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Between class and nation: international education and the dilemmas of elite belonging in contemporary Egypt

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Dissertation

**BETWEEN CLASS AND NATION:
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
AND THE DILEMMAS OF ELITE BELONGING
IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPT**

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Amina.

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2021

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how internationally educated youth in contemporary Egypt negotiate issues of national identity, postcoloniality and belonging while participating in globalizing class practices. Based on fourteen months of ethnographic research in and around for-profit international schools in Cairo, it focuses on how this privileged youth group constructed, experienced and enacted belonging at the intersection between class and nation. I argue that internationally educated Egyptians were caught in a cultural bind between competing constructions of class and national belonging. On the one hand, globally-oriented socialization practices and international education reproduced a historically-specific and colonially-inspired configuration of social distinction that linked elite belonging to a cosmopolitan-inflected distance from local culture. On the other hand, these markers of elite belonging excluded internationally educated youth from a materially embodied conception of Egyptianness that tied national belonging to essentialist constructions of local culture and identity. I suggest that the tension between class and national belonging expressed a single dialectical process that was rooted in colonial binary conceptualizations of culture and difference, which split ‘elite’ and ‘local’

into mutually exclusive cultural and symbolic repertoires. My analysis challenges dominant theoretical approaches that conflate the reproduction of class and nation by exposing the educational, gendered and linguistic gaps between class and national culture in contemporary Egypt. I present a bottom-up approach to understanding national attachment that highlights the embodied and moral labor that goes into the production of local selfhood in a transnational postcolonial setting. This approach also shows the differential gendered dynamics of class and national reproduction. The burden of maintaining cosmopolitan-inflected class boundaries falls squarely on the girls while boys are expected to embody the nationally-inflected skills and dispositions necessary for personal and professional trajectories that transcend class boundaries. In telling this story, I expose the sociohistorical dynamic by which colonial/postcolonial categories are reconfigured through globally-oriented class practices and highlight the unexpected ways that neoliberal globalism can become the incubator for intensely and irreducibly local gender and cultural norms.

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

This dissertation includes expressions and words in two broadly defined forms of Arabic: the vernacular Egyptian Arabic form spoken by middle and upper-class Egyptians in Cairo and Modern Standard Arabic (*fusha*). I have followed the system of transliteration for Arabic set by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* to transliterate both forms of Arabic. Many of the conversations and interviews that are directly cited were held in a vernacular style that included heavy mixing between Egyptian Arabic and English. To avoid unnecessary confusion, I have translated all conversations into a unified English, only marking interlocutors' use of English expressions or words when necessary for the analysis. In transliterating spoken Egyptian Arabic as well as vernacular concepts and other words specific to the sociolinguistic context of the study, I retained the sounds and pronunciation particular to the Egyptian Arabic spoken by my interlocutors in Cairo. For example, I used the "g" to transliterate the hard "g" sound of Egyptian Arabic, the "el" to transliterate the Arabic identifier "al" and used the "‘" sign for glottal stop rather than the letter *qaf* to transliterate reported speech.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In April 2015, the theatre and film club at the American University in Cairo (AUC) organized an event called “El Hara” (the alley), a carnival-like event that featured a simulation of a traditional Egyptian alley. Students constructed working-class apartment buildings and a traditional coffeeshop (*ahwa baladi*) on the main plaza of AUC’s New Cairo campus. They brought in traditional food vending carts for popular Egyptian dishes and beverages like *kushari*,¹ *ful*,² and *‘irq sus*.³ They placed a replica of a public bus and scattered a collection of objects and décor items of popular culture renditions of traditional working-class neighborhoods across the university campus. The five-hour event also featured a reproduction of a typical *sha’bi* wedding party, live performances by AUC’s folkloric dance troupe, a traditional puppet show (*al-aragoz*) along with other performances and activities. Students dressed in traditional robes and headdresses impersonated alley dwellers. Speaking to a TV reporter, one of the student organizers said the objective of the event was to “bring the authentic Egyptian alley, which is the root of the Egyptian people, the one we know from old Egyptian movies, to AUC students.” Another student, who was impersonating a woman selling vegetables on the street, explained that the student organizers “wanted those who don’t go to such places to feel the mood of the place and its environment and to see that people who lead this modest life could also be happy (“Tulab Al-Jami’a al-Amrikiyya” 2015). Whether

¹ A dish made of rice, macaroni, lentils, chickpeas and fired onions and topped with hot tomato sauce.

² A baked fava beans dish.

³ An iced licorice drink sold by street vendors carrying a large jugs on their shoulders.

the students were simulating an existing, past or imaginary alley was not clear. The spectacle featured an eclectic assemblage of themes and performances that could not be easily categorized as either working-class, traditional Egyptian, or even folkloric. Some activities and performances were associated with seasonal events and festivities, others were part of state-sponsored Egyptian folklore, and still others were historical and had long disappeared from everyday practices across Egyptian society. And yet many were aspects of everyday life for contemporary Egyptians beyond the traditional alleys of Cairo.

In its inception and execution, the event bore a troubling resemblance to the notorious world expositions of the nineteenth century, where colonizers placed the ‘the cultures of the colonized’ on display for their compatriots to view (Hinsley and Wilcox 2016; Mitchell 1988). It projected a sense of alterity that separated the students who organized it geographically, socioeconomically and culturally from “the alley” and what it represented. Its likeness to colonial practices of representation strongly echoed in public debates about *El Hara*, which unanimously decried the event as a shocking illustration of the class divide (*fagwa tabaqiyya*) that separated AUC’s well-to-do students from the lives of the majority of Egyptians (Bower 2015; Abdallah 2015). A popular analogy that circulated widely across the media likened the event to a zoo that AUC students constructed so they could observe ‘the Egyptian individual in their natural habitat’. Such characterizations reflected widely shared concerns in public debates about the social isolation of Cairo’s educated elite. An overriding assumption in these debates was that the globally-oriented lifestyle patterns of upwardly mobile families were

producing a disconnected (*munfasil*) and removed (*mughayab*) elite (Ammar 2009; Hassanayn 2013; Al-Hiddini 2014). To many people, the *El Hara* event was a perfect illustration of the extent of this disconnect.

Yet, in examining what unfolded in *El Hara* more closely it becomes clear that the students did not readily appropriate the gaze of an external foreign spectator. Rather than inviting “natives” to exhibit their own cultures, AUC students impersonated “other Egyptians” in a performance that exposed the elusive boundaries between the student actors and the real or imagined characters they represented. This elusiveness was prevalent across all event activities and performances. Whether they were casually enjoying their time in the traditional coffeeshop, sipping their chilled *irq sus* drinks or dancing and singing along in the fake *sha’bi* wedding, the event rather exposed students’ familiarity with and appreciation of the *sha’bi* practices to which they claimed not to have access. This was also revealed in the student organizers’ narratives which, at times, reified the class boundaries that separated them from the alley dwellers (“people who lead these modest lives”) and at other times celebrated a collective sense of Egyptianness (“the root of the Egyptian people”) that overrode these boundaries.

This event captured the same ambivalent sense of belonging that I found among a wider community of upper-middle and upper-class youth during my fourteen-months of fieldwork in and around international schools in Cairo. These young people belonged to upwardly mobile families whose lifestyle choices and consumption patterns indicated a desire to raise “global citizens”, at home in the world. Upon their graduation from school, they went on to attend colleges in North America and Europe. Those who remained in

Egypt, were most likely to continue their education at AUC and other private and internationally-oriented universities. Yet, rather than celebrating the sense of cosmopolitan belonging that their international education and privileged social location enabled, many struggled with a sense of disconnectedness from all things Egyptian. Their parents were also concerned about how their children ‘fit’ in Egyptian society, but were just as unsure about how to secure their children’s academic and professional future and at the same time foster their sense of belonging to Egypt. Everyone seemed to agree that elite belonging and national belonging were not one and the same thing in contemporary Egypt. For many, what it took to raise middle and upper-class children contradicted and often undermined what it took to raise them as Egyptians.

These discourses presented a puzzle about the structural and material underpinning of national belonging in Egypt. Why would a socioeconomically dominant group with no recognizable minority characteristics feel like it did not *quite* belong to the nation?⁴ This was even more puzzling since most of my interlocutors within families, friend groups and schools did not regard political or civic participation as essential to national belonging. What other registers informed their conception of belonging?⁵ What aspects about elite youth socialization challenged their sense of national belonging? And, how was their understanding of belonging different from conventional definitions in the

⁴ The majority of my interlocutors were Sunni Muslims although many were also Coptic Christians. Although differences in the extent to which Muslim or Christian youth experienced belonging or class-based isolation were noted, in this study, religion is not a primary category of differentiation between interlocutors. In chapter three, I discuss how different orientations to religion inform parental school choice.

⁵ Belonging (*al-intima*) was not the same as loyalty (*al-walaa*), which carried an immediately recognizable reference to Egypt as a nation state and Egyptians’ civic and moral duties as citizens. My interlocutors did not use those two words interchangeably.

academic literature which presumed that national belonging was the privilege of majoritarian communities like the one my interlocutors represented?

To answer these questions, I explore how shifts in the socialization of upper-middle and upper-class youth associated with economic liberalization and a greater integration in global cultural flows have rendered national belonging a category of collective deliberation and reflexivity among Egypt's cosmopolitan elite. My analysis focuses on how the expansion of international schooling, a product of educational marketization and internationalization policies, intensified, rather than lessened, the relevance of explicitly national frames of reference and identification.

International schools offer a privileged vantage point onto the intersection between broader social transformations attributed to neoliberal globalization and the more intimate, personalized and morally-inflected negotiations of identity and belonging of parents, educators and adolescents. The relatively small number of these schools and the high cost of their tuition, which ranged from a high of EGP 200,000 (approx. US \$20,000) to a low of EGP 50,000 (approx. US \$5,000) in the 2016-2017 academic year, rendered families with children in international schools a representative sample of Egypt's upper-middle and upper classes.

I use the categories "upper-middle", "upper class", "elite" and "upwardly mobile middle-class" to refer to affluent families who have the means to educate their children in private international schools. On the one hand, these different categories express the relative wealth and social status of these families within Egyptian society. On the other hand, these different categories indicate a significant degree of socioeconomic

differentiation within and across international school communities that I explore at length in the following chapters. My understanding of class tries to move beyond an exclusively materialist conception of class by exploring the role that globally-oriented socialization practices play in shaping new social and cultural conditions of privilege in contemporary Egypt (Heiman et al. 2012; Ball and Nikita 2014). In this second understanding of my interlocutors' position in society, class expresses an "aspirational category of belonging" (Schielke 2012: 46) that patterns a differentiated set of middle and upper-class practices, values and desires through the explicit, covert or indirect claims such practices make about elite belonging. In that sense, class indicates shared aspirations about elite belonging that bring together broad segments of the middle and upper classes through globally-oriented practices in the socialization and education of their children.

By following the circulation of discourses about belonging, culture and identity among international-school parents, teachers and students, I highlight a tension between class and national belonging that reappeared at different intersections in the socialization process: as parents negotiated or reflected upon decisions about educating their children at an international, rather than national school; when teachers tried to encourage students' civic engagement and raise their awareness of socioeconomic inequalities; and when students tried to imagine or make plans for their future upon graduating high school. I show how this tension between class and nation is rooted in the colonially inspired configuration of social distinction in Egypt, according to which elite and local are mutually exclusive relational categories of identification and belonging. My analysis underscores new sets of concerns and anxieties about locality and belonging that are

related to the formation of a new globalized urban elite culture, as a “lifestyle enclave”(Lamont et al. 1996), in and around Cairo’s new gated communities. I argue that the conjunction between international education and other shifts in upper-middle and upper-class urban and cultural practices have intensified the social and symbolic boundaries around internationally educated youth to an extent that rendered class and national belonging incongruous schemes in the socialization of young people in contemporary Egypt.

National Belonging in a Globalized World

In order to understand the conflicted, reflexive and aspirational dimensions of being ‘elite yet Egyptians’ or ‘Egyptian yet elite,’ my dissertation explores how belonging is constructed, experienced, negotiated and produced at the intersection between class and nation. Belonging connotes a subjective orientation toward community that emphasizes the never-complete, never-perfected and contingent project of *becoming* a member of society (Bell 1999; Aly 2015; Edensor 2002). It lends itself ideally to analysis of the way in which individuals caught between multiple and competing imaginaries of community and selfhood make sense and navigate their social realities (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011; Gerschiere 2009; Li 2000; May 2013; Calhoun 2003). As an emic category, belonging (*al-intima*’) allows me to attend to the historically and culture-specific understanding of national and class-inflected selfhood in a way that the more dominant frameworks for studying national identity foreclose.⁶

⁶ The Arabic word *huwuyya* (identity) was rarely used among my interlocutors.

The early 1990s witnessed an explosion in anthropological and broader social scientific research on identity (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Abu-Lughod 1991; S. Hall and Du Gay 1996). Scholars sought to make sense of two dominant and seemingly conflicting global developments: the intensity of transnational interconnections, mass migration and the heavy circulation of material and nonmaterial culture related to globalization, on the one hand, and the equally salient force of identity-based politics and violence within and between nation states, on the other hand. Challenging cultural homogenization theories that postulated the obliteration of cultural difference through the circulations of American-inflected global culture, anthropologists and critical scholars of identity argued that postmodern global conditions were reconfiguring, rather than erasing, identities (S. Hall 2017; Appadurai 1990). This body of literature introduced hybridity, flexibility and relationality as key tropes for understanding identity construction as an ongoing process that shifts in relation to one's positionality within relations of power (K. D. Hall 2002; White 2013). In lieu of identity, scholars proposed identification, among other categories, to distinguish between politicized and vernacular uses of the term, which emphasize fixity and primordality, and the more dynamic understanding of identity constitution that the new scholarship on identity put forth (S. Hall 2017; Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

However, this important shift in scholarly understanding of identity production in the late twentieth-century did not challenge dominant theories of national identity in which nationhood was conflated with nationalism as a political project (Benei 2005; Calhoun 2007; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Scholarly emphasis on reconfigurations of

identity in relation to the politics of multiculturalism, migration and colonialism in the Global North juxtaposed ethnic, racial and religious identities to hegemonic configurations of national identity and culture as bases for discrimination and exclusion (Vertovec 2011; Bonikowski 2016). This has meant that research on national identity and culture remained enclosed within research on nationalism as an ideological and political project that is chiefly represented by national intelligentsia, political elite or institutions or social groups that extend the official ideology of the nation state (Shryock 1997; Herzfeld 1997; Verdery 1991; Boyer and Lomnitz 2005; Lomnitz-Adler 1992; Handler 1988). Yet, this literature cannot explain why a dominant group with majoritarian ethnoreligious background, as the one I study, would feel excluded at home.

I suggest that an important reason for this gap in the literature pertains to the way in which this approach to nationhood overlooks the historically specific and complex configuration of national belonging in formerly colonized societies in the Global South (Chatterjee 1993; Lomnitz 2001; Siekmeier 2017). In these societies, attachment and belonging to the nation are imbricated with anticolonial resistance to an extent that renders anti- and postcolonial national imaginaries an enduring presence under conditions of neoliberal globalization (Kaur 2020; Getachew 2019; Benei 2008; Lukose 2005; Coe 2005; Boutieri 2016; Appadurai 1998). In Egypt, not only is the history of nationalism grounded in anticolonial resistance (Fahmy 2011; Reynolds 2012; Jakes 2020), but more pertinent is the way in which vernacular configurations of the national continue to be shaped by colonial and postcolonial repertoires and categories, through what Jessica

Winegar described as “nation-oriented frames of understanding and engaging with the world” (Winegar 2006: 9).

Winegar’s study of Egyptian visual artists extended the earlier work of Walter Armbrust (1996) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) on film and television by drawing attention to the ways in which the nation provides an overarching symbolic, moral and affective framework for cultural production. In her ethnographic study of Egyptian visual artists, Winegar showed how the interwoven history of visual arts and colonialism in Egypt rendered the art world a site where local artists constantly neogitated their relationship to Western modernity. She argued that the endurance of the nation as the dominant and organizing frame for these cultural negotiations has to do with the way in which in Egypt, as in other formerly colonized and (post)socialist countries, the national and the cultural became intertwined in local struggles against colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. Her study drew attention to the ways in which this history continued to inform the way in which artists responded to national and global transformations related to the privatization of cultural production and the opening up of the cultural field to artists with alternate and competing trajectories and ideologies.

Notwithstanding this attention to the personal narratives of artists, Winegar’s study like the broader anthropological literature that examines Egyptian nationhood isolated national attachment from the intricacies of everyday life and social relations. Within that framework, national belonging is a form of ideological or intellectual practice that leaves us wondering whether and how these cultural deliberations are translated outside of the enclosed circles of artists and cultural producers. My study sheds light on

the different ways through which these cultural deliberations are salient beyond artistic production. Like many of the artists in Winegar's study, the families in mine are also forced to reconcile their globally-oriented aspirations and ambitions for their children as middle-class-minded parents, on the one hand, and the colonial history of foreign education in Egypt and postcolonial and socialist-inspired attachment to free and national education as a collective path out of political and economic dependence, on the other. Their children grow up exposed to these discourses and internalized the sense of ambivalence with which it patterned everyday decisions and practices.

In pursuing the complex configuration of national belonging for a different kind of elite than the one conventionally studied in the nationalism literature, I follow a growing body of literature on everyday nationhood that examines how national belonging is produced in everyday social relations (Billig 1995; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Antonsich and Skey 2017). Challenging state-centric and top-down approaches to national identity formation, scholars of everyday nationhood emphasize the dynamic, heterogenous and embodied cultural repertoires that shape 'national cultures' and produce belonging (Edensor 2002; Bonikowski 2017). My dissertation builds on and moves beyond this body of literature by examining national attachment through the embodied labor that goes into the production of local subjectivity under conditions of neoliberal globalization. I build on Arjun Appadurai's (1995) notion of locality as a framework in order to think about national belonging as "a structure of feeling, a property of social life and an ideology of situated community" (217). In doing so, I try to separate national identity as a "category of practice" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) from an

understanding of national belonging as a more complex, dynamic and intentional aspect of social existence. Appadurai argued that “locality is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality” (1995: 210). He called on anthropologists to rethink their attachments to territorial nationalism in order to understand how local subjectivity is produced “in a world that has become deterritorialized, diasporic and transnational” (217). Although the nation state was precisely the context that Appadurai tried to overstep in his theory on locality, his discussion offers a compelling framework for rethinking conventional approaches to understanding national belonging in the context of neoliberal globalization.

In exploring articulations of national attachment beyond the ideological and institutional framework of the nation state in contemporary Egypt, this study does not undermine or wish to render invisible historical and structural lines of demarcation and national exclusion, specifically as they intersect with the religious and gender identity of many of my local interlocutors in international schools (Mahmood 2016).⁷ Some of my Christian interlocutors narrated experiences of exclusion inside international schools, or discussed how religious discrimination in Egyptian society at large informed their schooling choices. Yet, in foregrounding the kinds of concerns, negotiations and practices that are shared between and across Muslim and Christian families and youth, as well as Muslim families of different religious and ideological orientations, my aim in this study is to offer an analysis of a class-specific dynamic that I found across Muslim and Christian families.

⁷ While the majority of my interlocutors were Sunni Muslims, many were Coptic Christians.

Questioning Cosmopolitanism in Post-2011 Egypt

At the turn of the twenty-first century, upwardly mobile Egyptians expressed a strong cosmopolitan orientation in their consumption and lifestyle choices. In scholarship on Egypt, this orientation was traced to the emergence of American-style shopping malls (Abaza 2001) and cosmopolitan coffeeshops (de Koning 2009a), the circulation of global child-centered media and imported fast-consumer goods (Peterson 2011) as well as to gated housing and other similar urban practices associated with land privatization and a real estate development boom that took off in the late 1990s (Mitchell 1999; Kuppinger 2004; Bayat 2012; Denis 2006). In my dissertation, I show how the marketization and internationalization of the educational field brought these broader economic shifts to bear on the socialization of children. Within the first decades of the twenty-first century, exposure to international education became the ultimate marker of elite belonging. Newly established for-profit international schools became the principal site for elite production and the transformation of economic capital into social and cultural capital.

Although these urban, social and educational practices strongly echoed transnational trends that scholars linked to an emergent global middle-class culture (Heiman et al. 2012; Ball and Nikita 2014; Donner 2017; Rutz and Balkan 2013; Nambissan 2021), their configuration in the Egyptian context reconfigured colonially inspired constructions of social distinction. Through a strong appeal to Western-inflected cosmopolitan cultural practices, the new globalized culture of Egypt's urban middle and upper classes in the early twenty-first century intensified binary constructions of culture and identity, wherein anything marked foreign (international, cosmopolitan, global) was

classified as superior to anything marked local (national, *sha'bi, baladi*). This dichotomy was most forcefully materialized in the segmentation of the privatized educational field, where “national” and “international” were common vernacular categorizations that divided the educational field into inexpensive nationally-based education⁸ and superior international schools that delivered an imported educational program from a number of Western countries (USA, UK, Canada, France and Germany). Throughout the dissertation, I show how this division in the educational field reinforced and was reinforced by socioeconomic, spatial and cultural boundaries around internationally-educated youth that produced a sense of exclusion and isolation from the broader society.

However, in as far as it defined social distinction in twenty-first century Egypt, these educational transformations and their related lifestyle patterns amplified and deepened what the scholarship on Egypt refers to as “cosmopolitan capital”. This term denotes in one sense proficiency in English language and other related social skills that are highly valuable in the job market and by and large foreclosed to those who did not attend private schools (Barsoum 2002; Haeri 1997; Schielke 2012). Yet, a more in-depth analysis of cosmopolitan cultural capital links proficiency in one or multiple European language to a holistic lifestyle orientation towards Euro-American trends in taste, consumption and social practices that defines a so-called cosmopolitan class. To speak fluent English (and/or French) and to be able to mix English and Arabic casually in

⁸ Nationally-based education or “national schools” includes all public and private school that deliver the centralized educational curriculum of the Egyptian Ministry of Education. By comparison to the imported non-Egyptian education offered in the newly established for-profit international school, nationally-based education in public schools or private schools was inferior and inexpensive.

conversations is one of the most indicative markers of cosmopolitan-class belonging that indexes a person's early exposure to European languages at home and/or in private foreign or language schools. As cultural capital, cosmopolitanism also implies a situated subjectivity, a habitus, that predisposes cosmopolitan Egyptians to perceive and respond to the social world in a manner that sustains and reproduces their privilege.

As used in this literature, cosmopolitan capital is a category of analysis that reflects an underlying binary in emic categories of classification, according to which local and traditional forms and practices (*sha'bi* or *baladi*) are associated with the poor and working classes, whereas practices and forms associated with the middle and upper classes are categorized as modern, Westernized or international. In emic classifications, cosmopolitanism is an empty category that is only identified and defined in relation to what is categorized as *baladi* (*literally of this land*)⁹, *sha'bi*¹⁰ (popular) or the more recent *local* (pronounced with a heavy Egyptian accent *low-kal*). According to this typology, *baladi* and cosmopolitan are distinct cultural repertoires that draw a symbolic boundary between high and low-status cultural symbols. This classed configuration of locality (or ethnic configuration of class) is rooted in colonial structures of classification

⁹ *Baladi* is a derivative of the word *awlad al-balad* (sons of the land) which was an administrative and vernacular categorization that distinguished native residents of Cairo and Alexandria from migratory communities from Europe and other parts of the Middle East during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hanley 2017; El-Messiri 1978).

¹⁰ *Sha'bi* comes from the Arabic word *sha'b*, literally means population. It is the adjective most commonly associated with so-called popular neighborhoods (*al-manatiq al-sha'biyya*) in Cairo and other urban centers. These are older and more traditional neighborhoods that are predominantly home to low-income families. *Sha'bi* music (*al-musiqqa al-sha'biyya*) is a genre in Egyptian pop music, mostly sung by artists that belong to *sha'bi* neighborhoods, and is different from other pop music through melody, lyrics and audience.

and exclusion, within which localness was a feature of the underprivileged in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Egypt.¹¹ These constructions continue to shape public debates and private conversations about inequality and social distinction in Egypt. Along with their derivative words, these notions express the endurance of colonially inspired cultural binaries in shaping local systems of classifications.

Notwithstanding the resilience of cosmopolitan cultural capital as high-status marker in Egypt throughout the postcolonial period, the revitalization of its value in social and economic life in the context of neoliberal globalization brought with it a revival of anti and post-colonial discourses about cultural resistance in public debates and private conversation in the second half of the twentieth century. These discourses constructed the Western-inflected cosmopolitanism of the new internationally educated elite as a form of unpatriotic disavowal on the part of the privileged of their cultural ties and moral and civic responsibilities towards the less privileged, and more ‘rooted’ members, of their society. Nothing captures these sentiments better than the notion of *‘uqdit al-khawaga* or the *Khawaga* Complex.¹² The *Khawaga* complex is a vernacular

¹¹ Scholars have linked this socioeconomic configuration of locality in Egypt to power relations in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Egypt. During this period, a capitulations system granted European nationals and other foreigners who could claim protection from a European country extraterritorial rights and privileges in all legal matters, including in issues of trade and taxation. The system was extended in Egypt as part of the Ottoman Empire and remained in effect until 1937. The capitulations produced a degree of structural inequality in everyday life that rendered localness a feature of the underprivileged in Egypt (Hanley 2017). Consequently, many locals who possessed linguistic and other European cultural skills and dispositions were able to claim protection from a European nation by drawing on foreign cultural capital. Julia Elyachar (2011) argued that the resultant link between cultural practices and access to capitulatory privileges informed local constructions of foreign and native that mapped onto degrees of proximity to the culture and material privileges of Europeans.

¹² The designation *khawaga* referred to anyone who by virtue of their religious or ethnic identity could claim capitulatory privileges in Egypt under the Ottoman Empire. Julia Elyachar (2012) rightly

concept that suggests that Egyptians have a blind preference for anything foreign, a predisposition that, as the term implies, expresses a pathological obsession with the *khawaga*, a nineteenth-century designation of European residents of Egypt. The term is used in diverse contexts and as a vernacular critique of a wide range of cultural, linguistic, consumption and social practices that expose an underlying desire to come near or emulate Westerners and Western culture. Although the social context has changed since the emergence of the term, it continued to offer a multivalent vernacular means for the critique of globalizing social and cultural practices during the time of my research.

During my fieldwork research in 2016, for example, the Khawaga Complex was the theme of a series of TV commercials commissioned by the government to promote local merchandise. One of these commercials showed two men sitting in a coffeeshop commenting on a European-looking man buying “two bananas” from a fruit vendor. In Egypt, people commonly buy fruit and vegetables by the kilo. The two men admire the prudence of foreigners (*khawagat*), how they only buy what they need. Another man sitting next to them says he wished he could be like them. Next, an Egyptian man appears and also asks for two bananas from the same fruit vendor. Unlike their first reaction, the

contrasts this construction of foreigner with notions of *ibn al-balad* or *bint al-balad* (son and daughter of the land respectively). This fluid social categorization of the urban working classes as “*awlad al-balad*” pertains to a legal categorization of the native residents of Cairo that was in use in the early nineteenth century (El-Messiri 1978: 12). With the rise of anticolonial nationalism in the early half of the twentieth century and the establishment of the postcolonial state, the designation “*awlad balad*” acquired a socioeconomic, cultural and moral signification that distinguishes between who and what is authentic or pristine (*baladi*) and what has been influenced by foreign, mostly Western, cultural influences (*ifranghi*) (Reynolds 2012). If the *khawaga* denoted an archetype of a local whose cultural roots were located elsewhere, the cultural roots of *ibn al-balad* were in Egypt (Cairo or Alexandria). In addition to European residents of Egypt, this category commonly included non-Coptic Christians and Jews (Elyachar 2011; Hanley 2017).

two men start to criticize how trivial this man must be, to go out only to buy only two bananas. Sarcastically, they joke that this man must be having people over that day- implying he must be cheap. The scene ends with the familiar voice of Tareq Nour, an advertising guru in Egypt, saying “Why do we have this obsession with foreigners, thinking everything he does is better than what an Egyptian does? The same way, you always buy foreign products assuming they are better than Egyptian products, regardless of whether they were of same quality or if the Egyptian product was better. The *khawaga* complex costs you and costs your country a lot. Get rid of the *khawaga* complex, and be proud of your country’s products.”

The way in which this ad posited patriotism¹³ as the ‘remedy’ of an internalized, habituated and normalized (‘pathological’) preference for all things foreign (read Western) ideally captures the broader structure of feeling through which many of the parents, teachers and students in my study grappled with the ethical implications of their cosmopolitan lifestyle choices. The salience of this construct and the related burden it placed on upwardly mobile Egyptians with globally-oriented aspirations left many of my interlocutors with a sense of being caught in a moral and cultural bind between their class and national belonging. Their situation expressed a vital dimension to “living cosmopolitan” in Egypt that went beyond issues of status distinction and social reproduction. It exposed an intimate sense of moral questioning that infused the personal

¹³ In Egypt, there is no explicit distinction between patriotism and nationalism. The Arabic word *wataniyya*, commonly translated as nationalism, expresses primarily sentiments of loyalty and attachment to the nation. In this study, I use the English words patriotism, rather than nationalism, to highlight contexts where actions, rather than moral sentiments, are called upon.

narratives, everyday interactions and embodied practices that I document in my dissertation.

Hence, although in keeping with the scholarly literature on class in Egypt I retain the designation “cosmopolitan class”, I use the term to express what Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider described as “the cosmopolitan moment” (Beck and Sznaider 2010). Their understanding of the cosmopolitan moment distinguishes between cosmopolitanism as a political or normative project and cosmopolitanism as an historical reality and lived condition. They argued that, as a lived condition, cosmopolitanism is, “a function of coerced choices or a side-effect of unconscious decisions” (387) brought on through the intensification of transnational interdependence in the age of globalization. It is “globalization from *within*” (389). Beck and Sznaider’s understanding of cosmopolitanism offers a more relevant characterization of the kind of cosmopolitanism I observed among internationally educated youth and their families in Cairo. By thinking about cosmopolitanism following Beck and Sznaider as a condition, rather than an attitude, one can begin to make sense of the sentiments of remorse or regret that patterned the ways in which upwardly mobile parents lamented the impact of international education and other globally oriented cultural practices on their children’s sense of belonging, and yet were not willing to consider alternate, more locally rooted, paths.

Class in the Anthropology of the Middle East

Notwithstanding the ubiquity of class belonging in the organization and reproduction of social relationships in Egypt, social class rarely emerges as a standalone category of analysis in the anthropological literature on Egypt. Scholars’ chief interest in

religiously inflected forms of social and political practice in the Middle East has rendered class “troublingly invisible”- to quote Samuli Schielke (2012:36)- as category of analysis in the broader social scientific literature on the region. In this final section of the introduction, I build on the small literature on class in Egypt in order to lay out the broader politics and culture of class that informed the socialization and educational practices of upwardly mobile families in my study and undergirded the different kinds of tensions and contradictions it entailed. I argue that the Bordieuan conception of cultural capital, which informs scholarship on cosmopolitan class in Egypt, cannot account for the fundamental misalignment between the official and state-sponsored national culture and the de facto economically and socially dominant culture of the cosmopolitan elite. I argue that the endurance of colonially inspired constructions of culture, community and selfhood that divide social reality into Oriental/Occidental, local/foreign, poor/rich binaries in Egyptian class politics and practices challenges one of the premises of Bourdieu’s theoretical model, which postulated a fully integrated symbolic field under the aegis of the nation state and its “legitimate culture” (Bourdieu 1984).

Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is one of the most important theoretical frameworks for understanding how culture participates in the reproduction of social inequalities. His first examination of cultural capital emerged in a study he published with Jean-Claude Passeron about class-based differences in academic achievement in the French education system (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In this work, Bourdieu and Passeron defined cultural capital as informal academic standards that advance middle and upper-class students, “the dominant class,” whose upbringing and cultural socialization at

home predisposes them to fulfill these standards that are otherwise foreclosed to students of the “dominated classes.” A merit-based education system serves according to this understanding the institutionalization of class differences and inequality. In his subsequent examinations of cultural capital, Bourdieu expanded its scope to include a broader scheme for conceptualizing classed subjectivity ideally captured through his understanding of habitus. Bourdieu’s notion of habitus conceptualizes class as internalized and embodied in personal dispositions, cognitive inclinations and corporeal practices. It is incorporated ‘unselfconsciously’ by members of society and enacted in social practice by a logic of common sense (*doxa*). Habitus, according to Bourdieu, predisposes individuals to perceive and react to the social world in a manner that sustains and reproduces the objective structures of which they are the product (Bourdieu 1977: 72). In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu shows how taste, a “classifying practice” (1984: 171), is a vital manifestation of class-based habitus that transforms an objective condition (social class) into symbolic dispositions. Lifestyle within this model is the encompassing system of ‘classified and classifying practices’ (tastes) that draws symbolic boundaries around groups that share the same taste.

In the small body of literature that examines social class in Egypt, Bourdieu’s understanding of lifestyle is implicit in representations of the cosmopolitan class or a cosmopolitan elite (de Koning 2009b; Peterson 2011; Haeri 1997). As previously highlighted, what is central to conceptions of cosmopolitanism as the basis of a class-specific lifestyle in Egypt is the way in which it is structured around establishing cultural and sociospatial distance from *baladi*-inflected sites and practices. Yet, what this

configuration of cosmopolitan cultural capital overlooks is the role of modern state institutions in producing and organizing a cultural field that classifies non-national and non-local cultural forms as superior. The symbolic withdrawal of the state and its instruments of national culture production from the formation of elite culture in Egypt is particularly paradoxical in view of the hegemonic role that scholarship on Egypt attributes to the state, state institutions and nationalist intelligentsia in national pedagogy (El Shakry 2007; Armbrust 1996; Abu-Lughod 2005; Winegar 2006). Historiographic and anthropological scholarship on the formation of national culture in Egypt emphasized the ideological role that a nationalist middle-class intelligentsia played in negotiating polarizing discourses about a fundamental discrepancy between local culture and Western modernity (Schechter 2006; Ryzova 2014; Armbrust 2003; Schielke 2012). A dominant theme in this scholarship is the modernizing impetus behind anti and post-colonial nationalism, which forged Egyptian national culture as mediating between traditionalism -as a force against science and progress- and cosmopolitanism -as the blind appropriation of Western culture. Classical Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic) was one of the principal cultural agents that scholars tied to the formation of this construction of Egyptian national culture.

Yet, as implied through my overview of the cosmopolitan-*baladi* binary in the previous section, the role of official national or 'high culture' in mediating cultural capital was tangential to the configuration of social distinction in contemporary Egypt. The central role that private foreign educational institutes and foreign language proficiency played in elite reproduction and the marginal role that Arabic language

education and other culturally-relevant subjects played in elite education (as I will discuss at length throughout the dissertation) suggests a fragmented cultural field in which Egyptian Arabic (the local dialect), English and Classical Arabic – as three linguistic markers of *baladi*, cosmopolitan and official repertoires respectively- represent multiple and competing registers of value at play (Haeri 1997).

Hence, rather than examining *baladi* and cosmopolitan as bounded repertoires (Elyachar 2011; de Koning 2009b), my dissertation traces the interplay between local and cosmopolitan-inflected registers in the ways in which upwardly mobile Egyptians defined their self-worth, made judgements about others and established a sense of solidarity within and beyond their social class. Inspired by the work of Michele Lamont and others in reconceptualizing cultural capital through an analysis of boundary work (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lamont 1994), I explore cosmopolitan cultural capital as a particular configuration of socioeconomic, cultural and moral registers. I show how the shifting educational field in Egypt rendered school choice a dynamic arena where upwardly mobile families negotiated the socioeconomic, cultural and moral boundaries of class. By examining my interlocutors' distinct social mobility trajectories, lifestyle and religious orientation, and gender socialization, I highlight the multiple ways in which differentially positioned social actors within this elite community constructed and enacted the boundaries between their class and national belonging. I show how national belonging provided a dynamic register through which elite Egyptians drew moral boundaries between themselves and others within their own socioeconomic status. Against the background of Egypt's class culture, national belonging served as a

moral idiom through which elite Egyptians negotiated their privileged social local in a context of growing inequalities and contested their sense of ‘moral exclusion’ as wealthy and “Westernized” Egyptians.

Methodology

The dissertation is based on fourteen-months of multi-sited ethnographic research (between January 2016-August 2017) across key sites of upper middle-class social reproduction in Cairo, including schools, sports clubs, commercial and recreational areas. During this period, I conducted over eighty formal and informal interviews with international and national school parents, school owners, educators and former students and engaged in numerous informal conversations with teachers, parents and students in various public and private social settings. The aim of these interactions was to understand how issues of identity, culture and belonging figured within the inception and operation of international schools, in parental school choice, and in students’ educational experiences.

My initial introduction to the community of educators and school parents was facilitated through my network of friends and relatives in Cairo who put me in contact with their own friends and relatives who either worked or had children in an international school. The parents, alumni and educators who formed my interlocutors in Cairo’s international educational field were affiliated with sixteen different international schools that reflected the range and diversity of the field. Among them were four American, five British, three French, two German and two Canadian schools. These schools were selected to reflect the range and diversity of the 260 international schools that existed in

Egypt in 2016-2017. The names of individuals, locations and other details that might have provided clues to the real identity of my interlocutors were changed in order to preserve the anonymity of my interlocutors and the privacy of the institutions where or about which I conducted my research.

I spent the greater part of the 2016/2017 academic year following classroom discussions, and school and extracurricular activities that aimed to strengthen students' knowledge of Egyptian culture and history and to promote civic engagement at one international school that I would call the International School in New Cairo (ISN). To the best of my knowledge, ISN was the only school that had a standing secular program of curricular and extra-curricular activities that focused on the cultural identity and sense of belonging of its students. At a number of other schools, issues concerning culture and identity were incorporated into religious education.¹⁴ In as far as it created an institutional and pedagogical framework for students' engagement with questions about Egyptian culture and identity, ISN offered an ideal window onto day-to-day negotiations as well as more in-depth reflections on these issues among students and teachers. To gain a comparative perspective on the educational discourses and practices I was observing at ISN, I also regularly visited a private nationally-based language school, where I held long conversations with the owners and the teachers and sat in on classes in Arabic, social studies and religious education.¹⁵

¹⁴ I tried to gain access to some of these schools but was unsuccessful.

¹⁵ This school, which I will call ULS (Al-Ufuq Language School) followed the national curriculum in all subjects, but adopted a religious Islamic orientation that its founders and teachers presented as different and often opposed to the discourses on identity and culture imparted in the national

In parallel to my school field research, I followed parents, students and teachers as they engaged with friends, family and colleagues at their homes, in shopping malls, cafes, sports clubs, and university campuses. The aim of these urban excursions was to trace the link between the discourses and practices I was observing in the school and the broader social, commercial and political context of middle-class life in post-2011 Egypt. Although a growing percentage of international-school students were attending college abroad, the American University in Cairo was the first choice for international school students in Egypt. It was, therefore, an important site to examine a wider pool of students than the ones at ISN and other international schools I visited. I reached out to presidents of students' clubs and organization and through the help of international-school teachers and friends within its faculty, I started establishing connections with the student body. Some of the students I had long conversations with attended national and public schools, and hence provided a valuable perspective on the distinctive trajectories and experiences of the internationally educated.

Finally, in order to situate the debates and tensions surrounding international education within the broader educational field in Egypt, I conducted fifteen formal interviews with education experts, activists and policy makers, including a former minister of education, attended school fairs, Cairo's first international education

curriculum. Besides its religious orientation, ULS targeted a middle and lower-middle families. Tuition in 2016/2017 was EGY 8,000. In as far as my dissertation focuses on upper-middle and upper-class Egyptians educated in international schools, my fieldwork in ULS only served to provide a broader perspective on the ways in which issues of identity and belonging are negotiated in the educational field and to highlight the class-specific factors that construct national belonging in and around international schools.

conference, and various public lectures and seminars on education reform in non-governmental organizations and in public and international universities.

Chapters Overview

This dissertation consists of an introduction and four ethnographic chapters. Chapter two interrogates discourses about (non)belonging and foreignness associated with international school students, and explores how international schooling might be implicated in intensifying class boundaries in contemporary Egypt. The evolution of elite schooling throughout the twentieth century provides a historical framework through which I examine elements of continuity and discontinuity in the socialization patterns of cosmopolitan Egyptians. By situating recently established for-profit international schools within broader shifts in elite urban and social practices, I argue that international schools lie at the heart of broader social shifts that produce young people's sense of nonbelonging.

Chapter three focuses on the role that international schools played in drawing socioeconomic, cultural and moral boundaries between and across international school communities. By examining the personal narratives of five Egyptian mothers (and their partners) about navigating the education market and negotiating the merits and shortcomings of international education, this chapters showed how “love of country” (*hub al-balad*) and other similar articulations of patriotism and national belonging served as idioms through which elite families negotiated school choice and the broader moral dilemmas associated with raising privileged children in a context of growing socioeconomic inequalities.

In chapter four, I interrogate the discourses about national identity, culture and belonging that circulated through the International School in New Cairo (ISN). Drawing on Claudio Lomnitz's (1992) notion of "contact frames," I examine the institutional practices and educational discourses that reproduced and reified colonially inspired binary constructions on culture and belonging. I show how students were caught in a cultural bind between rigid and exclusionary construction of cosmopolitan and national belonging. On the one hand, international-school culture emphasized a Western-inflected conception of internationalism that heightened students' awareness of the politico-cultural boundaries of their identities as Egyptians. On the other hand, the same school culture produced a "purified" essentialist construction of Egyptianness that excluded privileged and internationally educated youth.

Chapter five examines how internationally educated youth negotiated these divergently constructed communities of belonging. My analysis focuses on observable disparities in the semiotic performances of boys and girls, whereby boys were far more likely to enact *baladi*-inflected linguistic and social practices. I show how this gender division was salient in the socialization of elite boys for whom the appropriation of *baladi*-inflected social practice was a vital aspect of their socialization as elite Egyptian men. I argue that the ensuing configuration of ideal masculinity and femininity highlighted the differential burden that was placed on boys and girls to reproduce class boundaries. While boys were encouraged to cultivate skills and dispositions that facilitated their movement beyond cosmopolitan-class boundaries, the socialization of

girls into cosmopolitan elite women restricted their exposure to mixed class settings and largely confined their public life within cosmopolitan-class boundaries.

CHAPTER TWO

“Living like Strangers”: International Schooling and the Sociospatial Production of a New Globalizing Elite in Cairo

In May 2017, many senior high school students in Egypt’s international schools were getting ready for college abroad. Canada, the UK, and the United States were among the most popular destinations, followed by the Republic of Ireland, Germany and France. Among the group of students that I had gotten to know well at the International School in New Cairo (ISN), many were expressing feelings of excitement mixed with anxieties about being separated from their families, friends and girl/boyfriends. It was ultimately a very novel practice for Egyptian youth to leave their parental home to attend college, especially among the middle and upper classes. Yet, what was particularly surprising to me, being myself an Egyptian studying abroad, was that none of the students seemed overtly concerned about living in a different country. Most of the students were far more anxious about what they were leaving behind than what they were approaching.

Yassin (pseudonym), who had become one of my closest interlocutors among the students over the preceding months, was not any different. He had gotten accepted into a Canadian university and was in the process of planning a trip to al-Gouna, a beach resort on the Red Sea coast, with guy friends during their last weeks in Egypt. All, save the one friend who was going to the US, were starting college in Ontario. Yassin’s main concern at the time was getting his student visa in time for travel. He was not worried about “fitting in” in Canada. “The guys were just talking about this the other day and we all feel that we had been living like strangers in Egypt all our lives so we are not worried about

being strangers anywhere else. We are used to this feeling,” he told me. We were sitting in Espresso Lab, a new coffeeshop that opened several branches in malls across New Cairo recently, and was particularly popular among college students. To Yassin and his friends going to college in Egypt was “pointless” because they would just be entering the “AUC bubble.”¹⁶ The only way going to college in Egypt would make sense to Yassin was if it meant he would be attending a public university, Cairo University for example, where- among other things- he would “learn to be Egyptian”. Since this was unlikely given his international education and the fact that Cairo University offered “substandard” education in the humanities, his disciplinary preference, studying abroad was the only meaningful path for Yassin.

Rather than representing an extreme opinion, Yassin’s account expressed common attitudes I had been observing among senior ISN students who I had gotten to know in the course of the 2016/17 academic year. His description of having lived like a stranger was reiterated in other students’ narratives and classroom discussions, in which students casually identified themselves as “not very Egyptians,” “like foreigners,” “a minority” and many other variations of ways of expressing a pronounced sense of distance from the life of “Egyptians.” This commonplace form of self-presentation among ISN students echoed in other exchanges I had with parents and teachers as well in public debates in which international school students purportedly lived in a “bubble” physically and culturally isolated from the everyday reality of the majority of Egyptians.

¹⁶ The American University in Cairo

Discourses about the bubble connected international education to a range of class-specific urban and social practices that in recent years have defined an emergent globally-oriented urban elite culture in Egypt. In his chapter, I interrogate discourses about nonbelonging circulating among international school communities by examining the broader structural and social transformations of which international schools are part. Rather than looking at international schooling as the recycling of longstanding educational patterns of cosmopolitan-class reproduction (de Koning 2009b; Peterson 2011), I argue that international schools reflected critical shifts in the cultural configuration of Egypt's urban elite in the twenty-first century. By exploring the imbrication of international schooling with emergent patterns of urbanization and media consumption associated with neoliberal economic restructuring, I show how discourses about foreignness and isolation are linked to the rearrangement of the conventional sources and institutions associated with the production of the educated elite in Egypt. These changes structured the cultural production of internationally educated Egyptians and patterned the new configurations of class and national belonging that I document in this study.

International Education and the Transformation of the Educational Landscape

Although many people I met in Cairo were convinced that pre-college international education was unique to Egypt's educational landscape (*ikhtira' masri*), the country's for-profit international schools were part of a transnational field of international schooling that has been growing exponentially in the last two decades. The growth of internationally-oriented schools that operate on for-profit basis is a global development

linked to the restructuring of national education systems in recent decades towards increasing marketization and internationalization (M Hayden and Thompson 2009; Bunnell 2014; Ball 2012). This type of schooling increased by four-fold within the first two decades of the twenty-first century reaching a total of about 10,000 international schools worldwide. Most of these school are located in the Global South, with Southeast Asia as one of the regions with the highest international school activity. Experts expect the number of international schools to double by 2027 (Bunnell 2019).

This emergent transnational field of international education is decidedly different from earlier existing models of international schools, which included “standard international schools” that are linked to diplomatic and expatriate communities or the so-called “internationally-minded schools” affiliated with the International Schools Association (ISA), which profess an ideological commitment to internationalism (Bunnell, Fertig, and James 2016). The literature on international education suggests that the current wave of international schools expresses an orientation towards internationalism as “global competency,” namely as a set of skills and dispositions that are necessary for success in a transnational employment market and working environment. Most of these schools deliver an imported non-national curriculum to a student body made up predominantly of the children of globalized middle and upper classes in countries of the Global South. The great majority of these schools are owned

and managed by multinational corporations that run a transnational network of international schools (Hayden and Thompson 1995; Bunnell 2019).¹⁷

In Egypt, the expansion of a commercially-based and internationally oriented education market was directly linked to the 1990's IMF-driven structural adjustment reforms which included the privatization and selling off of an array of public services and state resources to local and foreign investors.¹⁸ In the field of education, this entailed a subtle shift in policy and public attitudes whereby private education would no longer be an auxiliary to the public system but the only education desirable to segments of the population that could afford to pay tuition. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of private schools in Egypt increased by six-fold. In higher education, thirty new private universities were established, including a French, Japanese, German, British and Canadian university (Cantini 2017).¹⁹ There are currently about 260 schools in Egypt that are licensed as international schools (*madaris dawliyya*).²⁰ These constitute less than four percent of existing private schools, and a negligible share in a national education system of about 50,000 schools.²¹ Their meagre share in the Egyptian education system

¹⁷ Other circulating national-based curricula are Canadian, French, German and Japanese in order of proliferation (Bunnell 2019).

¹⁸ The 1993 World Bank Basic Education Improvement Project & Law 306/1993 on private education introduced new directives for private sector involvement in education. The law was introduced as part of fulfilling the BEIP directives, which included state withdrawal from providing basic education to segments of the population who can afford to pay tuition (World Bank, Basic Education Improvement Project, Staff Appraisal Report, 9)

¹⁹ Until 1995 the American University in Cairo was the only private university in Egypt. The new 30 universities established post-1995 does not include private technical institutes (*ma'ahid faniyya*).

²⁰ International schools are also known as schools that deliver special curricula (*madaris that manahij khasa*) in state and legal documents.

²¹ In 2018/2019, 10.3% of all students in Egypt were in private schools. The number is significantly higher in Greater Cairo. Of the total number of school students, 33% and 24% of school students are in private schools in Cairo and Giza respectively. The share of private education remains nearly

notwithstanding, the concentration of international schools in Greater Cairo and other urban centers express important shifts in elite educational practices that relate to broader socioeconomic and economic transformations shaping Egypt's new middle and upper classes.

On the one hand, the rapid expansion of an international education market in Egypt mirrored the deteriorating quality of nationally-based education²² in private and public schools. Budgetary constraints and an institutional and political failure to reform the national educational program have drained all schools that delivered the national curriculum of the institutional and pedagogical resources that would allow them to compete with international education. Although, as I will show, class has always been an important determinant of educational trajectories in Egypt, the combined growth of for-profit international schools and the rapid deterioration of nationally-based education in recent decades transformed the educational landscape by carving new social and symbolic boundaries between national and international schools in an already highly stratified education system.²³

constant at different stages as 32% and 21% of general secondary school students (*thanawi 'am*) are in private schools ("Kitab Al-Ihsa' al-Sanawi Lil'am al-Dirasi 2018-2019 [The Yearly Educational Statistics Books of 2018-2019]" 2019)

²² By nationally-based education, I mean education that follows the centralized national curriculum of the Egyptian Ministry of Education. The comprises education in all public and private schools in Egypt *not* licensed as international schools.

²³ This discussion pertains only to the general secondary track (*thanawi 'am*), which includes high schools that lead up to a secondary school diploma (*thawaniya 'ama*). This effectively excludes 60% of Egyptian high school students enrolled in technical high schools who are mostly of inferior socioeconomic status compared with students in general education.

The ensuing shifts in the configuration of private schooling in Egypt are key to understanding changes in the construction of cosmopolitan-class culture and identity in the twenty-first century. Studies that examined Egypt’s cosmopolitan class identified “foreign education” as a vital field in the production of cosmopolitan-class culture and identity (de Koning 2009b; Peterson 2011; Haeri 1997). However, in emphasizing the distinction between cosmopolitan (foreign) and mainstream (local) educational practices, these studies did not fully explore transformations internal to the configuration of foreign education. By presuming a degree of historical continuity in elite educational practices, these studies overlooked how cosmopolitan-class identity is dynamically related to the structural transformations that have been rearranging the educational and cultural field in recent decades.

In the following overview of the development of foreign education in Egypt, I will try to highlight important shifts in the political, institutional and curricular configuration of foreign education throughout the twentieth-century. In doing so, I hope to shed light on some of the key elements of discontinuity that shape belonging and identity for internationally educated youth today. In short, I want to explore what made Yassin and his friends—but not their often upwardly mobile parents—feel like strangers.

From Foreign to International: A Genealogy of International Education

“Foreign schools” is an unofficial designation of Christian missionary schools and secular private schools that were established by European missions or resident communities throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Although initially established either as community schools for Egypt’s European resident communities or as

missionary schools targeting mainly Christian and Jewish children, these schools became increasingly attractive to local families towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century (G. Salama 1962).²⁴ One of the likely reasons for the appeal of foreign schools to local families during this period was the instability of the system of government schooling, especially during the colonial period (Heyworth-Dunne 1939).²⁵

The growing numbers of Egyptian families admitting their children to foreign schools during the first half of the twentieth century was a source of growing public anxiety about elite appropriation of European cultural mores and social practices (Russell 2004; Hussein 2014). In the post-independence period, the government undertook successive efforts to interfere in the education of Egyptian students in foreign schools, the most significant of which was a law in 1948 that required foreign schools to offer Egyptian students classes in Arabic, Egyptian history and geography and civics education (*tarbiyya wataniyya*).²⁶ The program of study as well as textbooks and examinations were to be administered by the government. The law also prohibited private schools from teaching students any religion other than “their own” whether their parents approved or not²⁷ (Law 38/1948).

²⁴ Number of Egyptians enrolled in American schools was 8,073 out of 8719, 23,053 out of 30, 259 in French, 5522 out of 9239 in English and 4518 out of 8757 in Italian schools (Salama 1962: 309-310).

²⁵ Historians divide the British occupation of Egypt is into two stages: The first was between 1882-1922, when Egypt was under formal British administration. In the second stage (1922-1956) Egypt was only nominally independent since the British retained significant military and administrative power throughout this period.

²⁶ Between 1885 and 1920, the school curriculum of primary schools included lessons on manners, personal hygiene, and clothing. However, in 1920, the course was changed to a full-fledged instruction in national pedagogy titled “national upbringing and morals” (*al-tarbiyya al-wataniyya wa al-akhlaq*) (Pollard 2005).

²⁷ This provision was added on the request of the Coptic Orthodox church. Since Copts were the main target of European and American missionary activity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, this provision was particularly critical for the Coptic community.

Notwithstanding the high enrollment rate of Egyptians in foreign schools during the first half of the twentieth century, government education appears to have been the preferred choice for the majority of middle and upper-class families. On the one hand, attending a government school secured its graduates a job in the civil service, which was a prestigious career track in Egypt's growing bureaucracy. There is also little evidence indicating a link between foreign schools and leading figures in the political, economic or cultural life of Egypt during this period. Instead, the biographies of foreign educated Egyptian and studies on female education suggest that foreign schools were more closely associated with the education of religious and ethnic minorities (whether native or naturalized Egyptians) and with girls (Ahmed 1999; E. Said 1999; Pollard 2005; Russell 2004; Shakry 1998).

Less than a decade later, under the postcolonial state headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, all foreign schools were fully nationalized and brought under state control. The nationalization of foreign schools in 1956 reflected a dominant public discourse about the implications of private schools in colonial efforts to undermine Egypt's national independence. Most disconcerting in public debates about foreign education was how it subjected Egyptian students to a colonialist narrative about Egypt's history and culture that rationalized and supported imperialism (G. Salama 1962; Boktor 1963). For example, in a book published in 1963, Amir Boktor, a prominent educator, professor and Dean Emeritus at the American University in Cairo at the time, wrote:

“Had the activities of these schools been directed solely to the education of children of foreign elements, there would have been no problem. What happened was just the contrary...Nevertheless these schools assumed such a position of isolation and autonomy that they constituted by themselves an *imperium in imperio*, directing the youth to the channels they favored and coloring them with their own impressions, with no supervision or interference whatever on the part of the state...Thus, foreign schools with their unique curricula, their organizational pattern, and with no check on their work by the State, found ample opportunity to make themselves an instrument of propaganda for their respective countries, and faced no obstacle whatever in directing the youth the way they desired....” (73-4).

Boktor’s views are reiterated in Girgis Salama’s commentary on the need for new state regulations of foreign schools. Salama was *wakil* (manager) of “Al-Nasr School” (post-nationalization name of the English School in Heliopolis) in 1960 when he published an exhaustive study on the history of foreign education in Egypt. Here is how he described Egyptian students of foreign schools:

“Although one could not deny that these foreign schools graduated students with great proficiency in foreign languages, especially English and French, and that some educational diversity is desirable, yet these schools were shaping our youth (*shababna*) and molding their way of thinking (*tafkiruhum*) according to their different orientation and agenda, either religious, social or political...The required textbooks were replete with colonialist ideas that went against the dominant Egyptian nationalist movement (*al-itijihat al-wataniyya al-misriyya*)...These colonialist ideas created a rift among children of the Arab world (*abna’ al-watan al-‘arabi*), celebrating imperialism and imperialists, and elevating their history in a manner that renders them materially, scientifically and culturally superior, and overlooking Egypt’s history, its wealth and great civilization...There was nothing in these curricula about Egypt or the Arab world. Students graduated without ever being exposed to the Arab Egyptian perspective because they didn’t read Arabic books as they were neither proficient in the language of their country nor had any appreciation or respect for its literature” (My Translation, Salama 1960: 126-7).

Hence, moving far beyond the 1948 law, a new 1957 law established the Association of National Institutes (*Mu’assasat al-Ma’ahid al-Qawmiyya*), which was

entrusted with the regulation and administration of Egypt's 284 foreign schools,²⁸ now renamed "national institutes for languages" (*ma'ahid qawmiyya l'il lughat*). In addition, the state established a technical department (*al-maktab al-fanni l'il-ta'lim al-ajnabi*) to oversee the standardization and Arabization of educational curricula and examination at these schools. The process also entailed devising a pedagogical program aimed at cultivating the national sentiments of the Egyptian and Arab students attending these schools (Salama 1962). Compared to earlier efforts to nationalize foreign schools, the 1950s reforms ended foreign education in Egypt by reducing the autonomy of foreign schools to foreign language education. While in the past government-mandated subjects were complementary to the foreign educational programs taught at these schools, since the 1950s, the entire education program in foreign schools followed the standardized curriculum administered centrally by the Ministry of Education. The only key difference between foreign and government schools was that students at these schools continued to study most subjects in a European language (English in formerly British and American schools, French in French schools, etc.).²⁹

Notwithstanding -or also possibly as a result of- nationalization, private foreign schools secured their status as elite educational institutions that attracted the children of

²⁸ This number includes French, British, Italian, American, Greek, Maronite, Austrian, German, Swiss and Russian schools that survived into the 1950s from a total of 637 schools in the 1920s (Source: Salama 1962: 309-310).

²⁹ Since Germany was not involved in the Suez Crisis, German schools retained some degree of autonomy that allowed them to operate under the provisions of the 1948 law even though the majority of students were Egyptians. In addition, the nationalization process had different implications on secular foreign missions schools versus Christian schools that were under the patronage of the Vatican. While secular foreign missions schools were completely overtaken by the government, Catholic schools were allowed to retain some degree of autonomy.

elite families throughout the second half of the twentieth-century. Although foreign education does not seem to have provided any special privileges in the employment market, anecdotal evidence from conversations with international school families suggests that foreign schooling only became an important source of cultural capital for upwardly mobile families in the post-colonial period. Cairene parents who themselves attended public schools in the first half of the twentieth-century were more likely to send their children to foreign schools in the postcolonial period as a strategy of social distinction when mass education made schooling widely accessible to larger segments of society.³⁰ Hence, the expansion of public education from the 1950s onwards, the dominance of the public sector over economic activity and the system of guaranteed government employment for college graduates suggest that foreign education was by a large source of cultural capital or prestige within the more cosmopolitan segments of the urban middle and upper classes.

However, this system shifted significantly following economic liberalization in the 1970s. While the expansion of public education under Nasser succeeded at universalizing access to education, it failed to establish educational institutions that could withstand massive budgetary cuts, a population explosion and educators' rush for more rewarding job opportunities in oil-rich Arab countries in the 1970s. While enrollment continued to increase in public schools, low teacher salaries and overcrowded classrooms were taking a toll on the quality of public education (Cochran 2008). These developments

³⁰ The total number of students in foreign schools was estimated at 97,000 before 1956. In 1960, the total number of students in all private schools was 468,000 students out of a total of about 3 million (Cochran 1986).

coincided with important economic and political transformations that had a significant impact on the pragmatic valuation of an education geared toward “Arab socialism”. Political and social changes associated with the promulgation of the Open-Door Policy in 1974, the first wave of labor migration to the Arab Gulf countries, the signing of the Peace Treaty with Israel and improved relations with the West ushered in a new phase in Egyptian education. One of the most significant social implications of these shifts was a period of unparalleled rates of social mobility (Schechter 2019; Amin 2000). Although the state continued to uphold its commitment to providing free education, the 1970s ushered in a new period of educational reforms geared toward encouraging globally-oriented educational models that could better serve the training of a labor force for Egypt’s booming tourism industry, import trade, real estate and other sectors growing as a result of foreign investment. Consequently, attending a foreign school that exposed children to European culture and an intensive training in one or multiple European languages became a highly valuable asset in this new education market (Haeri 1997; de Koning 2009b). Not only did the government establish its own line of superior English-medium public schools in the late 1970s, the so-called experimental language schools (*madaris al-lughat al-tajribiyya*), by the 1980s, the president of Egypt was personally inaugurating the opening of private language schools (*madaris lughat*).³¹

Hence, between 1970s and 1990s, the field of foreign education in Egypt expanded to include two broad categories of schools; missionary and foreign missions’ schools that were nationalized under Nasser and which operated on a non-profit basis

³¹ Mubarak attended the inauguration of *Misr Li’l-Lughat*, a private for-profit school, in April 1985.

(national institutes for languages or *ma'ahid qawmiyya lil lughat*) and the more recently established for-profit private schools that came out of this first wave of educational privatization reforms in the 1980s, so-called language schools (*madaris lughat*).³² Besides their distinct histories, the curricula taught at foreign and language schools were nearly identical to the curricula and textbooks taught at Arabic-medium private schools and public schools. The only difference was that the principal language of instruction at language and foreign schools was not Arabic.³³ Another important difference was that non-profit foreign schools were financially accessible to wider segments of the middle classes while commercially-based language schools charged higher tuition.³⁴ As I will show in the following chapter, many Egyptians associated “private language schools” during this period with poorly performing students in public, experimental or foreign schools who could easily transfer to one of these commercially based schools as long as they could afford to pay tuition.³⁵

³² Following the new education law of 1981. The former included a wide range of both private Arabic and language schools (*madaris lughat*). The latter included both Catholic schools such as the *Sacre Coeur*, *Mere de Dieu*, *College de la Saint Famille*, *College de la Salle*, *the Deutsche Schule Borromaerinnen* as well as less well-maintained nationalized foreign mission schools as the *Lycee Francais Horreya*, the al-Nasr School (previously the English School), St. Joseph School, etc.

³³ Some of these schools offered an IGCSE or American diploma track in high school. A review of legislations and decrees of the Egyptian Ministry of Education (*qararat wizariyya*) between 1980s and 1990s revealed that this period witnessed an increase in the number of private for-profit language schools that received permission to offer foreign diplomas, specifically the British IGCSE. This provision clearly preempted the surge in international schools (*madaris dawliyya*) in the following years.

³⁴ Understandably, although middle-class Christian families are more likely to send their children to missionary schools, Muslims students constitute at least fifty percent of the students in Christian missionary schools.

³⁵ *Madaris istismariyya* or investment schools is the term used informally to emphasize the commercial rather than the pedagogical basis of private schools.

In the 1990s, calls for education reforms in public debates expressed growing concern over the capacity of the existing educational model to graduate a labor force equipped with the skills and competencies deemed crucial for success under global capitalism (Cochran 2008). During this period, the Egyptian government, in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), undertook a series of measures to develop a new institutional framework for curriculum development, including the establishment of a semi-autonomous body of experts entrusted with the task of developing a new educational curriculum for national education. However, the involvement of international donor agencies in the process instigated a strong wave of public criticism, particularly from the Islamist and leftist opposition. Reiterating the views of anticolonial nationalist educators like Taha Hussein and Amir Boktor, they attacked the government for condoning foreign intervention in the teaching of “national subjects.” This episode appears to have put a nominal end to international cooperation for curriculum development (Sayed 2006).

Around the same time, the Egyptian government started licensing so-called “international schools” (*madaris dawliyya*).³⁶ The proliferation of international schools in the late 1990s and 2000s reflected the growing demand for a new generation of educated Egyptians with new sets of skills and credentials that better served the integration of the Egyptian economy in global capitalism. This shift informed transformations of the educational field at the pre-college and college levels, which in turn invigorated the

³⁶ Another legal categorization that is used interchangeably with “international schools” is schools offering special curricula (*madaris al-manahig al-khasa*).

market of international schools. Educational policy during this period clearly reflected the state's endorsement of a greater degree of internationalization in both private and public educational institutes than in the past. In addition to supporting the establishment of private international universities, during the 1990s the government established separate English and French-medium sections in national public universities for students who could afford to pay tuition.³⁷

The rising demand for international educational programs responded to growing societal concerns with the quality of national education. Most disconcerting to the public was the profusion of private tutoring as an integral component of the educational process in both public and private schools as a necessary tool for preparing students for the final year examinations. Besides the financial burden it placed on parents, private tutoring reflected the way in which educational standardization had reduced the educational process to exam preparation through rote memorization of entire textbooks (Sobhy 2012a). Since international schools were allowed to teach an education program that was imported in its entirety from abroad, they promised to offer Egyptian students an education unlike anything they could receive in other private schools.

Within the span of just a few years, international schools had completely supplanted the role of the older and more established private schools, including the most prestigious French Catholic schools, as the schools of Egypt's elite. Many existing private language schools expanded their business by adding separate American, British or

³⁷ These include the English and French sections at the faculties of law (est. 1995), economic and political science and commerce at Cairo University.

French sections to their national track. In parallel, many Christian schools that had been operating as “national institutes for languages” had begun a process of internationalization. German schools, for example, started offering the German secondary diploma track in high school in the mid-1990s as an alternative track for students who do not wish to take the national secondary exams. Within a decade, these schools completely eliminated the national secondary track from their educational program.

At present, the category “international schools” comprises a conglomeration of K-12 schools that deliver imported nationally-based curricula from different countries³⁸. These schools were established as business enterprises following the model of the private language schools that flourished in the 1980s. Until then, “international education” (i.e. an education that did not follow the Egyptian national curriculum) was exclusive to a very small niche of the population which educated its children alongside the children of foreign expats, diplomats and other non-Egyptian residents in schools affiliated with foreign embassies.³⁹ These schools were by and large off-limits to most Egyptians, including wealthier families, due to their exorbitantly high tuition fees compared to other private schools and the overall foreign (read: Western and liberal) school culture. Since they did not prepare students for national examinations or offer any Arabic classes,

³⁸I use the term “nationally-based curriculum” following Bunnell (2019) to indicate that these schools import the national or nationally-based education of specific countries (American, British, Canada, French or German) as opposed to schools that deliver the curriculum of the International Baccalaureate.

³⁹ These include Cairo American College (CAC), the British International School (BISC) in Zamalek, the Lycee Francais in Maadi. These schools remain the most expensive and hardest to get in for most Egyptian families. The majority of parents I spoke to still regarded these schools as “too international and too liberal.”

studying at one of these schools also presumed that parents were willing to educate their children at the American University in Cairo or abroad.

The for-profit international schools that were established in the 1990s differed from “language schools” in that they did not follow the centralized national curriculum for most subjects, and hence enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy relative to other private schools (namely, so-called “language schools” and nationalized “foreign schools”). In line with global trends, the great majority of international schools in Egypt established post-1990s were for-profit enterprises that offered a UK or a US-based curriculum and were locally identified as British International or American International schools. Other international schools included French, Canadian and German schools. Only a very small minority of Egypt’s international schools operated under the umbrella of the Swiss-based International Schools Association (ISA) and had an International Baccalaureate (IB) track. Instruction at all international schools is in the language(s) of the country from which the curriculum is exported.

However, irrespective of the international curriculum and in continuation of the 1948 regulations, the Egyptian government required all licensed international schools in Egypt to teach three subjects from the centralized national curriculum. These are Arabic language, religious education (Christianity or Islam), and social studies/civic education (*dirasat ijtimaiyya/tarbiyya wataniyya*).⁴⁰ These subjects were compulsory for students in basic education from Grade 1 through 9, but were not integral to the chief educational

⁴⁰ Social studies are taught from Grade 4 through 9. Civic is taught in Grades 10 and 11 (need to double check).

program of international schools and, accordingly, were not included in the international *secondary* diploma programs. The integration of these subjects in for-profit international schools was a major difference between the new international schools established in the 1990s and later and the older international schools associated with diplomatic and foreign expatriate communities. It is one of the key elements that facilitated the shift towards international education among middle and upper-class families.

The unique organizational and curricular structure of international education transformed the institutional and pedagogical constitution of elite schooling to an extent that redefined what it meant to be an educated person in contemporary Egypt. Yet, these shifts in elite education did not constitute isolated transformations in the educational field. They reflected broader social patterns associated with the neoliberalization of urban life in Egypt in the twenty-first century. Nothing captures the link between transformations in the educational field and broader social transformations associated with neoliberal economic restructuring in Egypt as the school campus and the unique spatiality it constructed around international education.

In the following section, I take a closer look at the sociospatial configuration of international schooling in Cairo as a critical lens through which to examine the physical and symbolic registers that construct discourses about nonbelonging among international-school students. Although my analysis focuses on the International School in New Cairo (ISN), I draw on visits to other international schools, international-school promotional material and conversations with multiple international-school parents, alumni and students to highlight the overarching sociocultural and urban transformations that

patterned the experiences of young people growing up in and around international schools in twenty-first century Cairo.

The Green Campus in the Desert

The International School in New Cairo (ISN) is one of the older for-profit international schools that was established in Cairo in the late 1990s. It is owned by a businessman who is the CEO of a multinational corporation that owns and runs a conglomeration of for-profit international schools spread across the Middle East. Although ISN could be classified as one of the more exclusive of the international schools given its high tuition fees,⁴¹ its organizational and educational culture reflected the standard framework for the operation of most international schools in Egypt. Like most existing for-profit international schools (*madaris dawliyya*) in Egypt, ISN delivered a US-based curriculum for students in K-12 education. It teaches its predominantly Egyptian student body (15000 students) a curriculum that is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in Philadelphia. Students alternatively have the choice to pursue the International Baccalaureate curricula in high school. In addition, students are required to sit through classes in Arabic language, religious education (Sunni Islam for Muslims and Coptic Christianity for Christians) and social studies throughout primary, middle and high school. These classes must use government-assigned textbooks, teaching material and examinations.

⁴¹ In 2016/2017, ISN school tuition was in the range of LE130, 00 (approx.US\$ 14k) per academic year, which is relatively expensive compared to other lower-tiered international schools with school tuition in the range LE 50,000 (approx. US\$5500). A school's marketability is intimately dependent on its facilities and, among others, the percentage of non-Egyptian and non-local teachers within its teaching staff. At ISN, more than half of the teaching staff was non-local, mostly American citizens.

The campus of the International School in New Cairo (ISN) covers an area of 5200-square meters that separated two major landmarks of Cairo's southeastern satellite city, a gigantic shopping mall and a military complex.⁴² There were at least five other international schools in the same vicinity as ISN. Most were established in the early 2000s and occupy similarly fortified campuses. Other than the flags of Egypt and the foreign country with which the school is affiliated (the UK, Canada, Germany and the US), no other structures are visible behind the campus walls.

As an outsider to the community of ISN, entering the school required the daily routine of exchanging my national identification card at the security office at the gate for a red band that I had to wear around my neck throughout the entire duration of my visit until I exchanged it for my ID card upon leaving the school premises. Inside the school building, a security guard would escort me all the way to the high school administrative office where I waited for the teacher who had invited me to sit in on her classes, Ms. Sarah Gamil (pseudonym), to walk me to the classroom where she held her classes. In time, I would be allowed to climb up the stairs to the high school floor on my own, and as I got more comfortable around the school, I started dropping the visit to the administrative office and heading straight to class. My visits to the schools remained largely confined to this map until my relationship with Ms. Gamil and her assistant, Ms. Naila Fouda (pseudonym), allowed me to be invited to see others parts of the campus; the

⁴² New Cairo, the satellite city at the southeastern edge of Greater Cairo, was officially established in 2000 over an area of approximately 70,000 acres of desert land. It is currently Egypt's most vital commercial, business, and educational hub, and a prime residential choice for upwardly mobile Egyptians

cafeteria on the rooftop of the school building where senior students ate their lunches, a multi-purpose theatre where I attended school-run Ted Talks, the main schoolyard overlooking a soccer field, and the terrace where some of the teachers took their cigarette breaks.

Standing over the school rooftop, one could see construction sites stretching into the horizon in all directions. Yet, the desert was still a pervasive feature of the landscape. Large masses of bright yellow sand separate one construction site from another, border the main highways, and newly built bridges, and subtly encroached on the asphalt through the occasional gushes of desert winds. There were hardly any pedestrians on the road that separated the campus from the closest adjacent buildings. The few times I spotted pedestrians on the street, they didn't strike me as either students or people who lived or worked in one of the nearby gated communities. They were most likely domestic or other blue-collar workers who did not have work-related transportation privileges, and needed to walk from the main road (Road 90), the final stop of most shared buses, towards their place of work.

In the promotional material of international schools distributed in school fairs, featured on their websites, or on billboards on the streets of Cairo, the campus stood front and center. References to "open fields and greenery" that promised a "healthy" and "safe" environment and images of happy children running freely were recurrent themes in the marketing of international schools. The classrooms were almost always described as "spacious", "air-conditioned" and "equipped with the latest technology," or "well-lit and ventilated." Some promotional materials even included reference to "heated indoor

swimming pool", smart boards, computers, etc. These common themes in the promotion of international schools foreground a physical and spatial dimension to international schools that emphasized their distinction from the overcrowded classrooms and modest facilities of national schools (public or private). This rhetoric mirrored marketing tropes of gated communities that had sprouted up in the past two decades in and around Cairo's new satellite cities, their appeal to geographical distance from the density, noise and pollution of the cityscape, and their aesthetic allusion to different cultural worlds (Kuppinger 2004; Mitchell 1999).

The urban expansion of Cairo into its desert hinterlands, much like the expansion of its education market, was an effect of economic liberalization and IMF-driven structural adjustment reforms which entailed the selling off of public lands to development contractors. Satellite cities were a vital feature of these urban transformations. Since their establishment in the early 2000s, the size of Cairo has more than doubled (Denis 2006; Mitchell 2002). Scholars have estimated that only about 3-6 percent of the population, and no more than 6 million Egyptians, make up this class of affluent Egyptians who can afford the cost of this new suburban life (Peterson 2011; Mitchell 1999). These increased costs include paying rent or owning property in a gated community, owning one or multiple cars and bearing the increased price of the goods and services available in satellite cities compared to other parts of the city.⁴³ A quick survey of the geographic distribution of international schools in Egypt revealed their

⁴³ Although these studies rely on market reports from local corporations published in the 2000s, their number matches the estimated share of international schools in the overall educational system.

concentration in and around the newly established satellite cities of Cairo located at the southeastern and northwestern edges of Greater Cairo. In New Cairo, for example, of eighty-two private K-12 schools, forty-two are international schools.⁴⁴ In the northwestern satellite city and its suburbs, 6th of October City and Sheikh Zayid, there are at least eighteen additional international schools.⁴⁵

I was new to “satellite city life” in Egypt when I started my fieldwork. I moved to an apartment in a gated community (compound) in New Cairo in 2016 and was initially quite pleased with the relatively low traffic I had to navigate to reach many of the main field sites in my study. Yet, enjoying the low traffic on my drive to field sites in New Cairo also meant driving at least forty kilometers to attend events organized by NGOs in the central districts in and around Downtown Cairo and even further to reach other schools and interlocutors living in the northwestern suburbs in 6th of October and Al-Sheikh Zayid Cities. The massive distances I needed to cross to conduct my research and to move around the city were not unique to the circumstances of my life in Cairo. They reflected the rescaling of urban life and the creation of a new spatiality that defined satellite city life materially and discursively as an “isolated bubble” in Egypt.

⁴⁴ The number is gathered from the Private School Registry (*dalil al-madaris*) from the Minister of Education website https://search.emis.gov.eg/search_schpriv.aspx. The number of international schools includes 23 American, 14 British, 3 French, 1 German and 1 Canadian school. In addition, there are 37 language and 3 Arabic-medium national schools. Only nine government public general (thanawi ‘am) are located in New Cairo.

⁴⁵ This number includes only schools that are counted within the administrative boundaries of these areas. It excludes schools that are located in adjacent districts, such as al-Haram.

Scholars examining global patterns of urban expansion and real estate development in the twenty-first century emphasized how class-based practices of spatial exclusion and segregation define a neoliberal imaginary of urban life (Harvey 2008). One of the global architectural forms of this neoliberal urbanism are gated communities and other “fortified enclaves” (Caldeira 1996) for housing, work and commercial activity. In this body of literature, gated communities are the physical materialization of growing middle and upper-class anxieties about security, an escape from the density and anonymity of modern cities, and a locus for globalized middle-class longing for a lifestyle defined through material well-being, domesticity and self-transformation (Caldeira 1996; Low 2003; Candan and Kolluoglu 2008; Srivastava 2012; Zhang 2012). The “inward-looking and isolated lives” (Candan and Kolluoglu 2008: 40) of gated community residents is a cross-cutting theme in this literature suggesting a shift in modern conceptions of urbanity centered away from public life and civic engagement. Although scholars note the growing social and spatial distance between gated community residents and other social groups and classes in the same city, the extent to which these class-specific urban practices are shaping residents’ sense of belonging to a broader national community has not been fully explored.

In the urban scholarship on Egypt, gated communities instantiate the growing socioeconomic and spatial inequalities associated with the neoliberal economic restructuring and the privatization of public services since the mid-1990s (Mitchell 2002; Adham 2005; Denis 2006; Bayat 2012; Abaza 2016). Central in this literature is the way in which the restructuring of the Egyptian economy around construction and real estate

development brought about a series of divergent forms of urban practices that mapped onto class and spatial privilege. On the one hand, the urban poor were associated with various practices of “stretching out” (Bayat 2012) on the streets in search of informal economic activity, inexpensive leisure, or shelter in central districts. Well-off segments of society, on the other hand, engage in various practices of “urban enclosure” (Dennis 2006, Bayat 2012), a withdrawal from public spaces into residential, commercial and corporate enclaves in satellite cities. The “compound” is the most visible structure that manifests these trends.

The English word compound is the vernacular Egyptian word for gated community, and mainly refers to the type of residential gated communities established in and around the new satellite cities.⁴⁶ Not only residential buildings are gated in satellite cities. Schools, universities and most shopping and entertainment venues are also situated in gated campuses, whether as a single or mixed-use urban community. However, unlike the conventional gated communities examined in the urban literature, which are designed to provide “fortified enclave” inside the city, compounds in Egypt are located in satellite cities and are surrounded by other similarly gated structures, schools and college campuses, shopping malls, business centers, hotels, etc. Rather than security, which was not the main drive behind the appeal of gated community life in the desert land (Kuppinger 2004),⁴⁷ compounds extended a longstanding configuration of social

⁴⁶ *Al-qarya al-siyahhia* (touristic village), for example, is the term used to refer to residential gated communities in coastal areas.

⁴⁷ Anecdotal evidence even suggests that Cairenes generally feel safer inside the city. Although people perceive the streets as unsafe (sexual harassment, accidents, theft, etc.) in the city, it is unlikely that

distinction in Egypt that emphasizes physical and cultural segregation (de Koning 2009b). Gated communities in satellite cities created physical segregation by separating families twice; first, away from the center of Cairo into satellite cities in a manner that shares many of the characteristics of suburbanization, and second, within walled properties that isolate compound life from its immediate urban surrounding. Through their names, architectural design and promotional materials, compounds appealed to transnational imaginaries about urbanity and domesticity that almost always promised to separate future residents from their immediate urban surrounding. The names of the more exclusive compounds, like the names of international schools, are almost always English or exotic-sounding likes *Lakeyard*, *Bellagio*, or *Moon Valley*. The national/international segmentation of the school market was mirrored in the real estate market, where Arabic names or names that appealed to Egyptian themes are almost always indicative of a more affordable (compared to the very exclusive) and traditional housing project.

The compound is central in both the material and discursive construction of international schools as both shared many physical and cultural features: concrete walls and securitized gates that achieve an immediate sense of physical and cultural disruption between the world outside and inside. The centrality of the gated campus for international schools establishes the physical enclosure of a school culture and educational experience

life in satellite cities or in compounds is associated with a higher sense of home safety. For example, after the withdrawal of the police forces in January 2011, people living in compounds moved temporarily back into their old apartments in old middle-class neighborhoods inside the city. There is a higher sense of trust in the ability of traditional network of doormen (*bawabin*) on a street or neighborhood to safeguard property than in security staff of private security companies.

that is constructed as essentially non-national, outside the cultural and social context of national education.

The specific spatiality of international schools and its association with the urban transformation of Cairo in recent years is a central theme in private and public debates about the socialization of internationally educated youth. While many people I met in Egypt described the life of the privileged youth educated in international schools as a “bubble,” others, including international-school teachers and parents, used the designation “compound kids” as a shorthand for the socially and physically circumscribed and isolated life of these students. A widely shared assumption was that international school students grow up in a compound, attend school in walled up campuses -some of which are located inside gated communities-, hang out with friends in other compounds or in shopping malls and private clubs and ultimately attend one of Egypt's private international universities (unless they attend college abroad), without ever having to interact with people from outside of their “bubble”. The majority of the students and parents I met recognized this itinerary and found it an accurate representation of their or their children’s’ lives.

Others suggested a somewhat different pattern. Ahmed (pseudonym), for example, attended an international school in New Cairo before starting college at the American University in Cairo, which, in 2010, also relocated to its new campus in New Cairo. He was a senior in college when we met, and was determined to pursue graduate studies abroad upon graduating. Reiterating Yassin’s ideas about travel, Ahmed's main motivation behind travelling was "to get out of the bubble." Yet, Ahmed’s bubble was

geographically different than Yassin's. He lived in Masr al-Gedida, an upscale neighborhood in eastern Cairo, attended his classes in New Cairo and occasionally went out with friends in Zamalek, an upscale neighborhood near the old center of the city. His friends and favorite hangout spots were scattered around these three districts, which meant that he drove on average thirty kilometers across the city to get from one place to the other. His movement resonated what one of the international-school parents described to me as her children's pattern of "moving between islands", a pattern that echoes Marvin and Graham's (2001) notion of "splintering urbanism". Others have extended the island metaphor beyond Greater Cairo and suggested that members of their social class never venture beyond "Sahil-Sukhna-Gouna," which are three coastal towns on the Mediterranean and Red Seas famous for their beach resorts and gated communities.

Regardless of how one analyzes the urban practices of internationally educated youth and the community to which they belong, what was central in discourses about compounds and islands was how it expressed the social and cultural boundaries that regulated traffic into and outside of upscale places. By further probing the theme of the bubble, it becomes clear that the bubble was not merely the geographic closure of satellite cities and its gated communities as the urban scholarship may suggest, but rather expressed an emergent sociospatial imaginary in which class boundaries were both physically and culturally pronounced. It was an imaginary that situated international education and its unique spatiality at the heart of broader cultural transformations shaping a new globalized urban culture in Egypt.

Language and Popular Culture: Probing the Bubble beyond Spatiality

“This generation is part of a big experiment,” stated one international school father to me one day. I met Mustafa at a lunch party hosted by other international-school parents in their villa in al-Shoruk gated community. “Neither our generation nor the generation of our parents or grandparents has ever led a life of this sort...hopping from one compound to the other...We really have no way of knowing what will come out of our children,” he explained. Although Mustafa lived in al-Maadi, an old upper-middle class neighborhood in the southern part of Cairo popular among foreign expats, his son lived on permanent basis with his ex-wife in a compound in New Cairo. He had supported his ex-wife’s choice to live in New Cairo because it was also where her family lived and it was close to his son’s school. He recognized the convenience of living inside a compound in New Cairo; the greenery, the accessibility to most entertainment venues for children as well as the low traffic and relatively cleaner air. Yet, he was glad that his choice to stay in al-Maadi was exposing his son to life outside of New Cairo, “to see how the world outside of *Taggamu*⁴⁸ is like.” Muna, the hostess, agreed. She recognized that she did not grow up in an egalitarian society herself in the 1970s and 80s, and that access to exclusive spaces, like the sports club, private schools and the exclusive Mediterranean cost beaches shaped her own childhood and youth. She insisted, nonetheless, that there is something fundamentally different about her children’s lifestyle.

⁴⁸ *Al-Taggamu’ al-Khamis* (Fifth Settlement) is one of the districts of New Cairo.

“We were privileged, but we were not *as* afraid of crossing these boundaries when we wanted to. Some of us rode public buses... we used to walk to each other’s’ homes...sit in cafes on *al-Muqattam* or go horseback riding by the Pyramids... My children wouldn’t know how to stop a taxi on the street...I don’t think they walk anywhere outside of our compound or the mall...They feel too distant and strange to attempt to engage with others outside their circles (*dawairhum*)”

While Muna and Mustafa’s concern may be driven by a nostalgic reminiscence of “the good old days,” their characterizations of their children’s lives emphasized a sense of social distance that they didn’t share or identify with. Although Muna and Mustafa like many of the other international-school parents were themselves educated in private foreign schools, have a good command of English and possibly other foreign languages, and solidly fit within Egypt’s cosmopolitan class, they could not recognize their children’s sense of social and cultural isolation in their own experiences growing up in and around elite sites.

Other than their home address, the most remarkable distinction between these and all the other parents and their children I observed in my research was their linguistic practices. No matter where they went to school, almost all of the parents I met in my research spoke to me in Egyptian Arabic. They frequently and casually used English words or expression in their speech as is common within broader segments of Egypt’s middle and upper classes. Conversely, almost all of the internationally educated youth,

who were either in school or in college at the time of my research spoke to me almost exclusively in an American-accented English.

International schooling and its less prestigious national variants (private language schools) were vital in the general valuation and circulation of English (and to a lesser degree French or German) as the lingua franca of parenting and communication with children. Most parents I spoke to shared a strong conviction that speaking to children in a foreign language in infancy not only guaranteed their fluency, but more importantly ensured that they developed a native-like accent, a key distinguishing linguistic marker of class belonging in contemporary Egypt. Even parents who were not fluent in English, and hence did not communicate in full English sentences with their children, still introduced their children to individual words for objects or activities in English. In playgrounds, shopping malls and in various commercial and social venues frequented by middle and upper-class families in and around Cairo's upscale neighborhoods, in satellite cities and beyond, it was not only common to hear children communicate among each other in English, but it was equally common for salesclerks and others to speak English to children. While the mere mastery of a foreign language in the past may have been an indicator of superior education, the proliferation of English-medium education across a wider segment of society produced new linguistic practices of distinction among the elite. A native-like and Americanized accent, rather than linguistic proficiency, were the vital markers of elite status during the time of my research. To speak in the "right accent" immediately signaled an international education, whether or not parents were themselves fluent or proficient in English.

Besides international education, these seemingly subtle shifts in the configuration of linguistic capital was intimately connected to shifts in elite consumption of popular culture in recent decades. In the accounts of internationally educated youth and their parents, the conjuncture of language and popular culture was central to cross-generational comparisons about belonging and non-belonging. Parents of international school students commonly invoked their children's lack of knowledge of Egyptian popular culture as shorthand for their foreignness. Equally cognizant of the centrality of popular culture in their representation were the internationally educated themselves, who often mentioned their lack of familiarity with Egyptian popular culture and preference for American and international popular music, film and television as the source for their sense of disconnect from an Egyptian culture they intimately associated with mass-mediated popular culture. The shared understanding of Egyptian culture within the international school communities I traversed resonated with scholarship on Egyptian national identity and culture, which emphasized the vital role that mass-mediated popular culture played in the formation of an Egyptian national culture and as agent of national pedagogy (Fahmy 2011; Armbrust 1996; Abu-Lughod 2005). However, in recent decades, Egyptian media has been subject to the same structural and cultural shifts that led to the emergence of satellite cities and their international schools.

Although foreign (American, French, Indian, etc.) movies and music were regularly aired on public Egyptian TV and radio channels in the past, these constituted only a fraction of a centrally curated entertainment program that relied for the most part on Egyptian productions. In the mid and late 1990s, satellite dishes were becoming a

regular feature of Egyptians households. Satellite dishes expanded the cultural horizon of entertainment in Egyptian households to include other Arabic channels. In the 2000s, cable TV became more widely available in upper-middle and upper-class households. This shift transformed patterns of media consumption in elite households as younger generations of Egyptians acquired easy and constant access to American mass media.⁴⁹ These transformations introduced significant changes in the television culture thoroughly analyzed by Lila Abu-Lughod (2005). Although seasonal TV shows, especially during Ramadan, continued to be dominated by Egyptian TV dramas, and still imparted explicit ideological messages from the state,⁵⁰ the large number of satellite channels available to the average viewer and the growing popularity of Turkish, Lebanese and more recently Indian TV shows, in addition to American TV shows and movies, has meant that fewer productions were able to capture collective national attention as they used to in the past. When they do, internationally educated youth were seldom in the audience.

Yassin, who we encountered in the introduction, jokingly told me that he was “raised on the Disney Channel,” indicating his early socialization into American mass mediated popular culture and the limited cultural input Egyptian media had in the process. Ahmed, likewise, claimed that what distinguished his sense of belonging from his father’s, who enjoyed an equally privileged childhood, was that his father shared a

⁵⁰ State control over TV and cinema in recent years has been pronounced. Companies affiliated with the security apparatus have gained control over a number of privately-owned satellite TV channels. During my field research, I met people working in the TV and film industry who recounted extreme levels of censorship over their work that included direct interference in the scripts, film crews, plots and casting of productions.

taste for and knowledge of Egyptian popular culture with other Egyptians both inside and outside of his social class. As I will show in chapter five, to state that one follows Egyptian TV shows or liked Egyptian music- just as speaking Arabic in an international school- were the semiotic means by which young people contested their alleged isolation and claimed their belonging to Egyptian society.

Mobility and Exposure

Notwithstanding multiple references to the restrictive geography that circumscribed the movement of internationally educated youth across the city, it is hard to imagine that any person, especially a school-aged adolescent, who lives in a city as big and populous as Cairo has ever been exposed to more than the few neighborhoods or districts where their home, school and a few other intimate places are located. Moreover, a satellite city like New Cairo, for example, stretches over an area as big as most of the central districts of Cairo combined. Few parents, especially those who attended foreign schools themselves, were able to claim having been exposed to more heterogenous and less segregated spaces than their children. Although all foreign private schools were centrally located in more mixed-class neighborhoods in and around Downtown Cairo, many foreign educated parents spent their childhood and youth outside of school in one of Cairo's private sports clubs, which were exclusive to members. Since club memberships were inherited from parents or grandparents, the club formed a closely-knit community where everyone appeared to know everyone (de Koning 2009b).⁵¹ Parents

⁵¹ The more exclusive sports clubs in Cairo were established during the colonial period to serve the British and other foreign and elite communities. These are the Gezira Sporting Club in al-Zamalek

who attended public schools almost always lived in the same neighborhood as their school and often remained within that neighborhood for most social and commercial activities. In probing families about their patterns of mobility across the city, a few revealed that moving from New Cairo, at the southeastern edges of Cairo, to Sixth of October City, at the northeastern edge of the city at least a few times a month. Many visited relatives or friends who lived in central districts or in other cities on regular basis. Hence, rather than rendering them oblivious of life beyond gated communities, patterns of mobility between and within satellite cities and across Greater Cairo was likely to intensify perceptions of urban and social inequalities. A brief description of the two main routes that connected New Cairo to downtown areas will help illustrate my point.

The first route crossed the shabby and densely populated districts of Cairo, over Ramsis Square⁵² and al-Abasiyya all the way over Nasr City through the Sixth of October Bridge into the industrial and state security complexes of *al-Jabal al-Ahmar* and passing a ten-kilometer stretch of desert land, only interrupted by the cemeteries at *al-Wafaa w'al-Amal* and the *al-Moushir Tantawi multi-purpose complex* (named after the former commander in chief of the Egyptian armed forces).⁵³ The second route through

and Heliopolis Sporting Club in Masr el-Gedida (Heliopolis). The Egyptian royal family established Al-Ahli and al-Said clubs, in Zamalek and al-Dokki respectively, as local alternatives serving a more local elite community. These are arguably the more prestigious of Cairo's sports clubs. In the 1990s, there were no more than 10 sports clubs in all of Egypt.

⁵² The location of Cairo's Central Train Station.

⁵³ This route offers a nearly perfect sociospatial map of the development and expansion of middle-class neighborhoods in the past 100 years. Al-'Abasiyya was the suburban extension of the so-called Fatimid Cairo in the first half of the twentieth century. It is the site of many of Naguib Mahfouz's novels where it has come to represent the new urban life of Cairo's middle class from the 1920 onwards. Nasr City, on the other hand, is the largest district in Cairo and the urban epitome of the postcolonial state. Although it was planned and designed in the 1950s, Nasr City has come to

the Ring Road passed by the Nile Corniche through the low-income neighborhoods of Dar al-Salam, a long stretch of densely populated informal settlements at the outskirts of al-Maadi, al-Mounib and al-Muqattam. The red brick buildings of informal settlements, deserted government housing projects, and empty desert land defined the landscape along the route up to the signs of the exclusive "Qatameyya Golf residence," and the ultramodern architecture of corporate headquarters on Road 90 that marked the beginning of New Cairo. It would take me at least twenty-five minutes to reach New Cairo from the nearest urban settlement, Nasr City, and anywhere between 40 minutes to two hours to drive from New Cairo to most other middle-class districts of the city.

My point is not that young people's exposure to urban inequalities along the route to and from satellite cities sensitized them to taking on any political or ideological stance from poverty and inequality. How people choose to make sense of social and economic disparities is a matter distinct from experiencing and recognizing the overwhelming gap between quality of housing and facilities that one has access to and the kinds of dwelling one sees through the car window. As I will argue in chapter 4, this kind of exposure rendered internationally educated youth highly consciousness of their wealth and distinct lifestyles. Their attitude contrasted significantly with most parents' inclination to downplay their relative wealth and distinct lifestyle. Like Muna, the mother I introduced earlier, most parents invoked social practices and itineraries that highlighted their integration in a more heterogenous, popular (*sha'bi*), cityscape. By mentioning that her

symbolize the social changes associated with economic liberalization, becoming the preferred home to Egypt's repatriated labor migrants in the 1980s and 90s and location got Egypt's first big shopping malls.

generation rode public buses or walked on the streets, these parents claimed to have lived in a city where socioeconomic and cultural disparities were not as sharply pronounced or as intensely experienced as they were for their children.

In an article that explored the different itineraries of movement and mobility of working-class men and women in Cairo, Farha Ghannam (2011) shows how the ability to cross neighborhoods and navigate mixed-class settings was central to her interlocutors' sense of freedom and personal accomplishment. She argued that young working-class men and women must learn how to manage their personal appearances and cultivate a bodily hexis that facilitates their movement across different parts of the city, either to avoid police harassment for boys or unwanted male attention for girls. Likewise, the younger members of Egypt's cosmopolitan elite expressed an acute awareness of how their spatial practices mapped onto their distinct lifestyle and how both mapped onto their relative wealth in Egyptian society. Their sense of vulnerability and sense of sociospatial confinement stood in contrast to the narratives of their parents, and strongly echoed the more class-conscious practices of the working-class youth in Ghannam's study. This was most clearly illustrated in my conversations with Ahmed, the AUC student I introduced earlier. We were meeting up at the AUC campus along with another female friend of his when he recounted an incident that happened to him a few days earlier. He was driving his car to al-Zamalek from school when he had an accident on the road that passed by the cemeteries of al-Wafaa w'al-Amal. He called his mechanic, but he was not available and suggested instead that Ahmed drive his car to one of his mechanic friends in *al-Hirafyin*, a workshop district on the Eastern outskirts of Cairo. Ahmed felt extremely nervous about

driving all the way to *al-Hirafyin*, a neighborhood of which he knew nothing but recognized as a low-income neighborhood.

"The first thing I do is take off my earring, and place it in my pocket. I was very self-conscious about the cuts in my jeans. Surely, people in low-income neighborhoods are also wearing jeans with cuts, but mine were too high up my thighs. I imagined this would be considered too audacious for people there...When I got there, I couldn't talk like 'well, I had an accident, someone crashed into my car at the intersection, blablabla..' I had to say "a '*arrs* [curse word] fucked up (*fashakhli*) my ...but I couldn't remember the word for the trunk in Arabic so I just point to the trunk acting all angry and frustrated..."

Ahmed felt that this experience captured what he resented most about his privileged life, and why he wanted to leave Egypt. The fact that many men of Ahmed's socioeconomic background commonly visited *al-Hirafyin* to have their cars checked by the mechanics there probably wouldn't have made Ahmed feel any less anxious about 'taking a different turn on his route' or less self-conscious about what his body exposed about his class-specific lifestyle. This was most clearly encapsulated in Ahmed's attempt to adjust his clothing and appearance, change his tone, use curse words and speak Arabic. His experience reflected the way parents like Muna described their children as 'feeling too distant and strange to engage with others.' It is a feeling, I argue, that emanated from cognizance of boundaries rather than from an obliviousness to it. It is a feeling that

engulfed young people like Ahmed who felt caught in what appeared as an impossible bind between the social and symbolic boundaries of his class and nation. These boundaries were not just *out there*, they were integral to the socialization of young people who went to international schools and who moved around and between the “islands” or “compounds” of the new Cairo. From where to go, what to wear and how to speak, the boundaries separating class and national society were constantly “flagged” (Billig 1995) in everyday life. With each flagging, the boundaries and what and who they separated were reinforced and internalized.

Ahmed, Yassin and others did not identify *as* strangers, they felt like they lived *like* strangers. This subtle difference is also what distinguished the AUC students who organized the El Hara event we encountered in the introduction from colonial spectators. Because they were not strangers, these young people felt conflicted and uneasy about their “estranged” lifestyle. They were not oblivious about what it meant to be Egyptian; how else would Ahmed know what he needed to do to unmark his privileged cosmopolitan body. I suggest that it is this consciousness of their privileged social location, however they chose to respond to it, that which distinguished the younger members of Egypt’s cosmopolitan class from the generations that preceded it.

Learning to Be Egyptian

“To learn to be Egyptian,” was what Yassin believed an education in a public university in Egypt will teach him; not literary critique or historiography he was so excited about studying in the Canadian university he was admitted to. What it meant to be Egyptian, to Yassin, was to be able to move around different and unfamiliar parts of the

city, speak to people and get into the kinds of situations that he imagined all Egyptians - except people like him- went through. In many ways, what he wanted to learn was how to manage the situation that Ahmed was caught in without feeling the anxiety or failing to find the Arabic word for trunk. It was an understanding of “being Egyptian” that ran through my encounters with young people growing up and coming of age in and around international educational institutes in post-2011 Egypt. Not quite belonging for these young people was not about lacking basic civic or political rights, and which they did in fact lack. It was also not about living up to some intellectual or ideological conception of what being an educated Egyptian meant. Few of the young people I met cared if they were proficient in classical/ modern standard Arabic, worried about their limited grasp of Egyptian history and geography, or bothered with literary or artistic productions that would signify their elite status in Egyptian society. What the state, national educators and sociologists long held to be the tenets of an Egyptian identity were irrelevant to its educated elite in the twenty-first century.

Instead, as I will try to argue in the following chapters, these young people constructed Egyptianness and belonging as a materially embodied experience that was foreclosed to privileged and internationally educated Egyptians. For Yassin, in order to become Egyptian, he needed to move outside of his “bubble”- even to a solid middle-class and elite institution like Cairo University-, somewhere where he would be re-socialized as Egyptian. He also wanted to educate himself about Egyptian movies and comedies so that he could tell jokes and invoke familiar references from popular culture in interactions with strangers. Ahmed, a few years older than Yassin, had no such

aspirations. He confessed that, after years of attempting to follow Egyptian television, he just didn't "have the taste for it." He had chosen to accept his privilege and use it to search for other ways of being, to travel where his "strangeness" would make sense, where it would not be a sign of his privileged and isolated lifestyle.

The narratives and experiences of the other young people, parents and teachers I met in my research lie somewhere between those of Yassin and Ahmed. Some were less troubled by their privilege, many less resigned to accept their symbolic exclusion from Egyptians and most finding ways to lead a privileged and cosmopolitan lifestyle without having to cross any boundaries. What they all shared was a conception of belonging in which their cosmopolitan elite lifestyle did not fit within the broader social space that engulfed it.

CHAPTER THREE

Class, Parenting and the Dilemmas of School Choice

I walked through a school fair for the first time in April 2016. I did not know how to prepare for my visit since I had never heard of school fairs prior to starting my research. The first school fair to be organized in Egypt was in 2002. Nobody in my close circle of friends and relatives was shopping for schools then. However, since I returned to Cairo in 2016, everyone I was talking to about my research urged me to visit one of the many such exhibitions that were held on regular basis across the city throughout the year. Announcements for upcoming events would typically be made on the organizer's Facebook page unless one happens to drive passed one of the banners advertising such events on the streets.

The first school fair I attended was held in the lobby of a shopping mall located on the expressway (the Ring Road) connecting the southeastern satellite city of New Cairo to Maadi⁵⁴. Although I took this road frequently when the drive through the city would take me more than a couple of hours to reach the other end of town, I had never spotted a shopping mall there. Yet, there it was, among a row of office buildings stretched between the low-income neighborhoods right outside of Maadi and the still uninhabited desert land bordering New Cairo. As I walked into the lobby, I saw young couples, families with small children, and women walking in and out of the shopping mall. Few of these people looked like the 'conspicuously cosmopolitan' Egyptians that

⁵⁴ A southern middle-class neighborhood of Cairo associated known for its cosmopolitan community of foreign expats and middle and upper-middle class families. Maadi is also attached to several low-income neighborhoods.

the media and some of the literature associate with the education market. Most appeared to me as “ordinary looking” urban middle-class Cairenes that I see on the streets, in grocery stores and shopping malls all over the city. The attendees were mainly entire families; a father dressed in jeans and a casual button-down shirt carrying a pre-school aged girl in one arm walking next to a woman in bright colored veiled pushing a stroller or holding a hand of an older child. They looked like they were dressed up for a Friday afternoon.⁵⁵

Some held balloons labeled “EIS” (English International School), others had fastened small plastic Canadian and British flags to strollers they were pushing, and everyone was coming out with colorful gift bags and folders bearing the names of schools: “Manhattan Schools: American, British, National,” Noor: British International Schools,” “Al Bashaer: International School, Faith & Knowledge,” “Cairo Modern International School: American School for Girls,” “Nefertari International School,” “Al Kamal Azharian Language Institutes: Montessori,” to name but a handful of the over forty schools that were represented in the exhibition. About an hour later, I also left the mall with several gift bags, a heap of flyers, notebooks, pens and a few flags to take home. During that hour, I strolled through the corridors connecting the different booths, watched parents who looked remarkably fatigued and jaded in this colorful and festive setting as they listened to school representatives who appeared particularly jolly and excited. I engaged in some conversations of my own with school representatives, asking about educational programs, pedagogical philosophies, or extracurricular activities. I was

⁵⁵ Friday afternoons are associated with gatherings for the extended family.

dumfounded by how uninterested the school representatives seemed in my questions. Their answers were terse: “International;” “American Diploma;” “National;” “Islamic Modern;” “Montesori;” “national but adopting a semi-international approach” etc. Their responses suggested that my questions were extraneous or possibly annoying, and that there was more to this commercial activity than pedagogy and education the way I understood them.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the transformations of the educational landscape in conjunction with the broader neoliberal economic restructurings of the late 1990s and early 2000s produced a highly segmented education market that redefined ‘elite education’ in Egypt. One of the important implications of these transformations was the introduction of choice as a new ingredient in Egypt’s educational culture. Most of the parents I met in my research joked about how easy and straightforward it was for their own parents to decide where to educate them, while for them, as parents, the decision was an arduous and stressful process of research and deliberation that often started during pregnancy.

Hence, this chapter explores the different values, concerns, anxieties and aspirations that informed the educational decisions of middle and upper-class families in Cairo. Through the analysis of the narratives of six parents, chosen to represent the range of experiences I encountered among middle and upper-class families in Cairo, I show how the educational market created a new site where Egyptian parents negotiated shifting social and structural conditions in the socialization of their children. School choice has gained significant public and scholarly attention in recent years as an emblematic feature

of educational privatization policies and a vital theme in political and ideological contestations over education policy and reform (Torres 2009; Stambach 2003; Draxler and Steiner-Khamsi 2018). In the critical scholarship on education, school choice is an important agent in the production of educational inequalities and vital lens for understanding changing class-based strategies of social reproduction in many parts of the world.

In my analysis, I draw on the work of Stephen Ball (2003) on the educational choices of middle-class English families in highlighting the moral tension and contradictions that enfolded class reproduction in contemporary Egypt. I focus on four themes that were recurrent in my conversations with middle and upper-class parents. These are: national/international, old/new cosmopolitan, authentic/mimic, religious/non-religious. These themes served as axes for differentiation and categorization among international school parents, and expressed the different registers of value through which these parents negotiated conflicting attitudes towards educational internationalization and marketization. By examining how parents constructed moral boundaries between themselves and others of comparable wealth, on the basis of their “mentality”, their roots in the old cosmopolitan class, their hard work, or their religious commitments, my analysis highlights the cultural contingencies and historically specific tensions of class reproduction in contemporary Egypt.

School Choice and Class Practice

Although privatization has been a key trope in educational research on Egypt for decades, the ecology of the education market and the specific articulation of school

choice in the Egyptian context have not been fully explored (Sobhy 2012b; Hartmann 2008; Faruq 2008; Al-Khawaja 2008; Alaa Eldine Khorshed 2014; Krafft, Elbadawy, and Sieverding 2019) . To date, private tutoring and related commercialization practices within public educational institutions remain the focal topic of scholarship on educational privatization in Egypt. Other than macrolevel indicators about the expansion of for-profit international schooling, little is known about the structural mechanisms or personal motivations that animate the demand for private international schools. In this chapter, I draw on the groundbreaking work of sociologist Stephen Ball (2003) on the educational choices of middle-class English families in exploring parental choice in Egypt as class practice that exposes variation and divisions within otherwise similarly positioned class communities.

Ball's work on school choice pushed against an interest-driven and rational conception of class practice that foregrounded the pursuit of personal advantage as the ultimate motivation behind school choice. Instead, by arguing for a dynamic and transactional conception of class that emphasizes the processual, relational and contingent constitution of class, Ball's work exposed inconsistencies and contradictions between the family's objective positions (their wealth) and the lived reality of that position. It showed that middle-class parents were caught in a moral bind as they negotiated between their ethical and ideological commitment to public education and a range of other considerations such as risk, finances, characteristics of their children, their own schooling experiences, and concerns about their ability to maintain and expand social and family networks. Rather than showing a calculated process geared towards the

maximization of personal benefit, Ball described parents' decision-making process as "a complex cobbling together of values and principles," (Ball 2003: 114).

Ball's attention to the variety of reasons that motivated parental choice draws attention to the entanglement of schooling decisions with the moral configuration of parenting. It raised questions about the meaning of personal advantage when applied to the situation of parents who have to negotiate between their sense of moral duty towards securing their children's future and a range of personal and civic values and considerations they may hold as individuals. Likewise, among the group of middle and upper-middle class parents whose narratives I examine in this chapter, school choice instigated a new set of challenges and deliberations of values, attitudes and behaviors around parenting. As I will demonstrate in the following pages, the different registers of value that informed the narratives of parents formed an "ethical bricolage" (Van Zanten and Veleza 2001 qtd in Ball 2003: 114) that divided international-school families according to financial means, family and educational background, social mobility trajectories, and religious values at the same time as it brought them together through a shared sense of ambivalence and uncertainty about the advantages and disadvantages of international education.

The National/International Axis

Dalia was the first mother I met to have found the school fair useful. She did not end up choosing one of the schools she learned about during the exhibition, but she did find her visit useful in scanning the market before deciding on her son's school. She joined me on my second visit to the fair, in a different shopping mall lobby located about

50km west from the first one I attended, on the Cairo-Alexandria Desert Road. Although she was expecting to enroll her daughter in her son's school, she wanted to "discover what's new out there" (*aktishif eh el-gedid*). Strolling through the exhibition hall with Dalia, I understood why my earlier exchanges in the school fair were unproductive, and why most of the parents I was seeing seemed more frustrated than excited. Unlike me, Dalia knew which booths she would stop at, and what exactly she needed to find out about every school before she went. She was not open to exploring 'everything out there'; she had very clear target: British schools. "Why British?" I ask. "British schools are known to be more strict than American or Canadian schools, but do not overwork students like national schools. They are somewhere in the middle...they also focus on *tarbiyya* (moral instruction), *akhla'* (good behavior), that there are rewards and punishments...something that doesn't exist in American or Canadian schools." I had met other parents who preferred British schools for the same reasons. Once she identified booths of British schools, which totaled seven at this particular fair, she approached the school representatives with very specific questions: "Is this school already operating or still enrolling its first classes?" "Is the teaching staff Egyptian or foreign (*masryin wala aganib*)?" "What facilities are there in the school?" Regardless of the answers she received, Dalia would move on to ask about tuition, "the most important thing" as she told me (*aham haga*). Dalia asked for a tuition breakdown sheet, which was always at hand. These sheets showed how tuition would increase/decrease throughout a student's school years. She also asked about "locked fees," which I learned, is the privilege of

those who apply to a school that is only starting. It guaranteed that school fees do not increase until the child graduates high school.⁵⁶

As we are driving back to Dalia's apartment in Sheikh Zayid City, one of Cairo's newer eastern suburbs, in her old Hyundai, she said, "Ultimately, we are the victims of this system." I wasn't surprised by this sudden outburst of negative sentiments. As we were strolling through the exhibition hall, I could tell that Dalia's mind was preoccupied with thoughts she was not sharing. She continued:

In the past, there was nothing called international, there were private schools and we used to think private schools were for losers, kids who didn't get good scores and were bad students and couldn't handle government schools...so it was the opposite, back then, private was for the idiots...Now, the middle class (*el taba'a al-mutawasita*) is the most disadvantaged (*mazluma*)...it's not a matter of wealth, but a matter of mentality (*fekr*)... all that educated people (*el-musaqqafin*) aspire to in life is to be able to raise their kids well and educate them to secure their future (*yerabu 'iyalhum we yi'alimuhum kuwayis*)...My father would tell us what we inherited from him was our education...true, we attended ordinary schools (*madaris 'adiyya*) but he did everything to complement that, paid for extra courses we needed in English

⁵⁶ So-called locked fees were becoming a very strong selling point for new schools that have not yet established a reputation.

and computer and encouraged us to consider graduate school abroad...A good education increases your chances in life, not just work...it is what makes a person (*sina 'at al-bani adam*)...now we have international schools... rarely do you find people from our class (*taba 'a*) who send their kids to national schools anymore...hardly anyone does anymore...so, when you educate your children in international schools, you are putting them with people of the same social standard (*nas fi mustawahum*)...like-minded people (*fikriyan urayibin*) even if they are wealthier...

Like the frustrated-looking parents I watched coming out of the school fair, Dalia's mind was preoccupied with anxieties about what she would like and what she could afford for her children in Egypt's shifting educational culture. She and her husband, Muhammad, work at a managerial level in a government affiliated research center. Although both attended national schools, they agreed that the current condition of national schools was not suitable for their children. "It's not a matter of trying to move the social ladder (*antaqil ta'aba igtima'iyya*)," she explained later as we were drinking tea in the balcony of her apartment, "it's really not a class issue, the issue is simply that there is no longer a respectable (*muhtaram*) government education to rely on."

Muhammad, who had joined us then, pointed out the unsanitary conditions in many public schools, the overcrowded classrooms and that teachers curse and beat students. For him, nobody would be sending their kids to government schools if they could afford otherwise.

Yet, notwithstanding their educational and professional status, the couple struggled to be able to afford to send their son to the better international schools. Before Dalia inherited some money after her father died, she was not sure how she would ever be able to afford school tuition. “I was really depressed,” she remembered, “and crying every day and night and having nightmares about not being able to give my kids a good education.” Like many parents seeking international schools, the cost of educating their children for one year far exceeded all their other expenses. They considered some of the older private national schools. However, these are mostly located in and around Downtown Cairo. If they could not handle international school tuition, they would have to move back into the city, possibly to live with Dalia’s mother in her 3-bedroom apartment in Dokki⁵⁷ so that their children do not spend three hours on their way to and from school.

Dalia and Muhammad, as most young parents seeking international schools in Cairo today, do not regard the education market as a field where they can exercise a new freedom to choose the type of education they would like their children to have. In fact, many lamented the deterioration of nationally-based education in public and private schools because it compelled them to seek international education. The financial burden of paying international-school tuition was the first and most immediate source of their frustration. Second, like Dalia and Muhammad, most of these parents belonged to the generations of Egyptians who received national education, whether they attended a public

⁵⁷ A middle-class neighborhood in Giza.

or private school. Even among those who attended a private language school, very few were exposed to an international education. Consequently, parents' experiences in navigating the educational landscape were commonly described as times of great stress and anxiety. They described feeling overwhelmed by the quantity and variety of the existing schools, the multiple and often conflicting opinions that other parents shared about their experiences and the pressure of securing the resources to finance their children's entire education. While few could afford those schools that are widely held to be "the best"- many struggled to find ways to assess the educational quality and institutional stability of schools that have just recently opened.⁵⁸ The absence of any objective indicators or regular formal assessments of these schools rendered educational choice a highly contingent and risky investments for Egyptian parents. Instead of celebrating the choices it offered, like Dalia, many dreaded the sense of precariousness that the education market created.

The narratives of parents like Dalia and Muhammad offer a privileged vantage point for exploring the culturally contingent implications of the educational transformations I discussed in the previous chapter on Cairo's middle-class culture. Dahlia's anxieties about her children's education were rooted in a broader fear of downward mobility precipitated by the mounting financial burdens that families had to bear as a result of the extension of austerity measures and the increasing opening up of

⁵⁸ News about the government closing down private international schools is commonplace. Fraud and failure to fulfill other administrative regulations are often the cause, putting many students out of school overnight.

the Egyptian market to imported goods and services.⁵⁹ As with schooling, over the past two decades, most aspects of middle-class life in Cairo, from health care and education to entertainment and the consumption of everyday goods, have been restructured according to a new internationally oriented market logic. Whether this precipitated the devaluation of local alternatives or coincided with the objective deterioration of the quality of local goods and services is not within the scope of this dissertation to determine. However, what is certain that for middle-class parents like Dalia and Muhammad, these market changes threatened their sense of status distinction, placing them in constant pressure to ‘catch up’ with others within their social and familial circles.

Although Dalia was able to secure the funds to pay for her children’s education, her narrative emphasized her decision as necessity rather than choice. Through her identification as “middle class,” she drew a dual boundary around herself. As middle class, Dalia enjoyed a level of education and cultural capital, what she referred to as ‘mentality,’ that excluded her from the class of Egyptians who put their children in

⁵⁹ This situation was intensified and exacerbated during my fieldwork following the sudden decision of the Egyptian government to float the Egyptian currency in November 2016. The decision was a key requirement in negotiations over a \$12 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. The devaluation of the Egyptian Pound reduced its value by almost 50% against the US dollar. The heavy reliance on imported goods, whether as consumer or industrial products, meant that the price of most market goods doubled overnight. The related decision to withdraw government subsidies on vital products, such as gas and energy, further exacerbated the situation for salaried professionals whose incomes did not rise in accordance with the rising prices. Since one of the strongest selling cards for international school is the hiring of foreign teachers, native speakers of the languages of instruction, and the reliance on imported education material, tuition fees also doubled within the academic year. However, in response to public discontent in the media and several protests organized by parents in 2016-2017, the government decreed that international schools were prohibited from procuring their tuition fees in foreign currency and introduced a series of measures to control the rise in tuition fees in the future. Still, most school tuitions increased significantly between the time I conducted my fieldwork and the time I am writing this. As an example, School X’s tuition was about 50,000 Egyptian pounds in 2016/2017 has risen to 85,000 in 2018/2019.

national schools. Yet, in identifying as middle class, Dalia too downplayed her economic privilege compared to wealthier families, who did not have to sacrifice as much as she did to educate their children. Dalia was perhaps among the few of the parents in my study for whom national education was not entirely off the table. In the following narratives, the boundary that Dalia only hinted at between her and other international school parents will become more pronounced and nuanced.

The Old/New Cosmopolitan Axis

Unlike Dalia and Muhammad, Nada and Karim both attended private schools in the 1980s-1990s. Nada was educated at an all-girls French Catholic school; Karim at a private English language school. The first time I met the couple was in Guezira Sporting Club through a common friend who believed that Nada could be a great source for my research. Nada had been working as a teacher for seven years in three different international schools when I met her. She and Karim were parents to twelve-year old twins, Nadir, a boy, and Sophia, a girl. Like many upper-middle class mothers, Nada would spend her evenings in one of Cairo's sports clubs, where her kids practice sports (Nadir practiced swimming and Sophia did synchronized swimming) while she socialized with other mothers or met up with friends in the adjacent pergola seating area. Half the time, Karim would join. He often played a game of tennis before joining Nada on the pool deck, where they watched their kids practice and caught up with friends.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Guezira Sporting Club is one of Cairo's most exclusive sports and social clubs. Many longstanding members, like Karim and Nada, inherit their membership through their grandparents. It was established in 1882 and served as an important meeting place for Egypt's elite classes during colonial times. In 1952, the club was nationalized and brought under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth.

During one of several meetings at the Club, Karim was telling me about how he chose to become a pilot and how his career compelled his wife to give up her own as a tour guide and become a teacher. Her French education made the career shift easy as many international schools preferred to recruit graduates of missionary and other older language schools for their proficiency in European languages regardless of their educational background or their lack of any professional training as teachers. As a primary school teacher, Nada's working hours allowed her to spend more time with the twins. More decisively, it made it possible for the couple to educate their children at the school where she worked through teachers' privileges to receive discounted school fees. Even though both hailed from old upper middle-class "cosmopolitan" families, it was only through Nada's privileges as a teacher that they were able to afford to send their children to an international school. Their income alone would have only allowed them to send their children to a good private national school.

I asked them how they compared their children's education to their own. Karim's reaction was immediate. "What education!? The only thing I did at school was grow taller!" he joked. Karim attended a private language school, one of the secular foreign missions' schools that were nationalized in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis in 1956. As was the fate of many of these schools, the quality of the education it offered deteriorated gradually since nationalization. Since it did not have the transnational backing that Christian schools enjoyed, its sequestration by the government in 1956 entailed its virtual

transformation into a higher tier of public schools, and only because it offered more intensive education in French.

Nada explained to me that she wanted her children to be French-speaking like everyone in her and her husband's family, but she did not want them to be educated in one of the Catholic Schools. Unlike Karim, the school that Nada attended was among the most prestigious French Catholic schools. These schools have a longstanding reputation as one of the toughest schools that only graduate the best students. It continues to retain its reputation although its popularity among Cairo's elite families has waned significantly in favor of the more recently established international French schools. There was more than one reason why Nada did not wish to educate her children in French Catholic schools. First, none of these schools were mixed gender. "Yes, in the past, our parents found it an advantage that Catholic schools were boys or girls only. Many parents even preferred Catholic schools to many public and private schools for that reason. Nowadays, this just does not work (*mayinfa'sh*). I wanted my kids to be in the same school...I also want them to have the experience to be in school with people of the opposite sex. It's just not a normal setting." In addition, Nada confessed that she resented the harsh discipline at her school. "I actually remember the terror (*ru'b*) that filled me if I did something wrong...Even when I hadn't done anything wrong, I was always scared of something. I just didn't want my kids to go through this experience. I wanted them to like going to school." Hence, she was very pleased with the international school culture at her current school and the other schools where she taught because the children were not afraid of teachers or the principal. At her current school, primary school students would easily

knock on the principals' door to talk to her about something. "Moreover," she added subtly, "nobody goes to these schools anymore. Even all the good teachers don't teach there anymore." The owner of our current school convinced all the good teachers who were known at the French Catholic schools to work with him so to attract all the graduates who want to give their children a similar education."

Nada was overall pleased with the school because it had "many people like us (*nas kitir zayina*)...of course, you also find many nouveau riche who are only there to brag about putting their children in French schools and who can be a real source of nuisance for the teachers especially...but for the most part, most parents at our school are also graduates of French schools like us, who also go to the Guezira club or Heliopolis...you know, people who have similar 'background' [in English]". Nada's characterization of "people like us" is critical in illustrating the way in which boundaries between "old cosmopolitans" and "new cosmopolitans" are drawn within a school community. Unlike Dalia who self-identified as "middle class," Nada never referred to wealth or income levels to indicate her status group. Instead, she referred to her Catholic schooling and membership in exclusive sports clubs to distinguish "people like us" from the nouveau riche, who are assumed not to belong to this community because they do not have roots in Cairo's cosmopolitan society.

The 'nouveau riche' are a category that reappeared in many conversations I held with Karim and Nada. The fact that the school of their choice did not attract many "nouveau riche" was one of the features that they appreciated most about it. This was very important for Nada who lamented the commercialization of education that she

linked to the materialist approach to education and child rearing of newly rich families. On occasion, she would tell me about the difficulty of managing the pressure to match what other parents bought for their children so as not to make her own feel deprived. “During our times, you could never tell who had very wealthy parents (*aghniyya awi*) or who came from middle-income families (*mutawasita*). We all looked the same in our school uniforms... You couldn’t tell whose father was a simple engineer and whose engineer father was a big businessman... Decent families (*awlad al-nas*)⁶¹ at the time did not spend their money so lavishly as people do these days”. *Awlad al-nas* is an old and common designation through which people drew moral boundaries between elite families. *Awlad al-nas*, it is assumed, come from good, often recognized, families and whose prestige would be commonly associated with their disciplined upbringing and good manners.

Many international school parents who themselves attended private schools in the past expressed equal reservations about the materialism of international school cultures compared to their own schools. This was often attributed to the fact that most private schools in the past operated on non-profit basis. According to my interlocutors, school fees did not constitute a significant portion of their family’s income. However, admission to private schools was often tied to parents’ educational and professional status. Since the

⁶¹ The term, which literally means the children of the people, goes back to the Mamluk Period, when it used to refer to the children of Mamluks. Since Mamluks were not supposed to have families, their children occupied this liminal position as children of ‘the people’ but who could not bear the same status of their biological lineage. In modern times, *awlad al-nas* is a popular referent to people coming from ‘good’ families though how ‘good families’ are constructed differs across different usages of the term. It could indicate families bearing high social status as well as families that have a reputable for being morally upright.

best of these schools were Christian schools, they attracted a small niche of the cosmopolitan urban middle-class families who were often themselves exposed to some foreign education or were eager to belong to the cosmopolitan class.⁶² On the contrary, admission in for-profit international schools was entirely based on parents' financial ability. This made it particularly challenging for parents like Nada and Karim to sustain their sense of social and cultural distinction vis-à-vis newly rich families who could afford to send their children to the best schools.

Consequently, many such parents were skeptical that the affordability factor guaranteed that their children are attending school with children of "like-minded parents" to use Dalia's characterization. Parents' concern with the social background of other students in their children's school could be attributed to the way in which sociality was the main advantage of private education under Egypt's centralized education system in the past. Prior to the emergence of international schools, different private schools offered different 'contexts' for more or less the same educational process. This is not to undermine the impact of superior school facilities, organized extracurricular activities, student-teacher ratio, and class size or school management on students' overall educational experiences. However, in view of the configuration of private education in Egypt in the past, parents' educational choices often prioritized considerations about school community over educational program. As indicated by both Dalia and Nada, assessing the social environment (*al-wasat al-igtima'i*) was one of the most essential

⁶² The majority of students in Christian schools in Egypt are Muslim. Anecdotal evidence from interviews with former students indicated that the percentage of Christian students within the student body increased consistently from the 1990s to the present.

criteria informing parents' choices and often preceded or even supplanted considerations for what type of education the children would receive in their schools. Dalia's concern with placing her children in a school where people shared her "mentality" (*fikr*) or Nada with "social background" was one way through which socioeconomic, cultural and moral categories converged in parental choices.

In conversations with Karim, he appeared less committed to educating his children in a French school as Nada was. He did not object to the French school, but did not share Nada's enthusiasm about having French-speaking children. "Other than talking to their grandmothers in French, I don't see any value in learning French." For Karim, the primary criterion upon which he chose his children's school was that it could take good care of (*ter'a*) his children. "I don't even see the value of learning critical thinking and all these skills they claim they would learn in international schools...I'm not even sure this is what children need to learn to make it in Egypt...All I want is to know that my children are safe and learning what they need to make it to college...Everything else is fine...but it's not my priority..." Safety (*aman*) and care (*ri'aya*) were common idioms that parents used to express their concern with the material and social environment of the school. Muhammad's reference to the unsanitary conditions at public schools also reflected how the school building, facilities and management were foregrounded in parents' deliberations about their educational choices.

However, the concerns that Nada and Karim expressed about international schools were most common among families that were exposed to private and foreign education prior to the emergence of international schools. Although they recognized the

differences and advantages of international schools, their perspective was shaped by their own schooling experiences which were formed during a time when private and foreign education were the prerogative of a smaller niche of urban families that were connected through club memberships and various other social networks (e.g. where they spent their summers on the Mediterranean Coast, their neighborhoods, families and circle of friends). Compared with today's international schools, old foreign private schools brought together families that shared a high degree of homogeneity in lifestyle and social background. Since school tuition was within the reach of a wide range of urban middle-class families, wealth or income were not the main criterion of belonging to the community of foreign educated Egyptians, or at least cosmopolitan-class belonging was not constructed as such. This makeup of private schools in the past, specifically foreign and language schools, rendered schools a "safe" place for parents as they either knew or could easily relate to other families. Within these "old cosmopolitan circles," people may casually ask whether one knew "X" because they attended the same school or is related to "Y" because they bore the same last name as a way to establish connection. Asking a middle-aged person what school they attended, what neighborhood their parents live in or what club they go to remains one of the most common conversation starters among 'old cosmopolitan families' and the easiest way to place a person within the class structure.

The sense of community shared among the old cosmopolitan class appears to have been significantly challenged in recent decades through the transformation of the educational field in parallel to broader shifts in the socioeconomic and urban configuration of Cairo's middle and upper classes. While clubs and other hereditary

networks - institutional or otherwise- continue to serve as symbolic boundaries between old and new cosmopolitan families, the classification of insider/outsider in international schools followed a different operational logic. The crucial role that wealth played in school admission rendered international schools a heterogeneous place from the perspective of parents like Nada and Karim. This sense of heterogeneity was often expressed through moral categories that differentiated between the old (*awlad al-nas*) and new (*nouveau riche*) cosmopolitan class. Nada's reference to the materialistic drives of the nouveau riches reflected one of the most salient categories through which old cosmopolitan families drew a moral boundary around "people like us."

The Mimic/Authentic Axes

Dina was a forty-year old manager at a multinational corporation that sold fast-consumer goods and a mother of three children, two boys and a girl. All three attended a Canadian International School; her eldest was in high school. I met Dina together with two other mothers one evening in Downtown Mall. It is an open-air shopping center in New Cairo that is known for its high-end stores. Although it hosted stores selling various goods, like many similar centers opening up in Cairo's new satellite cities, its main point of attraction were the plethora of restaurants and cafes that serve a range of local and international cuisines. Dina initially suggested meeting at Café Z, where she and her friends occasionally meet to smoke *shisha* in the evening. However, that evening, the Champions League final game was scheduled, and all the cafes were packed. The only place quiet enough for a conversation was a Sushi restaurant, so this is where the following conversation took place.

Dina never attended any education fairs. She enrolled her children in the Canadian School because she knew the owners well. She attended the school's 'open house' and was impressed by what she learned about the "Canadian system" from the presentations she listened to. She liked the idea of "learning through play," and that "there is no punishment." To her, this meant that her family can spend quality time together doing something other than preparing for exams in the evenings -which is the case in national schools- and that her kids can pursue other hobbies or sports after school. She explained to me how the Canadian education system is set up in a way that teaches children to be self-reliant and responsible, "it is not about cramming for the exam and then forgetting everything the next day" (*dash, dash, dash, udlu' koll haga fi'l imtihan w nensa tani yom*). Compared to national school parents, she doesn't have to help her children prepare for exams or do their homework.

After eleven years in this school, Dina was very happy with her choice. She was especially proud of how Canadian education cultivated her children's personality, especially how it made them bold⁶³ (*gur'a*) and nurtured their "self-confidence" (*siqathum fi nafsuhum*). She stressed the role of Canadian teachers, how better prepared they are at "embracing" (*isti'ab*) children by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and discussing issues with them that Egyptian teachers would only scold them for expressing. She clarified that what she referred to as self-confidence, an Egyptian teacher would typically regard as rude (*illit adab*). As an example, she told me how her son once

⁶³ To be bold in the Egyptian context is regarded as a positive quality, as the opposite of being docile or timid and unable to express oneself.

got into trouble with his Arabic teacher because he argued with him over politics. “It was during the revolution, and the teacher was supportive of the Ikhwan, and my son wasn’t. He started arguing with him and the teacher berated him for his opinions, threatened to kick him out of class if he wouldn’t stop arguing, so my son just turned around in his seat and showed him his back (*idalu dahru*).”

Dina’s account of her son’s experience that evening seemed so positive that I was surprised when a few weeks later she described the experience of educating her children in an international school as “putting your children in a fire you try to shield them from” (*ka’inik bithutti had fi’l nar bas bithawli tihawti ‘alih*). We were having coffee on a breezy Ramadan evening at the clubhouse in the gated community (compound) where she lives in New Cairo, when she told me that many foreign teachers “make the children hate the country” (*yikarahu al-wilad f’il-balad*) and make them see everything in it as “trash” (*zibala*). She was especially concerned about teachers who “volunteer” (*yitbara’u*) to talk about “culture;” about such things as couples living together outside of marriage or about homosexuality. Earlier that week, her son had gotten into an argument with one of his Canadian teachers over the Arab-Israeli conflict. “This goes against school policy,” she explained to me, as they learned from the owners that anyone the school hires is explicitly informed that they are “not to talk about anything sexual, nothing related to religion, or anything related to politics, but some just ignore that.”

“When my children were younger, I used to get really worried that this would confuse them (*ti’mil ‘anduhum balbala*) and shake their faith (*tihiz al-‘aqida*). Now, I guess, it is good that they have this

exposure, because they have learned how to distinguish (*yifara'u*) between what is our culture and what is not and to make their choices (*yikhtaru*)...sadly, many who send their kids to international schools to show off (*manzara*) end up with children who are mimics of Westerners (*mutashabiha*)... And they are only mimicking the most superficial aspects, Halloween Parties and what have you... and leaving out everything that has to do with hard work ... This is why I explain to my children that their parents work hard to put them through international schools, not so they can hate the country (*yikrahu al-baladi*), go abroad, and leave it (*yitla'u bara we yisibuha*) but so they can fix it (*yissalahuha*)”.

Dina’s reflections on the advantages and disadvantages of international education were not exceptional for the parents I met who had older children in international schools. Most expressed similarly ambivalent attitudes about the impact of international education on their children’s personalities. While almost all of the parents seemed pleased with international education and how it fostered their children’s self-confidence and ability to express themselves, its impact on how they perceived and related to Egypt and local values was almost always a concern. This is particularly common since very few parents regarded international schools as a step on a path to emigration. Although almost all parents aspired to send their children to college in Europe or North America, the children’s ability to work and establish homes in Egypt was a critical concern for

international school parents. Like Dina, many feared that an education overtly critical of Egypt would make their children resent their country and push them to leave.

It is difficult to delineate the scope of what parents referred to when they talked about “our culture” or identified a shared understanding of what “loving or hating the country” (*yhibu el-balad; yikrahu el-balad*) entailed. The schools’ stipulation against discussing sex, politics and religion is telling of the range of topics that are categorized as “local culture” in international schools. I have heard my interlocutors refer to “our culture” when talking about practices as diverse as joking, reading the Qur’an, watching old Arabic movies, upholding conservative family values, having a moderate (not fundamentalist) approach to religion, showing respect for the elderly, or cursing a lot. “To love the country” was an equally ambiguous theme that was nonetheless very common in parents’ discourses. Rather than indicating a particular attitude or set of behavior, parents’ concern with their children’s ability “to love the country” (*yhibu al-balad*) indicated a general sentiment of attachment and being able to discern “beautiful things” (*al-hagat al-hilwa*) in Egypt. Dina described how she tried to make her children “not hate the country” by taking them on trips to see the Red Sea area and the Oases. When she took her children on a trip to New York City, she made sure they saw that “there is also trash abroad” (*fih bardo zibala barra*).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Garbage is here meant literally and figuratively. Cairo is a very unclean city and concern with garbage is an everyday matter.

Parents' anxiety about the impact of international education on their children would relate to Egypt resonated in the general public attitude towards educational internationalization. Much of this attitude adopted past representations of missionary and foreign missions' schools in attributing imperialist or neocolonial motives to international education. Dina articulated these sentiments when she described international education as "a fire," that purposefully undermined her children's faith and sense of belonging. Echoing the sentiments of many educators I met, Dina blamed "Egyptians" for allowing their education system to deteriorate, and the government for forcing parents to expose their children to these challenges. For Dina, as for many other parents, the only choice they had was to offset the dangerous implications of international education by "working with their children at home" (*ashtaghal ma 'ahum fil bayt*).

In examining Dina's account in relation to Nada and Dalia's, it becomes clear how national belonging, understood as children's embracing of their cultural identity and their resistance to adopting Western practices and attitudes, served as one of the categories of differentiation within international school communities. While Dalia stressed "like-minded parents'" commitment to education and Nada emphasized "her people's" non-materialistic motivations, Dina attributed the shallow mimicry of Westerners as a feature of children whose parents have not "worked hard" to put their children through international schools. Dina's representation differentiated between "mimicry" and "authenticity" on a moralistic basis. Like most parents I met who were critical of the cultural influence of international schools on children, Dina blamed children's loss of identity and sense of belonging on parents' superficial concerns with

the social prestige associated with an international education. Dina's commitment to fostering her children's sense of belonging was not linked to nationalist discourses. Instead, it entailed an explicit assessment of right and wrong attitudes towards international education, whereby the latter was associated with families whose primary concern was their class belonging. This view was further extended among international school parents who are more committed to their religious identity, as I will show next through Heba's narrative.

Committed/Non-Committed Axis

Dina's emphasis on working with her children at home was shared among many of the international school parents I met. Many also expressed an interest in registering their children in after-school programs and volunteer activities, but most admitted that their schedules were already filled with daily sports practice, art or music classes, visits to grandparents and other social functions. More commonly, parents sought out religious education to compensate for educating their children in international schools. For Christian families, the church provided the key institutional framework through which their children practiced their religion, learned to interact with a slightly more vertically diverse community than their social network, and engaged in social service (*khidma*) that exposed them to different segments of society. The mosque did not present a comparable institutional framework for the Muslim families I spoke to. Many parents, including Dina and her husband, hired a *sheikh* to teach their children the Qur'an. The *sheikh* would visit every Friday morning and help the children memorize sections of the Qur'an. However, most parents regretfully admitted that the routine had to come to an end when their

children reached middle school. Between frequent weekend trips, sports practice or simply the challenge of convincing their teenage children to wake up early on the weekend to memorize the Qur'an, most parents admitted to finding it difficult with time to commit to the practice. Many still feel satisfied that the practice had established a basis for the children's religious education that they could expand independently when they got older.

This widespread orientation towards religion as the way to balance the cultural impact of international education had its institutional form in so-called Islamic international schools. As previously noted, a growing number of the private schools featured in the school fairs I attended were branded "Islamic." In recent years, a few of these schools have acquired a fairly good reputation among middle- and upper-class families, including those whose lifestyle does not immediately appear to align with strict religious prescripts. Many of the parents I met strongly advised me to get in touch with parents and teachers working at one of these schools as they are widely known to pay closer attention to subjects as Arabic and religion compared to other international schools, focus on community service in their extracurricular activities, and overall foster the preservation of students "cultural identity" vis-à-vis foreign influences.

It was Dina who put me in touch with Heba, a mother of two boys at one of Cairo's better-known Islamic international schools. Heba and Dina met in Abu Dhabi in the early 2000s, when both their husbands were working at a multinational corporation. Dina had just quit her job and was fully committed to caring for her children during that period and became good friends with Heba whose two boys were of similar age to Dina's

youngest. Although Heba started her children at a “regular” international school in Abu Dhabi, she wanted to enroll them in one of Cairo’s new Islamic American schools that she had received positive feedback on from other parents. Heba’s choice of her children’s school was simple and straightforward: it was the only school that allowed parents who are *multazimin* and of “a certain class” (*klass mu’ayan*) to be able to put their children in international schools.

Multazim/a, which literally translates as committed, is a common adjective used to distinguish individuals who try to follow religious precepts in their lifestyle. Compared with *mutadayin/a* (religious) or *islami/a* (Islamic), Heba’s choice for the word “committed” is indicative of the way she positions herself vis-à-vis other Muslims who may not follow the same lifestyle. “Committed” does not carry the same judgmental undertones of more commonly used words like *mutadayin* or *islami*, which imply that others are not religious or not Islamic. Instead, “committed” emphasizes a person’s conscious and deliberate attachment to religious precepts in every aspect of life without discrediting the religious identity of others. This is a fine distinction that is telling of a broader tension around piety within cosmopolitan circles, specifically in post-2013 Egypt⁶⁵ where a pushback against dominant religious discourses associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafi-oriented practices sought to reclaim alternate “less committed” forms of piety as valid.

⁶⁵ In 2013, a popularly supported coup d’etat led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi ousted the Ikhwani president, Muhammad Morsi, from power. Security forces raided the sit-in of his supported, killings hundreds and detaining thousands.

Prior to the advent of international education, schools labeled Islamic, were Azhari institutes (*ma'ahid azhariyya*) and private (national) schools. The former are K-12 schools that are affiliated to al-Azhar University, but operate under the umbrella of the Egyptian Ministry of Education. The curriculum at Azhari schools, whether public or private, follows the regular centralized program of non-religious schools but differs in middle and high school through intensive education in religious studies. For administrative and historical reasons that I cannot cover in this chapter, Azhari schools occupy the lowest rung of public and/or national schools, both in terms of their academic credentials and their social standing. Private schools that were either officially labeled Islamic or informally referred to as Islamic were most commonly owned or run by members of the Muslim Brotherhood or individuals known to be affiliated with an Islamist organization. These schools were structurally equivalent to other private schools but upheld a more explicitly religious school culture than other schools (Herrera 2006).

The new education market introduced a new tier of Islamic schools. These schools followed a British or American educational curriculum, as many others in the market. However, they differed from those through the adoption of a cultural approach and the application of a set of regulations that the school management constructed as Islamic. It is important to underline that the label is not official; there is no objective criteria according to which a school would be identified as Islamic.⁶⁶ For the most part, this was an informal designation that was shared among the school community and used

⁶⁶According to my research, the “Islamic” label is implicit in slogans and mission statements. None of these Islamic international schools officially carry the word “Islamic” in their name.

by others. The religious orientation of the school owners, whether they are well-known local businessmen affiliated with religious organizations or known to adopt an overtly pious lifestyle was often the critical indicator of when a school would be classified as Islamic. Hence, so-called Islamic schools encompassed a wide range of public, private, national and international schools and represented quite diverse interpretations of what an Islamic school in 2017 looked like. What was uniform about these schools, however, is that neither offered an educational program that was exclusively religious. In all Islamic schools in Egypt, including Azhari institutes, religious education was an added component to the main “secular”⁶⁷ curriculum.⁶⁸

In Heba’s school, for example, this included extra classes in Quranic recitation (*tajwid*) with the expressed intention of teaching the students “correct pronunciation;” Heba stressed that they do not memorize the Qur’an as is customary in Qur’an classes.⁶⁹ In addition, the school enforced a set of guidelines and regulations that were not common in other international schools. These included requiring students to pray, separating boys from girls in middle school and offering extra classes in Quranic recitation (*tajwid*). Valentine’s Day, Halloween or Christmas were not celebrated in Islamic schools as they

⁶⁷ I write secular in quotation given the dominant religious framework of the national educational curriculum of the Egyptian Ministry of Education. Textbooks of subjects from science, to history and Arabic are replete with references to Islamic teachings. (See Sobhy, 2015).

⁶⁸ One of my interlocutors who runs an Islamic school but who has had years of experience working as a teacher in an international Islamic school regarded many Islamic international schools to be increasingly market-driven, relinquishing many of the conditions that would render them appear “extreme” to a wider population, such as having no policy against music or not dedicating separate times or spaces for boys and girls during break periods.

⁶⁹ Heba’s emphasis that the children do not memorize the Qur’an at school meant to highlight the school’s untraditional/progressive approach to religious education.

were most international schools. Instead, children were taught to perform the *haji* rituals and simulated it on a special celebration before the ‘Eid holidays. The school also organized *‘umra* trips for the school community.⁷⁰

Although religious piety (*al-iltizam*) constituted the main rationale for Heba’s school choice, she expressed reservations about labeling the school “Islamic.” While her attitude reflected the generalized sense of caution of talking about Islamic institutions and practices in the years following the 2013 standoff between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, it also exposed an emergent configuration of cosmopolitan-elite piety that was intimately connected to Islamic international schools.

This was the first time we met on our own without Dina. She had invited me to her apartment in Heliopolis on a Sunday morning when her kids were at school. She lived in a modern decorated duplex in a recently constructed building in Heliopolis, one of Cairo’s upper-middle class neighborhoods. “I’m not sure I like what people mean when they say the school is Islamic,” she told me after we had a long conversation in which she shared her concerns about the way in which some people in Egypt have become “more daring” (*itgara’u*) in openly expressing unorthodox views about religion. “How would you describe it then?” I asked her. She told me she preferred to describe the school as a “conservative school” (*madrassa muhafza*) and compared it to Christian schools in Egypt, which follow a non-religious curriculum but provide an environment that allowed for religious observance. “It is an international school like any other...It does not go beyond

⁷⁰ It is important to mention that this has become a widely common activity organized in many international schools, including those not labeled Islamic.

the basics of religion, which there is no dispute over...prayer, the segregation of the sexes, conservative school uniforms for girls, learning how to recite the Qur'an...there is nothing extreme about that," she explained to me. I never suggested that "Islamic" meant extreme, but it was clear that this is the assumption that Heba had to respond to in conversations with friends and family who did not subscribe to an equally *committed* lifestyle.

One of the main reasons why Heba didn't like the label "Islamic" is that it misrepresented the school community and associated it with the notorious Azhari schools or other private schools affiliated to Islamist organization. Like many other parents of "a certain" social class, Heba told me that she and her husband found it very difficult to find a school that "cared for religious education and commitment (*iltizam*) and helped parents raise their children in a certain way while also educating them to be open-minded [*mutafattihin*], well-read [*beyi'ru*], learn languages [*yi'rafu lughat*] and know how to do all these things well." She added that her children are not any different from others at other international schools:

"You know, their Arabic isn't really much better than other children. You can't really compare it to the Arabic we took at our schools in the past. The only difference is that they are taught how to pronounce the words correctly; they don't pronounce the *dhal* as *dahl* or the *tha* as *za* or the *thi* as *sih* as we, Egyptians, do...Of course, they don't get it that they can't talk like that with people, they can't just say *tha'lab* [correct pronunciation

of the Arabic word for fox] rather than *ta'lab* [the Egyptian pronunciation] in ordinary conversation...I find it embarrassing when they do so..."

Heba's emphasis on her children's 'not so proficient Arabic' and the school's "not Islamic" orientation was only a couple of the ways in which she expressed some of the most obvious tensions surrounding Islamic schooling for upwardly mobile families. Although almost all parents I met indicated that the "background," "mentality," "social level," etc. of other families in their children's school was a crucial factor determining whether they were content or not with their school choice, such a concern was very pronounced among parents who sought the alternative path of "Islamic" international schooling.⁷¹ The tensions of Islamic school parents go beyond their desire to raise pious children – which was one of the factors in Heba's school choice she felt the most comfortable expressing to me- as they revealed the awkward relationship between the linguistic and aesthetic registers associated with international education, those pertaining to an education grounded in Islamic culture and of Egyptianness. For instance, Heba wanted her children to learn to recite the Qur'an flawlessly as part of the dispositions and skills she wanted them to cultivate as committed Muslims. Yet, she felt "embarrassed" because her children were unable to differentiate when these skills would be appreciated, namely within a religious context that valued "correct pronunciation", and when it would

⁷¹ One of my interlocutors with children in an private Islamic school told me that being compelled to move her children to an Azhari private school when they could not afford international education was one of the hardest periods of her life as a parent. "At that point, I realized I preferred any school but this, anything but ordinary education, like ordinary people, like anybody...I broke out in hysterical tears the first day I dropped them off at that school..."

mark them off as outsiders within everyday Egyptian speech patterns in which “correct Arabic pronunciation” would be regarded as overtly pedantic and serious, something people were likely to make fun of. Furthermore, since weak Arabic, and often a broken Egyptian dialect, is a linguistic marker of the internationally educated in Egypt, being a proficient Arabic speaker would mark one as an outsider to the community of internationally educated who are not expected to speak Arabic well.

This multilayered tension in Heba’s narrative about school choice was equally evident in Heba’s attitude towards the community service activities organized by the school. Among international schools, the community service activities organized at Heba’s school were one of the school’s strongest extracurricular programs. It is a feature of the school culture that many of the parents I met who were outside of this school’s community found commendable. I was not surprised when Heba pointed how the school stood out among other schools for fostering children’s sense of charity and community work, *to do good (yi’milu kheir)*. Unlike many other children in her family, she felt her children were getting “exposed to the country and its different communities” through their visits and other charitable activities that took them to poor parts in Egypt and abroad.⁷² However, echoing Dina’s concerns, Heba was worried whether too much exposure would push her children away from Egypt. She narrated an incident that occurred the same academic year that caused many parents to talk to the school director. “They showed them a video of all the negatives aspects of life in Egypt, like the trash,

⁷² Heba mentioned that the school organizes trips for students to do developmental beyond Egypt, in other African and Asian countries.

poverty, and things like that... The teachers were of the opinion that this is important for the children to see but many parents were not happy. They didn't think it was right that children see that everything is negative in Egypt at such an early age... maybe for older children who can understand... I wasn't very happy either..." Heba's concerns resonated Dina's anxieties about the representation of Egypt and its potentially harmful impact on children's relation to the country. It showed how community service activities that were integrated into a religiously-oriented school culture could be at once appreciated for the values of charity and giving they instilled in children but at the same time mistrusted for their potential in "misrepresenting" the nation and alienating the students.

In many other instances throughout our meetings, Heba made comments that highlighted her consciousness of what it took to be of a "certain" social class in Egypt without explicitly stating what it entailed. For example, during one of our meetings, she narrated an incident involving a classmate of one of her students whose behavior was of concern to her and other parents and that they have spoken with the school director about. "It's clear that he comes from a family that doesn't belong in the school," she declared. I asked her how she could tell and her response was: "One knows these things, Noha," she said with a look that says, "You know what I mean." When I pleaded her to give me any example, she mentioned that the boy says words like "*yad*" [a shortened version of the expression *ya walad* (equivalent to calling someone lad) and bears a markedly rural tone] ... You don't pick up such words from watching TV or from the streets. It's a word you hear at home," she explained firmly.

Heba's ambiguous references to class were very common among upper middle-class Egyptians I met who typically evaded any explicit reference to wealth or income as the source of their social distinction.⁷³ With the exception of Dalia, almost all parents I met either relied, like Heba, on cultural and moral categorizations that they assumed I shared to refer to class-appropriate practices or, like Nada, referred to very specific membership communities (Guezira Sports club members, French-educated people, people who spend their summers in this or that Mediterranean Sea resort).

Heba, like many "committed" Muslims among Egypt's upwardly mobile classes, had to negotiate between raising her children in an equally religiously committed pious environment and partaking in the new social and cultural practices that distinguished Cairo's new cosmopolitan class. The surge in religiously oriented international schools in recent years indicated that the market was becoming increasingly responsive to the needs of parents like Heba. Yet, the expansion of Islamic international schools introduced new moral categories that drew moral boundaries between committed and 'non-committed' families (and Muslims and Christians) at the same time as they drew social boundaries around committed families in international schools from other committed families.⁷⁴ By

⁷³ In fact, in line with the use of English words to refer to trash bins ("basket"), shoes ("shoes") or "underwear," many of my interlocutors use English words, like "class," "social standard," "social level" or "social background" to talk about social differentiation. Like trash or underwear, class is a necessary, albeit a shameful aspect of life.

⁷⁴ Some of my Muslim interlocutors claimed that "having Christian friends" was one of the markers of cosmopolitan-class belonging in the past. The situation in public schools is more complex. Of ten Christian interlocutors in my study, only two attended public schools. Their experience was replete with anecdotes about discrimination and bullying on the basis of their religion. The film *La Mo'akhtha*, released in 2014, which told the story of a middle-class Coptic boy who is forced to transfer to a public school when his father dies, emphasized the reliance of Coptic Egyptians on private education as a way to evade discrimination at public schools.

claiming to offer “the best of two worlds” or “faith and knowledge” –as some of the slogans of these schools state- religiously oriented international schools promise parents the education that is important to guarantee their class belonging without compromising their spiritual commitments.

Elite Dilemmas

In this chapter, I showed how the expansion of school choice in contemporary Egypt created a vital medium through which upwardly mobile families produced, reproduced and negotiated class boundaries. Although all my interlocutors regarded access to international schooling as the most important vehicle for upward mobility and as the main means for securing their children’s futures, international schools exposed shifting registers of value informing the socialization of internationally educated youth. Rather than approaching international schools merely as the latest institutional framework for elite reproduction -as many studies on international schools in Egypt suggest-, my analysis of parents’ narratives highlighted widely shared concerns about a range of safety, pedagogical, cultural and moral issues that go into parental choice and which may go beyond securing class reproduction. The salience of moral and symbolic categories of identification and differentiation in the narratives suggest, furthermore, that school choice hinged on parents’ ability to draw symbolic boundaries with others in their own “class”.

By invoking “middle-class mentality” (Dalia), roots (Nada), ethical and national commitments (Dina) and piety (Heba), these parents tried to establish social distinction through disassociation, rather than association, with dominant representations of the elite in Egypt. This entailed a construction of international school parents as newly rich

families who made quick and easy money, who had limited educational and cultural capital, blindly imitated Western cultural practices at the cost of staying true to their faith and country, and who were not reflexive about their lifestyle or how they raised their children. The narratives of the parents I examined in this chapter exposed an internal dialogue with these real or imagined characteristics of international-school parents, and the labor they put into contesting their own association with it.

In many ways, the kinds of ethical deliberations, parental concerns and aspirations these narratives imparted strongly echoed the changing “moral economy of wealth” that Rachel Sherman and Anay Y. Ramos-Zayas documented in their studies of the United States and Latin America respectively (Sherman 2007; Ramos-Zayas 2020). These ethnographies drew attention to the specific kinds of parental anxieties associated with raising wealthy children in the context of increasing inequalities. Sherman showed how anxieties about raising entitled children pushed elite families in New York to place restrictions on consumption patterns and forge situations for social exposure and social mixing that did not reflect the family’s actual financial means. While Ramos-Zayas’s study of elite families in Brazil and Puerto Rico documented patterns quite similar to those examined by Sherman, her study focused on how these “anxieties of affluence” (Sherman 2007) in Latin American take on national and racial discourses. Challenging a strong association of elite with cosmopolitan and internationally-oriented outlooks in scholarship on the elite in North American and Europe, Ramos-Zayan argued that the valorization of national culture and language were pivotal in the ways in which Latin American families constructed moral elite subjectivities (Ramos-Zayas 2020: 129). Her

study offers a useful lens for examining changing configurations of elite cultures and anxieties.

In my study, I found that parents' paradoxical sense of ambivalence about educational choices that effectively placed their children in the best schools in the country exposed the specific cultural tensions and contradictions of elite belonging in Egypt. All of the narratives expressed a powerful sense of cultural and social rupture that separated the educational experiences of children from their parents' education and from a broader society imagined essentially as the opposite of the world of international schools (poor, dirty, unsafe, etc.) and yet reflecting their 'authentic' culture. Parents differed over how they perceived this sense of rupture; many expressed inconsistent and contradictory attitudes in their own narratives. The same parents who lamented the demise of public, nationally-based or non-profit private schools they attended, like Dalia and Nada, also celebrated the progressive pedagogical approaches of international education. Those who insisted that international education should not engage with Egyptian "culture," struggled to cultivate their children's national and cultural identity beyond the school. Even parents like Heba who put their children in religious schools worried that their children would not be able to develop the cultural knowledge and sensitivity to fit within Egyptian society.

In the following chapter, I explore how this sense of rupture materialized in the educational experiences of students. I focus on how teachers at one international school engaged students with 'the world outside', and examine the notions of culture and identity that animated their educational discourses and informed students' responses.

CHAPTER FOUR

“This is not the real Egypt”: (In)authenticity and National Belonging in an International School

Walking through the International School in New Cairo for the first time in 2016, a school I was told was “very international”, I was struck by wall decorations in its high school section that carried remarkably nationalist tones. On the staircase leading up to the high school floor, for example, a placard in Arabic calligraphy read: The Arabic language is the most eloquent language of all; one could not do justice to its eloquence in words (*al-lughah al-‘arabiyya tafuq kull allughat rawnaqan wa ya’jaz al-lisan ‘an wasf mahasinha*), signed by a student in Grade 10. Another placard read: Don’t obliterate your history by destroying your language; Your language is your responsibility, preserve it (*La taqdi ‘ala tarikhak b’il-qada’ ‘ala lughatik hiya amana fi unq’ak fa hafiz ‘alayha*). A second staircase in the building featured a mural in progress titled “*Masr Umm al-Dunya*” (Egypt is the Mother of the World), a common dictum in Egyptian nationalist discourse that constructs Egypt as the “cradle of human civilization” (*mahd al-hadara*). The mural included student drawings of a young man holding the Egyptian flag (in the fashion of imagery of the 2011 revolution), a traditional sweet potato vendor and his portable oven on cart, Ancient Egyptian symbols, a mosque, a woman in *niqab* beside an old man in traditional peasant robe and a “ordinary looking” veiled woman carrying a baby, and a silhouette of woman with full-figured breasts nursing a baby. In the background were the disordered rooftops of Cairo’s buildings, occupied by the densely arranged satellite

dishes. Besides the modern-looking young man carrying the Egyptian flag (a common symbolic representation of the 2011 revolutionary youth), the selection of images struck me as unconventional and quite eclectic. It was not clear how any of these images related to the title, to one another or to the school.

The peculiar arrangement of these nationalist motifs in the decoration of ISN's high school floor captured the moral scaffolding that engulfed discourses about Egyptianness and belonging that I would come to observe among the ISN community and the broader social networks around international schools in the months that followed. On one level, they suggested an institutional commitment, supported at least by some students, to nationalist idioms; history, language and "Egypt, the mother of the world." At the same, it exposed an ambivalence towards these very same nationalist idioms. The underlying message of the placards was that students were neglecting their language and history. Likewise, the selection of an eclectic combination of ordinary and mundane practices and values (street food, religious and traditional dress, youth, and the dense and chaotic urban landscape of Cairo) as illustration of the bombastic nationalist adage "Egypt, the mother of the world" -more commonly represented through the Great Pyramids of Giza, military victories or other monumental symbols of the nation- expressed shifting conceptions of nationalism and nationhood among the student artists that painted them.

By exposing both a preoccupation with nationalism and an ambivalence towards it, the walls of ISN reflected the state of moral questioning that characterized post-2011 Egypt. In ISN, and across multiple sites of middle and upper-class social reproduction in

Cairo, a cosmopolitanism associated with an elitist distance from all things national became the main target of moral condemnation in a revitalized discourse on national pride and belonging. As places of intensive interaction between the local and the international where local students were constantly exposed to and participated in the circulation of globally dominant cosmopolitan trends, international schools were vital sites for the moral negotiation of what it meant to be elite *yet* Egyptian in post-2011 Egypt. Consequently, they represented what Claudio Lomnitz's (2001) described as "contact zones," which are sites of transnational interaction that accentuate cultural boundaries and generate discourses about national culture and identity.

In this chapter, I interrogate the conventional conceptual understanding of the role of schooling in national identity construction. Through an examination of the institutional and educational practices that generated discourses about Egyptian national belonging at ISN, I show how constructions of Egyptianness were mediated through a binary opposition with the school's "international" American culture. Rather than reflecting the de facto cultural fluidity that characterized the school culture, the categorization of school subjects, activities and members of the school community reinforced fixed cultural and ethnic boundaries. In a process that echoed Bruno Latour's (1993) notion of purification, practices and bodies that confused the clearly demarcated categories of Egyptian and American were forced to comply with either of the two categories. Although Latour's theory focused primarily on epistemological processes that divide the world into natural and cultural spheres and along a range of associated dualities, his theoretical framework offers a pertinent logical model for conceptualizing

the coexistence of hybridity and authenticity in the discourses on culture and identity that this chapter will examine.

Schooling and the Production of National Belonging

Conceptualizations of modern schooling -as institution and social practice- are embedded in theorizations of nation-state formation in the context of modernity. Within this corpus of scholarship, schooling is presented as an institution of the modern state apparatus with very clearly articulated objectives that revolve around forging a national community (Durkheim 1961; Gellner 1983; E. Weber 1976; Corrigan and Sayer 1985). According to this literature, schooling plays an instrumental role in creating a sense of community by way of inculcating a shared set of linguistic, cultural and sociopolitical dispositions among children of the nation. The process entails the transmission of a unified body of knowledge that engages young members of the community -at a developmentally malleable age- in a series of rituals that sensitize them to cultural forms, symbols and values that represent the nation. The predominant understanding of this educational process focuses on the “imagined” (Anderson 1983), “invented” (Hobsbawm 1990), “created” (Billig 1995), or “manufactured” (Benei 2005) feature of this act of social engineering whereby political hegemony in modern times was established.

In recent decades, anthropologists of education have questioned the power attributed to the state in producing social and political identities in educational settings. Instead of focusing on how power relations are reproduced in the education system (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), anthropologists have argued that educational discourses and practices are themselves interpenetrated by multiple and contradictory ideological

messages that make their way into the production of educated persons. This body of literature has largely focused on local sources of contestation, how different social groups within the nation (female students or students of ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities) engage educational discourses about identity (Luykx 1999; K. D. Hall 2002; Kaplan 2006; F. J. Adely 2012). On the other hand, studies that focus on the impact of globalization on education have not fully explored how the circulation of imported educational discourses and practices may be restructuring local educational landscapes to the extent of revitalizing discourses about national identity and culture (K. Anderson-Levitt 2003; Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Hobson and Silova 2014).

Hence, in order to understand the puzzling preoccupation with the “nation” that I observed in and around international schools in Cairo, I interrogate the convergence between internationalism and nationalism in the context of international education in Egypt. Rather than examining discourses about national belonging as unfolding outside the framework of international schooling, in this chapter I situate discourses about national identity and belonging circulating among international school students within the institutional and educational culture of international schools. To that end, Claudio Lomnitz’s reworking of Benedict Anderson’s theorization of the emergence of nationalism through colonial encounters in South America has proven most pertinent. Lomnitz explored the mechanisms by which transnational interactions helped shape and redefine Mexican national culture and identity. Challenging conceptions of national identity production as an “internal” process of self-discovery, Lomnitz stressed the role of “contact zones” in which categories of the national and the foreign are produced

through transnational interactions. Frames of contact, according to Lomnitz, emerge in those contexts where commercial, discursive or social exchanges “generate an awareness of differences of ascription among actors, contacts between actors who ‘identify’ as national’ in contrast to others who are portrayed as ‘foreign.’” (Lomnitz 2001: 128-9). Frames of contact do not encompass every encounter between people of different nationalities or practices or discourses of national exclusion. Rather, they arise in transnational exchanges that express differential relations to modernity. Lomnitz’s understanding of contact zones focused on the imbrication between nationalism and modernity as the ideological scaffolding for structures of differentiation and ascription in the world system. According to Lomnitz, the nexus between nationalism and modernity is pertinent to national identity production in peripheral nations that depend in their claim to modernity on importing technology and capital from other, stronger, nations.

Lomnitz’s notion of contact zone is relevant to the role that international schools played in intensifying students’ consciousness of their national identity. As contact zones, international schools institutionalized a very vivid demarcation between nationals and foreigners that infused every aspect of the school culture. Unlike standard international schools serving a multicultural and international student population (Tanu 2017; Peterson 2011), the school culture at ISN, as in the overwhelming majority of international schools in Egypt, is divided between Egyptians and nationals of the country from which the educational curriculum is imported. This means that at ISN, teachers and most high-level staff, including principals, were Americans while all the students, teachers of government subjects and the entire housekeeping, security, janitorial staff were Egyptian. This

seemingly technical division of roles however, expressed a very clear socioeconomic and cultural hierarchy in the school whereby Egyptians occupied the lower rung in the institutional hierarchy compared to foreigners. This stratification of the teaching staff mapped onto the relative importance of school subjects, whereby government-required subjects were considered “free period” by the students. Throughout this chapter, I show how this binary division of the school culture reproduced colonial categorizations of native and foreigner (Reynolds 2012) wherein the flexibility with which students internalized and enacted multiple cultural registers were cast as impure and inauthentic.

The hierarchal division of teachers and their subjects expressed what Lomnitz explained as a differential relation to modernization. In student accounts, “Arabic teachers” (*muddarisin el-‘arabi*)- a category that included teachers of Arabic, social studies, religious education and national pedagogy- and the material they taught were superfluous to the “real” education they receive from their “American” teachers. Many confessed to spending their class time doing homework for other subjects or keeping themselves busy eating or chatting quietly (or not too quietly) while the teacher proceeded to present the material until class time finished. Stories about disruptive classroom behavior and outright disrespect of Arabic teachers were widespread among the students and greatly informed how they constructed Arabic subjects and their teachers. Students recounted stories about classmates who insulted their Arabic teachers and shared anecdotes of equally inappropriate statements coming from the teachers.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ See *Cultures of Arab Schooling* (Herrera and Torres, ed. 2006) for broader discussion about school cultures in Egypt.

Students' attitudes were by and large condoned by all parties involved: the Arabic teachers, the school administration and the parents. As subjects mandated by the state, their presence in international education (e.g. numbers of classes per week, budget for teaching, and their weight in student's overall grades) suggested that the inclusion of these subjects was a formal requirement, and not an integral part of the educational program. This does not deny that many parents were glad that they were taught in school, but nobody seemed eager to add extra academic load on the students. If they learned *something*, everyone was satisfied.

In addition, there was a subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, recognition that the structural inferiority of Arabic teachers both within the hierarchy of the teaching staff as well vis-a-vis the students was the source of students' disrespect of teachers and the disregard of their subjects. Others suggested that an intellectual and cultural gap separated the students from Arabic teachers and their subjects to an extent that made it difficult to convince students to take these subjects seriously—an issue I will get to later in my discussion of Arabic education. As long as they passed (or were passed)⁷⁶ final exams—which they almost always did—every concerned party was satisfied. The structural inferiority of Arabic subjects at ISN as in most international schools in Egypt reflected, on the one hand, the broader segmentation of the education market into superior international and inferior national schools. However, the integration of government-required subjects into an international education program whereby local students were

⁷⁶ Several teachers and students told me that subject teachers allowed student to cheat during exams. The school, supervisors from the Ministry and parents are aware that cheating takes place, but no one seemed disturbed by this practice, which has been totally normalized in Egypt's school culture.

constantly exposed to the differential relationship separating forms of knowledge and pedagogical practices associated with their local culture from those imported from a foreign, mostly Western, country accentuated and intensified the relative inferiority of culture-specific knowledge and pedagogy. The implications of this institutional setting were not only expressed in students' or parents' attitudes towards the so-called identity subjects, but most vividly illustrated in the narratives of those teachers assigned by the government to teach Arabic, social studies and religion in international schools.

Understanding attitudes towards these subjects and the specific points of critique is crucial to understanding the ambivalence that students experienced towards local culture; these attitudes explain why some told me they liked the "history" they took as part of their international curriculum, but not "*tarikh*" (literally history in Arabic) of the government as though these were different disciplines. As I will try to show, rather than fostering students' sense of belonging to the nation, the inclusion of national pedagogy at ISN structured a sense of dissonance between the hybridized identities of students and a notion of Egyptianness that rendered the betwixt and between identities of students as inauthentic, not *really* Egyptian or impure.

"What's the Point?" Hegemony and Cynicism in National Pedagogy

One of the most obvious sources for the production and transmission of discourses about national culture and identity in the Egyptian educational landscape was the combination of textbooks, classroom encounters, public debates as well as the individual narratives of teachers, students and parents about the so-called identity

subjects, “*‘arabi, derasat wa din*” (Arabic, social studies and religion). During the early stages of my research, private and public debates about international education almost always resulted in a discussion of the identity subjects, and whether their inclusion in the otherwise non-national educational program taught at international schools achieved what most believed was their objective, namely to ‘turn children into Egyptians’. However, contrary to a tradition of critical scholarship on the instrumental role of schooling in cultivating national belonging and loyalty to the state (Althusser 1971; Gellner 1983; E. Weber 1976; Bourdieu 1996), a nearly universal consensus among international school parents and students found these subjects to be counterproductive, that they further alienated rather than brought students closer to national culture.

Notwithstanding generalized support for a uniform centralized educational curriculum among education stakeholders in Egypt, cynicism over the pedagogical approach of the curriculum and the actual content of the textbooks were pervasive to the extent that even the current Minister of Education repeatedly criticized the curriculum’s outdatedness and rigidity in his public appearances. Although public debates on curriculum reform encompassed all school subjects, as the only school subjects that covered material beyond the natural sciences, identity subjects constituted a particularly divisive source of public discontent given the quantity of information that students were required to learn and memorize in preparation for exams.⁷⁷ Teachers, parents and

⁷⁷ A Facebook page called *Thawrat Ummuhat Masr ‘ala l-Manahaig* (Egyptian Mothers’ Revolt to the Curriculum) has gained significant following in the 2016-17. They made headlines when then they organized protest in front of the Ministry of Education headquarters in 2017.

students commonly expressed their ambivalence about the identity subjects by pointing to the futility of the material. International school parents were particularly frustrated by the amount of study time that their primary and middle school-aged children had to dedicate to memorizing the dates of various historical events and formulaic answers to routinized questions about “the circumstances leading up to 1919 revolution” or the “consequences of the Balta Liman treaty” in social studies. Since they themselves were exposed to very similar material that they also had to memorize -and ultimately forget- as students, the current accessibility of all the information that their children were memorizing on the Internet made the entire school subject all the more meaningless to them.⁷⁸ Not only parents, but the teachers of these subjects were equally concerned that the material did not speak to the developmental and intellectual level or interests of young people. Teachers talked about their frustration at having to explain to students “what’s the point” of learning this material when they, themselves found them irrelevant, and lacking any realistic connection to students’ lives. One social studies teacher told me that she tried to convince her students that learning the textbook material might come in handy if they ever wanted to go on a quiz show on television.

Ms. Suzan, for example, had been an Arabic teacher for more than twenty years when we met in the teachers’ room at one of the international schools I visited. She has been working in private schools for close to 15 years, the last five of which she was the

⁷⁸ Very few among the parents and teachers I met were aware of alternative approaches to the study of history and geography. Most seemed to presume that memorizing dates of important historical events or lists of various geographic terms and their locations was the only way history and geography could be learned.

Arabic teacher for students in the “American section” of an international school.⁷⁹ Ms. Suzan, like every Arabic teacher I met, was very unhappy with the curriculum (*al-manhag*), which she believed was the main reason why students were not taking the Arabic language and other ministry-required subjects (*mawad al-wizara*) seriously. Ms. Suzan, explained to me, that the textbook changed significantly over the years, claiming that curriculum reform was merely about cutting out repetitive material or switching order of lessons in the textbook.

Today, students don’t care for Arabic because they find no value in it for them. Why? Because as an Arabic teacher, and as a parent, I can tell you these lessons do not respond to what children need, they don’t add any substance to their life, their ability to deal with social issues, either as individuals or as a society...all the lessons are too simplistic. Perhaps, the only exception in Grade 9 would be a lesson on starting small business...Why should a 15-year old read a text (*nass*) about a pigeon...Even the passages from the Qur’an or the novel “*Tumuh Gariya*”⁸⁰ ...why don’t they include a novel about a young man who struggled to become a successful businessman, something more contemporary and relevant...why do they want they want to push the kids away...it’s all

⁷⁹ Many international schools in Cairo consisted of one campus comprising several so-called sections. The school where Ms. Suzanne taught, for example, included an American, British, French and national (Egyptian) section. Each section occupies a different floor in the school building.

⁸⁰ The novel offers a sexist narrative about the thirteenth-century Mamluk Sultana, Shajarit al-Durr.

memorization, nothing stimulates them intellectually, not realistic...write, but don't think”

Ms. Suzan could not add or change anything to the curriculum she taught because she is strictly supervised by the Ministry. She wished that she were able to teach a novel that used to be assigned in the past and which she found better suited to the students' interests, or that she could disregard lessons from the textbook that made the students' resent her subject, but she could not. Other Arabic, religion and social studies teachers I met shared very similar attitudes towards the identity subjects, as all emphasized the *futility* of the material irrespective of their pedagogical or ideological standpoints.

While Ms. Suzan upheld the importance of a centralized national curriculum that would ensure that schools do not mold Egyptian students according to competing ideologies and convictions, Ms. Fatma attributed the weakness of the curriculum to the state's weakness vis-à-vis foreign interests. Ms. Fatma had been an Arabic teacher for thirty years, fifteen of which she worked at an international school. When we met, she was working in a private language school that adopted an explicitly Islamic orientation. Ms. Fatma believes strongly that there was a meditated and systematic plan to undermine the value and relevance of the Arabic language and marginalize its importance in the identity of Egyptians. “The Arabic language equals Islam,” she told me. “There is international pressure on us to become civil (*madani*) or secular (*'almani*)” and this is why Islamic material is regularly reduced from the textbooks. Although education researchers suggest the opposite, namely that religious content has increased in the

Arabic curriculum (Sobhy 2015; Atallah and Maqar 2014), Ms. Fatma's views expressed widely shared anxieties surrounding education reform in Egypt (Sayed 2006). To illustrate her point, Ms. Fatma showed me a poem from the Arabic language textbook, in which references to *al-umma* (a transnational Muslim community) were replaced by *al-watan* (nation).

Notwithstanding her emphasis on the connection between Islam and Arabic, like Ms. Suzan, Ms. Fatma found that the Arabic textbook was filled with “silly” (*tafha*) texts, about personal hygiene and similar instructive lessons that did not have any substantial contribution to student learning and development. Consequently, Ms. Fatma found the spread of international education to be an integral component in the overarching plan to undermine Arabic. In these schools, Arabic and other Arabic-medium subjects were inferior to the other subjects taught in foreign languages, and to which students were required to pay more attention. For example, the government-required nine classes of Arabic per week were reduced to four or five classes per week, a fact that Ms. Fatma thought showed its real value in students' education. Ironically, even at Ms. Fatma private Islamic school, English was the principal medium of instruction.

While Ms. Fatma and Ms. Suzan focused on the content of the textbook as obstacles in Arabic language education, Mr. Adel focused on the pedagogical attitudes and ideology underlying Arabic language education. Mr. Adel worked for seven years at an international school before deciding to shift his career to teach Arabic as foreign language to adults. Since Mr. Adel has a Master degree in Arabic pedagogy, his assessment of the relationship between pedagogical theory and practice in Arabic

language education offered a more complex account than the one offered by Ms. Suzanne. According to Mr. Adel, the biggest challenge to Arabic language education lay in the ideological rigidity of institutions graduating Arabic teachers and scholars, specifically *Dar al-'Ulum* and *Al-Azhar*, the two most important institutions of higher education in Arabic. The problem, for Mr. Adel, preceded the content of Arabic textbooks. For him, Arabic education scholars were ideologically-motivated to resist the adoption of progressive pedagogical techniques. He claimed that these scholars and the institutions they represented firmly believed that adopting progressive methodologies in Arabic language education would further a grand plan to disintegrate the Arabic language, and by extension the cultural unity of the Arab Muslim nation. To Mr. Adel, there was nothing surprising about the negative correlation between Arabic subjects and good education. It made perfect sense to him that the better the school, the less emphasis it placed on Arabic subjects. This, according to Mr. Adel, was the logical consequence of the pedagogical rigidity of Egyptian educators in charge with devising the national curriculum in all subjects.

Yet, another vital source for students' lack of interest in the government-required subjects that was not addressed by the teachers, was the language of instruction in and of itself. Although most students at international schools were native speakers of Egyptian Arabic, very few of the students I met were proficient in modern standard Arabic (*fusha*). None of the students I met, including the well-read among them, had ever read a book in Arabic other than material assigned in school. Besides exams, students never wrote in Arabic. Most text messages exchanged between internationally educated youth, and

possibly the entire community of cosmopolitan Egyptians, was in Latin script even when words or entire sentences were in Egyptian Arabic. I will discuss students' conception and use of Egyptian Arabic at length in the following chapter. However, what is important to highlight with respect to Arabic language education and the broader government-required curriculum is the linguistic and cultural distance separating international school students from these subjects. Not only was classical Arabic an isolated linguistic field within students' overall English-medium (or French or German) education, it was also isolated from their everyday exchanges in Egyptian Arabic.

Although many parents and teachers attributed students' weak Arabic language skills to their international education, their relationship to Arabic was part of the broader linguistic situation in Egypt in which classical Arabic coexisted with the Egyptian vernacular (C. A. Ferguson 1959; Haeri 2003). Egyptian Arabic is the vernacular form that was used within international school communities and dominated all forms of oral communication in Egypt. Classical Arabic and Egyptian Arabic share cognates, sounds, and most phonemes but differ in their syntactical structure. Egyptian Arabic, moreover, entails elements of Coptic, Turkish, Italian, French and English. In spite of the rendering of Egyptian Arabic as the *de facto* native language of Egyptians, a modernized version of Classical Arabic is not only the official language of the country, but is also the only acceptable form of academic writing and the only appropriate form for official communication. In an important study on the configuration of the linguistic field in Egypt, Niloofar Haeri (2003) suggested that the coexistence of *fusha* and *'amiyya* shaped Egyptians' attitudes towards literary and creative self-expression beyond the specific

challenges of internationally educated Egyptians. Her work also drew attention to the inverse relationship between social mobility (educational mobility) and proficiency in classical Arabic as she showed how the educated elite in the 1990s were more inclined to master a foreign language than to improve their classical Arabic skills (Haeri 1997).

This brief overview of the political, pedagogical and linguistic situation structuring students' exposure to nationally relevant content at school aimed to highlight the contact frame against which students developed their ideas about Egyptian culture and their relationship to it. I argue that rather than cultivating students' sense of national belonging, the integration of government subjects (*mawad al-wizara*) in international education accentuated the discrepancies between "local" and "international" in students' experiences. This dissonance appeared to have been particularly pronounced in the years following the 2011 uprising, the context of my study.

The re-nationalization of international schools in post-2011 Egypt

The structural inferiority of nationally-relevant subjects in international education and its intensification through the broader ideology and cultural politics of language in Egypt was the overarching framework that shaped the attitudes of internationally educated youth to official constructions of Egyptian national culture. Given the total monopoly of the state over nationally relevant content in national as well as in international schools, schools effectively had little, if any, power to intervene in the curriculum, educational material or instruction of these subjects. However, this situation appeared to have been momentarily disrupted in the aftermath of the 2011 when, in a

state of patriotic fervor, local teachers and students in international schools initiated new activities and programs that aimed to foster students' national belonging.⁸¹

At ISN, many local teachers felt an urge to respond to the patriotic fervor following the 2011 uprising by creating new forums for students to express and celebrate their national belonging. In the months immediately following the uprising, for example, ISN, as well as many other international schools, started a tradition of celebrating an "Egyptian Day" and established a set of curricular and extracurricular activities aimed explicitly at fostering students' sense of belonging to and pride in Egypt and its culture. This included a course called Egyptian Culture (EC) and a yearly event featuring guest speakers who talked about the patriotic objectives or relevance of their careers to the advancement and development of Egypt.

According to Dr. Mona Aziz, who was the school leader behind the design of these activities, the school's commitment to national Egyptian culture was long overdue. She wanted EC to fill what she described as the "the cultural void" (*al-fagwa al-thiqafiyya*) of not only ISN students, but the entire generation (*fagwat gil*) to which they belonged. Hence, she developed the class with an eye on exposing students to "to what makes us who we are," she explained in English, so they can feel proud of themselves and their rich culture. Dr. Mona claimed that a lack of exposure to Egyptian literature, arts and mass-mediated popular culture was fostering students' sense of cultural dependence, and a sense of insecurity that undermined their personal and professional

⁸¹ I say momentarily because ever since 2011-2013, no new initiatives or programs were devised at ISN or other international schools that I have been following.

success. She was particularly concerned about the attitudes of parents and students for whom “learning about Egyptian culture is a waste of time.” “They think that to succeed, they have to be like them [Westerners]...And, unfortunately, this is how Egyptian parents nowadays think.” Dr. Mona found the state complicit in fostering this attitude among upwardly mobile Egyptians, suggesting that the cultural estrangement of the educated elite might be in the best interest of an authoritarian regime. Her views resonated with a longstanding critique of the political regime, levelled particularly at the Mubarak regime, for intentionally neglecting the cultural sector and marginalizing intellectuals and critical writers so that they could not establish a popular base.

In addition to carving out new curricular and extracurricular activities, local teachers at ISN told me that school regulations prohibiting students and teachers from communicating in Arabic became overnight obsolete as students and teachers became more sensitive to practices that undermined their culture and identity. A perfect illustration of this patriotic turn and how it problematized middle-class attitudes towards globalization in post-2011 Egypt was Naila Fouda’s narrative of self-transformation following the 2011 uprising.

Naila graduated from ISN in 2005 and had been working at the central bank of Egypt when the 2011 uprising erupted. She was deeply moved by the young people who took to the streets and their courageousness and commitment to “doing something for the country” (*ye’milo haga l’il-balad*). “The revolution made me see that there was an entire world out there that I had no idea existed...I realized how little I knew about Egypt, the city where I lived my entire life...I realized I lived in a parallel world where everyone

pretended *not* to be Egyptian.” The indifference and self-centeredness of her circle of friends towards what was happening around them pushed her to reconsider everything about her life. She stopped spending time with her school and college friends, quit her job and applied to a graduate program in development studies at the American University in Cairo. Upon completing the program, she got a job at a local NGO that organized arts workshops for low-income children. She took up her job as EC assistant teacher and coordinator of student activities at ISN because she found it to be a good opportunity to intervene in the lives of young people like herself.

In the literature examining social development in post-2011 Egyptian society, scholars have noted an upsurge in middle-class political participation, civic activities and volunteerism (Winegar 2016; Hamdy 2012; Mittermeier 2014). Even though this literature addressed the patriotic motivations and nationalist discourses that informed many of these practices, it has not fully explored the broader “structure of feelings” (Williams 1977) of which they were part, or how they stood in relation to formal or “banal” (Billig 1995) articulations of belonging and patriotism preceding the 2011 uprising (Schielke 2017). This is particularly pertinent to understanding the “nationalist turn” in international schools where patriotism, as suggested by the illustrations in my introduction, entailed the questioning of embodied everyday practices. In Naila’s narrative of the events of 2011, as well as in many others I’ve been exposed to in conversations with college students and teachers about the events of 2011, the unanticipated disruption of the structural stability of everyday middle-class life in Cairo brought about what Jarett Zigon called a “moral breakdown” (Zigon 2007) for many.

According to Zigon, a moral breakdown expressed “moments that shake one out of the everydayness of being moral...when must find ways, and choosing and reasoning may be two of the possible ways, to return to the unreflective state of being moral” (Zigon 2007: 133). Naila did not perceive her lack of knowledge of Egyptian history or unfamiliarity with her city as morally problematic prior to 2011. In 2016, her life remained in many ways similar to her life in pre-2011. What significantly changed according to her narrative was her ability to take this “parallel” lifestyle for granted, realizing that she needed to negotiate between her personal choices and inclinations and other consideration that had to do with being part of a national community.

In international schools, and the broader sites making up so-called “cosmopolitan Cairo,” the moral breakdown entailed questioning attitudes towards local culture and the nation more broadly. A desire to distance oneself culturally and socially from the nation, institutionalized through international education, and which Naila described as “pretending not be Egyptian,” was in turn reversed into a renewed commitment to “do something for the country” (*a’mil haga l’il balad*). Consequently, the desire to cultivate students’ sense of pride and belonging to the nation, understood as a conscious and deliberate commitment to celebrating local practices and forms and an active or intellectual engagement with “making the country better” (*el-balad teb’a ahsan*), was one of the primary goals that ISN teachers were aiming for.

During the classes I attended at ISN, and throughout my conversations with students, only a few reiterated official state discourses about nationalism that were dominant in 2016/2017, such as blind support for the military, or holding the Muslim

Brotherhood as traitors of the nation, etc. However, such views were largely peripheral to a more basic interest in identifying, defending or negotiating Egyptian culture or discussing how students fit within their society. Nowhere were these concerns as clearly articulated as in the Egyptian Culture (EC) class, a course designed to make up for the deficiency of the national curriculum.

This is not “the real Egypt”

During my first meeting with Ms. Sarah Gamil, she explained to me that the main objective of the EC course was to expose students to “the real Egypt,” to show them what’s going on outside of their circumscribed and sheltered environment. What they were studying in the government-required classes was irrelevant to Ms. Gamil’s design of the course. She assumed that students were not getting much out of their classes and hence she never took the time to review their textbooks or to compare her syllabus with the national curriculum. Moreover, Ms. Gamil was certain that her goals could not overlap with those of the state’s, which was primarily concerned with sharing an idealized and dishonest image of itself and Egyptian society. It was also not a curriculum, she maintained, that was designed with the specific socioeconomic and cultural circumstances of her students in mind.

Ms. Gamil’s goal of raising ISN students’ awareness of their secluded lifestyle and narrow perspective on Egyptian life expressed two presumptions about the students: First, that they were “blindly nationalistic” because they lived in idealized, ‘unreal’ conditions that spared them from experiencing what “life really look like for the majority of Egyptians”. Second, that their lives were atypical of the lives of the majority of

Egyptians, past and present. They were “too Westernized,” felt superior to “Egyptians,” and at the same time held exaggerated and romanticized views about “Egyptians.” “ISN students live in Egypt, but they don’t know much about it,” she summarized.

Ironically, Ms. Gamil was also not a “typical Egyptian” whatever that meant. She was born in the 1970s in Maryland to Egyptian migrants. Although they visited family on yearly basis, her first long visit to Egypt was in the late 1990s as a study abroad student at the American University in Cairo. She told me that during that year she was exposed to the life of “elite Egyptians” through her AUC friends. She was quite surprised and confused finding out that Egyptian youth did many of the things that she was not allowed to do back home “*because* she was Egyptian.” Years later, her family moved back to Egypt, where she started working in a civil society organization on women’s issues. She switched career when working in human rights organizations became risky in the months following the 2011 uprisings, and took up this job at ISN. As expected, Ms. Gamil was not in a position to follow Dr. Mona’s design of EC since her exposure to Egyptian culture was mainly through her parents who grew up in rural Egypt and her education in Middle East studies. Still, she fulfilled an important requirement for the job since she had “one foot in America, and one foot in Egypt” as one of the teachers described the school’s disinclination to hire an “ordinary Egyptian” for this course.

On several occasions, Ms. Gamil expressed feeling disconnected from her students’ culture and lifestyle, which she found to share little with the Egyptian life she knew from her parents and relatives. Her courses drew extensively from established reading texts in American universities on Egyptian history and included a couple of

works in fiction written by Egyptians either in English or translated, including Ahdaf Soueif's *Map of Love* and Yahia Haqqi's *Lamp of Um Hashim*. Other activities on the syllabus included preparing an Egyptian dish and writing an essay about it, a final project where students were asked to work on a creative representation of what "being Egyptian" meant to them among other modules focusing on the modern history of Egypt.

Throughout our conversations and my observations of her classes, Ms. Gamil objective of exposing students to the real Egypt often came out through recurring emphases on students' fringe culture and lifestyle as Westernized and privileged Egyptians, an issue that frequently stirred debates among students. The day Ms. Gamil discussed students' final project was one such occasion.

It was Halloween. In the last few years, Halloween has become almost mainstream across cosmopolitan circles and sites in Cairo; shopping malls put up Halloween decorations, grocery stores sell Halloween themed food and announcement and invitations to Halloween parties are regularly circulated on social media. However, by far the most focal site for Halloween in Egypt is Cairo's private schools and nurseries, especially, but not only, international ones.⁸² Since ISN is an American school, the Halloween celebration was even regarded as an "authentic" part of the students' American education and one of the ways through which the school exposed Egyptian

⁸² The normalization of Halloween as a yearly celebration in Egyptian schools has not passed without contention. Many refer to the appropriation of Halloween as an illustration of Egyptians' loose sense of their cultural identity and their foolish mimicry of Western practices. This is a widely shared view, even among parents who dress up their children for Halloween. Most admit that there is no harm in the celebration as long as it makes the children happy. Still, not celebrating Halloween is, in fact, one of the strong suits of Islamic international schools and some private national schools and attests to a school's commitment to fostering students' Egyptian cultural identity.

students to American culture. “I’m glad you are here today,” exclaimed Ms. Gamil when she saw me at her classroom door, “you get to see all the cultural confusion for yourself,” she said while looking at the few students who were dressed up for Halloween.

I walked towards my usual spot at the back of classroom, next to Layla and Ali, who seemed to have gotten used to my presence. I could tell that because, in three weeks of attending class with them, that was the first time they almost greeted me with a hesitant smile that I took to mean that they finally recognized me. Layla was wearing a flower headband, a white gypsy skirt over a white top. I thought she was dressed up as a hippie until I overheard her explain to Farah, the girl sitting on her right, that she was dressed as Jackie, one of the female characters in the American TV show “That 70s Show”. Ali, too, was dressed up. He was wearing a red bandana around his neck, a patterned buttoned-up shirt over jeans. I asked him about his costume and he said he was dressed up as a Hispanic gangster. When students had finally taken their seats and brought their side talks to an end, one of the students asked Ms. Gamil whom she was dressed up as. She said that she was dressed up as Wedad Mitry, “her favorite Egyptian feminist.” None of the students was able to guess who she meant. She pointed to her picture on the billboard, next to the pictures of Magdi Ya’coub, a renowned Egyptian-British heart surgeon, and Naguib Mahfouz, a novelist who won the Nobel Prize for literature in the late 1980s. “You will get to know all about her in the course of the semester.” That day, Ms. Gamil wanted to discuss students’ final projects. As has been the tradition in her class on Egyptian Culture, students’ final project had to engage the question of Egyptian identity, specifically, what it meant to them. To get them inspired,

towards the end of class, she showed them one of the best projects that a student in her class from last year submitted. The film was titled “Female Egyptian Idol.”

The film “Female Egyptian Idol” was a short 4-minute film that featured four women contestants to the title of “*al-Mar’a al-Masriyya al-Mithaliyya*” (*the Ideal Egyptian Woman*), all four characters were played by one student. The theme echoed a longstanding tradition for local governments and civil society organizations to recognize “the ideal mother” (*al-um al-mithaliyya*) of the year. That is at least where the student probably derived the Arabic title that her characters used in the film. However, it was more likely that the student’s main inspiration was from the popular Idol TV show given how the script was written and the film shot. The room was completely quiet, everyone seemed impressed by the students’ acting skills, her traditional costumes, and her ability to impersonate regional dialects and narratives- at least for a Cairene audience whose main reference would be popular media renditions of these dialects. The film included a brief presentation by each of the women, who introduced herself and explained why she deserved the title of the “Egyptian idol” followed by a short clip that featured each woman in her natural environment.

The first woman was, *Bahiyya*, a farmer (peasant) from the Delta region, dressed in a bright colored traditional *galabiya falahi* (peasant robe) with a long black veil loosely covering her hair. Bahiyya presented herself as a hardworking farmer who deserved the title because she represented what was most precious in Egypt, the Nile and

the land. The second woman was *Hajja Fatma*,⁸³ from the desert lands of Upper Egypt.⁸⁴ Hajja Fatma was married off as a child to a man old enough to be her father who died shortly after and left her to take care of their children. If *Bahiyya* was soft-spoken and sympathetic as peasant girls are stereotypically represented, *Hajja Fatma* was the archetypal Upper Egyptian woman of Egyptian TV dramas and movies. She was dressed in a black robe and black scarf that was wrapped around her head like a bandana, leaving the rest of the scarf falling on her back over a black robe. In a stern and grim tone, Hajja Fatma explained that she deserved the title because as Upper Egyptian woman, she was the best “caretaker” (*murabiyya*) who carried both the firmness of men and kindness of women. The third character was *Amar* from Abu Qir on the Mediterranean Coast. In keeping with the stereotypes of Alexandrian women, the film featured Amal as an attractive woman, dressed in the traditional tightly fit dress of *banat al-balad* featured in Egyptian art and cinema with tingling coins, loosely covered with a *milaya laff*.⁸⁵ Amar works in the fishing industry, her contribution to Egypt’s industrial development earned her the title of Egyptian Idol. The final contestant was a working-class woman from Cairo. Dressed in a long straight skirt and colorful top, her hair covered tightly in layers of patterned cloth, Amar used English words (badly pronounced) to show that, unlike the other women, she didn’t just make a living by following in the

⁸³ Fatma is pronounced Fatna in some variations of Egyptian dialects.

⁸⁴ So-called the Deeper S’aid (*al-sa’id al-juwani*) is commonly thought of as the most unchanging and conservative part of Egypt.

⁸⁵ According to *El-Messiri* (1978), the sartorial tradition of *banat al-balad* was losing ground to modern dress in the 1970s. I have personally never seen a woman outside of TV and Cinema dressed in this style.

footstep of her elders. She tried different jobs, took classes in English and computer, and boasted that she was a self-made woman.

When the film ended, the room was remarkably quiet. I could tell the students were taken by the acting skills of a former ISN student, especially her ability to impersonate characters so different from her own. In an effort to start a discussion, Ms. Gamil asked if they could picture an ISN student competing over the title of Egyptian Idol. “Of course, not,” exclaimed Ali. “ISN students are all American wannabes. They think everything Egyptian is ‘*yay*’⁸⁶.” Ms. Gamil seemed pleased by Ali’s reaction, and asked others to react to what he said. “Do you think you live or look like any of these women? she asked provokingly. The room remained silent, but Ali had something to add. “Students in international and elite schools seem to think they are not Egyptian, they don’t like Egyptian music and if they see someone listening to Egyptian music, they would look down upon them. None of them has ever stepped foot in *Muqattam*⁸⁷ or any *sha’bi* neighborhood, or know how to milk a cow or ever been to the countryside.” Ali’s short tirade about ISN students seemed to have really tipped Hassan off, who cut him off with “Look at what you are wearing [pointing at Ali’s Halloween gangster costume] Egyptians are not only those milking cows or hanging out in Sayida Zeinab [a *sha’bi* neighborhood indeed]. You are also using Snapchat and doing all those things you say others do”. Now, all the students were talking among each other. Ms. Gamil tried to bring

⁸⁶ *Yay* is an Egyptian satirical expression of elitist disgust or revulsion towards *baladi* forms associated with urban elite (e.g. “*yay baladi*”).

⁸⁷ *Muqattam* is a solid middle-class neighborhood in Cairo, but Ali seemed to use it as an example of a low-income neighborhood.

the room to order but it was very hard to keep the students quiet now. Muhammad said, addressing Hassan, that ISN were indeed a “minority...we are like foreigners in Egypt.” Class time was nearly over. It seemed to be a habit of hers to start heated discussions towards the end of class time. She reminded students that they didn’t represent more than one percent of Egypt’s 100 million residents, if they even constituted that much. The room was tense and students seemed to be continuing the discussion among each other. Hassan was red with frustration.

Ms. Gamil’s emphasis that students couldn’t situate themselves among the characters in the film was striking given that the script relied almost exclusively on stereotypical, clichéd and essentialized representations of provincial women, their styles, narratives and dialects in Egyptian movies and TV dramas. If anything, it showed the student filmmaker as someone well-versed in Egyptian cinema and TV dramas. Her discussion of that film was one of many similar discussions I attended in which the main message for the students was their nonconformity with an Egyptianness that their privilege allowed them to escape, and suggesting that Egyptianness was a classed experience that wealth and privilege contradicted. Such views were very popular among her students and other graduates of international schools at the time in college.

In fact, every time one of the teachers at ISN introduced me to a new group of students at ISN, they would initiate a conversation by telling them that I was interested in their identity, their sense of belonging to Egyptian society. Every time the students would react with a knowing smile to their teacher upon hearing a mention of their identity, as though they had just talked about this a minute before I appeared. Many times, they had.

Their reactions seemed almost always planned or rehearsed. A quick and decisive “we are not *really* Egyptian” would immediately be followed by a hesitant retraction from what was just uttered, “we are more like *khwagat*,” and then an even further step back: “because we are *metdalla 'in*” (spoilt or sheltered), we are not like the majority of Egyptians.” Students’ first reactions when presented with the topic of my study patterned most of their class discussions, their go-to-answer to most inquiries about their self-understanding and sense of belonging to Egypt. In subsequent interactions with the same students, few expressed the same firmness in their self-presentation as “not really Egyptian,” most shifted their tone to a more self-critical narrative about living a privileged life in a poor country or-as one of the students described himself- as embodying “the collateral damage” of Egypt’s modernization project.

A few days after Ms. Gamil showed the Female Egyptian Idol film in her class, I had a chat with Yassin and Ms. Gamil about it in her classroom. Yassin was one of those students who liked to hang out in Ms. Gamil’s classroom. He was a rather quiet student who didn’t participate much in class discussions. Outside of the classroom, Yassin had a lot more to say to me. He identified as poet and a Marxist and was very much interested in my research. Ms. Gamil and Ms. Naila, her assistant, commonly included Yassin in our discussions. Although they did that with other students, with Yassin they talked as though he were one of them, a grownup commenting on what the teenagers did and thought. As usual, Yassin offered me the sophisticated version of ideas his classmates often struggled to articulate. We were discussing how students reacted the other day

about the film; Ms. Gamil and Naila applauding Ali's tirade against ISN students. Yassin seemed to agree.

"Being someone who comes from a rich background," he explained to me, "you don't have an experience of this trauma that others share." Although our talk was about the women represented in the film, Yassin related the trauma that "Egyptians" share to the exclusion of the rich among them to experiences of being harassed by a police officer at a checkpoint, having to do military service or stand in line at a bureaucratic office.⁸⁸ In other exchanges with Yassin, he referred to a "struggle" and "poverty" as essential experiences shared among the majority of Egyptians, experiences of which ISN students were oblivious.

Although the intention of raising students' consciousness of their privilege may have been a key aspect of their civic education, it was isolated within an educational program that did not engage students in the social and political life of the country. Most of Ms. Gamil's class discussions about issues such as democracy, social justice, gender or pluralism drew extensively on debates and issues in American public life. Ms. Gamil's personal anecdotes and examples were mostly based on her life in the US and the experiences of Muslim and Egyptian migrants in the West. In Ms. Gamil's other classes, for example, students debated abortion, discussed the American presidential elections,

⁸⁸ While well-connected Egyptians find ways to evade these situations or get out of them, the assumption that well-off Egyptians are not subjected to police harassments or stopped at checkpoints was not entirely accurate given the number of times I listened to accounts of well-off Egyptian youth being harassed by the police, going through military service or managing bureaucratic matters. There is certainly stark inequality in the experience of the process, but Yassin seemed to assume that he could evade this by being wealthy.

racism against African Americans without including an equally in-depth examination of Egyptian political or social issues. Even when discussions were focused on social problems in Egypt, such as discrimination against garbage collectors or sexual harassment, the West, in general, and the United States, in particular, loomed large as the only frame of reference for thinking through these local issues. The resultant discrepancy between the levels at which students were expected to engage with the intricacies of social and political life in the US and Egypt was quite manifest in my conversations with those students who were interested in politics “but not Egyptian politics”.

At the same time, class assignments and discussions tended to objectify Egyptian culture in a way that disregarded the rootedness of students’ daily life in local social and cultural practices and exposed them to “aspects of Egyptian culture” as though they were foreigners in their own cultural milieu. For example, one of the EC’s class assignments required that a group of students prepare a different Egyptian dish, serve it to the classmates along with a presentation that addressed its composition, history and meaning in Egyptian culture. When Ms. Gamil first mentioned the assignment to me, I found it an engaging way to encourage students to think anthropologically about culture especially since in my conversations with students I found that their conception of culture (*thiqafa*) was still closely associated with high culture. Students were allowed to choose from a list of dishes specified by Ms. Gamil, which included food items that were served on regular basis in Egyptian households, like *foul* (fava beans), stuffed grape leaves, and *molokhiya* (a vegetable served as a soup with rice). Rather than presenting an opportunity for the students to reflect on the constitution of culture, students were predominantly concerned

about assessing the quality of the dishes they were eating. In their reactions to the day they had *foul*, for example, most students were primarily concerned about how the teacher didn't emphasize the importance of adding lemon to the dish and that other more popular ways of serving fava beans were not covered. "Although it did taste good," one student wrote in their report, "I believe it needed some lemon and a bit more tomato. The texture of the Ful was pleasant and the smell was the general known smell of Ful. The atmosphere and general impression was very cozy and reminded me of having traditional Egyptian breakfast on Fridays." Most student essays about the fava bean dish expressed nuances of the same ideas, where they appeared almost confused about the assignment. The teacher seemed to have overlooked the fact that most students, no matter how privileged or cosmopolitan their outlooks appeared, lived in Egyptian homes and within extended families where "Egyptian food" was just food. Many students wrote about the way *foul* is prepared in their own homes. Like any interlocutor an anthropologist meets in the field, the students were acting like any "native" would if presented with a familiar dish and asked to comment on it.

Purification and the Production of Authenticity

Discourses about Egyptianness circulating through international schools, and which distinguished between real or authentic Egyptians and those who are "not really Egyptian" on account of their privilege and cosmopolitan lifestyle, expressed a conception of identity and cultural belonging that refused to recognize or acknowledge the hybridity and flexibility of students' subjectivities as valid and legitimate. Such an understanding of identity was not only articulated in exchanges between and among

students and teachers, but was mediated through the institutional culture of ISN and most international schools in Egypt, where upholding the boundary between “Egyptian culture” and the culture of the country to which a school is affiliated was possibly the most vital factor supporting a school’s claim to internationalism and accordingly its value in the education market. A most vivid example of this fundamental approach to culture and identity was the hiring practices of international schools.

One of the most valuable features that upgraded or downgraded the reputation of an international school in Egypt was the percentage of foreigners among its teaching and managerial staff. Not only should these foreigners ideally be native speakers of the school’s language of instruction (Americans at an American school, British at a British school, etc.), but they should also not include foreigners living in Egypt who applied for a job as international school teacher. However, since 2011, safety concerns and the general political and economic instability in Egypt significantly affected both the quantity and caliber of foreign teachers who were willing to come to work in Egypt. Consequently, many schools were finding ways to sustain their reputation as institutions that were predominantly staffed by foreigners by hiring Egyptians ‘who could pass as foreigners.’

At ISN, for example, with the exception of the teachers of Arabic, religious education and civics, all ethnic Egyptian or Arab teachers were either Americans by nationality or of mixed descent. All were native English speakers with a distinctive American accent. Assistant teachers were an intermediary category because most, like Ms. Fouda, were graduates of ISN or more prestigious international schools. The school

didn't even make an exception to this obvious hiring bias when it offered Ms. Sarah Gamil, an Egyptian-American from Maryland, the job of an "Egyptian culture" teacher.

In my conversations with international school teachers at ISN and beyond, the discriminatory hiring practices of international schools were indicative of binary interpretation of internationalism in Egypt's educational landscape. Ms. Shahira Younis, for example, who was a mathematics teacher with a BSc in Physics and a doctorate degree in education told me that her mixed American-Egyptian decent, her white (European) looks and American accent played a role as equal in importance in her recruitment as her academic qualifications. Shahira recounted that on her very first day at ISN, she was told "not to utter a word in Arabic" (*matefta 'hish bu 'ik bi kilma 'arabi*), which she didn't for the first few months of working there. Noura Shalabi, the principal of ISN's middle school, offered an even more dramatic account of her experience. Noura was herself an Egyptian-American from New Jersey who only moved to Cairo in 2005 when she was in her early thirties. Noura had a Master degree in sociology and was working a journalist in the United States before choosing to take up a job at ISN as a way for her to reconnect with her Egyptian roots. Yet, notwithstanding her education and the fact that she was American, some parents asked to get their kids out of her class when they found out she was Egyptian. The situation did not improve when she attained more managerial responsibilities as assistant principal since parents would ask to talk to the school owner whenever they had a disagreement with her.

“The other Egyptians who worked here when I first started were of slightly lower class and did not have my same level of education. I think this hurt me more because parents couldn’t call me *bi’a* (trash). They saw I was educated (*mit’alima*) and of good family (*’ilti kwayissa*). They resented what I wasn’t in their head...It’s almost as it’s self-hatred. They think they are Westernized and they know they really are not, and I’m unfortunately a mirror of both sides”⁸⁹

Like Shahira, Noura, too was explicitly informed not to speak in Arabic at school. Yet, in Noura’s case, the requirement became a necessity in order to gain parents’ approval. Rather than receiving institutional support to enact her cultural bifocality, Noura felt compelled to “un-Egyptianize” herself and emphasize her Americanness in her dealings with parents and students.

In the narratives of teachers, such attitudes and institutional practices were reflective of the “*khawaga* complex” of Egyptians, in general, and the upper classes, in particular.⁹⁰ However, rather than explaining the *khawaga* complex through the logic of racial discrimination or self-hatred as many of the teachers did, I emphasize the cultural

⁸⁹ It is important note that parents rationalized the relatively exorbitant amount of money they spent on school tuition as the cost of recruiting internationally trained teachers that less expensive schools would not be able to afford. In many ways, this hierarchal logic of expertise that placed Egyptian professionals at the bottom was reflective of broader structures of inequality that Egyptian parents, many of whom with experience working alongside foreigners in multinational corporations in Egypt and throughout the Middle East, were very familiar with.

⁹⁰ I introduced the Khwaga Complex in the introduction as a vernacular idiom that criticized Egyptians’ preference for all things foreign and constructed it as a pathological obsession with foreigners.

binary that generated the *khawaga* complex and produced the structural ambiguity of teachers like Shahira and Noura at the international school. Like the students, these teachers did not fit in the divergent constructions of Egyptian and American. Their hybrid identities problematized the physical and symbolic boundaries that separated the two cultures. However, unlike most students, they could shift into the category of Americans by downplaying or outright negating aspects of their subjectivity that were Egyptian.

To “behave Egyptian”

In this chapter, I interrogated the educational practices that produced discourses about belonging and nonbelonging in international schools. In the first part of this chapter, I argued that the organizational structure of international schools constructed a binary understanding of internationalism that drew a boundary around all things, people and practices that were marked as national or local. This dichotomous organization of the school culture extended and amplified the hierarchical relationship between national and international forms of knowledge (school subjects) and expertise (teachers). I discussed how the monopoly of the state over the teaching of nationally-relevant subjects, and the specific ideological and sociolinguistic configuration of these subjects exacerbated the gap between nationally-based education and non-national education that international-school students were exposed to. In the second part of this chapter, I looked at how, motivated by the exceptional circumstances of the 2011 uprising, one school tried to address the structural and pedagogical constraints of nationally-relevant education. Through an examination of teachers’ accounts, class discussions, and assignments, I showed how this alternative ‘national-culture revitalization program’ reproduced a

classed construction of Egyptianness and belonging that strongly echoed colonial conceptualization of cultural and ethnic boundaries. In trying to raise students' awareness of issues of inequality, the progressive educational discourses of ISN teachers excluded the privileged and cosmopolitan lifestyle of internationally educated from its construction of Egyptianness. Central in my analysis, was how this school culture and the kinds of socioeconomic and cultural boundaries it drew between national and international contradicted the cultural fluidity that defined the lifestyle of Egypt's cosmopolitan elite, the cultural bifocality of many of the 'Egyptian-American' teachers who taught at the school and the much more complex socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural composition of Egyptians and non-Egyptians in the school population. This contradiction patterned students' understanding of belonging and their self-exclusion from the national community. This was most clearly illustrated in the mural, which I introduced at the beginning of the chapter, in which students presented the bodies of religious, traditional and poor people as the embodiment of 'Egypt, the mother of the world.' The messages on the walls also reflected this internalized sense of exclusion by emphasizing the sanctity of the Arabic language, as the mediator of culture and history, when it was an undisputed fact that ISN students spoke "bad Arabic." Even in contexts where students were encouraged to think creatively and critically about their identity, as in Ms. Gamil's classes, essentialized, clichéd and stereotypical representations of Egyptians foregrounded their discussions.

In the following chapter, I examine how students' constructions of Egyptianness as a fixed identity and class-specific experience patterned students' social practice

beyond classroom discussion and artistic productions. I show how, outside of contexts in which they were explicitly called upon to make sense of their identity, students navigated the binary culture of their school through a rich repertoire of embodied social practice that exposed the malleability of the cultural boundaries that they helped reinforce. One of the Egyptian-American teachers at ISN told me that her supervisor once casually instructed her to “not talk too much in Arabic with students, because then they start behaving Egyptian.” She recounted this incident to me once to show how American teachers internalized and participated in practices that discriminated against and undermined students’ national and cultural identity. The anecdote stuck with me as I observed the way in which students mixed styles and linguistic practices and how they casually drew on a range of cultural and moral codes to make an argument or tell a story. It became clear to me that an important impetus behind the institutional practices and educational discourses that reified colonial cultural binaries at ISN was that it operated in a context in which young elite Egyptians were constantly challenging fixed cultural categories, and disrupting, by virtue of their class identity and cultural practices, the power dynamics that sustained these boundaries. If Ms. Gamil’s supervisor was able to detect when students started to “behave Egyptian,” this didn’t only mean that they were able to “behave un-Egyptian” but that they were constantly shifting between the divergently constructed social practices that they embodied.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gendered Paths to Belonging: Fashioning Egyptianness in International Schools

Months after the end of my fieldwork, I got a call from Yassin. He had been living in Canada for close to an academic semester and wanted to chat about how his experience was changing the way he perceived his life in Egypt. He was understandably homesick and wanted to talk about missing the “Egyptian way”: of paying for drinks or meals for friends and not having to sit down and make calculations about who owes what to whom, about “chilling,” not taking everything so seriously and working all the time, practices he attributed to Canadians. He was saying how ironic he found it that he and his friends were missing “the Egyptian way” now when “some of them wouldn’t have been caught dead doing anything local back home.” “What do you mean ‘anything local,’” I asked him:

I mean anything *baladi*...you know what I mean... [after insisting he explain to me as though I were not Egyptian] it’s a negative term about manners, or ways of dressing or talking that are lower class... I honestly felt proud when this girl last summer called us *baladi* for teaching her boyfriend swearwords...[How come I asked] It meant that we were doing *something* right...that we were doing *something* Egyptian.

Yassin’s expressed sense of pride in cursing because it indicated that he and his friends were engaging in “local” linguistic practices confirmed my observations about a

gender division in students' personal narratives and attitudes towards issues of belonging, culture and identity. Most striking to me was an implicit and embodied discrepancy in the ways in which the linguistic practices of boys and girls aligned with local and cosmopolitan cultural repertoires. This discrepancy was manifested in the ways in which girls and boys talked, how they comported themselves, and in their overall self-presentation.

This observation contested students' self-presentation and representations as 'bourgeois' and Westernized, especially since I had found that the more popular male students at ISN commonly performed a range of semiotic practices that indexed *sha'bi* or *baladi* registers associated with Egypt's traditional working classes. Girls, on the other hand, did not engage in *sha'bi*-inflected linguistic practices and explicitly distanced themselves from any cultural practices associated with lower classes. As I probed this division further in class discussions and in conversations with students and parents, it became clear to me that this linguistic discrepancy was part of a broader divergence in the cultural construction of ideal femininity and masculinity that patterned the socialization of men and women of this class.

In this chapter, I explore the divergently constructed ideals of femininity and masculinity that circulated in and around international schools and examine how they mediated divergent practices and experiences of inclusion and exclusion from class and nation. My analysis challenges conventional understandings of Egypt's cosmopolitan-class culture in scholarship and Egyptian popular culture, which tie the appropriation of Western-inflected cultural practices to a relatively liberal or emancipatory attitudes

towards gender and sexuality. Instead, by examining the divergently constructed feminine and masculine ideals that circulated across international school communities, I show how cosmopolitan-inflected semiotic practices (like speaking English exclusively or being totally immersed in globally-dominant trends in popular culture) played a restrictive role in students' and parents' narratives of (non)belonging and (dis)connectedness. I argue that elite boys' appropriation of *sha'bi*-inflected dispositions and skills facilitated their ability to traverse class boundaries and to connect both symbolically and physically with Egyptians beyond their class in a manner that was foreclosed to elite girls. A cosmopolitan-inflected femininity conversely mediated girls' symbolic and physical isolation within class boundaries. I propose that this gendered division placed the burden of maintaining symbolic class boundaries on the girls while it provided boys with the social and cultural skills and dispositions to imagine personal and professional trajectories beyond class boundaries.

Understanding Elite Femininity/Masculinity in Sociohistorical Perspective

The intersection of gender and class is a key analytical lens through which multiple studies have examined the production of modern personhood in twentieth-century Egypt. Central to this literature is the way in which an emergent nationalist intelligentsia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century shaped and was shaped by a modernity project that tied national independence from British occupation to the social and cultural reform of Egyptians in line with Western modernity (Mitchell 1988; El Shakry 2007; Massad 2007). This reform project was strongly influenced by colonialist and racialized constructions about the local culture as well as by Victorian ideals of

personhood and bourgeois domesticity (Ahmed 1993; Baron 2005; Shakry 1998; Russell 2004; Pollard 2005).

The overriding importance of reforming Egyptians' domestic life in this modernity project foregrounded the cultural edification of women as pivotal to the realization of broader social and political aims. Anticolonial nationalist thought in Egypt linked the women's question to the national (political) duties of mothers and wives to bringing modernity in the socialization of young Egyptians. According to Omnia El Shakry (1998), this configuration of the women's question differed from other colonial contexts, specifically from anticolonial nationalism in India, where, following Partha Chatterjee (1993), the preservation of cultural difference from the colonizer was premised on the separation of all aspects of political and economic life in an 'outer material' domain associated with men, from an 'inner domain' of religious and cultural life associated with women. Egyptian anticolonial nationalist thought, argued El Shakry, "sought to reconstruct women, by protecting, advancing, or developing them, as *both* a domain of culture (Chatterjee's inner domain) and progress (outer domain)" (Shakry 1998: 130).

Multiple studies showed how the most intimate and mundane aspects of women's private and public life were subject to scrutiny, critique and reform in anticolonial nationalist thought. From personal hygiene and self-care, mothering and housekeeping, to schooling, leisure activities and manners of socializing, scholarship on the women's question offered a compelling case of the extent to which the 'civilizational reform' of

Egyptian womanhood conflated national modernity with colonial constructions about Egyptian culture and society.

The emphasis on womanhood should not discount how the men who wrote and deliberated about the women's question were also part of a parallel, albeit different, project of social and cultural reform. Scholarship that examined the educational and professional trajectories and personal lives of members of the nationalist intelligentsia and the broader class of modern educated men, the *efendiyya*, to which they belonged highlighted narratives of self-transformation that exposed an ongoing tension between modernity, tradition and colonialism that these men negotiated (Schechter 2006; Ryzova 2014; Jacob 2011). Still, the preeminence of this gendered 'civilizational project' in nationalist discourse has rendered womanhood both a measure of social and national progress and a critical site for political and cultural contestations throughout the twentieth century (Shakry 1998; Ahmed 1993; Hatem 1992; Abu-Lughod 1998b).

Scholars of gender have explored the implications of this specific configuration of the women's question on feminism in Egypt and debated the relevance of its precepts to the life worlds of women beyond the small niche of urban middle and upper-class women. This scholarship focused on linking these early nationalist discourses on women's education and "liberation" to the eventual cooptation of an emergent feminist movement under the postcolonial state, or explored the reconfiguration of the women's question under the Islamic revivalist movement (Hatem 1992; Ahmed 1993; Abu-Lughod 1998b; Mahmood 2005). Although class is a key variable in the historiography of the women's question, scholarship on gender in Egypt has not fully explored the role that

class has played in reproducing, redefining or contesting the colonialist/nationalist project of “women’s liberation” - as the title of Qasim Amin’s divisive text, published in 1899, on the women’s question presented- in the postcolonial period.

Hence, in this chapter, I focus on the intersection of class and gender in producing the cultural dissonance between the feminine and masculine ideals that circulated around international-school students. In keeping with Partha Chatterjee’s spatial imaginary of gendered modernity, I show how, among elite adolescents in contemporary Egypt, a Western-inflected cosmopolitanism was more strongly associated with the “inner domain” of women, which young men tried to disassociate from by appropriating working-class-inflected cultural styles and linguistic practices. This gendered binary in cultural practices echoed the gendered construction of cosmopolitan-inflected social and cultural practices in Egyptian media and popular culture as feminine, and the related valorization of a racialized ideal of Western femininity (e.g. speaking European languages, fair skin, blond hair, blue or green eyes, slender physique, and European fashion etc.) as some form of hyper-femininity. I show how this gendered construction of Western/cosmopolitan culture cast cosmopolitan-class men as unmanly and effeminate, and motivated their enactment of social and cultural practices that ostensibly contested their cosmopolitan-class belonging.

My analysis diverts from dominant approaches to understanding cosmopolitan-class culture in Egypt, specifically those that emphasize a selective cosmopolitanism and those that attribute a significant degree of agency in the appropriation and cooptation of a Western-inflected cosmopolitan culture. In so doing, I try to bring the literature on the

women's question in anticolonial nationalism in conversation with anthropological research on Egyptian class culture.

Revisiting Cultural Binaries

A dominant approach in the anthropological literature that addresses Egypt's class culture is an analytical model that organizes society along a cultural-moral spectrum that separates at one end a traditional, uneducated and locally-rooted poor from a rootless and Westernized elite at the other end of the spectrum (Armbrust 1996; 2003). As an analytical framework for understanding social stratification in Egypt, this conception of class reflects vernacular categories and classifications, specifically in as far as it imagines a middle-class culture situated somewhere between the extreme cultural poles of society. Hence, studies that examined middle-class and cosmopolitan Egyptians in the late and early twenty-first century highlighted the ways in which upwardly mobile and globally-oriented Egyptians negotiated their participation in Western-inflected globally-dominant social and consumption practices with their commitment to local and religiously-inflected constructions of propriety and respectability.

The works of Anouk De Koning (2009) and Mark Allen Peterson (2011) are important ethnographies of this class-specific dynamic, both of which explored in-depth the gender-specific articulations of these cultural negotiations. Central to both ethnographies is an analysis of the multiple ways through which middle and upper-class Egyptians embraced a cosmopolitan lifestyle without flouting traditional and religiously-inflected gender norms. In both studies, class-specific patterns of public socializing,

specifically in coffee shops, was an important lens for examining variance in the ways in which cosmopolitan men and women navigated this class-specific dynamic.⁹¹

De Koning argued that upscale cafes provided an enclosed public space that allowed cosmopolitan women to sit by themselves or in gender-mixed groups, both markers of cosmopolitan-class belonging, without the scrutinizing gazes of outsiders who were likely to find such public forms of sociability morally suspicious. Her study situated cafes and other similarly enclosed upscale places within a broader cityscape in which female public visibility was not only heavily restricted but also potentially dangerous. She argued that “the ability of many upper-class women to engage in their preferred lifestyle, modes of sociability, and self-presentation depended on such class closure and control over their environment” (142). If upscale cafes were spaces where women performed their elite cosmopolitan identities, Peterson’s examined the traditional coffeeshop (*al-ahwa*) as the place where elite men ‘cement their masculinity’ (Peterson 2011: 147) by mixing with people from other, lower, social classes. His study highlighted the way in which young men used offensive language and other semiotic practices in interactions among themselves and with waiters to contest the effeminate construction of elite men as *fafi* (soft) or *metdala’in* (pampered).

While both scholars emphasized class-specific mechanisms of exclusion and segregation that made cosmopolitan Egyptian lifestyles possible, the analyses put forth in

⁹¹ In the early 2000s, when both scholars conducted their research, upscale cafes that target young cosmopolitan youth were only starting to appear in Cairo. Prior to that period, upper-class socializing mainly took place in the more exclusive, less public, sporting clubs. Clubs are more intergenerational and restricted to members and guests.

their studies upheld a dualistic understanding of cosmopolitan-class culture wherein Egyptians consciously appropriated social and cultural practices associated with cosmopolitanism and actively incorporated them into an otherwise traditional lifestyle. I argue that by emphasizing reflexive and purposeful practices of cultural negotiations, these studies have conflated “reflexive cosmopolitanism” (Beck and Sznaider 2010), as analytical category bearing nearly universal social implications, with the class culture of Egypt’s educated elite. In doing so, these studies have neither offered a critical analysis of how this class-based cosmopolitanism relates to more dominant understandings of cosmopolitanism in the academic literature (Hanley 2008) nor fully explored the culture-specific mechanisms of elite belonging and reproduction in Egypt.

An underlying premise in this analysis was that a cosmopolitan lifestyle, which entailed speaking European languages, being more open to gender-mixing, women spending time on their own in public spaces for work or leisure, or following globally-dominant fashion – to name but some of the practices examined in these studies-, was a “liberating” force external to the broader restrictive cultural environment of Egypt. This construction was implicit in the way in which these studies emphasized an agentive impetus behind cultural negotiations, in which elite Egyptians were reflexive cultural brokers, who were shrewdly managing their lifestyles through balancing their identities as Egyptians *but* cosmopolitan. However, a quick survey of scholarship on the Egyptian bourgeoisie and urban middle classes throughout the twentieth century cannot explain why ethnographic descriptions of the early twenty-first century would construct these practices as *outside* of local practices (Cole 1981; Abu-Lughod 1998b; Reynolds 2012;

Russell 2004). Although changes in the spaces, patterns of sociability, leisure activities attributed to cosmopolitan middle and upper classes throughout the twentieth century are undeniable- and noted in both studies-, both Peterson and De Koning framed their interlocutors' social practices and cultural negotiations within longstanding cultural tensions over issues of women's respectability and male dominance. If these kinds of negotiations were integral to Egyptian modernity and the culture of the cosmopolitan class as these studies indicated, it is unclear why they were separated analytically from the "local cultural field."

Hence, what I propose in this chapter, is to approach the intersection of culture and gender as a critical lens for understanding the seeming incongruity between class and national belonging among Egypt's educated elite. Rather than analyzing cosmopolitan and locally-inflected social practices as materializations of different cultural and ideological worlds- which may have made more sense a century ago-, I examine them as parts of an integrated class culture that bears its own gendered logic of reproduction. What I propose extends Lila Abu-Lughod's (1998) argument about cultural hybridization as a more viable notion for understanding the "entanglement of separate cultures" than postcoloniality. In her important synthesis of scholarship on gender and feminism in the Middle East, Abu-Lughod argued that the idea of cultures as bounded and fundamentally distinct is a product of the colonial encounter. Instead of reifying colonial cultural boundaries in postcolonial scholarship, she emphasized the importance of studying the process and dynamics of cultural entanglements (Abu-Lughod 1998a; 1991).

In my examination of the gender division I observed among elite youth, I try to move beyond the colonial/postcolonial genealogy in analyzing the culture of Egypt's cosmopolitan class by foregrounding the local dynamic of cultural hybridization that takes gender as its organizing principle. Rather than tracing national/global cultural boundaries, the following analysis of the gendered linguistic practices and socialization of elite youth will highlight how cultural boundaries are produced, reproduced and negotiated through binary gender practices.

Ideal Masculinity and Femininity in International Schools

Towards the end of the academic year, Ms. Gamil dedicated several weeks of classes to discussing gender and gender inequality. Among the activities she planned were student debates on a variety of issues on sexism, patriarchy, gender-based violence, etc. She deliberately assigned the boys feminist positions and the girls the antifeminist roles in these debates. I found the debates to be a refreshing break from the class discussions where the boys were consistently contesting any feminist or progressive views raised by their female classmates or the teacher.

One of these debates was between Rami (boy) and Caroline (girl) over music videos and their representation of women. After the students had finished their presentation and Ms. Gamil was just about to discuss the debate with them, Rami asked if she would allow him to speak in Arabic. She did not object. For the following five minutes, Rami answered Ms. Gamil's question in an Arabic heavily interspersed with the English words of concepts and sources he consulted for his presentation. Caroline only answered Ms. Gamil's questions in English.

After class, I had a brief conversation with Rami. I wanted to congratulate him on giving a really good presentation. He blushed and started talking more passionately about the representation of women in American music videos. I asked him why, when he had given such a good presentation in English, he was unwilling to answer questions in English. “I feel more comfortable in Arabic. I express myself better.” “So, how do you say ‘objectification’ in Arabic” I teased him. He didn’t know the answer. When I told him the Arabic word, *tashyi*, he said he probably heard it before during a sermon at Church. “I’m not like ISN students,” Rami wanted to clarify to me, “my father is a self-made man.” He retold a story I had heard him tell before in class about his father’s rags-to-riches trajectory, how he started as a small trader selling imported merchandise from Alexandria in Cairo, how he managed to establish a textile factory, and got ripped off by his siblings, who stole his business from him and he had to rebuild his business. Rami was very eager to finish high school so he could start working in his father’s factory. He wasn’t applying to any schools abroad like many of his classmates because he did not want to be too far from Egypt. He wanted to study at AUC, so he could use any spare time he had to work on the side. “I have older brothers who work with my father, if I say a word in English around my older brothers they would scold me. *Ehna mish betu’ el-kalam dah* [we don’t do that] they would tell me... *estargel* [be a man]... I spend a lot of time with my father at the factory and so I’m used to talking to people from all walks of life, not like others here. I watch Egyptian movies and TV dramas...I’m not like them.”

Rami was certainly not the first person I met at ISN or beyond to point out the effeminate construction of cosmopolitan or Westernized Egyptians (Peterson 2011). At ISN, most of the male students I interacted with or observed in Ms. Gamil's classes tried to assert their fluency in Egyptian Arabic over against their English language skills even though their entire education and most of the media they consumed was in English. Like Rami, many sought to avoid being perceived as unmanly or *fafi* (unmanly, sheltered and privileged) by expressing familiarity with curse words and other popular slang terms that they associated with the urban poor and working-class *sha'bi* youth.

The margins of nearly every page in the notebook I took to ISN included a list of all the undeniably *sha'bi* expressions that I was surprised to hear in one of the most exclusive schools in Cairo: *malaksh fih* (none of your business), *ekhras yala* (shut up), *habtahak* (I'll smack you), *ha'ossak* (I will cut you), *w'il mushaf* (I swear by the Qur'an), *uqsim b'illah* (I swear by God), *erkenni ba'a* (get to the side; literally park here). There is nothing inherent about the construction of these expressions that marked them as *sha'bi*. I recognize them as such given my own familiarity with the linguistic repertoire of middle- and upper-class Cairenes, and because it was mostly only the boys who used them.

While the boys spoke mainly in an Arabic interspersed with English words or expressions, female students, in contrast, expressed themselves almost exclusively in English both in classrooms and in private conversations even when their English was interspersed with Arabic words or expressions. Among the boys, speaking Arabic was more common among the popular senior students while speaking English was commonly

associated with nerds and those not within the popular cliques.⁹² Among the girls, no such distinction existed. All the girls, including those who only joined ISN in high school and whose primary education was in French or German schools,⁹³ spoke mainly in English. When they did speak Egyptian Arabic, they had a distinctive accent that I came to identify among many internationally educated girls. Many rolled their r's, elongated their vowels and softened many consonants like *sh* and *'ain*, pronounced the *a* in Arabic words with an *uh* that sounded a lot like the English *e*, and dropped most identifiers (el) in the words they used frequently. Some Arabic nouns might be pluralized as English words by an adding an *s* at the end, and English expressions might be literally translated into Arabic. I heard one of the female students say once "*mesh hatewga' yani!*" which literally translated to "it wouldn't hurt to..." but which only made sense in the context as an English expression. The more relevant Arabic expression would have been "*mesh hatkhassar*" (it won't cost). Overall, the effect of these linguistic practice was a much smoother integration of Arabic words in English sentences, not the other way around.

This divergence in the linguistic practices of male and female students was part of a more extensive division in the ways in which male and female students presented themselves along the local-cosmopolitan register. On the one hand, the boys were more outspoken in class discussions, joked more and adopted what some of their classmates

⁹² My categorization of students in popular and nerds is based on numerous conversations with Ms. Gamil and Ms. Fouda about their students and the relationship between the different groupings, and with students who self-identified as "nerds", not part of the "in group." The popular students I refer to in this chapter are those who exhibited a visibly dominant presence in the school and were part of a recognizable clique (*shella*) of four or more male students.

⁹³ Given that ISN is one of the more expensive international schools, many parents save up in primary and middle school in order to be able to afford to pay ISN's tuition in high school.

described as a thug style (*baltagi*) in the way in which they held their bodies and interacted with other people. They deepened their voices, loosened their posture and generally adopted this mixed attitude of carelessness, levity and aggressiveness that, to them, encapsulated what being Egyptian meant. Their performances invoked popular masculine ideals in Egyptian media, specifically those that celebrate coarse and aggressive attitudes associated with thugs and “bad boys” in Cairo’s working-class neighborhoods (Armbrust 1996; Ghannam 2013). To the majority of these boys, the most immediate source for their “*sha’bi*” style were the mimicked performances of other friends and relatives, Youtube videos of popular songs and TV commercials⁹⁴ that feature *sha’bi maharaganat* music and the highly circumscribed and structured encounters they have with private drivers, *menadiyya*⁹⁵ and handymen. That the girls were inspired by American media stars, fashionistas and similar female models they were exposed to through popular social media platforms was obvious through their clothing, hairstyle, makeup and physique. Many used hand gestures and a body language that strongly resembled those associated with American teenage girls. I could not detect any of the gestures, linguistic practices or aesthetics commonly associated with *sha’bi* or *baladi* female styles in the girls’ performances.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ More recently, Tiktok is a highly popular medium for the circulation of *sha’bi*-inflected styles among school students in Egypt.

⁹⁵ A *minadi* is a form of valet service that is run by private individuals or groups informally on the streets of Cairo.

⁹⁶ This was noteworthy to me because, during my adolescence, it was fairly common for middle and upper-class girls to be infatuated with *baladi* female characters in Egyptian cinema and TV dramas and to mimic their style- if only as a joke- sometimes.

The glaring discrepancy in the ways in which female and male adolescents comported themselves was corroborated in their personal narratives and conversations with me. The girls consistently responded to my queries about their interest in Egyptian popular culture or practices that they would identify as uniquely Egyptians, such as *baladi* dancing, with negation. While I suspected this was true, what mattered most was that they did not choose to identify any aspects of their day-to-day life as uniquely Egyptian. In comparison, the boys exaggerated their exposure to and familiarity with practices or attitudes that they identified as Egyptian and boasted about hanging out in traditional coffee shops or bragged about playing football with boys from different classes. In time, I realized that many felt the need or pressure to engage in mixed-classed activities even when they were not entirely comfortable in these settings.

One day, Yassin and his friends, invited me to join them at a traditional coffee shop after school. Yassin sent me their location via google so I could follow them once I was ready to leave school. The coffee shop was located at the edges of the Fifth Settlement which connected New Cairo to the outskirts of Madinat Nasr, a more socioeconomically integrated district with a predominantly middle-class population. The coffee shop consisted of a small indoor area where the drinks and waterpipes were prepared and a larger outdoor area, nicely shaded under a pergola covered with bougainvillea. Although I recognized other ISN students in the coffee shop, it did not strike me as one of those coffee shops that regularly welcomed women (as many coffee shops in Downtown Cairo do, for example). It may have been possible that the scrutinizing gazes I received were directed at my age and the fact that I was meeting boys

half my age. However, any sense of unease I may have felt dissipated when I realized that I was probably far more comfortable in this setting than the boys I was meeting.

I sat with the five boys for a couple of hours there talking about politics, religion and casually gossiping about the cool boys and girls at ISN. Neither of them seemed to identify as such. Three of them hung out regularly in Ms. Gamil's classroom to hold meetings for student activities or to chat with her and Ms. Fouda about all sorts of school and non-school related matters, the other two I was meeting for the first time. They were probably the most well-read of the high school students I met. They were very politically-minded, passionate about human rights and unexpectedly well-versed in Marxist and postcolonial literature. They knew very little about Egyptian leftist writers or activists. Although only six years had passed since the 2011 uprising, they were not even familiar with the names of leftist or Marxist politicians or organizations that made headlines during this period. When I could not help showing some sign of disappointment about this, Selim, who hadn't said much earlier admitted, we are "black skin, white masks" invoking the title of Franz Fanon's important book on postcoloniality.

Given how Selim described his group, I was curious about how they would characterize their classmates who weren't as critical. Muhamad Hamzawi, or Hamzawi as everyone called him, a very amusing and opinionated friend of Yassin's, dominated this conversation. He had told me earlier that he was born in the UK where he lived with his family until they moved back to Egypt when he was ten years old. I had guessed that he didn't grow up in Egypt from his English accent, and heavily accented Egyptian Arabic. He often got into trouble with other kids in schools because he regularly made offensive

remarks about religion. Hamzawi was particularly annoyed by the “*baltgiyya*” (thugs). These boys “mimicked *sha’bi* classes...partied and did all sorts of things they pick up from Western media and pretended to be studs”. He stood up from his chair and started moving his body slightly sideways, bent his arms and curved his back slightly to give an impression of the way the “*baltgiyya*” held themselves. He laughed at himself doing that. We all found it funny, too. Hamzawi said he found everything about them fake and pretentious. The other boys agreed and Yassin volunteered to identify those among the students I knew that Hamzawi would include in his descriptions. I asked them about the “cool girls”. “The girls are more open-minded,” Yassin stated. They all agreed they were “more Westernized” than the boys, “because it is *feminine*,” added Hamzawi sarcastically. He immediately started mimicking the way the girls spoke English. “They think they are Valley girls with their fake Valley girl accent,” he joked.

Another guy, who wasn’t very talkative before, said “the girls were all about feminism” in a way that suggested he did not take it seriously. The other boys agreed that feminism was the only thing that the girls could get political about, suggesting that they were otherwise indifferent to public issues. We could not stay longer, because everyone needed to be somewhere, and so we agreed to meet again to continue this conversation. “Maybe meet somewhere else next time?” I asked. “Sure,” Yassin said, “we don’t come here very often anyways.” A couple of the boys said it was their first time to sit there. I sensed that it was their first time ever sitting in a *sha’bi* coffee shop that served waterpipe (*shisha*). When I brought this up with Yassin later, he confessed that they don’t really like to hang out in traditional coffee shops.

The way in which Yassin and his friends conflated the appropriation of *sha'bi* and Western practices in their representation of cool kids at their school showed the way a *sha'bi*-inflected masculinity was integral to class-specific constructions of ideal masculinity. This contrasted significantly with their representation of the cool girls. The cool girls did not combine *sha'bi* and Western practices the way the boys purportedly did. Their femininity was attributed to their “Valley accent,” their “open-mindedness” and their interest in feminism.

On the one hand, Yassin and his friends represented the limitations of binary gender and cultural categorization: Although, in keeping with normative male practices, they invited me to meet them at a traditional coffeeshop, it was not their conventional meeting spot. They spent a significant amount of time criticizing the “Westernized” cultural practices of fellow ISN students, yet they spoke predominantly in English about their estrangement from and/or ignorance of public life in Egypt. Yet, on the other hand, in criticizing the cool and popular students at ISN, Yassin and his friends exposed the gender ideals that patterned the social and cultural practices of elite youth. While I might find it harder to situate them squarely within these binary gender ideals, their narratives inadvertently reproduced its ideological power in categorizing and grouping male and female students at their school. In the next section, I examine the articulation of these constructs outside of school, exploring the broader social context that reinforces binary cultural ideals in the gender socialization of elite youth.

(Egyptian) Culture in the Early Socialization of Elite Youth

On my very first meeting with Ms. Gamil she noted that she found her male students more patriotic than her female students and that they expressed views that aligned more strongly with mainstream Egyptian nationalism than her female students did. She suspected that this gendered division in her students' attitudes was due to the inherently masculinist construction of nationalism and its association with the military, which in Egypt is an exclusively male domain. To illustrate her observation, Ms. Gamil told me that girls never saluted the flag during morning assembly, a ritual that was only enforced at ISN two years earlier when a special visitor from the Ministry of Education informed the school director that the school would be penalized if it didn't start to organize a morning assembly to salute the flag. "Girls never sing the national anthem, and the boys always sing very loudly no matter how badly they sing," she remarked. I probed the matter further with some of the students one day. I found out that individual students didn't commonly volunteer to salute the flag. Instead, the school director randomly asked students to step forward and chant the salutation. A couple of the female students told me that when girls expressed an interest in saluting the flag, the director was hesitant to let them lead the chants under the pretext that boys' voices were louder.

In my analysis of students gendered performances, I found that Ms. Gamil's observation captured a telling discrepancy between the willingness of girls and boys to salute the flag. Yet, whether girls did or did not salute the flag at ISN had little to do with their attitudes towards nationalism or a differential sense of affection or loyalty to the nation. Instead, I argue that girls did not embody the linguistic and cultural skills that the

school director found necessary to perform allegiance to the Egyptian flag. Yet, rather than expressing a social failure or cultural shortcoming on the part of girls, their linguistic formation was the crust of a deeply rooted cultural divergence in the gender socialization of elite youth.

This divergence was clearly articulated in parents' schooling choices. Many of the parents I met who had considered educating their children in community-based international schools affiliated with diplomatic missions⁹⁷ told me they preferred a for-profit international school because it was mandated by the government to teach Arabic. For many of these parents, this was particularly critical for boys. Nada, an international school parent, who we encountered in Chapter Three, was very explicit about emphasizing a gendered dimension to language education. Although she educated both her daughter and son in an international school that taught Arabic, she told me she may have considered the "embassy school" if she only had girls. "It's not right that a boy who lives in Egypt doesn't speak Arabic...especially a boy," she told me matter-of-factly. I asked her why she found this pertinent to boys. "A boy needs to be self-reliant and take care of a family, this is not imperative for girls... Don't get me wrong, I would like my daughter to have a career and to accomplish things, but a boy has responsibilities..."

Nada's concern about her son's 'proficiency in Arabic' was not merely a question about language skills or proficiency in written standard Arabic. It was a shorthand for a patriarchal conception of the roles of men as heads of households, where proficiency in

⁹⁷ These schools enjoy a significant degree of autonomy through their affiliation with foreign embassies. They are, therefore, not subject to the same governmental supervision and curricular requirements that the Ministry of Education places on for-profit international schools.

Arabic was regarded as a critical element in a boy's socialization, not a girl's. Among a man's responsibilities, according to Nada, was to be able to read a utility bill or draft an email in Arabic if he ended up working for the government or any organization that *still* used Arabic in formal communication. Implicit in the articulation of these concerns was a divergent imaginary of girls' lives, where they would not need to interact with Egyptians from other socioeconomic backgrounds. I stress imaginary because many of the scenarios that Nada suggested were not immediately discernible from her life and the lives of many of the other parents who shared similar views. Almost all the parents I met invested comparably in their daughter's and in their son's education and expected their daughters to work, read utility bills, and lead successful professional lives.

Yet, Nada's statement was indicative of the ideal or desirable arrangement for elite families in which boys were the breadwinners in charge of public interactions in mixed-class settings. What Nada's emphasis on the fact that "it's not right that a boy who lives in Egypt doesn't speak Arabic" disclosed was that it was, in fact, *alright* if a girl does not. This became very clear in relation to the divergent semiotic performances of international school students, where it was not only alright for girls not to speak Arabic, but in fact, desirable that they don't.

Across all my conversations about international schools and the communities they served, the notion that upper-class girls could not speak proper Arabic was widely shared. Unlike the boys, girls did not pretend to be proficient Arabic speakers or expressed any attempt at correct pronunciation. On several occasions, I observed girls blush when teased about an Arabic word they did not understand or mispronounce, indicating that

such comments were generally shared and received as some form of endearment rather than criticism. My interlocutors commonly used the English expression “how cute” when they wanted to tease a girl for mispronouncing or failing to recognize the meaning of an Arabic word or expression, or exhibiting ignorance or unfamiliarity with a local dish or practice. “How cute” was a popular double-entendre among English-speaking Egyptians because it encapsulated the appeal of being ignorant of local culture (as a foreign woman would be) even when it was invoked as a criticism of someone’s (mostly women’s) privilege-based disconnect from local culture. However, to say “how cute” about something a boy has done would not carry the sense of endearment. Not merely because “cuteness” is not a preferred adjective for manliness, but also because a boy who is judged as not being able to express himself in Arabic properly would be ridiculed, as Rami earlier shared about his brothers.

There was such a powerful feminine appeal to not being able to speak proper Arabic that some girls may be accused of feigning their linguistic incompetence. Malak, a thirteen-year old in a French international school and the daughter of one the international-school teacher I got to know during my research often accompanied her mother during our meetings. Malak repeatedly pointed to her linguistic skills, or rather lack thereof, to indicate, *indirectly*, her superior class status among others in her swimming team. During one of my meetings with her mother at their apartment in al-Rihab City, a gated community in New Cairo, Malak walked in from her swimming practice wanting badly to share something with her mother, and me, that happened that day. Her coach, who regularly teased her for being a *khawagaya* (female *khawaga*) made

her read out loud from an Arabic text before practice. It was a pamphlet that detailed new guidelines for swimmers during national tournaments. Although she had repeatedly told the coach that she was very good in her Arabic classes at school, he never believed her. Malak claimed that she read the text well. Another girl in her team volunteered to continue reading but, according to Malak, pretended not to know how to read properly and would stutter every once in a while, to read a word “as though she can’t read when she is always speaking only Arabic,” she exclaimed laughing. On several occasions in the following months, Malak’s mother would use that anecdote in our conversations to stress the kind of challenges that her daughter had to navigate to be a swimming champion, which entailed her need to interact with people from different socioeconomic classes and the jealousy that her elevated social status stirred among her female classmates.

Yet, that which constituted Malak’s sense of elite belonging, her ‘genuine’ weak Arabic, was concomitantly the source of her exclusion from the broader cultural community of fluent Egyptian Arabic speakers, the one that elite boys were laboring to fit in.

Gendered Paths to Belonging

In an important examination of the dialectic between class, culture and bodily movement in Egypt, Julia Elyachar (2011) argued that embodied practices associated with *sha’bi* culture constituted “embodied attachments to historically specific forms of belonging” in Cairo (2011: 89) against which different forms of embodied attachments, including both Islamist and *infrangi* (liberal cosmopolitan) kinds of belonging, were forged. Drawing on George Herbert Mead’s understanding of gesture, she postulated that

sha'bi bodily practice fell within “the realm of gesture” (2011: 92) because it expressed bodily practices that were not an explicitly articulated part of social identity (as compared to practices that indicated religious piety for example) and yet played an important role in social communication and identification in everyday life.

Although Elyachar does not use the category “national” in her article, her emphasis on *sha'b* (literally the people) and *sha'bi* (more commonly translated as popular) as historically specific articulations of a community constructed over and against foreign categories strongly echoed the ways in which the practices and discourses about national identity that circulated among ISN students constructed Egyptianness as *sha'bi*. This class-inflected construction of Egyptianness resonated with the discourses about Egyptianness that I examined in the previous chapter, and in which Egyptianness was a classed experience foreclosed to privileged internationally educated youth.

A closer examination of the interplay between *sha'bi* and cosmopolitan repertoires in patterning ideals of femininity and masculinity suggests that gender socialization excluded elite girls from a national, *sha'bi*, realm that was strongly associated with ideal masculinity. The narratives and semiotic performances of international school students constructed cosmopolitan and *sha'bi* repertoires as feminine and masculine ideals respectively. This materially embodied and discursively articulated binary construction, deeply rooted in the gender socialization of elite youth, informed the movement of elite boys and girls across class lines along remarkably divergent patterns.

In the life of international school children, playing sports was a common source of inter-class interactions that exposed the divergent ways in which boys and girls were

socialized. This was made clear to me during my fieldwork when, Sherine, one of international school parents I met related to me the experience of her twelve-year old son, Khalid, who had recently been offered a spot on a soccer team that competed at the national level. This was a great feat for the family. They were finally sowing the seeds of the financial and moral investment they made in their son's soccer training in private international academies. Yet, not a month had passed and Khalid was asking his parents if they would let him quit the team. While the father was not willing to give in to his son's "*dala*" (indicating he was too pampered and needed to man up); Sherine was concerned that her son was having a really difficult time making friends with other team members who did not share her son's economic and social background. She told me that he would come home after practice feeling very down because "nobody would joke with him" because he was different. I had met Khalid a few times and he was one of the boys who expressed the same fascination with *sha'bi* culture that I recognized in ISN students. I could understand his disappointment.

Weeks after Sherine brought up the matter about Khalid quitting, we met and I asked if they had taken a decision in that regard. Khalid was still on the team. He was now friends with the other players, she announced with relief. They were not the type of friends who would go see a movie together; but little by little, they not only had started exchanging jokes but also whatsapp account numbers. Sometimes, Khalid would offer them a ride to the bus stop in his car (driven by a private chauffeur). I asked Khalid how he got along with them now that he had gotten to spend more time in the team. "All the

kids in my schools think they are cool (*say'in*), these kids are really cool,” was his answer.

Khalid's experience represented a common situation for adolescent elite boys who had to navigate mixed-class settings for the first time. Like many other international-school boys, Khalid had played soccer since childhood in exclusive private academies with the intention of making it into a team that combined soccer players from across the nation. Although he struggled to make friends at first, his parents pushed him to “man up” to the challenges and try to fit in with peers from different classes. Like most other boys of his class, he had a taste for and an appreciation for *sha'bi* styles that not only facilitated his ultimate integration in the team but also made him enjoy being part of it. This trajectory was mainly possible for Khalid because it fit neatly within his gender socialization.

For female students and their parents, national sports tournaments and other sporting events were also occasions when they were exposed to different classes. However, in closely probing parents and students about sports, I realized that the sports girls played were almost always individual sports, like tennis, swimming and gymnastics, or very exclusive sports, like synchronized swimming. As sports that could be practiced individually with a private coach in exclusive private courts or swimming pools in gated communities, they did not involve the same degree of social mixing expected in other sports. Since team sports, like basketball or handball, were only played in sports clubs and involved mixing with one's team and teams from other clubs, they were very

uncommon choices for the cosmopolitan elite families.⁹⁸ Unlike Khalid's account, the experiences shared by parents and female adolescents with me about exposure to other classes in the context of sports emphasized the incommensurable attitudes of girls from different classes. The "pampered" attitude of cosmopolitan girls in these accounts were always sources of amusement that served to simultaneously mark the narrator's elite status even as it was criticized it as illustrated above.

Beyond sports, divergence in the movement of boys and girls in and around the city and their everyday exposure to Egyptians from other social classes forged different imaginaries of belonging that left boys more conscious of the tension between their class and national belonging, and more willing to manage it compared to their female peers. As in the accounts of Rami, Khaled and Yassin, boys were generally more likely to frequent places and find themselves in mixed-class settings that highlighted their 'cultural vulnerability' as elite cosmopolitan men and in turn promoted their appropriation of *sha'bi* dispositions. Male adolescents were also regularly exposed to men who worked for or provided services to their family: security guards, private drivers, and all handymen and technicians who enter Egyptian homes are men. Many middle-class and elite families expect boys to oversee maintenance work and other similar types of work alone or in the company of their fathers or private drivers. Such "supervisory roles" require that elite boys cultivate a cultural capital that is legible in everyday interactions with people from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

⁹⁸ Girl soccer has been recently introduced in Egypt and is most closely associated with a cosmopolitan middle and upper-class communities.

On the other hand, girls' exposure to women from other social classes was significantly restricted, if not completely absent in their life. This the case even in domestic service. Historically, domestic service jobs were taken by rural or working-class Egyptian thereby providing elite women with a steady and possibly intimate exposure to women from other social classes. But in the last two decades, elite families have begun to hire foreign domestic workers. In fact, hiring female migrant workers or refugee from the Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, or Sri Lanka as domestic workers or nannies has become an important marker of elite status in recent years. Most of these women do not speak Arabic. Many can barely speak English; nonetheless they were still expected and encouraged to use English in their communication with household members, especially the children.

The cultural enclosure of internationally educated girls is reinforced by growing public anxieties about sexual harassment on the streets and in public spaces in Cairo (Roushdy 2016). In conversations with girls, anecdotes about "that one time they walked on the street" because they could not find their ride or wanted to do something adventurous exposed a spatial dimension to class enclosure (Chapter Two) that severely restricted elite girls' exposure to and interaction with Egyptians outside of their class community. In effect, the few times female ISN students narrated experiences about public spaces, they almost always entailed accounts of ways they, or their male friends, confronted strangers who either effectively did or indicated an intention to perpetrate an act of sexual harassment against the girls. Hence, notwithstanding multiple reported

accounts about sexual violence against girls within exclusive spaces, including at international schools and universities, class discussions and other exchanges among ISN students constructed sexual harassment as a feature of street life and other mixed-class settings, a danger that could be avoided if girls remained within the spatial bounds of exclusive and cosmopolitan spaces. In this context, what girls wear and how they comport themselves in public spaces become key elements of cosmopolitan-class culture that are regulated through the spatial enclosure of women within exclusive cosmopolitan spaces. Hence, most cosmopolitan families in my study would allow their daughters to dress according to the latest fashion in crop tops and hot pants or wear two-piece bathing suits in exclusive cosmopolitan spaces, but would explicitly prohibit their daughters from wearing revealing or tights clothes in public spaces that are frequented by people from outside of their closely-knit social network. These seemingly contradictory codes of female modesty were linked in the ethnographies of de Koning (2009) and Peterson (2011) to the ways in which cosmopolitan women navigate religiously-inflected codes of women's public visibility. However, in situating these practices within the gender socialization of elite youth, I propose that these practices highlight the centrality of cosmopolitan femininity in the reproduction of class culture and closure in Egypt.

Cosmopolitan Femininity and Class Reproduction

A general consensus within the scholarship on gender and nationalism, is the construction of women as “signifiers” or “reproducers” of ethnic and national boundaries (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Kandiyoti 1993; Chatterjee 1989). This understanding of the roles of women in processes of social reproduction takes the cultural alignment

between the dominant classes and the legitimate culture of the nation state for granted (Bourdieu 1984). However, as this and multiple studies on Egypt's class culture have indicated, misalignment between the cultural capital of the cosmopolitan class and the officially endorsed culture of the state in Egypt is the underlying cultural logic of social distinction. In the following, I show how this class logic constructed cosmopolitan femininity as the measure and gateway to elite belonging and/or exclusion.

During one of the class discussions on issues of gender, the topic of marriage came up. As usual, the boys were defensive about the prerogatives of men to make more money than women as breadwinners and heads of household. A couple of the boys were of the opinion that a woman who makes more money than her husband would be dismissive and disrespectful of her husband (*tehin gozha*). The underlying assumption in these boys' statements was that women are expected to show deference to their husbands. The girls did not question the power dynamic implicated in the boys' statements. What they were most concerned about was the boys' emphasis on income and wealth as indicators of a wife's appreciation of her husband. "I don't care how much money my future husband would make," one of the female students claimed, "as long as we come from the same class." Most of the girls agreed that how a boy was raised at home, his education, and "mentality" were what mattered most in a partner, and not how much he made. It seemed to me that Ms. Gamil wanted to direct her students to think about power dynamics in a relationship because she brought up her own marriage to a fellow teacher that all the students knew, to show how she and her husband had different but equal responsibilities towards their household. The students were not convinced Ms. Gamil's relationship was

relevant because her husband was not Egyptian. “In an Egyptian marriage, a man is expected to be dominant,” stated one of the male students, whose mother Ms. Gamil had told me was the CEO of a big textile company in Egypt. To further make his point, the student argued against his classmate who emphasized “class” over “wealth.” “Ideally, a man should marry a girl whose family is not as wealthy as his, maybe from a lower class, to feel superior in the relationship.” All of the girls in the classroom, including Ms. Gamil, seemed very annoyed by the views of their classmate. One of the girls said it was unthinkable for her to marry someone from a different social class. She said she could marry someone from a different religion, but not someone from a different social class, ignoring the fact that such a move was both forbidden in Islam and illegal.

Conversations about marriage and dating revealed the differential roles that boys and girls played in class reproduction. While the discourses of girls defined class through cultural and moral boundaries, the boys invoked a materialist understanding of class that foregrounded socioeconomic boundaries. Paradoxically, while the girls viewed marrying within one’s class as a guarantee for a romantic and mental connection they found it difficult to imagine with someone from outside of their class, the boys of their social class stressed the commensurability of their own views on marriage with more traditional and mainstream ideas about gender role expectation. Whether or not these discussions were accurate reflections of students’ views is hard to assess, what they highlighted, however, was the different ways in which girls and boys constructed class and imagined their own role in its reproduction. This different attitudes of boys and girls towards marriage was corroborated in other conversations I held with other members of this

community about marriage and romantic relationships, which linked the marriageability of elite women to her education and the extent to which her manners and style expressed cosmopolitan-class belonging. While education and style were not irrelevant in the cultural capital of elite men, men's marriageability was strongly tied to their wealth and/or professional status.

This discrepancy in how girls and boys related to class resonated with the general centrality of cosmopolitan femininity in marking the boundaries of elite cosmopolitan spaces in Cairo. For example, in the early 2000s, multiple upscale venues in Cairo introduced measures to deny veiled women services. Many nightclubs and restaurants that served alcohol outright prohibited veiled women from entering their premises (Khalil 2009; *Egyptian Streets* 2014; *The Economist* 2015; Mahfouz 2015). Even today, many such venues explicitly inform guests upon making dinner reservations that veiled women within one's party will not be allowed entry. In some venues, telephone receptionists list the 'styles of veiling' that restaurant managers accept. In recent years, such practices have come under public scrutiny especially as more beach resorts and hotels started prohibiting women wearing burkinis from using pools or private beaches (Islam 2017; Aboghazala 2018). In 2020, the parliament passed a law that prohibited hotels and other private beaches from restricting access to women in burkinis (Morsi 2020). Much of the public debates around these practices adopted a rights-based rhetoric, mostly inspired by parallel debates taking place in Europe, which suggested that upscale places and their users were practicing discrimination against upright Muslims (*multazimin*) (*LA Times* 2020).

Yet, I mention practices of discrimination against veiled women (needless to mention *muntaqibat* who wear a full-face veil) in upscale restaurants in this context because it captured the centrality of cosmopolitan femininity in marking class boundaries in Egypt. There are rarely other explicit regulations concerning dress code in Egyptian restaurants as is conventional in comparably upscale venues in other parts of the world. Veiling, however, was divisive in the early 2000s as the number of upper-middle and upper-class women who took on the veil started to rise. Unveiled women, a minority in Egypt, are by and large either Christian women (and these mostly also have their distinctive form of conservative clothing style) and elite cosmopolitan women.⁹⁹ To the latter, non-veiling is in many ways a class practice, a cosmopolitan-class practice that plays a powerful role in defining the symbolic and cultural boundaries of class, and sorting families into cosmopolitans and non-cosmopolitans.¹⁰⁰

Rethinking Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism in the Egyptian Context

In the introduction of this study, I argued for an understanding of cosmopolitanism as a structural condition rather than an ideological or cultural attitude among the upper-middle and upper-class Egyptians I encountered in my study. Drawing on Beck and Sznaider's (2010) distinction between "reflexive cosmopolitanism" and the "*unintended and lived* cosmopolitanism" of social life under globalization, I tried to emphasize the cultural and ethical tensions and contradictions that patterned elite

⁹⁹ Rumors that one of Mubarak's daughters-in-law wanted to don the veil were circulated in the early 2000s and associated with the ban of popular preacher Amr Khaled from working in Egypt and his unofficial expulsion from the country.

¹⁰⁰ As I tried to show in the narrative of the the religiously committed mother we encountered in Chapter 2, it was particularly challenging for families who committed to orthodox understandings of a religiously upright life to establish their class status.

Egyptian's relationship to the globally oriented and cosmopolitan-inflected practices they participate in. In this chapter, I traced the unintended and lived dimension of Egyptian cosmopolitanism to the colonial history of Egyptian modernity, specifically the ways in which it extended a colonialist and patriarchal "civilizational project". Besides the devaluation of many aspects of the local culture, a critical outcome of this process has been the configuration of cosmopolitanism as a symbolic repertoire that delineated class boundaries. My examination of the gendered articulation of this class culture and how it related to broader practices of gender socialization showed how elite Egyptians negotiated the restrictive elements of this cosmopolitanism without risking class reproduction. That girls were "more Westernized" or "more open-minded," as many believed, did not merely indicate attitudinal differences between boys and girls but also a structural differentiation that positioned women as reproducers of class culture. This positioning of elite Egyptian women as gatekeepers of class boundaries, entrusted with the reproduction of cosmopolitan-class culture -and the national modernity it continued to symbolize for many of my interlocutors- challenges conventional understandings of cosmopolitanism that conflate cosmopolitan-inflected social and cultural practices with a liberal and possibly anti-nationalist ideological attitude towards culture and gender. Ironically, within this context, it was the appropriation of *sha'bi*-inflected local cultural practices that which *emancipated* elite boys from the spatial and social confines of their class and empowered their participation in public life.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored how a socioeconomically dominant community in Egypt negotiated issues of identity, postcoloniality and belonging while participating in the globalizing cultural and social practices of a transnational educated elite. I focused on the manifestation of this dynamic in for-profit international schools, a vital site of elite production, that ideally captured the globally-oriented aspirations of upper-middle class and upwardly mobile Egyptians. As these schools were also the source of mounting public anxieties about the cultural identity of the country's educated elite, they offered a privileged vantage point onto the intersection between identity and belonging as issues of broader public concern and the everyday and intimate and morally-inflected negotiations of parents, educators and adolescents.

The main contention of this study as laid out in the introduction is that there is a historically-specific tension between class and national belonging in Egypt. This tension was grounded in the colonially inspired cultural formation of social distinction, according to which elite and Egyptian indexed mutually exclusive symbolic and cultural repertoires. Chapter two traced the materialization of this configuration of social distinction in the educational, linguistic and urban practices of upwardly mobile Egyptians. I highlighted the ways in which economic restructuring in the 1990s and the ensuing privatization and marketization of services such as land use, housing, media and education intensified class boundaries to the extent of producing a sense of nonbelonging among internationally educated youth. These economic shifts informed the educational choices and personal narratives of the parents that I examined in Chapter 3, exposing a generalized sense of

ambivalence about whether and how exposure to international education may be interfering with children's national attachment. I showed how these concerns were not exclusive to any specific group within the middle and upper classes, such as pious, nationalist or secular, but rather were shared among a diverse group of parents of different and even at times opposing ideological orientations and positions within the elite.

Through an examination of how the internationally educated themselves constructed, experienced and enacted their 'predicament' as elite and Egyptian that ran across chapters two, four and five, I argue that Egypt's internationally educated young elite was caught in a cultural bind between competing constructions of class and national belonging. On the one hand, young people embodied their globally-oriented classed socialization and were fully cognizant of the privilege and social distinction it bestowed upon them. At the same time, their understanding of national belonging was shaped by (post)colonial discourses about Egyptian national identity and culture that they were exposed to at home and in school. These discourses tied national belonging to a classed construction of authenticity that excluded the cosmopolitan-inflected culture and dispositions of upwardly mobile and upper-class Egyptians. According to this construction, Egyptianness was the materially embodied experience of the majority of Egyptians who lived in poverty, steeped in local cultural forms and practices, and impervious to the Western-inflected cosmopolitanism of the educated middle and upper classes.

In chapter four, I showed how the culture of international education contributed to the reification of these colonial binaries through the creation of an institutional and pedagogical framework that divided knowledge, people, spaces and cultures into the realms of the national and international. Far from reflecting a diverse and multicultural “international”, the internationalism of international schools – as that of the broader education market- was a heavily Western-inflected internationalism, an inflection that- to many of my interlocutors- signaled the vitality of colonial dynamics in the present. A critical implication of this pattern was the way in which it activated and intensified the relevance of national frames of reference and identification in the discourses about identity and culture that circulated across international schools.

Although the dissertation highlighted instances where students contested the discourses on Egyptianness and belonging that circulated in and around their schools and homes, my analysis of the gendered articulation of this cultural dynamic in chapter five exposed the powerful ideological role that this construct played in the gendered reproduction of class. Through an examination of an observed gender division in the linguistic and cultural practices of female and male students, I showed how conflicting constructions of class and national belonging -and the divergently constructed cosmopolitan and local cultures repertoires they generated- were integral to the gender socialization of elite adolescents. Notwithstanding some variation in students’ belonging narratives – some endorsing, others contesting classed constructions of Egyptianness- their gendered performances attested to the salience of this construct in how they imagined ideal masculinity and femininity. To enact national belonging, internationally

educated boys appropriated mass-mediated rendition of working-class masculinity. These practices were not only condoned, but mostly encouraged and applauded within cosmopolitan-class circles and among parents who found in them a vehicle for their sons' integration in a broader national community.

The adoption of an idealized construction of working-class masculinity among cosmopolitan elite boys reified binary gender categories, and placed the burden of maintaining class boundaries on the girls. Girls were not only uninclined to adopt styles and practices that were marked local or working-class, but also deemed such practices a threat to their class status and prestige. Rather than challenging symbolic class boundaries, this gendered configuration of class, or classed construction of ideal masculinity and femininity, helped restore the colonially inspired cultural binaries that patterned class boundaries in Egypt.

In this dissertation, I proposed that cosmopolitanism, as constructed within this sociohistorical context, played a restrictive role in the gender socialization of elite boys and girls. Rather than expressing a multicultural, progressive or globalist imaginary of selfhood and community, the bourgeois cosmopolitanism associated with for-profit international schools and elite lifestyle practices reinstated colonially inspired conceptions of culture and difference. In this context, cosmopolitanism was in many ways indistinguishable from an outright appropriation of Western-inflected cultural and linguistic practices that restored a colonial cultural hierarchy through the segmentation of the educational market and its differential valuation of "cosmopolitan" and "local" cultural capital. More importantly, was how this structural and cultural configuration of

cosmopolitanism patterned the way in which internationally educated youth related to and identified with local cultural forms and practices.

In examining the culture and politics of cosmopolitan-class culture in Egypt, my dissertation emphasized the embodied and morally-inflected configuration of national belonging in this postcolonial and transnational context. In the narratives of the parents, students and educators I explored throughout the dissertation, national belonging was not a privilege or an entitlement as a top-down approach to understanding national attachment might suggest. Instead, my interlocutors within Cairo's cosmopolitan elite understood belonging as virtue that they had to cultivate over and against the pressure they felt to catch up with global processes. Parents, foremost, recognized a necessity in educating their children in international schools and providing them with all the resources that would help them be fluent in foreign languages. Yet, as I have argued, this openness to global cultural flows was by and large driven by the "cosmopolitan moment" (Beck and Sznaider 2010) they found themselves in, and not by ideological or ethical commitments to cosmopolitanism as a political or cultural project. My interlocutors associated this "cosmopolitan moment" with a revitalization of colonially inspired practices of social distinction, or, in vernacular parlance, "Egyptians' pathological obsession with foreigners" (*'u'dit al-khawaga*). In that sense, actively cultivating "love" (*hubb*), "pride" (*fakhr*) and an attitude of appreciation towards the culture and people of Egypt entailed 'resisting the obsession' by laboring to *incorporate* Egyptianness in one's social and cultural practices. In other words, to *manage* what Beck and Sznaider's (2010) referred to as "cosmopolitanism from within".

This was most clearly manifested in the way in which overturning cosmopolitan-inflected dispositions was one of most visible means by which this young elite enacted its national belonging. Yet, this is also where the gendered articulation of these constructs (of national and class belonging) might offer new insights into anthropological understandings of the classed configuration of gender and gender relations in Egypt. How does the cultural discrepancy in the socialization of girls and boys structure normative gender relations in private and public spaces? What are the specific forms of gender-based discrimination and exclusion that emerge out of this class-specific configuration of gender? What other ideological, institutional and social mechanisms participate in the reproduction, negotiation or contestation of these colonially-inspired gender ideals? To what extent are constructs about cosmopolitan-inflected femininity and *sha'bi*-inflected masculinity informed by racialized notions of personhood and community? These are some of the questions that my work puts forth, and which might offer fruitful insights for further research on gender, class and belonging in Egypt.

The risks and limitations of international schools

“Have you found a solution?” is a question parents and educators constantly asked me upon the mention of my research topic. Without needing to clarify what concerns they expected my research to respond to, such questions exposed the generalized sense of a ‘deep problem’ with Egyptian education that infused public and private conversations about education. Such questions were also ways in which the parents and educators I met articulated their sense of ambivalence and sometimes cynicisms about institutions like international schools, and more broadly, education reform, regardless of their

involvement with them. Alas, my response was always disappointing. I am not an education scholar, I would explain, but an anthropologist who looks at international schools as a methodological lens by which to explore broader shifts in elite culture and socialization practices. Yet, in concluding this study, I want to use the opportunity to underline some of the implications of my findings on public debates and policy on internationally-oriented education in Egypt, and beyond.

First, the findings of my study point to the structural and ideological limitations of internationally-oriented schooling in fostering the kinds of cosmopolitan attitudes and values that most international schools attest to upholding in their mission statements. Given the speed with which this schooling model is growing in the Global South, especially in the Middle East (Bunnell 2019), there is need for more ethnographic and critical research on the ideological and cultural formation of for-profit international education. The small body of ethnographic research about both older community-based and more recently established for-profit international schools indicate clearly the implication of international education in the reconfiguration or redefinition of local culture and local cultural practices (Tanu 2017; Peterson 2011; Belal 2017; Van Oord 2007). Whether this takes place through the outright promotion of Western-inflected conceptions of culture and ‘civilization’, the rearrangement or repackaging of local cultural practices, or through the reproduction of colonialist dynamics, there is need for more anthropological or anthropologically-informed research on the implications of international schooling on the cultural production of the globalizing elite of the twenty-first century.

Second, in as far as international schooling in Egypt as in many parts of the Global South is tied to profit-driven corporate interests (Nambissan 2021; Edwards Jr. and Means 2019), there is little indication that it will not exacerbate educational and social inequalities, both at the national as well as the global level. My dissertation has demonstrated the extent of the real and perceived gap between the educational experiences of students in international and national schools in Egypt. My findings corroborate earlier studies that addressed the challenges that face job seekers who do not speak English and do not possess the same internationally-oriented skills and dispositions of privately educated Egyptians (Barsoum 2002). The ensuing educational system does not merely privilege those with inherited cultural capital, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have long noted about schooling in France, it also produces an entirely different cultural register to which students in schools with nationally-based curriculum have no access. Yet, while others examined educational inequalities from the perspective of the economically marginalized, my work has offered a new vantage point for exploring the internal dynamics of elite formation and closure in Egypt. The fact that neither the Egyptian state nor local communities have expressed any interest in pressuring international schools into offering scholarships and other forms of financial assistance to students from families that cannot afford tuition indicates that equity or diversity is not ‘a desirable albeit unfulfilled’ objective in education policy. On the contrary, it suggests that “exclusivity” is an integral component in dominant constructions of superior education in an internationally-oriented neoliberal educational field.

The cultural configuration of this “exclusivity” that I examined in my dissertation indicates that neoliberalizing economies in the Global South may be producing new conditions of social privilege that challenge conventional modernist understandings of the social mechanisms that reproduce national cultures and closures. While my dissertation focused on how students navigated conflicting cultural repertoires of elite and national belonging, the ongoing marketization, internationalization *and* financialization of the educational field in Egypt shows that these practices are embedded in broader ideological and structural shifts in the relationship between the state, the cultural field and educational institutes.

Finally, these educational transformations highlight the paradoxical implications of enjoying a superior schooling experience in present-day Egypt. What is paradoxical about an international educational trajectory is how it relates to Gramscian approaches to eliteness that take the power of socioeconomically dominant groups to control and govern the production and circulation of cultural and ideological messages for granted. This study has suggested, however, that the attainment of globally-relevant and internationally recognized skills and disposition may be draining the local educated elite of its full potential to participate in and contribute to cultural, intellectual *and* political life in Egypt. This contradiction - implicit in my engagement with eliteness in Egypt- raises questions about the power (ideological, political or cultural) that a ‘civilian elite’ in Egypt possesses and reproduces by educating their children in for-profit international schools.

Many of my interlocutors among critical educators and those engaged in activism or intellectual debates pertaining to education in Egypt claimed that it was in the best interest of an authoritarian regime to isolate wealthy and highly educated Egyptians culturally and socially from the rest of society. Yet, in exploring how internationally educated youth negotiated their sense of “not quite belonging,” this dissertation documented a revitalization of national frames of reference and identification among cosmopolitan elite communities that sheds new light on common representations of elite cultural isolation and estrangement in Egyptian public debates. What the findings of this study propose instead is the emergence of a new understanding of nationalism among the globalizing elite of post-2011 Egypt challenges modular conceptions of nationalism and national belonging that emphasize modernist understandings of national culture and identity. Instead, the salience of moral, affective and aesthetic registers in lieu in the articulations of national belonging that I observed among internationally educated youth, their parents, and teachers point to a new construction of national belonging and citizenship that reproduces national attachment without compromising the culture and lifestyle of a globalizing elite.

The dissertation captured the early phases of this national renewal in 2016-2017 as urban elite communities were still grappling with changing social and economic conditions under a new political regime. Yet, the development and consolidation of this nationalist turn under the new authoritarian military regime with the support and endorsement of large segments of the globalizing elite in the years that followed calls for further in-depth investigation of the “nationalism” of Egypt’s globalizing elite culture.

Understanding whether and how the globalizing class practices of Egypt's elite serve as incubator for the revitalization of national attachment under an authoritarian regime might provide a new vantage point for understanding broader transnational cultural dynamics that fuel the resurgence of populism and ethno-nationalist politics in the twenty-first century.

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