don't believe this. This is nonsense. These are just documents that are far from reality. There is no teaching, nor activities in the school. They asked us last year about how the school could be improved but they did nothing to turn our ideas into actions. Actually, the school this year is even worse than last year.

Asma'a (another 11th grade student) commented:

Honestly, I don't care about the school or the school improvement. All I care about is to achieve the scores that will get me into the college I want.

Another 11th grade student said during the same discussion:

Since the beginning of this process, those teachers who were keen to teach have no time any more after becoming very busy with this thing.

In this section, I have looked at the school space not only as a reproduction medium intended by the state, but as an obvious base upon which all schooling activities and practices must occur (Molotch 1993:888). More specifically, the architecture design of the school building, human densities and locational relations are forces in determining what can be done in the space of the school (Molotch 1993:888). The school building was designed in the shape of several large buildings, high fences, iron gates, and security check points, with an obvious resemblance to the state's control. While the student population of two of the three schools was arranged so as to keep the boys and girls separate, young people in each of the schools were a mix of social strata, coming from the different areas of the district. In terms of location, none of the three schools were built inside or even close to the poor areas where most student live. Instead, they were located at the heart of the New Maadi area, which is

known for luxury housing, large shopping malls and supermarkets, as well as companies working in the businesses of Petroleum and importing and exporting.

3.3 Everyday school life: from morning rituals to unoccupied classrooms

Both curricula and extracurricular practices and activities in the secondary schools had manifested students' subjection to a disciplining nationalist discourse with a strong ethical Islamic flavour. In this section I explore elements of curricular and extracurricular schooling practices in an attempt to trace "how historically informed ideas, identities, and relations are converted into pedagogical practices" (Kaplan 2006: xvi).

Any normal day in any of the three schools started with the usual morning line programme. I observed that students were lined up for their classes in a U shape. The biggest group was grade 10, comprising around 60 to 70 % of the registered students, while there were a few 11 grade students, and no grade 12 students at all. Some students were late, moving slowly and still joining the line. The leader of the morning line (normally a PE teacher or a social worker) was holding a microphone and shouting at students, asking them to show more discipline to start the morning rituals. Some students were standing on the side, preparing to perform the role assigned to them. The morning line was normally attended by the school principal, deputies and all teachers who would normally stand facing students and watching their compliance with the line's discipline.

The programme started with the PE teacher leading students to perform their morning exercises. In all cases when I attended the morning line in any of the three schools, students' participation in the morning exercises was minimal and was always followed by harsh comments by the line leader about how lazy and useless they were.

The morning programme that followed the morning exercises was usually led either by an Arabic or a Social Studies teacher. The programme in all schools³⁵ started with chanting the Quran, to be followed by a reading of the *Hadith*. It was a practice that went back many years and had become regarded as a non-negotiable issue despite the fact that it was not a ministry policy at that time. A selection of the Quran and *Hadith* passages was decided on by the teacher supervising the morning programme and was normally linked with religious, national or social occasions.

The next part of the programme was the reading of the day's news, taken from newspapers, and mostly about the president, the government, and the Minister of Education. The day's news could be followed by a students' activity, announcements on school planned events, or celebrating an achievement by a teacher, a student or by the whole school. The last part of the morning involved chanting the national anthem and saluting Egypt's flag, a process which had to be loud and strong. Again, and before marching to classes, saluting the flag was mostly followed by harsh comments by the line leader because the salutation of the flag was not as enthusiastic and loud as it should have been.

The morning line programme also addressed issues on school discipline, and included instructions and announcements, normally given by the principal or a deputy, emphasising the school rules, and code of conduct, and reinforcing the school authority. In most cases, these disciplinary announcements turned into warnings to those individual students, or groups of students, or classes, who had violated the school code of discipline, or announcing penalties for one or more students.

Students' compliance with the school uniform was one of the most important disciplining rules that occupied much attention most of the time particularly during the morning programme. Female students were supposed to follow the prescribed uniform, which was a blouse of a specified colour, with a skirt or trousers. In addition, female students in particular were instructed to appear in the school with

³⁵ By "all schools" here I mean all Egyptian schools.

modest clothing, meaning that tight clothes and anything else that would attract attention, such as jewellery, accessories, and makeup, were not allowed. As for male students, they were also required to follow the approved specified shirt or polo colour with trousers. In addition, students wore jackets or pullovers in winter. For female students, while the veil was not a requirement all Muslim female students came to the school veiled. In order to control the potential colours and shapes of head scarves, only normal or simple white head scarves were allowed. However, despite the uniform rules imposed by the schools, many students contrived to circumvent these rules and to be in school without exactly abiding by the acceptable shapes and colours. Many girls would show up in the school in tight clothes, wearing jeans, accessories and make up, and in numerous fashions of white head scarves. Most male students came to the school in jeans and t-shirts.

All students had to arrive on time for the morning programme. Those who were late were normally kept standing by the school gate until the morning programme was over, after which the principle or the deputy could decide on how to deal with them. In most cases, late students were warned and told that they should arrive on time for the line, and students normally made the excuse that they lived far away from the school and that the traffic was bad.

The school's morning line programme constituted its general assembly where all the students and teachers had to be present. The programme was intended and planned every day to enforce discipline. Both nationalist and Islamic discourses were strongly present side by side in the morning line.

Leaving the morning rituals and looking at life inside the classrooms, the first thing one would observe was that classes were attended by few students. Grade 11 students' attendance was mostly around 15% to 20% and teachers usually combined students from several classes together.



Figure 6: A classroom at the experimental school. Photo by MF on 11 December 2009

The class normally started with the teacher greeting the students with “*asalam alikom*” (peace be upon you) and the students would reply “*Wa alykom El-Salam wa rahmet allah wa barakato*” (peace be upon you too and God’s mercy and blessings). Depending on the relations between the teacher and the particular group of students in the class, there could be a few exchanges with individual students. The beginning of each class was always interrupted by the administrator or another teacher coming in and checking on students’ attendance through an attendance sheet that had to be signed by the teacher. The teachers’ readiness and motivation for teaching was always affected by the fact that students were absent and that most of the attending group of students were a combination of students from different classes.

Few students were ready and motivated to be engaged with the teacher. Most 11th grade students in the three schools I have discussed with the phenomenon of the private tutoring always said that the school’s lesson schedule was always far behind that of the private lessons, due to the fact that the private tutoring usually started around two months before the school year. In the classes I visited, the teacher was

normally standing in front of the students and using the black board. Students were either sitting in their groups or in rows listening to the teacher while following what was being explained in the text book or taking notes of what was being explained and/or written on the board. Teaching was done through lecturing by the teacher with little student participation and with an emphasis on preparing for exams by alerting students to relevant exam questions.

3.4 The nationalist discourses of “belonging” and “loyalty”

During one of my visits to the Nasser Girls’ School, the group of students I was supposed to meet were not in the classroom. When I went to the administration building to ask about them, I was told that they were at the library for a lecture on “belonging” by a university professor and that I was allowed to attend if I wished to. I walked into the library, which was filled with students, teachers and some parents (members of the school board). The lecturer started by saying that she was not really going to give a lecture but that rather she wanted to have a discussion about students understanding of the meaning of “belonging”. The students at first were totally silent and reluctant to talk. The lecturer had to address the question to individual students, asking for their opinions. The students’ answers came in a few words like: *“belonging is about belonging to our country”, “loving the homeland”, “defending the country against enemies”, “not accepting any things against the national pride”*. One student asked: *“Is disrespecting the president considered against belonging? I am asking because some of us criticise the president and ask why he does not step down”*. Another student said: *“We have to respect the president, otherwise we could be sent to prison”*. Students continued discussing whether criticising the president was against belonging or not, while the lecturer and teachers were looking nervous and not feeling comfortable about how the discussion was progressing. The lecturer tried to change the subject by asking about the difference between “belonging” and “loyalty” and whether they have the same

meaning. A student said: *"We become loyal to the country and we do our best to make it a better place"*. Students continued their contributions by saying that belonging and loyalty is about improving the country, building factories, creating jobs to counteract unemployment. The discussion went back again to the issue of the president when a student said: *"Cursing the president or wishing that he would die is not enough and won't solve our problems. There are lots of bad issues that require solutions. Feeling sorry for ourselves is not enough. We've got to do something"*. The lecturer commented on all the students' contributions, and concluded by advising students that *"in order to make your voice heard, you should use the legitimate channels. My advice is to look for a local NGO where you live and become a member. Through the NGO you fulfil many of the great ideas you have mentioned today"*. She added: *"Be optimistic, please, otherwise you can't do anything"*. The head of the school board thanked the lecturer and decided to add some comments and closing remarks:

If you decided to join a local NGO, check first on its goals and the nature of its activities, and the people in charge. Of course you don't want to get involved with an NGO with bad intentions (referring to Islamist NGOs) and find yourself arrested.

He added:

It's very important to stick to ethics and religion. Taghyeer (change) starts from the self before demanding changes. It's not your role to judge anyone. Those in charge are acting in a certain way because they see and know things that we don't know. They do what they can do. God will not judge us or them on results. God will certainly judge human beings on the effort regardless of the result. This is why you should fulfil your own responsibilities and ask yourselves about how you make use of your time, how you treat your teachers, and so on.

The school management realised that the school's morning daily dose of saluting the flag and chanting the national anthem was not enough to reinforce nationalist discourses of "loyalty", "belonging", etc. One of the well-known approaches to reinforcing such discourse was to host a speaker from time to time who could address relevant topics with students. The notion of "belonging" was one of the

most important and famous topics for such events. Through such actions the state continued to use the school and education at large as a significant utility in trying to control younger generations. Surprisingly, the lecture that was planned to reinforce notions of belonging and loyalty was turned into a debate between students as to whether criticising the president was against belonging and loyalty or not. The unexpected discussions around criticising the president triggered a hint on the meaning of *taghyeer* (change) by the head of the school board in his closing remarks. That was the first instance during my field work when the notion of *taghyeer* was brought up in public, and in several instances this was done by young people (as will be discussed later in this thesis).

3.5 The Islamic discourse within schools

As explored in detail in the previous chapter, Egypt on the one hand started from the late 1980s to experience a forceful trend towards Islamic revival (*elsahwa al eslamia*), which was claimed to be a reaction against the belief that religiosity and Islamic knowledge had become inferior in everyday practice in favour of modernisation and secularisation. On the other hand, the state under Mubarak's rule adopted a strong official Islamic discourse through the official media channels, mosques under the control of the state, and most importantly, schools.

Kaplan's (2006) study of schools in Yayla (Turkey) has looked at the Turkish national education system following the 1980 coup. Kaplan asserts that the education system "forged powerful emotional bonds between the military institution and the civilian population: the curriculum simultaneously instilled the idea that law-abiding citizens should dedicate their lives to army and nation" (Kaplan 2006:209). With such compelling nationalist discourse, Kaplan emphasizes that the Turkish generals' "ambiguous flirtation with adherents of the Turkish Islamic Synthesis not only has resulted in Islamizing the curriculum but also has ironically helped politicize their own corporate identity and ideas" (Kaplan 2006:209-210).

Egyptian students were also subjected to a powerful official Islamic discourse inside the school. Quran verses were hung on the school walls, inside classrooms, and on walls of private tutorial centres. A considerable part of the morning line was spent on religion and piety ethics. In addition to religious education, which is a mandatory subject for all students, considerable portions of the secondary school's Arabic language and social studies curricula had focused on the official view of Islam and Islamic history. Most teachers, both in schools and in private lessons, were adopting a religious discourse on the prominence of Islam in all aspects of life. All female students at the Nasser and Al-Haditha schools, as well as teachers and other staff in the three schools, were veiled except for very few, who were mostly non-Muslims.

Starrett (1998) has described the state's official school-based Islamic discourse as the "functionalisation" of religion, by which religion becomes packaged and delivered to the public. Starrett argues that the state's attempt to control religious revivalism through religious studies and the official religious discourse within schools did not work, but rather it created public discontent and criticism of the state, and in the meantime it has worked as a point of departure for further exploration of religious resources, particularly those away from the state's control.

I was not deliberately warned against talking to students about religion. However, there were many hints by teachers and administrators that it would be better to stay away from talking about religious issues. I intentionally did not ask to join religious education classes and avoided answering curious questions about my religion. Despite the restrictions on talking about religion, however, it was not difficult at all to observe such a strong discourse through the religious signs and connotations that permeated the school culture. In some instances, talking about religion was unavoidable. In this section I explore the religious discourse within the school as manifested in daily practices, classroom teaching, and extracurricular activities.

First: in looking at the schools' everyday practices, the three schools dealt with the Islamic part of the morning line programme differently. While the Nasser (girls) and El-haditha (mixed experimental) schools used a moderate tone, the Moustafa Kamel (boys) school usually had a very loud and long religious programme that included a

long Quran chanting by a teacher, a long *Hadith* by a student, and a long and loud religious speech by an Arabic teacher that was followed sometimes by another speech by the principal. Speeches mostly addressed notions related to Islamic superiority, highlighting Islam's main teachings, and confirming the very strong Islamist identity of the school. All three schools paid special attention to all Islamic religious occasions and celebrations, and even considered them much more important than any other educational considerations.

All forms of the speeches within the school, whether formal or informal, and inside or outside the classroom, included repeated elements of religious connotations about God (*Allah*) and /or the Prophet Mohamed. Teachers and students used such elements as an integral part of their speech. Expressions like "*be-ism allah elrhaman elrahim*" (in the Name of God the Merciful), "*asalam alikom*" (Peace be upon you), "*wnabi*" (for the Prophet's sake), "*wallahi elazim*" (I swear to God the Almighty), "*Insha allah*" and "*b-izn allah*" (God willing), "*barak allah fek/feke*" (God bless you), "*be-ism allah mashallah*" (thank God), and many other expressions were used spontaneously as part of the normal speech and communications. In addressing students, some teachers repeatedly used Quran verses and *Hadith* quotations.

Second, in looking at the official Islamic discourse embedded in the secondary school curriculum, I observed a history class in which the teacher spoke about the 18th century French invasion of Cairo, as part of the 11th grade history curriculum on the Islamic rule of Egypt. The teacher compared the French invasion of Cairo to what she called the recent American invasion of Bagdad:

Napoleon broke into the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo on horseback while at the same time convincing Egyptians about how much respect he had for Islam and Muslims. Western colonisation never had respect for Islam and Muslims. We have a recent example as proof, which is the American invasion of Baghdad during which American soldiers broke into the mosques and houses of Iraqi Muslims, while at the same time George Bush was telling the world that USA respected Islam and was only rescuing Iraq from Saddam Hussein.

The example given by the history teacher and the way in which history teachers taught the section on the "Crusades" emphasised the discourse that Islam had been

and still was subjected to attack by the West and others. It is a discourse that was used in conjunction with the discourses of superiority of Islam, and the inevitability of freeing and *tatheer* (cleanse) the Palestine and other Arab/Islamic territories of the western occupation / influence. The Arabic novel "*wa Islamaah*", which was part of the 11th grade Arabic language curriculum, dealt with the Islamic era under the Mamluks period and addressed the relations between "Islam" and others along the same line of discourse. The main elements that Arabic teachers dealt with in the classes I observed revolved around the notion that Muslims should not fight each other, but unite together to defend the *Umma* (Muslim community or people) against its enemies.

The notions of Islam versus others and Muslims uniting against the enemies of the *Umma*, need to be examined against the notions of loyalty and belonging that were discussed in the seminar. The two discussions were reflecting the polarisation that existed within Egyptian society, between Egypt as the homeland for all Egyptians versus Egypt that is considered a small part of a more global concept of the Islamic *Umma*.

Third, in looking at extracurricular activities, a camp was held by the Nasser girls' school during the mid-year break and was attended by around 35 students. The idea of the camp was initiated by a small group of teachers who were eager to see the school doing better. The meetings to prepare for the camp witnessed tensions between the different competing agendas of different groups within the school. The initiators of the idea of the camp wanted it to be a new start to develop good relations between the school and its students. The principal and the school administration were keen to use it as a show case to prove to the *Iddarra* and other schools that it was the best school. Their main focus was on preparing attractive posters and banners and having a big show at the end of the camp, and to dedicating all the camp activities to prepare for this show, to which *Iddarra* officials and community leaders were invited. A third group wanted to use the camp to stress religious and ethical principles and to address issues related to what it meant to be a good Muslim young woman (*moltazima*). The camp ended up as a mixture of the

three agendas, with more focus on having the big show at the end. Ms. Soad's position during the preparations for the camp was a good example of the school's Islamist discourse. Ms. Soad, who was a member of the committee to prepare for the camp, stressed the importance of adding a morning session to the camp's daily schedule. She said:

A camp like this should put a big emphasis on religious and ethical principles and address issues related to what it means to be a good Muslim young woman (moltazima).

Ms. Soad (a senior Arabic teacher) was regarded as a committed teacher and as someone who was concerned about the school's role in ensuring religious ethics were taught, and that girls should learn at the school moralities of the good Muslim woman. Ms. Soad liked to talk to girls about their life and she preached on pious ethics in the class. She told me about an incident while still shocked because of the female students' perspective on relationships:

It was the month of Ramadan during the last school year when a student asked me in front of the whole class if it's religiously acceptable to talk to her boyfriend while fasting or it's better to wait until after the Iftar (the meal to break fasting). Of course the girl meant to ask if talking to her boyfriend might spoil her fasting. I didn't believe that I had heard the question and asked the whole class: girls, do you really have boyfriends?" Some of them shockingly answered: "Oh, that started to happen long ago". It's a shame, thank God my daughter isn't like that. Our generation was raised at school and home on following pious commitments. I never talked to a man until I was already at college. Even at college, talking to male colleagues was very limited and never went beyond issues around studying. Friendship between males and females at this age should be controlled. I have no problem at all if girls get married at the age of 18.

Ms. Soad found a considerable contradiction in the student's question. For her, as a committed pious person, being in a romantic relationship contradicted being a good Muslim and the pious spirit of the holy month.

I also attended a seminar which the girls' school arranged for parents and teachers of grade 10 students with a psychologist on how parents could handle their adolescent young people and problems of adolescence from an Islamic point of view. The speaker presented herself as an educator, a psychology expert, a chairman of an

NGO in the neighbourhood, and a mother of a student in the school. The attendees were mostly mothers from the neighbourhood and teachers. The discussions mostly revolved around participants' complaints that young people argued and wanted to discuss everything and to have a say about everything and did not want to give up. The speaker narrated a case study that turned out to be the main topic of discussion about a high school female student who was regarded by her teachers as an excellent student. The young woman had fallen in love with a young man whom she met online in one of the chat rooms:

She told her mother of her decision to marry her virtual boyfriend. As you all know, this is a disaster and a scandal for the girl's family. What could be worse than the daughter loving a man whom she met online in a chat room? The mother was advised first to keep the father away from the whole matter in order to avoid any complications. Of course, as you all know, complications happen when the family acts in such cases with aggression such as physical punishment, withdrawing the girl from the school and rushing into an arranged marriage in order to rescue the family reputation. Mothers should carefully watch what their young people do on the internet and away from the family and should listen to them. If you don't listen to them and jump into blaming and cursing, they will stop talking to you and you will never know the troubles they get themselves into. Our old Islamic history and the first Muslim mothers provide many examples on how early Muslim parents handled their children through listening and dialogue.

One cannot tell if the case narrated by the speaker during the seminar was a true story or made up as an extreme example to horrify both teachers and parents into applying stricter controls on young people's mixed socialisation. Whether true or made up, telling such a story during a school seminar on "problems of adolescence" confirms the use of the Islamic discourse within the school in regulating young people's sexuality.

In this second section of this chapter I have tried to sketch an image of everyday life in the Egyptian state secondary school. The image I have described, while tried to complement the image described in the first section of this chapter on the schools' physical space, has focused mainly on embedded discourses in both the curricular and extracurricular schooling practices. Despite what was claimed by the State (MOE

2007) concerning the role of the school in preparing a generation that can fit into the expectations of the state's economic reform, the everyday school practices had paid more attention to the notions of discipline, religious commitment, appropriate behaviour, and loyalty and belonging to the country or the Islamic *Umma*.

3.6 Conclusion

The physical space of the three schools of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam *iddarra* privileged certain kinds of discourses connected with specific nationalist and religious meanings aimed at reproducing the loyal Muslim citizen. Despite the amount of jargon included in the educational reform's vision, mission, and strategies for preparing future generations that can contribute to Egypt's project of modernisation (MOE 2007), the three schools' physical spaces attempted to support the state's reproduction project and deterred the students from their goals (Lefebvre 1991). Moreover, the physical space and everyday life in the three schools explored in this chapter emerged to suggest that schools were resources of ambivalence and contradiction. Walls around the school buildings carried banners and other media propagating the educational reform discourses of the effective school that would ultimately contribute to achieving sustainable economic growth and democracy. However the schools' physical arrangements, everyday disciplinarian discourses and forms of fragility (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) had come to contradict the propagated reform discourses. Students were not interested in engaging in school activities and were not really trusting schools' improvement efforts. Female students in particular were subjected to schooling disciplinary hegemony which controlled their existence in their school's public space and their participation in activities that would be seen as contradictory to modesty.

I maintain that the physical details and symbols in public spaces in schools only supported the state's official authoritative discourse. School spaces were not a retranslation of all the invisible relations of power; however, they reflected the

challenges facing the schooling system and the political regime at large. Following Kaplan's attempt to "trace how historically informed ideas, identities, and relations are converted into pedagogical practices" (Kaplan 2006:xvi), life in the three public secondary schools was a mere reflection of the fragile and ambivalent Egyptian political situation after 60 years since the 1952 coup and after 30 years of Mubarak's regime. The schooling nationalist discourse manifested in a physical disciplining hegemony, different visual symbols and morning daily rituals was combined with an official Islamic view and challenged by a powerfully growing Islamist discourse.

Realising the challenges facing the schooling system, the government was striving for reform. However, it was a reform that had the stamp of the same system of centralised authority (MOE 2007, Herrera 2006, Naguib 2006), trying to lead reform from above and ignoring local realities. Such reform efforts were reduced at the school level into written statements hung around the schools' buildings and a useless rearrangement of desks claiming to promote "active learning" with no real improvement.

CHAPTER 4

Cracks in the “national security”: when schooling fails

4.1 Introduction

Chatting with a small group of 11th grade students in the Moustafa Kamel Boys' School, Ahmed (a student) said: *“our school is totally out of control.”* He continued: *“Look from the window and you will see students climbing the school fence getting into or escaping from the school in the middle of the day.”* I looked from the window and there were approximately ten to fifteen students jumping over the school fence.

Watching the scene of the students jumping over the school fence, I recalled both the early discussion with the Moustafa Kamel School's management on the notion of “national security”, and the launching events of the five-year strategic plan of the Egyptian Ministry of Education in June 2007. The mission statement of the Egyptian state schooling system according to the five-year plan was:

to foster equal opportunities for all Egyptian students to realize quality education that empowers them to become creative life-long learners who are tolerant critical thinkers with strong values and a wide range of skills for active citizenship and dynamic participation in an ever-changing global society.

Despite the progressive schooling mission statement of 2007, I argue in this chapter that the Egyptian schooling system after thirty years under Mubarak's rule is not qualified either to play its intended role towards maintaining “national security” for the Egyptian state, or to fulfil the state's agenda of preparing young Egyptians for supporting the state's measures for economic reform.

This chapter looks at the fragility (Fuller 1991) of the schooling system from four viewpoints. First: with a highly hierarchal and authoritative education system and at the same time less investment on the state's side, schools and teachers are out of order and there is a widening gap between the schooling system itself and the teachers. Second: the students' everyday tactics of chaotic behaviour and opposition

are creating cracks in the old collapsing body of the schooling system. Third: students' absenteeism is the way through which they voice their disappointment with the schooling system and contribute to the commodification of education. Fourth: tutorial classes on the one hand were flourishing as an alternative to the collapsing system; however, on the other hand they manifested a highly commercialised education system through which teachers were selling their services and students had become customers in the education market.

In exploring the above-mentioned viewpoints, I continue in this chapter the school ethnography through which I became involved in the everyday life of the three schools. In the first section I will look at teachers and school staff negotiations in the school system to which they themselves are the key to its goals being achieved. In the second section I will explore the students' reactions to the everyday school discipline. In the third section I will explore life in a private tutoring centre.

4.2 Hierarchies of discipline: the state, the teachers and the students

A new Minister for Education was appointed in January 2010 at the end of the first term of the school year. The next day, everyone in the schools was talking about it, given what they knew about the new minister's leadership style in his previous responsibility as a president of one of the state universities. Very shortly after his appointment, the new minister visited a middle school in Helwan district (to the south of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam district) without any previous notification. The minister's visit was accompanied by many journalists and was fully covered by the mass media. During his visit, the minister punished almost everyone in the school and humiliated in public the school administration and teachers. The next day almost all newspapers and many TV programmes had the minister's visit at the top of their agendas. The minister announced that he would continue these visits to schools in order, as he said to the newspapers, "to ensure school discipline". Very soon, the newspapers were announcing that staff and teachers at that school were

objecting to the way they were treated by the minister in front of the national media, and that they were threatening to go on strike. The three schools were terrified, like all the other schools. The teaching and non-teaching staff were expecting a visit at any moment. These developments contributed to a more tense school environment. Mr. Abdel Aziz, a senior Social Studies teacher, told me that *“the new minister is more of a policeman than an educator”*. He added that *“what the minister did during that school visit was unethical and it means that the guy doesn’t understand what his role is as a minister for education”*.

School principals and deputies were mostly MOE staff in their last few years in service before retirement. The three principals of the three schools I worked with were about to retire and had only been promoted recently to their position as school principals. School principals report directly to the head of the *Iddarra* (the district level Educational office). School principals worked in a very centralised management system where many decisions about their schools were made either at central MOE, the governorate (province) level, or the district level. With all the government’s recent efforts towards decentralisation, principals were still running schools based on orders coming from above. For example: at the time of the field work of this research, principals were not involved in making decisions about hiring teachers or other staff for their schools. Despite the very small financial resources left for principals for the day to day needs of the school, they had to seek approvals from the district office for every penny they needed to spend. A considerable portion of the everyday life of schools was dedicated to receiving visits from officials and inspecting committees from different levels of the educational authorities. District and province level subject area supervisors visited teachers and carried out classrooms observations as a matter of performance appraisal. Other committees and individuals did school visits to monitor financial issues, administration issues, accreditation processes, etc. Mr. Ramadan, the Haditha school principal, said: *“My job is mostly about pleasing someone above, rather than making this school a better place for learning”*. Ms. Zeinab (the Nasser girls’ school principal) said: *“I do not want problems and hope that the last few years of my service before retirement go*

peacefully". Whenever a high ranking committee was visiting the school, everything in the school was dedicated to pleasing the visitors. The school would turn into a showcase to convince the visitors that it was the best school ever. In a discussion with a group of teachers, Moustafa (a Maths teacher and one of the cadres recently trained on school reform processes) said: *"I was chosen several times as a principal and I refused"*. He added: *"The principal's job is a humiliating one. I'd rather be a teacher. The principal's job is about following orders with no power or support at all."*

Teachers within the Egyptian education system are poorly paid. The government had made several attempts to improve teachers' salaries; however, such attempts had not yet materialised in actual improvement. Issues related to teachers' income, promotions, certification, absenteeism and similar concerns were part of everyday life in a school. The situation of an unrewarding job with a highly authoritative and oppressive system created in the three schools (similar to other schools) a general attitude between teachers of resentment and being disillusioned with the whole system. Some teachers found a solution for their economic hardship through becoming private tutors (which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter).

One morning, I was waiting at the social work office at the Moustafa Kamel Boys' School with three social workers: one male (Mr. Hussein), and two females (Ms. Aida and Ms. Awatef). A 10th grade student was caught jumping over the school fence because he was late and was supposed to sit for an exam. Hussein and another teacher started to deal with the student. They took his bag and emptied its contents on a desk. They were looking for some specific items, perhaps cigarettes or drugs. When they did not find what they were looking for in the bag, they started to search his pockets. They took his mobile phone, a cigarette lighter, and his wallet. They had to hit the student a couple of times in order to get what they were looking for. Hussein opened the mobile phone and started exploring its contents and making jokes, while the other teacher was searching the student's wallet and counting the

large amount of money. The student had to explain that he had received the money from his father just that morning in order to pay for the private tutoring class after the school day. They kept the mobile phone and the cigarette lighter, and allowed him to join his class.

This was a situation where two members of staff (a social worker and a teacher) practised a disciplining role with the student through humiliation. It was a disciplining image of the school that made it very close to the brutal image inside an Egyptian police station which was one of the main factors that triggered the young people's uprising on 25th January 2011.

Another situation occurred when I was leaving one of the messy classes in the Moustafa Kamel School to move to another class. I had met the two teachers who were assigned by the school management to maintain discipline on the third floor of the building where the class was located. The two teachers who were supposed to lead me to the next class visit commented as follows:

Teacher (1): *Oh, you are the one who is doing research in the school.*

MF: *Yes, that's me.*

Teacher (1): *Are you really doing research about those losers?* (He was referring to the students).

MF: (silence).

Teacher (2): *Maybe he is only interested in those losers in particular.*

MF: (silence again).

Shortly after starting my field work, "Youssef" became my main contact person in Nasser girls' secondary school. Youssef was a biology teacher, the head of the school improvement committee on student involvement, and a private tutor for biology in after-school hours. I first met Youssef on my second visit to the Nasser school, based on his request to see how I could provide some help to the committee he was

heading. Youssef was in his late thirties, and originally from a village in Upper Egypt. He graduated from the Faculty of Education, in the biology department. He left his village and moved to Cairo (Al-Basatin neighbourhood) where he lived with his family. Youssef presented himself as one of those teachers who wanted the school to be a better learning place for younger generations and aspired to play a role in shaping the young people as good Muslim Egyptian citizens. Youssef was one of the initiators of the mid-year vacation camp (which is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter). He admitted that he could not afford the needs of his family without the money he was making as a private tutor. In the meantime, he was a committed teacher in the classroom and the students were engaged and seemed to enjoy having him as their biology teacher. Youssef had good relations with everyone in the school from students to teachers, administrators and workers. He was joined in his efforts by a group of teachers and staff such as Ms. Salma, the psychology specialist; Mr. Sherif, the history teacher; Mr. Salah, the Maths teacher; Mr. Medhat, the Social Studies teacher; and Ms. Samiha, the social worker.

Groups of male teachers and administrators usually gathered at night at the coffee house especially in the month of Ramadan when the season of private tutoring was not very busy yet. Every time I joined one of these gatherings it was clear how important such gatherings were for them as a venue for peer solidarity, connectivity, and information exchange. Such gatherings also attracted senior school and *iddarra* officials such as principals, supervisors, and unit heads. Most of the chats revolved around work challenges, trying to find a chance to transfer to a better school or obtaining some benefits. Coffee house gatherings were venues for talking about issues that could not be addressed freely in schools and offices in the morning. These were the behind the scene issues for assigning senior staff, demoting or transferring problematic staff, and many other issues. Senior officials used these gatherings to their benefit through addressing some sensitive issues with other officials and paving the road for decisions and actions in their interest.

Teachers in state schools were assigned to act in a way that reproduced the authoritative and disciplining state. The question here is whether such reproductive attempts by the school worked or not. Contrary to what one might officially hear in the morning at schools about all the enthusiasm for the school improvement policies and processes, all the educational participants in the coffee houses admitted that most of such efforts were only on paper. Most teachers and other staff, described by the classical Foucauldian (1979) analysis as “technicians of behaviour” and “engineers of conduct” (Foucault 1979: 294), spoke of the huge widening gap and the growing distrust between themselves and the system. Over the past decades, teachers’ conceptions of schooling and their role within the institution of the school had been through considerable changes. Such changes, impacted by socioeconomic factors affecting teachers’ livelihoods and a much centralised authoritative educational system, had disqualified teachers from assuming the role they were assigned to play through which the student as an “individual subject is a reality fabricated by ... discipline” (Foucault 1979:194).

4.3 Students’ tactics and opposition to everyday school discipline

Egyptian secondary school students, being subjected to school discipline and discourses, became involved in the everyday practices of chaotic behaviour and opposition. While students’ chaotic practices could not be argued as clear acts of “resistance”, nevertheless I argue they have caused cracks in the structure of the schooling system. Following Abu-Lughod (1990), who argues that we should respect everyday acts of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990: 53), learning about everyday oppositional practices allows for understanding the complex and ever-changing structure of schooling power and how it works. In this section I explore examples of the schooling environment with the intention of looking at everyday chaotic and oppositional practices.

Walking into the Moustafa Kamel School for boys was like walking into a battle field. When I finally entered the school after obtaining the security clearance, I realised that most probably it was not a matter of security at all. They were trying their best not to allow a stranger to walk into such a messy situation. After I had obtained my security clearance, the principal, while not really welcoming my presence in the school, asked Mr. Hussein (one of the social workers) to introduce me to a group of students. Mr. Hussein was the youngest social worker, a short but well-built sporty young man who was delegated by the school principals to handle discipline issues. He suggested that I meet a group of 11th grade students. Climbing up the stairs to the third floor, he was shouting and chasing students who were still outside their classes. Passing by the school's large building on my way to where I was to meet the group of students, I saw that many classes were not functioning and the few students in those classes were extremely noisy. Before walking to the classroom, Mr. Hussein told me that this class was better than other classes and that they would not waste my time, but that if anything happened I should call him immediately. An Arabic teacher was working with the few students in the class as a replacement for another teacher who had not shown up. Mr. Hussein introduced me to the Arabic teacher and told him that he could leave the class with me. The Arabic teacher left the class and Mr. Hussein introduced me to the students:

Everyone, stand up (all students stood up while the class was still noisy).

Listen to me (in a sharp loud voice): *Mr. MF is a guest at the school. He will spend some time with you. Try to benefit from him. I am sure that you will not embarrass me by misbehaving.*

This particular group of students responded positively to my presence, and I was able to have a reasonable discussion with them. However, this was not the case with a 10th grade class that I joined the following day at the same school, when I met the "Al Kofar" (non-believers) group, and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

The school management had almost lost control over the students, who showed up in the school whenever they wanted and left whenever they wanted. When the

school gates were closed, students simply jumped over the school fence. The morning line had to be led by the physically strongest teacher or administrator while they adopted a powerful religious discourse. The leader of the morning programme needed to be very loud and aggressive in order to finish it and send students to their classes. Many teachers had stopped teaching or even showing up in the classes because either the students were absent or the classes were out of control. Out of frustration, the principle once complained to me that he had caught one of the teachers hiding in a small building (that was closed for refurbishment) in order to avoid showing up in the class. The school was noisy all the time and students were all over the place: in the playground, in the corridors, and on the stairs.

The first impression of what was going on at the Moustafa Kamel School for boys was that the students were causing chaos, and the school management was too weak to control it and apply the rules of discipline. I would argue that the chaos caused by students' collective behaviour should be understood following Abu-Lughod (1990) as "reinscribing alternative forms" of power (Mahmood 2005:7). Young men described by their teachers as a "bunch of losers" with no future had chosen to act like a real "bunch of losers". Janice Boddy's work is quoted in Mahmood (2005) for her analysis of the "subaltern gendered agency". Boddy concludes that the Sudanese women in her study of the "Zar" practices "use perhaps unconsciously, perhaps strategically, what we in the West might prefer to consider *instruments of their oppression* as means to assert their values both collectively ... and individually... *This in itself is a means of resisting and setting limits to domination ...*" (Boddy 1989:345, cited in Mahmood 2005:7). Following Boddy (1989, cited in Mahmood 2005), I argue that the young men's chaotic behaviour at the Nasser school was perhaps either an unconscious or a tactical (de Certeau 1984) use of the instrument of their oppression in response to the hegemonic schooling authority.

Mr. Shaban (an Arabic teacher who had agreed to stand in for an absent teacher) became very aggressive towards a student called Yasmin who seemed to be whispering to the student sitting beside her while he was teaching some Arabic grammar. He started shouting at her that she should pay attention. He continued shouting: *"I know I am not really benefiting you, I know that you have got it all at the private lessons, but who knows, if you pay attention, you may benefit a little"* He continued even louder: *"God help him", "God help him"* and continued *"Yes, I am talking about your father: God help him to handle you"*. The reaction by Yasmin (who did not show up a great deal at school) was a very quiet and silent one and she looked unaffected by Mr. Shaban's attacks.

What do we have here? First: Mr. Shaban was an Arabic teacher who had accepted an extra workload to teach Arabic to groups of students from different classes. The Arabic grammar lesson he was teaching was a difficult one. He was one of the teachers who did not give many private lessons. He was also not known among the students as one of the teachers they felt comfortable with, compared to other teachers with whom the girls felt more at ease when talking and socialising. Teachers like Mr. Shaban had developed this sense of being marginalised because of not obtaining enough of the students' attention in class and in their private lessons. Second: Yasmin was a *thanaweya-aama* student who was not attending school regularly. Thus, being away from the school for a long time, she was keener to talk to her peers than pay attention to Mr. Shaban's Arabic teaching, which she might have felt was boring and not important. Young people after a period of absenteeism always had many stories to tell their friends at the school. Yasmin acted carelessly towards both Mr. Shaban's teaching and his attack. He was striving to confirm his authority as a teacher and to show that he deserved some respect even though many students like Yasmin were developing carelessness and disrespect towards the role of the school and teachers.

Chaotic and careless behaviour are examples of tactics (de Certeau 1984) used by young people either collectively or individually within the schools' complex culture,

in order to make the best out of their schooling situation. Despite the fact that such forms of behaviour could not be considered oppositional, they did, however, manifest the extent to which the students' agency seemed to stand against the hegemonic schooling culture. In certain instances, young people's reactions to the school disciplinarian system were far from being tactical in De Certeau's sense (1984) and were perceived as deliberate oppositional acts.

One morning in the girls' school, after the morning line was over and all students had left for class, a group of about 20 students who had been kept near the school gate were brought in and were asked to form a row in the middle of the playground. They were students who had arrived late and missed the morning line. Students were asked to pay half an Egyptian pound for being late. It was a rule that the principal applied to students who arrived late and missed the morning line programme. Two students paid the money and went to their class. The rest of the students were kept standing in the middle of the playground because they had collectively decided not to pay the fine and said they were willing to stay all day standing there. After around 45 minutes of negotiations, however, the students were dismissed and sent to their classes.

I was allowed into the three secondary schools in the Dar-elsalam and Al-Basatin neighbourhood as a researcher with interests in younger generations and how they perceived their future education and self-realisation. The school staff also recognised me as someone involved in Education reform efforts. Some administrators and teachers started to check whether I could support them with some activities.

The psychology specialist at the girls' school requested that I facilitate some seminars for students on topics of interest to them. I facilitated a seminar for 10th and 11th grade students, and for school staff, both teachers and administrators. The request came from students as a need to discuss generational relations and tensions.

The seminar was held in one of the empty classrooms in the middle of the school day and was attended by about 30 students and about 10 teachers and administrators including head teachers and deputies. The discussion started around the meaning of a generation and the difference between the two generations in the room. The students moved swiftly towards talking about their own experiences and the extent to which they saw a problem in the relationship between the two generations. The seminar started with a brain storming session during which the students said:

Student 1: *We think differently.*

Student 2: *Their mentality is different; they hardly understand our needs and our feelings.*

Student 3: *They are convinced that what they think useful for us is the only right thing and that we shouldn't question it.*

Student 4: *They think they are always right, and never admit when they are wrong. When it's so obvious that we are right about something, they never admit that we are right.*

Student 5: *They don't know how to pay attention or listen to us, and they yell at us all the time.*

Student 6: *They say it's a generation that is aar ala masr (a shame for Egypt).*

One of the students, called Norhan, said: *Since I joined this school I feel like am going to have a nervous breakdown because of so much yelling at us. They are yelling at us all the time.* She then directed her speech to Ms. Nour (the school deputy): *Why are you always shouting? Excuse me, but you allowed us to express our opinions. Right?*

For a while the room was shocked by the situation of the 10th grade female student's loud criticism of the school deputy in front of everyone. While other female students were laughing and muttering, teachers and administration staff were completely astonished by such a situation which they were not used to. While the deputy was totally speechless, Ms. Soad, an Arabic teacher, started to defend Ms. Nour:

She is acting like your mother ... she cares for all of you she is one of the few who really care about the students.

The students continued describing how they saw the older generations' attitude towards them:

Student 7: *They hardly listen to us or take any steps to learn about our needs and expectations.*

Student 8: *Older generations like my parents and most teachers don't understand the difference between them and us.*

Student 9: *They allow themselves to make mistakes but they don't allow us to make mistakes and learn from our mistakes.*

Student 10: *They never remember the good things we do, they only remember our mistakes.*

Student 11: *While they keep watching our mistakes, we still are missing a role model from the older generations to inspire us.*

The teachers and other school staff (many of them already have children of the same age) started to become defensive in responding to the students. One teacher said:

Parents want their children to be the best. We are old enough to have more experience than you, and we have a responsibility to help you at this age. Youth today spend a lot, we give you a lot. Youth are not responsible and they have high expectations. You shouldn't talk about the lack of a role model. Prophet Mohamed is the real role model for you.

Towards the end of the discussion, students contested the teachers' views that young generations have very high expectations. Wafa, an 11th grade student, said:

Yes, we have high expectations, we expect a lot and we will continue to expect a lot. You know why? Simply because it's our time, it's our generation. It's not true what older generations think and repeat, that we are useless, stupid, and spoiled. We are aware of what's going on and most of us know what we want. It's also true that many of us are frustrated and fed up.

The "we" in Wafa's narrative was both generational and gendered. Students (seminar participants) were pressured by disciplining rules imposed by the school and the family. Female students opposed the school and family authorities and talked critically of parents and teachers. They were keen to point out their generational consciousness through repeatedly highlighting differences between their generation and older generations and the fact that it was their "time".

Female students' reactions manifested the extent to which the schooling system was gendered. Female students in many instances opposed the school discipline that attempted to control them as girls by applying stricter measures. Female students

reacted through rejection and withdrawal. This pattern of action was repeated throughout the period of my presence in the schools. First, during the "belonging and loyalty" seminar when the students criticised Mubarak. Second, during the leadership camp when the students criticised the school's learning environment. Third, during the many group discussions I had with students during which they criticised the schooling and the education system at large. Let us look in more depth at the situation. During these events young women contradicted the discipline rules by voicing their criticism of older generations and even the president. While the school was organising dialogues and opportunities through which the students were supposed to enact norms and discipline, the young women exploited the situation allowed by the school to voice their generational and gendered opposition.

4.4 Absenteeism: studentless means powerless

I knew that secondary school students' absenteeism was a general phenomenon particularly in Cairo and Egypt's other main cities. For years the MOE tried to address the problem by posing more restrictions and penalties for absenteeism. For grade 10 students, attendance was compulsory, since their final scores for attendance and participation in the school were calculated in addition to the results of their final exams. Starting from grade 11, however, the final scores were determined only by a student's performance in the final exams. The MOE had to impose fines for grade 11 and 12 students' absenteeism and to cancel their registration for the final exams when a certain number of days absence had been reached. The MOE allowed students to re-register for exams after paying LE25 as a fine. Evidently, parents became willing to pay the fine in order to allow their children the time to go to private lessons and study at home. For most students and families, the school had become a place for registering for exams and nothing more. The issue of attendance and absenteeism was always a topic for discussion between students, in classrooms, in teachers' meetings, in management meetings. Students always exchanged news

and rumours about the policy changes to be undertaken by the government to force them to attend. One rumour was that students would be prevented from sitting for final exams if they exceeded the limit of days of absence. Another rumour was that students going beyond the limit of days of absence would not be able to apply for military or police academies.

While attendance in grade 10 in all three schools was around 60%, attendance in grade 11 was at best no more than 15%. These percentages of attendance were mentioned in meetings I attended in the three schools and were confirmed by the schools' administrations. On the day of announcing final results for grade 11, I saw one student (Reem) whom I could not recall having seen at all in the school before. She was standing with a woman (whom I learned later was her mother) surrounded by other students and teachers. The students and teachers were welcoming and congratulating Reem. I asked one of the teachers (Youssef):

MF: *Who is she?*

Youssef: *Oh, you don't know Reem? She is the ranked first for the school and the whole iddarra for grade 11; let me introduce you to her.*

MF: *Hello Reem, mabrouk.*

Youssef: *Reem is one of our best students and she has won the school the first rank at the iddarra level.*

MF: *Reem, do you know me? How come I haven't seen you at all?*

Reem: *I heard about you from my friends; I didn't come to the school at all this year.*

MF: *You didn't come to school at all? Why not?*

Reem's mother: *We insisted that she should have private tutoring in all subjects and that studying at home was better than coming to school. It would be waste of a time. It worked and she got very good grades and a high ranking. She was very close to being among the 3 highest ranked students at the Cairo level.*

Youssef said: *"If you have the right wasta you shouldn't worry about attending, and there are always solutions for handing the problems of absenteeism".* Mrs. Soad (an

Arabic teacher) said: *"I have a daughter in grade 11 at the same school but she doesn't come to school"*. She went on: *"I handled the issue of her attendance with other teachers and the school management"*. This was how a few students managed not to show up at all except perhaps once or twice to complete some formal papers.

Having an attendance of only 5 to 8 students in each class, the management in the three schools decided to combine every 3 or 4 classes together and assigned a teacher to work with them all together. However, the teacher might decide not to show up at all or pass by the class briefly to ask the students to stay quiet. The students sat in couples or groups, chatting, studying, listening to music and playing with their media devices (MP3 players and mobiles), taking and exchanging photos, ring tones, etc. Almost all the teachers I talked to said it was very difficult for them to teach, with the current rate of student absenteeism. The majority of 11th grade students I met and talked to in the three schools during my field work told they showed up in their schools only once or twice a week. The reasons for absenteeism were brought into discussion with students in many instances during my class visits in the three schools. Students mostly expressed the same reasons. Here is what Ahmed (grade 11th at Mostafa Kamel Boys' School) said:

Why should I come to the school if teachers are not willing to teach?! They know that we have been through all the lessons in the private classes so they have stopped making any effort. Between the private lessons and studying I have no time to come to school more than once, maximum twice a week to see my friends and play football. Most of the time the teachers are either absent, ready to give up their time with us easily, or busy doing something else.

I discussed with different groups of students in all three schools which days they choose to show up in the school:

Student 1: *I choose the same days that my friends also come to the school.*

Student 2: *I choose the day when I don't have a private lesson later in the day.*

Student 3: *I choose the day of a certain committed teacher whose class I want to attend.*

Student 3: *I choose the day of the PE classes, to play football.*

Student 5: *I choose Thursdays, it's the end of the week and we go out together after school.*

Time management was a big concern for many students. In group discussions, students did quick calculations of their time. Every day they needed (at the minimum) 5 hours for studying, 5 hours to attend private lessons, 8 hours of good sleep, 3 hours to eat and watch TV. Ahmed said:

Coming to school consumes around 6 hours, which means I have to sleep less and study less.

One day, upon leaving the Moustafa Kamel School, Abdu (an 11th grader that I had met in one of the classes) asked if he could talk to me. We sat at the side of the open area around the playground. Abdu was a tiny young man with a pale face. His main concern was that he could not manage his time to study and he needed my advice. Abdu lived in the neighbourhood and came from an educated family with 3 brothers and sisters. He did not have a personal computer because he told his father that it would waste his time. He was studying five subjects and taking tutorial classes in all of them (English, Arabic, Maths, Chemistry and French). He liked Chemistry but had difficulties in both English and Arabic. Out of fear, he had decided to come to school every day. We did simple calculations of his time in a school day as follows: six hours of sleep, three hours for special tutoring, six hours in the school, one hour for prayers, one hour watching TV, and seven hours for studying. He wondered if seven hours a day were enough, because one of his teachers said he should study 18 hours a day. My advice was "even five hours a day can be very good if they are done with concentration". We also discussed how to organize his time between the five subjects by dedicating more studying hours to difficult subjects, after identifying his problems that required improvement. Abdu left our brief discussion with a little smile.

In all three schools, it was clear that school management had given up on the issue of attendance and that there was nothing for them to do. As a result, the schools acted as if they were not accountable to parents or the community in cases of student failure. The girls' school principal desperately asked me in the middle of a discussion of the government's plans for improving learning outcomes: *"If students don't show up at the school, how come the school is held accountable for educational results"* While I was not in a position to answer the principal's question, the one that actually posed itself was: if families and students continue withdrawing from schools at such a high rate, meaning that the school is losing its disciplining subjects, what are the consequences for young people, teachers, the school, and the state?

Absenteeism can be seen by students as simply a matter of time management, concerning the amount of time they spend in private lessons. Calculating the time needed for studying, attending private lessons, attending school, and so on, was a common theme in all the discussions with students in the three schools. The students had come to think that it would not be logical to go to school every day and do almost nothing, while having a very tight time schedule outside school. I argue that absenteeism should also be understood as students voicing their disappointment with the system and calling for change. Witnessing the collapse of the schooling system, the practices of exclusion, and the carelessness of those in charge, young people had chosen to withdraw. Furthermore I argue that instead of functioning as the docile bodies being reproduced at the school venue, students had come up as creative agents capable of commodification of the school itself. For *thanaweya-aama* students, the state school is a commodity that has no value any more. For them, time was too precious to be wasted at school. While absenteeism manifested the devaluation of the state schooling commodity aimed at preparing students to pass the *thanaweya-aama* bottleneck, the private tutorial informal system flourished as the solution. In the following section I explore the private tutoring arena as an alternative pedagogical possibility, and attempt to find some answers.

4.5 Private tutoring: an alternative pedagogical possibility

The majority of 11th grade students I met in the three schools in the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam went for private tutoring in all their subjects and said they would continue the private lessons for the following year. Towards the end of the school year, students mentioned that they had started booking their places with teachers and centres for the following year. They mentioned that the month of August was the latest time to reserve a place (and pay a deposit) with the desired tutors and centres. Students found it strange that I kept asking about their reason for going for private tuition in all their subjects. They asked me: “Have you been living abroad?” It had become the system and there was no way to avoid it. It was not something for discussion in the family as to whether to do this or not. Older brothers and sisters had been through this before. When the decision was made by the family that their children should go for *thanaweya-aama* and continue to higher education, the students knew that going for private lessons was a necessity because very simply they were convinced that they could not rely on the school. All the students I talked to said that “*Teachers don’t teach any more*”. Students mostly saw that teachers at the private centres were more organised and did a much better job.

Families were making considerable sacrifices towards meeting the demands of the *thanaweya-aama* private lessons. Abdu (the 11th grade student at Moustafa Kamel School) said: “*My family has been saving money for the last two years in order to afford the cost of my private lessons*”. Ms. Soad (an Arabic teacher at Nasser School) had a daughter in grade 11. She said:

Since Lamia (her daughter) became a thanaweya-aama student, our house has turned into a private centre. Her father and I didn’t want her to go to private centres which meant going out every day. That’s not right and is a waste of time. Teachers come to our place every day to teach Lamia and other female students. I know it costs more to bring teachers home, but my husband is an engineer and his income allows us to do so.”

The flourishing market in private lessons in Egypt started in the late 1980s to early 1990s following the wave of economic privatisation recommended by the economic adjustment programme (Herrera 2008, Hartman 2007, Bray 2006). It was the time when the Egyptian government withdrew its promise of a guaranteed job for university graduates. Achieving high scores in *thanaweya-aama* exams and reaching their desired college became the obsession for every family with children at the general secondary stage in order to compete in the privatising labour market. Egyptian parents particularly those having children in *thanaweya-aama* became keen to provide their children with educational support in order to reach the desired higher education level. In the meantime, teachers found in the private tutoring an opportunity to supplement their income.

Parallel to the boom in the private tutoring market, state education continued to suffer a gradual deterioration due to very high class density, poor in-service professional development for teachers, over-centralised decision-making, and too much emphasis on high-stake exams systems. For *thanaweya-aama* students, enrolling in private lessons became the main educational service. Secondary schools in particular turned into no more than sites for registration for exams and were almost empty for most of the school year.

The main qualification required for a good private tutor for a *thanaweya-aama* student is her or his ability to predict exam questions or problems and to help students to prepare for the exams. Private tutors who had become stars in the private tuition market were those with a reputation for predicting exam questions. Many teachers, particularly for core subjects (languages, Maths, science, social studies) in all three of the schools did private tutoring. Private tutoring was a source of jealousy and competition between teachers in general and those at the same school in particular. There were the teachers who were seen by their colleagues and novice teachers as the “sharks” of “private lessons”. They were experienced in their subject areas, and reputed to be very good, and expensive. Their private classes were soon filled by students coming from an economic status that could afford their

high prices. There were other teachers who were trying to compete in the private tutoring market, with fewer qualifications, and lower prices. At the school level, teachers who received more attention and demand for their private lessons were very powerful. Teachers for non-core subjects or those who could not or did not care to join the private lessons competition were to a large extent left in the shade.

In addition to teachers who were either employed by the government or private schools, there was another category of individuals involved in private tutoring. They held university degrees in engineering, science, medicine, languages, etc, and due to a very high rate of unemployment, decided to present themselves to owners of private tutoring centres as private tutors for a subject area that is relevant to their academic credentials. Some of them had become very famous in the neighbourhood, particularly those with an academic background in engineering, as tutors for Mathematics, Algebra and Geometry, and their private classes had become very crowded.

Thus teachers, particularly those who were struggling to enter the private market, had made every effort they could to get more students into their lessons and private centres. They behaved very nicely towards the students by removing many of the traditional limits and the formality of the relations between a teacher and students. They socialised with students, talking and laughing, and allowed for an informal relationship to develop. In some instances, they put pressure on students by commenting publically on their performance or even by sending messages to parents that their young people needed support.

Hadia (an 11th grade student) was repeatedly pressured by Mr. Ashraf, her Maths teacher to join his private tuition group. Mr. Ashraf even left messages at her home when she did not show up in school, that she should join his private group. Hadia, who admitted that she was weak at Maths, decided to join the private tuition group, despite what she said:

I don't like Mr. Ashraf. He is boring. He doesn't help me. In fact, he depresses me. He keeps telling us that we are losers and useless.

I will address in Chapter 6 how Hadia ended up leaving the Maths private lessons after telling Mr. Ashraf that she was not benefiting from his tutoring.

The Al-Eman Centre was a private tutoring centre at the heart of the Al-Basatin area. The centre occupied the whole of the second floor of a 5-storey building. The centre and the whole building were owned by Haj Mo'men, who was originally from a small village in Upper Egypt. Haj Mo'men studied agriculture and then travelled to Kuwait where he worked for around 15 years. Coming back from the Gulf with some savings, he decided not to return to his home village. Instead, he settled in Al-Basatin and built the 5 storey building for himself and his children. He was advised by some teachers to turn the second floor of the building into a private tutoring centre. The centre included rooms of various sizes: several small rooms for small groups of students (8 to 10), medium-sized rooms for around 25 students, and a large room that could accommodate close to a hundred students. The centre served students from all educational stages: primary, middle and secondary.

I went to the Al Eman Centre with Youssef, who is one of its founders. It took Youssef a long time and much convincing and assuring Haj Mo'men to allow me to visit the centre. As the practice of private tuition was considered illegal, and in order to avoid paying taxes, teachers and owners were always suspicious of strangers and were not willing to allow them to walk into private lesson centres and venues. Youssef looked very worried every time I took a photograph.

Figure 7: A private tutoring centre. A photo by MF at the Al Eman Centre on 12th April 2010



Haj Mo'men himself sat at the entrance of the centre collecting the fees from students who paid fees for each lesson they attend. Upon making the payment, students were given special cards to be handed to the tutor when they joined his class. After finishing the lesson, the cards were used to process the payment for the teacher who received 70% while Haj Mo'men received 30%. Youssef said this was acceptable as he preferred going to the centre rather than to students' houses. The cost per 90-minute lesson is on average 30 Egyptian Pounds per student. I was told that the fees had been set at this low rate so that they would be affordable for families in the neighbourhood. The cost per lesson became higher towards the end of the year when the centre started the so-called "revision classes". These revision classes were mainly dedicated to preparing students for exams, and the students practised answering questions that were potential exam questions. During the visit, several small rooms were occupied by small groups of students (12 to 15) with their tutor sitting around a rectangular table. We waited in one of the small rooms. On the side of the room there was a shelf with packs of flyers that Haj Mo'men had printed to market the centre's services.

In addition to flyers, big posters had also been produced and hung all over the centre's walls. The posters and flyers included the names of teachers and the timing of their lessons every week. These posters and flyers always added a title to the name of the teacher, such as "The famous", "The outstanding", "The unique", "The master of ...", etc to show that the centre had the best tutors on board. The posters

and flyers normally included a Quran verse to encourage students to study hard and some included a prayer to be said before studying.

I joined Youssef's biology lesson for a large group (around 40 students) of 11th grade male and female students. The students were sitting in a traditional lecture setting. As a tutor, Youssef was different from being a teacher at school. At the school I saw him trying to apply active learning practices and he encouraged students' participation and cooperative learning. As a tutor, he was performing according to students' expectations to be ready for exams. Despite the great effort made by Youssef to explain the biology lesson, it was a long lecture loaded with a great deal of new information and no dialogue. A few students were taking notes, while others were not really paying attention. Many students were relying on the booklet that was prepared by the teacher and distributed at the end of each lesson. The booklet provided a summary of the contents of the lesson, and important questions and strategies to answer them. Youssef showed me the booklet for the lesson and was proud of his exertions in preparing it. He explained that each tutor prepared her/his booklets for her/his tutees. The booklet was part of the package that students pay for. Students mostly relied on these booklets for their studying and for exam preparation.

After the lesson we went back to the waiting room to talk more to Haj Mo'men. He talked to Youssef about the promotion he was preparing for the *thanaweya-aama* revision lessons planned to start one month before exams. Haj Mo'men was worried about a new student assessment system the Ministry was planning to apply the following year. According to Haj Mo'men, the new assessment system would allow teachers to control 50% of the students' final grades. The 50% would be used to evaluate students' activities, class participation, and attendance. Haj Mo'men believed that the new system would reduce the demand on private lessons which meant that some centres would have to close or reduce their services. Haj Mo'men

said he made sure to recruit the best teachers in the neighbourhood. In order to ensure his clients' (students') satisfaction, he usually walked into the class after the teacher had finished and asked students whether they were satisfied with the teacher's performance. Haj Mo'men said that he fired teachers when students were repeatedly dissatisfied with their performance.

Students went to the private tutoring in their normal clothing (no uniform) and were mostly organised in mixed groups (boys and girls) unlike the school. They mentioned that going to the private lessons was a sort of escape away from the schooling system and family pressures. Girls, particularly those coming from conservative families that did not allow girls to go out alone, regarded private lessons as a way out to see their friends and socialise a little. In a discussion with a group of 11th grade female students at Nasser girls' school about private tutoring, I asked:

Imagine that next year the school and the quality of education is everything that you want, will you be willing to give up on going to private lessons and save all the money your family has to pay?

They all replied in unison with a loud NO. One student said:

Mainly, the quality of education will take ages to improve. It's not fair; it has become the only way for us to go out. Boys can go out whenever they want. For us girls, our time is divided between studying, helping with home chores, and going to school for some time. We are mostly not allowed to go out as a group of friends. Going out has to be with my mother or my older sister or brother.

Students estimated that private tutoring consumed around 30 hours a week. These 30 hours included the time for what they called "sankaha" or "fooling around" before and after lessons. By "fooling around" or "sankaha", Mariam (an 11th grader at the Al-Haditha School) explained:

Walking slowly with a group of other students to the place for the lesson, walking slowly back home and maybe stopping for a drink or for a little chat and a few laughs, and stopping at a shopping mall to get an idea about new clothes, accessories, and makeup. We talk about a lot of things: about music, studying, the school, teachers, and also about boys.

Female students also implied, in the middle of informal discussions, that some girls also used the chance of going out to meet boys before or after the private lesson. They did not want to talk in detail about this issue nor about the fact that, in such a conservative community, going out to private lessons was the only chance to interact with boys.

Young women, in particular, were subjected to their families' control, which imposed restrictions on their movements and existence in the public sphere. Families had come to be obsessed about controlling young women's sexuality and mixed-gender socialisation. Such obsession went further in some cases to restricting friendship and peer-relations with other girls and even not allowing girls to leave home unless accompanied by a family member. The private tutoring informality and flexibility, away from formal schooling discipline, has granted girls the space to manoeuvre their families' control over their movements and relationships. They have creatively used the time allocated to their private lessons to connect with their peer groups, have some leisure time, and meet boys away from the family and local community supervision. As such, I maintain that girls have used private tutoring as an escape from oppressive regimes at home.

Although students somehow opposed state schooling, as part of the system, yet with societal and familial pressures they attended private tutoring centres in order to progress within the system. A legitimate question here is, what exactly were students then opposing and why? In answering this question, I am aware of the danger of becoming trapped in an agency-structure dichotomy that would lead to what Abu-Lughod (1990b) describes as a tendency to romanticize resistance. To Abu-Lughod, such romanticising occurs when resistance is reduced to "signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated" (Abu-Lughod 1990:42). Along the lines of

thinking of Abu-Lughod and Foucault's work on "governmentality" of the transversal nature of power relations (Foucault 2001), these young people were involved in multiple intersecting power-relations within the family and the school.

First, the cultural capital of the *thanaweya-aama* educational credentials obliged families to make sacrifices in order to be able to afford tutoring. While valuing the educational cultural capital, families were also impacted by emerging market values and were aware of privatising labour market expectations. If the family could not afford to send young people to private schools to obtain other high school certificates, then passing *thanaweya-aama* was an obligation. With private tutoring investment, while supporting young people's position in withdrawing from regular schooling, families were seeking a return to their investment. Young people were at the centre of the family's attention and observation on how they used their time and whether they were studying enough to achieve the desired scores. They were fully aware that their parents were carrying the financial burden of their education after having given up on the state's promise for free "education for all". Abdu (the 11th grader at Moustafa Kamel School) had realised the sacrifices his family had made to support his private lessons and perhaps that made him tense about managing his time. Certainly he did not want to disappoint his family.

Second, young people replaced the daily schooling hegemonic discipline by the informality of private lessons that allowed them autonomy and flexibility. At school, students were not allowed to choose their teachers or classes, or even their school uniform. While it was true that families and students were somehow obliged to go for private lessons and their ability to choose a private service within the neighbourhood was to some extent affected by a family's financial capability, still the private lesson arrangements granted students the privilege of choosing between different teachers, different locations, and flexible time schedules. Young people were strategically establishing their own networks and systems of support and solidarity with their peer groups and friends around their private tutoring plans. Friends or close colleagues go to lessons together. As Mariam (the 11th grader) had implied, female students were utilising the opportunity of going to private lessons as

a window of release to go out with friends and having some leisure time away from oppressive regimes at home and *thanaweya-aama* pressures.

Third, young people opposed the system's deteriorating quality of teaching and were replacing it by a pedagogical alternative that, despite being run by teachers from the system, satisfied young people's demands and expectations in exchange for teachers' financial benefits. This complex process had led to the reconfiguring of young people's relations with teachers at the venues of the school and the private tutoring. Students were no longer schooling subjects to be disciplined but rather, customers in the educational market to be satisfied. At the school venue, students were easily connecting and establishing a rapport with those famous and well-known teachers in the market. Other teachers who were seeking to find their place in the private market would do anything to attract more students to their private groups. Some teachers, such as Mr. Ashraf the Maths teacher at the Nasser School, would even attempt to force students into their tutoring groups. At the venue of the private lesson centre, students could report to the owner of the centre if they were not satisfied with the performance of the teachers. If not in a centre, students could leave the private lesson group if not satisfied with the teacher's services. That was exactly what Hadia did when she became dissatisfied with Mr. Ashraf (her Maths tutor). In fact, realising how vital client satisfaction was to the success of his centre, Haj Mo'men invited students' feedback on teachers' performance.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides a vision of the highly contradictory nature of Egypt's secondary schooling and its frustrating and confusing reality. In this chapter I have argued that the Egyptian schooling system after thirty years under Mubarak's rule is not qualified either to play its intended role in maintaining "national security" for the Egyptian state, or to fulfil the state's agenda in preparing young Egyptians for supporting the state's measures for economic reform.

Teachers, assumed to be “technicians of behaviour” and “engineers of conduct” (Foucault 1979: 294), are pointing out the huge widening gap and the growing distrust between themselves and the system. Impacted by socioeconomic factors and an over-centralised authoritative educational system, teachers are no longer qualified to assume the schooling hegemonic disciplinary responsibilities.

I have argued that Egyptian *thanaweya-aama* students have an agency that enables them to creatively and strategically contest the schooling system, occupy the space of education, and negotiate new meanings of schooling. In doing so, I have looked at students’ chaotic and careless tactics and at students’ absenteeism. I maintain that chaotic and careless tactics and absenteeism might be understood as strategies calling for an inclusive schooling system. Young people witnessing the collapse of the schooling system, practices of exclusion and humiliation, and the carelessness of those in charge, have chosen to act chaotically and/or to withdraw. I have argued that their chaotic behaviour and withdrawal actions are perhaps either unconscious or perhaps a tactical use of the instrument of their oppression (Boddy 1989) in response to the state school exclusion practices. Young people’s agency in this context might be conceptualised as the capacity of being conscious of one’s own choices as opposed to the school hegemonic discipline (Mahmoud 2006:8). Furthermore, I have argued that instead of functioning as the docile bodies being reproduced at the school venue, students have emerged as creative agents capable of commodification of the school itself. For *thanaweya-aama* students, time is too precious to be wasted at school.

Edmunds and Turner argue that “generations shift from being a passive cohort (‘generation in itself’) into a politically active and self-conscious cohort (‘generation for itself’) when they are able to exploit resources (political/educational/economic) to innovate in cultural, intellectual or political spheres” (Edmunds and Turner 2005: 562). Female students’ narratives confirm an emerging active generational consciousness among young female Egyptians that is manifested in how they creatively exploit the school venue and the educational space at large in advocating their subjectivities and agency.

My intention has been neither to prove that the school has collapsed and is not functioning any more, nor to say that Egyptian young people's agency has become dominant in Egyptian schools. I attempt to take the young people's trajectories and strategies seriously, considering the way in which young people make sense of these for their lives. In fact, my intention in understanding young people's position towards state schooling is to allow it to inform us about the "complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power" (Abu-Lughod 1990b:53) within the social and educational arena. In order to understand young people's position, we should pay attention to "the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power" (Abu-Lughod 1990b:53). Foucault's works on governmentality stress that "the intensification or concentration of power-relations .. becomes the potential dissolution of the purely vertical, oppressive, model .. Power comes to be seen as 'transversal' (Foucault 2001:329) and by no means solely oppressive" (Leask 2012: 62).

With the young people's everyday tactics and oppositional acts to state schooling, the increasing rates of students' absenteeism, and the flourishing of the private tutoring market, the transversal and "complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power" (Abu-Lughod 1990b:53) are at play within the educational arena, striving for contestation of the entire system of education towards more inclusion and less hegemony. Such interworkings were significant among other factors that triggered young people's forceful involvement in the 2011 street actions that have been and still are transforming the Egyptian political situation.

At the intersections of state schooling discipline, discourses and failures that were explored in the school ethnography in Chapters 3 and 4, I will explore in the next chapter how young people are negotiating their future fears and aspirations.

CHAPTER 5

Negotiating meritocratic aspirations and hopelessness

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I suggest that the transversal educational exclusionary circumstances of *thanaweya-aama* studentship constrain the sorts of subjects that students can become and at the same time constitute them as young and educated in the Egyptian context. In particular, I argue that Egyptian students' negotiations of notions of success and self-realisation reveal a number of ambivalences through which students' subjects are constituted. As such, negotiations carry fragments of western notions of individuality³⁶ (Jeffrey 2008: 741-3), and local culturally idealised trajectories of national, communal and pious commitments and submission to patriarchal social norms. I further argue that such communal and nationalist commitments for some young people go beyond the model of the "good citizen" towards exploring and negotiating notions of "*taghyeer*" (change) in what they witness of examples of corruption, and absence of equity and justice.

The main theme of this chapter is to explore the extent to which young people, while negotiating their fears of failure and risks of exclusion were connecting these fears with what they witnessed of the collapse of the schooling system and the failure of the state's welfare system. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi (2000, cited in Singerman 2007), argues that a new generation of the Arab youth has been brought into the post-independence dream, where universal education is the dream of upward social mobility, and yet their hopes have not been fulfilled. Education, to a large extent, has failed to act as an agent of social mobility (Bennani-Chraïbi 2000:147). The youth stayed in schools, their parents invested in private tutoring, they went for exams and succeeded, and then what happened? The state did not meet its promise to provide

³⁶ "Fragments of Western notions of individuality" here refers to recent geographies and sociologies cited in Jeffrey (2008: 741) on Western youth, highlighting what he described as "interlinked but distinct themes" regarding Western young people's lives which are "the decline of class, fluid identities, and transformation in young people's political strategies" (2008: 741).

employment or to provide a dynamic labour market following the neo-liberal reforms (Singerman, 2007:35).

A cross-cutting theme in this chapter is concerned with how the students negotiated meritocratic aspirations and at the same time hopelessness about the future due to the realities of life in the capital city of unemployment, corruption and *wasta* networks. The notion of hopelessness and the fact that young people were not taken seriously turned, for some of them, into aspirations for changing (*taghyeer*) the system itself.

5.2 Narratives of tension, boredom and despair

Thanaweya-aama, as explained in more detail in Chapter 2, is considered by students, parents and educators as a significant benchmark. *Thanaweya-aama* students consider the three-year period of their secondary school to be a very tough one. It starts immediately on the completion of their compulsory basic education at the age of fourteen. At such an early age, young people are obliged to make some difficult decisions about their future. They choose to go for the challenge of *thanaweya-aama*, which would lead them to higher education rather than joining a secondary vocational school, which would be the end of their educational ambition. Soon, towards the end of grade 10 and moving on to grade 11, they have to take another decision: between studying arts or science. It is a decision that will affect their area of study at university. In addition, when starting grade 11, they start to prepare for the exam at the end of each of the eleventh and twelfth grades. *Thanaweya-aama* students and their families are known for being always overwhelmed by studying and exam pressures and going through periods of depression and frustration. Other families in the neighbourhood sympathize with the families who have young people at the *thanaweya-aama* stage and always express the wish that the latter will pass through such a hard period successfully. Among the many criticisms of the way the government handles the dilemma of *thanaweya-*

aama, are accusations that the political regime intentionally maintains this system in order to keep young people busy and pressured all the time, thereby ensuring they do not become involved in any political activism.

During my field work, a major topic of young people's narratives, given their status as *thanaweya-aama* students, revolved around aspirations for the future and the fear of failure. Ahmed was an 11th grade student in the mixed experimental language school. He was from an educated family (both his parents are university graduates) and lived in the Saqr Qurish area, which is adjacent to the Maadi privileged neighbourhood. As explained before, families who send children to such experimental language schools were among those willing to invest more money in order to gain an education service that was of a better quality than the regular state education. However, despite the promise that students enrolled in such experimental schools would receive a better quality education, through discussions these students repeated the same complaints and frustrations about the schooling and exams system.

Ahmed: Thinking of exams makes me feel very depressed. I am afraid of failing my exams and then failing to go to the college I want. Why have they decided to arrange exams in such way that despite all our efforts and our families' sacrifices over the three years of thanaweya-aama in studying and tutoring classes, all of it is reduced to achieving in exams. It's not fair that only my scores in exams will determine my future. I can't even think about the college of my dreams because it all depends on my scores. I don't study or go to private tutoring to learn but rather to prepare for exams. Failure is not about not passing exams but mainly about failing to get the required scores. You have asked us before if we practise or do anything else with our time besides being a student. Actually, we can't afford to do anything else with our time other than attending school and private tuition, and study.

Ahmed voiced the fears, frustrations, and sense of boredom of many *thanaweya-aama* students. For young people, passing from *thanaweya-aama* to college life was not just a step in their academic life but rather a big challenge through which they broke the vicious circle and state of boredom they lived in, and which would certainly have an impact on their future. For the three year period of *thanaweya-aama*, young people had only one duty, which was to study for exams that would

determine their future. According to Schielke (2008), rural Egyptian "young men do not attribute boredom to saturation by media, consumption, and a search for spectacular experience as some Western voices do (e.g., Klapp1986: 117-129). Rural boredom is primarily framed as deprivation, not saturation" (Schielke 2008: 256). While very busy with studying, informal urban life for *thanaweya-aama* young people like Ahmed was on the one hand tense, due to the burden of the responsibility to succeed and fear of failing, and on the other hand boring due to repetition and frustration. Ahmed's response to my question about what *thanaweya-aama* students did with their time besides studying confirms the capacity to aim for more, and the awareness that there are alternatives to the monotony of the everyday schedule and the on-going state of tension. Such contradictory and hybrid experiences of tension and boredom manifest the extent to which such experiences were connected to "aspiration and a progressive modality of time" (Schielke 2008: 257).

Amina, at the time, was a 16 year old 11th grader at the girls' school. She was an outspoken and bright young woman, who lived in Dar-elsalam area with her family. Her father was a carpenter, and her mother worked in a factory in the neighbourhood to support the family. Amina had a twin sister who left school and was getting ready for marriage. Her older brother passed away two years ago and she had another brother who was 10 years old:

Amina: I think I need a psychiatrist.

MF: why?

Amina: I am in a very bad mood and feel very pressured and unable to study. I am afraid of the unknown and what might happen all of a sudden and change my life. I can't afford to fail. My biggest fear is to fail thanaweya-aama because of the crisis in my family.

MF: What's happening with your family?

Amina: My parents got divorced last week. He (referring to her father) left home two months ago. Last Thursday I was at a private lesson when he called me and my sister who was with her fiancé and asked us to come home and

told us that he had divorced our mother. He is 56 years old and is getting married to a woman who is 27. She has never been married before. I wonder what makes a girl, who has never married before, marry a 56 year old man. She told him: I am afraid of your daughters. I am very attached to my youngest brother Mohamed. I told him we are not afraid of your new wife, but I am worried about Mohamed and that the new wife would mistreat him. He wants to bring her to live with us. I am in thanaweya-aama and my sister is getting married soon. I won't allow my mother to serve his new wife and I am scared that his new wife may start to ask me to leave my studying to take care of the household chores. Things are very stressful at home. My mother knew that the divorce was coming sooner or later. Actually she asked for the divorce, and because of that, he wanted her to give up all her rights and entitlements. She refused. He wanted to take all our furniture for his new house. She refused that too. He has beaten my mother for that. He has taken her bedroom furniture for his new wife. He still sometimes helps with the fees for my private lessons. Now after the divorce I am afraid that he will stop any financial support for my tutoring classes and my higher education if I pass the thanaweya-aama exams. He (still referring to her father) has three children from a previous marriage and none of them went to school. He was very happy when my sister dropped out of school and he is not interested that I finish thanaweya-aama and go to college. He kept telling me and my sister that we've got no future in education. My mother works hard to support us and my sister's marriage. I want to pass my exams and go to college because this is the only way to support my mother and brother financially in the future. If I fail my exams and lose my chance to go to college, particularly after my parents' divorce, there will be a crisis. I am sure that my mother will insist that I get married very soon. Not having older brothers and after my father has left home, she will insist that I get married.

Both Ahmed and Amina dreamed about passing their *thanaweya-aama* exams and reaching the college they wanted. While surviving *thanaweya-aama* and starting college life was a break-through for Ahmed, it was crucial for Amina in coping with her family crisis and as the only way for social mobility. For Amina, surviving *thanaweya-aama* and finishing college would allow her to support her family, so they could move up and away from what she currently saw as a crisis situation. Such modest ambition in Amina's case was “inherently paired with despair and frustration because practical circumstances make it difficult or impossible to realize one's ambitions” (Schielke 2009:172). Amina brought gender and class aspects to the understanding of young people's negotiations of *thanaweya-aama* challenges by giving a voice to young women coming from urban poor families. Amina, while

feeling sorry for her mother, was worried about how her father's new marriage would affect the financial support for her tutoring. For Amina, failing *thanaweya-aama* would mean disappointing her mother and most probably being obliged to accept an early marriage. She was well aware that she was being subjected, like her sister, to attempts at control over her sexuality through early marriage. The only way out for her was to succeed in obtaining the scores that would qualify her for college. Tension and boredom in Amina's case were paired, like that of the Rabi Das young women in West Bengal, India (Ganguly-Scrase 2007), with the circumstances and disadvantages of the life of the "urban poor".

Karim, at the time, was an 11th grade student in the Don Bosco Technical Institute located in Shubra, a lower middle class neighbourhood in northern Cairo. Karim lived in the Al-Daher area which is another lower middle class neighbourhood located in the middle of Cairo, and his father worked as a driver in a private company. Karim is one of the young people I had met in Tahrir.

Karim: I was in a state school before joining Don Bosco. I joined this school to escape thanaweya-aama with all its tension. We study Electricity, Maths, Physics, Social Studies, Italian and Arabic. The study in the school is all in Italian. Don Bosco is a sort of private vocational high school that can lead to university education. It qualifies me to go to the Faculty of Engineering if I get high scores. The degree is also accredited in Italy. In order to join the school I had to go through a number of admission tests. In my school there is no private tuition and the teacher has to do his job. If he doesn't, I have the right to complain and the school admin is responsible for taking action. After the revolution, the school disciplinary system became stricter. We have two sections, Mechanical and Electricity. I decided to study electricity because it opens more job opportunities in the future.

I am truly proud to be at Don Bosco but my biggest fears are about the fact that the education authorities recognize Don Bosco as another vocational high school. As you may know, such vocational high schools are known for being horrible. There is news that the government will ban school-leavers of vocational education from joining the School of Engineering. The government claim for such upcoming policies is that the degree of the vocational school doesn't qualify students with credentials equal to the thanaweya-aama certificate. My school is not a normal vocational school and we are way more qualified than state thanaweya-aama students to join the Faculty of Engineering. Such a decision would mean ruining my dreams and those of

many others and then we can't go on to higher education simply because the School of Engineering is our only option.

I am not worried about finding a job because school-leavers of Don Bosco are known in the market and can find a job. I am just worried that I can't go to university. I may have to go to Italy for my higher education. There is an Italian University here in Egypt but it's too expensive for me. I don't mind if people say that I am a school-leaver of a vocational education but we are perceived by the government as lower quality school-leavers.

Karim was not a typical *thanaweya-aama* student. He and his family had chosen the private vocational school with the promise of no private tuition, a better schooling system, a guaranteed place in the college, and a better chance for a place in the job market. However, with the government's expected restrictions on allowing school-leavers of vocational education to join the School of Engineering, Karim and other Don Bosco students feared that their dreams were being compromised.

Young people were also worried about university studies and what exactly to expect as university students and whether they would have a fair chance to succeed. Ahmed, Marwan, and Khaled, at the time, were 11th grade *thanaweya-aama* students at the boy's school. They showed up at the school together twice a week. They also went together for private lessons in all five subjects for the 11th grade. The three friends came from educated families, and all lived in the Al-Basatin area. Ahmed's father was an accountant and worked for the government. Marwan's father was an agronomist, also in the government. Khaled's father was an engineer and worked for a private company. At the time of talking to them, Ahmed and Marwan had not made up their minds about their future studies; however, Khaled wanted to study Engineering.

Ahmed: *I am very frustrated (mohbat) because of this school*

MF: *What do you mean by frustrated?*

Ahmed: *Well, first I have to waste my time and come, and now even more with the new Minster, as they want us to come every day. As you can see, coming to this school is a complete waste of time. We do almost nothing all the time. If a teacher shows up at the class he shouts and curses all the time. Well, there are just a few good teachers, but students will not give them the*

chance to teach. As a student I have no rights in the school. We are being treated very badly.

MF: *Have you made up your minds about your future college studies?*

Marwan: *No, I haven't decided yet. Actually, it won't make any difference what I decide. You know, in the first place what we learn at school is useless. The evidence is that most university graduates don't find a job. Even if I find a job, how much money I will make? Very little.*

Ahmed: *The studying we do here at school and then at the college is not enough for a real job and a good income. So what we end up with is a certificate that we hang on the wall. Useless, right?*

MF: *What do you think can be done about this?*

Khaled: *As students we can't do anything. We have no time to think or do anything other than being a thanaweya-aama student. But those in charge have to find solutions to improve the education system. They need to study examples in other countries in Europe, the USA and Japan and learn what they did with their education systems. Teachers' salaries here are very low. All those who go for a teaching job, they do it because they didn't find a better job. They need to learn what other countries do to prepare youth our age and older to learn skills needed for the market.*

Ahmed: *The private universities the government have allowed in the last years are creating inequalities between thanaweya-aama leavers.*

MF: *Ahmed, what do you mean by creating inequalities?*

Ahmed: *Yes, let's assume that Khaled (his friend) achieves lower scores than me. He still can find a place at the college he aspires to, as long as his family can afford the fees of the private university, while I can't because my family can't afford the expensive fees. This is simply due to the fact that the private universities' admission system is not the same as the one for the state universities.*

The government of Egypt during Nasser's time made the promise to make higher education free for all Egyptians. That was the case until ten years ago when the government started to allow business men to establish private universities. By 2010, there were more than 30 private universities and higher education institutes, and the number was growing, serving thousands of young people coming from families capable of affording the fees of private higher education.

Young people's narratives about their fears of failing to join the college they wanted, raise critical questions about the official educational discourse which, while emphasising a “social contract based on democracy, freedom, and social justice” (MOE: 2007), fails to support the most modest ambitions of the young generations. In fact, it forces them into a vicious cycle of despair and frustration. Young people's experiences with *thanaweya-aama*, while blended with ambition for college studying, are full of risks, uncertainties, and fears of failure. The narratives of young people revealed the extent to which they perceived passing the *thanaweya-aama* bottle neck as constituting their educational cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In the meantime, young people's narratives also revealed the extent to which they were aware of how the educational system was being used in attempts to determine them and reproduce domination and exclusion.

Even talented young people were not sure whether choosing a college subject that corresponded with their talent would bring them closer to achieving success. Noura, at the time, was a 16-year-old 11th grader in the girls' school. She lived in the middle-class New-Maadi area close to the school. Her parents were divorced and she lived with her father and her 13-year-old sister. Noura's father had a university degree in commerce and owned a small real estate company in the Maadi area. Noura had shown me several of her drawings, and it was obvious that she was talented at drawing:

Noura: *I like drawing so much and I am a member in the school's arts activity group.*

MF: *Do you plan to study art when you go to college?*

Noura: *I want to study fine arts when I go to college. But my father is not convinced that I should do so. He said that it will not help me to secure a real job. I feel he is right about that. He said: I want you to go to college and study mass communication or something else that can secure you a job, and you can keep practising drawing as a hobby.*

Amro was an 11th grade student at the Pyramids School, Giza when I knew him as one of the Tahririan frontline “revolutionaries” and fighters facing the aggression of the police and army. Amro, a tall, well-built young man who talks very fast, was very proud of himself and of his involvement in the revolution. He lived in the lower middle class area of Fiesal in Giza with his family: his father, who is a government official; his mother, who is a housewife; and his only younger sister. I met Amro shortly after the *thanaweya-aama* results had been announced:

Doing graffiti during the revolution changed my life and made me to want to study art and design. I started to dream about studying graphic design but my thanaweya-aama scores won't allow me to reach this dream. My scores may get me into the Faculty of Mass Communication. There I can study advertising, which could be close to my interests. I consider that I have failed thanaweya-aama as I couldn't achieve the scores I wanted. Actually, having been in the streets after the revolution I didn't expect to pass in the first place. I didn't achieve the scores I wanted in the thanaweya-aama exams and at the end I am being enrolled in a higher education course that isn't what I aspire to. But I will live with it and can make something out of studying mass media like many journalists I know.

The narratives of Karim, Ahmed, Noura and Amro, around taking their steps to college life expressed the fears and frustrations that their dreams were being somehow compromised. They either would be obliged to study, or would have to choose to study something other than what they had been longing to study. Neither the colleges' admission policies nor the job market were working for the benefit of the young people. They were convinced that the system was not working for their favour anymore; however, each of them somehow was working on surviving the situation.

The question here is how the *thanaweya-aama* students' subjectivities were constituted while they made sense of their feelings of despair, frustration, uncertainty and exclusion. Between a high-stake exams system, family pressures, and colleges' admission policies, young people were confronted with an unfair set of material circumstances. It might be suggested that the circumstances of *thanaweya-aama* studentship “constrain the sorts of subjects that students can be at the same

time as they constitute students" (Youdell 2006:37). In other words, while negotiating their *thanaweya-aama* experiences and aspirations to college life, young people were discursively constituted and constrained. In the middle of matrices of the transversal class, gender, and educational inclusion and exclusion discourses, new possibilities arose for overcoming the conventional and familiar links. Amina, Karim, Ahmed, and Amro's negotiations of their class, gender, ability, disability, inclusion, and exclusion were "examples of shifts in the implicit .. discourses" (Youdell 2006: 40) of being young and a student in the Egyptian context. While confirming the value of the educational cultural capital, they even were more aware of the attempts to reproduce patriarchy and inequity within the educational arena.

The next section will take this discussion further towards young people's negotiations of their own aspirations about the future and their dreams of success.

5.3 Wealth and power aspirations, and *wasta* realities

Young people's narratives on the meanings of success aspired to culturally idealised trajectories towards mature manhood and womanhood. Coming from urban lower middle income families, young men had voiced an image of success that was somehow organised around and in relation to the living standard of wealthier citizens.

In a discussion with a group of students in the boy's school, male students talked about what it meant to be a successful man in the future. Some students responded that being successful would mean benefiting society, being a good citizen, supporting one's parents, and fearing God. However, Ahmed (a friend of Khaled and Marwan) disagreed with his colleagues:

Ahmed: I don't agree, this is not success for me.

MF: So, what's success for you?

Ahmed (starting to speak loudly in a theatrical tone as if he wanted to attract the attention of his colleagues):

Five issues will be a sign of being successful. First, a bank deposit that would give me a monthly income of at least 6,000 pounds, which would allow me to buy anything I wanted. Second, a job with a good salary. Third, a nice big house. Fourth, a nice big car. Fifth: getting married to a beautiful wife and having a big family of at least 3 children.

The rest of the students were laughing and commenting on each of the five signs mentioned by Ahmed, showing their agreement with him.

The students presented somehow inconsistent meanings of success. Ahmed and the students who seemed to agree with his views were fantasising about an image of wealth and prosperity. However, other students during the same discussion presented meanings that were more associated with notions of the “good citizen”. The latter view on the meaning of success will be addressed later in this section in more detail, highlighting the tension between this view and the fact that the system had failed them.

Young men had also fantasised about becoming military or police professionals, given the discourse of power and control that was bound up with the power of the political regime. Members of the group of male students in Mostafa Kamel boys’ School who called themselves the “Al Kofar” group fantasised about this:

Nasser: I will join the police academy. I want to become a police officer.

MF: Why a police officer in particular?

Nasser: Being a police officer allows me to give a hard time to anyone who bothers me. I will also make good money. All the "kofar" are planning to apply for the police academy.

Amro “the revolutionary” had a similar fantasy:

In the past I strongly wanted to join the special forces of the military, and even prepared the papers for this. It's the army branch responsible for special

operations. I have someone in my family who joined this force. After the revolution I withdrew the application and got rid of it. I can't spend the rest of my life in the army after this experience.

It is a fact that Mubarak, who was originally a military General, depended on the power of the army to continue ruling Egypt for about 30 years. It is also a fact that the Mubarak regime extensively utilised the police forces against any form of opposition. It became a public discourse that military and police officers were in return granted numerous benefits and power. The fantasies of some young people about becoming police or military officers in the future were affected by the public discourse within the Egyptian context about the power granted by the political regime to the police and the army.

Ahmed, Amro, and the Al-Kofar, in negotiating notions and meanings of success, aspired to being rich and powerful. Such aspirations fitted with the “culturally idealised trajectory towards mature manhood” (Osella and Osella 2000:118) within the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam informal urban context (Hoodfar and Singerman 1996, Hoodfar 1997, Schielke 2009a). Young men’s narratives suggested that the extent to which they aspired to becoming wealthy and powerful was a sign of successful masculinity. Along these lines, young men perceived their lives as somehow organised around and in relation to the living standards of wealthier citizens (Kaplan 2006). “Through ‘voyeurism’ and window-shopping” (Abaza 2006:215), images of globalised consumerism in the public spaces of the city of Cairo became mixed with young people’s aspirations about the future and their fulfilment of fantasies and expectations.

Abeer is an 11th grade student living in the Al-Basatin area. Her father owns a car maintenance workshop in the neighbourhood:

I dream of finishing my college studies, and becoming a well-educated person, getting married to a good person, living in a nice place, working and making a difference to my country. I want to have at least two kids.

I want to be someone famous and have an important position. I also dream of travelling abroad and seeing the world. I especially want to go to France, Italy and Dubai.

Sometimes I dream of being very rich, living in a big villa, and owning an expensive car. All these dreams depend on whether I get the good scores that can get me into the college of communication studies or drama.

I know that as a female, finding a good job is not easy and sometimes it's impossible. I also know that men take all the good jobs and that they don't see us working. But I don't accept that I am less than men or that they can do things that I can't do. I will not just get married and stay home. I will have a journalism or media-related job.

Despite the fact that a rich husband would mean better life conditions, I dream of getting married to a person I love, not just because of money. He should be successful, even if his education level is lower than mine.

Young women have also voiced an image of aspiring to the living standards of wealthier citizens. In doing so, young women's views on the meaning of success is gendered, expressing an ambivalent image of a longing for equity, yet in the meantime submitting to patriarchal social norms. Such ambivalence was manifested in Abeer's ambition for a good job, while recognising at the same time the patriarchal norm that privileges men in the labour market. Abeer also contradicted herself in dreaming about being very rich and yet not necessarily getting married to a rich husband but rather to the person she loved. More than male students, young women emphasised the social capital of forming a family and having children. Abeer was looking for marriage with a man who would be good, educated and successful. Manifesting a gendered meaning of success, a good marriage was consistently part of the equation when young women expressed their views about the meaning of success. Along the same lines, early marriage at high school age was a common theme mentioned in many of the female students' narratives.

Amina (the young woman encountered earlier in this chapter) talked about her twin sister's marriage at the age of 17 (grade 11):

Farida is my twin sister. She was here in the school with us and finished grade 10. She was supposed to be in grade 11 now with me. Last summer she got a marriage proposal from a much older man than her in our neighbourhood and she accepted. They will get married in summer. I think she is happy that she is getting married soon. He finished a high school vocational diploma and makes good money. My mother encouraged her to leave the school and get married. With our parents' divorce, my sister's marriage will reduce the responsibility and educational financial burden on my mother.

Some girls who are currently in the school are already engaged and will marry after they finish thanaweya-aama and who knows, maybe they will get married before they complete their degree. In most cases, families and girls would accept a rich husband who will secure her a good living standard. A good marriage deal for them is a big success compared to the hassle of thanaweya-aama that most probably will lead to unemployment. In general, men in our neighbourhood prefer to marry a young girl with a lower education level than themselves. However, having the certificate of thanaweya-aama will mostly guarantee a husband with a good education level but not necessarily a good income. If she doesn't complete thanaweya-aama, she will be obliged to marry whoever her parents accept.

MF: Will you agree to leave thanaweya-aama and get married to a rich husband if you get such a marriage proposal?

Amina: My mother would want this to happen, but no, I want to finish thanaweya-aama and go to college.

A few months later and upon the announcement of the *thanaweya-aama* results, I had not seen Amina at the school but I knew that she had successfully passed grade 11 and was moving to grade 12. I called Amina on her mobile to congratulate her, and was surprised when she said "wrong number". Later on, when I asked her friend Noura about what was happening with Amina, Noura told me that Amina was going to be married soon and that she had not seen her any more.

Youssef, the teacher of biology (my guide at the school and in the neighbourhood) explained the view of parents in the neighbourhood on girls' early marriage:

The well-off men in the neighbourhood are those involved in the quarry and marble business. For most families, a girl's marriage to a rich man in the quarry business is a big achievement. It means improving the living

conditions of the whole family of the girl. At the same time it's also considered a protection for the girl. Many families would even accept that their girl is going to be the second wife. For them, dropping the girl's education plans for an early good marriage deal is a "success". In doing so, they make a comparison between the immediate good marriage offer and keeping the girl in the school, going through the hassle of private tutoring, carrying the burden of college education, and God knows whether then the girl might end up staying home unmarried and unemployed.

The case of the two sisters Amina and Farida shows how the cultural capital of education is gendered in the course of the decision making: whether to drop educational plans and go for an early marriage deal or to continue the investment with the hope that it will help to secure a good marriage. Fears of uncertainties and exclusion were used by some young women and parents to justify the decision to drop the educational plans. In some cases, when the proposing man was rich, it was discussed within the family as an opportunity that might never come again. It might be suggested that the cultural capital of the educational opportunity was being lost under pressures of insecurity and uncertainty. In other cases, education was still crucial for securing a good marriage, precisely because of the cultural capital it has. That was what Amina confirmed: that not completing at least the *thanaweya-aama* qualification would oblige the young woman to marry whoever was accepted by the parents.

Fears of unemployment and exclusion were significant common themes in both male and female students' narratives. The Egyptian state had failed to fulfil the promises to provide the education that can prepare young people for a better future. Egypt HDR (2010) reports that for 2008-09, "unemployment was more pronounced among the poor, where 29% of poor educated persons [aged] 18-29 were unemployed and one out of four educated non-poor was unemployed" (Egypt HDR 2010:82).

The notion of *wasta* was a significant common theme in almost all students' narratives on aspirations for future employment. In several discussions with 11th grade students, they had talked about future aspirations and practice of *wasta*. Both female and male students had expressed their senses of hopelessness for the future

due to what they described as networks of corruption that were dominating the Egyptian scene:

Student 1: *We understand that our chances of getting good jobs after graduation are limited because of wasta.*

MF: *What exactly do you mean by “wasta”?*

Student 2: *Wasta is when individuals get a job or are favoured over others, not because they are qualified and meet the job requirements but rather because they are well connected somehow with someone powerful.*

Student 3: *Wasta is one feature of corruption that is everywhere.*

Student 4: *Wasta is everywhere, even at the sporting club. I went to play football because I am a good player, as all my friends say. I went for the admission test but I was not accepted because spaces were reserved for kids coming from well-connected families.*

Student 5: *Wasta means that those who possess the power of money and connections can find their places and the rest of us will be sitting and waiting at the coffee house.*

Student 6: *We are cancelling our dreams because it's obvious that there is no hope of achieving them.*

Student 7: *I know university graduates, even graduates from the School of Medicine, who are working in unskilled labour because of unemployment.*

Student 8: *I admit it, after graduation I will look for wasta from a relative who works in a big company in the industrial area. He can help me find a good job opportunity.*

In negotiating hopelessness about reaching future aspirations, young people engage in a political position through an obviously cynical attitude as shown in their discussion of *wasta* and corruption. All those students were coming of age in the city of Cairo to join its large segment of educated unemployed youth. They belonged to lower middle income families of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam areas. Families invested considerably in *thanaweya-aama* and higher education; however, such investment was not matched by real job opportunities that enabled young people to move on to the independence of adulthood. The notion of “cancelling our dreams” manifested young people's desperation at the signs they saw of corruption and injustice. Young people continued critiquing the system for its failure to support

them in achieving their dreams. There might be a tension here between the young people critical stance of the system, and how they spoke about “benefiting the country” and being “a good citizen” as a sign of success. In doing so, young people “are not trapped into acting in certain way by their habitus” (Jeffrey 2008: 747) when they spoke of the notion of a “good citizen”. On the contrary, I argue that notions of “benefiting the country” and being a “good citizen” were about longing to make a difference and not about maintaining the “status quo”.

5.4 Self-realisation: change (*taghyeer*) is the key

Young people had considered the notion of "*tahkik-elzat*" or self-realisation through talking about their long term dreams or how they saw themselves in the future:

Noura: I want to be (God willing) someone good and appreciated. I want to hold an important position one day so that I can make a difference and (afeed el balad) benefit the country. However, the academic and professional future is predestined by God. Of course it does not mean that we become passive and do nothing but we are certain that we can't reach any success or achievement beyond what is destined for us by Almighty God.

Khaled: I want to fulfil my dreams and make my parents happy and proud of me, establish a family, and serve the community like Professor Zuwil. But he succeeded abroad. I want to go abroad. Zuwil said: in the US they gave me all the support to succeed. He didn't find any support here.

Ahmed: El-balad de mesh mehtagalna – this country doesn't need us. I want to go abroad where I can succeed. I have many relatives working in the Gulf. Most probably they will find me a job over there after I finish college. I have no value here and many young people my age want to go abroad. I want to go abroad because I expect to be more respected and appreciated and my chances to succeed are higher. The situation here is awful and is getting worse. I feel ashamed that some people in my neighbourhood can't find food for their kids' supper.

Despite being ideologically loaded with reference to western notions of individuality, the notion of "self-realisation" (*tahkik elzat*) when used and responded to by young people also carried locally understood meanings. I argue that young Egyptians' notion of self-realisation, as exemplified in the narratives of Noura, Khaled and Ahmed, carries fragments of western notions of individuality, particularly their assertions of the declining influence of class differences in reaching success (Jeffrey 2008: 741-3), as well as local notions of national, communal and religious commitments. However, I am not suggesting that young Egyptians' cultures are derived from western youth cultures. Moreover, the student's confession (quoted earlier in this chapter) about his intention to use a relative's *wasta* for employment, and Ahmed's narrative of letting relatives find him a job in the Gulf shows the extent to which young people valued the available local and traditional networks in negotiating their future aspirations and potential.

Acquiring a university degree, finding a good job, and forming a family were common themes in both the male and female students' narratives on the meaning of "self-realisation". However, young people had navigated other notions that I am exploring here in more detail, such as "wanting to benefit the country", "wanting to go abroad", the notion of change (*taghyeer*), and the religious notion that "success and future are predestined by God".

The notion of benefiting the country (*afeed el Balad*) and wanting to become the good successful citizen who contributes to the good of the nation had been used by some of the young people. While it can be interpreted as a nationalist position, young people's negotiations of the notion of "benefiting the country" have expressed the extent to which they wanted to contribute to improving the quality of life for their families and communities. Amina, for example, wanted to reach her dream for higher education and a good job in order to support her mother and brother to survive economic hardship. The position of young people such as Amina does not confirm Schielke's view that what the "aim of self-realisation entails can come to stand in conflict to community- and family-oriented values and aims"

(Schielke 2009a: 172). However, I argue with Schielke that young people's longing for self-realisation through personal achievement of graduating and forming family “entails aims and ideals of personhood that, while they do not necessarily stand in a felt conflict to community and religion, are not framed by them” (Schielke 2009a:173).

The notion of “benefiting the country” is inherently paired with despair and frustration (Schielke 2009a: 172), particularly with young people’s notion of being excluded and *awez aseeb el-balad w asafer bara* – wanting to leave the country and go abroad. With the expression “this country doesn’t need us, I want to travel abroad”, young people were negotiating on the one hand their sense of exclusion, and on the other hand their sense of individuality, which means that if what it took to succeed was to go abroad they would make that decision. The notion “this country doesn't need us” manifested young people’s sense of desperation due to exclusion. According to the Egypt HDR (2010) report, “28% of male youth expressed their intention to migrate” (Egypt HRD 2010:39).

Schielke argues that for rural Egyptian young people, “this is an escapist perspective for sure, and escape is a strong topic indeed in the aspirations of young people” (2009a: 173). For those rural young people, a “sense of emptiness, and stagnation” are behind what Schielke described as “the grand paradigmatic strategy of escape and success” (2009a: 173). In the case of the young people in Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam, the escapist perspective was blended with a political position against the system that did not meet their aspirations at all. Noura, while expressing what self-realisation meant to her, declared her position against Mubarak and his government. Ahmed, while longing to go abroad to succeed, expressed his sense of shame at the examples of injustice. These young people’s aspirations to migrate were based on their sense that the situation was hopeless and that their circumstances would not improve. I argue that the young people’s narratives on going abroad were more of an expression of frustration and despair rather than a trend towards escaping into an individual solution.

For some young people, the notion of benefiting the country went beyond the model of the “good citizen” and notions of change (*taghyeer*). They were very critical of the system failure, from the degeneration of schooling and the whole education system and to the networks of corruption that they saw as dominant within Egyptian society. Young people like Noura, Ahmed and Khaled did not believe in the effectiveness of small changes here or there. They believed in a total change of the whole system. For them, the system did not work any longer. With the expression “*taghyeer*”, young people referred to changing the whole regime. Along these lines, Ahmed spoke about the sense of “shame” that some poor families in the neighbourhood could not afford to provide the basic needs for their children. For Ahmed, it was the corrupt system and absence of justice that had led to such a shameful situation.

Jeffrey (2008) seconds Cole’s (2004) argument “for the distinctive capacity of young people to challenge and transform structures of political domination” (Jeffrey 2008: 749). Cole argues that “youths’ structural liminality – the fact that they are less embedded in older networks of patronage and exchange – makes them uniquely poised to take advantage of new social and economic conditions” (Cole 2004: 576, cited in Jeffrey 2008: 749). There were many signals made by young people in the three schools, as transcribed in this chapter and in other parts of this thesis, which I found striking for their critical political position against the political regime. In several instances, upon leaving a school after a long day’s visit I was wondering about what was happening and whether such signals by young people should be considered as an alert for a large-scale change (*taghyeer*) on the horizon.

The pious notion that the future and what one can achieve is predestined by God is another common theme of young people’s narratives in negotiating a notion of “self-realisation”. Young people had used the discourses of “God willing, I will succeed” and other expressions which showed their convictions that success, income and other benefits are gifts destined from God. These young people had mostly emphasised that a commitment to religious ethics was not to be compromised for

reaching success. One would think that such pious discourse might be in conflict with the secular liberal notion of agency that was manifested by many young people in negotiating notions of *taghyeer* (change) and in their critical position towards what they described as a corrupt system.

Noura had criticised the political regime in the middle of a discussion on her meaning of self-realisation:

I am totally against this government and I hate Mubarak and all the corruption around us. I want to contribute with something small that can help taghyeer (change) the bad situation in this country (el-balad).

While Noura was very critical about the political regime in the course of discussing her future aspirations, at the same time she confirmed her conviction that success, future and change are “predestined by God”. Noura (as I discuss in Chapter 6) was a participant in the neighbourhood’s mosque lessons. Young Egyptians were negotiating the meaning of achieving self-realisation at the intersection of piety and religious commitment. Their pious commitments were not in conflict with their critical position towards corruption, and their desires for changing the realities around them. With such conceptions, young people were producing their own hybrid meanings that were to a great extent trying to break down such polarisation (Mahmood 2009:861).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter young people voiced their sense of tension, and boredom regarding their current status as *thanaweya-aama* students. While acknowledging the value of passing *thanaweya-aama* as the pathway towards future success and social mobility, young people also showed their awareness of how the educational system was being used for the reproduction of domination and exclusion. Emerging from *thanaweya-*

aama to college life, young people's subjectivities were constituted while they made sense of their feelings of despair, frustration, uncertainty and exclusion. At the intersections of class, gender, and educational exclusive circumstances, young people showed their capacity for overcoming the conventional links that were aimed at subordinating them.

Coming from lower middle class backgrounds, the Egyptian students voiced an image of success that was somehow organised around and in relation to the living standards of wealthier citizens. Their narratives suggest the extent to which they aspired to become powerful and wealthy as a sign of successes. Young people's notion of "self-realisation" carried locally understood meanings of finding a good job, forming a family and believing that success is predestined by God, and it showed the extent to which young people valued the available local and traditional networks in negotiating their future aspirations and potentials.

Young people's narratives reveal a number of ambivalences through which they are constituted as young and educated. For instance, voicing criticism against *wasta* networks and the corruption they entail, while at the same time thinking of the potential *wasta* networks available to them for employment upon graduation; swinging between the notion of "self-realisation" with what it carries of western notions of individuality and longing to live abroad while voicing Egyptian lower middle class idealised trajectories of longing to benefit the country and make a difference; young women longing for equity in the labour market upon graduation while submitting to patriarchal social norms by being willing to drop their educational plans and going for an early marriage and admitting that men have a better chance in the labour market. These contradictions are centered on intense competition between the middle-class elite and disadvantaged low-income strata (Roger 2008), "effectively reworking the social history of youth ... to meet the demands of new economic and political conditions" (Rogers 2008: 79).

CHAPTER 6

Gendered tactics: unruliness and ambivalence

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores young Egyptians' navigation of forms of patriarchy and subordination of their wider everyday life inside and outside the state school. Such navigation manifests young people's tensions about the schooling system, familial and societal pressures, and hopelessness about the future. I suggest that young people, while going about such navigation were deploying "tactics of the weak or powerless" (De Certeau 1980: 8). I will particularly explore in this chapter some cases of young people's individual and collective gendered tactics of unruliness and ambivalence.

Life for Cairo's informal dwellers is mostly dominated by older generations (Hoodfer 1997, Wikan 1990, Singerman and Hoodfar 1986) which leads to a state of constant tension between older and younger generations. "The family is the main source of social capital, in the form of bonding, social networking, exchange, synergy and trust of others....However, family links can also constrain social development, especially when family values dominate youth and transcend the private sphere to spill into the public domain" (Egypt HDR 2010: 69). Patriarchy in this context is manifested in fathers' (as household heads) control over the political economy of the neighbourhood. Mature men at the age of forty and older are the business owners, the craftsmen, the experienced workers, the informal merchants, or the government officials and the teachers. They attempt to be in control of the young peoples' future choices, employment, relationships, and even political participation within the household and the neighbourhood.

6.2 Boys' unruly tactics

Young men from the informal neighbourhoods face various forms of contradictory pressures and subordination. While they are regarded as men who will in the future be responsible for their families, they are meanwhile accused of being undisciplined and irresponsible. While they are burdened by the expectation of finishing their higher education degrees and finding a good job, they look around and see older brothers and cousins who are unemployed and have not achieved much. While they are regarded as the protectors of females of the family and the neighbourhood, they are accused for committing street harassment. While they are encouraged to act as an example of a good Muslim citizen, they are accused of being conservative and fanatical.

The following are cases where young men individually and collectively deployed tactics while they navigated forms of pressures and subordination. I will first exploring the Al-Kofar group's aggressive and chaotic position, and then I will look at Amro's political unruly position.

6.2.1 The "Al-Kofar" gang

A group of male students in the Mostafa Kamel boys' School decided to call themselves "*Al Kofar*" (non-believers). The group that occupied a corner in one of the 10th grade classes proudly introduced themselves to me as the "*Al-kofar*" group. The name "*kofar*" comes from the Arabic word "*kofr*" denoting unbelieving in religion. It was my first time in this particular class, so I started by introducing myself and explaining what I was doing in the school. The *Al-kofar* group started fighting with each other, and then they started fighting with other students. They cut me off while talking and they interrupted any other students who were talking, by making a noise or commenting sarcastically on what was being said. I waited a long time for the class to calm down and listen. I had hardly introduced myself, and having a discussion was almost impossible without shouting higher than all of them. I decided

to observe the situation for a while, and had side talks with a small group of students and individual students:

Ahmed (a student) said: *"Teachers avoid coming to our class. Those students keep fighting and creating problems all the time. They all come from the Dar-elsalam area. Our school is totally out of control because of them."*

MF: *What did you want to imply by mentioning that they are from Dar-elsalam?*

Ahmed (lowering his voice): *Students in the school come from three areas: Maadi Gardens, Al-Basatin, and Dar-elsalam. Dar-elsalam is a poor area with a very low level of education and many problems. We have fights every couple of days outside the school gates between students coming from Dar-elsalam and other groups of students.*

I approached the Al-Kofar group to try and have a conversation. I waited for a while until there was a moment of silence during which I was able to get their attention. The discussion started and I tried to keep it going despite interruptions:

MF: *What do you mean by naming your group "Al-kofar"?*

Student 1: *It means that we are bad and nobody can defeat us.*

MF: *Why are the six of you in particular in the group?*

Student 1: *We are old friends and we come from the same area. We all live in Dar-elsalam, we go out together.*

Student 2: *And we fight together.*

MF: *Who do you fight?*

Student 2: *We fight with anyone who dares to bother us.*

MF: *Why do you keep disturbing the class work?*

Student 2 (laughing): *We try to fill the boring time in the school.*

MF: *But some teachers are trying to do their jobs and teach, right?*

Student 3: *Don't believe that, all these students take private lessons, the teachers don't teach any more.*

Student 4: *The teachers in the school don't have any respect for us. They treat us like "shit".*

Student 5 (not a member of the group): *I agree there is no respect for students in the school. The other day a teacher hit me on the face for nothing.*

The unruly tactics of the *Al-kofar* group at the Moustafa Kamel School can be understood, following De Certeau (1980: 6-8), as an uncertain move causing a mess within the classroom. The *Al-kofar* was one example of various unruly tactics deployed by students at the boys' school. It was a sign of their attention and understanding of the gaps in the school discipline created by a particular combination of circumstances at this specific school venue due to weak school administration, among other factors that were discussed in detail in previous chapters.

Students were keen to point out that their chaotic behaviour was due to the fact that the school was not really the venue for education any more. More importantly, their narratives reinforced their claim that they were treated with disrespect and aggression. Male students who came from poorer areas within the district were particularly positioned as trouble makers and the source of problems. The *Al-kofar* group had chosen a provocative title. The meaning of "*kofar*" within the Egyptian context has bad connotations. Such terms are not normally used or welcomed among informal dwellers, who are known for being highly respectful towards religion and religious beliefs.

6.2.2 Amro: "the revolutionary"

Amro (the 11th grade student) encountered in chapter 5 had talked about his political unruly position at the school venue and within his family:

Amro: My parents for a long time didn't know that I had joined the revolution's street actions. While I was known to many people in Tahrir, I lied to my parents that I was in a private lesson or hanging out with friends. Even after I'd told them that I'd joined some demos, they didn't understand that I was that close to the street actions.

MF: But why did you lie to your parents?

Amro: You know, even if they'd known, I wasn't going to stay home. I just saved myself the headache of them panicking and worrying about me. My parents are pro the revolution but like many Egyptian parents they support the revolution from home and as long as it's away from their kids.

One morning I found out through Twitter that the clashes in Tahrir had resumed. I left home after a fight with my parents, who didn't want me to go out. My father told me, if you insist on going now, just stay in the street and don't come back. I said, fine. I had no money. I collected my stuff and borrowed some money from my cousin on my way to Tahrir. For two days I was engaged in non-stop clashes with the police. My mother called and asked me to go back home and I refused. She said, come back and discuss the issue with your father.

Before going home I had to attend a private lesson. I had a big fight with the private teacher when he accused those in Tahrir of treason, and he even cursed those who had just died and said that those in Tahrir were thugs who were paid to fight against the police. I told the teacher loudly that he was an 'idiot'. I called him names and assured him that those in Tahrir didn't get anything in return. I told him that I was going to Tahrir and that my father had raised me as a real man, not a "pussy" like him (the teacher). He asked me to leave and not come back. I left after telling him that I would never come back. He called home and complained to my parents. Later on when I went home, I had a long argument with my father for almost four hours.

MF: *Has anything changed at the school since the revolution?*

Amro: *Being called a bunch of losers and useless kids by the teachers and the principal continued after the revolution. Nothing has changed. Actually after the revolution they started to call us "thugs".*

A student, "A.M.", in my school, in the same grade as me, died with a bullet in his neck in Tahrir when the army attacked the sit-in of April 8th. That was the sit-in following the Friday's demonstrations when a group of military officers announced that they were supporting us and announced their disobedience to the military authorities. A few days later at the school we decided to hang up a huge banner with the photo of our classmate who had died in Tahrir. I walked to the principal's office with a couple of my classmates to ask him to allow us to hang up the banner. Some teachers were also sitting in the principal's office. The principal (son of) refused and said: "I won't allow a photo of him to be hung up in the school. He is (referring to our classmate) just a thug". The principal and teachers called us losers and thugs and said that what we are doing is ruining the country. We got very angry and we attacked the principal and teachers. All of us were punished and were not permitted to hang up the banner.

The clashes that happened at the school after the accident in the Port Said Stadium³⁷ was even more confrontational. There was a call for a general

³⁷ The Port Said Stadium disaster was a mass attack that occurred on 1 February 2012 in the Stadium in Port Said, Egypt, following an Egyptian premier league football match between the Al-Masry and Al-Ahly clubs. At least 79 people were killed and more than 1,000 were injured after thousands of Al-Masry spectators stormed the stadium stands and the pitch, following a 3–1 victory by Al-Masry. Al-

strike leading to civil disobedience after what happened in Port Said. In that massacre I lost many of my friends who were members of the "Ultras Ahlawy"³⁸. The strike was calling for the military to step down after the failure to lead the country. We (students in my school) were among the first to join the strike. Well, I know that most of us don't go to school anyway; however, with the strike the school was literally empty. Unfortunately the strike failed, thanks to government workers and older generations who have become slaves to the regime. After the failure of the strike, we (in my school) prepared and hung several banners about the Port Said Martyrs and announcing our position against the regime. The school management ordered the removal of all the banners. A big clash erupted in the school between students on one side and the principal and teachers on the other side, after the principal again called my friends (who died in Port Said) thugs and the losers of Ultras. We almost destroyed all the school's furniture and windows. Many students were dismissed from the school that day.

Amro is an example of some (certainly not all) *thanaweya-aama* students who were engaged somehow in the Egyptian revolution. It can be suggested, in relation to the public discourses of the revolution and the Arab Spring, that the revolution is a "youth-made and youth-led revolution" which had an effect on the way young people have navigated forms of patriarchy and subordination since January 2011. Notions of solidaristic masculinity and violence have become significant among many male students during and since the revolution. Male students' previous experiences of in-school everyday oppositional practices turned into exposure to threats of death and injury during the revolution clashes. Amro lost some of his classmates and friends in clashes and accidents that followed the revolution. He faced the dangers of death and injury every time he was in the front line of such clashes. With all that Amro went through during the street actions, he continued to struggle with familial and school authorities that were trying to control him. Engagement in street actions at such particular historical moments had a significant effect on students' position towards the schooling normative hegemony. Instead of continuing the tactics of acting chaotically in De Certeau's sense (1984), students started to shift towards transferring the revolution into the space of the school in a way that would

Masry fans violently attacked Al-Ahly fans, and also the club's fleeing players, using knives, swords, clubs, stones, bottles and fireworks as weapons (BBC 2012).

³⁸ Ultras Ahlawy (UA-07) is an Egyptian ultras group that supports the Cairo-based Egyptian Premier League football club Al-Ahly.[1] The group was founded in 2007 by former members of the first Ahly support group, Ahly Fans Club (AFC). (Saied and Hassan 2007).

eventually contribute to redefining the meaning of the schooling space. Amro narrated two incidents during which he and peer students attempted to use the school venue to honour their friends and classmates whose life was sacrificed during the clashes of the revolution. He also mentioned the strike against the military rule that was joined by his school and many other schools.

I asked Amro if he considered himself religious or not. He said:

I am not religious, I don't pray a lot and I don't fast every day in Ramadan. But I don't go with the idea of atheism that some young people talk about. If a boy or a girl tells me they don't believe in God or religion, that should mean that they have read about all religions and done enough research to reach such a conclusion. But they are idiots and just repeat ideas without any n-depth understanding. They think that by saying so, they can do whatever they want with no obligations. However, Islamists are trying to impose religion onto everything, particularly the political conflict. I am not convinced about the frames of ethics in our society. It's so hypocritical and Islamists are using religion to serve their political agenda.

Amro's frankness about not being religious went beyond the notion of "flaws of perfection". While an Islamist would describe Amro's position as "imperfectionism", Amro and other Tahririan young people would see it as the normal position by a rebellious generation which, while respecting religion, did not accept replacing a corrupt regime with a theocracy. Young people like Amro, who had engaged somehow in the actions of the revolution, had started to realise that the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups were using religion excessively for achieving their political agenda towards establishing a religious state. Amro was simply saying that he did not risk his life and his martyr friends and classmates did not die in order to replace Mubarak with the Islamists.

6.3 Girls' ambivalence and tactics of survival

Thanaweya-aama young women in the informal neighbourhoods also face various forms of pressure and subordination. On the one hand, they are burdened by the

expectation of succeeding in their exams, and finishing their higher education degrees. On the other hand, they face considerable control of their movements and existence in the public sphere. Given that the informal areas were intensively targeted by the actions of the Islamist revival, girls and women were particularly targeted. Preachers of the Islamic revival consider mixed-gender socialisation and issues of love and romance outside the confines of marriage to be very dangerous (Schielke 2009b: 161). Consequently, informal communities have developed an obsession about controlling young women's sexuality and have preferred to allow girls' early marriage as a matter of protection and in order to maintain the family reputation against the dangers of any potential mixed-gender socialisation.

The following are cases of young women's navigation of forms of pressure and subordination. In the course of such navigation, young women on the one hand had voiced an ambivalent and sometimes ambiguous position, and on the other hand through the tactics they had deployed had shown the potentiality for causing "cracks" within the structure of the given patriarchal and Islamist discourses (De Certeau 1984:37-38).

6.3.1 Hadia: "provisional submission"

Hadia was 16 years old (at the time), and an 11th grade student living with her family in Al-Basatin. She attended some of my events and discussions but she mostly remained silent and did not participate. Whenever I saw Hadia in the school, she was walking alone. As I understood later, Hadia approached Ms. Sanaa, the psychology worker, to talk to her. Ms. Sanaa suggested to Hadia that she might like to talk to me. Over a number of interview sessions, Hadia explored her day to day challenges with her family and teachers:

Hadia: My father is originally from Upper Egypt and moved to live in Al-Basatin, and got married to my mother who is from Saidia Zeinab³⁹. He is an artisan working in manufacturing bags, and my only brother (Ahmed) finished

³⁹ The famous district in old Cairo.

his high technical (vocational) education and is working temporarily as a salesman. My mother doesn't work.

I attend private lessons in four subjects: Arabic, English, Mathematics, and Italian. History is the only subject I study on my own. I like studying history – it's like reading a story, and I like stories.

I am not allowed to go outside the house without my mother, and I am only allowed to go to school and private lessons after school. I can't talk to neighbours because my mother doesn't like them. Mum is always nervous and doesn't listen to me at all. I feel am useless with no value. Nobody cares to know what I think, even at school.

I'd like to be a normal girl, laughing, and going out with friends, but I am mostly alone and frustrated. Home is frustrating, school is frustrating. Nobody cares about what I want. Even if some people ask about me, they do it sarcastically, so. I lock myself in my room and cry. The only refuge for me is music.

I am a shy person and don't have many friends. Actually I only have one close friend (Farida). Farida is my age and also in grade 11 but she goes to another school now. We used to go to school together until grade 10. I used to go to her house and she used to visit me. I like her so much, and I miss her. We haven't met recently.

I wish that my parents would pay more attention to my needs and my studies instead of keeping on watching over me and my behaviour all the time.

MF: *What makes you think that they watch over you all the time?*

Hadia: *I am sure they do. My mother reads my diaries, and spies on my mobile to see who I am talking to or texting.*

Ahmed cares for me and talks to me when he is home and not tired from work. However, he wants to control me. He keeps watching over me, where I go, who I talk to, ...etc.

The worst thing is that Ahmed refuses to let me see or even talk to my only friend Farida. My mother agrees with Ahmed and tells me to obey him. Ahmed thinks that my friend is impolite because she is never shy about telling anyone what she wants or dressing the way she likes. She is veiled also, but she puts a nice veil. They want everyone to be speechless like me. My brother claims that he saw her walking with a boy. I don't believe him. But even if she meets boys, it's not his business. I use every opportunity to call her on the mobile when they are out, but I am not free to answer her calls if they are around. I am planning to visit her next week but I won't tell my mother.

MF: *What about your father. Why can't you ask for his support?*

Hadia: I know that my father cares for me but he doesn't talk to me at all. Even if I try to talk to him he tells me to ask my mother or Ahmed.

Hadia was struggling with the familial rules, and pleaded for more attention and equity. Rules imposed by the family regarding relationships and socialisation were not suggested in Hadia's narrative as being religious but were seen rather as social norms. Ahmed (Hadia's brother) retained a traditional notion of masculinity through exercising repressive control over Hadia. The notion of being "useless" was used repeatedly by Hadia to refer to her position within the family. Being in contact with her friend and having a peer friendship was of great value to Hadia, to the extent that she would take the risk of seeing her friend while hiding this from the family. This was the making of Hadia's gendered subjectivities as the lonely, shy, obedient, quiet young woman. She was being taught by her family what it means to be a "young woman" living in an informal neighbourhood. The same processes were relevant for Ahmed (Hadia's brother) who was being trained to become the man responsible for guarding his sister. Such masculine social norms represented another element of the patriarchal legacy facing young women within Egyptian informal communities.

Being economically dependent on their families, young people at the ages of attending high school and university are subjected to communal and familial pressures and control over their socialisation and aspirations. The older generations are in control of many decisions concerning young peoples' lives, such as education, friendship, marriage, practising religion, as well as simpler things like choosing clothes and even going out with friends. Among informal dwellers, young women in particular – upon reaching the age of adolescence and in addition to the daily pressures of being young – are subjected to official and informal measures to regulate female sexuality, the way they dress and the roles they are permitted to adopt within the public sphere.

Hadia was also struggling with her marginalisation within the schooling system, both the formal and informal. By informal, I refer to the private tutoring system that emerged as a parallel and informal educational system:

MF: *Tell me about school.*

Hadia: *I come to school every day in order to escape home. However, here in the school also, nobody cares or is willing to listen. You know what? I was forced to take private Maths lessons with Mr. Ashraf, my Maths teacher at school. He passed by our house and told my parents that I needed help with Maths and that I should join his after-school tutoring class. My mother forced me to join his private group. It's twice a week after school hours and we have the lesson in the house of one of our classmates. I hate it and I want to leave.*

MF: *Why do you hate it? Don't you need help with your Maths?*

Hadia: *I do need help with Maths, but I think I can help myself if I get more encouragement. The problem is that Mr. Ashraf doesn't have faith in us. He keeps telling us during the class and also during the private lesson that we are useless and hopeless. I don't need private tutoring in Maths with a teacher who keeps telling me that I am useless.*

MF: *So what are you going to do?*

Hadia: *I don't know yet. I don't get any benefit from the private lessons and I pay a lot. I will stop, but I am afraid that Mr. Ashraf will give me a hard time after I leave. Should I tell him face to face or should I send the final week's lesson payment with one of my classmates and ask her to inform him that 'm stopping? I don't know what to do.*

A few weeks later I saw Hadia in the school and she had a big smile on her face. She stopped to talk to me briefly:

Hadia: *Finally, I have just told Mr. Ashraf face to face that I don't need the private Maths lesson and that I can study it myself. I told him that I am leaving the lessons. But I didn't tell my parents that I've left Mr. Ashraf's lessons. He may talk to them, meaning that I may face trouble at home. But I will insist I'm not going back.*

Thinking of the prominence of what the school should mean for Hadia, her narrative does not suggest that a significant role is in fact being played by the school. Although she escaped from home by going to school, she repeated the same notion of being “useless” when describing her position within the school. She submitted provisionally to restrictions placed on her movement and relationships by her family

and to the norm of the private lessons. At first I thought that it was a contestation on Hadia's side to the teacher's authority by telling him face to face that she was leaving his private Maths lessons. If, however, it was not an act of contestation and subversion, then what was it? Hadia neither subverted nor escaped the teacher's and family's pressures to join the lessons. It might be suggested that Hadia had submitted to norms in a way that changed the norm itself (Butler 2006: 532). Butler asks: "Is it possible to inhibit the norm in order to mobilize the rules differently?" (Butler 2006:532). Hadia strategically avoided subversive actions and joined the private lessons. Through submission to the norm, she allowed herself the time "to make room for an alternative agency, a creative deployment of power" (Butler 2006:533). Butler argues that "there are, after all, other things to do with rules than simply conforming to them. .. They can be recrafted. Conformity itself may permit for hyperbolic instantiation of the norm that exposes its fantastic character" (Butler 2006:533). That is exactly what Hadia did by joining the teacher's private lessons for a short period which allowed her the opportunity to realise the uselessness of the private lesson for her which eventually granted her the courage to face him with the fact that she did not need his help. It was an example of the ambivalence of mastery and submission which paradoxically occur simultaneously towards the constitution of the subject (Davies 2006:426). Hadia as a subject had cultivated a novel tactic of desubjection through abiding by the rules. It is a tactic that perhaps she might start deploying with her family and in the school.

6.3.2 Noura: being young and Muslim

Noura (the 11th grader in the girls' school, encountered in Chapter 5) wanted to speak about her social life within her family and in the neighbourhood:

Noura: Despite the fact that I am not wearing a hijab (veil), I regularly go with my neighbours to Quran and Fekh (Islamic principles) lessons at the neighbourhood mosque. I go to these lessons two to three times a week. My neighbour makes sure to remind me and now I go regularly with her and her daughter. I like the mosque's lessons because it makes me more knowledgeable about my religion.

MF: *Why have you chosen not to wear the hijab?*

Noura: I am refusing the hijab for a very simple reason. Many girls are wearing tight clothes and yet wear a hijab. For them the hijab is just a fashion. I think this is wrong. I am wearing tight clothes too, but not wearing a hijab. My father never obliged me to wear a hijab because he knows about how I behave. There are many girls who are wearing a hijab and yet do bad things.

My younger sister is so reckless. She has a group of female friends who are crazy. I can't believe what they do. They go with men in their cars and do lots of crazy stuff. My sister doesn't listen to any advice from me or dad. She listens to music all the time. She wears tight clothes despite being veiled. She keeps a long list of boys' mobile numbers. When I asked her where she got all those numbers, she said that boys go to the school and throw papers at the girls with their mobile numbers.

Every time I go to the mosque lessons, I try to take her with me but she refuses. We are not really religious at home. We are open-minded or you could say not conservative or liberal (motaharerren).

MF: *What exactly do you mean by open minded / liberal (motaharerren)?*

Noura: My father is not conservative like our neighbours and he doesn't pray. At the time of prayers no one at home will tell us to go and pray. My father drinks alcohol sometimes and smokes shisha. My sister and I listen to music. My father never comments on how we dress or that our clothes are not appropriate. He just lets us decide on whatever we like to wear. Our neighbour's father has a big beard and the mother is monaqaba (wearing a neqab, which is a veil that covers the whole body including the face). They are committed (moltzmeen) meaning that they do all the prayers on time. They are conservative about dressing and relationships between girls and boys. You know, when they have visitors, even relatives, men and women do not sit together. My family is not like that.

Looking at Noura's case versus that of Hadia, the latter presents an image of an oppressive and overarching patriarchy which does not appear to be at work in Noura's case. The differences between the two cases reflect the socioeconomic gaps and fragmentations that have emerged in Cairo neighbourhoods in recent decades, as discussed earlier in some detail in Chapter 2.

Being subjected to the piety discourses of the mosque movement and the conservative model of her neighbours on one side, and a secular father on the other side, Noura joined the mosque lessons and in the meantime did not wear a *hijab* and

defined herself as *motaharera* (liberal). Noura, while critical of her sister's reckless behaviour and her peers' duplicity, did not mind that her father drank alcohol and she had no interest in her neighbours' conservative model. Noura liked to be modest and acknowledged that veiling and other pious practices were a means for acquiring modesty, and in the meantime she liked to be *motaharera*, which means being free from strict religious obligations such as prayers, veiling, etc.

For Noura, not wearing a *hijab* and considering herself *motaharera* was not in contradiction with being a good Muslim young woman. However, this view is certainly not consistent with the views of the preachers of Islamist revivalists. I argue that Noura's self-image as a Muslim young woman is considered one of the "cracks" within the established grids (De Certeau 1984: 37-38) of the given Islamist system of thinking. Nonetheless, with such tactical practice, did Noura sound ambivalent by voicing concerns about the mixed-gender socialisation carried out by female students in her school while at the same time longing to meet boys?

Noura: I want the school to pay more attention to students and stop being careless. There are many girls who are doing bad things and it is the school's responsibility to help protect them. They know and watch girls walking with boys outside the school and they do nothing! They say, since it's outside the school borders we can't do anything. It's their responsibility to do something if the family is not aware.

MF: Doing "bad things" means that they meet boys outside the school, right?

Noura: Yes, for example I see many girls meeting boys close to the market around the street corner and teachers passing by them and not doing anything. Ok, let's say they can't do anything in the street, at least the next day in the school they could talk to the girl or notify the family. But they do nothing!

MF: But again, what do you expect the teacher to do? Maybe the girl is walking with her brother or cousin?

Noura: No, it certainly doesn't look as if the girl is with her brother or a cousin. They are sitting very close to each other. The boy has his arm on the girl's shoulders, and they are sitting very close together. Actually, it's not only one girl. It's a group of girls and boys acting like lovers. How come they are freely sitting together in the street and he is putting his arm around her. How

come? Unbelievable!! I am a girl like her. How come I would allow a boy to get close to me like that in front of everyone in the street, particularly when I know that he is fooling me?

Ok... I used to go to a sporting club to practise "Karate" and I met many boys. But there are no ways that I would talk or go out with anyone. One day I felt that the trainer's assistant was crossing the limits during the "karate" training, so I decided to leave. He wanted to hold my hand while coaching me on doing certain moves. So I said no and decided to leave. I have stopped practising for the last 6 months. I was very advanced in my training and if I was still practising I was going to be a coach myself. Despite all that, I decided to leave and I don't regret it.

MF: *What exactly are you worried about?*

Noura: *I think that such relations are wrong, haram (forbidden by religion) and can lead to a sexual relationship outside marriage. Actually, due to my own circumstances, I am totally against such relations.*

MF: *What do you mean by your own circumstances?*

Noura: *Well.. I don't want what happened to my parents to happen to me. My parents divorced when I was like 3 years old. Since then I've been living with my father and I didn't know my mother until I was 13 years old. At the age of 13 I found out that I have a sister who is three years younger than me, who is now living with us. My mother is married and currently living outside Cairo. I go visit her every now and then and she is only allowed by her husband to see us for half an hour at the most.*

At first it seemed that Noura was driven by the effect of the pious morality of the mosque movement in rejecting any mixed-gender socialisation. She even confirmed that such relationships are religiously forbidden. However, it transpired that she was affected by her social status as a daughter of divorced parents. It was obvious that she meant that rushing into a relationship at such an early age could mean ending up in a marriage that would not last for a long time. Interestingly, Noura started to talk about how much she liked a radio programme called "*Ana w el Ngoom w Hawak*". It is a late night famous radio programme that receives calls mostly from young people asking for advice related to their romantic affairs.

Noura: *Do you know the radio programme "Ana w el Ngoom w Hawak"? I always listen to it. I never miss that programme.*

MF: *Actually, no. What about it? What do you like about it?*

Noura: *The presenter is very good at discussing real life love stories and all kinds of relationship problems of love affairs, marriage problems, divorce cases, everything. I like romantic and love stories. I am very romantic but at the same time I am very conservative about relations.*

MF: *That means you have never been in a relationship?*

Noura: *My neighbours are 4 young men and a girl. The four young men are all older than me. The youngest is 20. I'm friends with all of them and my father knows all of them too. One of them, who's 23, admires me and he told my father so, but he will not go for a friendship with me. The four of them are very polite, which makes me to believe that there still a few men who can be trusted.*

MF: *What about that one who admires you, do you admire him as well?*

Noura: *I don't admire him but I like his personality and the fact that he is respectful, compared to what I know about the majority of men.*

MF: *So you do admire him.*

Noura: *I don't admire him enough to marry him.*

MF: *Nobody is talking about marriage at your age; you are just 16 years old.*

Noura: *Everybody is talking about marriage at my age. Many of my friends (my age) are engaged and some of them are already getting married. The sister of my very close friend Amina is getting married soon and has already left school.*

MF: *Amina is your closest friend?*

Noura: *Yes, Amina is my closest friend but she is making the same mistake. She also has a boyfriend. She lies to herself. She knows that this is not right and she is stubborn and insists on repeating the same mistakes as she made in the past. She knows how to protect herself and to put limits. Although she can't be obliged to do anything she does not want, at the same time she can be stubborn enough to choose to do wrong things.*

Noura had no problem in talking to men and even liking one of them, as long as she was comfortable that the person was trustworthy and respectful. At the end it seemed that Noura in rejecting romantic relations at her age was not really coming from a pietistic position but rather from a social conservative position due to her own experience within her family. Noura had decided on what I would call a survival tactic. Butler asks: "How does one stay in the matrix of rules enough to survive, and how does one bend and redirect those rules in order to breathe and live? If without

the norms one cannot survive, it is also clear that with the norms survival is also imperilled.” (2009:533). Noura was not driven by morality rules regarding romance and relationships. Rather, she wanted to be on the safe side by talking to men within a safe environment, and in the meantime she was seeking to fulfil her curiosity about relationships by listening to lovers' narratives on that radio programme.

6.4 Ambiguity between religiosity and fun

Young people in Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam were being subjected to a forceful Islamic discourse. Mosques and local religious organisations targeted young people by organising subsidised private tuition and other youth-centred services and activities. Some of the young people I met went regularly to Quran lessons at the mosque; and/or attended private tutoring organised by mosques and religious local organisations supported by the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafi movements. Some of the young people mentioned that they watched new religious TV satellite channels and programmes presented by new preachers, both moderate and conservative.

Some young people showed ambiguity in navigating such forceful religious discourse. I borrow here Bayat's definition of fun as *“a metaphor for the expression of individuality, spontaneity, and lightness, in which joy is the central element”*, and his observation that *“youth are the prime practitioners of fun and are the main target of anti-fun politics”* (2007:434). In the following two examples, I am exploring how young people, both male and female “swing back and forth from partying to prayers”, (Bayat 2003:1) taking an ambiguous position in navigating religious discourses and the embedded anti-fun politics:

6.4.1 *Sheikh "Turbo"*

The first month of the school year 2010/11 overlapped with the month of Ramadan. After the Ramadan *Fitr* feast, I passed by the boys' school to say happy *ied* (feast) and meet the few male students I had known and worked with in the previous year, as well as to ask how they were doing and how their summer break had been. It was the daily break time and the group of students, I wanted to see, were in the playground, standing together and laughing aloud. I approached them and talked briefly, and they told me about the subject of their laughter. Ahmed said:

We remembered what we were doing during the month of Ramadan. We laughed remembering how we managed to escape the long Ramadan night prayers (taraweeh) in the nearby mosque, by going to another mosque in the neighbourhood where the imam is faster in finishing the long Quran reciting. The funniest thing is that we were calling the faster imam "Elsheikh Turbo" because he was very fast at finishing prayers compared to other mosques where the prayers took forever.

During the month of Ramadan, in all mosques evening prayers are conducted, during which long parts of the Quran are recited. These special prayers are known as *taraweeh* and they can be very long (over an hour), during which one stands upright to read from the Quran. The Quran is divided into equal parts for the purpose of reading sections of equal length during each of the Ramadan nights, so that by the end of the month the entire Quran has been completed. With the forceful trends towards Islamic pious practices, and despite the fact that these prayers are voluntary, it has become a phenomenon that Egyptian Muslims of all ages, both females and males, attend the *taraweeh* prayers in the mosque after *asha* (the last evening prayer).

Male students were keen to be seen physically in the mosque for the "*taraweeh*"; however, they could not endure the long prayers and found relief with the imam they named Sheik "*turbo*". Scheilke discusses practices of piety and their "flaws of perfection" (2009b:S34) by arguing that Ramadan, for many young Egyptian men, is about fasting and prayers as much as it is about other forms of fun and enjoyment. Following Schielke, highlighting the notion of Sheikh turbo is "likely to shed more

light on the much less perfect social experiences and personal trajectories that all too easily remain obscured by the strong tendency of religious discourse” (2009b:S35).

6.4.2 Music is “*haram*” but we cannot give it up

During a group discussion with 11th grade female students, they wanted to discuss managing their time and what they called time wasters:

Noha: *Listening to music wastes my time. I spend a lot of time listening to music. I love all kinds of music.*

Khadija (in a very restraining tone): *Listening to music is “haram” (forbidden). On the Day of Judgment a heated stick will be pushed into the ears of all those who used their ears to listen to music”.*

MF (addressing other students): *What do you think of what Khadija has just said?*

Khadija (before other students have the chance to talk): *This matter is not subject to disagreement because it comes from Almighty GOD. That’s what was said by both the Sheikh on the TV and the Sheikh at the mosque. Listening to music is a distraction to ibada (practices of piety) and makes people think about bad issues.*

The rest of the students were speechless and left with no choices other than to agree that listening to songs and music is *haram* (forbidden).

MF: *So all forms of music are considered haram? What about some music genres such as religious music? Is that considered appropriate?*

Khadija: *no music at all. That means no TV, no radio, no cinema. One should stop paying attention to music played in the street while passing by. I trained myself to close my ears when and where music is played so that I don’t hear it.*

Fatma: *I listen to music and songs. It may be wrong. But I am not religious enough to stop loving and listening to music. (A number of girls nodded, agreeing with Fatma)*

Listening to music, particularly modern Egyptian pop music, is a major element of the everyday life practices of young people. They store their favourite music on their cell phones, computers and MP3 players. Noha, Fatma and the other girls could not

deny their desire for the fun of listening to music. According to TV and mosque preachers quoted by Khadija, however, the committed and God fearing Muslimness does not fit with listening to music that is considered a distraction to *ibada*. Faced with Khadija's concerns, the female students had no other choice but to admit their ambiguous position that despite the fact that it may be "*haram*" they could not give it up.

6.5 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that young people, while navigating forms of patriarchy and subordination of their wider everyday life, were deploying "tactics of the weak or powerless" (De Certeau 1980: 8). Through deploying these tactics, young people were either confirming their gendered agency causing cracks within systems of subordination, or surviving times of pressures and tension. In certain cases, young people's navigation showed ambivalence and somehow ambiguity about the direction in which they wanted to head, while navigating forms of subordination.

Both the Al-*kofar* group and Amro had deployed unruly tactics in handling schooling and familial subordination. Despite the Al-*kofar* and Amro's lack of power, the value of their unruly tactics derived from their skilful use of the available opportunities and circumstances to shake "the foundations of power" (De Certeau 1984:39). Amro, through his political agency, had gone beyond De Certeau's tactic of the weak and powerless by confirming that he was not religious and that he was against an Islamist regime. However the "Sheikh Turbo" young men and some female students had shown ambiguity in handling the forceful religious discourse when those discourses intersected with their individual desires. The two cases in the last section of this chapter have shown that while young people wanted to abide to religious preaching, even the most conservative preaching, they sought ways out when such preaching went against their desires for fun and enjoyment.

Young women showed ambivalence and somehow ambiguity in navigating forms of patriarchy. Hadia was ambivalent as to whether to submit or subvert familial and schooling pressures, and Noura was somehow ambiguous between abiding by the Islamist rules of the good Muslim girl and her very individual choices. In the middle of their ambivalent and ambiguous positions, both Hadia and Noura had produced survival tactics that I have argued were a confirmation of their gendered agency and at the same time considered as cracks in the very foundations of patriarchy. Hadia's action to leave the private lesson she hated was a moment of victory. Noura's decision not to wear a hijab and her obsession with romantic relations were not consistent with the Islamist discourses of the mosque movement and poses questions about the effectiveness of such movements to mobilize young people.

CHAPTER 7

Tahrir narratives: renegotiating age, gender, and the city spaces

7.1 Introduction

On 24th February 2011, a small group of *thanaweya-aama* students established a Facebook page⁴⁰ under the title “*thawret tolab thanaweya-aama*” (Thanaweya-aama Students' Revolution) and wrote:

Dear thanaweya-aama colleagues: we have established this page following our great revolution in order to demand changes in the education system for a better future for all Egyptian young people. Please share this page with all your friends and colleagues both boys and girls. We want to have thousands of members so that we can prepare for our first street actions.

A post was added on 24th February calling for an event on Monday 28th February 2011 at 10 am for a march from Tahrir Square to occupy the headquarters of the MOE that day. Several posts followed, calling for increasing membership of the page, discussing their demands as *thanaweya-aama* students, and making preparation for the first street actions by students after Mubarak's removal.

From 25th January 2011, young Egyptians of high school and university age, and young graduates, took the lead in what had been described as one of the pivotal historical moments in Egypt's modern history. Egyptians from different social segments on an unthinkable scale joined the young people's waves of protests and sit-in that forced the removal of ex-President Hosni Mubarak (Herrera 2012, Schielke 2011, Hirschkind 2011).

I finished my field work in Cairo between November 2010 and January 2011, and was preparing to work on the data analysis and start writing my thesis. However, with the 25th January protests and then the occupation of Tahrir Square, the downfall of Mubarak, and the incidents that followed, I had to go back to fieldwork for the whole year of 2011, but only in and around Tahrir Square. Despite not seeing the familiar faces of the young people of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam schools, thus

⁴⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/thanawya.revolution>

causing the discontinuity in persons between this and preceding chapters, there were other young faces within the square whose voices have also appeared in the previous chapters. During that period, schools were closed for the mid-year break and the MOE extended the schools' closure through April 2011 until it was somehow safer to reopen schools for a very short period before they were closed again in May 2011. During that period, the whole of Cairo was for most of the time under curfew rules imposed by the army forces that turned Cairo from the Friday of rage (27 January 2011) into a huge military facility. The curfew rules and the insecure situation in many areas around Cairo, including the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam area, made it impossible to go back to my informants in the three secondary schools.

As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Tahrir Square was one possible route which the emerging oppositional consciousness could take. In order to understand Tahrir Square, the insights of the previous chapters are crucial. I argue in this chapter that young people, through calling for and engaging in the Tahrir riots and occupational actions were claiming a "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1996). The demands that were made in Tahrir Square through young people's acclamations, *"iesh, horia, adalaa igtimaaiya, karama insania"* ("prosperity, freedom, social justice and human dignity") were, following Lefebvre, a call for "a radical restructuring of social, political, and economic relations, both in the city and beyond" (Lefebvre 1996: 34), manifesting their emerging political consciousness. I further argue that young people's engagement in the Tahrir actions contributed significantly to redefining the meaning of the city's "abstract spaces" (Lefebvre 1991).

According to Ahmad Abdalla (1985), the prominent leader of the Egyptian university students' movement in the early 1970s, Egyptian students' engagement with anti-colonial and protest actions go back to the early 20th century. As discussed in some detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the 1967 - 1973 students' movement was "a socio-political force that acted principally as an element of pressure on the ruling power" (Abdalla 1985: 218). According to Abdalla, students played a pioneering role in stimulating other social forces, especially the middle class (1985: 219). Yet about

forty years later, youth were seen as “burdened with authoritarian states, corruption and nepotism that circumscribe their life chances” (Swedenburg 2007:8).

I will first explore in this chapter how young Egyptians’ sense of hopelessness and their desires for change acted as a real ground, among others, that gave birth to the events in Tahrir. I will then explore the narratives of three young people (Amro, Mona and Karim) through which they recall their memories of being engaged in the Tahrir actions from 25th January 2011 and the Tahrir occupation to the Mohamed Mahmoud battle in November 2011. In exploring the three young people’s narratives, my intention is to understand what Tahrir gave to young people in return and what their engagement in the Tahrir actions meant in relation to their sense of hopelessness and future aspirations.

7.2 The route to Tahrir

I spent several Ramadan nights during August 2010 in the informal settlements of the Al-Basatin and Dar-elsalam neighbourhoods. I walked along the streets and narrow lanes; I met familiar faces from the three schools and the educational district office, and joined gatherings in coffee houses with groups of young teachers and parents. The following is from my field notes:

I crossed the bridge above the metro railway and jumped into one of those small motorised carts called a “toktok” on my way to Al-Basatin. The small and very tight toktok was riding along the unpaved narrow streets of the informal neighbourhood. There were about 8 of us packed inside it and banging into each other every time it jumped or turned in the middle of the very crowded narrow lanes. All the buildings on both sides of these lanes had turned their ground floors into small shops for selling goods. Streets, buildings, mosques and shops were beautifully decorated with colourful Ramadan decorations. Shops were packed with different types of food needed for Iftar (Ramadan breakfast) and Sohor (Ramadan last daily meal before fasting).

Street vendors were all over the place selling fruits, vegetables, homemade food and even clothes. The buildings were mostly small and very close to each other except for a couple of main streets where there were tall buildings with a few smart cars parked in front of them. There was one of "mawa'd el rahman" (charity meal) which was almost empty after the Ramadan Iftar meal where either well-off families, businessmen or parliamentary election candidates arrange every day during Ramadan for the provision of Iftar meals for the poor who cannot afford expensive Ramadan food.

Every street we passed had a number of small and medium-sized mosques and several coffee shops. Men who had just left the mosques after the long taraweh prayers as part of the Ramadan daily prayers were gathered around cups of tea, shisha and their favourite backgammon games. Many young men were also in cafés watching a football match, chatting, laughing, also smoking shisha, and looking at girls passing by. Young women with mothers and/or elder sisters were walking around until late at night, and even after midnight, buying food for Sohor and for next day's Ramadan's Iftar. Almost all the conversations in the café gatherings were about the coming biggest Egyptian parliamentary election in a month's time, and the most controversial Egyptian presidential elections expected in 2011. These have made the holy month of Ramadan different this year, with all the tensions and politics of elections.

The street noise was an amazing mix of Quran reciting coming from mosques and some shops, modern Egyptian pop singing, famous TV shows, young people yelling while watching a match, and political debates between men over the upcoming heated elections. In the middle of all that was going on, groups of students could be seen leaving the private tutoring centres located in the neighbourhood. They were the thanaweya-aama students preparing for the upcoming school year that would start soon after Ramadan and they had already started their private tutoring lessons.

It was an image of the Cairo urban "informality" (Bayat 2009) alliance created from the marginals and the working class during decades of dramatic expansion of impoverished urban settlements amidst an excluding state's privatising economy. Beneath the surface of the Ramadan cultural rituals in the crowded narrow lanes and coffee houses, unemployment, street children, deprivation of basic rights, and other features of exclusion and informalisation existed side by side with luxurious upper class neighbourhoods.

Cyberactivism and blogging about politics by Egyptian young people – particularly young journalists, photographers, lawyers, and computer programmers – goes back to 2004. Since then, cyberactivists and bloggers have been focusing on documenting and reporting incidents of torture and anti-human rights practices by the regime, and about street actions organised by political activists demanding change. The road for cyberactivism was paved by the coordination between both the leftist and Islamist forces from late 1990 onwards, that resulted in the establishment of the "*Kefaya* – The Egyptian Movement for Change" in 2004. *Kefaya* (enough) was formed by Egyptian political activists from different generations and backgrounds who for the first time mobilised successful street protests calling for an end to the Mubarak regime and rejecting Mubarak's son as his successor for the presidency (Hirschkind 2011). In 2008, the 6th April Movement was born from within *Kefaya* in support of protests and strikes by workers in the industrial town of Mahala El-Kobra:

When 6th April arrived, Egypt witnessed its most dramatic political mobilization in decades, an event that brought together people across the political spectrum, from Muslim Brotherhood members to Revolutionary Socialists (Hirschkind 2011: 15).

In the early summer of 2010, a brutal case of torture and killing by the Egyptian police in the large coastal city of Alexandria was uncovered by media and cyberactivists. Khaled Said, a young man from a middle class family in Alexandria, had been dragged out of an Internet café and beaten to death by two policemen. The case of Khaled Said triggered a considerable amount of rage among young people and students, particularly in Alexandria, Cairo and other large cities. Several youth movements, particularly the "6th April Movement" and "Youth for Change"⁴¹, arranged streets events and demonstrations against such brutal government practices. A Facebook page was created by some young people called "We are all Khaled Said". The page was created, as explained by its creators, to express the collective stance of many Egyptians who were fed up with practices against human rights and government corruption. Surprisingly, in a few days, followers of the page

⁴¹ The youth wing of the *Kefaya* movement.

reached about half a million members, and in a few weeks, members subscribing to the page reached one million. Herrera maintained in an interview on 28 February 2011 that the case of Khaled Said broke the fear barrier:

Suddenly the youth were saying “We’re not afraid anymore,” “We’re fed up,” “Enough is enough!” They were getting bolder and bolder on Facebook, insulting the president and political figures, spreading photos of corruption and torture. When I asked one of them, “Aren’t you afraid to do this?”, she replied, “What are they going to do, arrest millions of us? Millions of us are doing this.” So this became a moment when collectively, a generation crossed the fear threshold (Chamberlain 2011: online).

In fact, young people’s engagement in protest actions against the Mubarak regime was not really a sudden phenomenon. In addition to the several groups of activists that emerged from the *Kefaya* movement starting from 2004 such as “Students for Change”, and “6th April Movement”, there were also several Ultras groups that attracted thousands of young men of high school and university age who were fans of famous football teams. Amro’s (the *thanaweya-aama* student encountered in Chapters 5 and 6) engagement with street action went back, as he said, to when he was 16, when he joined Ultras:

Amro: My engagement (fel syasa) with politics started when I joined the Ultras Ahlawy group (the Al-Ahly football team fan group) in the neighbourhood in 2009 through my friends. There was an Al-Ahly match in summer 2010 at the same time as the incident and death of Khaled Said. We decided to arrange a “cortege”⁴² for him as part of the Ultras activities and it was the first time the song was chanted, “khafe mena ya hokoma” “Fear us, cops”.

MF: *Do you remember the lyrics of the song?*

Amro: *Of course.*

“khafe mena ya hokoma” (Fear us, cops)

“Gayeen el-lela nawyeen” (We came tonight for a purpose)

⁴² “Ultras have always taken positive initiatives to attempt to outdo the cheering activities of the opposing team’s supporters. From here came the term “cortege” which was adapted from the street war terminology of Colombia, Brazil and Argentina. It means going out in demonstrations as a show of power in the opponents’ areas of influence, away from the stadium. Cortege sometimes leads to violence” (El-Sherif 2012).

"Gomhor Al-Ahly walaaoaha" (Al-Ahly fans have lit the fire)

****om elzabet aal amin" (fuck the officer and the sergeant)*

Alle alle holy gans alle Alle alle holy gans alle

Alle alle holy gans alle Alle alle holy gans alle

****om elzabet aal amin" (fuck the officer and the sergeant)*

This song has always sent the cops crazy. We were thousands chanting it in the stadium and it was like an earthquake. At the end of 2010, during the match of Al-Ahly, the Police Central Security Forces (CSF) beat us and threw tear gas at us. Another match was a few days before the event of 25th January. The instructions were: Ultras are not allowed to chant or raise any banners. It turned into harsh clashes with the CSF.

On 24th January, the day before the revolution, I was standing close to my school. By chance there was a demonstration in the street. A police officer asked me what I was doing there; I replied "I'm playing". The police officer slapped me in the face and called me bad names and told me to leave. I will never forget the feeling when I was slapped. Every time I was in anti-police demonstrations I remembered the slap on my face and that horrible feeling of humiliation.

As an Ultras member, Amro experienced the brutality of the CSF when he was a young football fan travelling after his team. During those events, Amro usually became engaged in clashes with the CSF, which always feared such wild gatherings of the young football fans. Ultras' gatherings and marches, chants, banners and fireworks were attempts by the young football fans to make their own "claims to the city" in the spaces of main streets, stadiums and football courts. Through this process, young people subverted the authority of the state by controlling their everyday sports gatherings; through it, too, they experienced "an unmediated and unobstructed fulfilment" (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011: 87) of their subversive desires. Ultras' clashes with the CSF around the football pitches also showed "how competition over the production of space operates" (Molotch 1993: 889) between

the state's brutalities to produce spaces of domination versus the young people who strove to produce spaces for subversion. That is exactly why the site of actions is important and why we should be concerned with spatial legacies (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011: 87).

Amro also suffered other street experiences of humiliation and disgrace from the police. Narrating his first encounter with streets actions by his Ultras group, he repeatedly called it *"mosharkety fel syasa"* (engagement in politics). For Amro, engagement in politics meant opposing the CSF brutality. However, it should be noted that his path prior to the revolution was different from that of many of his peers, like Mona, who had never been into a police station before other than for the issue of her national ID.

I met Mona following her arrest by the CSF during the Mohammed Mahmoud battle, which I will address in detail in a later section of this chapter. We met through a revolutionary friend after she was released and she narrated the story of her link with Tahrir. Mona (at the time) was a 23-year-old university student from a middle class family. She was studying at the college of languages. However, she said: *"I don't really care about the university studies; my main interest is my work, which is shooting and directing movies."* Mona lived with a room-mate in a small flat close to down-town Cairo so as to be near her work:

I was struggling to live my life, like any normal Egyptian girl. Before the revolution I was living a normal life, doing my job, and was not interested in any politics. In fact, I avoided it because I thought only about making movies, which is the thing I love doing. I never talked about politics. I always thought that politicians were a bunch of rich people who were good for nothing. There was no hope at all that anything might change in this country, so I said: "I'll try and do something here, and if I fail, I'll leave the country and live abroad." Life was monotonous; even the works that tackled politics were shallow. I used to say: "What are you talking about! Nothing will change that way. I even didn't know who the Prime Minister was. I'd heard that those who tried to talk about politics were tortured and put in jail."

Mona's position and aspirations before the revolution were not too far from those of many of the young people I had known during my field work in the three schools. She aspired to success either in Egypt or abroad, and as she mentioned, her aspirations did not include any involvement in politics. While Amro had chosen to engage in street actions, Mona sounded hopeless about the whole situation. Despite their different positions, however, the views of both Amro and Mona correlated in terms of the meaning of involvement in politics and acts of resistance. Such correlation confirmed that young people had reached a point where politics practised through negotiations and compromises had become rotten and corrupt, and did not convince them anymore. That was confirmed later on in many instances during the Tahrir occupation and beyond, when young people in particular completely refused to negotiate or compromise unless their demands were met.

7.3 Is it possible!?

The year of 2010 had just ended with all the political tensions related to the brutality of police authorities, disastrous parliamentary elections, and fears about the near future. Suddenly, around 1 am after New Year's Eve, the TV news cut into the New Year celebrations to announce that a massacre had just occurred. A church bombing incident had occurred at the heart of Alexandria. News agencies around the world soon reported 21 people killed and 97 injured in the blast, which had occurred shortly after midnight as Coptic Christians were attending services at the church. Here is how Mona described the situation around that time:

The anger started to pile up. I noticed that something had been going on in the country since the last parliament elections in 2010, and that anger had started to rage. I was living in downtown, and I heard by chance about the fraud that had happened in those elections, but one reaction happened that changed everything, because it was one incident following another, and after what had happened at the Alexandria church, anger really started mounting up. The moment we heard about that incident, we knew it wasn't a sectarian strife scenario; this was not the kind of sectarian strife

scenario that had been created perfectly during the previous years. We thought that the Alexandria church incident was a mere game to drag people's attention from where the course of actions were heading, and this affected the mass perception in an irregular manner. People were fed up and we were among them, and day after another everything was heating up.

In January 2011 and following the uprising in Tunisia, the anonymous admins of the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said” suggested turning the national holiday for Police Day on 25th January into a Facebook event, “Revolution of the Egyptian People” (*Thawrat Shaab Misr*). Mona was doubtful that any change could happen:

Public invitations were launched on Facebook, motivating people to go on demonstrations on January 25th. But we thought this was just a joke; was it really possible to agree on a demonstration or a revolution? The march was to depose the leadership of the police forces. I felt they must be joking.

The Facebook event, which was joined by many young people and many other Egyptians, had caused serious discussions in the press and on social media between supporters of the event (mostly young people) on one side, and those who did not really see what was coming on the other side. Academics were also doubtful that anything could happen:

Just days before 25th January, a friend asked whether there could be a revolution in Egypt like there was in Tunisia, and I said no, I don't think so, because it seems so difficult to mobilise the people in Egypt, and for decades people have expected a revolution to break out in Egypt, but it hasn't. (Schielke 2011: 1).

7.4 From 25th to 28th January: emergence of political consciousness

The period of rage from Tuesday 25th to Friday 28th January was a period full of doubts and questions on what was going to happen next. It was also full of fears because of the magnitude of aggression by the state authorities, and concerns about

safety after the news broadcast by the media that police stations were being attacked and prisons being broken open by force and that thousands of criminals were free in streets.

The narratives in this chapter on young people's involvement in the Tahrir actions during the 18 days from 25th January to Mubarak's downfall on 11th February and beyond come from the three young people Amro, Mona and Karim (the Don Bosco high school senior encountered in Chapter 5). In building the story of young people's involvement in the Tahrir actions I will use the narratives of the three young people which they had narrated in different meetings with me and at different stages. Parts of the narratives come from Amro, Mona and Karim's written memories which they have posted online on their blogs and / or Facebook pages.

During the month of Ramadan / August 2011, it was night time and I was in Tahrir Square at the intersection of Mohamed Mahmoud Street. A group of 25 to 30 young people, mostly of high school age, were gathering in front of the Hardees restaurant. They were waiting for others who had responded to an invitation for a gathering in Tahrir Square. I approached the few familiar faces I knew in the middle of the group and saluted both Amro and Karim. The latter agreed to leave the group to sit with me in one of the Tahrir coffee houses.

Karim: I am not ashamed to say that I wasn't at Tahrir Square during the revolution, but I followed the progress of the revolution in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and the rest of the governorates. Being locked at home was out of my hands. It was against my will and I wanted to go to Tahrir Square. Although staying at home watching what was happening on TV during the revolution was the peak of being negative, I was able to turn it into something positive and they were the best 18 days in my life; I can't forget even a single hour of those days.

On January 25th, I heard there would be demonstrations. But what difference does that make, I thought; every now and then we hear about demonstrations and nothing happens. I even didn't pay attention to what happened on the 25th. The next morning, on January 26th, I left home to go to my institute in Shubra. On my way, my eyes fell on Aam Mohamed (the newspaper seller). I thought of taking a look at what had happened

yesterday. The official newspaper headlines were about Lebanon and what was going on there and a bit of news on demonstrations requesting reforms that had ended safely. I laughed mockingly, saying that the country would never change, that would be only in my dreams and I swore that not in a million demonstrations would anything happen. Before leaving Aam Mohamed for the institute, by chance I saw a newspaper called "Al Masry Al Youm", and its first page looked odd, as there was a photo of a dark square with thousands of people rushing in different directions, but the photo wasn't very clear. I found out later that it was unclear because of the tear gas bombs; I bought that newspaper for the first time and rushed to arrive on time at my Institute.

At the end of the week, on Thursday January 27th. I left home for the Institute and came across Aam Mohamed, but I didn't find anything new, so I continued on my way. I reached the institute and we had a Social Studies class; we happened to open up the subject of the demonstrations, and I told the teacher, "The young people went on demonstrations on Tuesday, and look what happened!! They were beaten and went back home, nothing happened. " He told me, "You will see what will happen tomorrow." I sat down wondering what was going to happen.

Mona went on to tell her story after she had been released. Up until the midnight of 25th January Mona was still sceptical that anything could happen:

I thought that nothing was going to happen on 25th January and that no one would do anything. This was my thinking until the midnight of the 25th; all of a sudden we found our friends knocking at the door to escape from the tear gas bombs... We didn't believe it until our friends showed us the photos they had taken in Tahrir Square and we saw a lot of people there. Our friends themselves did not realize the number and variety of people that were there: it wasn't only the elite (cultured people and political activists). One of our friends told us that some young people lit a fire from the wood, sat around it and started to sing, and the question I kept thinking was, What is the meaning of what is happening?

I hadn't really been into demonstrations or protests in the past. I was happy to join the 6th April Movement strike in 2008 because my friends were there and I was just cheering from a distance... but to have such a number of people engaged in the same thing as was the case on the 25th... was fairly weird to me, a lot of enthusiasm in the air. I kept asking myself, was anything going to happen or not? On the 26th some of our friends got arrested! There was a strange movement in the country that we didn't realize... the incident that was similar to what was happening was the

students' protest that took place in the 1970s that my mother had told me about.

The one who found it most difficult to speak was Amro who, as he said, carried many sad memories of those days. He didn't join the 25th January demonstration because he had "a private lesson". He said he wasn't convinced about joining in and didn't believe that there was going to be a revolution. Sitting in a Costa Cafe close to Tahrir Square, Amro talked about his Tahrir memories:

I actually joined the revolution on Friday January 28th (known as the Friday of Rage). I didn't know what to expect. The private lesson was cancelled. By accident I joined the march from my neighbourhood to Tahrir. When we were approaching the square, the march took the wrong entrance to the square, which brought us face to face with the police forces that were waiting. We were beaten aggressively. We were attacked with khartoush and tear gas. I went home, but passed by the pharmacy in order to deal with the effects of the tear gas. I slept for two days.

My parents didn't know for some time that I had joined the actions of the revolution. Even later on, when I told them that I'd joined some demos they didn't understand that I had been that close to the front line. My parents are pro-revolution but like any parents they are always worried about me and what could happen to me in the street. I will never forget those days.

Karim's memories of January 28th, the "Friday of Rage", come from where he was stuck in the Al-Daher area, not too far from down town Tahrir:

I woke up at 6 a.m. and went to church. I prayed, then at 8:30, I walked along the street with my friends to have breakfast as usual. But on our way back, and all of a sudden, we found all the signals of our cell phones were going up and down. At that moment I knew I had to move and that something was happening in the streets. We went around a lot of streets and then went out to the main streets where I found plenty of cars and armoured vehicles, people running to left and right, shops closing their doors and some people who looked weird wearing black sunglasses and with strong physiques (State Security Sector guys). But when we got back to the side streets, we found everything was normal, people walking by, shops open, so I realised that the danger was in the main streets only. But by 1 p.m. I noticed some youths who looked very strange who did not belong to the neighbourhood standing round the corners of the streets. We

called them "baltagia" (bullies). I went back home around 2:30 p.m. and found all of our neighbours gathering at our place watching the Al Jazeera TV channel for some time and the official TV channels for a while after that.

Mona continued narrating her memories about the Friday of Rage from her location close to downtown Tahrir:

There were invitations on Facebook for something to happen on Friday the 28th. What would we be doing?... We thought that it was over, that the demonstrations had been suppressed and that our friends would be released... and then it was the 28th; all means of communications (internet, mobiles, and even landlines) were cut. I was supposed to shoot a movie that day, and my day was going on as planned, but 30 minutes before shooting the communications were cut, so I cancelled the shooting, and when the communications were disconnected, we couldn't reach either our families or our friends, so people had to go down to the streets to know what was happening. I couldn't go out that day: my friend locked me at home because she was afraid that we might get lost in the crowd.

After the Friday prayers I tried to go out, but I couldn't find anybody to go with. It was such a bad feeling. I felt paralyzed and helpless, it was a horrible feeling. From the balcony, I saw people arrested, I saw a lot of violence, and I didn't know what to do. I felt terribly helpless, all I could do on the 28th at 3 p.m., as all the pharmacies had finished their stock, I sent bandages or disinfectants, and the whole neighbourhood did the same.

All the men and women were standing on the balconies throwing cotton and bandages, and we knew that people were dying in the streets. My roommate was so sick, so she had to go down for an injection, but she found injured people with serious injuries, the pharmacies were empty, and the policemen were about to retreat, so they took off their clothes in the streets and were wearing civilian clothes to run away. That night I couldn't sleep, but on the 29th I woke up to hear the sound of bullets coming from everywhere, and I heard from our friends that they (the Ministry of the Interior) were starting to kill people, This didn't frighten me as much as when I asked myself a question: Where am I? I've seen armoured vehicles shooting people with live bullets. So it is a revolution then, and I don't know what to do?

My mother called me, and I was telling her that people were dying here without any fault, it is a war!! As my mother was breaking down, I had to go to her house on the other side of Cairo. She picked me up and there were fires everywhere on the ring road, especially on our way back home. In my family I am treated as a responsible person, just like my eldest

brother to a great extent. I have achieved this the hard way, it is such an effort, so I've always felt responsible for taking care of my elderly father and mother. I didn't know how to protect them. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whether what was happening was right or wrong.

The memories voiced by these three young people on the first few days of the Egyptian revolution showed the emerging young Egyptians' political consciousness. It was something they had not experienced before, of being face to face with the ugly aggression of the state. Amro had been in clashes before, between the Ultras and the police during football matches, and Mona has been in a demonstration before. But this time, demonstrators were being beaten and even killed in the streets. In narrating their memories they repeated the questions: is this really happening? What can I do? What does this mean? For young people, the emergence of political consciousness came as they witnessed moments of uncertainty, fear and worries about themselves, their families, and friends. In the middle of hopelessness that any change could happen, chaotic streets, and fears of consequences, critical decisions were made. Amro joined the march from his neighbourhood to Tahrir without letting his parents to know that he had done so, while Mona told her mother that she was leaving home and going back to Tahrir with her friends.

For young people, one of the significant paths leading to Tahrir was online social networking through blogging, and the connectivity of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other online media. In various ways, young people intensively utilised their digital experiences, strategies, tools, training and networking during the first few days of the mobilisation and throughout their engagement with the Egyptian revolution. The significance of online connectivity for young people during those first few days was tested when the government cut the internet and mobile service. Away from notions of cyberactivism, as Mona put it very simply: *"When communications were disconnected, we could reach neither our families nor our friends; people had to go down to the streets to know what was happening."* This is

what Hammelman and Messard (2011) argued, that online participation leads to offline participation (2011: 24). Moreover, online connectivity was utilised by young activists during the first few days for mobilisation and disseminating information about routes of marches, safety precautions, types of suitable clothes to wear, medicines needed for street clinics, and other items required in order to support the occupiers. Despite the significance of the role of social media and online connectivity however, some young people rejected the notion of the “internet / Facebook revolution” that was widespread during those early days. Karim said:

When I am on Facebook or Twitter I feel I am in the kitchen of the revolution. However, this is not a Facebook revolution. This is our revolution. This is the youth's revolution.

Karim said exactly what Herrera (2011) argued, following the downfall of Mubarak, that:

What is happening in Egypt is not a Facebook Revolution. But it could not have come out without the Facebook generation (Herrera 2011: 5).

Young Egyptians’ sense of hopelessness and their great desires for real change were the real grounds that gave birth to Tahrir. Despite the uncertainties and fears, masses of Egyptians from different social strata were moved by the younger generations’ “claims to the city”, the radical connotations of their call for real change, and that they filled the roads and streets leading to Tahrir Square. However what Tahrir has in turn given to young people remains to be explored. The following sections of this chapter are attempts to unveil part of it.

7.5 Tahrir occupied

The Friday of Rage ended with the defeat of the police forces, who by around 5 pm on that day had vanished completely from all streets around Egypt. The escalations of the Friday of Rage of bloody battles between protestors and the CSF, the

demolishing and burning of police stations, the invading of prisons and the escape of prisoners, ended with the scenes of Egyptian military tanks around critical points in Cairo, other large cities and main roads. In a few hours, Tahrir Square was completely surrounded by military tanks. At the same time, the state media announced a state of emergency all over the country, a curfew in Cairo and major Egyptian cities, and the military forces had been put in charge of internal security. Most Egyptians from that point were obliged to guard their neighbourhoods against what the media were announcing as potential attacks by thugs and criminals.

On Monday February 2nd, hundreds of thugs, whom revolutionaries claimed were hired by Mubarak supporters, attacked the demonstrators in Tahrir Square on camels and horses. Eleven of the Tahrir occupiers were reported dead and around 600 injured due to the attack. The incident, which became famously known as “the Camel Battle”, was followed by a street war in Tahrir Square and Cairo's down-town streets between occupiers and attackers and many were killed or injured. Following the “Camel Battle”, thousands and (on certain days) millions of Egyptians from all ages and social strata filled Tahrir Square demanding the removal of Mubarak and his regime.

I did not spend much time physically in Tahrir Square during those 9 days, as I and many others were torn between staying in Tahrir and joining the local security committees or *legan Shaibya*, which became responsible for guarding neighbourhoods and properties against potential attacks.



Figure 8: Street Clinic in Tahrir Square on 10th Feb 2011. Photo by MF.

Tahrir Square during those 9 days turned into an icon of the so-called “Arab Spring”. The square was so lively with the occupation’s actions of acclamations, flags, banners, songs, collective prayers, night discussion circles, graffiti drawings, and music playing. Thousands of Tahrir occupiers were able to stay there together during the occupation period, while none of them could predict when and how this occupation was going to end and what was going to happen to them if it failed. The occupiers took care of many details to support the occupation: checking IDs / passports at the square entrances, guarding the square against potential attacks particularly at night, securing food and water for thousands of occupiers, establishing and operating clinics to take care of occupiers needing health care, securing medicines and other urgent needs for clinics, building mobile toilets, running an internal Tahrir broadcasting service to share important news and

broadcast the speeches of leading revolutionaries, and arranging blankets and tents for thousands who were spending the night in the square.



Figure 9: Focal points of the occupied Tahrir Square. Photo by BBC News. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12434787>

Amro, Mona, and Karim narrated their memories about those nine days, from inside the square as occupiers or from outside supporting the informal committees. In the following sections I am using the three young voices to tell the story of the Tahrir occupation and the overthrow of Mubarak in their own words:

Amro:

I went back to the square the very day of the Camel Battle. I was laughing, not believing what was happening. Everything happened in front of the army forces and they did nothing. Then I was involved in the battle that followed the Camel Battle, and it continued all night and the following day. I saw lots of blood that night and many people I didn't know died that day. I remember very well a young man of my age who was killed close to the

TV building. His corpse was carried to the square and that made the situation very bad. After these incidents, people of different ages and social backgrounds started to fill the square.

Karim:

From January 29th to February 1st I was sitting in front of the TV following the news in the morning and in the informal committee at night. During those days I believed in change but I wasn't sure that saying "Mubarak Out" was what change was really about, and of course, the term "revolution" was totally new to my ears.

February 2nd was one of the hardest days that I've ever witnessed, as I was in a dilemma, especially after Mubarak's famous speech. The Camel Battle took place and I saw it all live on TV. I felt so numb and helpless, I didn't know what to do. I stayed watching the TV all night and didn't sleep; every now and then I went down to update those in the informal committee. I waited patiently for the sun to rise, hoping that the numbers of occupiers would increase in the morning and their resistance would become stronger. On Thursday we were watching the progress of events in extreme silence and I asked my father a question: "Does Mubarak have to leave or not?" He answered, "He has to leave, he has ruined the whole country, but not this way." I replied, "Hosni Mubarak would never leave other than this way," and from then on I was struggling to go to Tahrir Square, but my father refused because he was afraid something bad might happen to me, especially as we lived far from Tahrir and there were a lot of transport problems, due to the curfew. He took all the money to prevent me from leaving home. I totally understood his situation as a father.

Mona:

I stayed with my mother 3 days, she is so with the revolution and she felt so sad for the young people who were dying. From January 29th to the Camel Battle I didn't know anything. The television was filling people with the idea that what was happening was wrong. Then on the day of the Camel Battle, I woke up and watched it all on the TV, I kept watching and was completely absorbed by what I had watched on the TV the whole night, I cried and couldn't believe what was happening in our country. It was a war. The next day I told my mother that I was going back to Tahrir.

My mother wanted me to swear that I wouldn't go to Tahrir, but in fact I did. I called my friends to know their locations, I knew two who had died, Sally and Basiouny. These guys had been sitting at the table next to me in the coffee shop two weeks ago. Tens of our friends were arrested and bad things happened to them. When I was at my family's house, I couldn't access the internet, so when I went to Tahrir, I saw what had happened in the past days... I decided that I wasn't going back home again, and when

my mother called to check up on me, I told her that I was staying in a safe place. She told me, I don't want you dead.

At first, I didn't have a clear role in Tahrir. I went there with my friends, and I joined people to distribute things to others, on Thursday, and the day of the provoking speech before the day Mubarak was overthrown there was a march that I joined. My normal role was to be there all the time; make sure the numbers of occupiers were not decreasing and defend any attacks. I started to feel that I had to take photos to collect some material, so I started to look for any camera, even if it was small or borrowed; I realised the importance of documentation.

Some days I joined people without cameras, just to be with them, and some other days, I wanted to document what was happening as I thought it might be a proof of something like Mohamed Mahmoud. I needed to take photos, no matter the quality. That's why the first thing that was broken after we got arrested was the cameras. I took photos of the attacks, the bombs, and the gunshots, how attackers were moving. I needed to document these things, just to prove that the occupiers were neither criminals nor bullies.



Figure 10: Tahrir Square on 10th Feb 2011. Photo by MF.

Karim:

Just after the Camel Battle and for a week I went into streets in my neighbourhood talking to people, saying that we should scream out in the face of injustice, we should say No, and join the protesters in Tahrir, and that those who could go should never hesitate to help Egypt and liberate the country, and other things of that sort. We found some people hanging up posters for Mubarak, so we tore them apart, and others were writing Yes to Mubarak, so we altered the Yes to a No. My friends and I did that kind of work around the neighbourhood.

Amro:

The night before Mubarak stepped down, I spent it with Ultras in Mohamed Mahmoud Street. We didn't sleep all night. When Mubarak stepped down I went home for some sleep.

Karim:

February 11th was the best day in my life. I woke up at 6 a.m. and decided that I would do anything to go to Tahrir that day, but how could I do that, as my father was completely rejecting the idea, but I decided I would try, and maybe he would agree. My father woke up around 8 a.m. and he found me packing. He asked me where I was going, so I said I was going to my grandfather. He said that I was not going anywhere, but I told him that I was fed up of staying at home, that things had become safer and people were going to work I said, Please let me go, I am fed up of staying at home, it isn't 12 yet and the demonstrations have started. Anyway, after a long fight I was able to get out of the house and I went to Al Abasseya to my Grandfather. I knew that the demonstrations would pass by my Grandfather's house. I went out and after almost half an hour I heard people crying out, and without thinking I ran and joined the demonstrations and cried out with them "Good Morning Mubarak... Today is your Last Day".

I was just about to ask where we were going when I heard them saying: "Martyrs in Millions... we are going to the palace", so I knew that we were going to the presidential palace and I was very happy that I had joined in. We walked along and after some time we heard the mosque calling for prayers. I told myself: "I am a Christian. What should I do?" Someone called Mina (Christian too) said, "Let's go around those who are praying and open a path for the cars to pass." They finished praying and we continued the march towards Ramsis Street to head to the palace. There were thousands and thousands of protesters coming from our direction. We were so happy and we ran to join them.

Women from houses gave us cold water to be able to continue as the weather was a bit warm that day, but we didn't feel it, we were crying out

with all the strength we had, we were happy and angry. Every time I felt that I had gone far from home I said to myself that I should go back so as not to worry them, but I kept hearing a voice saying "Freedom, Freedom", so I kept walking and repeating this until we reached the palace. Of course, on our way there we heard some people cursing us, and a lot of people were astonished and couldn't realize what was happening.....! We reached the palace, and after almost an hour we saw a woman coming out onto the balcony and she was making calls full of excitement and joy (zaghrouda) and at that very moment I felt that I was alive and all the tiredness I had felt was gone and I kept jumping and dancing saying: "Egypt is free and Mubarak is out". We cried, thanked God, prayed, played songs and celebrated.

For young people, the scenes they had witnessed of bloody battles, tear gas, and massive state repression became combined with their hopelessness about the future. In that sense, Tahrir became a turning point for many Egyptians, particularly young people. Despite notions of hopelessness about future and fears of the present, new hopes about change were born in Tahrir. The three young people were persistent about the significance of being physically present there. Karim was very upset that he could not be there physically. Mona had emphasised that the number of occupiers was very important, as well as securing the square, and documenting what was happening. Her role had evolved from being there in the square to support an adequate number of occupiers and to defend attacks, to taking photos and collecting materials for the documentation of what was happening. Karim, despite restrictions on his involvement, started talking to people in his neighbourhood to protest and to join the protesters in Tahrir.

All the battles from January 25th to the Camel Battle (February 2nd) were about which side could seize the square. The aggression of police forces on the Friday of Rage (January 28th) was mainly to prevent protesters from reaching there. The Camel Battle was the last fight by the Mubarak regime over the Tahrir space. After Mubarak's camels and cavalry were defeated, Tahrir was officially occupied and declared to be a liberated territory. The moment the square was occupied by

protestors, it was claimed as the base and the icon for the revolution. Protestors acted in various forms and with great creativity to make their claims to the city. The entrances to the square were completely closed and guarded, traffic was prevented, banners with revolutionary demands were hung all over the square, some protestors slept under the military tanks to prevent them from moving, and street surfaces were painted. The revolutionaries made every effort to confirm the Tahrir occupation through barricades, ID check points, a radio in the square, media areas, street clinics, IT sections, lodging areas, etc. All forms of procedures, division of labour, daily schedule of events, artistic works, photos of martyrs, music, singing, and signs were attempts by the occupiers to make their own claims to the city (Lefebvre 1996) and subvert the authority of the state. Like the Greek case of Navarinou Park (December 2008), Tahrir Square – which used to be the centre of the capital of the state of Egypt – was “turned into a lived space reflecting and affecting political developments in the country” (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011: 84).

During the 18 days of Tahrir, *thanaweya-aama* young people became involved in the numerous occupational techniques that allowed them to redefine the meaning of “public space” and its significance for their political consciousness and everyday oppositional practices. These young people also learned a great deal about practical occupational techniques that enabled them to make their move to start claiming their rights to quality education.

7.6 Claiming rights to education: the MOE occupation

The online discussions on the Facebook page “*Thanaweya-aama* Students’ Revolution” around the MOE occupation event reached a decision to meet on 28th February at 10 am in Tahrir Square and march to the Ministry building. After a long

discussion and contributions by the page members, the final demands of the first *thanaweya-aama* street actions were agreed upon.

Thanaweya Amma demands:

1. Postpone exams due to the time lost during Tahrir
2. Cancel the schools' student attendance tracking
3. Consider the students' dignity and rights as Egyptian citizens
4. Modify the exam schedule to allow students more time to prepare
5. Reduce parts of the syllabus proportionate to the time left in the school year
6. Establish a different system for school governance and discipline
7. Reform education curricula to become competitive with first world countries and to prepare for a real scientific renaissance
8. Consider the idea of establishing a national programme of science in Egypt

We look forward for further contributions and to meeting all of you in Tahrir on Monday at 10 am in front of the Kentucky store.

Figure 11: Demands of the MOE occupation (a translation of the demands posted on the group's Facebook page on 26th February 2011).

On Monday morning, 28th February 2011, I left my office in Maadi for Tahrir Square. There were a few tents that were kept in the middle of the square, which was partly open to traffic. The square was still decorated with flags, banners, and photos of the revolution martyrs. At the side of the square there was a gathering of around 500 students. It was apparent from the banners they carried that they were the *thanaweya-aama* students. A couple of young people were taking the lead to organize the group and prepare for the march to the Ministry building, while other students were busy with their sheets of papers and markers preparing their banners in which they expressed their demands, while still other students were using their

cell phones to call more students, urging them to hurry up and join the march that was going to start moving soon. The gathering was mostly male students, with a small group of female students who came in their school uniform. With the growing number of young people gathering, cars and buses crossing the square started to slow down, and the pedestrians and car drivers were asking young people who they were and what the gathering was for.

Despite the fact that the march to the Ministry building was planned to start at 10 am, the young people decided to wait for more students to join. So the march started at about 11 am with around five hundred students leaving the centre of Tahrir Square and heading towards Elqasr Elieny Street then turning left into Falaky Street, passing by one of the old campus buildings of the American university and the buildings of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Military tanks were still blocking most street around Tahrir Square, particularly those leading to the Ministry of the Interior, which is the police headquarters. The military police tried to stop the march, asking young people about their purpose and where the march was heading to; however, the students continued their march while more students kept joining. Three to four students were leading the chanting of the march. The chanting was mostly about students' demands for a better education and better future. Their slogans were also very critical of the current education system, particularly the thanaweya-aama exams system.

In less than half an hour, the students' march reached the main gate of the Ministry. In no time the gate was completely locked and the street in front of it was occupied by students who continued shouting their demands. More kept coming and joining the occupation of the street and main gates of the ministry. Some students decided to climb the very high fence and main gate, carrying flags and banners. Shortly after the march had arrived at its destination, military tanks arrived and blocked the streets around the Ministry; however, they did not prevent other young people from joining.



Figure 12: Occupation of MOE on 28th February 2011. Photo by MF.

The MOE occupies a wide area close to Kasr Elani Street and Tahrir Square and is composed of a large main building in the middle as well as a number of other buildings, and surrounded by a very high fence. The main building, which contains the offices of the Minister and senior staff was, until the 1950s, a luxurious palace of one of the princesses of the Mohamed Ali family that ruled Egypt until 1952. Over the years, with the growth in the number of employees and the need for more space, several other buildings were added. As someone who is familiar with the MOE buildings, I can confirm that occupying the Ministry's main gate and its surroundings meant that none of the Ministry's key officials, including the Minister himself, could leave the building unless the occupation was dismissed by force.

I was standing between groups of students, trying to do more than just observing and photographing, by chatting to individuals or groups. I approached a group of female students standing at the back talking to each other:

MF: *First time taking part in street actions?*

Student 1 (sounding hesitant to reply): *Are you a journalist?*

MF: *No I'm not a journalist. I'm a researcher writing about students' participation in the revolution.*

Student 1: *Ooookay. No, this is not my first time! I've been in Tahrir several times and I go to Tahrir every Friday but it's the first time for some of my friends.*

MF: *You are all dressed in your school uniforms!*

Student 1: *Yes, we agreed to gather at the school gates in our uniforms so that our male colleagues would recognize us and can help us in case we face any harassment.*

MF: *Where are your schools located?*

Student 1: *Most of us come from schools in the close-by neighbourhood of Saida Zeinab.*

MF (asking another student who had become interested in our chat): *Is this your first time in a street action?*

Student 2: *Yes.*

MF: *Why are you joining this time?*

Student 2: *Because I want the education system to be changed.*

The next morning a statement was posted on the “*Thanaweya-aama Students' Revolution*” Facebook page:

Dear colleagues (those who were with us yesterday and also those who couldn't join us): As you know, yesterday during the event in front of the Ministry of Education for the whole day, around 7 pm we were asked to nominate three of us to meet with by a Ministry senior official to present our demands. Omar, Moustafa (myself) and Hana were selected to meet the Ministry representative who we found out later is an advisor to the Minister. We have presented all your demands. We got most of the demands related to this school year and this year's exams approved. They

promised that the rest of demands are now at the top of the Minister's priorities.

My colleagues, we know that some of these promises are not going to become a reality and that we will need to take more and more action. But we are all proud that yesterday our voices were heard for the first time. Congratulations, and we will not stop here until we oblige them to change the useless education system.

Historically, university students have dominated student streets actions and marches. However, for the first time, it was pre-university students who organised a collective street action in front of the MOE and occupied its vicinity. The Facebook page “Thanaweya-aama Students' Revolution” showed that it was the first time during the revolution's actions that “education” and “students” in particular were directly connected with the term “revolution”. Young people utilised their virtual space related experiences and skills, particularly Facebook, in creating the online event, discussing the list of demands, coming up with the event's slogans, and reaching out to different online student communities and groups to support the event. The demands that were discussed online among students revolved around notions of justice, dignity, rights, respect and scientific progress.

In order to claim their educational rights, *thanaweya-aama* students deployed several of the techniques of the Tahrir occupation. Students could have organised their protests inside Tahrir Square or in their school; however, in their first *thanaweya-aama* street actions they strategically chose to head to the MOE headquarters as the state authority responsible for the education system. They also chose to start their march to the MOE from the heart of Tahrir Square. Inspired by Tahrir values, students' acclamations were very expressive about the extent to which they saw the current education system as useless for preparing them for university studies and for life.

7.7 Surviving the counter-revolution

Following the fall of Mubarak, young people grappled with how to move forward, and their position as the real force behind the revolution, aiming to reach the outcomes they hoped for: dignity, democracy and equity. However, not long after the removal of Mubarak, these young people realised that they were facing a counter-revolution that was working hard at marginalising them and stripping the revolution of any real meaning or hope. They also realised the mistake of leaving Tahrir immediately after the fall of Mubarak. So they chose to keep up a momentum of pressure on the interim military rule to make sure that the goals of their revolution were not left aside, and they went back to street actions of marches and sit-ins in Tahrir and other locations. In the name of allowing the country to return to the “production cycle”, the interim regime, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, attacked all sit-ins and protests. These incidents involved the humiliation of protestors, such as the famous virginity tests for female protestors, and caused hundreds of injuries and casualties. Thousands of young people (even children) and other protestors were arrested and sent to military trials. Moreover, young people started to realize that all the political processes under way were marginalising them and that there were no intentions of real change. Consequently, young people engaged in major street actions that involved harsher clashes and even bloody battles with both the CSF and the military forces. The Mohamed Mahmoud street battle was considered the biggest after the fall of Mubarak.

7.7.1 The battles of Mohamed Mahmoud

The Mohamed Mahmoud (November 2011) first battle began when the military security forces raided a sit-in that was occupying Tahrir Square. After that, CSF kept using Mohamed Mahmoud Street, which is near the Ministry of the Interior, for raiding Tahrir and seizing activists. Protesters started confronting CSF along the street. Days of fighting erupted during which tear gas filled the sky above the square and several Tahrir clinics were established by many young doctors who were

volunteering to take care of cases of injury and suffocation. CSF snipers fired directly into demonstrators' faces, and many lost their eyesight permanently. More than 40 protesters died in the Mohamed Mahmoud battle.



Figure 13: Mohamed Mahmoud battle front line. Photo by AP. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20395260>

Thousands of Egyptians coming from different backgrounds (researchers, journalists, lawyers, photographers, celebrities, political activists and civil servants), mostly middle class, who had originally met in Tahrir not long before, decided to occupy the safe zone in the square, backing up the Mohamed Mahmoud fighters. Some of them were holding banners with slogans against the military rule, others were volunteering in the different clinics that were distributed at many spots of the square, a few were trying to get close to the entrance to Mohamed Mahmoud street to take some photos, and the rest were engaged in non-stop discussions about what was going on. A friend of mine tried to go deeper into the battle zone to try to take some photos. One of those young men who were fighting told him:

You, sir, stay there in the safe zone and leave this to us. Even if we die, the country loses nothing. You and others like you shouldn't die. El-balad (the country) needs you but it doesn't need us.

Here is how Mona and Amro narrated their memories about their engagement in the Mohamed Mahmoud battle:

Amro:

There was a call for a sit in on Friday November 18th close to the “Adha” feast in order to demand the rights of the martyrs and injured and demand the resignation of the Cabinet. The injured and the families of martyrs were beaten severely by the police. The news about the attacking and beating of these people caused thousands of young people and revolutionaries to mobilize in Tahrir and Mohamed Mahmoud Street and resume the sit-in. Severe clashes erupted with the police forces in Mohamed Mahmoud street. I was on the front line, where tear gas and stones and khartoush were used all night and there were hundreds of injuries. The next morning, when many had left the square, the CSF attacked the sit-in and many young people were arrested. Later in the day, when the clashes were on hold, a group of us decided to go and talk to the officers to ask them to release our friends who'd been arrested. Fifteen of us walked into Mohamed Mahmoud Street, but we didn't notice that the street was filled with security agents and their thugs. In a few moments the clashes resumed and we were arrested. They asked us to sit on the ground and wait. I tweeted to one of my friends that I had been arrested. One of the activists came in and like kidnapped me away from the clashes. The rest of those arrested were not released until late at night.

Mona:

I was outside Cairo, and when I returned, I was shocked by what was happening in Tahrir Square and Mohamed Mahmoud. I called one of my friends, and he said, “Don't go, Mona, it's very dangerous.” But I decided to go, and take a camera, any camera, to document what was going on. When I got there, I began to go deeper and deeper down Mohamed Mahmoud Street to where the worst of the fighting was. I saw some middle class youths among a majority of young people who were obviously coming from informal and marginal areas. They were falling down right and left from tear gas and from rubber bullets. Everyone was extremely tense. They were shouting: “No to the military, no to the police! We want to see the military go!” Motor cycles ridden by young people kept speeding back and forth carrying injured protestors to clinics inside the square or to ambulances for critical cases to be carried to hospitals. With the hundreds of fighters in Mohammed Mahmoud there were thousands of supporters, mostly older men and women, filling the square.

Amro:

The next morning, in the square, people were running away and leaving their tents behind. We were even chased outside the square to Kasr Elnil

Bridge and many people were beaten and arrested. We had to hide inside a coffee house and the guy closed the door so that we wouldn't get arrested. We left when the square was totally empty. Later on the military withdrew and we realised that another massacre had happened during the attack and that another big sit-in had started in the square and Mohamed Mahmoud.

The following days, the clashes became harsher and other activists were arrested. They had been taking photographs. They were beaten by Islamists and later on they were arrested by the police. By that time I'd met many of my colleagues from school and private lessons, in the middle of the clashes. With the presence of the Islamists and by creating a buffer zone, the military was able to build a wall in Mohamed Mahmoud between us and the police forces.

Mona:

There were a few women and girls on the front line, and when the CSF were attacking, they defended themselves with stones. Different types of people were arrested.

Amro:

I stayed in the square the whole time. I only left to go for a shower at home or to go to my private lessons. The Cabinet was dissolved and a new prime minister was named and that started a new sit-in in the vicinity of the Cabinet, rejecting the named new prime minister. They arrested one of us at night and the next morning they attacked all of us and the ugliest thing happened to the female activist who was beaten in the square and her clothes were ripped off completely by soldiers.

The Mohamed Mahmoud Street battle was the peak of the after revolution resistance in which young people were completely involved as the only real force of resistance in the street, facing the so-called counter-revolution. The battle started with a sit-in by young people in solidarity with the demands of the injured revolutionaries and martyrs' families. For young people, *takreem* – honouring those who sacrificed their lives and future for the revolution – could not be compromised. Instead of being able to attract the authorities' attention to their demands, they were beaten by the CSF. That made the young people so angry and caused the biggest and harshest wave of protests and clashes since the fall of Mubarak.

The front lines of the Mohamed Mahmoud battle were dominated by young men coming from the informal Cairo neighbourhoods. They represented the marginal young of unemployed and unskilled labour that held longstanding accounts against the police. Those front line fighters had been the fuel for the revolution's street actions since January 25th. The majority of the Mohamed Mahmoud front line fighters were the brothers, sisters, relatives and friends of those who were injured or died during the eleven months since the eruption of the revolution's actions. Many Egyptians were puzzled about the insistence of those young people to fight the police and become injured and die inside Mohamed Mahmoud Street, and kept asking: Why don't they just leave the street and stay inside the square?

Mohamed Mahmoud Street had turned into a "symbolic space" (Ryzova 2012:2) where young people engaged in the production of a new spatiality where the battle over the space was actually for the sake of the battle itself. Ryzova argued that "the fight itself was the message" (2012:2). Helpless young people with stones in their hands facing CSF brutality were delivering a clear message that they would not give up on the blood and death of their revolutionary peers and that the old practices by the police forces were unacceptable.

7.7.2 The woman's voice is a revolution

Mona continued narrating her involvement with the Mohammed Mahmoud battle and arrived at the point when she was arrested:

I reached the front lines facing the CSF. There were only about twenty metres in between. There were maybe forty people there. I saw two or three other women there. But there was no talking in the chaos. I noticed that when the guys stopped throwing stones at the CSF, they would come forward with their tanks and try to arrest them. Or they would fire tear gas directly at them. I was trying to document things with my small camera. And in the middle of that, I found at least six or seven CSF soldiers had come at me — in just two seconds, they were very fast; people beside me ran quickly, but I couldn't. They beat me on the head, and grabbed my hair — I was shocked, I didn't know what to do. They broke my camera, and they were kicking me, beating me with sticks, everything. One of them,

wearing civilian clothes, grabbed me by the shirt and dragged me down the street. I was dizzy; I was going a bit unconscious from the beating on my head. He began to ask me: "How much do they pay you to do this?" And things like that. They dragged me to the Ministry of the Interior on foot.

I was alone – they caught each one alone. There were officers who beat me once I entered the building. One high ranking officer – with three stars on his epaulets – used an electric stick on my arm, and he kept doing this again and again. I was saying "Stop!" – I was trying to get him away. Then they shoved me into a sort of a kiosk. They began to explore contents of my bag and throw everything on the floor. Within two or three minutes this space was full of guys – a lot of them teenagers, maximum seventeen years old. They had all been beaten – there was blood everywhere. My head was also bleeding from the injuries, and my lips and mouth too. They took our mobile phones, and our sim cards and everything. They took my ID. And they kept calling us names. Police soldiers outside the kiosk acted as if they wanted to grab me and drag me outside again to beat me again. They were saying to the officers, "Let her outside and we're going to fuck her! We'll screw her whole life!"

After a while a van came, to deliver us to the police station. Those arrested in the van were something like forty men, and I was the only woman. I was the first one who got down. I told one of the CSF officers there, "Please don't let anybody beat me again." But inside the station, an officer who was standing on the stairs kept looking at me, up at down, and calling me names and threatening me. He kept saying, "Get her upstairs. We're going to fuck her, we'll screw her life." We all had to go upstairs, into an office. And there, they threatened me again: "We are going to hang you on the wall." There was blood everywhere on the walls. We stayed upstairs for something like seven hours. We wanted to go to the bathroom: they told us it was forbidden. At 2 a.m. they got us all downstairs to go into the truck again, and go to the prosecutor.

At the prosecutor's office we were put in a very small place like a cage, maybe three square metres. And when it was my turn I was called to stand in front of the deputy prosecutor. He acted very civilly; he told me, "Don't worry, sit down, how did they arrest you? You are young, you're a girl, you look peaceful. I have been in Tahrir Square myself." He kept writing questions. And he was giving the answers instead of me, like: "No" – "I don't know," "It didn't happen." As if he was going to help me. We all waited for six hours to know what was going to happen to us. Another arrested group came, and there were something like 100 of us, or 150, and we were divided between two cages. I was still the only woman. They took me out of the cage, and let me sit on the floor in the same area, between the two cages. There was a lower-ranking policeman who kept harassing me all that day. I was completely terrified of him. While I was waiting between

the two cages, I was alone, and he entered the area, and was trying to touch me, and grab my body.

At 6 p.m., they told me, "We'll release you — you just have to go back to the police station to process the release." We went back to the van, where that lower-ranking officer kept telling me, "I want you." The van kept making turns and detours—going in circles. We realised we weren't going to the police station. People were singing at first, but then they started asking, "Where are we going? What's happening?" Suddenly we saw through the cracks he'd entered a road to the desert. And we reached a military camp, and stopped. We were all so depressed and discouraged — really shocked. They'd tricked us.

We entered the camp and there were many soldiers holding sticks and surrounding the car. The officers in the car were laughing and telling us, "These soldiers will screw your life; they will beat you to death." I was so terrified. I asked one of the officers, "Please don't let anyone beat me again." And we all left the car. I told myself, "OK, it's my destiny, I will stay here forever." They beat all of them, but this time not me. The police took off their belts, and used them to beat them, and punched them on their backs, and kicked them. They put me in one cage, alone, with everyone else (around 60) in another, and they kept a soldier with me. I asked him, "Please get me a blanket, it's too cold for me" — I was sleeping on the floor. I was telling myself, "Mona, you are going to live here for days. You don't know what will happen to you. There's nothing you can do." Suddenly at 10 p.m. they opened doors, and told me they would release all of us except seven, who would stay. Among those who stayed were people with very serious injuries. They took our fingerprints, and then they released us in front of the camp in the desert in eastern Cairo, and we had to make our own way back.

At this point during the same meeting, Mona finished narrating her experience of her two days under CSF custody after being arrested in Mohamed Mahmoud Street. She continued reflecting about such an experience and what it had meant to her:

I was amazed at how those officers were taking their role very seriously. They had all decided that this girl (referring to me) posed a threat to their own security and the security of state. I could understand that they were defending their presence there. But they chose to humiliate me. Of course I couldn't do anything to them, but why were they beating me? Were they afraid that I was stronger, like the fierce animal that bites because it is afraid, not because it is stronger? The same idea came to my mind about the virginity tests that were done by the military police. Their idea was to humiliate the girls in every way possible. The presence of girls meant that

they were not afraid of them; facing them was the battle. They just couldn't accept the fact that a girl could say No to their face amidst all the beating, and that made them humiliate any girl that was arrested in such a situation.

After being detained for 2 days; the question was in the eyes of my family: did they do anything bad to you? They had the right to ask, but they asked sensitively (but thank God, they couldn't do anything to me). As for the virginity checkups; I didn't know someone who had been through that experience, but I couldn't believe the idea itself!!!! It was directed at women, as if they were saying; we will humiliate you and make you feel ashamed. It was done by men in front of detained men and women. It was planned, and I think that they wanted to humiliate both men and women so as to make families feel that they wouldn't want this to happen again.

Samira Ibrahim⁴³ was one of the people who made me hold on to the country. She uncovered all the lies and broke all the taboos. She is an Egyptian girl from Upper Egypt, and she revealed what had happened and sued them. I knew her lawyer in November and he told me that she was threatened by the Egyptian Army, who were afraid that she might make a scene... she shook a lot of things inside me, her family supported her even if they didn't realize that. I also saw what the treatment was like inside prison: first they treated the girl as a girl, but then they treated her like a thing... I was arrested because I was taking photos in Mohamed Mahmoud, I was so furious and I was standing in front of them, so they arrested me... from the very beginning, they meant to insult my body by harassment. It was organised, not for pleasure, but for humiliation, and of course it is known what they said to the girl that was arrested, she was cursed with the worst words. This happened to me, and the threat I will never forget was that they would send a woman to the cell to beat me, and this could have happened, who knows!! But I must be lucky, as some people looked for me and worked on releasing me; but I was thinking, what about those girls that didn't know people who worked in Human Rights organisations!! What has happened to them?

Mona was keen to mention all the details about being grabbed by her hair, and the threats of sexual abuse, isolating her from male detainees and then allowing a soldier to try to harass her, and humiliating her by reminding her that she was a girl and young. After such an experience, Mona realised clearly what she constituted for this revolution. She realised that by being there in the street, on the front line, documenting what was happening, she constituted a threat to those in power. She

⁴³ Samira Ibrahim was a Tahrir activist who pursued legal action against the Egyptian military for allegedly forcing her to undergo a 'virginity test' when she was arrested in one of the revolution's events.

made an observation that despite being arrested and treated with humiliation, she stood in front of those in power, defending herself. Mona and many other young women who had been through such experiences and worse had broken many taboos about gender existence and roles within the public sphere and what Egyptian girls and women are capable of. She had brought up the famous case of the virginity test of Samira Ibrahim, which for her was the biggest breaking of the taboo of shame when a girl faces sexual abuse.

A slogan was created and used in many marches and events: *"aalo sout elmaraa aoura!.. Sout elmaraa thawra thawra"* (They said the woman's voice is a shame! The woman's voice is a revolution, a revolution). The slogan was a rejection of the Islamist belief that the woman's voice is *aaoura* or a shame, which calls for the silencing and veiling women. The slogan was also a strong message to those in power that the abuse and humiliation practised against revolutionary females did not work and that they could not frighten them into withdrawing. Mona and her female peers had broken many such taboos and made a priceless contribution to gendering Tahrir and thus emerged as significant players in the street actions of the Arab Spring.

Mona, Samira and other female revolutionary voices had contributed significantly to gendering spaces of the revolution and their claims to the right to the city. The Tahrir front lines had been dominated in most events by young men. Female participants had been assigned low risk assignments such as street clinics. Yet their presence on the front lines, and subsequent arrest and humiliation, had unveiled the role of girls and women in the revolution.

7.7.3 Martyrdom: negotiating meanings of life and death

One year after the Mohamed Mahmoud first battle, many street groups and activists called for a celebration of the first anniversary of the battle. Clashes in the second Mohamed Mahmoud battle erupted between protesters and the police in the Mohamed Mahmoud and Youssef Elgendy streets, off Tahrir Square. Gaber Salah, a

17-year-old young man (known as Jika) and a friend of Amro, was shot in the head by the police. Two days later Jika was pronounced brain dead but his family kept him on life support in the hope that he would recover. After being hooked up to life support for five days, he was pronounced dead. Shortly before joining the celebrations, Jika had written on his Facebook timeline:

If I fail to come back, I ask the people to continue with the revolution and claim our rights.

Amro kept silent after Jika's funeral and decided a couple of weeks later to post a note about Jika on his Facebook page:

I went to Mohamed Mahmoud Street and then to Youssef El Guindy Street where there were clashes that started around 8pm on the day of the Mohamed Mahmoud first battle anniversary. There I found many of my friends, and Jika was there too. I took the laser pointer and kept showing them the CSF soldiers who were standing on the roof of one of the buildings. I told them: "Let's get out of here." Jika and another of my friends refused, but I left.

I'd hardly ever prayed to God in my whole life and I was very stubborn about everything, but I prayed with the rest of the people and asked God to help Jika because he was Jika and because no way could someone else I knew die like Maryam, Galal, Karim, Ali Maher and Omar. At night, we went to Tahrir Square again, and we kept singing Jikkkkkkkkaaaaaaaaaa, and in the morning, a number of us returned to the hospital. I went in and saw him and I was shocked. Jika, the guy that I'd known – we'd both joked together and teased others together – was lying so still on the bed. I saw the pain and grief in the eyes of all my friends and in Jika's mother's eyes; I couldn't even tell her that he was going to be ok.

A few days later they announced Jika's dead officially. On the day of the funeral, we were standing looking at one another and didn't know what to say. Should we say: "Farewell, you are going to a better place!!" Or: "May your soul rest in peace; we won't be able to avenge as usual"? All I did say was: "You will look down at us and see us better people", but in fact we are worse than ever.

Jika was a companion of mine in the clashes, standing shoulder to shoulder. I didn't want him to die, because I couldn't bear to know that someone else of my friends had died. I just hope this will come to an end when I die. We don't belong here. Unfortunately, farewell JIKA.

Young people, due to their engagement in the revolution, started to speak about their dead friends / peer revolutionaries / martyrs. The notion of “martyrs” carried meanings of grace and nobility. Amro’s narratives had repeatedly mentioned the loss of his friends during the clashes. Young people have to survive such new realities in their lives, which result from too many voices being silenced forever, the voices of friends and colleagues shot dead.

The point here is how Amro and other young people are living with and making sense of the notion of “martyrdom”. Armbrust suggests that “in the early days of the Revolution, martyrdom was an actively performed rhetorical position — a kind of irresistible force in the eyes of those who took it up as a weapon in their continuing struggle” (Armbrust 2012:6). However, Amro's narrative and other young people's reactions to the death of their friends went beyond how the issue of “martyrdom” was monopolised for revolutionary goals. Young people came up with a slogan that started to be used in all the demonstrations as an expression of their attitude to the death of their peers:

“ya ngeb haahom ya nmot zayouhom” (Either we avenge their rights or we die like them).

Amro was deliberate about his feeling of “loss”. Young people had engaged in the actions of the revolution, and their hopes for justice, or even basic human dignity, had not yet been reached. Instead they started to lose their revolutionary peers, one after the other. They started to lose those who used to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. All what was left to them, besides the feeling of loss, was that their peers were now called “martyrs”. For them, their martyr friends were those revolutionaries who died for the liberation and good future of the country and future generations. This meaning of “martyrdom” for contemporary Egyptian generations goes back to all those who have died in the different wars over the past 50 years for the dignity of the country.

Amro sounded helpless and ambivalent in his farewell words to Jika. Surprisingly, he was not talking about revenge for his friend's death. In fact he was telling Jika that “we wouldn't be able to avenge”. Surprisingly also, Amro was not posing the famous

question from day one of the revolution: "Who killed Jika? " As if he already knew the answer. His ambivalence stemmed from his inner conflict between Amro the courageous young man in the early days of the revolution who was engaged in almost all the harsh clashes and battles, and Amro the spectator, helpless in front of the death of his close friend and afraid that such death was in vain. In his Facebook note he could not repeat the slogan: *"Either we avenge their rights or we die like them"*. Instead he wrote that may be the solution was to *"die like them"*.

At the end of his note, Amro made an astonishing statement, that *"we (young people) don't belong here"*. Through these simple words he brings back a pre-revolution notion, referred to in the previous chapter of this thesis, when Ahmed (a student from one of the schools in Al-Basatin) said: *"el-balad de msh mehtagalna"* (This country does not need us). Amro, at such a historical moment as that of Jika's death and realising the death of his friends one after another, engaged in renegotiating his future aspirations that started with hopelessness before the revolution and were turned to hopes for change with the removal of Mubarak. Now in front of the death of his close friends, his future aspirations were reduced to the notions of life and death and whether he belonged to life or maybe to death instead.

7.8 Reflections: cultivating a new self through resistance

The three revolutionary young people, Amro, Karim, and Mona, were keen to talk about how they had changed as a result of their engagement in the revolution. Their comments and observations showed the extent to which they were aware of their involvement in a self-production process through which they constituted themselves via critical resistance (Leask 2012:66)

Amro was keen to explore the many revolutionary actions and engagements he had been involved in:

My days were always like spending all day in the street or joining sit-ins or demonstrations after school and only leaving for lessons or to go home for

a shower and a change of clothes. In July 2011, after exams I joined the march from Tahrir to Abbasya. My life was changed that day. I was hit on the head and had to be hospitalised, and had to have the bones in my face repaired with artificial supports. I then joined the Ramadan sit-in, and that was when I got more involved with more activities through Twitter and doing graffiti. In fact, doing graffiti changed my life choices and made me decide to study Art and Design.

I joined the Egyptian Students' Movement for Change and I also joined many demonstrations in front of the MOE. In November we were demonstrating for the dissolution of the students' union and its old bylaws. We led a strike for all schools against the military rule. I was invited with other colleagues to appear in a TV show with the Minister of Education about the strike. The Minister refused to appear with us. He told the presenter to choose him or us and she chose us. A deputy minister called during the show and accused us of causing trouble to the schooling system and threatened us on air. He defended the military and I told him on air that the military had killed my colleague, a student in one of the Ministry schools.

I joined the 6th April Movement and I told them that those who made the revolution were those who stayed in the streets, not elkhwalat (pussies) who were competing to appear in TV shows every day. After I said that, they asked me to leave.

We went to spray graffiti close to the military facility in Abbasia. Clashes erupted and I was injured and arrested that day. I made fun of the officer who asked me about my name. We were put inside a military car. They asked for IDs. I didn't have one. We were taken to the Bulaq police station. I kept tweeting to friends that I'd been arrested. Finally I was allowed to leave after some time. I was arrested again in Jan 2012: we were drawing graffiti on Dar Merit in Qasr Eini Street, close to Tahrir. An officer had seen us and he asked me for an ID, and I said I didn't have an ID. He took all the stuff we had. He wanted to arrest one of us and release the rest and we refused. We decided that we would all stay together. After keeping all of us for some time we were released.

After the incident of the female activist who was tortured and abused in Tahrir by CSF soldiers during the Mohamed Mahmoud battle, I joined a feminist group defending women and girls. Girls are serious in what they do. I learned a lot about women's rights and I realised how backward we are in the way we think about women in our society. Males in this society allow things for themselves and disallow them for females.

Amro was engaged in an ongoing self-creation through his different experiences and engagements. Being in the street, learning and doing graffiti, getting injured, joining and leaving different groups, appearing on TV, going on strike, being arrested, and

attending the funerals of dead friends all involved nonstop decision-making, choice-making, and risk-taking. It was such an amazingly rich time for Amro that he admitted that it had changed his life choices and world view about gender roles and about his own future aspirations.

Karim became involved in graffiti campaigns, and documentation. He faced dangers of attack and arrest:

I joined all the demos and sit-ins. I loved the music of the revolution and the new bands. But my main activity was spraying graffiti in Shubra. One of our friends took the lead in the graffiti movement and I joined the group and agreed to go to Shubra to do graffiti: "No to Military trials for civilians". We also did graffiti for individual revolutionists in custody. We did graffiti against the prime minister as well. People in the streets started to attack us and to accuse us of wanting to destroy the army, and we were characterised as traitors. In order to enable our colleagues to do the graffiti, we opened a dialogue with those who were attacking us. People believe that sending those arrested to the military court protects the country, because it's against thugs. After finishing the spraying, I had the role of documenting our activities by taking photos for our work. Some people arrested me and accused me of taking photos in order to publish them on the net in order to get money. I was almost beaten and my camera was almost taken from me.

Before the revolution I was interested in the rights of the Copts and I thought that Muslims were very bad. I even believed that Islamists had committed the church bombing. After the revolution I didn't feel I was a minority and I felt able to express what I thought. I am an Egyptian and my religion is none of anyone's business. They say we are kids and excited because of the clashes with the police. It's so exciting to go against the authority. The feeling of fear has gone, and I won't stay passive in front of any aggression any more. The revolution was an earthquake because we broke the taboo of the authority and we felt we owned the country.

The self-production for Karim was about breaking taboos, both the sectarian one and the authoritarian one. Karim had emerged into an "immanent cause rather than merely the effect of some transcendent power" (Deleuze 1988:37 quoted in Leask 2012:64). Karim's self-image emerged to be not one of a minority any more, and was not locked into his religious identity any more either.

Mona provided a more reflective stance on how her engagement with the revolution had changed her in various ways:

Being in Tahrir made my hope swing up and down about what I was planning for my future, and the same with the feelings of hopelessness and despair that my friends and I had before the revolution. The majority of us come from average families: at that time we were aspiring to create a career path for ourselves, we had learned some good English, and our sole aspiration was to get out of the country to see the world and live our lives. The whole situation was turned upside down... we had the feeling that we wanted to push this country forward. Young people of 20+ years old had that feeling, and that was satisfying and comforting.

At this age, our feelings change and reshape every day. You feel you are becoming a grown up human being... even in your personal life, love life or practical things. Decisions change from one hour to the other, according to the course of events. I don't know whether for us that was rapid maturity or change? I really felt that the political scene changed our characters, a lot of things changed as well as our points of view. I started to become interested in politics, which I'd always avoided. I cared about the whole scene and I realised that I had a role to play in one way or another.

The consequent events and months were like a rebirth to me. So my first shock was the virginity tests that the army did. To me the woman came first and last. When those tests happened, everything for me was collapsing. I had to seek a balance, new principles and concepts for life.

I had nonstop questions, reflections: What is the army? And what is a state? What is the role of the army? Who constitutes the army? What is the difference between what was happening and what terrorists do? What was legal and what was illegal? I had even more philosophical questions about war and politics. I discovered all that and started to understand. What happened has seriously changed our lives forever, our plans and feelings, particularly as girls. All topics were renegotiated at such stages of change.

Mona's account here is a rich narrative that explores how young people in the middle of the revolution's events and actions were renegotiating their notions of success, future and life choices at the intersections of critical resistance. Mona's account, like those of the other young people discussed earlier, brings to the discussion the notion of migration as “the grand paradigmatic strategy of escape and success” (Schielke 2009:173). However, Mona in this reflection negotiated the notion of migration as a pre-revolution strategy. Along with the notions of migration

and success, Mona had brought that of class to her reflective thoughts. As she explained simply, she and others come from average families where children were not expecting an inheritance. They would have to depend on themselves, fight and find their ways to success. Discourses of migration and success were replaced around the time of the revolution with discourses of *taghyeer* (change). In fact, Mona used words like rebirth, shock, and earthquake as expressions of the magnitude of change that accompanied young people's engagement with the revolution. For Mona, *taghyeer* intersected with the two key concepts of *El-balad* (the country), and the woman. Mona was shocked that after the revolution, with all the new hopes, women face such abuse and humiliation.

7.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued for the emergence of young people's political consciousness as manifested in their calls and engagement in the Tahrir riots and occupational actions through which they were making their own "claims to the right to the city". Young people had brought to Tahrir their disappointment with the state's schooling, opposition to forms of corruption, frustrations about all forms of subordination, and their sense of hopelessness about the future. At the gates of the Ministry of Education young people had brought their *thanaweya-aama* case and the notion of "claiming the right to education" to the agenda of the revolution. They successfully utilised their online connectivity and virtual skills for mobilisation, disseminating information about routes of marches, safety precautions, and needed support for occupiers.

The street actions and occupation of Tahrir Square were aggressively confronted by the state's repression. Young people had engaged in the actions of the revolution with hopes for justice and basic human dignity. Instead, they started to face humiliation and injury, as well as the death of their revolutionary peers one after the other. With such painful experiences, young people realised that by being there in

the street, they constituted a threat to those in power. This was particularly true for female revolutionaries who had broken many taboos about gender existence and roles within the public sphere and shown what Egyptian girls and women are capable of.

I have also argued in this chapter that young people's engagement in Tahrir contributed significantly to redefining the meaning of the city's "abstract spaces". Those spaces such as Tahrir Square, the Presidential palace, the Ministries of Education, the Interior, and Defence, and the main roads, all of which were supposed to manifest the states' power hegemony, were turned into venues that reflected the fast-changing political scene and an evolving map of political participation and expectations that were dominantly young and female.

Mohamed Mahmoud Street in particular was turned into a unique space for young revolutionaries. On the one hand, young people became engaged in the production of a new spatiality where the battle over the space of Mohamed Mahmoud Street was actually for the sake of the battle itself, thus reflecting the young revolutionaries' obstinacy against the state's brutality. On the other hand, young female revolutionary voices contributed significantly to gendering spaces of the revolution by their presence in the front line of the Mohamed Mahmoud battle and facing the dangers of arrest, humiliation, injury and death.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

This thesis examined the complexity of the coming of age for lower/middle class young Egyptians at the venue of the state secondary school and in the wider everyday life in Cairo's low-income informal neighbourhoods one year before and during the Arab Spring. With the increasing volume of educated unemployment and the growing socioeconomic disparities among Egyptian youth (Egypt HDR 2010), the thesis aimed to provide an understanding of the meaning of education for the new Egyptian generations and the role of the schooling system in shaping their potential and aspirations. I followed analyses (Levinson et al 1996, Kaplan 2006, Jeffery et al 2008) that show the extent to which schooling could be a resource for "ambivalence" and "contradictions". I used a "cultural production" (Willis 1983) approach to understand the ways in which young people negotiated and navigated their schooling, familial and communal discourses, relationships and pressures. The analysis of "everyday tactics" (De Certeau 1984) provided an understanding of the young people's everyday actions through which they survived disciplinarian systems by both making use of the existing cracks and causing further cracks in the very foundations of the schooling system.

Despite the centrality of education to Egypt's nation-building, and the schooling system's strong disciplinarian, nationalist and Islamic orientation, I have argued in this thesis that the lack of investment, together with the lack of employment for graduates, has undermined the educational structure. Young people navigate a highly contradictory reality in their secondary schooling, between the expectations invested into it from various sides, and its frustrating and confusing reality. Young people employ various tactics to make the best out of the highly unsatisfactory and contradictory situation of a collapsing school system, authoritarian disciplinary pressure, de facto privatisation of education, and various family pressures. As a result, young Egyptians construct spaces of cynicism and disaffection, whilst at the

same time maintaining some commitment to the value of education as a tool for social mobility.

I conclude that schooling discipline and weakening, tensions about future potential, and forms of exclusion have generated young Egyptians' feelings of hopelessness and ambivalence and enabled the articulation of critical dispositions, as well as, for some of them, triggering engagement in the *Tahrir* riots and occupational actions to demand their "right to the city". Secondary school failure is an important indicator that the recent Egyptian education reform strategies, as part of the state's economic reform, are not working either towards supporting Egyptian society's current complex transition or in responding to young Egyptians' ambitions and expectations. Falling short of its intended task of acting as an instrument of national security and neoliberal disciplining, the secondary school has instead ended up contributing to cynical and oppositional subjectivities. The current conditions of the state schooling system – combined with the rapidly increasing rates of unemployment, the also rapidly growing socioeconomic disparities, the prolonged state of "waithood", and involvement in street politics since January 2011 among Egyptian youth – raise several warning flags that Egyptian society is likely to continue experiencing waves of protests and political actions by young Egyptians.

By writing this thesis, I contribute to the anthropology of schooling and the social anthropology of Egypt which has recently emerged through the works of Mahmood (2001, 2005), Hirschkind (2001, 2011), Koning (2005), Herrera (2006, 2008, 2012), and Shielke (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011). Even though there is a growing body of anthropological work on Egypt which focuses on the tension between structure and agency, the connections between state schooling, youth and resistance have rarely been explored. The ethnography of this thesis raises critical questions on common theoretical metanarratives – especially those theories that sketch an image of a comprehensive state or moral and ethical discipline – and shows an ambivalent reality of weakening authoritarian disciplines and the extent to which young people

are navigating but not always finding course of meaningful action. This thesis also contributes an in-depth ethnographic focus on gender in the intersection with class and age. It provides an image of how young women's tactics of making the best out of the gloomy conditions in the low-income neighbourhoods in Cairo are more based on compliance and ambiguity, unlike young men, who are more able to make use of the local culturally idealised masculine trajectories of chaotic and unruly behaviour. Thus this thesis also provides evidence that it is possible to conduct an in-depth ethnography across the gender division in the Middle East.

In order to formulate my argument, I structured the thesis into 8 chapters, creating a complex image of state schooling and the young people's coming of age in contemporary Egypt. In Chapter 1, I put forward the thesis argument, and explored the theoretical and conceptual materials on schooling and agency. In Chapter 2, I set the context for the thesis by examining the history of what is today a deteriorating education system in Egypt, arguing that it had been produced by the three consecutive regimes of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak who utilised it to confirm their legitimacy and support their political agendas. Within the same historical context, Egyptian youth have emerged since the 1950s as a significant element of the Egyptian equation, either by being the target of appropriation and control or as significant players in the anti-regime actions. I continued setting the context in Chapter 2 by exploring how the city of Cairo with its middle class and informal settlements has emerged over the last five decades as Egypt's capital, and discussing Cairo's economic and social stark polarisation of very poor informal settlements (*ashwaiyyat*) side by side with very rich gated communities. In Chapters 3 and 4 I drew a sketch of the physical elements and the everyday discipline and practices in three urban secondary schools which were supposed to produce citizens who would fit the state's economic reform. Following that, I sought in Chapters 5 and 6 to understand the ways in which young Egyptians negotiate aspirations for social mobility at the intersections of their complex educational circumstances, and the forms of exclusion and subordination in their wider everyday lives. In Chapter 7 what

I sought to understand was the emerging political consciousness of young people, which was manifested in their calls and engagement in the *Tahrir* riots and occupational actions through which they were making their own “claims to the right to the city”.

8.1 State schooling: a resource for contradictions

This thesis has unveiled the everyday life in Egyptian state secondary schools that has been kept away from anthropological research. With the exception of a limited number of research endeavours – for example, the critical ethnographies by Herrera and Torres (2006) – Egyptian schooling either was not on the agenda of anthropologists, or was kept away from their reach. Commenting on the evolution of sociology and anthropology in Egypt, Abaza (2010) suggests that “there are insurmountable paradoxes that continue to loom in the professional and academic sphere due to the intricate relationship between intellectuals and the long history of the authoritarian military state” (2010: 187). As I explained in Chapter 1, I had to go through a long process of state security clearances in order to be allowed into schools. Conducting social research in schools was and still is considered unwelcomed by the state authorities and is only allowed in very limited cases.

This thesis has shown how the spatiality and everyday life of Egypt’s state secondary schools intersect with the everyday complexity and ambiguity of the state’s economic reform. The state secondary school is an attempt by the state to prepare youth for the transition to higher education and eventually to fit with the requirements of the labor market as directed by the standards of economic structural adjustment. According to the Egyptian government’s statistics, the state secondary school is an urban phenomenon representing an important element of the Egyptian state’s reform project. The thesis has shown that the Egyptian state had produced secondary schools as an “abstract space” (Lefebvre 1991) to function as a disciplining system. With the deterioration of the state schooling system after thirty

years under Mubarak's "fragile state" (Fuller 1991), its weakening was causing students' withdrawal from schools and the flourishing of the private tutorial market. This thesis reveals the reality of actual relations of power and social becoming at the school that are manifested in very low attendance rates (less than 20 per cent of students attend secondary schools), and the schools' failure to achieve the aims assigned to them by the government. Accordingly, it has become evident that schooling within the Egyptian context can only be understood as part of a social and cultural (re)production and state project of creating loyal citizens. This thesis shows that the state secondary schools, despite the official reformist discourse, were not qualified either to maintain "national security", or to fulfil the state's agenda in preparing young Egyptians for the labor market. Instead, the Egyptian state secondary schools emerged as sites for the cultural production of young people's cynical and oppositional subjectivities. At the same time, the thesis shows the extent to which higher education constitutes a cultural capital for Egyptian families. Young people's and their parents' relation to the schooling system is neither a docile acceptance nor a general rejection. However, it is a relation that is characterised by strong ambivalence, as people try to obtain the best possible education for their children in a system that contradicts itself over what it promises and what it actually does, and often fails altogether in what it is supposed to achieve.

This thesis has demonstrated the extent to which state schooling in Egypt, far from being a means of reproduction of social and economic inequalities, has evolved into a highly contradictory, fragmented and contested resource. Officially, as attested by the educational authorities, schooling should be an equal right that prepares enlightened citizens and promotes democracy, freedom and social justice. However, as manifested through its physical details and everyday rituals, the school is a mere reflection of the authoritarian state, and a venue for discipline and control. Young people despite being sceptical (due to increased educated unemployment), continue to consider education as a pathway to social mobility. They had withdrawn from school, declaring it to be a non-functioning structure that is hardly more than a venue for exam registration, and that real education occurs through private tutoring

arrangements. As for teachers and administrators, while expressing their resentment at a poorly paid job and a highly centralised system they are using the school venue for marketing their own private tutoring services. Thus this thesis provides further evidence in support of the growing global understanding that schools are flexible utilities that are incapable for the reproduction of inequalities.

8.2 Agency: new meanings and ambivalences

With regard to the younger generations of Egyptians, this thesis has demonstrated that their aspirations and fears about the future were integrated and fed into local frameworks of self and subjectivity, and that their individualistic subjectivities were developing at the intersections of notions of modernisation and consumerism in the city of Cairo where their dreams of a good job and luxurious lifestyle might be fulfilled. Emerging into college life, *thanaweya-aama* leavers were constituted as young and educated while confronted by an unfair set of material circumstances, and hopelessness about future chances. While navigating forms of patriarchy and the subordination of their wider everyday life, young people deployed tactics that were either confirming their gendered agency, thus causing cracks within systems of subordination, or were helping them to survive times of pressure and tension. While navigating aspirations, fears, and forms of exclusion, they showed ambivalence and somehow ambiguity about their life choices. Young Egyptians' sense of hopelessness was significant among other factors that triggered their forceful involvement in the 2011 street actions, as explored through the narratives of the three revolutionary young people presented in Chapter 7. At the venue of Tahrir Square, young female revolutionary voices significantly contributed to gendering spaces of the revolution by their presence in the front lines of demonstrations and clashes.

This thesis contributes to the anthropology of young people in Egypt, the Middle East, and the global south. It specifically contributes to the knowledge about how young people coming from low income urban backgrounds come to perceive

themselves as young and educated, and navigate their life chances, challenges, and meritocratic possibilities. The thesis shows that young people from low-income urban Cairo are not trapped into acting in certain predetermined ways by their habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and/or discourses (Foucault 1979). It also contributes to an understanding of how young people's self-perception is gendered, by emphasising how young women navigate forms of patriarchy and exclusion, negotiate aspirations and hopelessness in relation to social mobility, and break taboos about girls' and women's presence, participation and capacity to act in the public sphere.

This thesis whilst revealing the many cracks that already exist in the structure of the school, also draws attention to the cracks which the young people themselves at times cause in the structure of discipline. When they turn a lecture on loyalty to the political regime into a critical discussion about the president, and a group of them call themselves "Al-Kofar" (the Infidels) in a school with an outspokenly Islamic appearance and identity, then it is evident that the projects of authoritarian and revivalist discipline are taking place under conditions of a near collapse of public services and social authority.

The thesis also contributes to understanding that while young people navigate their everyday experiences of subordination they are sometimes ambivalent, fluctuating between submission and resistance to forms of subordination. Such ambivalence was apparent, for example, in how they were voicing criticism against *wasta* networks and the corruption these entail, while at the same time thinking of the potential *wasta* networks available to them for employment upon graduation, and swinging between the notion of "self-realisation" – with what it carries of western notions of individuality and longing to live abroad – and voicing idealised middle-class trajectories of longing to benefit the country and make a difference.

Young people's navigation of forms of patriarchy and subordination of their wider everyday life showed ambivalence and somehow ambiguity about the direction in which they wanted to head. For example, young people at times showed ambiguity

in handling the forceful religious discourse when those discourses intersected with their individual desires. While young people wanted to abide by religious preaching, even the most conservative preaching, they sought ways out when such preaching went against their desires for fun and enjoyment.

Young women, while longing for equity in the labour market, upon graduation submitted at times to patriarchal social norms by being willing to drop their educational plans, going for an early marriage and admitting that men have a better chance in the labour market. Some young women were also ambiguous about abiding by the Islamist rules of the good Muslim girl and their very individual choices. In the middle of their ambivalent and ambiguous positions, young women produced survival tactics that confirmed their gendered agency was causing cracks in the very foundations of patriarchy and posing questions about the effectiveness of political and religious structures to mobilise young people.

This thesis provides what may be an important contribution to the anthropology of the Arab Spring. It shows in Chapters 3 to 6 how the seeds of the uprising of 2011 could be observed in interactions between students and teachers and the pronounced generation conflicts that many of the students expressed. In Chapter 7, it explores young Egyptians' engagement in the Tahrir actions during January 2011 and beyond. It shows the extent to which such engagement in the Arab Spring's street politics is dramatically contributing to redefining the meaning of the state's "abstract spaces" in Egypt. These abstract spaces, such as squares, main roads, government buildings, and particularly schools, all of which were intended to manifest the states' power hegemony, are being turned into venues that reflect the fast-changing political scene and an evolving map of political participation, expectations, and socio-cultural changes that are predominantly young and female. At the gates of the Ministry of Education in February 2011 young people brought their *thanaweya-aama* case and the notion of "claiming the right to education" onto the agenda of the revolution.

In relation to limitations of the study (in other words, areas that I was not able to look at) and possible future studies, it should be noted that this thesis has not addressed state secondary schooling from the point of view of the state, its institutions and key officials in charge of leading the development and implementation of secondary education strategies and policies. Equally important in future studies of schooling in Egypt is a thorough examination of policies, processes, circumstances and experiences involved in *thanaweya-aama* leavers' admission and transition to college life. Of interest too in future studies would be a critical ethnography of private secondary schooling and the extent to which young people coming from upper middle and upper class Egyptian families make meaning on their schooling experiences. Equally important would be an examination of the experiences, circumstances, tensions, and the sense of "otherness" involving non-Muslim young Egyptians and non-Egyptian⁴⁴ young people at the venue of the state secondary school.

⁴⁴ As reported by humanitarian agencies, thousands of Syrian refugee children are currently enrolled in Egyptian schools.

Epilogue

Egypt's face has been changing since January 2011 as have the lives of the young heroes of this research who are now supposedly two or three years into their college studies. Two and a half years after the removal of Mubarak's regime and in one year under the rule of Morsi the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) leader, the young Egyptian revolutionaries and other political forces realised that their revolution had been hijacked by the MB and that they had to go back to the streets again, to demand the removal of the MB regime. On 30th June 2013, millions of Egyptians took to the streets demanding Morsi's removal, and on 3rd July 2013, General El-Sisi, Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, announced Morsi's removal. The latter development was perceived by many young revolutionaries as an indication that the country might eventually come under military rule again, although this time with the blessing of the masses. At present, many young revolutionaries have returned to protesting both in streets and in their universities in opposition to what they view as the return of the previous regime's brutality and aggression.

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