How Privatized Schooling is Operated from Below in Iran

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Abstract

This thesis takes the context-specific neoliberalism in education as an entry point to inquire into the networks of relationships involved in social reproduction through privatized schooling. I ask beyond the neoliberal regulations that the government imposes on the privatized education, how the embedded neoliberal rationality in the institutional and individual levels is operating from below. I specifically look into the bilateral relationships between supply and demand sides of the choice system of education provision to explore the diverse tendencies involved in it, including neoliberalism, Islamic technocracy, and class middle-class, whose advantages highly depend on formation of a coalition. The thesis is based on research conducted in Tehran, from late September 2019 until early December 2019, consisted of 27 interviews with parents, school principals, and other school staff. Further, it is supplemented by non-participant observation in two female private high schools. Drawing on three months' fieldwork, I explain the complexity of the school choice process from both sides of the deal; education provider and education consumer. On the one hand, I argue that how the school management board narrows down the composition of staff and students to maintain and present the school's distinctive institutional habitus. On the other hand, I describe the parental school choice, which operates as a class strategy safeguarding the privileged social positions and possessed capital of the family while ensuring the prospect attainment of the student, academically and professionally. Thus, this thesis sheds new light on the relational networks involved in the choice system of education provision that considerably contribute to the perpetuation and reproduction of social inequality.

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Chapter one: Introduction

'Iran, France, Iraq, Lebanon, Chili … the struggle is the same; abolition of neoliberalism'. This slogan, written on a large placard and carried by students of the University of Tehran on the occasion of National Student Day in Iran, became the source of controversy in December 2019. While the protest was organized to target the unjust policies of the government, including the commodification and marketization of education, in a broader sense, the debates turned heated on whether the term 'neoliberalism' is an all-included indicator of the authoritarian regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Given the historical and contextual differences, it was questionable that to what extent these diverse social movements, ranging from Iran to Chili, can be considered united in terms of intentions and ends[1]. The trending arguments on social media and intellectual fora coincided with my research in Iran, which made me revisit the starting point of the thesis.

All those discussions on the question of the historical configuration of neoliberalism in Iran that this research theoretically relies on, highlighted the importance of an overview focused on neoliberalism and its theoretical and practical deployment, across geopolitical boundaries. Hence, it is crucial to study what neoliberalism refers to and how its consequences can be traced to the education system. In what follows, first, I examine the question of neoliberalism to open up the ground for further discussion on the multidimensional nexus of privatized education in contemporary Iran. I also argue the methodology I have employed to give insight into the question of how privatized education is operated from below.

[1] Find more information here -> https://www.radiozamaneh.com/479572

Question of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is practically associated with the re-engineering of the state through pro-market governance and competitive individualism, which encourages reduction in welfare state provisions, private enterprise, free trade, *Laissez-Faire*, and consumer choice (Harvey, 2005; Bockman, 2013). Bringing the concept "homo economicus" into focus, Wendy Brown (2015) applies neoliberalism as "an order of normative reason," which extends "a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life" (Brown, 2015, p.30). Thus, considering it as rationality, neoliberalism is more than what David Harvey called as a political project and a historical turning point that strives to accomplish restoring the class power of the global economic elite (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal rationality has become the dominant mode of governance that is neither limited to the economic sphere nor state policies; rather, it is intertwined with the formation of new subjectivity and citizenship, and a new organization of the social (Brown, 2015; Kivelä, 2018; Oksala, 2013; Wilkins, 2018).

I have found this notion of neoliberalism compatible with the thesis's analytical point of view that can open the space for exploring the three interlinked dimensions of neoliberal policies in education; governmentality or the modern state's art of government, embedded and organized neoliberal rationality in the institutional level, and the neoliberal subject (Michel Foucault et al., 1987; Rose, 1990).

As well-known theorists of neoliberalism, both pro or con come from the Global North, the relevant theoretical framework on what neoliberalism refers to, usually supplemented by the historical narration of neoliberal policies' implementation in the Global North and the affected livelihood of people in regions like The United States and Europe under the rule of market logic (Dados & Connell, 2018). Even though many scholars across the Global South have been

concerned with neoliberalism, its roots, aspects, and implications, there is an impression that neoliberalism with fixed characteristic and attribute imposed on the rest of the globe in the 1980s and 1990s by IMF and World Bank through structural adjustment programs, so the rest of the world imported and implemented a copy of Northern policies (Dados & Connell, 2018). Hence, studies of neoliberalism sometimes considers "the Western neoliberal trajectory as the neoliberal trajectory per se" (Hilgers, 2012, p.80). This western-centric narration can shed further light on the question of why the application of neoliberalism as a conceptual framework, with such a general understanding, turns controversial if its contextual and local trajectory would be overlooked.

Concerning the slogan mentioned above, do we all struggle with the same issue? By and large, yes. Despite the local variation of neoliberal policies' implementation, there is a shared consensus on its negative consequences, including natural resource exploitation, dismantling of the welfare state, increasing global inequality, and even oppression in the name of freedom (Young, 2018, p.185). Thus, it makes sense to target a global order whose operation through the expansion of market logic aggravates the social and economic inequality across geopolitical boundaries. Neoliberal program is not concerned with inequality since it prioritizes competition, "which increases efficiency, productivity, and ultimately, wealth" (Jones, 2018, p.170) hence, "social justice can never be the aim of successful economic policy" (Oksala, 2013, p.64).

However, going deep into a given setting, the manifestation of neoliberalism and its assigned rationality is context-specific. The neoliberal order is not a unified and standardized set of policies leading to similar outcomes. Exploring neoliberalism across countries represents its volatile hybridity and its existing manifestations as partial, polycentric, and plural (Peck et al., 2018). As Ong (2006) noted, neoliberalism as a mobile technology has a fluid and heterogeneous nature.

Accordingly, neoliberal logic is best conceptualized not as a fixed set of attributes and outcomes or "standardized universal apparatus but a migratory technology of governing that interacts with situated sets of elements and circumstances" (Ong, 2007, p.5). Therefore, the theoretic agenda of neoliberalism does not contradict the emergence of various political, institutional, and individual implications arising from the implementation of market-led rationality in different spatiotemporal contexts (Abazari & Zakeri, 2019). Drawing on this brief introduction, the next section deals with the operationalization of neoliberalism after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran.

Neoliberalism in post-revolutionary Iran

No doubt, the conceptual framework of neoliberalism cannot be directly transposed into the Iranian context without paying attention to the three decades' correlation of political Islam and neoliberal ideology(Abazari & Zakeri, 2019). The neoliberal policies in the economic field have been implemented by the complete consensus of all political forces involved in the power structure so that the privatization of state-owned enterprises and institutions has been introduced as a panacea to the wretched economic situation of Iran by the end of Iran-Iraq war (since1989) (Harris, 2013, p.213). For the first time after the 1979 revolution, IMF and World Bank mission visited Iran in June 1990. In the summary report of the mission under the heading "The Islamic Republic of Iran undergoes profound structural and institutional changes" was stated, Iran's authorities "expressed their determination to move forward with broadly based macroeconomic adjustment, encompassing a strengthened role for the private sector and a step by step opening up of the economy." (cited in Nomani & Behdad, 2006, p.74).

In this regard, privatization, precarization of labor, deregulation, and the state's irresponsibility in the field of social services, including health care and education, have been the crucial plans on the path to neoliberalism (Abazari & Zakeri, 2019). Over the post-war reconstruction and

economic liberalization, education was not an exception, so the market-oriented reforms affected the education system strikingly.

Ask help for education

In the first decade after the Islamic Revolution (1979), private schools were shut down with the excuse that non-governmental schools only served the better off and increased social and educational inequality. (Jafari, 2008; Arani et al., 2015). However, the state's inability to provide financial resources to the Ministry of Education due to the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), population growth, the decline of oil revenue, urbanization, and the high public demand for education (Arani et al., 2015) made the state ask help for education from the private sector in 1989.

Over recent decades, the privatization of education enjoyed governmental support. "This support included administrative (organizational support), financial/material (low-interest loans and assignment of land), and workforce (dispatching teachers)" (Ibid, p.3). The consequence of this actions was the establishment of 13,893 private schools, employing about 105,000 staff in the academic year 2009-2010 (NGSO, 2011). Although, because of economic constraints and inadequate applicants, some private schools have been suspended over recent years (Arani et al., 2015), others, specifically in metropolises, have developed and even turned to the educational complexes, covering different grades from pre-elementary to pre-university.[2]

Alongside the growing participation of the private sector in education, the state gradually steps back from the education system, so the percentage of the GDP spent on education expenditures

[2] Public education in Iran includes three sorts of schools; the elementary school that starts at the age of 6 for 6 years, junior high school, from seventh to nine grades, and senior high school from ninth to eleventh grades. The pre-university grade (the twelfth) is only mandatory for higher education applicants.

has dropped from 4.6 percent in 2007 to 2.3 percent in 2019, while the global percentage was 4.8 in 2017 (Soltani, 2019).

According to Article 30 of the constitution of The Islamic Republic of Iran, "the government is responsible for providing the means for public education for everyone up to the end of high school. It must expand free higher education until the nation reaches self-sufficiency" (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). However, advocates of privatization argue the expanded state in Iran has led to the formation of an inefficient and costly bureaucratic system. Therefore, outsourcing public services improves the managerial and administrative system of the country, and the growing competition among the private sector will lead to improved service provision (Sadeghi Borujeni, 2018).

Privatization of education has also been introduced the treatment of educational inequality (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013) that in the absence of an efficient tax system, could provide the essential funding for investment in public schools in favor of underprivileged classes (Mohammadbeigi, 1990, p.22). In this view, the deputy minister of Labor and Social Welfare in an interview pointed out "after the Islamic revolution, along with the growing flow of marketization in education, some top officials regarded Article 30 infeasible and even incorrect that was ratified due to the post-revolutionary atmosphere of the country" (Midari, 2019). To understand this account, it should be noted that the post-revolutionary policymaking was generally characterized by seeking to eradicate poverty and establish "the rule of the oppressed" in society (Behdad & Nomani, 2009).

Privatized education; complex networks or relationships

The impact of neoliberal policies on education can be studied in two trends; the privatization in public education or "endogenous" privatization which "involve the importing of ideas, techniques, and practices from the private in order to make the public sector more like business and more business-like" and privatization of public education or "exogenous" privatization, which refers to "the opening up of public education services to private sector participation [usually] on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education" (Ball & Youdell, 2008, p.9). In the education system of Iran, Both trends are investigable (Omidi, 2019), and due to the expansion of the topic, I narrow the field of study to 'exogenous privatization' and outsourcing education to the private sector. Schooling is my longtime interest, and I started researching it in 2013 over a research project titled 'From school to home,' which investigated the everyday life of female high school students within the period, leaving the school and arriving home.

So far, neoliberalism as a central analytical framework of many existing studies on the educational inequalities, has broadly been examined on the more general critique of the substitution of democratic structures with market logic (Brathwaite, 2017). It would be simplistic, however, to reduce the interpretation of what is happening in the education system to the economic agenda. As Michael Apple (2006, p.30) noted, no one chapter could hope to provide a complete picture of the education system's complexity. Even though the penetration of neoliberal doctrine has substantial impact on education, it does not illuminate the whole network involved in it. Thus, it is crucial to provide an outline of the determinant parties surrounding the phenomenon of privatized education or choice system of school provision.

Analyzing the United States educational system, Apple (2006) attempts to go beyond the relationship of education and economy to explore the multiple and even contradictory tendencies within the education's rightist turn, what he calls "the force of conservative modernization" (p.4). Although the account is focused on the contemporary situation of the United States, his approach to the combination of forces influencing the education system could be traced in an international context. He discusses four significant elements of conservative modernization in education: "neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, and a particular fraction of the upwardly mobile professional and managerial new middle class" (ibid, p. 31). Drawing on the insight that Apple's work confers, in this thesis, I explore the interlinked tendencies that accompanied market turn in education.

My main argument is focused on an alliance of diverse beneficiaries, including government, neoliberal and Islamic-technocrat institution (Nikfar, 2005), and middle-class citizen-consumer (Wilkins, 2018) that has changed the landscape of the education system in Iran; thereby, each party is making a profit out of the ongoing process of privatization of education. This research starts investigating the process of school choice prior to the parental decision to grasp a bigger picture of that. Accordingly, it is necessary to demonstrate how the ultimate parental school choice, which is a class-oriented strategy for social reproduction, is influenced by multilayer screening and selecting procedures in the governmental and organizational levels. Initially, the state regulates the foundation of private schools and determines who will be the founder of a private school and under what condition a school is going to be established and run. Further, according to the ideological and political affiliation of the school's founder and management board, the institutional habitus of school (D Reay et al., 2001) determines the context-specific regulation of a private school, and markedly affects the school choice. Eventually, the choice system of school provision makes

parents responsible to 'freely' and 'autonomously' choose the best education provider for their offspring.

This research attempts to shed further light on the complexity of privatized education and the networks of relationships involved in the reproduction of social inequality through education in the Iranian context. For doing so, both sides of the choice system of education provision, school and family, are analyzed.

Given the growth of the parastatal sector through the privatization of state-owned enterprises, Kevan Harris (2013) identifies the macro privatization in Iran after 2005 "Capitalism from above, as wide and dispersed patrimonial networks came to dominate the technocratic agencies" (Harris, 2013, p.243). However, the other side of the coin is 'neoliberalism from below' (Gago, 2017) that regards neoliberal policies' implementation, as a multilateral process with different and even contradictory dimensions that simultaneously is operated from above and below. Challenging the image of "omnipotent above for the state," Veronica Gago underlines neoliberalism from below "as a set of conditions materialized beyond the will of government" which has been implemented by the regular people and individual citizens who embody the neoliberal logic via various strategies in their everyday life (Gago, 2017, p.6).

This thesis is shaped around the idea that the privatization of education is not merely a top-down force imposing from above on subjects. Instead, the complicity of a neoliberal form of citizen who is a responsible consumer for her own welfare, with the government, has transformed the educational landscape at the structural, institutional, and individual scales. In the network of relationships involved in education, a coalition of neoliberals, Islamic-technocrats, and middle-class citizen-consumers, makes the system effectively function and benefit certain class strata.

Hence, the second chapter deals with the supply side of the choice system of education provision. It examines a variety of strategies that the private school's founder and management board deploy to construct, maintain, and represent the school's institutional habitus, serve a specific group of citizen-consumers, and by doing so, survive within the competitive atmosphere of privatized education. Drawing on the two important tendencies; neoliberalism and Islamic technocracy, it is also argued that at the institutional level, how privatized schools represent themselves to the market, and how the compositions of employees and students are engineered through given gatekeeping strategies that give rise to the formation of an exclusive and distinctive environment for 'insiders.'

The third chapter examines the demand side of the choice system of school provision. First and foremost, the conventional notion of choice within the education system as a free and autonomous action is questioned. My main argument is the blurry boundary of choice and compulsion that implicitly or explicitly makes parents prefer private schools on public ones. Besides the appealing aspects of the choice system, this process can arouse a sense of passivity and pressure that is discussed there. Moreover, given the prior school's screening and gatekeeping, I argue the criteria that make interviewees enroll their offspring in a given school. It is studied how through avoiding 'others', the middle-class parents with the cooperation of the school management attempt to not only safeguard but also reproduce their class-oriented privileges and cultural capital.

Methodology

This thesis is based on interviews with 27 individuals; 12 school staff, including principal, vice-principal, teacher, consultant, and librarian, and 15 parents who enrolled their teenage children in different private schools of Tehran. Moreover, I supplemented the research data by conducting

non-participant observation at two female private high schools in Tehran. In general, the fieldwork lasted from late September 2019 to early December 2019.

Regarding the interview with parents, I drew on my formal and informal social networks to recruit respondents through the snowball sampling technique, and I interviewed 13 mothers and two fathers. The interviewees' age varied from 37 to 47, and the age of their offspring, whose school was the interview's main topic, varied from 13 to 17. However, it needs to be mentioned; there were some points that the parent, simultaneously or comparably, talked about the schooling of their other child.

The interviews were focused on the parental school choice of seven male students and eight female ones. As I could not find any meaningful connection between school choice and student's gender, I do not note the gender of the respondent's child. Most of the interviews took place in both the interviewees' place of work and their house. At the request of some parents, the interview was conducted by phone calls, and with the respondents' approval, all interviews were digitally recorded.

All parents I interviewed, belonged to middle-class starta. Accordingly, the interviewees can be categorized into three groups, lower middle-class (including three families), middle-class (six families), and upper middle-class (six families). This grouping is mainly derived from a composite of parents' occupation, education, and residential neighborhood. Further, reading the transcribed interviews several times helped me to relatively capture the interviewees' socioeconomic class by noticing some subtle points among their words. As some questions targeted the family cultural capital, this factor also gave more detail on respondents' familial habitus and their possessed cultural capital. Furthermore, in the case of in-person interviews, the parents' mannerisms,

language, and appearance were complementary sources, making the class categorization more accurate.

It turns out that the school choice was an exciting topic for the interviewees since they all enthusiastically shared their experiences with me. I find the topic, school choice, as something between a private matter and public matter, which can trigger heated conversations between people. So, this issue sometimes influenced the format of the interview and made it less-structured and more storytelling.

In respect to the interviews with the schools' staff, eight of those were conducted in person and inside the school. As central offices of the schools were the interview's location, shortage of time and other staff's presence somehow made the conversations short. After conducting two interviews with schools' staff through telephone, the impact of environment got highlighted for me, since the fear of being heard by other staff might make some interviewees talk cautiously and conservatively. To broaden my perspective on the employment policies of private schools and the work condition, I also conducted two telephone-based interviews with a female teacher and a male one who worked in other private schools of Tehran. Concerning the interviewed staffs' gender, nine respondents were female and three of them were male.

As I expected prior to the fieldwork, finding the proper observation setting was a demanding job since I tended to supplement my interviews by observation of a field that, more or less, could be a representative sample of private schools' atmosphere. In pursuit of this, I held three informal exploratory interviews with private schools' teachers to figure out what is going on at the field level. As a result, with the consultation of my key informants, I chose two private schools in two different neighborhoods; one in uptown and relatively classy area and the other in midtown of Tehran.

Both schools accepted me as an autonomous researcher; however, I experience two sorts of dynamics between the schools' management board and myself. I was introduced to both schools by my informants who were collaborating with the schools at the time. Rayan high school's management board was extremely strict about my presence in the school, so I could manage to attend there only three times. Except for one time that I was allowed to attend a mathematic class, I spent the rest of my time in the central office, where I interviewed teachers and other staff. Yasin high school, however, was more welcomed, and I could visit there six times. In Yasin, I felt less pressure; thereby, I could walk around different places like the library, restaurant, and yard, and I attended three different classes. However, because of the short period of fieldwork, in none of the schools, I became an 'insider'. Even in Yasin high school, my presence was monitored by the staff.

As "ethnographic knowledge builds upon a negotiated reality between the anthropologist and informants" (Ong, 1987, p.1), this thesis mainly presents a textual analysis of 27 interviews. After transcription of all interviews, clustering and analyzing the data aided me to extract the principal themes and construct a structured narrative out of the raw materials.

It should be noted that to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the respondents' names are pseudo. Rayan and Yasin are also pseudo titles that I use for referring to the observational fields.

Chapter two: Engineering the staff and students' compositions

Lili, the mother of a 14 years old boy, Sina, who studies at Atomic Energy (AE)[3], a very prestigious junior high school, started looking for "an excellent high school" when her son was ten years old. She spent considerable time and effort, weighing up various options. Private schools' websites did not suffice for her, so Lili visited many schools in person to "have a more precise picture of what is going on." Eventually, she selected three well-known schools, and "it was the beginning of the journey" since her son had to pass three different entrance exams. Meanwhile, she changed her mind about one of the choices since "that somehow had a religious atmosphere." Lili hired several private tutors to make sure Sina could pass the science exams. At the time, AE, for example, received 6000 applications while it was supposed to select 120 individuals based on the result of the first round science exam and then narrow down the applicants to 60 in the second round that is called a psychological interview. She described that summer as a very stressful period saying that "It was like; I was also a student getting ready for the exams." Sina was admitted to both schools; however, because of the brighter future that could be imagined by choosing AE in terms of higher education destination, Lili enrolled her son there even though it was much further away from their residential neighborhood. Over the interview, Lili was confident that her son would be admitted to AE senior high school[4] and, consequently, Sharif University, the first rank engineering university in Iran. Like many people, Lili regarded engineering as a prestigious academic discipline and a high-ranking career choice. After sharing the story of school choice, Lili finished her account in this way:

[3] The Atomic Energy is a private high school affiliated to the Atomic Energy Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

[4] The interviewee mentioned that AE senior high school also selects pupils based on the entry exams' results, however, "according to the last year's admission result, 52 of 60 admitted students were AE junior high school's graduated ones".

> "Honestly, my main reason for insisting on private schools is their environment. You know what? The atmosphere of private schools is more sterilized compared to public ones. Among Sina's 20 classmates, there is still one student who is a troublemaker and smokes cigarette. However, in general, wealthier families are more decent and well- mannered. Right? Because they are educated. We also had challenges [there], but I am more relieved about him, now. In AE, limited places are offered, so; families are selected, students are selected".

Lili's school choice is a good starting point for this chapter since it highlights various aspects of school choice that are discussed in detail here. As explained in the introduction, to capture the broader picture of the choice system of education, it is crucial to look at the complex networks of relations between family and school. On the one hand, target families' expectation, priorities, and demand take shape to the institutional strategies and practices of school, and on the other, the school's structure and goals affect the applicants' wants and make them partly adjust their expectation and aspiration to the school's regulations and policies. As a result of this bilateral relationship, over the process of school choice, some options become virtually unthinkable, others possible, and yet others negotiable (Reay et al., 2001, p.6). In practice, both sides, family and school, are influenced by each other in furthering their ambition and ensuring their interests and privileges. In this chapter, the process of school choice is examined prior to the parental choice and within the institutional context.

School institutional habitus

There is an intensified competition among the private sector to catch parents' attention due to the growing demand for private schools.[5] While the newly founded or less renowned schools need to strive to be seen, identified, and chosen in this competitive atmosphere, the well-known schools can take advantage of their established reputation and, consequently, the higher number of applicants. So, even though high fees and high academic entry standards bring a great deal of self-selection among applicants, there is still severe competition for places (Power, 2003, p. 23). Scrolling through the private schools' websites demonstrates that particular branding strategies are applied to underline the critical role that a school can play on the pupil's prospective destination in terms of higher education and occupation. However, the spectrum of parental expectations of school varies based on the familial habitus and orientation. As Lili points out, parents aim to find "an excellent school" for their offspring but, what criteria make them choose one school over another is a question.

Expanding the concept of habitus to the organizational level, Reay and others (2001) put forward the term 'institutional habitus' to explore schools' strategies in terms of organizing students' composition, admission policies, and exclusiveness. In a Bourdieusian approach, institutional habitus refers to differing everyday practices within schools in terms of curriculum and pedagogy policies that practically interact with the familial habitus, and it has a significant impact on the choice-making processes. As a conceptual framework, institutional habitus is defined "as a complex internalized core that is the source of day to day practice" in a given

[5] In 2018, the World Bank released a report indicating that the rate of enrollment in private schools in Iran at primary and secondary grades has increased. Accordingly, enrollment in primary private schools between 1971 and 2015 augmented from 7.16 to 10.45 percent. Furthermore, enrollment in private secondary schools between 2003 and 2015 increased from 6.72 to 13.56 percent. For further information take a look at http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&type=metadata&series=SE.PRM.PRIV.ZS

environment and "tends to be reproductive rather than transformative" (Reay et al., 2001, p.1). As it is through the workings of habitus that practice is associated with capital and field, school choice for both sides of the deal, family and school, it is a proper opportunity for the interaction of various capitals and habitus that leads to the development of certain practices. (Reay, 2004, p.432)

The concept 'school culture' (Bernstein, 1977) can also be a suitable supplementary tool to rely on exploring the significant role that the school plays affecting and being affected by the school choice process. Clarifying the term school culture, Bernstein made a distinction between two school's interrelated complexes of behavior, the expressive order and instrumental order. The expressive order refers to conduct, behavior, and manner, and the instrumental order "is concerned with the acquisition of specific skills and bodies of knowledge" (Power 2003, p.22). To put it concretely, the instrumental order is defined as a matter of small classes, quality teaching methods, and a high-performance curriculum. On the other hand, the expressive order is characterized by the school atmosphere, the pupils' composition, social exclusiveness, and the didactical policies of a given school. Within an individual school, there can be a variation of these orders, and even "there may be considerable tension between them" (Ibid).

The schools' managerial board usually tries to make the school characteristic by emphasizing its distinctive curriculum and pedagogy. Even though all of the private schools in Iran are obliged to implement the nationwide educational program and follow the planned curriculum, some might carry out their own scheme and even use external educational sources besides teaching the nationally distributed textbooks, which seems promising to boost school-level performance (Windle, 2019) . For example, the principal of Yasin high School states:

> "We believe the content of formal textbooks has serious problems, and it needs to be transformed. We have worked a lot on this issue, and still, there is much to do. Just for your

> information, we author 48 percent of what a tenth-grade student studies. The rest is the contents of formal textbooks. Forty-eight percent of our curriculum is beyond the education system plan […] We believe the formal education methods, particularly in humanities, are fundamentally incorrect."

Private schools usually offer a variety of extra-curricular courses, ranging from swimming to robotic classes. However, to operationalize the planned scheme and follow the school's desired orders, the management board needs to recruit the right employee and the right student, who, academically and culturally, correspond to the school's institutional habitus. In the section below, I explain how and under what conditions the private schools' regulations and policies are constructed, and how these regulations influence the entry policies of the school.

Sources of schooling regulations

Concour,[6] the Iranian university entrance exam, dramatically affects the instrumental order of private high schools so that many educational practices, including students' and teachers' compositions, class sizes, training methods, curriculum, and extra-curricular courses, have been arranged to maximize the percentage of students' admission in top-notch universities. In this regard, branding on the instrumental order of schools mainly focused on hiring Concour specialists, Concour-based curriculum, organizing weekly mock tests, and offering unique plans like 'Concour camp' on afternoons or holidays. On the other hand, the expressive order mainly takes shape through two primary sources; governmental regulation and individualized school management's tendency.

[6] Concour is a standardized nationwide entrance exam holding once a year as the primary way of getting admission to higher education for most of universities and fields of study in Iran

In the post-revolution Iran, beyond their educational goals, schools have been regarded as an institution for "Materializing *Hayate Tayyebah* (the ideal Islamic life), universal justice and Islamic-Iranian civilization" (Fundamental Reform Document of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2011, p.6). As "it is in schools that the government's programs can be presented in a much more systematic manner than in places of worship, work, or in the family" Iranian revolutionaries rearranged schooling and the content of curricula in order to implement the Islamic ideals and values (Shorish, 1988, p.58-72). Thus, in the first place, the school's expressive order is affected by the regulations and laws that the government imposes on private educational institutions. The government primarily determines who is allowed to found a private school and under what circumstances. Article 8 of the Law on the Establishment and Administration of Non-Governmental Schools and Educational Centers[7] for instance, specifies that the founder must meet the following requirements:

- Citizenship of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Practical belief and commitment to the principles and rules of Islam, faith and good reputation
- Practical commitment to the constitution and *Velayat-e-Faqih* (leading the country on behalf of the occult twelfth Imam by the supreme leader)
- No affiliation to the former regime of Iran (Pahlavi monarchy) or deviant and illegal factions
- No criminal records
- At least a bachelor's degree or equivalent
- At least 30-year-old
- The Marital status of a male applicant should be married (Law on the Establishment and Administration of Non-Governmental Schools and Educational Centers, 2011, p.6)

[7] The first law on the establishment of private schools was approved in 1988 and revised in 2008. The revised version was supposed to be implemented on a trial for five years; however, because of the change of government cabinet, it was ratified three years overdue in 2011. The new law is called 'Law on the Establishment and Administration of Non-Governmental Schools and Educational Centers.'

Even though Article includes two notes on the application of religious minorities and its preconditions, these fundamental requirements practically narrow down the list of potential founders of private schools that can lead to the formation of given institutional habitus and the implementation of given expressive order. This law also encompasses other detailed articles and notes on the duties and responsibilities of the private schools' founders, school funding, essential qualification of private schools' principal, salaries and benefits of private schools' employees, and condition of private schools' suspension. These regulations can guide us to the question of government and its positions within the nexus of privatized education in Iran. I do not have space here to include the gatekeeping mechanism that the government imposes on the foundation and administration of non-governmental schools; however, I suffice to touch upon the dialectical relation of the government and the private sector in terms of schooling since it opens the space for private school autonomy and informal school-based regulations.

At the legislative level, the government formally regulates different aspects of privatized schooling, including summoning working teachers to the ministry selection board and inspecting the schools' environment and equipment. However, in practice, the sporadic and loose supervision of the government on private schools' performance provides the floor for emergence and development of informal and flexible arrangements and practices so that school could find a way around to deal with or even circumvent challenging regulations. An example could shed further light on this dialectical relationship. As all schools in Iran are single-sex, the recruitment of teachers of the opposite sex is not legally allowed in high school. However, within both observational fields, some male teachers were present. In this connection, my informants refer to tactics that the management applies to avoid trouble. Both schools had a security gate and safeguard. So, "they could be informed about the presence of the Ministry inspector immediately

and asked the male teachers to hide somewhere like in the kitchen for a while". My informant in Yasin added, "I am pretty sure the Ministry knows about it, but they just pretend they do not know."

More elaborately, the expressive order of school is directed by the ideological and political tendency of the founder (either natural or legal person) and the management board who have been selected based on the external regulation of the government. The research finding shows that, many private schools apply multilayered gatekeeping policies to build the desired composition of students and employees. To investigate the institutional habitus of private schools and its contribution to the gatekeeping processes, it is crucial to see where the school's internal orders and regulations stem from, and from which tendencies the school's day-to-day practices emanate.

The interviews and observation that I conducted revealed two dominant tendencies among private schools' management that form the institutional habitus and determine the gatekeeping policies; neoliberalism and Islamic technocracy. As explained in the introduction, the neoliberal tendency is based on economic rationality and the idea of weak and inefficient state so that it is guided by the dichotomous vision of bad public school vs. good private school (Apple, 2006). This tendency also stresses the enhanced parental voice and choice via privatized education through "the reintegration of educational policy and practice into the ideological agenda of neoliberalism" and free-market (Ibid, p.31-35).

Analyzing Luxemburg's insight on the non-capitalist zones, Nancy Fraser (2014) argues that the front-story of capitalism is always situated to a social reproduction at the back-story of the social bonds that underpin the social cooperation/domination, required for capitalist commodity production (Fraser, 2014). Hence, education that is regarded as a non-economic zone, plays a crucial role in maximizing private sector participation, profit-making, and consequently

perpetuating social and economic inequality. Through promoting the parental right of school choice, neoliberal ideology has developed a burgeoning, mobile, post-national middle class who use the opportunity of school choice "as a class strategy, a mechanism for reproducing social advantage, a means of 'doing' class" (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p.83). In this regard, neoliberalism produced a new common sense and a new set of subjectivities that affect the dynamics of educational inequalities via acknowledging and encouraging the privatization of education. Nonetheless, in the Iranian context, the neoliberal tendency is not a sufficient explanation analyzing the complex network of relationships within privatized education.

Islamic technocracy is constructed around the synchronized tendencies towards traditionalism and modernization. In his analysis of the Islamic-Iranian modernization after the 1979 revolution, Mohammadreza Nikfar (2005) in opposition to the stereotypical theorization of the Islamic revolution that regards it a severe reactionary of tradition to modernity, refers to the empowerment of an authoritarian religious discourse that is not opposed to the application of modern/instrumental rationality. To put it more bluntly, he notes that through the empowerment of 'Muslim technocrats' notion of tradition/ modernity was reformed so that the combination of religious-oriented fanaticism and technique-based modernism leads to the formation of Islamic-Iranian modernization that practically promote a peculiar religious kind of capitalism [in Persian *Maldariye moderne eslami*].

The interviews and observation data acknowledge the influence of Islamic technocracy tendency on the field of privatized education. This tendency is characterized by the deployment of Islamic discourse in education to the extent that some interviewees called them 'religious schools'. Unlike the neoliberal emphasis on the idea of the weak state, Islamic technocracy is usually guided by a stable vision of state. Further, private schools run by this tendency are explicitly or implicitly

affiliated to a political/religious party, faction, or even a statesman. Hence, the gatekeeping strategies of these tendencies, especially on students, are markedly structured based on the clear-cut division between 'insider' and 'outsider.'

These schools are usually eager to recruit applicants whose familial habitus match the institutional habitus of the school. So, religious-oriented belief and, in some cases the political affiliation of the applicants' family are taken into consideration over the interview process. In the first place, the school's institutional habitus encourages specific families to apply, but it is not always the case. In this light, Rima points out:

> "Our home is quite close to Roozbeh school; it is an excellent school in terms of educational infrastructure, it has many facilities, it is religious though. Two of my friends' sons passed the entrance exam of a gifted high school because they used to be Roozbeh's students […] Now, I regret that I cannot enroll my son there. Why can just some particular people go there? They (the management board) emphasize the mother [of student] must wear *Chador* (the full-body-length black veil that is introduced as top hijab for Muslim women by authorities), they mean family should be religious. They do not register a student without further investigation. What a pity! The school has its own swimming pool; it has even a football playing field inside the complex."

This comment demonstrates how the management tendencies determine the school's gatekeeping policies. It also highlights the religious-oriented criterion for recognition of the potential 'insider' whose familial habitus corresponds to the institutional habitus. Through branding strategies, the private school managerial boards attempt to distinguish its institutional habitus and build an exclusive environment for its target pupils. The school's tendencies need to match up to its target family's expectations, priorities, and tendencies. In the next section, I argue the strategies that

private schools apply to make their desired composition of staff and students. It should be noted that the existence and degree of gatekeeping strategies highly depend on the number of applicants and the school budget; thus, obviously, there are private schools that are not selective to afford the schooling expenses. However, as all the cases I deal with through the interviews and observation went through the process of multilayered entry exams, I concentrate on the first-hand data gathered over the research.

Selected staff; private schools' employment policies

Privatized education leads to school autonomy, devolving various aspects of decision-making from central or regional offices to individual schools (Whitty, 1999, p.53). So, different institutional habitus give rise to different sets of practices within schools. To operationalize the desired educational plan and the instrumental and expressive orders, hiring the 'right employee' is a primary step. Overall, public schools' teachers are either educated in the so-called Teachers Training Colleges that the Ministry of Education manages and, consequently, are offered permanent contract employment with complete benefit packages, or hired through the multi-layered examinations that the Ministry occasionally gives to handle the regional teacher' shortage. In the latter, the employment contract can be either permanent and full-time or temporary and part-time. The private sector, however, goes through a different procedure to recruit staff. Each school is responsible for the recruitment of its own employees. According to the parliamentary enactment, however, the management has to introduce the working employees to the selection board of the Ministry for the sake of a job interview focused on the moral qualifications (Law on the Establishment and Administration of Non-Governmental Schools and Educational Centers, 2011, p.11). Therefore, initially, ascertaining the employee's competence is the responsibility of school management.

Accordingly, the private schools' teachers are diverse in terms of their resume and work experiences, so that some are quite young working as self-funded Master or Ph.D. students, and some are middle-aged and elderly experienced teachers who keep teaching in private schools after retirement from the public sector. Working concurrently in public and private schools is also the case that usually happens due to financial needs.[8] Some people tried other relevant occupations and now want to give a shot to working in a school like Yasin's consultant who found the school environment more "critical and informative" challenging her professional competences compared to a private counseling center.

All in all, the school's employment policies are an essential factor highlighting its instrumental and expressive orders and consequently differentiating a school from others. In this connection, the Rayan vice-principal's words are illuminating:

> "Here, we have the best employees, whether the administrative staff or the teachers. We try to select the finest. If somewhere in the city, there is a top-notch teacher, they would come over here. I mean, they come for an interview, and in case they meet our expectations, they would be asked to collaborate with us. It is our characteristic".

Although I found it an exaggerated account, the quote demonstrates the importance of staff screening for private schools' branding strategies. My informant's explanation about Rayan employment policies can shed light on the other side of the story:

> "Rayan regards Danesh (another well-known educational complex in Tehran) its first rival. Before Rayan, I worked in Danesh for two years. Rayan management usually employs

[8] One of the interviewees, a mathematics teacher in Rayan and simultaneously in a public school, wanted to quit working in the public sector since there is a considerable demand for private mathematics tutoring at home which is also more profitable. However, in his words, the Ministry's regulation makes quitting problematic since, according to his permanent contract, he "must complete the committed 30 years working period".

> former teachers of Danesh much easier than others. I guess, [Rayan managers] think, Danesh's teachers are more skilled and experienced. Further, I guess the manager tends to tease them. For example, Rayan's current financial manager used to work in Danesh for several years but, for some reason, she quit her job there and got employed here."

This comment highlights two things. First, it demonstrates the importance of the private school's employment policies and their influence on the representation of school institutional habitus. Second, it refers to the intensive and negative competition of private schools that affect the employment strategies in the market-oriented rationality of privatized education.

Drawing on the staff's explanations, the job interview procedure and arrangement vary among private schools to the extent that there is no common requirement that all schools take into account. Emphasizing the instrumental order, some schools mostly hire retired or working teachers of public schools because of their specialty in teaching. On the other hand, in some cases, young teachers' recruitment is justified by the modern and up-to-date educational plan like Yasin high school. This composition is usually legitimized by the school's active and discussion-based pedagogy. Of course, there are schools with a combination of young, middle-aged, and older teachers with different occupational backgrounds.

The expressive order of school also affects the employment policies that go beyond the technical and professional background of job seekers. To find the right employee, the expressive order leads to exercising given gatekeeping policies that majorly originate from the founder and manager's tendency and ideological affiliation. Thus, the job interviewer might explicitly or implicitly inquire about personal matters related to the interviewee's religious commitment, political affiliation, and as a respondent, put it together "the applicant's flexibility with the school regulation and rules." For instance, in Iran, appearing in public without hijab is an offense for

women, regardless of their religion (Islamic Penal Code, Islamic Republic of Iran, 1985), and school is not an exception. The degree of rigidity about the hijab, however, highly depends on the informal regulation of each school. While public schools impose more or less unified dressing code on both employee and student, private schools are more self-directed so that the school's founder and management decision is determinant. In this light, Rayan high school encompassed various forms of hijab among its female employees, ranging from employees wearing *Chador* to the employees who have so-called 'incorrect hijab' and push back the compulsory hijab law in their everyday practice. On the other hand, Yasin high school was more homogenous in terms of the female employees' dressing code, and except for my informant who worked there as an extra-curricular teacher, the rest of the employees had full hijab (which means all of their hair was covered with either *chador* or scarf).

This example can lead us to the broader picture of institutional habitus and the way school management's tendency affects everyday schooling practices. Schools with Islamic technocracy tendency attempt to carefully engineer the staff's composition since the implementation of a given educational plan is highly on employees' shoulders. Thus, the school's gatekeepers look for the right fit or at least someone flexible who can adjust themselves to the planned institutional strategies and practices. On the other side of the spectrum, some schools are reputed due to their "modern," "open-minded," and "flexible" climate that usually attempt to employ teachers who ideologically match the school habitus.

Teachers usually get informed about vacant jobs through their social networks and interpersonal communications. Well-known and reputed private schools can enjoy a higher number of applicants for a vacancy, which not only intensifies the competitive atmosphere but reduces the bargaining power of employees. Hence, employment policies practically lead to

engineering the staff's composition and, consequently, varying power dynamics between two groups; employees and managerial board on the one hand and employees and student/family on the other.

The entrance of the market to education affects the work conditions of teachers and other employees. All of the research respondents had fixed-term contracts (from three months to nine months) without benefit coverage, including medical insurance, unemployment insurance, and retirement pension. Moreover, they did not have sufficient access to employer-funded training. This working condition places teachers in a precarious status so that they are suffering from a lack of job security. My informant answered a question about job security in the following way:

> "It (job security) is a joke! Last year, Rayan principal fired the biology teacher after 14 years of working here. I think they were looking for an excuse (to fire her). She (the fired teacher) just said instead of Monday, switch my classes to Tuesday. In an offensive tone, the principal said: "what else do you want?" So, she got insulted and left. The principal never got in touch with her to renew the contract. There is no guarantee."

This case indicates how the fix-term contract threatens employees' bargaining power and their job security and how it can intensify the dismissal probability in particular at the time of conflict or financial difficulty. However, it is essential to note that on the other hand, this precarious form of employment provides flexible employment for individuals who, based on their situation, need that. For instance, a significant number of Yasin's teachers and other employees like the librarian and the consultant were university students, so, because of their workload as a working student, lack of a permanent contract, benefits package and job security are not their big concern. Instead, they could take advantage of this part-time and flexible job that meets their financial needs partly and enrich their resume.

Drawing on the evidence of interviews, teachers' composition is one of the main criteria that parents usually note evaluating their school choice. It also affects the power dynamic between teachers and students/families. The qualification criteria of a 'right teacher' vary among parents. Rich experience of teaching is an asset; however, it is not a determinant factor. Some parents I interviewed regard young teachers' recruitment as a weak point of a private school, that is not a case in public ones. Nasrin's description on the teachers' composition of her son's school that makes her unsatisfied is enlightening:

> "You would not see a real teacher in private schools, [they] don't have schoolteacherish manner. In public schools, teachers are recognizable. I feel that since my sister is also a teacher. But, in private schools, some inept people are introduced as mathematics teachers or English teachers! I would say, this is a fraud!".

Nasrin used the word 'inept' [in Persian Jegheleh] in a humiliating way that indicates the power dynamic that age and experience can bring about. However, age, of course, is not the only element that can influence the power dynamic of teachers and students/families. More importantly, the, as privatized education creates a potentially favorable environment for market activity (Verger et al., 2016. p.8), market-oriented logic considerably influences the relationships. Arabic teacher of Yasin high school, for instance, was upset about the "unrealistic expectations" that paying tuition fee produces among parents:

> "A friend of mine who is an experienced teacher got fired just after two weeks of the new academic year since pupils said we dislike her. Children and families feel entitled to make a teacher jobless. Grading is also a problem. I remember once a mother said, how come my daughter got a lower GPA than her cousin who studies in a public school? I didn't even know what to answer."

The term ‘entitled’ was also used by four other teachers describing the dynamic that tuition fee creates between teacher and student/family. In this light, an English teacher stated that several times she heard pupils complained about something while emphasizing the money that they are paying to the school. She shared her opinion on the reason for this issue by saying, “well, private school is like an enterprise, so; to some degree, you have to please your customer.”

The dominant tendencies of the private school founder and management board lead to the exercise of given employment policies. Besides other elements, the school branding relies on the composition of teachers and other employees, which can be a crucial agent affecting parents’ school choice. The precarious employment that the private sector creates, however, can dramatically influence the job security and bargaining power of teachers since the penetration of market-oriented logic to the nexus of relationship in private schools, not only provide an advantageous status for the employer but, it encourages student/family to see themselves as consumer of education (Ball et al., 1996) in an entitled position so that unrealistic and even unreasonable expectations jeopardize the teachers’ job status. In the next section, the enrollment policies of private schools are examined, which play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the institutional habitus of school.

Sifting students/families; private schools’ enrollment policies

Although the high number of applicants allows well-known private schools to exercise selective admission policies, the structure, procedure, and outcome of them vary from school to school. All the parents I interviewed went through the gatekeeping processes since the schools they chose for their children had more applicants than free places. The exercise of gatekeeping strategies also depends on the amount of tuition fee since in some cases, the large amount of tuition fee allows the school management to prioritize the exclusivity and smallness of the school over the number

of students so that in this case the lower number of pupils would not only be a problem but an asset. By and large, all schools define their target group. While in public school, the residential neighborhood of the student and its nearness to school is determinant, private schools can individually define their target student/family according to a variety of factors. In the word of Yasin's principal, "private schools are like autonomous greenhouses that nurture students."

GPA might be the first factor that narrows down the applicants. Schools that have made their brand based on the higher education destination of pupils prioritize the prior educational performance of applicants over the gatekeeping. Moreover, science entry exams operate as an endorsement tool on student high-performance. As many interviewees point out, the science examination are formulated beyond the formal textbooks' content, so, as Lili and Sina's case indicates, it is a time and energy-consuming and sometimes costly process to get ready for the exam. Hence, the applicant's accomplishment highly depends on the care, time, effort, and money that their family spends.

Student screening, however, is not confined to the educational performance of applicants. As the interviews reveal, accepted individuals of the science exam get invited to the second round of screening, an in-person interview. Many parents called this phase psychological testing, and when I asked them to clarify what it is accuratly, they referred to generic matters like student's interests, hobbies, goals, and plans. As my informants explained, there is no general protocol for designing the private schools' examination. Thus, each school decides individually about the format and content of its entrance exam, and parents get to know about the procedure over the choice process. In many cases, parents were asked to join the interview even though they were not asked any questions. So, the school could have a picture of the applicant's familial orientation. In this light, Bahar shared her idea about her vital role over the selective entry exams of her daughter's school:

> "Before enrollment, Ana went through both science and psychological exams, but I had this impression that those were not decisive. I would say, me and her dad made her got admitted. Since they did not even announce her grade. I am sure they did not even evaluate her paper! Yeah, I guess the mother and father of applicants are significant. There are students who have low GPAs, but they got admitted just because they come from decent families."

This comment indicates that to what extent the selective entry policies of a private school can be guided by the students' familial habitus and its correspondent to the institutional habitus of school. As the expressive order is the product of the joint negotiation of familial and institutional habitus, the second round of entrance exams is also a crucial step for the school management board to engineer its pupils' composition carefully. In the word of vice-principal of Rayan:

> In public schools, you cannot screen and filter students. You have to enroll applicants. But, private schools are entitled to select their students. If a student is not a decent choice because let's say her broken family affects her mental health, or she has a disciplinary problem, it is possible to not enroll her. It is crucial for providing a peaceful and safe environment for others. Here, we sift our students and challenge their educational performance, their family, their psychological status. They would be selected if they could pass our filters."

This case mirrors the importance of selective admission policies on maintaining the school's expressive order and building an exclusive environment for the education of a selected group of students. Private schools seek out gifted, able, motivated, and committed students and less favorable pupils are "less able" students with particular educational needs, especially emotional and disciplinary challenges (Gewirtz et al., 1995). Hence, although by cherishing the parental

choice, the private schools' door seems open, just selected individuals can pass through it. The penetration of market logic to education leads to what some scholars called "cream-skimming" (Bartlett, 1993; Whitty, 1999) that ensures particular students with particular sort of characteristics are selected. Nonetheless, there is a subtle question unanswered, who selects whom and based on what criteria.

The criteria that navigate the student gatekeeping policies need to be traced in the tendencies of the school founder and management board. The coalition of neoliberalism and Islamic technocracy lead to the exercise of specific admission policies in some schools. Applicant's class origin is crucial, as the Rayan's vice-principal declares that the middle-class and upper-class families are their target groups. Yasin's case, however, is somehow tricky.

Even though Yasin's principal mentions the presence of some working-class students in the school, its number was not significant. They were mainly "able and motivated students whose family could not afford the tuition fee, so whether we have decided to offer them scholarship or external charities financially sponsor them." There was also a case in which the father of a student who was a blacksmith suggested that he works for the school in return for paying his daughter's tuition fee. Attendance of the working-class students with any reason is not in opposition to institutional habitus, but rather, as this case indicates, it is a cream-skimming tactic that the management applies to select the able students who are predicted to get a good score on Concour exam. Thus, although benevolent intentions justify this specific selective policy, there could be other intentions involved.

The applicant's class status cannot explain the whole story of gatekeeping. Schools with a religious tendency look for pupils whose familial habitus match the institutional habitus to promote the harmony between school and family and consequently ensure certain privileges. Hence,

beyond the educational performance of the applicant, the cream-skimming is exerted based on the familial habitus that practically confines the applicants' school choices. Selective admission policies are applied to keep the school's environment exclusive or, as Lili said, "sterilized" for certain socioeconomic strata who have the most conformation to the school's institutional habitus. In this connection, Mustafa points out:

> "I used to be a religious person, so I was looking for a religious school for my daughter, not a super religious one, though. I searched a lot and realized that Roshangar is a high-performance school, and all the staff was so experienced. However, it turned out the management interrogates parents with questions about like watching the western satellite channels. Even though my daughter passed the entrance exam, we did not go there."

As discussed before, the marketization of social life does not stand alone, so "an ideology of market freedom and equality based on "choice" is not sufficient to deal with the contradictions and conditions that emerge from such economic, social, and educational policies" (Apple, 2006, p.19) Hence, ideological tendencies that are connected not reducible to the neoliberal economic policies are determinant integrating the institutional habitus of private schools into a wider set of ideological commitments. "The operation of the habitus regularly excludes certain practices, those that are unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs" (Reay, 2004, p.433). Without a doubt, both expressive and instrumental orders seem to be closed and opened based on the extent that the school is stratified, leading to a particular social relation and outcome. Thus, in practice, the relationship between family and school is complicated and cannot be understood in a straightforward way. Total conformity of familial and institutional habitus is not plausible, but the gatekeeping strategies are intended to make the school environment as exclusive as possible. The selective entry could not be enough to warrant the maintenance of institutional habitus, so, some

private schools still keep cream-skimming through grouping and tracking strategies after admission.

Exclusion from within

The outcome-based incentives of schools can also lead to multi-layered internal screening and grouping within school, relying on the school instrumental order as a "source of cleavage" (Bernstein 1977, p.34). Accordingly, so-called able, motivated, and committed students (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Power, 2003) might receive different curriculum and training based on their academic performance and merits. Mitra's account gives more sense in this regard:

> "My daughter's friend was an 'advanced' student of Kooshesh school. It was my first time hearing the word! Look! In the first place, the school selected 60 students. It did the screening once. But, it exerted that again to select another group of students out of 60 kids to prepare them for different sorts of Olympiad or the Concour exam. It is so weird! I am wondering how the non-advanced students feel. They might feel miserable and stupid!"

"By practicing relatively open entry but having strong stratification within schools" (Baker et al., 2004, p.146), tracking and grouping could take different shapes in private schools. Some schools like Mitra's example are explicit about their tracking and grouping plan, but some private schools apply this strategy implicitly or less noticeably and invest more on some individuals. For instance, Yasin principal who alleges that "unlike many private schools, they do not select the elite but nurture the elite," explains:

> "I recommend that you see our students, you see someone studying here, and she is the Yasin's choice, but she is low achieving. Although her GPA is awful, she has been admitted. Here, we have 10 percent of two extreme sides of the GPA spectrum since we

> believe it is the social reality […] We do not expect weak students to become efficient and prominent scholars in the development of knowledge, they just make my community real, so, I also make them grow, but I am not concerned with them."

This account implies the importance that the top 10 percent has for the school planning, reputation, and branding. Apparently, Yasin is a heterogeneous school in terms of students' intake, which is also highlighted in the school website; however, it invests more in some pupils to take advantage of their prospective achievement. The comment highlights the growing impact of market forces on pupil grouping by the constitution, a type of "exclusion from within" (Bourdieu & Champagne, 1992 cited in Windle, 2019, p.196) that brings about a sort of hierarchy among students. The supervision strategies, nonetheless, does not confine to the instrumental order and the academic performance of pupil; rather, it could be exerted concerning the school's expressive order, what is the next section's topic.

Fear of other

To avoid the possible challenges that might affect the school's performance and consequently jeopardize its reputation, primary gatekeeping is essential but not enough. The management board usually deploys different strategies to immediately recognize the potential source of problem within the school. Thus, the exclusive environment of school requires constant supervision and control. The research finding indicates that relying on the institutional habitus and the flexibility of the school instrumental and expressive orders, different mechanisms are applied to maximize control within private schools. For instance, Sahar recalled her daughter's elementary school that recruited a person as "watcher" for each grade "to attend all the classes, monitor the conduct of both teacher and students, take notes, and report monthly to the principal." She described this

strategy as a very helpful and wise move since "it revealed the strength and weak points of everyone."

Control strategies were appealing for most of the interviewed parents who seek a "safe and trustworthy environment" for their offspring, whether in an old-fashioned form like assigning a human spy who watches, listens, follows, monitors, and reports, or some novel forms that are less idiosyncratic. The constant supervision can take even more intensive but a discreet manifestation, like the installation of a closed-circuit television system inside and outside of school. In this connection, Afsaneh shared her opinion on her son's school, where she used to work as an English teacher for several years before giving birth to her twin girls:

> "Every single student is controlled. A closed-circuit television system is installed on every corner. Children are all under the magnifying glass. Even though the educational complex generally has 700 pupils, they are performing very well. Each grade has an educational supervisor. Moreover, the principal is great. He has the discipline. All are under his magnifying glass. First of all, teachers are controlled. They have to be accountable for every single move. I was always concerned with moral and disciplinary issues, and I am quite satisfied (with the school performance)."

The idea of the panoptic gaze in school (Kupchik et al., 2009) being seen but at the same time, uncertainty and ambivalence of visibility state can lead to self-policing, self-scrutiny, self-evaluation, and self-surveillance (Ball, 1997) for both students and the staff. Thus, besides education, safety as a commodity has been sold in private schools (Casella, 2009) .Installation of closed-circuit television system in school demonstrates that the existing disciplinary mechanism is getting novel faces through applying advanced surveillance panoptic technologies for constant monitoring of students and staff (Ibid).

The control mechanism and security equipment are applied to double-check the selected students' performance and detect possible troublemakers. The surveillance is possible since many families demand it. Drawing on the concept, distinction that Bourdieu formulated, surveillance is operating as a social and cultural reproduction mechanism (Ball et al., 1996) through which, the school aims to shield its habitus, and middle-class parent attempts to safeguard their 'class-specific taste' and avoid 'others' who do not possess 'the right cultural capital' (Gewirtz et al., 1994). Hence, the consensus of parents and school management on the deployment of effective surveillance mechanism can be traced in "horror or visceral intolerance (sick-making) of the tastes of others" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.56), as an Parinaz casts:

> "I know it is impossible to find a school that has no villain; however, in private schools, the troublemaker is a misfit. Conversely, because of the high population. in public schools, the supervisor even cannot memorize the students' names until the end of the academic year."

The respondents usually justify surveillance by safety and protection. However, their emphasis on 'othering' stems from their fear of integration with 'others' that potentially can endanger the harmony of institutional and familial habitus. I elaborate on this fear from the parental side in the following chapter under the title of 'intensive parenting'.

Chapter three: It is the parents' turn to choose

Having school choice seems difficult to opposed since it implies autonomy and agency. I asked all the interviewees' opinions about the diversity of education providers and having the right to choose, and many answered this seemingly simple question with a noticeable hesitation, regardless of their position towards their child's private school. During the research, this repetitive pause from seemingly volunteer users of the choice system got highlighted for me. It was like a signal warning about the complexity of parents' position towards privatized education. Choosers are heterogeneous, and their finalized choice has not been made straightforwardly and neatly.

For sure, the parents seek out quality education for their offspring, and the choice system of education provision offers many options to weigh and make an informed and autonomous decision. Although parental school choice seems appealing for many respondents, the other side of the coin needs to be explored. Drawing on the evidence of fieldwork, along with the sense of autonomy and agency that the choice system could give rise to, can also cause anxiety and be a severe source of pressure, difficulty, uncertainty, conflict, and frustration for some users.

The choice is not made in a vacuum (Gewirtz et al., 1994), and an assemblage of different and sometimes contradictory elements makes parents prefer a school over another. The choice is "a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon" (Ibid, p.26) so, analyzing the choice-making context provides a new lens to capture the complexity of the process in its different stages.

In the first chapter, I discussed the implementation of neoliberal logic in schooling and the influenced landscape of education through market-oriented regulations. The second chapter dealt with the institutional level of privatized education or the supply side of privatized education. Here, I focus on the question of school choice from the parental side. For doing so, first, I examine the penetration of market rationality and "ethic of enterprise," including autonomy, efficiency,

competitiveness, self-responsibility, entrepreneurship, and urge to succeed (Rose, 1990) into the rationality and practice of the neoliberal subject. Secondly, the affected landscape of the education system through the construction of neoliberal citizen-consumer (Wilkins, 2018) is studied. Relying on the aforementioned conceptual framework, I answer the question that how the embedded neoliberal rationality operates from below in schooling and how middle-class parents as seemingly free and volunteer applicants of the choice system take different positions towards their school choice in a complex network of relationships.

Neoliberalism and subjectivity

In the Foucauldian point of view, Nikolas Rose (1990) contends that the neoliberal arrangement of social life is operating through three interlinked aspects; the first one is governmentality, the power that the state exercises through diverse strategies and tactics over the population regulating their conduct. The second one can be sought at the institutional level, which is "embodied in the design of institutional space, the arrangements of institutional time and activity, procedures of reward and punishment, and the operation of systems of norms and judgments." The third dimension refers to the "technologies of the self" embedded in people's everyday practices and makes them conduct their own conduct. In this view, "enterprise culture" through the "autonomization' and 'responsibilisation' of the self" (Rose, 1990, p.3-10) goes hand to hand with the government regulations and makes neoliberal ideology function effectively. So, all aspects of human life and social conduct are re-formulated in terms of neoliberal rationality taking competition as the focal principle of governing the social (Foucault, 2008, p.120-121).

Through internalization of enterprise culture into individual logic and practices, the individual is to become "an entrepreneur of itself, seeking to maximize its own powers, its own happiness,

its own quality of life, though enhancing its autonomy and then instrumentalizing its autonomous choices in the service of its lifestyle" (Rose, 1990, p.11).

In this light, as Veronika Gago (2017) states, beyond the government's will, neoliberal logic is actively operated through individuals into their own forms of organizing economic and social life. Neoliberalism is not just a top-to-down order imposed upon citizens by the governmental policies and financial institutions' regulations; rather, it has been implemented through a reciprocal relationship between subject and state (Clarke et al., 2007). As power works through not against subjectivity (Foucault, 1982; Rose, 1990), neoliberal ideology creates its desirable subject to operate effectively in different fields ranging from finance to health care and education. Discussing the concept 'citizen-consumer' (Wilkins, 2018) and 'active citizenship' (Kivelä, 2018), in the following, can shed more light on the construction of desirable subject of neoliberalism.

Neoliberal citizen-consumer

The historical configuration of state under contemporary neoliberal governmentality and consequently, the education restructuring via market rules creates a new form of citizenship so that, "citizens are seen as consumers and public services as providers" (Wilkins, 2018, p.8) The notion of the citizen-consumer reflects the idea of 'Homo economicus,' which was briefly argued in the first chapter as a subject of neoliberal governmentality (Brown, 2015). The desired subject of neoliberalism "is constructed as a free and autonomous consumer, capable of making calculated and rational choices in the marketplace, and responsible for the consequences of their choices" (Kivelä, 2018, p.162). In this view, the school choice system functions as a technology of subjectification and re-regulation (Kivelä, 2018, p.162) for producing the desired citizen, an active agent, responsible for their personal welfare and wellbeing. So, the reconstitution of state power

and reworking of citizenship are entwined and mutually determinant components of neoliberal state restructuring "rather than as separate and asynchronous transformative processes" (Ibid).

Neoliberal educational reform is characterized by privatization and focused on the notion of 'choice system of provision' and equalizing opportunity that it can bring about through competition and choice (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). In the field of privatized education, the notion of choice is interlinked with neoliberal consumer-citizen, who can act in a rational, responsible, risk-calculating, and self-maximizing manner. In the choice system of provision, this is the family that needs to seek out the existing options actively, distinguish poor, average, good, and excellent service providers, and select the best option for its own good. However, it is questionable that who and based on what sort of resources can perform an active and autonomous role in the market-led education system. Conforming with the neoliberal rationality in the individual level and taking advantage of it, require specific types of capacity, which makes some benefit and some not.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the coalition of neoliberalism and Islamic technocracy has markedly changed the dynamic of privatized schooling in its institutional level. Nonetheless, the coalition is achieved through the complicity of another party, which is the burgeoning, upwardly mobile professional middle-class (Apple, 2006; Ball & Nikita, 2014) who deploys the opportunity of school choice as a class strategy to safeguard its own class-oriented privileges (Diane Reay et al., 2011). Hence, exploring the position of neoliberal citizen-consumer in the nexus of relationships that affected education does not make sense without exploring the crucial role of class in the formation and development of a given dynamic. Therefore, in the text below, relying on the firs-hand data, I elaborate on the class-oriented practices and positions of the neoliberal subject over the school choice process.

Go-getting middle-class and schooling

Choice system of school provision transfers the responsibility for education from the shoulders of state onto citizens,' under the argument that "the government can no longer afford the expense of such services" (Apple, 2006, p.24). The interviewees describe the act of pulling back from education in different words like "the Ministry of Education is literally abandoned," "it does not receive enough budget," and "education is not a priority in this country," so, it triggers the impression that "except us (parents), nobody cares about our children' education, so, sadly, you have to spend money to progress."

Given the penetration of neoliberal policies into the education system, the first indicator of access to a quality school that comes to mind is income. As many studies shows, parallel to an increase in family income, access to quality education, and consequently, academic attainment improves (e.g., see Mayer, 2010).

The tuition fee varies from one school to another. The non-governmental schools' tuition fee schema is annually formulated by the 'Policy, Planning and Central Supervision Council'[9] according to criteria, including the educational courses, educational level, academic year plan, extracurricular activities, physical space and equipment of school, regional conditions of the school, and the country's official rate of inflation. (Law on the Establishment and Administration of Non-Governmental Schools and Educational Centers, 2011, p.8-9). However, besides the stated fee, an individual school is legally allowed to ask for extra fee whose amount is determined based on the range and time of extracurricular activities and particular services like daily meals and transportation.

[9] The Policy, Planning, and Central Supervision Council and its provincial and regional branches are established to oversee the non-governmental schools' activities and their accommodation to articles of 'Law on the Establishment and Administration of Non-Governmental Schools and Educational Centers.' The minister of education is the head of the council.

As the head of the Non-Governmental Schools Organization states, 11.5 percent of 14 million students in Iran educate in private schools, who mostly inhabit the metropolises. 76 percent of those are government employee's offspring, 4 percent of faculty members' and managers', and the rest (20 percent) self-employed and free-lance experts' offspring. Accordingly, middle-class families are the principal applicants of private schools (The Islamic Republic News Agency, 2019). The interviews' finding also indicates the fact that middle-class families are the first applicant of private schools, who can be categorized into three groups, lower middle-class (including three families), middle-class (six families), and upper middle-class (six families). As mentioned in the introduction, this grouping is mainly derived from a composite of parents' occupation, education, residential neighborhood, and the varying form of their possessed social and cultural capitals.

For middle-class, school choice could be a parenting strategy (Ball & Nikita, 2014; Gewirtz et al., 1994; Reay et al., 2011) that contributes to the process of social reproduction, so the advantage-seeking and opportunity-hoarding parents deploy their material and cultural capitals to maintain and reproduce their privileged social positions. In pursuit of it, they mainly rely on two sources of capacity; their material resources and accumulated cultural and social capitals (Gewirtz et al., 1994). Money confers a wide range of choices, even so-called the luxurious schools in high-class areas of Tehran. Further, parents' professional and language-based skills and their interpersonal network of connections aid them to somehow guarantee their offspring's admission to a particular school through negotiating with the school gatekeepers.

Given the neoliberal tendency of private schools, gatekeeping policies are mainly focused upon the class origin and cultural capital of applicants, which are partly recognizable over the multilayered entry exams. Even the GPA criterion is highly dependent on students' class origin and their prior access to quality educational sources.

However, the Islamic technocracy tendency captures certain parents' attention who demand a specific sort of ideological education for their children. This faction usually seeks out schools that comply with its own familial habitus and social and cultural capital, since, the school resources confer their offspring essential means for identity-making and reproducing certain privileges that stemmed from both their class and their ideological and political affiliations. Thus, over the process of school choice, on the one hand, there is a dialectical interplay between various types of social, economic, and cultural capital and habitus, and on the other, distinctive opportunities provided by the market-led education system (Robson & Butler, 2001, p.71).

To explore the role of familial habitus, class origin, and social and cultural capitals of the family in the choice system of education provision, the different positions that the lower middle-class, middle-class and upper middle-class respondents take towards their choice is discussed subsequently.

Parents' position towards school choice

By privatization of education, the primary responsibility of education is shifted to parents' shoulders. On the other hand, the private sector's entrance to education increases the diversity of school types available and, consequently, provides a diverse system of provision for families.

For all interviewees, more or less, school choice was a time and energy-consuming procedure. Distinguishing between poor, average, good, and excellent education providers are what parents, initially, try to do in their decision-making journey. Further, as explained in the second chapter, applicants need to pass the multilayered entry exams to get the admission of 'good' and 'excellent' schools.

Respondents usually obtain their data about an individual school through social networks and social media, and many supplement their viewpoint by visiting the schools. Hence, some well-

known brands were repeated many times among their words, either as an alternative option at the time or as a comparable case with the selected school.

In general, the notion of freedom of choice lies at the heart of neoliberal political rationality (Kivelä, 2018); however, in practice, it means different things to different people in different contexts (Ball et al., 1996, p.92). Choice can get several connotations within the neoliberal system of education provision. The research reveals that the school choice is not necessarily a free, autonomous, and voluntarily act; instead, it could be made by a sense of high uncertainty and pressure.

The respondents' positions in relation to their school choice can be represented through two categories, active chooser and passive chooser. I use these two context-specific concepts to structure the research data, and the majority of the respondents fit well within these two categories. The source of these two positions is interviews with 15 parents, including two fathers and 13 mothers. The interviews were conducted over autumn 2019, from late October till early December, so the school choice had been made at the time. The parents were asked to share their experiences throughout the school choice process their comments about their choice. The questions set out to explore the respondent' thoughts on the chosen school, and the variety of influences shaped the decision.

The parents' position towards their choice is basically represented through two factors; the degree of certainty that they feel about their choice and the extent of autonomy that they had at the time of making the decision. Moreover, Gewirtz and others (1994, P.9-10) identified two crucial ways in which parents differed from each other in their approach to the unmade school choice; inclination and capacity as the material resources and cultural capital of the family. I found these interlinked concepts useful in discussing the respondents' positions in the process of school choice.

Drawing on certainty, autonomy, inclination, and capacity, in the following, I explain in more detail about what I mean by active chooser and passive chooser, and what school choice means in different familial contexts. In doing so, I argue the dynamic between inclination, certainty, capacity, and autonomy in the network of choice system.

Active choosers

Choice confers privilege (Gewirtz et al., 1994, p.5) since it is predicated on the idea that chooser, relied on their possessed knowledge, seeks out the maximum possible benefits. However, in the field level, choosers' socioeconomic context and accumulated cultural capital markedly navigate the action. From the governmentality perspective, in the absence of direct state intervention in education, self-regulated and risk-calculating citizen-consumer needs to choose the service providers and take the responsibility of their choice, whether right or wrong. The decision-making considerably depends on the chooser's capacity.

In this regard, active chooser is relatively privileged. Their material and cultural capitals provide them the essential ground to have a wider variety of options, from so-called luxurious private schools to the average ones. Financially, they are not concerned with the number of tuition fees. Moreover, relying on the material sources, they can go beyond the spatial limitations to seek out educational opportunities wherever they exist (Gewirtz et al., 1994; Ball et al., 2012; Wilkins, 2018) like Mustafa, who initially, chose her daughter' school and then sold out his house to purchase a new one, close the school. Hence, active choosers feel more autonomy and agency over the process of school choice, and relatively, fewer obstacles hinder their path.

Due to their cultural capital, active choosers have more effective contact to identify excellent choices. In this connection, relying on their interpersonal networks, they have "some kind of 'insider' knowledge of education systems and the way they work" (Ball et al., 1996, p.93). This

information is crucial, helping them to make a more confident and certain decision. Because of their occupation (e.g., manager, free-lancer expert, and housekeeper), they are likely to have more spare time to visit the selected schools and scrutinize its different aspects.

Active choosers usually belong to middle-class and upper middle-class families who have sufficient capacity, including material and cultural capital, to seek out among private schools exclusively. They generally find private schooling advantageous for their offspring in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. In this view, they are cable of selecting good and excellent options which are appealing by either their instrumental orders and academic achievements or their expressive order and environment, or a combination of both.

Active choosers' material, cultural, and social capitals make them an 'insider' in the gatekeeping process. So, it is likely that their child passes the multilayered entry exams much straightforward. The class status of active choosers allows them to hire private tutors or purchase supplementary educational materials to ensure passing the science entry exam. Furthermore, they are more familiar with the market-led education system and have the confidence and capacity to deal with it over the psychological exams. Their interpersonal connection, language, and mannerism are also determinant since make the management board of schools convinced that they are the right student. As Gewirtz and others assert they possess "a certain degree of cultural capital in the right currency" (Gewirtz et al., 1994, p.10) to make them benefit from the market-led education system

Hence, in the relational networks of choice system, active choosers are advantaged. They seek out an excellent school with loader voice and sharper elbow (Wilkins, 2018).They act autonomously, calculate mindfully, and select freely and more certainly, and by doing so, they would minimize their choice's potential risk of.

Passive choosers

Passive choosers, compared to active choosers, have relatively less material capital, whereby the amount of tuition fee somehow limits the range of their choices. While excellent options might seem unachievable for them, good and average schools more comply with their budget. Moreover, their offspring's chance to get admitted to an excellent school is relatively less since, as I said, the science entry exams of many high performances private schools are beyond the formal textbooks' content so, they might not be able to provide supplementary educational materials.

In this view, despite their inclination towards private school and their certainty about the determinant role of quality education on their children's educational and occupational destination, passive choosers also consider 'good' public schools as an option. They usually share a sort of anxiety about the correctness of their decision, since they have to take the whole responsibility for their choice and be ready for the potential risks that their choice might bring about.

Some respondents shared their concerns about being blamed because of their incorrect school choice. They react to this pressure and anxiety in two ways; going through severe financial difficulty and choose the best option which might be overpriced for them (like what Sahar did by saying that "I am sure it will worth it"), or choosing a relatively good private school and personally supervise their child's performance over the academic year.

Passive choosers' choice can be described as a voluntary-compulsory choice. They believe public schooling is poor, and the only way to receive a quality education is a private school. However, choosing a private school is not an easy decision for those who mainly belong to the lower middle-class. In this connection, some interviewees refer to the financial pressure that their school choice has imposed on the whole family. Afsaneh, for example, prioritizes her son's school choice over her twin girls' since he is getting close to the Concour exam:

> "Unfortunately, we could not afford to enroll them all in private schools. So, for now, Behzad is more important. My twins are just 8, so, public school is ok. However, my husband and I monitor them. In public schools, they are not concerned about students."

This comment demonstrates how the boundary of choice and compulsion is blurry in school choice, and how the choice system of school provision through a dichotomous notion of public/private schools put pressure on some class strata to the extent that it gives them a sense of passivity over the process.

To make more sense of parental position towards the choice system, in the following, I discuss two crucial issues that considerably navigate middle-class parents' school choice, the dichotomous notion of public and private schools and intensive parenting.

Private school versus public school

Even though the Ministry of Education has appreciated the presence of private sector in the field of education as beneficial participation for the public good, a rigid dichotomy between public and private schools has been shaping (Rahimpour Azghadi, 2020) so public schools are always compared with supposedly more efficient and high-quality private ones (Apple, 2006, p.24).

While some scholars see this dichotomy a fabricated one that the penetration of market logic into education triggers (Rahimpour Azghadi, 2020) at the field level, this dichotomous perspective is getting intensified to the extent that the principal of the Yasin high school regards a good public school an exception that is successful because of its principal' endeavor. The interviewees usually assign the problem of public schools to factors, including insufficient systemic control, the high population of pupils, delinquency, limited funding, and poor infrastructure. However, in a broader sense, indifferent and irresponsible state introduce as the source of the problem.

The position that interviewees take to their school choice is strongly underpinned to a dichotomy of bad public school vs. good private school. In this light, the two comments cited below are illuminating:

> "Honestly, I wondered if I enroll my daughter in a public school, but, as the classes are too crowded, I got scared if the school would repress her creativity and motive. I have heard some horrible stories about public schools."

> "Public schools are like soldier' homes. There is no color inside the building. It gives off a bad vibe. Students' uniforms usually are white and navy blue. You know what I mean. The environment is repulsive."

Whether this antagonism is fair-minded or not, public dissatisfaction with governmental schools leads to a growing demand for private schools, even among the lower middle-class population (Verger et al., 2016). Hence, access to quality education is not merely a conflict of upper class against one lower class; instead, it is a mishmash of certain strata demanding accountable and effective education providers (Ibid). To stimulate more demand, private schools usually offer parents different options for the tuition fee payments, including installment or monthly paycheck, which was selected by most of the parents I interviewed.

This dichotomous insight could be the primary incentive of passive choosers who despites the financial difficulties, voluntarily yet compulsory choose the high-performance private schools. This antagonism, through rationalization of "blame-the-victim explanation," places lower middle-class parents in a doubtful and uncertain stand by wondering, "What if I get my fingers burnt by enrolling my child in a public school." This explanation gives the sense that "if your child is 'unsuccessful' at school, well, you've only got yourself to blame — you made the wrong choice;

the system is not responsible" (Gewirtz et al., 1994, p.4). The pressure that this dichotomous notion could trigger puts some interviewees in the mood of intense anxiety and insecurity for their offspring's welfare, safety, and prosperity that in practice, leads to intensive parenting.

Intensive parenting

The reaction of middle-class parents to the increased risk and insecurity triggered by the dichotomy between private/public schools, could be traced to their intensive parenting. For many interviewees, the school choice process causes severe pressure usually on one, and sometimes on both; father and mother. Shabnam shares her school choice' experience in the following way:

> "You might not believe that, but I visited more than 20 schools. I also checked out the comments that people left on Tizland[10] website about schools' teachers and the environment. Moreover, I asked our neighbors about their schools."

All respondents spend considerable time and energy to make the decision. Although the educational expectation and preferences navigate their decision, the school's expressive order and the environment have more priority. They attempt to make sure the institutional habitus of school complies with their familial habitus.

The intensive parenting does not confine to the school choice phase; rather, it is likely to continue over the academic year through monitoring the school's expressive and instrumental orders and its influence on student performance. In this light, Lili's words on the anxiety that she felt because of a disciplinary matter in Sina's previous school is illuminating:

[10] Tizland is a Persian website that targets parents and students. It mainly produces and shares educational content for different grades. It has a section, namely 'Your Comments,' which contains students' and parents' feedback on the performance, equipment, and environment of an individual school.

> "When Sina was in fourth grade, one of his classmates told him something about sexual relationships. He told me that. I was devastated. I meet the principal, supervisor, and consultant several times, and I threatened them if you are not going to solve the problem, I would officially sue you. Now, I guess I was overreacting. But it was horrible for me at that time."

This example demonstrates that to what extent schooling matters for some parents so that a conversation between two kids that might happen just out of curiosity, become a source of severe anxiety for Lili.

Furthermore, constant monitoring and scrutinizing can target the instrumental order of the school. The idealized norm of "go-getting, high flying, winner take" middle-class (Reay et al., 2011, p. 5) made some interviewees aspire to maximize their children's educational performance through different strategies, including monitoring their children homework, constant attendance in school events, being in touch with teachers and educational supervisors via phone call or social media, protesting challenges, purchasing supplementary educational materials, and recruiting private tutor at home.

Of course, intensive parenting is not limited to schooling. All interviewed parents registered their offspring in various classes and courses out of school time ranging from foreign languages to web programming. In some cases, the number of out of school classes was that much I could not even imagine one could afford all simultaneously. Ambitious parents are also obsessively worried about whether their children get into the high-rank university (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p.84). In a broader picture, their effort is guided by facilitating their child prospect destination, academically and occupationally. Many respondents also share their eagerness to help their child to apply for internationally high-rank universities.

Overall, the parents' intensive involvement in schooling is mainly motivated by a severe desire to protect their children and themselves from potential difficulties. So, as argued in the second chapter, parents with the complicity of the school' gatekeepers attempt to provide an exclusive and safe environment for their children to make a distinction between 'insiders' and 'others' and thereby protect their given class-based privileges.

'Other' is not a homogenous group, and it takes different implications based on the familial habitus and political and ideological affiliation of family. In this light, the selective entry policies of schools, thus, are serving both sides of the choice system; on the one hand, it is deployed the school's gatekeeper to construct the desired composition of students, and on the other hand, it makes parents secure about the exclusivity of the school for certain class strata. So, the owner of the "right cultural capital" (Gewirtz et al., 1994), who is an 'insider,' can get the trump card to enter the school.

Conclusion

In my thesis, I scrutinized the networks of relationships that influence the privatized education from below. The argument was based on the fact that along with, the neoliberal regulation that the government imposes on all the sphere of social life, the complicity of the neoliberal institution and neoliberal subject plays a crucial role in moving neoliberalism forward, as each party takes its own advantage out of it. Further, I inquired into the contribution of other ideological and class-based forces that are connected, but not reducible to educational neoliberal polices.

The idea of 'neoliberalism from below' conferred me with a suitable lens to explore the complexity and even contradictory nature of choice in privatized schooling and the coalition of different tendencies that are involved in. The penetration of neoliberal policies into the education system of Iran transformed it into a market that is run by supply and demand rules. This thesis was structured to investigate how beyond the market-oriented regulations of the government, supply and demand sides of the choice system operate. It explored how the choice system of education provision for both sides of the deal, family and school, is a proper opportunity for the interaction of various capital and habitus at the field level and positioning itself at the winning end of the uneven playing field.

My contribution to this area of study was that the choice system functions through a reciprocal relationship between school and family. Both sides of the market-led education system, education provider and education consumer, through each other's complicity engineer the composition of school staff and students' intake, what not only guarantee the reputation and profitability of the school within the competitive atmosphere of private schooling, but create an exclusive and distinctive environment for particular class strata to ensure their class-oriented advantages by avoiding 'others' and reproducing their privileged social position.

Analyzing education as a system of social reproduction has a strong background in sociology and anthropology, and this research was guided to shed more light on the question of through what schooling mechanism social inequality reproduces.

As Michael Apple notes, we cannot stop the reproduction of social inequality through education unless we explore the alliance of diverse forces that are moving the privatized education forward (Apple, 2006), and this is what this thesis is about.

Certainly, my interviews and observation do not represent all the possible perspectives and experiences in the choice system of education provision and its relation to social reproduction. The thesis seeks to open the road for further research project on the relational dynamics of privatized schooling, that due to the growing participation of the private sector in the education system of Iran, has transformed the landscape of education.

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