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New Developments in the Educational Policy in the Arab World

Privatization, Rights, and Educational Markets in Egypt ¹

There can be little denying that mass formal schooling has been perceived as a global institution that plays a foundational role in the socialization of children and youth. It carries the promise, among other functions, of transmitting in the young dispositions in support of democracy, global citizenship, gender equity and human rights. One needs only read the many international charters and declarations dealing with education, development and democracy such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) for examples of this rendering of schooling.

But is the global institution of the school actually delivering on its promises to forge global citizens and societies for equity, rights and inclusion? More to the point: how has the neoliberal turn of the 1990s when educational reforms were structured according to market logics with policies for example, of decentralization and privatization, changed the character and quality of the school? Is the school becoming obsolete as other ways of conceptualizing and organizing formal education take precedence? These questions cannot be answered conclusively, but some preliminary research on privatization and educational markets in Egypt indicates that all is not well with the institution of the school and it may be gasping for its very survival.

Is the school on its way to extinction?

Questions about whether the school may be becoming obsolete occurred during a visit to an ordinary public sector secondary school in a medium sized provincial town in northern Egypt

last spring. The visit took place at 11.00 AM in the middle of the week during a working day, in the midst of the second half of the academic term. Yet on entering the grounds it soon became clear that something was amiss; apart from the hospitable greetings of teachers, the din of car horns and vendors from outside the school walls, almost no other noise was audible. Silence is hardly a feature of a public sector boys' school with enrolments at full capacity. It soon became evident that there were no students in the school, not a single one. The classrooms, corridors, and courtyard were completely empty except for the clusters of teachers sitting together reading newspapers, chatting or sipping tea.

It transpired that the school's pupils were not out on an excursion or sports' activity, but were at home studying for the high-school exit exam, the *Thanawiyya Amma*, which determines which faculty they can enter at the university. It was explained that with only three months to go before the exam, which is staggered in the second and third years of secondary school, pupils could not afford to waste time in school. They needed to use each waking moment to prepare for the exam. (Why students from first year secondary with no exam to prepare for also skipped school was not addressed.) The school has tacitly abrogated its role in providing support for this most critical of exams as families turn to the unregulated and, it must be added, illegal market of private tutors, guided study groups,

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and lesson centers to perform the work of preparing students for the exam.

Even though the school is virtually studentless in the three to four months leading up to the exam, the full teaching and administrative staff are obliged to be present for the entirety of the school day. They arrive to school in the morning to sign in the school's log, a requisite for getting their salary, and are then locked into the school building. The school gate is actually bolted behind them, a necessary precaution, the principle sheepishly explains, to ensure they do not sneak off early to their extra-curricula jobs of giving lessons to the very pupils who are not in school. At 2.00 PM sharp when the bell sounding the end of the day rings, the teachers jostle at the school's entrance as the doorman slowly unbolts the gate.

The teachers rush out, anxious to get started on their round of private lesson sessions which, for the ones in the most demand, could last well into the night. To gauge whether this scene is typical or not I related it to other teachers and pupils not attached to the school. Not one so much as batted an eye. "This is completely normal" a second year university student assured me. "No one learns in school anymore. We all learn in the private lessons." Her matter-of-factness about the dysfunction of the school leads one to ask, is the school—as understood as a social institution, a microcosm of society, a place of building community and a way of learning about social intercourse, rights and values—on its way to extinction? Is the market of educational services making the school obsolete? More to the point, will the obituary of the school need to be written soon?

Free Markets and Democratic Reforms

The school as a laboratory for democracy, to use the imagery of John Dewey, inspired much of the twentieth century planning and conceptualization around global schooling. This utopian democratic vision of the school underwent a transformation

in the 1990s when an emerging discourse about democracy, rights, and markets penetrated international donor agendas and policy reforms in education. Market-oriented and business model approaches to education and the organization of society more broadly, took precedence and led David Jenkin to cynically coin his famous acronym of the TINA theory, "There is no alternative" (to the market). Principles of the market—accountability, efficiency, and cost effectiveness—to name a few, have since informed policies of educational restructuring around the world. In much international development discourse the education sector is viewed as meriting investment primarily for its human capital potential, or for its ability to yield high economic returns insofar as it trains a population for the labour market and contributes to the stimulation of markets and trade. Issues of democracy and rights often get added on to principally economic oriented education policies.

The earliest of the free market reforms called for decentralization and privatization of education systems, apparent prerequisites for economic growth and democratization. The discourse connecting decentralization to democratization has become ubiquitous and reproduced across jurisdictions. It is common to find phrases in UN, World Bank, USAID and other policy documents that refer to the decentralization process as leading to "democratic participation" and the "empowerment of citizens."

Decentralization calls for a gradual dismantling of government funding of schools so that they become the responsibility of local communities, what is called, "local ownership." But the language of ownership and empowerment disguises issues of equity and social justice, or rises in social inequality and forms of injustice. At a very basic level, decentralization which calls for degrees of state withdrawal from funding and governing the education sector, disadvantages and further marginalizes the poor and financially strapped middle classes in favour of the affluent who already have the resources and know-how to ensure the quality of schooling for their children.

Whether or not decentralization can lead to democratization and greater participation is another question. In principle the dismantling of a centralized education system could lead to more flexibility, greater response to local needs, less bureaucracy, and possibly more participation. Yet in settings such as Egypt where the educational bureaucracy is characterized by a hierarchical and non-consultative power structure, it is more likely that decentralization is contributing to the creation of a system of multiple hierarchies each with its own strict authority, rather than opening the way for a new culture of consultation and participation.

In the context of Egypt, and also throughout the world, debates have been raging about the short and long-term consequences when education is restructured according to market models and rationales. Critics argue that neoliberal reforms encourage extreme individualism at the expense of the public good and lead to wider and deeper social inequities. The global push for the reorganization of education systems towards greater privatization and decentralization are based on the premise that financing and organization of education is more a matter of individual responsibility than state responsibility.

On the issue of governance and democracy, it has been argued that neoliberal reforms do not intrinsically support democratic processes, but potentially seriously undermine them. Some evidence suggests that purely market oriented reforms are easily implemented in authoritarian, non-democratic systems where consultation and accountability is not necessary, a finding which calls into question the relationship between “free markets” and “free” or “democratic” societies. A dilemma for policy makers, educators and analysts alike has been that democracy and markets, which collectively inform the language for educational investment and reform, share neither an evident compatibility nor a common philosophical or historical foundation. Added to this is that global reforms must be carried out in specific national and regional settings with their own contingencies and histories.

Unregulated Education Markets in Egypt

Egypt is the most populous nation among the Arab states (currently at 80.5 million), is a Muslim majority country, and is located in a geopolitically volatile region. It has historically acted as a leader in the region in matters of social and political-economic reform. In the mid-twentieth century, similar to other newly independent post-colonial Third World states, education was reconfigured in a spirit of revolutionary change. Under the leadership of populist president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952-1970), education was nationalized and administered by a highly centralized state bureaucracy. Policies were forged with the dual purposes of constructing an economic system grounded in socialist principles of equity and growth, and as an ideological space of Arabism and Third Worldism that would stand in distinction to the colonial past.

The succeeding presidency of Anwar al Sadat (1970-1981), in contrast, turned away from the state socialism and non-aligned orientation of his predecessor and, through the Open Door policy (*Infitah*), ushered the way for liberalizing reforms. Economic liberalization continued unabated during the Mubarak regime (1981-present), with the added factor that national security became even more paramount in the functioning of the state machinery. From the 1990s the education sector has been regarded as a component of the state’s national security apparatus, and since 2001, has also been implicated in the US led war on terror. Conflicting national policies call for centralized surveillance of the education sector in the interest of national security, and decentralization and privatization of education in the interest of local autonomy, governance and ownership.

The privatization of education in Egypt includes state sanctioned and regulated private schools and universities and the vast unregulated realm of private tuition which includes private lessons (*durus al-khussusiyan*), guided study groups, and private lesson centers where

students are considered as customers in an expanding market of educational services. Private tutoring, whether in the home, study group, or center, constitutes a veritable shadow education system in Egypt. Up to 1/3 of the household income of Egyptian families is spent on educational costs, the majority for private tutoring.

The World Bank reported in 2002 that nearly 9 per cent of Egypt's total GDP goes towards education, 60 per cent of which is publicly financed and a substantial 40 per cent of which is privately financed. The World Bank applauds the Egyptian government and Egyptian families for their commitment to education as their spending on the sector far exceeds amounts spent in OECD countries. But this exorbitant private spending comes at high social costs. Privatization places an inordinate financial burden on households and accentuates social divisions, and, possibly, increases the cycle of poverty if education does not yield returns on its investment.

Another consequence of the growing reliance on unregulated educational services is that families accept the burden, however begrudgingly, of ensuring their children receive the requisite learning to pass through the educational system. As they put their energies and resources in the private informal markets, they are less likely to put pressure on schools and local authorities to provide adequate and quality schooling, a factor which leads to the further deterioration and, as the vignette above about the empty school illustrates, irrelevance, of the school.

The Demise of the Teaching Profession

Another way of assessing the consequences of the spectacular spread of private educational services is that it leads to the demise of the teaching profession. As the state gradually withdraws public investment from schools and the public looks to the private sector for exam preparation, teachers no longer fulfil their roles

as educators, with the social responsibility that accompanies it. They instead enter into a service industry that demands exam preparation specialists where the pupils are the clients and they the service providers.

In need of livable wages, for the starting salary of a teacher with a university degree is \$23 per month, many teachers are pressured to put themselves forward in the market of private lessons, thereby possibly jeopardizing their reputations as educators, and sometimes resorting to less than ethical means to procure clients. In ethnographic studies I conducted between 1989-2003 it was not uncommon to find teachers who used tactics of intimidation, favoritism, and at times physical punishment, so that students in their class would take private lessons with them after school hours.

Some would-be schoolteachers might forego work in schools and enter directly to employment in illegal private lesson centres which have been mushrooming since the mid-1990s and can be enormously lucrative businesses. Lesson centres cater to almost every socio-economic group and can be found in urban slums, high-end urban areas, villages and mid-size towns. They adapt to the needs and means of local communities. In Cairo, secondary school pupils already in expensive private schools customarily take private lessons in all major subjects, at a cost of between LE2000 to LE3000 per subject per year at specialized lesson centres.

Tutors with good track records, meaning those whose students score especially high marks on the **Thanawiya Amma**, gain almost a rock star status. One such tutor of chemistry, "Ustaz Hany" broke away from a known lesson centre in Cairo to start his own centre when demand for him skyrocketed (many of his clients scored high enough to enter medical and other high demand faculties). He is known for his "millionaire" lifestyle. He drives the latest model of Mercedes, bought a holiday villa in the posh North Coast town of Marina, and employed a fashionable secretary to handle his schedule and the growing waiting list for his classes. But markets are

volatile and the meteoric rise of a tutor star can be met with a crash when the exam results are published and another tutor's clients have superior results.

Private Schools and Polarization

Market trends have also entered the domain of the private school, but in a different manner and with distinct consequences. From a purely market point of view, privatization allows for a host of new players to enter the educational market which, in theory, could stimulate some sort of educational pluralism, or what is called "school choice." Schools, unlike the informal lesson market, are regulated and must follow the national curriculum. But new institutional arrangements have emerged in the private schooling market which appear inimical to the basic principles and values of education and democracy, especially with regards to equal treatment of all students. From 1991 to 2001 there was a 52% rise in private schools, and the emergence of a new prototype, the investment school (*madrassa istahmariyya*).

Unique in the history of Egyptian education, these schools which date to the early 1990s and cater to the urban professional classes, are set up as investment companies (*sharikat istahmariyya*) and their governing boards often consist primarily of business people with no background whatsoever in education. Some investment schools offer a menu of educational programmes and parents can choose from the more economical Arabic language track which leads to the Egyptian secondary certificate, or the much more costly international sections, the British IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) and International Baccalaureate.

Since the mid-1990s the American high-school diploma has come into vogue and become part of the educational offerings. American and British programmes can cost parents anywhere from four to eight times more than national programmes at the same schools. At one private

investment school in Cairo, for example, secondary fees for students in the national Arabic programme in 2003 were LE 4,200 per year compared to LE 20,000 for the American section. Students following the Egyptian curriculum were relegated to an old building with poorly ventilated classrooms while their colleagues following the American system had exclusive use of a renovated air-conditioned building across the courtyard, a modern cafeteria and new computers. Spatial separation of students and staff naturally leads to feelings of resentment, inferiority and superiority.

Another trend in the private school market is to attract students according to oftentimes polarizing categories of religion and ideology. The school market offers choices in Christian schools, Islamic schools, non-denominational Arabic schools, foreign (European and North American) language schools, all of which are under the administrative umbrella of the Ministry of Education and follow the national curriculum. Some private Islamic schools, for example, attempt to cultivate an Islamic conservative, tacitly anti-national identity. In such schools symbols of nationalism such as the national flag and face of the President, for instance, may be replaced with alternative symbols such as a Saudi Flag since Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and by pictures of Quranic passages. These schools may also pursue discriminatory "Muslim only" policies with regard to hiring and enrolments even though it is not legally allowed to do so. Christian schools may follow similar policies, causing pundits to worry about the role of schools in exacerbating sectarianism.

Schooling for the Public Good

The institution of the school as it presently exists may very well be dated, unable to serve the changing needs of (global) citizens, act as a harbinger of rights, and respond to transformations in the social and economic spheres. When children and their parents decide to bypass the school for private educational services, one

cannot help but conclude that schools are failing and possibly free falling into extinction.

But the current alternatives, driven by principles of the market and a privatization that buttresses sectarian divisions, should not be considered as viable, sustainable, or ethical.

It is too soon to write the obituary of the school

and to wave a wistful goodbye to the teaching profession, but a rethinking about how schooling should be organized and financed clearly needs to be undertaken. Among the great challenges of educational analysts, reformer, and practitioners are to reclaim schools and educators from narrow market, sectarian, and purely ideological interests and to look again towards the ideal of education as a public good.

Développements dans la politique éducative du monde arabe Privatisation, droits et marchés de l'éducation en Egypte

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Il est incontestable que la scolarisation formelle de masse joue un rôle fondamental dans la socialisation des enfants et des jeunes. Elle porte les promesses, entre autres fonctions, de jeunes dotés des capacités dont ils auront besoin pour soutenir la démocratie, la citoyenneté mondiale, l'égalité entre hommes et femmes et les droits de l'homme. Il suffit de lire les nombreuses chartes et déclarations internationales consacrées à l'éducation, au développement et à la démocratie, comme la Convention relative aux droits de l'enfant (1989) et la Déclaration mondiale sur l'éducation pour tous (1990), pour trouver des exemples des vertus de la scolarisation.

En Egypte, et dans le monde entier, le débat fait rage sur les conséquences à court et long terme d'une éducation restructurée en fonction des modèles et des principes du marché. Ses détracteurs affirment que les réformes néolibérales encouragent un individualisme extrême au détriment du bien public et conduisent à des iniquités sociales encore plus

nombreuses et profondes. L'offensive mondiale pour la réorganisation des systèmes éducatifs dans le sens de plus de privatisation et de décentralisation repose sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle le financement et l'organisation de l'éducation sont plus une compétence individuelle qu'une responsabilité de l'Etat.

En Egypte, la privatisation de l'éducation concerne les écoles et les universités publiques soumises à la réglementation et à la sanction de l'Etat, ainsi que le vaste royaume non réglementé de l'enseignement privé qui regroupe les cours privés (*durus al-khussusiyan*), les groupes d'étude encadrés et les centres de formation privés – où les étudiants sont considérés comme des clients dans le marché en pleine expansion des services éducatifs. En Egypte, le tutorat privé, à la maison, dans le cadre d'un groupe d'étude ou dans un centre, représente un véritable système d'éducation fantôme. Les familles égyptiennes dépensent jusqu'à un tiers de leurs revenus dans l'éducation, en majorité pour du tutorat privé.

Neue Entwicklungen in der Bildungspolitik der arabischen Welt Privatisierung, Rechte und Bildungsmärkte in Ägypten

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Man kann kaum bestreiten, dass Massenschulbildung als weltweite Institution wahrgenommen wurde, die eine grundlegende Rolle bei der Sozialisierung von Kindern und jungen Menschen spielt. Neben anderen Aufgaben verspricht die eine Vermittlung von Haltungen zur Stützung von Demokratie, weltweitem Bürgertum, Geschlechtergleichstellung und Menschenrechten an junge Menschen. Man muss nur die vielen internationalen Chartas und Erklärungen lesen, die sich mit Bildung, Entwicklung und Demokratie befassen und zu denen beispielsweise die Kinderrechtskonvention (1989) und die Weltweite Erklärung zur Bildung für Alle (World Declaration on Education for All, 1990) als Beispiele für diese Darstellung von Schulbildung zählen.

Im ägyptischen Zusammenhang und auch in der gesamten Welt hat es lebhaft Debatten über die kurz- und langfristigen Folgen gegeben, wenn Bildung nach dem Vorbild von Marktmodellen und -argumentationen umstrukturiert wird. Die Kritiker argumentieren, dass neoliberale Reformen extremen Individualismus zum Nachteil des öffentlichen

Wohls fördern und zu umfassenderen und tief greifenden sozialen Ungleichheiten führen. Der weltweite Vorstoß zur Reorganisation von Bildungssystemen zu Gunsten von mehr Privatisierung und Dezentralisierung basiert auf der Annahme, dass die Finanzierung und Organisation der Bildung eher eine Frage der Verantwortung des Einzelnen als eine staatliche Aufgabe ist.

Die Privatisierung der Bildung in Ägypten beinhaltet vom Staat anerkannte und regulierte Privatschulen und -universitäten sowie den riesigen unregulierten Bereich des Privatunterrichts, zu dem auch Privatstunden (durus al-khussusiyan), geleitete Studiengruppen sowie private Unterrichtszentren gehören, in denen die Schüler als Kunden im expandierenden Markt der Bildungsdienstleistungen betrachtet werden. Der Unterricht durch Privatlehrer entweder in Privathäusern oder in Studiengruppen oder -zentren stellt in Ägypten ein echtes Schatten-Bildungssystem dar. Bis zu ein Drittel des Familieneinkommens ägyptischer Haushalte wird für Bildungskosten und der größte Teil davon für Privatstunden aufgewendet.

Commissioning Positive Activities for Young People

The National Youth Agency commissioned research into current policy and practice concerned with commissioning positive activities for young people in local authorities across England.

The research took place across three government regions (North East, North West, and the West Midlands) between January and April 2008 and involved 17 local authorities in total.

- What is the nature of competition and contestability – is there a ‘market’ in services for young people?
- What is the voluntary sector’s experience of commissioning? Are authorities using the ‘intelligent commissioning’ model?
- What quality and standards frameworks are taken into account?
- To what extent are young people involved in the commissioning process?

To read the report see www.nya.org.uk/information/119123/commissioningpositiveactivitiesforyoungpeople/