

Conclusion

Schooling the Nation in the Shadow of the Uprising

“What use is education for a lost nation?” Egypt’s president asked rhetorically during a televised conference on education in 2016. The statement went viral on social media, eliciting strong reactions among Egyptians, who expressed dismay, confusion and indignation that their president should diminish the importance of education or insult Egypt as a lost nation. Many of these reactions, however, missed the context of the statement – Sisi was not, in fact, referring directly to Egypt. They also shifted attention away from the substantive content of his intervention, in which he referenced key elements of his understanding and hopes for education and the “Egyptian character we want to educate.” The two main points he raised are directly pertinent to the themes of this book. He first asserted that “knowledge and learning are not enough,” nor is what is taught in school: discourses in the mosque and church and in the media are equally important “in building the character we want.” He went on to say that, among the countries in the region in which “the chaos we are witnessing” has occurred, there are those with good education systems and where illiteracy had been almost eliminated. He was likely referring to Syria, where the quality of preuniversity education was considered to be relatively high. He declared that these countries had been unable to construct the character that could have protected them from such scales of death and destruction. It was at that point that he posed the question: “What use is education for a lost nation?”

The second point in the president’s intervention related to the kinds of schools that could serve as models for Egypt. Drawing on a recent visit to a primary school in Japan, he reflected on the group dynamics, calm and order he had witnessed. He described the lunch scene where no child ate until everyone had been served and a specified student leader gave the signal to start, noting in particular that the students accepted the food offered to them without making objections or additional demands. He remarked that there was no violence or harshness on the part of the teacher, who hardly had to direct the students. The president concluded that these schools had created a personality characterized by consensus

with colleagues, docility and deference to leadership, commitment, cooperation, team spirit, strict compliance and discipline.¹

Such reflections crystallize longstanding themes in how regimes in Egypt, in the region and elsewhere have understood the role of schools in the production of citizenship. They touch on the functions of schools both as nation-building institutions that nurture national belonging and loyalty and as disciplinary institutions that cultivate desired values, attitudes and subjectivities. The comments are also revealing for their silences about social inequalities and the neoliberal transformation of education over the previous decades. As such, they reference issues at the heart of this study: the potential power of schools to instill docility, compliance and deference to authority; the place of harshness (or emotional and physical violence) in everyday processes of subjectivation in schools; the role of schools in creating a commitment to the nation and reinforcing regime legitimacy, and the intersections between schooling, neoliberalism and the 2011 uprising.

Based on rare extended access to Egyptian schools and analysis of official textbooks, this book examines the production of lived and imagined citizenship before and after the 2011 uprising.² Lived citizenship refers to the differentiated experiences of the rights and responsibilities of protection, provision, participation and legitimation, while imagined citizenship concerns the representations of political values and identities that give meaning to the relationship of subjects to their polity (Introduction chapter). In this chapter, I develop the overarching arguments emerging from the analysis. I elaborate first on how the production of lived citizenship in schools illustrates a mode of governance that I call “permissive-repressive neoliberalism” – selective deinstitutionalization and intensification of violence in the context of privatization and austerity. I then enquire into how far these trends can be considered a reflection of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon and unpack their implications for the functioning of schools as disciplinary institutions. In the second part of the chapter, I underline what school

¹ The complete statement was: “What use is education for a lost/failed nation, or one that is failing or that we are failing”: *Yinfa’ il-ta’lim fi- aih ma’ watan dayi’, aw bidi’, aw ihna nidaya’uh*. Some of the key terms in the intervention were: *insan wa’i* (committed human being), *al-wada’a wal-iltizam* (docility and compliance), *al-tawafiq ma’ zamayelha* (consensus with colleagues) and *al-insiya’ lil-qiyada* (deference to leadership). For a video of the full intervention, see Al-Sisi al-Ta’lim la Yufid 2016.

² As detailed in Chapter 1, I conducted most of the ethnographic research from 2008 to 2010 inside six boys’ and girls’ secondary schools across different neighborhoods in Greater Cairo. I revisited the main research themes after the uprising through rounds of interviews from 2016 to 2018. I analyzed the relevant school textbooks from the late Mubarak era to the present.

textbooks, rituals and narratives bring to focus about the production of imagined citizenship before and after 2011.

Lived Citizenship under Permissive-Repressive Neoliberalism

About a year before the 2011 uprising, the Minister of Education at the time, Ahmad Zaki Badr, stated in a parliamentary address that the banning of corporal punishment in schools had led to teachers losing the respect of students and effectively becoming “doormats.”³ He went as far as to claim that the filing of police reports by parents when their children were beaten had “led to the destruction of the educational process.” These comments were so outrageous that a few days later, Badr had to retract them. He asserted that he had been misunderstood, and emphasized that beating is prohibited and unacceptable in all its forms. Only a few months earlier, Badr made another controversial statement when he declared that he had received private tutoring as a student and that “there has to be a way for the teacher to improve his income” (ECER 2010a). In contrast to the public statements of previous education ministers, which had attacked the pervasive growth of private tutoring and its violation of the constitutional right to free public education, Badr presented the extralegal marketization of education as a legitimate means for teachers to make up for their poor pay. As such, he was implicitly legitimizing the forms of shirking, absenteeism and coercion that allow teachers to engage in and create demand for the private tutoring that had increasingly replaced school instruction.

Representing a more candid expression of attitudes and policies that had been obfuscated by previous ministers, Badr epitomized the intensification of the neoliberal and securitized direction of the late Mubarak era. He was nicknamed the “Minister of Interior of Education” in opposition media, as he had already exercised his repressive mode of governance as head of one of the nation’s largest universities, reportedly releasing thugs onto the university campus to assault politically active students. His selection as education minister reflects the approach and credentials favored by the Mubarak regime (1981–2011) in its final years. Badr’s preference appears to have been for students as docile consumers in a privatized system where the market can be enforced, and

³ The terms Badr used were that teachers had lost their *haiba* and became *maltasha*. *Haiba* is a quality attributed to someone who has a natural claim to respect, and commands authority and a measure of deference. Someone who is a *maltasha*, on the other hand, is a regular and easy target for abuse.

contestation deterred, by extralegal and violent means. His comments sought to legitimize a status quo where teachers can shirk their duties in school, provide privatized services within the public system and beat students with impunity, while citizens are maligned for demanding protection under the law and repressed for attempting to exercise their right to participation. Badr's statements offer clues into how both repression and permissiveness were critical to sustaining crony neoliberalism and the neglect of public services on the eve of the Revolution. However, his contested justifications, subsequent retractions and his references to contestation by families, all reflect the regime's crisis of governance and legitimacy. Indeed, one of the most notable waves of school protest occurred, and was repressed, during his tenure, only a few weeks before the uprising.⁴

While political repression and contestation are highlighted in recent literature on Egyptian politics, this book shifts the focus to everyday repression, contestation and legitimation and emphasizes permissiveness as an essential tool of everyday governance. I use permissiveness to refer to the selective *de jure* and *de facto* retraction of legal and institutional protections and regulatory enforcement, and the nurturing of these patterns in a process of de-stating the state. While I touch upon the repression of political contestation, my focus is rather on the everyday forms of physical and emotional violence to which young people are subjected, especially as administered or tolerated by agents of the state. I argue that schools offer particularly illuminating insights into the constellations of privatization, permissiveness and repression that have become the hallmarks of everyday governance in contemporary Egypt. They demonstrate the pronounced differentiation embedded in this mode of governance.

Relations in the three tracks of technical, general and private schools indicate the parameters of lived citizenship for differentially positioned segments of society. While the general secondary track (*thanawiya amma*) is at the center of public discourse and policy concerns, I have given equal attention to the neglected technical education track that enrolls a greater proportion of young people, and to private language

⁴ Students in a number of semiprivate national institutes and their parents initiated a wave of demonstrations and sit-ins, particularly in Alexandria, against a ministerial decision to convert their (formally nationalized but largely independent) schools into public experimental schools. While the formal justification for the decision was allegations of corruption in the schools' management, there were claims that the real motivation was to divide the schools' assets, including large plots of land, and allocate them to cronies of the ruling party. Like other protests by teachers, students and parents, it was met with police repression.

schools that enroll the country's elite (about 2 percent of the population cohort at the secondary stage).⁵ By analyzing repertoires of cheating and bribery, millionaire tutors and precarious teachers, pervasive truancy and humiliating punishment, I illustrate the ways that privatization, permissiveness and violence operate in each track of schooling. The key elements of “permissive-repressive neoliberalism” are privatization and austerity, permissiveness, repression, differentiation and contestation.

Privatization and Austerity

Privatization and austerity – the defining features of neoliberalism – have transformed education systems across the globe. Few educational systems however exhibit similar levels of de facto privatization to those in Egyptian secondary schools, where most students are compelled to obtain their education through paying for private tutoring (Chapter 2). The uncontrolled spread of private tutoring has been facilitated by an institutional context that determines the material conditions of teachers, fails to prevent related extralegal practices and has reduced investment in education to the point that the market has radically transformed and displaced public schooling. Most public schools in Egypt have become institutions that provide service of little value and public provision of education has become no more than a source of ridicule. Confirming the common refrain that there is “no education” (*mafish ta'lim*) in Egypt, the country was recently ranked the second worst in the world in terms of students' reading abilities (Mullis et al. 2017). Combined with reduced public spending on education, this perverse form of privatization through private tutoring has led to the collapse of quality and widening gulfs of inequality for both students and teachers (Chapters 1 and 2). An educational reform announced in 2018 was accompanied by further decline in public expenditures on education to half its preuprising level (when adjusting for purchasing power parity), reversing the improvements that came with the uprising (Chapter 7). The case of Egypt indicates how

⁵ For the three types of schools covered by the study, in 2020, technical secondary schools enrolled 35.5 percent of the population cohort, public general schools (*thanawiya amma*) teaching in Arabic enrolled 25% percent, and private general secondary schools teaching in foreign languages enrolled less than 2% of the cohort. As for the categories not addressed by this study: about 6 percent of the age cohort enrolled in Al-Azhar religious secondary schools, 27% of youth were not enrolled in any type of secondary schooling (drop outs), and about 0.5 percent of all students in Egypt are enrolled in international schools (see Chapter 1). Gross enrollment in the secondary stage is calculated based on official enrollment data for the school year 2019/2020 (MOE 2020c and MOE 2020b for MOE enrollment and CAPMAS 2021 for Azhar enrollment).

informal privatization that started in the 1980s as targeted additional support in the final year of schooling can morph, through austerity, permissiveness and repression, into a parallel system that displaces school and transforms its functions across educational tracks.

Neoliberalism here spells widespread institutional collapse that takes different forms across the tiers of schooling. The two tracks of public schooling show us the differentiated workings of the privatized state. The technical track indicates educational markets where the least advantaged students are coerced by underpaid teachers to enroll in private tutoring, in which they obtain little more than the possibility of passing their exams through systematic cheating.⁶ The public general track, where private tutoring is almost universal, is served by markets in which middle-income youth do not have credible prospects of achieving the ideal middle-class trajectory of university enrollment, formal employment and a professional career. The third type of school is formally private but private tutoring enrollment is paradoxically almost universal in high-stakes markets where more affluent families make a heavy financial and emotional investment in learning and memorizing vast amounts of material, while developing few skills they consider of value. This kind of privatization has increased households' reliance on the market, as well as on charitable (religious) networks, while deepening their disengagement from the state. As key state functions are abandoned, the influence of conservative forces grows as they step in to provide various actors with not only the resources to face rising costs but also the frameworks to understand and retain a sense of control over their realities.

Permissiveness

The kind of informal privatization seen in Egypt is made possible by the pervasive corrosion of the normal functioning of schools. On the part of teachers, this includes shirking their duties, absenteeism, carrying out illegal forms of punishment, involvement in extralegal tutoring markets, the facilitation of cheating and the presentation of inaccurate data about student grades, attendance and various school activities. On the part of students, it includes engagement in exam cheating and noncompliance with rules regarding uniforms, school attendance, behavior toward peers and staff, and participation in school activities such as the morning assembly. Indeed, codes of conduct were scarcely observed in any of the schools in this study, especially in public schools. Student

⁶ Tutoring may be less prominent in rural technical schools than in these Cairene schools, but the realities of "no education" and systematic cheating are shared (Chapters 1 and 2).

noncompliance is not altogether surprising given that most students receive their education beyond the school gates. Many construe this as an unjust situation for which the state and teachers are primarily responsible, adding to their grievances about the fairness of the examination (in light of unequal access to high-quality private tutoring and perceptions of illegal access to exam questions) and the decreasing returns to education. Violent punishment critically fuels noncompliance. Indeed, the dynamics around discipline in schools bring to the fore the pervasive, gendered noncompliance and contestation among young people in such contexts (Chapter 4). The culture of bullying fostered in schools through an almost complete absence of deterrence, is another element of permissiveness and a critical feature of the withdrawal of the rights to protection that should be guaranteed by the state.⁷ Since 2011, despite ministerial pronouncements on promoting “discipline” in schools, noncompliance has only increased on all fronts, from truancy to a greater sense of entitlement to exam-cheating, even among general secondary students, where the integrity of the *thanawiya amma* exam had long been guarded as a matter of national security (Chapter 7).

Noncompliance in schools is an indication of the progressive decline of the authority of the state and its institutions, and the extent to which this decline is experienced and expressed across different social classes. Like de facto privatization, permissiveness in schools is a reflection of wider trends in the state apparatus. Permissiveness in Egypt indicates cronyism, corruption, deregulation, precarity and informality, but importantly encompasses weak and uneven regulatory enforcement across key institutions (Chapter 1).⁸ It indicates the deployment of the breakdown of the rule of law as integral to modes of everyday governance. Such permissiveness has led to a sense of generalized complicity in illegitimate practices, where the citizen must engage in illegal or extralegal activity to make a living or access public services. This complicity, which is fundamental to the reproduction of the system, is also critical to discourses that malign, silence and disempower the citizen. In schools, the context of

⁷ My focus was on hierarchical relations of punishment rather than on practices of retaliation and violence by students toward teachers and even less on horizontal violence among students. I discuss sexual harassment by male students, however, because it was a recurrent theme in citizenship discourses of female students in terms of rights to protection and public safety (Chapters 4 and 6). The forms of violence in boys' schools, including bullying, destroying school property and bringing drugs and weapons into school, are occasionally highlighted in the media. They are also explored in a study by Kamal Naguib (2006) and in a recent feature film *La Mu'akhza* (2014).

⁸ Egypt has recently ranked very close to the bottom of the global Rule of Law Index (WJP 2021). Egypt ranked low on corruption, regulatory enforcement, civil justice and criminal justice, including in comparison to the region and to lower middle-income countries.

permissiveness fuels the contentious atmosphere of moral blame and negative labeling. Students are belittled as cheats or failures even if they have not received adequate training in their formative years, while teachers are cast as immoral for shirking their duties in order to create demand for private tutoring (Chapter 2). However, not only permissiveness but also violence is critical to the prevailing mode of governance.

Repression and Everyday Violence

Violent and humiliating punishment is a key feature of classroom relations in Egypt's public schools. From the first pages of this book, I have recounted my observations of students being slapped; kicked; beaten with hoses and sticks; addressed as scum, animals and failures; and insulted in obscene language, even if such violence was actually reduced in my presence and is more intense for younger students in lower grades. Harsh punishment is deployed as a means for facilitating extralegal practices in schools and coping with their multifaceted impoverishment and institutional collapse (Chapter 3). It facilitates extralegal extraction of labor and income where students are compelled to pay for additional tutoring, selectively forced to clean the classroom floors, sweep the playground or make tea for teachers in exchange for marks or being spared physical punishment. Violent punishment is therefore implicated in the distorted informal privatization of education. Its severity is however correlated with the social class background of students. Technical school students receive the harshest forms of punishment, followed by general school students, while punishment in private schools is far less severe (Chapter 3). Physical beating and humiliation are also disproportionately applied to boys and the policing of sexuality to girls (Chapter 4). (Male) students reproduce the violence in interactions with their peers, with teachers who are perceived as weak, and through intimidation and sexual harassment of female students (Chapter 3). The reproduction or conservation of violence (Bourdieu 1998) is therefore mediated by class, gender, age and key contextual parameters in schools. Extralegal punishment, bullying and harassment in schools illustrate the ways in which access to protection under the law is classed and gendered. If authoritarian Arab schools have long been assumed to cultivate docile subjects, Egypt's violent and dysfunctional schools now cultivate contestation, cycles of violence, a culture of noncompliance and negative self-esteem, with a variety of damaging implications for children and adolescents (Chapter 4).

The extralegal practices undermining students' entitlement to free public education necessitated the continuous silencing, belittling and

contempt of students, physical intimidation and repression of contestation. One of the key functions of everyday repression is to contain contestation of the extralegal practices pervading schools. The repression of expression, participation and representation is also applied to more politicized expression or organization. Censorship, securitization and surveillance, as well as the Islamization of permitted forms of participation, are evident in various aspects of the life of schools (Chapters 1 and 6). These forms of securitization and surveillance are classed, gendered and legitimized through a variety of nationalist and religious tropes.

Above all, violent punishment in schools has been de facto permitted by the state: Public-school teachers know that they can practice it with impunity. The forms of mistreatment and poor conditions to which teachers themselves are subjected partly inform these dynamics (Chapter 3). Violence in schools is part of the structural stresses of poverty, precarity and austerity. The forms of punishment that predominate in Egyptian schools are therefore less an expression of child-rearing practices among the poor, or a masculinity training among men and boys, than the result of the negligence of a weak privatized state (Chapter 3). This is not the kind of harsh punishment that accompanies a strict disciplinary process, but one that attempts to mask the absence of such a project and facilitates the establishment of parallel privatized schooling. Violent and humiliating punishment has been increasing in Egyptian schools precisely because of the absence of an official well-resourced disciplinary project. However, across the tracks of schooling, the uprising catalyzed changes in these patterns in terms of greater assertiveness on the part of students and a decline in harsh punishment, with possibly enduring effects (Chapter 7).

Differentiation and Contestation

The patterns of lived citizenship implied in permissive-repressive neoliberalism are necessarily differentiated and are experienced according to class position, gender, age and other salient forms of social difference. Given the focus on urban schools and the dimensions of class and gender, I do not fully address other facets of social difference, like religion, disability or sexuality or the experiences of rural youth and those who do not reach the secondary stage of schooling. However, comparing different tiers of urban schools provides a vivid illustration of the extent and nature of differentiation in access to citizenship rights understood along the parameters of protection, provision, participation and legitimation (Introduction chapter). Just as privatization takes place differently and has

varied implications for learning across the tiers of schooling, permissiveness and repression are also differentiated. Schools show the extent to which the rule of law, institutional functioning and the perks of informality, cronyism and petty corruption are unevenly distributed. While teachers are often portrayed in the Egyptian media as making massive profits, I underline the very unequal distribution of tutoring income among teachers. Informal privatization in the form of tutoring is less pervasive and lucrative in primary and preparatory education, the technical secondary track, lower income neighborhoods, rural areas and in subjects that do not affect student grades (Chapters 1 and 2). In addition, women are some of the biggest losers of the decline in decent public-sector jobs in general and the informal marketization of education in particular, given that after-school tutoring markets are harder for them to access due to gendered social norms. Educated young people today are more likely than previous cohorts to suffer from informal precarious employment (Chapter 1), and express profound frustration and insecurity in relation to employment prospects (Chapter 6). Permissiveness with regard to exam cheating is highly differentiated in that open cheating and lax assessment in technical schools look very different from the forms of cheating in either public or private general secondary *thanaawiya amma* (Chapter 2). The forms of oversight and support that are part of the regular functioning of educational authorities are variably applied to schools in different times of the year and in relation to certain activities, but also with more privileged schools in urban areas receiving more rigorous inspection. Permissiveness with regard to attendance and skipping school are applied differently to boys than girls, whose mobility is controlled in relation to ideals of modesty. The deteriorating conditions of schooling also elicit forms of 'gender traditionalism', where boys tend to adopt more intimidating and confrontational behavior, while girls' noncompliance with school rules center on expressions of femininity (Chapter 4).

In terms of repression and everyday violence, parents in private schools can expect that their children will not be beaten or humiliated. Meanwhile, parents of technical school students, and even general secondary school students, have little access to their rights to protection under the law and are likely to face humiliating treatment if they attempt to intervene or report violations of their rights. Patrimonial relations and even physical strength and intimidation add further layers of differentiation. A less-advantaged student might be able to avoid violent punishment based on the threat of physical retaliation by a committed family member or protection by a patron. The existence of such possibilities of avoiding repression and accessing permissiveness is in fact critical for the

sustainability of this mode of governance. More pronounced forms of both permissiveness and repression therefore define the relation of the state with citizens outside the more privileged middle and higher income groups and affect men and women differently.

Permissive-repressive neoliberalism is also highly contested. The extralegal practices, both permissive and repressive, that pervade schools are not accepted by docile students without contestation. Although most avenues of participation and expression are effectively blocked, students and parents have indeed become more assertive, making complaints to schools, threatening escalation to higher educational authorities and filing police complaints against school actors. The dynamics of permissiveness and repression associated with private tutoring drive and define the contested nature of these forms of marketization (Chapter 2). Critically, school dynamics also reveal differences in the means students employ to oppose dominant practices. Individualized retaliation and counterviolence against teachers are more prevalent among disadvantaged students and boys, while more affluent students were more likely to deploy modes of collective action such as protests and petitions, especially after the uprising (Chapter 7).

Is This Mode of Governance Really Neoliberal?

Permissive-repressive neoliberalism is intimately linked to but quite distinct from neoliberalism as studied in the Global North. On the one hand, neoliberalism is often used as shorthand to refer to the two key global trends of austerity and privatization, which are clearly prominent in the Egyptian case. On the other hand, formal and informal privatization take different forms in this context. Private tutoring has certainly become a global phenomenon, but remains in many parts of the world an auxiliary activity that has not effectively replaced schools or led to the disintegration of the normal functioning of public education. Despite austerity and privatization, preuniversity education remains a public good provided predominantly by the state. Furthermore, the extralegality and informality of forms of punishment and control in Egyptian schools are far removed from experiences in schools of the Global North where corporal punishment is hardly practiced and schools broadly function according to their formal rules and regulations. Neoliberalism has been further conceptualized in terms of its associated technologies of governance, especially those that seek to forge enterprising self-managing citizens. A key element of neoliberal governmentality is “governing from a distance” through layers of codified techniques that include a constellation of market mechanisms which entail ongoing processes

of responsabilization (Rose 1993, 1999). Although discourses of responsabilization and the effort to promote “active citizenship” are prominent in the Egyptian case, other elements of this aspect of neoliberal governmentality remain more limited.

While these differences are critical, a growing body of literature challenges the notion that there is any one monolithic formulation or practice of neoliberalism. To begin with, the geographical development of neoliberalism has been uneven in different parts of the world (Harvey 2005). The literature around the Washington Consensus shows how neoliberal policies have been differently applied and promoted across the world (Sera and Steglitz 2004). Neoliberalism is an extraordinarily malleable technology of governing that is taken up in different ways by various regimes, whether authoritarian, democratic or communist (Ong 2006b). It “is inflected by local meanings, discourses, and histories” (Kanna 2010, 102). In this view, neoliberalism is an important point of reference “in dealing with phenomena such as the de-statization of governmental activity [and] the marketization of labor and budgetary austerity policies,” yet these phenomena are found in configurations that do not necessarily correspond to the picture of a standard “neoliberal package” (Hoffman, DeHart and Collier 2006, 10). In the same vein, the ways that neoliberal values of self-management and self-enterprise shape citizenship depend fundamentally on their interactions with particular political environments (Ong 2006a, 502). This body of literature shifts the focus to examining the local inflections of neoliberal policies, including their specificities, diversions and subversions. Therefore, while taking seriously the dangers of too wide a definition of neoliberalism (Wacquant 2012), the dynamics in Egypt can nevertheless reveal how neoliberalism as a differentiated global phenomenon takes form in a particular context in the Global South at a particular historical juncture. De-stating, precarization, reduced public spending, privatization and attempts to promote responsible enterprising active citizenship are elements that make neoliberalism an inescapable point of reference in the Egyptian case.

Repression (the intensification of institutional punishment and extra-legal violence) and permissiveness (selective deinstitutionalization and deregulation) can also be considered features of neoliberalism as a necessarily variegated global phenomenon. Scholars such as Loïc Wacquant (2009, 2010) show how changes in welfare and justice politics are interlinked and how neoliberalism has been accompanied by rising levels of incarceration and a host of often racialized punitive measures against the poor. As housing and social and health services are withdrawn and marketized, more funding has been channeled to the police to contain and (mis)manage the social consequences of these disentanglements. The

increasing power of the police and their centrality to the reproduction of the neoliberal global order has been analyzed with particular reference to Egypt (Abdelrahman 2017). Scholarship on the Global South has explored everyday violence and failure to invest in the rule of law as deliberate tools of governance (Pearce 2018). In terms of permissiveness, a range of phenomena including deregulation, employment precarity, informality, tax evasion and cronyism have all been linked to neoliberalism, although more work is needed on everyday permissiveness as a means of governing the poor.

The point is that there is a symbiotic relationship between violence, permissiveness and neoliberalism even if their forms and intensities vary. The weakening of the welfare function of the state is compensated for by the (formal or informal) strengthening of punitive powers and the weakening of regulatory functions. Oversight of corporations and legal (employment, environmental) protections are reduced, while policing and incarceration of the poor increase. As such, the protection function of the state is transformed when its provision function is weakened: It becomes selectively more punitive and less regulatory. It is in this sense that I argue that forms of repression and permissiveness result from, accompany and facilitate the implementation of neoliberal policies.

The Transformation of the School as a Disciplinary Institution

Permissive-repressive neoliberalism has implications for the functioning of the school as a disciplinary institution that is meant to observe, normalize and examine, and ultimately to create docile subjects in the Foucauldian sense. It is not straightforward to talk about discipline in the Foucauldian sense in the absence of effective enforcement of school rules and pervasive physical punishment. It is difficult to think of schools as disciplinary institutions when they function as (privatized) soccer fields that boys rent for money (the losing team pays), meeting points to gather before jumping the fence, social clubs and beauty salons for girls, spaces of extralegal labor and income extraction, or locations to listen to a religious sermon that is not part of the official curriculum.

Violent punishment in particular has little place in Foucauldian notions of disciplinary power. For Foucault, discipline is distinct from repression and violent punishment in ways that are important for the production of subjects. Foucault argues that “disciplinary mechanisms” began to displace sovereign power in the modern era, and that the former extract time and labor, not wealth and commodities from bodies (Foucault 1977, 239). The distinction is between repression and violent

punishment on the one hand, and, on the other, institutionalized power relations that deploy measured (and typically codified) punishment as part of a disciplinary project. Punishment within a disciplinary power relationship aims neither at expiation nor repression but “brings five quite distinct operations into play: ... [it] compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault 1977, 182–3). The “regimes of power” that Foucault identifies are however less than hegemonic in their scope, especially in non-Western societies (Weslund 1999, Ismail 2006, Deacon 2002).⁹ The appealing distinction between violence that breaks and destroys (sovereign power) and a relationship of power in which a field of responses and inventions open up (disciplinary power) is difficult to observe in many contexts. Violent punishment also compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes and excludes – that is, it normalizes, and it does not eliminate possibilities of response and inventions.

The absence of a neat distinction between repression and discipline should not prevent an exploration of the production of subjectivities in institutions that do not effectively observe, normalize and examine. Instead of thinking in terms of docility and panopticons or modern and premodern punishment, it is more productive to consider how different constellations of disciplinary techniques function and what subjectivating role they perform within the institution. The operation of the three techniques of observation, normalization and examination can illustrate the differentiated manner in which disciplinary institutions operate.

For Foucault, the superimposition of relationships of power and knowledge assumes all its visible brilliance in the examination (Foucault 1977, 185). However, the schools studied here show just how divergent and ambiguous the disciplining role of the examination can be. Widespread cheating in technical schools means that the examination does not do the work of normalization and judgment for disadvantaged youth. However, the functioning of this kind of examination indeed renders the schooling experience behind it visible, bringing to light the negligence and permissiveness that shape classed and gendered subjectivities. In the same

⁹ “Strands of so-called pre-modern power coexist with modern, disciplinary techniques and interact with them in complex and varied ways in the lives of many people” (Westlund 1999, 1055). As Deacon notes, “[n]ot only are power relations not reducible to the disciplines, or the latter to the apparatuses of the state, but it would also be wrong to see the disciplines as replacing or transcending sovereignty, as if Foucault had merely reversed Enlightenment histories of progress in order to relate the story of the rise of unfreedom” (2002, 112). Ismail has also pointed to the difficulty in drawing “a definite line separating the modern and the traditional” with regard to “Foucault’s genealogy of disciplinary regimes in the context of historical practices of control in non-Western societies” (2006, xxix).

school system, the examination can be an intense national event with high material and symbolic returns for more privileged students. It can also have an ambiguous position in the disciplining of middle-income students facing low and uncertain prospects for social advancement. This differentiated (mal)functioning of disciplinary techniques therefore reflects divergent realities and resources, and is productive of different subjectivities, discourses and practices.

The work of surveillance can be similarly differentiated and distorted. Instead of a codified system of surveillance, forms of control can break down and become more informal and personalized. They can also become reduced and intensified into particular domains like controlling female sexuality and political opposition, thereby reflecting wider modes of governance. The principal's office as a key locus of surveillance can be reduced to a tearoom for facilitating privatized extralegal practices, a checkpoint for controlling paper trails that attest to the supposed order and activities in the school, and a space of higher punishment, where noncompliant students (and their parents) are subject to additional extralegal forms of emotional and physical violence. In other words, rather than functioning like a Foucauldian panopticon of disciplinary governance, it can become the locus for permissive-repressive governance. The third element of discipline, normalizing judgment, never ceases to operate even if it functions in less formal and codified ways. Even when they are mired in permissiveness and violence, classed and gendered practices in schools normalize, differentiate and hierarchize by teaching students the parameters of acceptable behavior and offering them lessons about their place in society. The school plays a critical role in the production of differentiated subjectivities, whether it is a violent and dysfunctional technical school or a laid-back and dysfunctional private school displaced by private tutoring. It always normalizes and judges, even if it does not always examine.

The role of resources is critical for appreciating the functioning of disciplinary institutions. Relations dominated by repression and those that are more disciplinary in nature are embedded in different motivations and implications, but also in different resources and capacities. Starved of essential resources, schools are unable to perform their disciplinary role. The modern school is designed to function as a disciplinary institution aimed at the creation of useful subjectivities, endowing citizens with appropriate cultural capital for the reproduction of their class status. When this process of capital accumulation is seriously impaired, the institution may be forced to resort to a mixture of repressive and permissive measures. In this version of neoliberalism, forms of violence and permissiveness are integral to the fragmented disciplining by the market.

The decline in the authoritative disciplinary role of the school also undermines its power to perform its other historic functions of political legitimation and the promotion of national belonging.

Official Narratives and Rituals of Legitimation

Schools are not only spaces where citizenship is lived, but also where it is legitimized and contested. Schools are key arenas for examining narratives of imagined citizenship and the everyday production of hegemony. Textbooks reflect the key parameters of official narratives, nationalist rituals in school embody key tropes of citizenship and their contestation, while everyday discourses of students and teachers point to modes of appropriation and negotiation of these official narratives. Analysis of novels, assigned readings and exam questions across a range of key subjects can draw out the ways in which official narratives portray the citizen, articulate the route to national progress and construct national identity and belonging.

Although not always articulated with either clarity or force, nationalism, Islamism and neoliberalism are the key tropes presented to Egyptian secondary students in official textbooks since the late Mubarak era. The textbooks emphasize love and sacrifice for the nation, pride in ancient Egyptian civilization and the role of the army in national progress. Muslim identity, history and piety occupy a central position in textbook articulations of both nationalism and citizenship, seen in the consistent invocation of Islamic references to legitimize the key narratives of national devotion and good citizenship (Chapters 1 and 5). Official textbooks therefore reveal the extent to which regimes since the 1970s arrived at an accommodation with Islamist forces whereby the latter gained increasing control of cultural spheres with direct influence on young people. National renaissance is not to be achieved by establishing social justice, eradicating poverty or gaining full independence from foreign exploitation as articulated in postcolonial era textbooks, but rather through pious charitable neoliberalism. Charity, entrepreneurialism and sacrifice for the nation are valorized as the solutions to the nation's challenges, and the textbooks lament the citizen's engagement in un-civic or illegal acts and the lack of patriotism among the young.

The textbooks in use throughout the late Mubarak era reflect the lack of clear ideological legitimation. The postindependence narratives presented under Nasser (1952–70) have been erased since Sadat (1970–81), while everything under Mubarak seems to have been written with a shaky hand. The major ideological and political changes since the 1970s – the shift toward liberalization, the switch to the Western camp in

the middle of the Cold War and the steps toward peace and normalization with Israel – find little resonance in school textbooks. The austerity, liberalization and privatization adopted under Mubarak are hardly propagated or defended. Instead, the textbooks highlight supposed achievements in the social sphere that have little credibility, including “the declaration of education as Egypt’s national project.” They make little reference to realities of everyday violence, poverty, exclusion, inequality and permissiveness, except to discuss corruption in moralizing terms. Democracy and participation are frequently referenced, but are cast within religious, authoritarian and paternalistic tropes. The textbooks rely heavily on Islamic legitimation and condemn extremism, but hardly present a coherent alternative Islamic vision. Under the military command that took over after Mubarak, textbook changes remained limited, although references to the Mubaraks were purged, the 2011 Revolution was praised, and the continuation of protests was rejected. Changes under the one-year rule of Brotherhood indicate the different (exclusionary, Islamizing and inclusionary) possibilities that their reign might have entailed. Since 2013, changes to textbooks reflect the continuity (and fragility) of ambiguous legitimation. The most notable deletions, additions and retractions revolved around participation and legitimation (protest, Revolution, characterizing the old and new regimes) but not to concerns around protection and provision central to student notions of imagined citizenship (Chapter 7).

Beyond textbooks, nationalist rituals in schools capture critical patterns around the lived performance of national belonging, citizenship and legitimation before and after the uprising (Chapters 6 and 7). The daily morning assembly/ *tabur* is the primary site for nationalist rituals in Egyptian schools, explicitly delineated by the ministry and subject to periodic inspection. Like other school activities, however, *tabur* is fundamentally undermined by the lack of resources and absenteeism caused by de facto privatization. The sanctified performance of the nation as decreed by the state is frequently cancelled, altered, unattended or mired in chaos and violence. Instead of representing the state’s authority, teachers often collude in the cancellation and alteration of the ritual, indicating the lack of commitment among all school actors to the institution – and in part, to the nation. If the assembly becomes noisy and disorderly, as it often does, teachers resort to physical and emotional violence to restore some measure of order. When the national anthem is actually performed during *tabur*, and when secondary students are actually present, they often either avoid chanting it or mutter inappropriate variations that involve ridicule and obscenity. Instead of love, belonging and commitment to the nation, it is discourses of violation, humiliation,

indignation and disenchantment that dominate this subversion of school rituals, especially by male students. These subversive performances create and foster oppositional identities, emotions and meanings. Again, if it is actually performed, *tabur* narratives are often appropriated by contesting Islamist forces. Many schools (extralegally) replace or supplement elements of *tabur* with more Islamist elements and chants, although this does little to reduce student avoidance of the ritual. The ritual becomes a representation of a weak state whose dictates are under-resourced, ignored and altered.

Tabur thus becomes less a ritual of national devotion or an authoritarian disciplinary tool than a site of alienation, withdrawal and contestation. If rituals can be thought of as models both of and for society (Geertz 1965, Kapferer 1981), the lack of attendance at the morning ritual and its breakdown into chaos and violence are symbolic of the loss of sanctity of the nation, the state and its institutions. *Tabur*, as a lived reality, is a powerful representation of the regime's permissive-repressive everyday governance and its contested narratives of legitimation. It is a physical embodiment of the antagonism and mutual disengagement between young people and the state at this historical juncture. The uprising represented a momentary rupture in these trends: Teachers describe a surge of commitment and respect for the nationalist rituals of *tabur* in the period after the Revolution. A few years later, most students had little participation or knowledge of *tabur* and its components, describing it as "just noise," with little enforcement or enthusiasm from teachers, while Islamic chants continued to complement or replace mandated nationalist ones. Some students and teachers also criticized the introduction of pro-army songs into the ritual, as too political, not really patriotic, unwelcome in their implicit glorification of the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood regime or at least for being divisive of the school community (Chapter 7).

Official narratives and rituals of imagined citizenship therefore amount to a thin veil of legitimation as opposed to a sustained use of schools as tools for the production of hegemony. Rather than directly addressing and legitimizing the ideological orientations and choices of the regime, they are concealed beneath nationalist and religious narratives. Such disengagement from legitimation can be seen as intentional and guided by the goal of depoliticizing the young. It parallels the inculcating of political passivity and complacency associated with neoliberal "active citizenship" (Brown 2005). However, the trajectory and rhetoric of the "depoliticization of education" since Sadat has had the distinct outcome of a thorough Islamization of education with enduring effects on Egyptian politics and society. If the Nasser regime planted the seeds of the opposition Sadat had to confront by instructing students in the ideals

of social justice and Arab nationalism, so too the Sadat regime planted the seeds of the varieties of the religious opposition Mubarak confronted. The depoliticization of poverty, social justice and geostrategic decisions was accompanied by the politicization of religion in official textbooks as well as school rituals and activities. Creating Islamist opposition might however be advantageous, as it is easier to justify the repression of Islamists in the current global geopolitical context than a liberal or social democratic opposition. Discourses of imagined citizenship among educated youth cannot, however, be considered depoliticized, neoliberal, or in fact as Islamized as those of older generations.

Student Narratives of Imagined Citizenship and National Belonging

Our dignity is violated	كرامتنا متهانة
And our sustenance with humiliation	واللقمة باهانة
Why do you bring us to the world if you hate us?	بتخلفينا ليه لما انتي كارهانا؟
...	...
Love means two people giving	الحب يعني اتنين بيدوا
Not one hand building and 600 bleep-bleeps tearing down	مش إيد بتبني وستميت تبت يهدو
...	...
Love is a state	الحب حالة
Love is not poetry and talk	الحب مش شعر وقوالة
Love is something that cannot exist among people who collect their lunch from garbage bins	الحب حاجة ما تتوجدش في وسط ناس بتجيب غداها من صناديق الزبالة
Love inside you	الحب جواكي
Is an impossibility	استحالة

From the poem *Juha*, by Hisham Al-Gakh¹⁰

These verses by Egyptian poet Hisham Al-Gakh reflect many of the themes articulated by young people across the schools: humiliation, economic exclusion and dilemmas of national belonging. The striking statement of the impossibility of loving the nation echoes the narratives of non-belonging among students (Chapters 6 and 7). Students seized on questions around love and belonging to the nation to elaborate oppositional discourses weaved around critiques of their lived realities. Discussions around national belonging were channeled into a construction of Egypt as a state that does not provide adequate services, job opportunities, access to the law or dignified treatment and is therefore

¹⁰ The poem has had significant popularity. One YouTube version of its recital (Al-Gakh 2010) had been viewed about 4.5 million times by October 2017. Translations to English are my own.

not a subject of love or belonging. To describe their realities of lived citizenship, public-school students used the language and imagery of poverty, injustice and inequality: terms and images that had effectively been eliminated from textbook discourses. Their narratives show how little students appropriated the neoliberal ideals referenced in the textbooks. In middle-income general secondary schools in particular, students constructed the country as corrupt and not worthy of allegiance, service or domicile. This indignant rejection of national devotion was more pronounced among boys, and was constructed as more justified due to their exclusion from economic opportunities – in light of normative understandings of their roles as primary breadwinners (Chapter 6). Constructions of Egypt as “violated” and “violating,” as (male) students had put forward in their alternative lyrics to the national anthem, reflect the ways in which pride in the nation had been destabilized through practices perceived as undermining of human dignity and ideals of masculinity.

Students also did not employ the Islamic notions of justice that occupied a prominent place in textbooks, suggesting important generational differences with teachers on this front. Students located the legitimacy of the regime primarily in relation to the socioeconomic sphere, not around issues of identity, morality or cultural authenticity. They did, however, reproduce the textbook construction of the “bad Muslim,” where a host of negative social realities, from the proliferation of uncollected garbage on the streets to petty corruption and civilizational decline, is attributed to lazy, immoral, impious and uncivil behavior condemned by Islam (Chapter 6). Notably, school actors shifted between alternative discursive repertoires and modes of action, moving almost seamlessly between Islamist responsabilizing, enactments of entitled citizenship¹¹ and reliance on clientelistic networks to address problems such as garbage collection, drug dealing and sexual harassment in the vicinity of the schools. That none of these narratives became hegemonic, and none of their strategies succeeded, points to the deep impasse facing young people at this historical juncture. This fluidity challenges any neat division between secular and religious frames, entitlement and responsabilizing narratives, or citizenship entitlement as contrasted to clientelism and patrimonialism (Chapter 6).

As reflected in narratives around *tabur*, teachers described a sense of pride, ownership and empowerment among students in the period following the Revolution. With the hope of meaningful political change,

¹¹ Enactments or acts of citizenship are instances where subjects constitute themselves as those to whom the right to have rights is due (Isin and Nielsen 2008).

nationalist feelings could be more comfortably experienced and expressed. The prominent place of nationalist symbols, especially the national flag, from the very first days of the uprising was not only an expression of newfound national pride but also a deliberate strategy that mobilized latent themes of national devotion propagated in official discourses. It also sought to bypass the regime's maligning of oppositional forces as traitors to the nation (see Pratt 2005, Abdelrahman 2007).¹² The protests made the critical move of redefining nationalist expression around the struggle for the rights and demands of "the people," not around defending the nation from foreign aggression, as propagated by school textbooks.

The striking expressions of lack of national belonging among students can therefore be seen as oppositional narratives that are contextual, fluid and changeable. They are evidence of the failure of official narratives of legitimation and dominant projects of governance. After the passing of the exceptional moment of the uprising, student narratives reflected very similar themes as those voiced before the uprising.¹³ One of the most notable changes was the weaving of political repression in their narratives of exclusionary citizenship, a theme that was far less prominent before the uprising. In sum, despite the renewed securitization of education since the uprising, hesitant textbook changes and everyday rituals and discourses in schools demonstrate the continued inability and lack of interest in propagating regime narratives in schools (Chapter 7).

Conclusion

It is sometimes argued that the neglect of education in Egypt is the result of a deliberate strategy to keep the population uneducated, or, as one teacher put it, to destroy young people. Expanding the ranks of the better educated could indeed be detrimental to ruling regimes in the medium term. Younger, better educated and more affluent Egyptians were at the forefront of the 2011 protests,¹⁴ and the results of the relatively free voting episodes in 2011 and 2012 indicate that oppositional forces – secular and

¹² Incidentally, in the first days of the Revolution, Al-Gakh explicitly renounced the verse declaring the death of the beloved Egypt in his poem *Mikamilin*. He recited in *Mikamilin* (Al-Gakh 2011): *Ten'iti' idi ama 'ult habibti matit* [roughly translated: Cursed is my hand when it wrote that my beloved is dead].

¹³ The ways in which pro-regime media have appropriated nationalist symbols since 2013, including the iconic phrase *Tahya Masr* (Long Live Egypt), and associated them with support for the current regime, might be creating greater alienation from these nationalist tropes for some young people.

¹⁴ The Arab Barometer dataset shows that 84.5 percent of the participants had at least a high-school education (Beissinger et al. 2015, 6).

Islamist alike – find it far easier to recruit among better educated urban constituencies. On the other hand, an intentional strategy of keeping the population uneducated would not explain similarly poor investment in health, transportation or basic infrastructure for the majority of citizens. Rather, the condition of education is the result of permissive-repressive neoliberalism as the designated mode for coping with the economic and political crises facing successive regimes. Schools nonetheless reveal these configurations of permissive-repressive governance as tenuous and contested, indicating that the overturning of the postcolonial social contract is far from hegemonic.

Starving schools of resources and stripping down their disciplinary role gives rise to the failure of education in one of its central mandates – that of creating loyal patriotic citizens. Today's schools do not reproduce authoritarianism in the sense of schooling youth in the authority of the textbook as the sole source of truth or the teacher as a venerable source of authority. Narratives and rituals of legitimation primarily serve to signal the correct parameters of public discourse that youth can deploy without risking repression. Egyptian schools are no longer capable of nurturing faith in the leader, a governing ideology, or even nationalism. What emerges is a mode of governance that is legitimized, not by instilling devotion to the nation or loyalty to the regime, but by degrading the citizen. The most consistently repressed behavior among the majority of less-privileged young people is anything that resembles enactments of citizenship. The clearest message delivered to the majority of youth by the lived realities of public schooling is about their unworthiness and lack of ability and potential, ritualistically repeated in violent and humiliating practices.

Schools function to deter any aspiration of citizenship among young people. They illustrate the denial, erosion and differentiation of citizenship, in its four parameters of protection, provision, participation and legitimation. Disadvantaged youth may act as bad citizens engaged in extralegal practices, passive and hardworking Muslims, or clients seeking the protection of patrons, but not as entitled citizens. Above all, they are not entitled to the very service for which the school is designed. Middle-income youth experience another form of degraded citizenship. They may suffer from less severe forms of everyday violence, but they see the rights their parents had secured in previous decades being stripped away and marketized. They can hope to access meaningful services, but only as far as their diminishing means allow. More affluent youth are schooled in yet another form of degraded citizenship. They might have greater access to protection under the law and acceptable basic infrastructure, but they must pay for everything else. Even if the most privileged can expect new highways linking their gated communities to their beach resorts, like

other subjects, they are schooled not to expect economic, social or political rights from the state. Egyptian schools produce not entitled citizens, nor docile subjects, but rather varieties of clients, consumers and quasi-citizens. Above all, they offer an education in degraded citizenship.

Apart from the education reform program announced in 2018, steps have been taken to implement the vision for national character building inspired by the observations on Japanese education discussed in the beginning of this chapter. In 2017, an agreement was concluded to set up Egyptian–Japanese schools across the country, heralded in the media as aiming to promote values and positive behavior, reinforce belonging to the nation, instill an ethos of collective cooperation and problem-solving and create good learning environments. The new schools are, however, very small in number and charge considerable fees. The new experiment for the production of the good citizen is targeted at a slim stratum of students. Rather than a national project of character building, what emerges is another form of privatization targeted at those able to pay for a measure of distinction from the neglect and violence on offer in the systematically destroyed institutions of the state.