

6 Performing the Nation, Imagining Citizenship: School Rituals and Oppositional Non-belonging

How do textbook narratives of citizenship and belonging manifest in the schools? How far do these narratives trickle down to school rituals and seep into teacher and student discourses? How far do they generate forms of appropriation and deference? What constructions of the self and of young people do everyday narratives of imagined citizenship imply? What are the classed, gendered or generational differences in how themes of national belonging, citizenship, Islamism and neoliberalism were articulated? How far does the Islamist influences on textbook discourses also extend to domination of school activities and everyday discourses? This chapter is concerned with how official legitimation is lived in the everyday and how citizenship is imagined from below, by inquiring into both rituals and everyday narratives. The first part of the chapter addresses the dynamics around the morning assembly (*tabur*) in the different schools and the performance of its nationalist components. The second part develops the key themes that emerge from the observations and interviews with students and teachers relating to the narratives of national belonging and citizenship, and their classed and gendered dimensions.

Performing the Nation in School

Symbols and representations of the nation are prolific in Egyptian schools in flags, maps, posters and artwork, as well as in the morning assembly and school radio. Until 2011, photographs of Mubarak (and sometimes the former first lady) were displayed in all the research schools and in almost all classrooms. Nationalist poetry was featured in decorative posters and was recited on the school radio in official competitions. Maps of Egypt and representations of various landmarks, mosques and other architectural and historical monuments were abundant in the schools. Non-oppositional Islamic content was also prominent in the schools in posters of Quranic verses, prophetic sayings or narratives about Islamic historical figures. For example, promotional material advertising the vision and mission of one of the schools were



Figure 6.1 Artwork on the walls of the boys' technical school. The text in the left panel reads, "The sad al-Aqsa [mosque] is calling unto Muslims"

made in the form of Islamic prayers and Ramadan calendars. Posters and artwork in the different schools reflected religious themes, such as the artwork in Figure 6.1 in the corridors of the technical school. Written or visual representations relating to foreign injustices, such as conditions in Palestine or Iraq, could be found in some of the schools. There however no oppositional content relating to nationalism or citizenship in any publicly visible form.

Apart from these representations, the morning assembly is the central ritual that attempts to establish a daily presence and performance of the nation in schools. The daily school assembly or *tabur al-sabah* (literally morning queue) is the main formal ritual that all schools are required to hold at the beginning of the school day. Schools receive regular directives about *tabur* and its content, its importance, upcoming inspections and competitions, and specific injunctions such as the need to "to emphasize the achievements of the minister and the government." *Tabur* is meant to have a number of components, including saluting the flag, singing the national anthem, a physical exercise routine, general school announcements and a school radio program coordinated by an assigned teacher.

The school radio program could broadcast a variety of items. It may include a Quranic recitation or a chosen *hadith* (reported narrative of Prophet Muhammad), daily domestic (and international) news, displays of student talents or an artistic contribution such as a poem or a short musical performance, news of prizes received by students, a quote of the day or a piece of general information and announcements of school and district-level activities such as student elections, yearly festivals and exhibitions, wall journals, debates, sports, art or music competitions or tournaments.

In reality, most of the components of *tabur* cannot be properly performed in many public schools. In fact, the first obstacle to the performance of the nation in schools is that there is often no music accompanying the national anthem. Many schools do not have music teachers, and students do not have any opportunity to develop musical skills allowing them to perform the musical accompaniment to *tabur*. The shortage of resources in public schools means that is no development or display of other student talents and hardly any real activities to report. School activities (*anshita*) are critical for civic education and fostering national belonging, including volunteering and collaborative work, social, cultural, religious, sports, artistic, and creative activities, trips, psychodrama and seminars about social issues (see Al-Sayid Muhammad 2006, 141–3). However, music, sports, arts and other creative and intellectual activities have almost completely disappeared from school life in most public schools (see Chapters 1 and 2). This is not only due to the exam-driven focus on subjects that affect student grades, but also because of three other interrelated factors: meager or nonexistent budgets for school activities; corruption and complex bureaucratic procedures that impede the utilization of existing resources; and serious shortages in teachers in the relevant specializations, who earn low salaries and lack opportunities to offer private tutoring. Reportedly, these school activities have also been limited because of a fear that Islamist forces will dominate them. Therefore, despite the importance of school activities in cementing official nationhood and citizenship projects, in most schools, activities of all kinds are effectively absent as a direct result of prevailing social policies and security concerns.

The performance of the morning ritual is highly variable across the schools of the capital and the country more generally. In many public schools, especially in the lower grades, *tabur*, if performed, is typically reduced to four components: invocations to stand in line properly, salutation of the flag, one couplet of the national anthem and, more often than not, a collective reprimand and humiliation of the student body, usually for a lack of order or proper comportment during the nationalist

rituals. In many secondary schools, the morning school meeting is simply not prepared or performed. It is reduced to an attempt to escort students to classes in a more or less orderly manner. Even in its reduced format, the process of maintaining order during assemblies I attended was rarely smooth. Sporadic insults (“come on you two animals”: *yalla ya hayawan inta wi huwa*) escalated into a collective reprimand of the student body with varying levels of obscenity and physical violence involving the use of canes and hoses (see Chapter 3).

On top of this, most secondary school students do not in fact attend *tabur*. Most students do not come to school regularly because of their reliance on private tutoring (Chapter 2). However, many of those who do come arrive at the end of assembly. In fact, in the girls’ public general school, which was the most orderly and strict of the public schools, special incentives, warnings, reminders and threats had to be made to get students to attend the morning assembly on a particular date because the school had to participate in the district Assembly Competition, an exemplary *tabur* was being prepared, and competition officials were going to be present on that date to inspect the assembly. Despite the diminished audience on most days, the four public schools did attempt to maintain a semblance of *tabur* in the first weeks of term, albeit in an abridged and hasty format. There was some attempt to get students to stand in line and chant the salutation of the flag and sing the national anthem. It was clear that particular teachers and administrators in each school were more interested than others in *tabur* discipline or in students displaying the correct patriotic demeanor with sufficient vigor during the salutation of the flag and the singing of the national anthem. The principals of the boys’ technical school and the mixed private school placed particular importance on this aspect. They brought up *tabur* in their reflections on the school and students and invested considerable efforts in trying to cement the ritual. For these principals and other invested teachers, *tabur* and discussions of *tabur* were occasions to lament the lack of a sense of national belonging on the part of the students. In the technical boys’ school, students singled out for more serious violations of “the mannerisms of *tabur*” (*akhlaqiyat al-tabur*) were retained for special reprimand and punishment by the principal, including the difficult courtyard physical drills he was known for. Proper comportment at *tabur* included the vigorous singing of the national anthem and chanting of the flag salutation, refraining from any other speech or movement, standing tall and upright, and embodying pride, respect, devotion and commitment to the nation.

In both private schools, *tabur* was certainly performed and prepared by both teachers and students. Students came up to the microphone and led

the salutation of the flag, read headlines from official newspapers, recited a chosen piece of poetry or shared a piece of general knowledge with the student body. Teachers often led a brief morning exercise, and the students marched to their classes in an orderly manner. Because secondary school students in the private schools had very low attendance rates (less than 10 percent of the cohort) and many arrived at the end of assembly, they were hardly parties to this ritual. It is relevant in this regard that most public secondary schools are *only* secondary schools and do not enroll students in the primary or preparatory stages.¹ Most private schools, conversely, enroll students in all stages. This explains why they retain a far greater semblance of discipline overall and why *tabur* still has some attendance, as the nation retains something of a regular audience of (younger) children.

Reception of the nationalist elements of *tabur* implied intensities of avoidance, ridicule, indignation, obscenity and contestation among students, and boys especially. Even in assemblies that were being in fact performed, as in the private schools, most secondary students and many preparatory students did not utter the flag salutation and national anthem. Some did so without the required vigor, others made fun of enthusiastic performances of the national anthem by younger students, and yet others murmured alternative lyrics to the national anthem. These highly critical songs were widely known and circulated, primarily among boys, in the schools. These were typically short verses fitted to the same tune of the national anthem or to other popular tunes. The lyrics were in fact deemed by the boys to be too obscene to repeat in front of me. They were typically variations on themes of abuse by the nation and state, of disentanglement and failure, of being violated by the nation or of the nation being promiscuous. They were narratives of shaming and disentanglement. One general secondary student provided the following description of *tabur* in his school:

There isn't even a flag salutation. The flag is torn in the first place. It doesn't have an eagle [the eagle in the middle of the Egyptian flag]. Other students, yes, they know something about Egypt: "Long Live Egypt." There are a lot of songs about Egypt. They all have obscene words. They compose new songs to curse their country (*yishtimu baladhum*); that's how much they love it, they don't love something called Egypt.

Students were constructing and solidifying new symbols and meanings in relation to the nation, ones that were bound up with their experiences

¹ The semiprivate experimental schools (now called Public Language Schools or *Rasmiya Lughat*) are an exception to this rule.

and understandings of citizenship. The reluctance to sing the national anthem or enthusiastically salute the flag and the use of obscene language could of course resemble a form of (male) teenage rebellion against authority and the mandated embodiment of discipline and enthusiastic performances of national devotion. This does not fully explain student behavior or their “alternative” nationalist lyrics. For example, many students also chatted with friends during the Quran recitation in *tabur*. This was not only disrespectful but also violated the explicit religious injunction to listen attentively when the Quran is being recited. There were no popular songs ridiculing the Quran. When deviating from what may be considered proper religious conduct, students employed a variety of other discourses to describe their behavior, contextualizing their actions or simply accepting blame for them (e.g. that they cannot really hear the recitation because there is a lot of noise, but, yes, they should listen attentively. No such justification is needed to excuse unpatriotic discourses and practices. Rather, many students openly expressed a lack of love or belonging to the country.

Un-loving the Nation

Given the insistence on national belonging in textbooks and the media, I expected significant expression or even lip service to love of the nation among students, especially that most discussions were being conducted inside the schools and in front of peers. However, even when students started with affirmations of love of the country, they seemed unable to conjure up further support to their statements and quickly began to articulate the opposite view: that there was no reason to love the country. After their preliminary responses, whether negative or affirmative, students developed further reflections that almost always centered on the negative conditions of citizenship as lived and experienced. These reflections had important intersections with both gender and social class. Previous studies have linked class and gender to political knowledge and national belonging among Egyptian students, although their conclusions do not reflect a clear consensus. One study of Egyptian school students found that older, male and private school students were more politically aware than younger, female or public school students (Al-Tukhi 1999), although other studies did not note these gender (see Awad 2006) and class differences (see Al-Sayid Muhammad 2006, 137). Other studies suggest that girls may experience greater pressures to show obedience to and conformity with social norms (see Al-Sayid Muhammad 2006). Some studies reported the sense of national belonging being rated higher among girls than among boys (Sabah

2004). Other studies, however, noted higher male ratings or no gender differences, where boys were portrayed as having more sense of belonging due to greater levels of participation in different public activities, and because they had more freedom, more social engagement and participation (see Al-Sayid Muhammad 2006, 133).²

While students in the general schools seemed to be by far the most vocal and oppositional in their discourses, similar attitudes prevailed across the six schools among both boys and girls. Boys, however, tended to be more direct in expressing a distinct and open lack of a sense of belonging. Many simply answered “no” or “of course not” – they do not feel love for or belonging to the country, and some quickly linked this to a desire to leave the country altogether. Girls tended to begin their reflections with short affirmations: “of course” or “surely” we love the country. Another frequent first response was the effectively evasive and religiously framed statement: “Egypt was mentioned in the Quran.” Students would then continue with phrases such as “not a lot” and “we love it in words, not in deeds.”

As if emboldened by their collective reflections, this would frequently progress into statements like “If we as a people benefited from Egypt, we would love it,” and “We are oppressed in the country ... we don’t feel our freedom or anything.” As a female private school student put it, “Why should I love it if I am not getting my rights in the country? One can be proud of one’s country when one sees something good in it, when they do something good for you.” This sequencing of responses may explain why surveys of nationalist sentiment might record overwhelming expressions of national belonging (UNDP 2010). While the first and socially sanctioned response may be “Yes, of course we love the country,” this is not always the final answer. Although the general tone was similar, I found that boys were generally more engaged in oppositional discourses and somewhat better versed in the details and concrete examples of corruption than girls. This may have also been informed by differences in political interest between boys and girls and therefore a difference in their exposure to political news and media, including its oppositional variants.

The lack of national belonging among students was a significant theme for teachers and principals as well. They frequently referred to the lack of

² While it has been argued that interest in politics among students is primarily influenced by family factors (Awad 2006), studies among Egyptian youth and school students found that boys had higher rates of reading newspapers than girls and more knowledge of political facts. This can be attributed to different interests and socialization and the fact that girls are required to spend more time doing household chores and studying (Al-Tukhi 1999, UNDP 2010, 41).

vigor in the salutation of the flag as the most immediate manifestation of this, but mainly focused on young people's desire to leave the country and their despair or anger at conditions in the country, notably unemployment and corruption. For example, when reflecting on "this generation," the principal of the general girls' school said that there is no belonging and that this is the first thing that can be noticed. She explained that this was because students did not know the national anthem and were not getting the lyrics right. She then continued that the students were frustrated because everyone tells them that there are no job opportunities and nowhere to go. The principal of the mixed private school voiced similar sentiments on lack of belonging, albeit with a different justification: "The children have lost faith in us. The state they are in, we are the reason for it. All the role models are corrupt ... They hear about corrupt people. They do not feel they belong to the country. Many of them want to travel. They didn't used to salute the flag when I got to this school." Teachers sometimes blamed public discourse or parents for the lack of a sense of belonging among students. As one teacher put it, this is because students hear in their homes statements like "Damn this country; is this a life we are living?" (*yikhrīb bit diḥ balad, hiya diḥ 'isha illi 'ayshinḥa?*). As the principal of the girls' private school put it,

Unfortunately, there's not this power of feeling loyalty to the country. They hear what's going on around them, from their parents, about everything, transportation, economic crisis, private tutoring costs, living expenses ... I feel that they always say: "there's nothing" ... they don't have the hope or loyalty to improve anything. They feel the future is not bright. I don't want to say they are lost (*dayi*), they are better than that, but the circumstances around them are not good.

While many teachers lamented the lack of feelings of belonging among students, this was frequently excused or contextualized. Across the different schools, teachers had immediate explanations for the lack of national belonging they felt was predominant among students. These explanations were not about unpatriotic youth or bad citizens, nor were they contrasted with the wise president or the good Muslim who loves his nation, as articulated in the textbooks. They revolved around the various facets of lived citizenship. As a teacher in a private school put it, "At the core is the relationship between the state and the person ... if it is normal, then there will be love and belonging to the country." Another private school teacher concluded, "If the citizen is treated humanely, then he will have belonging and he will want to give to the country. If you treat the citizen as less than an animal, he sees that this country deserves nothing."

Some teachers also voiced a particular difficulty or ambiguity in dealing with dominant expectations about national belonging and their role

in promoting it. Several teachers noted that they wanted to instill love of the country into their students or lamented its absence. In their own reflections however, many digressed into an affirmation of student alienation, and even their own lack of national belonging. As teachers in the girls' general school reflected, "It's true, why should he love it, he has no apartment, no job and no good treatment, even ourselves, we don't feel belonging." A teacher in the technical girls' school offered the following reflections on belonging, knowledge of the country and issues of inequality and corruption:

No, they know nothing about the country. You know the social conditions we have. Sometimes I talk to them about Egypt ... to love Egypt ... but the country gives them nothing ... We have class backwardness [inequality]. These people are neither blind nor idiots. They know the income coming into Egypt and where it goes. Sometimes, I tell them, if only you knew about the miracles of ancient Egypt ... but the level of culture is low. For me, I look at Ramses' statue or the pyramids, and I feel I am the son of a civilization.

If textbook themes of love and belonging were not replicated by students, neither were other constructions of citizenship in official textbooks. As described in Chapter 5, textbook discourses of nationhood and citizenship focused on building Egypt through science, on good citizens adjusting to the demands of a changing economy and on Egypt being under external threat from an "other" that is a major cause of injustice and disenfranchisement. In their critical narratives, many students reversed the significance of the intended sources of national pride provided in the textbooks and provided alternative notions of citizenship and belonging. Celebrated Egyptian scientists and the achievements of Ancient Egyptian civilization were not key themes in their discourses. When they were mentioned, however, they were frequently used to mount further criticism of current affairs in the country. The only times students made reference to science in relation to nationhood or citizenship was to comment that "no one gets their rights in the country" because world-renowned Egyptian scientists like Nobel Laureate Ahmad Zuweil had to leave the country "to get their chance." The only times that Ancient Egypt was mentioned was also in negative commentary on contemporary conditions: "We say we have the pyramids, but what did we invent this year?"

Similarly, the image of the unjust "other" was hardly present in students' discourses. In fact, students often constructed Egypt negatively, in contrast to other countries "that progress and prosper." School-level discourse on the "other" reflected a more general tendency to attach to the West and the "other" the opposite of what is construed as lacking in

Egypt or about Egyptians. The “other” was primarily just, fair and other countries offered contexts in which people could live as citizens with respect, especially the poor, and where one does not need connections to get a job. The “other” is also hard-working and productive. Not only were the West or the United States frequently invoked in this regard, but also China and other, richer Arab countries. As a student in the public general girls’ school put it, “In China, they beg people to take a vacation, and the students here, they just dance or sleep in the playground.” Just the mention of China in one conversation prompted one student to declare that Egypt is the most backward country in the world. Even one of the most vocal Islamist teachers argued, “We have to admit that in the U.S. there is fairness and justice,” juxtaposing this to the patriotism and connections required to access opportunities and resources in Egypt. In fact, the “other” mainly featured as the standard against which to measure the country. As one student put it, “You can see films about the life of American youth, the lives of other countries. [Young people] grow up with the idea that Egypt is bad. Its debts are endless. America is much better, or Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Australia, China, or the Emirates.” As a female student put it, “If I had not been born here, I would not like to live here.” These themes resonate with narratives in popular films, serials and TV programs.³ In an era of far more open media and greater exposure to global and regional trends, the vivid multiplication of Egypt’s “others” seems to have rendered the image of Egypt and Egyptians increasingly negative in the eyes of young people, as well as strengthening alternative notions of citizenship, as suggested by recurrent themes in student discourses.

Constructions of Citizenship among Students

Young people in all the schools, as well as their teachers and principals, linked national belonging to disenfranchisement to citizenship rights and the weakening of state institutions. They immediately rechanneled the discussion of national belonging into a critique of lived citizenship and

³ Films arguably have a more significant impact on student discourses compared to other media, as the news and political talk shows are not very important in comparison to patterns of the consumption of films and television dramas by teenagers (see Mahmud 2004). A 2004 study found that all teenagers watched television, about half of them watching it regularly, and almost all of them watched, whether regularly or irregularly, television serials (*musalsalat*) aired on Egyptian state television, be they romantic, social, historical or political in content (Mahmud 2004). The study found that the preferred television viewing for teenagers was Arabic films, followed by religious programs, Arabic plays, Arabic songs, television serials, foreign films, sports and then educational programs (Mahmud 2004, 486).

political realities. Students implicitly discussed citizenship in its four dimensions of protection, provision, participation and legitimation (Introduction chapter). They especially emphasized themes relating to provision and protection, and the associated legitimizing narratives. The main reasons not to love the country were most consistently articulated with reference to provision of services and opportunities: unemployment, poverty and inequality, as well as protection under the law: corruption, lack of public safety and everyday humiliation or loss of dignity. In both technical and general public schools, humiliation, premised on social class, was a distinct theme for both girls and boys. Private school students, on the other hand, framed their expressed lack of belonging in terms of blocked opportunities and a lack of desirable jobs, in addition to systematic corruption and cronyism. Previous studies have also argued that economic factors, especially unequal distribution of incomes and unmet basic needs, impacted students' sense of national belonging (see Al-Sayid Muhammad 2006, 137–9).

Most students placed unemployment and underemployment at the heart of their reflections on national belonging. Unemployment was such a dominant theme for general school students that it seemed to define their whole outlook on their generation and on national belonging. As detailed in Chapter 1, the most deeply felt impact of neoliberal policies and the failing rule of law in the late Mubarak era was increased unemployment, informalization and inequality of opportunity, disproportionately affecting women and educated youth. Students used language that reflected the powerful emotional impact of unemployment. They reflected on “this generation” as “frustrated,” “in a bad emotional state,” “feeling they were in a closed circle” and “with no way out.” They drew upon the experiences of their relatives and acquaintances, among whom unemployment was prevalent or even dominant. Students in the general schools noted that even graduates of good faculties and universities could not find jobs, commenting that most boys end up hanging around cafes and seeking to leave the country. “There are no jobs. We expect that we too will take the certificate and ‘sit’ (stay unemployed). All our friends are in open universities, and in the end they too ‘sit.’”

The implicit framing of employment as a primary citizenship right has to be understood in light of the absence of other social rights. The intense concern with unemployment has to be seen in light of the lack of social safety networks in the country, where basic needs cannot be met except through employment. There is no unemployment insurance to speak of, and other welfare provisions addressing poverty, disability, illness or old age are limited and difficult to obtain. In a 2010 national survey, respondents stated that they found the future less predictable, jobs

uncertain and incomes very irregular. One of their major concerns was the risk of having serious health issues and falling into poverty due to the costs of medical treatment (UNDP 2010, 86).⁴ Technical school students did not seem to feel as vulnerable to unemployment per se; after all, boys in technical schools were almost all employed, albeit in temporary, seasonal, low-skilled and very low-paid work in the informal economy. This is not uniformly the case across the country, as overall unemployment rates among technical school graduates are very high. Unemployment rates vary considerably across the country and are much higher in Upper Egypt in particular (Chapter 1). Some male technical students, however, did express a desire to leave the country and were concerned about the difficulty of obtaining jobs in the future, especially stable, better paid jobs in the formal economy.

Unemployment as intimately linked to reflections on love and belonging to the country also translated in dreams of migration. As one student immediately responded, "If I finish and 'sit' (become unemployed), will I love Egypt?" Teachers and principals also focused on unemployment in their reflections on national belonging. Strong imagery was used in relation to unemployment: "It's all black and closed in front of the kids," as one principal put it. As the principal of the boys' general school framed it, students want to "graduate and find work, but most men graduate and sit at home ... you know how much money he needs to get married and have a home? So they want to leave the country. They think of things financially ... not love of the country ... It's all because of this unemployment." Therefore, closely related to unemployment was the desire or hope of leaving the country in search of jobs. This desire, especially among boys, was even more pronounced for private school students and was reflected in classroom discourses. As one French teacher expressed it in composing her sentences for grammar exercises: *Je ne souhaite qu'une chose: vivre en Amérique. Je souhaite que mon frère réussisse, et que nous vivions au Canada.*⁵ Indeed, a national survey of youth found that more than 28 percent of male youth stated an intention to migrate, with socioeconomic background being positively

⁴ "This uncertainty about the future seems to be an integral aspect of the experience of poverty in Egypt. It brings an intolerable sense of insecurity and vulnerability to lives of the poor. They feel vulnerable to trivial and accidental incidents. Insecurity is related to lack of health security as indicated by the poor when expressing their fears about tomorrow. The first fear they describe is being sick and unable to afford treatment. All interviewees of focus groups considered health as a major asset whose absence necessarily leads to poverty" (El-Laithy 2007, cited in UNDP 2010, 86).

⁵ Translated into English: I hope for only one thing: to live in America. I hope that my brother succeeds and that we live in Canada.

correlated with this intention, those expressing it coming from the highest socioeconomic level (UNDP 2010, 39).

Related to unemployment and underemployment, income inequality, poverty and rising prices were particularly prominent themes in the reflections of public school students. In their responses on national belonging, students made statements such as “I see people who cannot eat, and those who can eat chicken every day” and “There are people whose salaries are huge, and here there are people who sleep in the street.” Several students explicitly stated that incomes in the country should be more equal. There was a clear awareness of the privileges and rights afforded to other Egyptians based on income. Students made statements like: “Those who are really living in this country are those who have money.” As Ghannam (2002, 173) has also found, people strongly believe that the rich, who have more money and better connections, enjoy more protection and are better able to secure access to various resources. World Values Surveys show a sharp rise in the aversion to inequality for almost all income groups and all social groups in Egypt between 2000 and 2008, with the poor growing more inequality-averse than richer people over this period preceding the 2011 Revolution (Verme et al. 2014). Poorer people seemed to have become more aware of their relative conditions and expressed this new awareness through changes in views on a broad range of topics. The results from the World Values Survey show that dislike of inequality is also positively associated with freedom and interest in politics, but negatively associated with trust and religious practice (Verme et al. 2014). The limited liberalization of the late Mubarak, combined with the increasingly visible forms of inequality, manifested, for example, in the growth of gated communities whose advertisements permeate popular television programming may have contributed to this growing awareness of inequality as well as the more secularized oppositional discourses circulating in the liberal independent media.

Not only poverty, but even hunger featured in many student discourses, which they linked to inequality, government policy and crime in their neighborhoods. Students asked, for example, “How can someone see people dying of hunger, how can they go to bed at night?” Another student stated, “They are about to starve the people.” As one student in the public general girls’ school elaborated, “Poverty makes people do these things. And more and more, the poorer we get, we are killing each other. Even rape ... if a guy can’t afford to marry ... The poorer the country, the more we are tearing each other apart.” Similarly, a 2010 national study of the causes of poverty as perceived by the poor concluded that “youth, both urban and rural, explained poverty on the basis

of the failure of state policies to protect low income groups in the face of the trend towards privatizing the economy” (UNDP 2010, 86).

While clearly frustrated with conditions in the country, private school students used themes of recognition instead of livelihood and survival in reflecting on nationalism. Poverty per se was not a key concern or theme in their discourses, perhaps reflecting limited awareness of or concern with wider social conditions. Many still felt that there was limited sense of national belonging in their generation and highlighted the sense of limited employment opportunities. As a female private school student put it,

Most people are not interested in the country. For example, if they say there is a war tomorrow, will all the guys want to go? Do you think they care about it? No. They all curse it and the day they were born in it and will flee it whenever they can. If you say I want to stay and build my future, he will say: “Where is the future?”

As another private school student put it, “Yes. It’s true. We don’t have belonging. We are coming out in an age when the country doesn’t give us anything. People say it didn’t give us anything so that we should give back. They don’t know how to give back.”

Students were bitterly critical of the state of education in the country, a key example of the state of public services and citizenship right to provision. “There is no education” is the common refrain interlocutors frequently employed, sometimes just on the mention of education (Chapter 1). Students also reserved special ridicule for public or free education. As one student remarked in the course of a conversation, “This is the free education that they try to make us feel indebted for (*yiziluna bih*), and they don’t actually give us anything.” Public education had become so maligned that students often used a refrain from popular culture where signs of ignorance (of basic facts, terms or foreign words) received the joking comment, “Excuse him, he’s [received] free education” (*ma’lish aslu ta’lim maggani*), or variations on this refrain. Private school students were also frustrated with the quality of education and its implications for their future prospects. Their curricula, examinations and admission into universities are all determined by government policies. Their only potential encounter with public education is the possibility of enrolling in a public university. They equally mocked regime claims of free education (where tutoring is commonplace and prestigious faculties charge significant fees) and lamented the poor quality of public universities and the relatively poor prospects it implied for them. As one student put it, public universities “are becoming like *ma’ahid* [low-status two-year colleges]. Even the new private universities, people say they are

expensive and people still enroll in tutoring as well. Good education costs money.”

Beyond the provision-related aspects of citizenship, students also highlighted issues relating to protection in terms of the rule of law, the right to equal and dignified treatment and public safety. For public school students especially, it was not only economic exclusion that was highlighted but also the humiliation and derogatory treatment that came with it. With reference to both love of the country and in the course of ongoing discussions in the schools, students referred to humiliation and disrespect in interactions with agents of the state in the school, which they understood as being related to their low social status. Students were aware not only of their lack of access to legally available rights such as medical insurance or freedom from physical punishment in the school, but also of the humiliation they would face if they attempted to access those rights or to challenge violations of their rights (see Chapter 3). As one student commented, “They are disgusted of us when we go to the *ta'min* [medical insurance room at school] and they tell us to get out ... as if we are beggars.”⁶ Students weaved the verbal violence of humiliation into their reflections on national belonging and the desire to leave the country. As one student put it, “Here, what do we get? We are insulted and humiliated, and that’s all (*Binitshitim wi nitbahdil wi khalas*).”⁷ Student narratives on national belonging highlighted the theme of humiliation based on poverty, as in “The poor are treated like dogs.” Finally, some boys also linked humiliation to being harassed by the police or treated abusively when drafted into the army, sensitive topics that students did not elaborate on.

Also linked to the dimension of protection under the law, corruption was a key element of the citizenship narratives of students, along with other forms of permissiveness, cronyism and the absence of the rule of law. Poverty was frequently linked to corruption in the discourses of public school students: “Would we be like this, if we did not have all this theft and corruption?” However, this was not a reproduction of official discourses highlighting individual petty corruption, but more an example of subversion centered on use of the forbidden term “poverty,” where corruption was not related to individual morality but to the regime and the president. Students linked national belonging to the cases of

⁶ Every school should have medical supplies, a nurse and regular visits by a doctor, and all students are officially covered by national medical insurance. Students knew, however, that the nurse and doctor do not regularly come to school and usually have few, if any, medical supplies.

⁷ *Bahdala* is “something that unsettles or disturbs one’s sense of honour and integrity” (Ismail 2011b, 850).

corruption that were being uncovered and described how this encourages further corruption across the system. As students in the boys' general school asked, "The income of the Suez Canal, where does it go? Whose pockets does it go into?" Private school students also frequently brought up corruption in their reflections on belonging: "The people responsible for the country; they are the ones stealing it." Corruption was therefore politicized and not linked to the practices of the bad citizen, although the following sections give examples of negative self-perceptions and blaming the citizen.

Overall, there was a sense of gravity in the discourse of some students on these matters and a rather discernible narrative of causality leading from the regime (and before 2011, Mubarak himself) to poverty and social ills. In the girls' technical school, for example, students linked conditions in the country with the president, some immediately moving to disentangle the twinning of nation and president: "I love Egypt, but the President, I hate him." The same sentiment was echoed by general school girls: "I love it, but I don't love the one controlling it." "He is bringing down the county (*midayya' il balad*) ... girls get kidnapped and body parts get stolen ... and education; there is nothing." In fact, at points students made statements like: "We want the president to be changed," or "To fix things, everyone has to be removed ... the minster, everyone ... We need all new people." The idea young people were explicitly articulating in an authoritarian context was that it is because the ruling clique is corrupt that ordinary people are poor. In contrast with textbook discourses, the solution was not renaissance through pious entrepreneurship – the solution was the complete replacement of the ruling elite.

Rights to public safety that were underlined in discussions of belonging often revolved around the daily concerns around sexual harassment discussed in Chapter 4. Even if harassment was a more prominent theme in the girls general school, girls in the technical school also brought up fears of sexual harassment in their reflections about the sense of belonging to the country. In addition to the themes of unemployment, poor education and humiliation, they articulated the state's functions in terms of security and mocked the regime's claims of Egypt being "the country of security and safety" (*balad al-amm wal-aman*). Girls, especially in the public schools, expressed serious concerns about their physical vulnerability and fears of sexual assault, while boys saw economic opportunities as more important in achieving their future goals as the expected main breadwinners of their families. Public safety concerns were not only related to sexual harassment however, the school authorities and students in the general boys' school also expressed public safety concerns and had also attempted (and failed) to secure police presence around the

school to deter violent fights among students, drug dealing and drug use near the school.

The right to participation featured little in student discourses, even for private school students. There was little mention of rigged elections, even in discussions of corruption. While some students did use statements like “there is no democracy” in their reflections on national belonging, this was not a recurrent theme, nor an aspect expressed in significant detail. This is interesting in that it also contrasts with textbook discourses, where the only rights explicitly highlighted were the supposed right to participation and support to democracy (Chapter 5). Reflecting the limited political participation before 2011, as well as possible self-censorship, only one student referred to the possibility of being arrested in a demonstration and the violent police treatment associated with it as another reason to hate the country. That student was indeed arrested on January 25, 2011, on the first day of the uprising, although he was released several days later.

The discourses and emotions described here arguably reflect the growth of independent media and other forums where dissent could be voiced and information shared more freely in the late Mubarak era. A number of studies have highlighted the role of Arab satellite channels in the political socialization of the young in Egypt and the shaping of young people’s political priorities and perspectives (Abdullah 2007, Al-Tukhi 1999 and Mahmud 2004). The media, newspapers (Al-Tukhi 1999) and more recently satellite television channels (Abdullah 2007) are considered the main sources of knowledge about politics. Arabic satellite channels, especially *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* at the time, had privileged positions in this regard (Abdullah 2007). However, this was balanced by the growth of relatively independent Egyptian satellite channels in the 2000s. In the course of our conversations, especially in the general schools, students and teachers referred to issues that were raised on the popular political, social and news talk shows aired on privately owned Egyptian channels. These programs (such as *al-Ashira Masa’an*, *Wahid min al-Nas* and *Al-Qahira al-Yum*) regularly discussed issues around corruption and highlighted, to varying degrees, the plight of the poor and those living in informal neighborhoods. Especially after 2011, social media became even more important for the young. The balance between Arab and Egyptian satellite channels shifted again in subsequent years in light of increasing control of local media after 2013 (Chapter 7).

Locating Neoliberal and Islamist Citizenship

The neoliberal and Islamist elements in the official narratives of the Good Citizen found more complex reflections in student constructions

of citizenship. The preceding discussion shows that the parameters of neoliberal and Islamist citizenship as outlined in the textbooks did not take root among students. In all the schools, the negative conditions in the country were directly attributed to the state, the regime and the president, not to the inevitable results of globalization or the negative practices of citizens, their lack of piety and the shunning of Islam, or the practices of the aggressive other, as in textbook discourses. Their narratives of imagined citizenship implied that services, economic opportunities and protection under the law should be provided by the state, not by entrepreneurial citizens. It may be that because an explicitly anti-neoliberal rhetoric was not strong in most oppositional media, their criticisms were not framed directly in opposition to the parameters of neoliberalism.

The neoliberal “responsibilization” of the citizen (Rose 1999), however, was an issue that students and teachers dealt with in complex and contradictory ways. Lack of ambition, materialism and the triviality of students’ interests were key themes articulated by teachers in their reflections on “this generation” of students. Many teachers portrayed students as being without aim or ambition, an empty generation that “does not work hard and has been brought up that way,” that wants money without putting in the effort to get it, that is “dependent and will always be like that”; that “their state is upsetting because they are the future of the country”, and that they “just care about soft drinks, crisps and ringtones.” These discourses maligning young people were, however, paradoxical, gendered and contrary to the neoliberal ethos of material success. There were cases where the same teachers who portrayed students as “lacking in ambition” would also assert that students are “frustrated” because of blocked opportunities: “They could score above 95% and not get into any good college.” Contrary to the idealized neoliberal active citizen, interest in financial success was criticized by school authorities across the schools. Teachers frequently lamented that students only cared about money and future incomes and took all their decisions on that basis. In the private schools, teachers remarked that students asked them which faculties they should enter to earn better incomes, while in the public schools, teachers joked that many students wished they could become football players in order to make huge amounts of money. While both girls and boys were negatively labeled for lacking in ambition and patriotism, it seemed to be easier for teachers to call girls superficial and “empty inside,” while excusing boys as the subjects most affected by the negative economic conditions and everyday repression in the country: “Why would he love the country if he has no apartment, job or good treatment?” Therefore, while criticizing

materialism, teachers frequently affirmed the importance of material and financial concerns, especially for boys.

Finally, neither in student discourses nor in their reported practices was there a strong interest in active, participatory and charitable citizenship as promoted in some textbooks. Participation in civic activities was very limited among students because it was not encouraged or even tolerated by the state or school, despite a growth in community outreach and charitable activity among the more affluent classes. There were very limited forms of local participation among students, except for attending religious and Quranic recitation classes. According to a 2010 national survey, fewer than 3 percent of young people participate in volunteer work or group membership, even of recreational or sports teams (UNDP 2010).⁸ In the private schools, there were attempts to engage the students, who were largely absent and overwhelmed by exam preparation, in school activities to promote the image of a vibrant school or to continue the earlier legacy of community outreach of established schools. A small number of those private school students did mention engaging in charitable activities, as well as in private creative and civic programs over the summer vacation that were not attached to the school.

The other element that seemed to be underrepresented in student discourses was Islamism. I expected to find more prominent deployment of the Islamist themes of rule by sharia law or the protection of religious identity and morality. It is possible that some students downplayed or censored their Islamist views in my presence (see Chapter 1), but their general openness with me and the deployment of Islamist narratives by teachers in the schools indicate that self-censorship was not the key issue here. The example below where students did not hesitate to challenge my intervention on an issue relating to religion may also indicate that self-censorship in front of a guest was not the barrier to deploying and defending Islamist narratives. The discourse of these urban educated youth was simply less saturated with Islamism than textbook narratives. Students did not even employ the Islamic notions of justice and the just ruler found in the textbooks, although they seemed by no means hostile to these notions. It appears that concerns with protection and provision were too dominant and that mainstream Islamist narratives had a diminished

⁸ In terms of group membership, including participation in youth centers and sports clubs, political parties, unions and associations, housing and school boards, only 4 percent of young people appear to have participated in any of these groups; the majority have taken part in recreational activities, with 67 percent participating in youth centers and sports clubs (UNDP 2010, 40–1). Those who participate in political parties represent only 0.12 percent of young people in the eighteen to twenty-nine age group, while 84 percent of eligible youth did not exercise their right to vote in the last election.

hold on young people's political imagination in those regards. Where, then, did all the Islamism go, if not into their discourses on citizenship? One area of overlap is the link between textbook criticisms of the young as bad citizens and adherence to Islam as being at the core of the definition of good citizenship.

A narrative from the classroom can shed better light on how the themes of neoliberalism and Islamism are linked, as well as providing insights into student relationships with the authority of the text and with hegemonic Islamist discourses. In an Islamic Education class in the general girls' school, the teacher elaborated on a number of *hadith* (reported sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) from the official textbook. One *hadith* was about the importance of *itqan* or diligence in performing one's work. In his commentary on the importance of *itqan*, the teacher explained how they (in the west) progress and that we have backwardness because each person is not performing his role. The teacher noted that abroad, "they work eight hours; but here you wake up, go to work, have breakfast, bring onions, sit and chat ... A large percentage do not do their work well." He continued, "Our factories are failing and closing down. Why? Because of lack of diligence and carelessness (*'adam al itqan wal-ihmal*)."⁹ *Itqan* is in fact a key trope in the responsabilizing and maligning of young people in mainstream neoliberal Islamism (Sobhy 2007).⁹ The next brief *hadith* was about the grave sin of harming one's neighbors. The teacher elaborated that those who leave their laundry dripping on that of others and thus causing them harm are not really Muslims. The woman who does this, "Is she a Muslim?" he asked the class. They nodded that no, she is not. Another example was about people disposing of their garbage close to the houses of their neighbors. These were also declared not to be Muslim, an assessment seconded by the students once more.

The teacher's explanation was aligned with the official discourse on citizenship in the textbooks, where responsibility is placed on the individual for the bad conditions in society, not the state's duty to provide public services or the citizen's right to receive them. They also touched on issues that were very close to home for the students. In the neighborhood of this school, the municipality regularly failed to collect the garbage, despite the newly introduced – and significant – garbage-collection fees paid by citizens. Garbage collection had become a serious problem in Cairo and other parts of the country. If residents preferred to throw their garbage further away from their own homes, and therefore probably

⁹ For a discussion of the uses of *itqan* in non-oppositional Islamist discourses, see Sobhy (2007).

closer to the homes of others, did this really mean they deserved condemnation as infidels? What I found more striking was the willingness of students to accept and defend such statements that were essentially applicable to many of them or to their families and neighbors. It also seemed to me that these were grave pronouncements on who is or who is not a Muslim, as they contradicted mainstream Muslim jurisprudence, which clearly delineates the sins that are considered grave enough to warrant such judgment. After class, I asked students what they thought of the lesson and wondered if it was right to pronounce on the infidelity of a Muslim. A student tried to explain that the teacher was only really talking about those who intentionally meant to harm their neighbors. Another student stood up, as if to give a formal sermon, and with a pious demeanor reiterated the message of the teacher and the importance of obedience to the words of the Prophet and God and to be good Muslims. The situation became tense, as I was perceived to have challenged orthodox understandings of Islam and the very status of *hadith* as authoritative, not the textbook narrative or the teacher's interpretation. In fact, one of the students subtly signaled to me to end the conversation. She later told me that she agrees with me, but that students "are not used to discussing anything about religion" and that anyone who does so is "a transgressor and at fault" (*khariḡ wi ghalat*). This was despite the fact that I only referred to the well-known Islamic prohibition on making pronouncements on whether or not someone is a real Muslim, and suggested that we know many people who may engage in such behavior, including in this neighborhood: Are they then not "Muslims?" I had clearly violated the dominant norms in the school, and, as a result, they rendered themselves even more visible. As I realized in my attempt at a small token of gratitude and reciprocity to the students (Chapter 3), it is when violating the norms of the school that they render themselves most visible.

This narrative was perhaps an example of the deference that educational scholars attributed to authoritarian Arab education (Chapter 4), which I only witnessed in relation to discussions that involved religion. This deference was however ambiguous and suspended. Clearly, my reception of these words was different than those of the students. It was as though I had taken the words to their depth and length, while the students passed through and beside them. They did not resist them or accept any challenge to them, but also they did not affirm the way I took the discourse to its logical conclusion: that many of the neighborhood's residents should be considered infidels in this interpretation. This deference was therefore partial and distanced. The



Figure 6.2 Opposite the gate of the boys' technical school: uncollected garbage, animals grazing, tutoring advertisements on the wall

discourse had to remain suspended, true as received religious orthodoxy, but loosely linked to everyday realities. What remains clear is that issues framed in terms of religious authority would be treated with deference, that challenges to them would be countered and maligned and that, indeed, students had hardly been exposed to more open discussions of religion. The larger political implication is that there may be less need to scrutinize Islamist ideas or political programs if political opponents are construed as anti-Islamic or as contradicting Islamic dictates (as the experience of the March 2011 referendum especially brought home). The textbooks had succeeded in cementing the hegemony of Islamist discourses and their relevance to all social affairs. Students were willing to take the religious blame, regardless of how counterintuitive or inaccurate it might be, so long as it was done in this suspended manner.¹⁰

¹⁰ This suspended distanced relationship to orthodoxy is also not the same as the more intellectual trend of post-Islamism that questions and reinterprets, although there are important overlaps to be explored.

Other narratives confirmed this distant deference and ambiguous relationship with Islamism and the responsabilizing of citizens. When I asked a teacher in the same school to tell me a little bit about the neighborhood, “garbage” (*zibala*) was not only the word she used to describe the neighborhood as a whole, but a main theme in her narrative on the place. She commented on how the neighborhood was full of uncollected garbage. This was clearly evident around the school, as occurs around many schools in the country (see Figure 6.2).¹¹ The municipality only cleaned the streets, removed the garbage and placed plants along the sides of the streets when an important official was rumored to be planning a visit to the area. This was a significant event in the life of the community that several other respondents also referred to, stressing that they had never seen their neighborhood so beautiful. However, the plants were removed on the same day, and the garbage quickly piled up again, especially close to the schools. In parallel with the absence of garbage removal, the teacher explained that all the other services in the neighborhood were also very poor. In fact, no public transportation served the neighborhood, whose residents had to depend on private minibuses.

The question of uncollected garbage actually had a direct effect on this school and public safety within it. One of the school gates had to be closed off with cement blocks because residents were disposing of garbage in the passageway to the gate and setting it on fire, both effectively blocking the entrance and creating choking fumes every morning. The gate that was blocked was the one referred to in Chapter 4, which female students had used to avoid constant harassment from boys from the adjacent schools. Although this teacher, who displayed a very pious demeanor, spoke disparagingly of those who disposed of the garbage, blaming them for throwing it near the school, she mainly focused on “services” and the actions of the municipality in her narrative. She certainly did not call the residents infidels or bad Muslims. Furthermore, she explained that teachers in the school had written many letters to the educational authorities and the municipality, and had made attempts to remedy the situation with the help of the influential sponsors of the school. School actors were not passive, nor did they make those appeals to the residents themselves. They took action and demanded it

¹¹ The piling up of garbage near schools, opposite them or directly adjacent to their walls, is a reality for many schools across the country, a topic frequently covered by the press. This may be because there are often open unused nonresidential spaces around schools.

from government bodies, and tried to get influential patrons to mediate between those government bodies to achieve their goals. They may have displayed deference to hegemonic Islamist discourses, but they also attempted to invoke their supposed rights as citizens and drew upon patron–client relations in improving their situation. They acted based on their needs and the possibilities available to them.

This was a key moment when I had to deal with my desire to render “the social more real, more orderly, more predictable than it is” (Ball 2006, 4). To my dismay, students and teachers did not neatly divide themselves into either Islamists or non-Islamists, self-blaming or government blaming, citizen-responsibilizing or rights-claiming, docile or defiant, or indeed either citizens or clients. I had to begin to accept that the world as it is, will always be “complicated, confused, impure, uncertain” (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 1991, 259).

Students could also not be placed into either having a negative self-image or an understanding of being subject to injustice, or as either fitting into “individual agency” or “state agency” camps, as elements of both coexisted in the discourses of many students and teachers. One student in the girls’ general school mixed the categories in this manner “In the end, we are treated unjustly. If we were educated properly from the beginning, we would have been great people. Now we turn out disgraceful” (*bimitla’ irar*: a strong expression implying being worthless and disgraceful). Students certainly used notions of individual morality to discuss grievances at a more micro-scale, notably characterizing teachers’ practices in terms of a lack of conscience (Chapter 2). However, the textbook focus on corruption from the perspective of individual morality, legitimated within an Islamic framework, was largely subverted in student discourses. It was not just the messages of the curriculum that were instrumental in reinforcing constructions of students as bad and unworthy. Disrespect and the derogatory treatment of students was systematic and normalized through the patterns of physical beating and humiliation in the public schools, though far less in the private schools (Chapter 3). Many teachers, and according to the students, their own parents, were constant sources of charges and portrayals of failure and worthlessness.

In sum, there were clear tensions in student and teacher discourses between constructions of the young as bad citizens and therefore as responsible for negative conditions in the country, and young people as oppressed and unjustly treated by those in power. This complexity and overlap are inseparable from the way the late Mubarak regime made corruption integral to the daily functioning of Egypt’s citizens.

From cheating on exams to bribing government officials to obtain services (private tutoring included), almost every citizen was in some respect a participant in extralegal, illegal and questionable practices. Every citizen could be/is corrupt. This embeddedness in corrupt or extralegal practices is more endemic and more blatant among lower middle-class and working-class parents, whether it is because of the way they disposed of their garbage or built their homes without permits on agricultural land (as in much of the neighborhood of the public schools) or clandestinely siphoned electricity off from the main public network without a license (see also Singerman 1995, Ismail 2006, Dorman 2009). By staying outside the public education system, higher-income students and their parents were not involved in illegal practices in the way that lower-income parents often had to be. Even though higher-income parents may still pay small bribes, often justified as a form of social solidarity with underpaid employees, for them privatization implies being somewhat more insulated from everyday corruption and extralegality. As such, the affluent classes, especially in their everyday realities, could occupy a somewhat higher moral ground from which they could, and did, protest against the state.

Another contrast to textbook narratives related to the idea of the nation under threat from external enemies, a theme that is also prominent in Islamist discourses. Perhaps surprisingly, only a minority of teachers, but none of the students, cast Egypt in geopolitical terms in their discourses on national belonging. Some teachers referred to foreign plans for the weakening of the country and the targeting of its youth. Here, when the blame was placed outside the young, it was directed at the other (the West) as corrupting youth, often intentionally. As a vocal Islamist teacher in the general public boys' school put it, this generation is "oppressed (*mazlum*), targeted and its destruction is [deliberately] planned out (*mitkhatahu izai yitdammar*)."² A religiously observant teacher in the girls' private school also opened his reflections on "this generation" by referring to the loss of identity due to conscious plans to "marginalize youth, direct them away from what is important and corrupt their awareness" (*teghayyibuh*). These teachers saw foreign intervention in education as a key means whereby this intentional corruption of youth was being carried out by high-level education officials. Perhaps in this sense, they were the ones who had most appropriated, albeit in an oppositional vein, the official discourse of Egypt as a state under threat from external powers. For a number of those teachers, the weakness of education, and especially of science education and scientific research, was juxtaposed to the strength of Israel, which produced advanced weapons. For example, with

reference to the choice many students made to study arts instead of sciences, a teacher in the public general boys' school commented:

There is a problem in science subjects in Egypt ... Israel is so small and produces weapons ... It's a problem of the curriculum. Iran is rising too. They started putting obstacles in science. Even in setting the weekly timetable they have science subjects right after each other. The minister is a just a big employee. They tell him the main lines, and he applies them ... This is a predetermined policy ... They include things to destroy the identity of students.

Fatma Sayed (2006) and Linda Herrera (2008a) have written in significant detail on the discourses and conspiracy theories that surround foreign intervention in Egyptian education. In these discourses, the destruction of education is seen as a deliberate policy by the U.S. to maintain the inferiority of Muslim countries, especially in relation to its ally Israel. The fact that students did not raise this theme is an example of key generational difference in the appropriation of Islamist discourses.

Finally, in discussions with teachers and principals, criticisms of the young were also linked to interpretations of Islam that were understood in moral terms, especially in terms of sexual morality. For example, in reflecting on this generation, the principal of the technical school evinced both apologetic and sympathetic views of the students, combining moral blame of young people and society with the narrative that this is a disadvantaged generation that had its excuses (*gil ma'thur*). His focus was not on poor economic conditions, but on "the lack of adherence to moral and religious values." In many cases, teachers mentioned increased access to pornography, the consumption of which seemed to be rampant among the male students. This was a frequently voiced concern, especially in the public schools, and was directly linked to new media technologies, the Internet and patterns "coming from abroad." However, this moral lens, which reflected the themes of mainstream Islamist and non-Islamist discourses, was not the key theme for most other teachers or students. Many teachers and administrators in fact explicitly resisted describing the students as a corrupt and lost generation and therefore as bad citizens. Across the schools, teachers often referred to the bad conditions (*zuruf*) in the country and to students as oppressed, unfortunate or crushed by living conditions (*mazlum*, *ghalban* or *maghlub 'ala amruh*).

Conclusion

School rituals and student discourses reveal the poverty of participation and legitimation in schools. Participation as an element of citizenship

is rarely practiced in any of the venues designed for it in the schools. Even the mandated participation in nationalist rituals is hardly enforced in secondary schools. Such participation becomes an image presented on days when inspector visits are expected, but is otherwise abandoned by students and teachers alike. The lack of participation relates not only to a crisis of belonging and legitimacy, but equally to poor resources and the de facto privatization of secondary education through tutoring.

Across students from the different tiers of schooling, neoliberalism was far from hegemonic, national non-belonging was consistently voiced and Islamist discourses were deployed in ambiguous and generationally differentiated ways. Students and teachers related the conditions of lived citizenship directly to government policy and weaved this into their constructions of nation and state. Notably, students used vocabulary that had long been erased from official textbooks, deploying the language of rights, injustice, humiliation and poverty. Many students especially emphasized humiliation based on social class. Even middle-income students in the general schools represented themselves as poor and placed this self-identification at the center of their discourses on the nation and citizenship. Private school students from higher-income groups used the themes of recognition and underemployment instead of livelihood and survival in referring to the lack of opportunity and employment, even though they expressed the same sense of a lack of national belonging and the desire to leave the county. It is nonetheless critical that the concern with blocked opportunities or the reproduction of their class status had reached high up into the affluent classes and is prevalent across the educated classes. Textbook discourses promoting national belonging, active neoliberal citizenship and docile Islamism had therefore not taken root among students across the schools.

While the analysis explains the bounded set of themes that structured student and teacher discourses on these matters, this is not to deny the variation, fluidity and different possibilities within these discourses. First, how students feel about, perceive or relate to these narratives not only varies from one individual to another, but also goes through periods of flux, as is apparent from the changes in discourses about national belonging and its expression after the “January 25 Revolution” (see Conclusion chapter). Patriotic nationalism was not rejected per se by most students, as might be the case, for example, in some countries of the Global North, and therefore remains a relevant register ready to be activated under different circumstances, as

occurred in 2011. Second, what I am implicitly characterizing as a relatively secular discourse of citizenship among these urban Cairene youth cannot be generalized to all parts of the country, especially given the dominance of variants of Islamism in public discourse and education. Third, just as lines could not be easily drawn between the deployment of discourses and practices that implied citizen entitlement and those that implied citizen blame, the distinction between discourses of love of and sacrifice for the nation, as opposed to discourses of a non-belonging or even of hate, is also a delicate one. Major contemporary events, whether the 2011 protests or the repression that followed the disbanding of the Rabaa sit-in, can be as important in shaping discourses on national belonging. Constructions of the national self, of the state and of national identity, and perception of political opening, are all elements that can change significantly and quite rapidly based on changing political realities.¹²

Finally, student discourses about economic exclusion, its politicization and the desperation expressed in relation to the strong possibility of unemployment cannot be assumed to be equally common to disadvantaged youth in different contexts. Many of the exclusions to which these young people are subjected are common to other contexts in the Global South, as well as having some resemblance to underprivileged schools in countries of the Global North. However, research among young people in different contexts shows the variation in how they relate to the realities of exclusion and their utilization of neoliberal themes or other related tropes, such as hard work, education and faith in meritocracy (e.g. Swartz et al. 2012).¹³ That is, there is no necessary link between social exclusion and its articulation within citizenship discourses, nor is there a

¹² Research has suggested, for example, based on the examination of discourses of national character and consciousness before and after the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine, that high-school students' experience of new forms of community and solidarity during the "revolution" led to the emergence of novel articulations of national identity, and that national consciousness was therefore an effect rather than a cause of the Orange Revolution (Fournier 2007).

¹³ For example, a study of township youth in South Africa found that few young people made an explicit connection between the government (or apartheid) and their present socioeconomic circumstances, and that many saw hard work and education alone as the key to achieving socioeconomic mobility (Swartz et al. 2012). In fact, the strongest contrast between that study and the findings here came in the earlier researchers' assertion that there was "almost no evaluation of the inferior quality of township education and lack of available jobs" and instead a strong sense of responsibility and a seeming faith in the "meritocracy myth" (Swartz et al. 2012, 30–5).

necessary association between social exclusion and forms of national belonging. As Yuval-Davis puts it, “discourse on social locations, complex as it is, cannot be conflated with the belonging discourse on identifications and emotional attachments, and any attempt to do so is essentialist and often racialized” (2006, 202).¹⁴

¹⁴ For example, a study of British Muslim youth noted that their normative accounts suggested an interpretation of citizenship that is congruent with the neoliberal discourse of individuals taking responsibility for maintaining social order, while noting varying levels of alienation and affiliation with Britishness when it came to citizenship (Mustafa 2016).