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Violence, Class and Masculinity in Egypt:  
Gendered Punishment in Cairene Schools

Max Planck Institute for the Study of  
Religious and Ethnic Diversity

*Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser  
und multiethnischer Gesellschaften*



Hania Sobhy

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Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,  
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## Abstract

Gendered violence in schools remains understudied and poorly integrated in understandings of the changing pressures facing men and women in neoliberal, securitized and precarious global contexts. This paper draws on the findings of extensive research with young men and women in Egyptian schools catering to different social classes before and after the 2011 uprising. It shows how the rise in violent punishment in Egyptian public schools reflects modes of lived citizenship, where state-sanctioned violence is intimately structured into the everyday experience of the majority of less fortunate youth and in particular young males. It explains how harsh and humiliating punishment in schools is linked to the formal and informal privatization of education, the impoverishment of teachers and the disinvestment of the state in social services. As such, it is not restricted to a minority of marginalized schools as in other contexts. The paper underlines how sexual harassment, as a critical component of the everyday lived experience of female students, cannot be understood in separation from the different forms of violence circulating in schools. It suggests that change in these practices can be catalyzed by major political events like the 2011 uprising and the sense of empowerment and entitlement it generated among young people in particular.

Keywords: Egypt, violence, masculinity, education, Arab, politics, gender, social class

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Stereotypes abound about Arab men, most of them incredibly negative. Among a number of familiar tropes, Arab men are especially associated with violence. My engagement with this topic does not seek to uncover the orientalist, colonial or geopolitical drivers of such stereotypes, although it is critical to explore and appreciate them (Amar 2011, Hasso 2018). Rather, drawing on my extended work with youth in Egypt, I explore the meanings and implications of the key observation that, in the public sphere, young men are in fact the primary recipients of sustained and varied forms of physical and emotional violence, not only on the street, but also in key state institutions. I make no claim that my findings apply to some entity called 'Arab men'. In fact, I suspect that the type and intensity of everyday violence I describe, even if it has parallels in some contexts, is *not* shared by male youth across the region. I do however emphasize that a close understanding of the particular constellations of violence, humiliation, exclusion and precariousness faced by young men in particular contexts is critical for any appreciation of their use of violence and of a host of other associated behaviors, emotions and choices. It is equally critical for understanding wider social processes, political dynamics and indeed the conditions facing women, including their exposure to violence by men (both in the public and private spheres). The forms of violence that young men face do not start or end at home, on the street, in the labor market, in encounters with the police or indeed in prison. Sometimes, the most extended exposure to violence (and the most sustained training in violence) for young men occurs during their formal education. The forms of violence found in schools are both physical and emotional, and usually occur together, with far reaching individual, gendered and social repercussions. Gendered violence in schools remains, however, far less studied and far less integrated in understandings of the changing pressures facing men in neoliberal, securitized and precarious global contexts.

This discussion describes the key features, drivers and consequences of the forms of emotional and physical violence experienced in public secondary schools in Egypt. Physical and emotional violence (beating and humiliation) has been on the rise in Egyptian schools in recent decades. It has become commonplace to encounter news reports about a teacher using an electric Taser to punish a student, or beating a student so severely as to break his arm. These more sensational cases that receive media coverage in fact obscure the reality of the normalized daily violence experienced especially by male students and administered primarily by male teachers. Egypt also suffers from an epidemic of sexual harassment (Abdelhadi 2008, Mayton and Ammar 2008). Sensational cases of group sexual assault that make it to the media

also obscure the reality of sustained sense of threat and vulnerability young women feel on the street. The daily harassment that female students experience around their schools, and the resulting moral blame and surveillance by school actors also fundamentally shape their experience of schooling. I argue that a number of patterns are critical in understanding these forms of everyday violence, which shape lived experiences and subjectivities. First, emotional violence or humiliation is a critical component of this violence. Second, the type and severity of physical and emotional violence is fundamentally premised on social class. The forms of punishment exercised in schools reflect modes of lived citizenship, where state-sanctioned violence is intimately structured into the everyday experience of the majority of less fortunate youth and in particular male youth, creating rifts with the experience of a (shrinking) middle class – especially with the more fortunate strata that attend private schools. Third, patterns of violence are fundamentally gendered whereby more intense and sustained violence is seen as essential for the production of male youth, who might otherwise seek to contest, resist or retaliate against the various forms of economic, social and political exclusion that they experience. This, in turn, has implications for gendered dynamics – including public and private violence against women. Furthermore, the epidemic of sexual harassment in Egypt cannot be understood in separation from the forms of physical and emotional violation that young men experience, in their near universal enrollment in schools, but just as critically on the street, and in their experience during military conscription. In sum, the forms of punishment found in the majority of Egyptian public schools are not perceived to be part of a disciplinary project that is designed to produce certain kinds of educated subjects. As I argue elsewhere, the rise in violence in Egyptian schools can only be understood in relation to their increasing failure to provide rewarded cultural capital in light of a severe decline in the quality of education and in returns to education and trends in its marketization (Sobhy Forthcoming). These forms of violence are mostly extralegal but sanctioned by the state, and structured by its withdrawal from basic functions. As such, it often fuels noncompliance and contestation, not docility. These forms of violence have critical political implications as they crystalize the fundamental divisions in the everyday experiences of lived citizenship of Egyptians. Whereas the experience of vast segments of the population are underpinned by the physical vulnerability and the denial of their most basic rights to protection and provision, the experiences of the more politically engaged middle class and affluent youth orients them towards different sets of concerns and modes of political action. The divergence in the everyday experience of violence underlines the difficulty of making cross-class



political coalitions around demands and visions that stem from these divergent realities and they structure the different approaches to the role and legitimacy of the use of violence in anti-regime political mobilization. Finally, I show how change in these violent practices can be triggered by major political and social events like the 2011 uprising and the sense of empowerment and entitlement it triggered, particularly among young people. Such change might be small and fragile, but it remains indicative of the cultural change pushed along by the uprising and the ongoing everyday contestation of the violence and economic exclusion faced by young men and women.

The first section provides an overview of the issues around masculinity and violent punishment. The second section focuses on masculinity and briefly explains the research sites and methodology. The third section describes the gendered and classed forms of punishment practiced in these Cairene schools. The following sections explore the purposes, drivers and consequences of these forms of punishment and the final section discusses whether and how these patterns have changed since the 2011 Uprising in Egypt.

## Violence, Class and Masculinity

Violence can occupy a prominent place in constructions of masculinity (Kandiyoti 1994; Connell and Connell 2000). Bringing up boys using corporal punishment can be a “way of claiming or asserting masculinity” (Connell 1995, 83; Moore 1994). Physical punishment can therefore be part of a distinctly masculine discourse or masculinity training, where physical dominance becomes central in the construction of masculinity. Work that specifically focuses on masculinity and schooling in the Middle East is almost restricted to the work of Shirazi on Jordan. Arab and Muslim masculinities are often ahistorically naturalized on the basis of biological, psychic, or racial/cultural differences, yet masculine identities were and are lived and experienced heterogeneously in response to situational and historical conditions, even within cultural categories such as “Arab” and “Muslim.” (Hasso 2018). Work by Ismail, Ghannam, Hasso, Amar, Naguib and Inhorn has made critical inroads to the study of intersections of masculinities with social class, violence, fertility, sexuality and caregiving in the Middle East. The theme of violence appears in critical ethnographies of urban Egypt in terms of the exposure of male youth on the streets to arbitrary police power (Ismail 2006), or of female partners or family members

to violence in the household (Ghannam 2013). In her study of the production and control of social space in the popular urban quarters of Cairo, Salwa Ismail has also described the humiliation of young men in encounters with the everyday state, which is “embodied especially in such police tactics as roughing up, beating, and slapping” (2006, 123). Ismail shows how the encounters of young men “with the state destabilize their masculine constructs and necessitate a renegotiation of their masculinity” (2006, 127). Ghannam shows the diverse components of a desired masculinity where “good grooming, nice manners, fashionable clothes, skill in navigating the city, assertiveness and courage, the ability to provide for one’s family, and knowledge about when to use violence to defend self, family, and relatives” are all critical enactments in the daily assertions of manhood (2013, 24). Social class is critical in understanding performances and negotiations of masculinity, where “the overlapping between class and gender is central to any adequate conceptualization of how masculinity is materialized, supported, challenged, and reinforced (2013, 8). In his ethnography of state-owned textile companies in Alexandria, Shehata (2003) has also described the absolute concentration of power and repression in the hands of the top manager and the regular use of humiliation, intimidation and even physical violence in highly delineated hierarchical relations within the factory. These patterns of control find are reflected and inflected in everyday relations in schools. Abdul Hamid (2000) has argued that the dominant means of social control in Egyptian society are reflected in the means of control in the boys’ general secondary schools he studied, in terms of lack of dialogue, authoritarian relations, absence of freedom of expression and dissent, and forms of exclusion and symbolic violence against disadvantaged students.

The links between masculinity, domestic violence against women and sexual harassment are also critical. In her work on the enactment of masculinity among Palestinian male youths, Peteet explains the distinct place of exposure to violence in the specific context of living under occupation. She also highlights how some men who were subjected to beatings and torture during detention in the occupied West Bank prisons return home and inflict violence upon women (Peteet 1994: 45).<sup>1</sup> In exploring the relationship between dominant constructions of masculinities and the sexual harassment of young women in Australian secondary schools, Robinson highlights the ways in which sexual harassment is integral to the construction of hegemonic heterosexual masculine identities; the importance of popularity, acceptance

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1 The intimate links between military conflict and forms of sexual assault and exploitation are highlighted in various literatures (Enloe 1990, 2010).

and young men's fears within male peer group cultures; and the utilization of sexual harassment as a means through which to maintain and regulate hierarchical power relationships, not just in relation to gender, but also how it intersects with other sites of power such as 'race' and class.

## Violent Punishment in Schools

From the initial introduction of universal education in the North in the nineteenth century until well into the last century, beating, humiliation and isolation were routinely used as methods of teaching and discipline (Pinheiro 2006). At home and in schools, corporal punishment and other forms of cruel or degrading punishment were the widely favored methods of "discipline, perceived as 'taming' unruly children, training presumptuous children to take their 'proper places' in the social order and hardening unseasoned children to the difficult, brutal and abrasive world (Pinheiro 2006). As Middleton (2008) notes in the case of Britain, what might be considered cruel now was likely considered unremarkable in the early twentieth century, at a time when physical violence was a part of everyday life. Corporal punishment and the implements of such punishment were a regular part of the spectacle of power within the school (Middleton 2008). The historical development of school discipline in the global North is generally portrayed as moving away from harsh and humiliating means to less physically violent and exclusionary forms of discipline and punishment. Corporal punishment loomed remarkably large in criticisms of educational practice in early modern educational institutions, which "were perceived as poorly regulated, arbitrarily managed, abusive, ineffective, generating resistance" (Deacon 2006, 179). It has been argued that corporal punishment did not constitute the sort of individual that the state in the late twentieth century deemed appropriate, as it tended to exclude rather than include (Marshall and Marshall 1997). "Punishment in schools began to shift away from the public, the spectacular and the physically violent, to the personal, the mundane and the psychologically compelling, from 'threats or blows' to 'a cold and neglectful countenance'... The body, once made to be tortured, became something to be trained and corrected" (Deacon 2006, 182). Despite this general progression, however, it must be noted that studies in the global North have observed that certain categories of children are disproportionately and more severely subjected to such school discipline, including children of color, boys and

students receiving compensatory services at schools for disabilities (for reviews see Cameron 2006 and Hyman 1995, see Bhana 2005).

Different literatures in the field of psychology and education have pointed to a host of traits—from depression, fear and anger to poor executive functioning—associated with harsh treatment and corporal punishment. In fact, most studies in the global North that continue to discuss this issue highlight the negative consequences for even the milder and codified forms of corporal punishment practiced in some of these countries, especially in the United States. A 2010 report on the impact of corporal punishment in the US found that harsh physical punishments do not improve students' in-school behavior or academic performance, with studies showing they are in fact correlated with lower academic performance (HRW 2010). The report highlights studies that show how children who have been subjected to hitting, paddling or other harsh disciplinary practices have reported subsequent problems with depression, fear and anger, and that they frequently withdraw from school activities and disengage academically. A 2011 study comparing two private West African schools concluded that children in a school that uses corporal punishment performed significantly worse in tasks involving “executive functioning” – psychological processes such as planning, abstract thinking, and delaying gratification – than those in a school relying on milder disciplinary measures such as time-outs (Talwar, Carlson and Lee 2011). In addition to its educational implications, corporal punishment has been associated with a variety of psychological and behavioral disorders in children and adults, including anxiety, depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, impulsiveness, delinquency and substance abuse (DuRant et al., 1994, Goodman et al., 1998).

The links between violent punishment, social class and gender have been highlighted in various studies. Studies from India (Krishan 2005) and Brazil (Goldstein 2003), the brilliant literature on child rearing in the UK (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989, Gillies 2008) and a large body of empirical studies in the U.S. (see Straus 1994, Dietz 2000) all establish a link between harsh forms of punishment directed at children (and women) and social class or ‘structural stress’. Gendered differences in school punishment have been highlighted by various studies. As Herrera (1992) explains in her work on preparatory schools in Cairo, teachers make a clear distinction between the male and the female student and the more effective way of dealing with each one's “nature”; so that girls are “shamed”, they are punished more verbally and embarrassed in front of peers, while boys have to be beaten and beaten harshly as they do not respond to ‘slight’ punishment. In his work on masculinity and schooling in Jordan, Shirazi shows how the rationale for different forms of discipline is very much

bound up in binary constructions of gender identity and the understanding that boys are inherently more difficult to control and demand strict, firm, and – depending on the teacher – physical forms of discipline in order to learn how to be respectful and ‘become men’ (Shirazi 2016: 7-8). These observations suggest a disciplinary cultivation of manhood that was absent from the discourses of teachers and students in the research schools. Instead of schooling in manhood, students and teachers deployed different language and categories of boys being likened to ‘animals’ and teachers treating students as though they were ‘from the street’ and highlighted forms of exploitation bound up in these practices of punishment.

While it may be tempting to consider Egyptian schools to be at an earlier point in the same ‘developmental trajectory’ as countries of the North, most indicators point to a rise in violence in Egyptian schools, especially over the past decades. The topic has gained increasing media visibility and attention by specialists and general commentators. While there is no claim that the modes of punishment examined in this qualitative study are somehow representative of violence across Egypt’s tens of thousands of schools, the available quantitative studies indicate just how commonplace these practices are. The aim of this discussion is to show the discourses and practices around punishment in concrete school contexts and the questions it raises in terms of the classed modes of disciplining of the male body. Although corporal punishment has been a regular feature of public and private schools since the inception of modern schooling in the Middle East (see Fortna 2002), the level of violence and humiliation in today’s schools in Egypt is generally seen as unprecedented. ‘Beating in schools’ is the most common way this issue is discussed in the media, in public discourse and in the schools, so I sometimes use beating (*darb*) and humiliation (*ihana*) in order to reflect the terms more commonly used in the field. I must clearly highlight that I did not however devote nearly as much attention to the other phenomenon, also widely discussed in Egypt, of ‘violence in schools’, which relates to the rising trends of violence by students against teachers, against school property and against each other. Around 80% of the boys and 60% of the girls in one study in the 1990s reported being beaten by teachers with the use of hands, sticks, straps, shoes, and kicks (Youssef, Attia and Kamel 1998). About a decade later, a study by the National Center for Social and Criminal Research (NCSCR) showed that 91% of noncompliant students experienced violent punishment (Yunus 2009). By 2010, a change in the nature of this violence could be noted. A report of the Egyptian Centre for Human Rights (ECHR) on incidents of teachers’ severe violence against students detailed forty-one cases reported in the media over one academic year; which included severe

beating, the breaking of an arm, a nose or a finger, threats of pushing students from higher floors or of beating students with shoes, stepping on their neck, hitting them with sticks, puncturing their ears, using an electric Taser, injuring their faces, slandering them and preventing them from entering school (Nasif 2010). According to the report, the reasons provided for violent punishment by teachers included: students not understanding the material, speaking out-of-turn or with a classmate, excess noise in the classroom, attempts to coerce students to enroll in in-school tutoring or private lessons, students' long hair, students' rejection of punishment, requests to leave early, failure to bring the proper notebook or to do the homework, and jumping the fence or not attending the morning assembly (Nasif 2010). However, there is very little analysis or data on how a host of different factors affecting school punishment in Egypt, from teacher training to the rural or urban location of the school. As suggested by studies in other contexts, variations in the frequency and intensity of punishment may be related to large class size and low teacher qualification. On the other hand, official Ministry regulations definitively protect students from beating and humiliation, and regular instructions to teachers especially in recent years indicate that "physical and emotional punishment" (*al-'iqab al-badani wal-nafsi*) is strictly forbidden. In fact, amendments to the 2008 The Law of the Child went further to 'criminalize' school violence against children instead of only being subject to Ministry regulations – in a context where violence intensified, and the law was little known across schools. The rise in violence in Egyptian schools has to be seen against the wider deterioration of the education sector from its vibrant phases up to the 1970s. While it is not possible to elaborate fully on this here, the system now suffers from very poor infrastructure conditions (Sobhy 2019), very low and inequitable public spending, very poor teacher pay and working conditions and very poor learning reflected in such shocking patterns whereby in 2016 Egyptian students scored second to last on the international literacy test PIRLS (see Sobhy Forthcoming)

Physical and emotional punishment of students is still by no means unique to Egyptian schools and is common in other countries of the South. For example, the findings of a 2007 report conducted in thirteen Indian states indicated that about 65% per cent of school children underwent corporal punishment (Nagar 2007). This is still about 25% less than the 91% figure reported for Egypt in the NCSCR study (Yunus 2009). In other countries of the global South, beating can also be common (see Pineiro 2006). It is difficult however to make meaningful comparisons across countries from available survey data where definitions of 'corporal punishment' and 'harshness' are often not consistent and intersections with social class and gender

are not always examined. For countries in the region, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that current levels of beating and humiliation in Egyptian schools are not paralleled in places like Jordan, Tunisia or Lebanon, or in the richer Gulf countries. However, there is very little research that can fully ascertain this or compare the type of and intensity and gendered and classed dimensions of punishment to those practiced in Egyptian schools.<sup>2</sup>

This overview shows how little research has been done on violence, gender and schooling in Egypt and in the region. As my research in schools was not directly focused on an exploration of masculinity, my reflections on the gendered aspects of school punishment might encourage further research on the topic. The discussion here draws on the findings of extensive research with young men and women in Egyptian schools catering to different social classes over the past decade. I conducted most of the research in six boys and girls secondary schools in Cairo from 2008 to 2010, and I revisited the main research themes in intensive qualitative fieldwork in 2016 and 2017 and follow-up rounds of interviews in 2018 and 2019.<sup>3</sup> While referring to the experience of students in private schools and to the experience of girls, the discussion here mainly focuses on the experience of boys in public schools. This research is possible because I was fortunate enough to obtain rather exceptional access to conduct prolonged research inside Egyptian schools through an official permit from the Ministry of Education and several levels of security clearance. My aim was to study mainstream schools catering to different social strata and genders under the national system. The pre-2011 fieldwork consisted of close to 500 hours of observations inside the schools in addition to about 150 group and individual interviews, while the post-2011 follow-up fieldwork consisted of about 50 interviews with students, teachers and stakeholders. My focus was on schools from the bulk of the system: technical schools where 56% of secondary students enrolled and public gen-

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2 One recent UNESCO study examines school violence primarily among students and covers a number of Arab countries. In a ranking of the total percentage of students who reported having been bullied, out of 42 countries, Egypt takes the 2nd place, Palestine (West Bank) and Algeria the 6th and 7th, Oman and Mauritania the 11th and 12th, Qatar the 15th, Sudan the 17th, Kuwait and Iraq the 30th and 31st, Lebanon the 33rd, UAE the 35th, and Morocco the 40th (UNESCO 2017: 9). In terms of gender differences, male students are bullied more than females in Oman and Morocco, whereas in Egypt, Palestine, Mauritania, Qatar, Sudan, Kuwait, Iraq, Lebanon, and UAE, female students are bullied (or report being bullied) more (UNESCO 2017: 9).

3 I could not conduct research outside Cairo, but the metropolis is large, officially 17.2 million residents in 2017 (CAPMAS 2017) and diverse enough to display a range of urban phenomena.

eral secondary schools that accounted for about 33% of students and private general schools only enrolled 2.7% of students (MOE 2007, Annex 2, 77).<sup>4</sup> The six ‘research schools’ were two technical schools, two public general schools and two private general schools, catering to urban working class, middle class and high-income families, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

## School Punishment: Gendered, Classed and Arbitrary

Name-calling, humiliation and scolding (*shitima*, *ihana* or *tahzi*) were the main ways in which many (but not all) teachers used to rebuke noncompliant or underperforming students in the public schools in my presence.<sup>6</sup> Real or perceived noncompliance was typically responded to with *shitima* (name-calling) often directed at the whole class and often extended to more general derogatory statements about the students as a whole, their future potential and the families and parents who had failed to ‘raise them properly’. Students were regularly called stupid, rubbish, rotten, retarded, or animals. “*Hayawan/a*” (animal), “*zift/a*” (scum), and “*humar/a*” (donkey) were the most common curses I heard—considered mild enough to use in front of a ‘guest’ like myself. In the two boys’ public schools and, to a lesser extent, in the girls’ schools, several teachers also carried with them pieces of hard plastic hoses or wooden canes, which they used in the courtyard, corridors and classroom. Others used their hands—

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4 This excludes religious schools, which represent around 10% of the system and international schools catering to a slim subset of the elite. As declared by the Minister of Education in April 2018, there are only about 250 international schools in Egypt, out of about 7000 private schools (only 2500 of them providing instruction in foreign languages and the rest teaching in Arabic only). Egypt has a total of about 52,600 schools (MOE 2017). The study also does not address the experience of about 30% of the age cohort does not have the opportunity to enroll in secondary schooling in the first place.

5 The four public schools are located in the same lower income informal neighborhood in the east of Cairo and the private schools are in two different high-income neighborhoods (Nasr City and Zamalek). In line with conventions of anonymity in ethnographic fieldwork, all participants have been anonymised, and pseudonyms have been used as substitutes for actual names. The informal neighborhood and other place names have been deliberately left vague to protect the identity of participants.

6 As opposed to terms like ‘misconduct’ or ‘resistance,’ ‘noncompliance’ is not meant to necessarily carry a normative value, but rather indicates behaviors that do not comply with the expectations and the structured activities of adult authorities in schools (Stevick and Levinson 2003).



and legs—to deal with noncompliant students. But it was quickly clear that these patterns did not apply to everyone and that gender and class were the key parameters shaping the frequency and severity of punishments students received. Although students frequently remarked that beating and humiliation were considerably reduced in my presence, in the boys' technical school, students were still slapped on the face and harshly beaten in my presence. I experienced the technical boys' school especially as a volatile and violent space in comparison with the other schools (although it was not as violent as some schools that have received press coverage). In the girls' schools, teachers' attitudes were similar in terms of the regular use of humiliation, but physical beating took different and less severe forms. Teachers in the girls' public schools responded to student noncompliance using punishments that ranged from name-calling, twisting the student's ear, hitting her on the back or shoulder, to calling her parents and sending her to the principal.

In addition to gender, social class was therefore clearly linked to the likelihood of receiving beating and humiliation. It is not surprising therefore that students frequently implied that the disrespect of teachers was predicated on their low social class. As students in the girls' general school put it, “teachers treat us as though they are above us,” “they treat us as though we are from the street” and “they look down on us”. Class background was therefore seen as essential for tempering abuse in different ways. Students who came from more affluent or influential families, including the children of schoolteachers, were typically afforded better treatment. In both technical schools, students who paid their in-school tutoring fees regularly and enrolled early were spared the related abuse. Beating, humiliation and negative labeling were clearly less severe in the general schools. The willingness to display violent punishment in my presence as well as student reports on the violence suggests that punishment was markedly less severe and humiliating. In the private schools, such beating and humiliation was the exception rather than the rule and was more closely consistent with the mission and official regulations of the schools and private tutoring contexts (see Sobhy Forthcoming for more details). Many students in the public school also remarked that beating and humiliation are not features of private schools even in nearby [low-end] private schools (where some students in the general schools had themselves been enrolled in the primary and preparatory stages). Dignified treatment was something afforded to those who had the means to pay for it.

Apart from these gendered and classed differences, emotional and physical punishment was ‘informalized’ and arbitrary, rather than part of codified regulations. It was dependent on a number of factors and patterns of exchange in the school con-

text including age, family background, and enrollment in private tutoring with the teacher. It therefore did not represent the same kind of grievance for all students. This added a critical element of arbitrariness or ambiguity to the extralegal application of punishment. For example, the older and more assertive third secondary students in the boys' technical school were notably spared some of the harsher humiliation and beating that many first and second secondary students endured. Teachers were also less able to pressure them into enrolling in tutoring groups (as reflected in their lower enrollment in tutoring (Sobhy 2012)) or to coerce them into performing additional chores in the school.

It is important to note that violent punishment is not a legacy of secondary schools alone and is understood as the norm in most primary and preparatory public schools (see Naguib 2006). In fact, most students and teachers agreed that beating is more common for younger students in earlier grades. Having an especially daring or violent father could also affect the likelihood of being punished; some students implied that some fathers are able to intimidate teachers in order to deter them from further abuse.<sup>7</sup> In the general schools especially, students who excelled in traditional (non-oppositional) areas of religious learning such as Quran recitation also tended to receive better treatment. High-achieving students received better treatment as well; although their numbers were limited in all four schools and they significantly overlapped with the previous categories of more affluent and connected students. Others yet, had privileged positions due to their relationships with particular teachers, for whom they ran errands or otherwise gained their favor.

## The Multiple Purposes of Punishment

From the perspective of teachers, these forms of punishment are meant to serve a number of different functions. Certainly for some teachers, punishment was just a means to manage the classroom, ensure order and incentivize students to perform

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7 In some cases, students and their families resorted to direct violence or threats of violence against offending teachers. The issue of 'violence in schools' has in fact gained increasing prominence in public discourse in Egypt. Since the 2000s, news reporting and media portrayals of Egyptian education, including at least two popular films, also paint an image of a rising violent, assertive and confrontational attitude among students. These reports and portrayals refer to violence among students, but especially highlight students' verbal abuse, intimidation and sometimes physical aggression against teachers.

better academically. Punishment however often served other purposes. Harsh punishment therefore had other motivators and purposes for teachers than enforcing classroom compliance, and was critical to facilitating other extra-legal practices. The direct financial benefit extracted from students is apparent in the strategies employed by teachers to enroll in private tutoring with them. Many teachers used excessive emphasis on compliance and order to waste class time; creating student dependence and ‘demand’ for private tutoring services. In the technical schools, noncompliance to official uniform or other regulations was used as a pretext to punish those students who had not yet enrolled in tutoring. Private tutoring, an informal and undocumented practice and at the same time a multi-billion pound industry where around 70% of technical and general secondary student enroll, ultimately results in the displacement of learning from schools and leads to other fundamental distortions in the learning process (Sobhy 2012, Ille 2015, Sieverding, Krafft and Elbadawy 2019).

There were, however, other extralegal practices that harsh punishment and the threat of punishment could facilitate. In both technical schools, students were often forced to clean the labs and perform other chores in the school. In the boys’ technical school especially, students were made to sweep the floors and carry out different tasks, such as making tea for teachers and running private errands for them. Boys particularly resented being compelled to clean the floors and were fully aware that this was not part of any official regulation. Students also explained that they were the ones who had set up the labs and arrange classroom furniture. This work was seen as less humiliating than cleaning floors, but, it was nonetheless resented for being an extra-legal means by which teachers and the school took advantage of student labor. As one student commented, “if I did this work in a workshop outside, I would be treated better and I would get paid.” In my presence, some teachers tried to justify these practices, arguing that it was laudable to keep one’s surroundings clean, claiming that this was a normal practice in good schools and ‘abroad’. Not all teachers forced students to perform such chores and not all students complied with such directives. It was clear that some students had more leeway than others in performing these chores and could actively resist being forced to do them.

Another important driver of punishment was deterring different forms of contestation by students. Students understood that those who challenged teachers or made complaints about them would receive especially severe punishment and their parents would also be humiliated if they decided to intervene. This was especially true because of the extra-legal, unsanctioned practices pervading the schools, which could be used in recriminations against teachers. For example, in reference to the

practice of some teachers of making students clean the floors of the classrooms, one student in the boys' school recounted how a teacher had failed him in the practical exam because he took a video on his phone of this practice and of her and threatened to expose the kind of language she used in the classroom. He explained the teacher's degrading attitude and negative labeling of students; adding that "she makes us feel hopeless [*bitya'isna*]."

Finally, most public school students did not portray physical beating as reprehensible *per se*. They focused on explaining it as arbitrary and unfair; and ascribed its occurrence to social class, financial exchanges or extra-legal demands. This may have been due to its normalization in schools or the prevalence of this kind of punishment in a significant proportion of household settings. An important line of defense for students was therefore to insist that teachers were *not* like parents. Boys often wanted me to record the beatings and insults, urging me to document this; gesturing to me to write it in my notes, and checking with me: "did you write that one down Miss?". Many wanted to shame the teachers, to expose them or to exact a measure of justice out of them. We are suffering, Miss." Many students refrained however from decrying the violence as directed to them personally, and many maintained a matter-of-fact or a playful attitude: not one of pain and indignation, but rather one of wanting to expose, mock and debase the teachers. For both boys and girls, there was an overriding resigned or matter of fact attitude; that this was a reality with which one had to live. Some, however, clearly expressed a sense of grievance and a desire for accountability. For example, after describing regular practices of beating and humiliation, one such student declared: "I'm talking to the minister from here and saying this."

## Why all the Violence?

Across different discussions and interviews, public school teachers put forward a number of interrelated discourses for articulating beating. They framed beating as being appropriate for the kinds of students they dealt with, as a means of preserving respect and authority, as a form of caring and moral instruction in an extension of parental roles, as the only effectively available tool of discipline in the school system, and finally as sanctioned by Islam. In fact, a telling example of the divergent discourses and practices on violence based on social class, relates to one of the most

commonly used justifications of beating. Public school teachers frequently claimed that beating was sanctioned by *shar‘* (Islamic jurisprudence), often explicitly challenging its prohibition by the Ministry on those grounds.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, to counter what they saw as savage and thuggish practices in public schools, teachers in private schools, and especially in high end private schools, frequently resorted to other readings of Islamic teaching that placed great limits on beating and humiliation of the young.

One issue, however, deserves caution. Violence in poorer schools in Egypt is often portrayed as just a reflection of the cultural practices of poor people. In that sense, if teachers treated their children in the same manner as they treated students, beating could be seen as a social norm that penetrates the school and overrides school regulations. A number of teachers, in fact, explicitly linked engagement in extralegal practices, such as beating and coercion into tutoring, with the social class background of the teacher; arguing that teachers of ‘technical’ subjects, who come from ‘a different social background,’ are more likely to engage in such practices. Despite the lack of significant recent literature on the matter in Egypt, one study conducted in a middle-class neighborhood indicated just how widespread a harsh disciplinary approach is: about half of parents beat their children and about thirteen per cent did so severely (Hassan et al 1999 cited in Alyahri and Goodman 2008). Indeed, students in the public schools frequently remarked that their parents treated them in disparaging and insulting ways; calling them stupid, failures or declaring them to have little potential for success. Private school students were also reportedly not spared the verbal aggression and negative labeling of their parents, although they were not as frequently beaten nor were they humiliated as harshly. However, there was frequently a class difference between teachers and students in the public schools; and many teachers saw themselves as coming from a higher social class than their students (except for teachers of practical or technical subjects in the technical school). This may indicate that they treated their own children with significantly less violence and greater respect. Many of them certainly enrolled their own children in private or experimental schools where they were not beaten or humiliated in the same manner. The study by the Egyptian National Center for Social and Criminal research, which indicated that over 91% of noncompliant students experienced violent punishment,

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8 Because (light) beating of children by parents for the sake of promoting religious observance can be seen as being sanctioned by an Islamic text, teachers in public schools reasoned that they were entitled, by analogy, to beat students to instill in them proper moral upbringing.

also showed that about 40% of families believed in violence as a means of education and upbringing (Yunus 2009). Although more detailed and recent studies are needed, the vast difference between the 90% reporting violent punishment in schools and the 40% of parents believing in administering it at home, may suggest that teachers apply vastly more punishment to students than families do. Recent ethnographic research by Farha Ghannam in a popular neighborhood in Cairo would also suggest that the violence at home, even poor homes, is far less severe than these forms of violence in poor schools. Ghannam explains the use of violence in the family as follows:

For it to be acceptable, however, violence should be measured and infrequent. A slap on the face is the most common type of physical disciplining of family members and is often a symbolic gesture that asserts the power of the man in front of others. Although more severe forms of corporal punishment are sometimes deployed by husbands, fathers, and brothers, these forms are usually discouraged and negatively viewed. A man who indiscriminately uses force is linked to *ghabaawa*, which usually refers to stupidity but in this context refers specifically to „social incompetence“ or the inability to materialize the appropriate social norm in the right setting (2013, 115).

At a basic level, therefore, these patterns of punishment were made possible because the state does not have the will or ability to implement the official regulations that protected children from physical and emotional punishment. It is safe to assume that the majority of beatings in schools happen with full impunity and the complete approval of school actors and authorities. Teachers' actions are almost only questioned if parents take their grievances to educational authorities, to the media or to the police, typically doing so in cases where students have been gravely injured and they are able to demonstrate this with medical reports. Parents do, however, need considerable cultural (and economic) capital for the police to show any interest in their case. In fact, individuals of more modest socioeconomic background “are [often] unwilling and incapable of calling on the state or invoking its powers” (Ismail 2006, 43). Teachers were therefore fully aware that they could beat (poorer) students with impunity and that most students had no effective access to the law.

According to teachers however, harsh punishment was necessary to maintain order and control and as appropriate for the “types” of students they dealt with. They frequently described students as “only responsive to beating” (*maygush ghir bil-darb*) or “not [properly] raised by their parents” (*ahluhum marabuhumsh*). Students' supposed poor upbringings and noncompliance were typical justifications given for the use of severe punishment. For example, during the lesson of one particularly harsh teacher in the boys' technical school, students were disruptive throughout her class;

as she continued to verbally and physically assault them. She later explained to me that “animals have to be treated like animals,” and that if the students were human, she would treat them as such. In the subsequent class with a different teacher, the same students engaged in very little challenging or noncompliant behavior. The next teacher was strict but used very little verbal or physical punishment. She stuck to the material she was teaching and did not seem to be wasting class time. In this case, violent punishment and humiliation were clearly not needed to ensure the compliance or respect of the boys, and arguably led to more disruption and noncompliance.

It has been argued as well, that the harsh style of punishment discussed here, including humiliation and rebuke, is essentially applied to teachers themselves. In his ethnography of preparatory schools in Alexandria, Naguib (2006) has presented a vivid image of how the oppressive structure inside the classroom extends upwards into a punitive, oppressive and humiliating relationship between teachers and principals and between school principals and those higher up in the hierarchy of the educational system. These patterns may have led to teachers being harsh with students and to resort to various extralegal practices. For example, if teachers are held accountable and harshly rebuked for classroom cleanliness, while insufficient cleaning staff are employed and properly paid, they clearly had an incentive to force students to perform such tasks. Teachers also frequently argued that beating was necessary because the system had deprived them of all other disciplinary measures with which to punish and incentivize students.<sup>9</sup>

The disproportionate use of beating by male teachers may, therefore, be related to an acute sense of vulnerability in the face of a perceived assault on their masculinity due to the various stressors to which they are subjected. Every humiliating encounter with higher education authorities or wider forms of abuse by police or agents of the state could drive male teachers and parents to reassert their sense of dominance through violence in the classroom and household. Such assertion of domination is also expressed in terms of control of female modesty in girls' schools (Sobhy Forthcoming). For male teachers in particular (the key perpetrators of the more severe forms of beating), low wages undermine their claims to performing idealized masculinities as primary breadwinners. Being unable to provide for their fam-

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9 This is a complex issue, but some of the withdrawal of the ability of teachers to reduce student grades or have them expelled has to do with a long-term trend of teachers using such measures to coerce students to enroll in tutoring with them, and with truancy and the privatization of education. It is part and parcel of the collapse of the disciplinary role of the institution into a permissive-repressive mode of operation (Sobhy Forthcoming).

ilies, nuclear as well as extended, injures idealized masculinities in ways that do not apply to women. Fodor (2006) argues that one of the major gender differences in the experience of poverty is that men often find themselves in a gender role crisis when they are too poor to function as successful breadwinners. Public discourses and practices of socialization into masculinity “construct manhood in terms of guardianship of honor and responsibility for providing for the family” (Ismail 2006, 127). These constructs relate to the control of female sexuality and the importance of breadwinning in constructions of masculinities and may indicate some of the disruptions of ideal masculinities reflect in situation in the schools. Manhood can also be defined around certain forms of integrity and independence in income generation, increasing the frustration of male teachers in adhering to various dictates of masculinity if they feel compelled to engage in extralegal practices to make a living or avoid punishment from higher authorities. According to Naguib, teachers experience three levels of ‘impotence’: social and economic impotence stemming from their low salaries that prevent them from earning a decent living; creative impotence because they have little autonomy in the classroom and are subject to surveillance and institutional pressure; and an impotence that results from the students’ full awareness of all of these conditions (2006, 66). This bears strongly on the greater frustration that male teachers may feel and the greater pressure to secure additional funds even if this includes involvement in harsh or morally questionable practices.

A host of other factors arguably contribute to the increase of violence in schools. The poor physical and sanitary state of many of them, the lack of developmental and recreational activities, the poor quality of learning from the foundational stages, and the poor conditions of teachers all contribute to a stressful and more volatile situation. These are all factors that deserve far greater in depth quantitative and qualitative research. However, it remains important to reiterate that teachers and public schools exhibit significant differences in the prevalence and severity of punishment, as well as engagement in other extra-legal practices. Teachers can vary significantly in how harshly they punish, as seen in the example of the two teachers in the boys’ schools and in terms of a gendered and classed dimension of punishment; where female teachers and teachers of higher socioeconomic background are seen as less likely to engage in harsh and humiliating punishment. I also did not encounter the more graphic and pathological practices that are sometimes reported in the national media or circulate on social media, but are often only known in the small school community or to social and NGO workers, and only occasionally documented in official reports (Nasif 2010).



## The Myriad Consequences of Violence

Harsh punishment has been linked to four main areas of student discourse and practice: an increased propensity to engage in violence, an inability to internalize moral values, a negative self-image and increased noncompliance. My own research on school discipline is better suited to address noncompliance in particular and one aspect of violence relating to sexual harassment. Literature on school discipline suggests that forms of student noncompliance may develop when teachers use harsh or arbitrary punitive measures, maintain extreme social distance because of classroom size or teacher personality, or use arbitrary criteria for judging student work (see Woods 1990 for an overview). D'Amato (1993) has argued that in the absence of either compelling structural returns to education in terms of improved social standing, or situational rewards in terms of interest in the material and positive classroom relations, student frustration often escalates into more volatile forms of noncompliance. Such a process can help students establish and modify their understandings of material in a way that is meaningful for them. Despite harsh forms of punishment, contestation and noncompliance were prominent features in all the schools. In fact, it should not be very surprising that harsh and repeated beating did not produce the desired classroom compliance. As Middleton notes, since the time when it was first prescribed in British teaching manuals, the excessive use of corporal punishment has been understood to produce what educational psychologists referred to as the "hardened offender", who believed that he (or she) was "an ill-used person", suffering punishment merely because the teacher was "in a position arbitrarily to exercise a coercive authority" (Middleton 2008, 269). This may explain why students' seeming nonchalance in the face of the prospect of being beaten. It explains why in many classes, students simply did what they pleased, regardless of the likely response in terms of humiliation or physical punishment. More broadly however, the directives, rules and regulations of the school were violated in fundamental ways. Rules and expectations of attendance and good behavior were scarcely observed in all of the schools. This is driven not only by punishment, but also by the realities of informal privatization. Most students got their education elsewhere, and many of them felt this to be an unjust situation for which teachers carried considerable responsibility. Despite, and arguably because of, the use of physical violence by teachers, students frequently engaged in confrontational behavior. In almost every class in the boys' technical school, one or more students engaged in behavior that was guaranteed to elicit verbal humiliation and physical punishment from the teacher. Indeed, if the

frequency and extent of their noncompliance is a good measure of lack of fear, docility or submissiveness, boys in the technical school were the least fearful; and boys across the schools were generally quite assertive. They also sometimes ‘took it in their hands’, through noncompliance, ridicule, pranks or other retaliation against teachers.

Apart from violence and noncompliance, other additional coping mechanisms include forms of exit, flight, avoidance and establishing new relations of exchange. Flight involves various forms of truancy, whereby students avoided coming to school as much as possible, avoided entering classes, and when they came they often attempted to jump the fence after their attendance had been officially recorded; others dropped completely out of school. The other two strategies were far more common in the technical schools. Most of the boys in the technical schools sought employment in workshops and small businesses in the neighborhood in order to obtain income and other sources of meaning and value. The clientelistic response involved performing extra favours to teachers (making tea, running errands) in exchange for leniency regarding grades and attendance in a kind of nurturing patron client relations.

Another way of understanding the boys’ seemingly nonchalant reactions to physical punishment by teachers, is to appreciate that being beaten could be seen and experienced as an assault on idealized masculinity; one that it is not pleasant to confront, highlight or dwell on. Being beaten can therefore represent a distinctly ‘masculine’ shame, which is inextricably linked to income, power and social status. The assumption among students was that if a boy is better built or more aggressive, he would not receive as much strikes from teachers. If he has enough money to regularly pay for private tutoring, he would be spared the related harassment from teachers. If he had a powerful father who could intimidate teachers, he could be among those standing by the side of the classroom while others swept the floor. If his family could afford to send him to a private school or had access to state institutions and could possibly file police complaints against teachers, he would not be beaten or humiliated at all. Ultimately, if he were not poor, he could more successfully embody an idealized dignified masculinity. Within the construction of men as primary breadwinners, with income earning capacity is central in constructions of masculinity, beating represents an injury to idealized masculinities – both in terms of physical vulnerability and in terms of its relation to social class and poverty.

While this study did not focus on violence among students, one aspect of such emotional and sometimes physical violence by students was inescapable: the sexual

harassment of female students from adjacent schools. A key theme that emerged from observing patterns of punishment and discipline in the schools was the intense focus on female modesty. In the public schools, girls were monitored and harshly rebuked on a daily basis for violations of the modesty/femininity code, while in the two private schools, control of attire was more formalized, the rebuke far less humiliating and the contestation less prominent. The controls on female conduct in public schools were intimately related to the concerns relating to sexual harassment around the schools. Sexual harassment is an issue that many schools must deal with in various parts of the world as in Egypt. This was true for the public schools and especially for the girls' general public school. The fact that that school was directly adjacent to both the boys' general secondary school and another boys' preparatory school meant that school authorities had to deal with harassment issues almost on a daily basis. The boys from both schools constantly harassed the girls. Some parents simply did not want to bring their girls to school because of constant harassment. Many girls resented, feared and were deeply hurt by the harassment they encountered. Disrespectful harassment and hostility ranged from empty bags of chips being thrown at girls, to a whole range of verbal sexual harassment (which was often rude or insulting, rather than flirtatious or courting) and sometimes included attempted physical contact. Beyond this everyday verbal – and limited physical – harassment, incidents of sexual assault were also not un-common. This included a recent case of violent sexual assault of a girl in the public general school. Students recounted how the student had arrived at school in torn clothes and a hysterical state having been assaulted by one or more boys and was locked up in the toilet by the principal until her father and brother came to collect her. In response to my shock at the story, students expressed that this was 'normal.' Several other stories were referred to of girls from nearby schools being assaulted. It was not a pleasant topic, however, and the girls did not want to discuss the incidents in detail. This theme of physical vulnerability and lack of public safety constituted a distinct element of citizenship disempowerment, as constructed by female students (Sobhy Forthcoming). Girls tried different strategies to avoid the twice-daily ritual of harassment when arriving to and departing from the school. Some tried to walk out of school accompanied by teachers, many made sure to walk out in big groups or with at least one other student and a few carried small self-defense tools such as pepper spray, a pin or a small knife. The most effective strategy, unfortunately, was not to come to school at all.

## What Changed since the Uprising

There have been a number of noteworthy changes in the reality of schools since the uprising in 2011 (Sobhy Forthcoming). For most respondents, one of the most notable changes after 2011 was a rise in forms of defiance among students. Teachers especially highlighted examples of increased contestation of physical and verbal violence: ‘now when you tell a student come here girl (*ya bit*, derogatory), she answers back that she has a name you should call her by’. Students also referred to their own contestation of physical and verbal aggression: ‘if he attacks me verbally (*ta’ada ‘alaya lafthiyan*), I tell him I will make a complaint with the supervisor or administration, so he backs down’. Students referred to teachers using more negotiation and dialogue in conflict resolution. Even in interviews with male technical school students, they referred to teachers controlling students less through physical punishment and more through ‘grades’ and emotional appeals and reprimands or what some referred to as emotional punishment (*‘iqab ma’nawi*): ‘I have now lost faith in you,’ or ‘you are not a man so do not speak to me’. Although these patterns can still be seen as inappropriate, and ‘emotional punishment’ remains officially prohibited in Egypt, students clearly found these methods more acceptable. In general, this was a widely noted theme by teachers, suggesting that it may have indeed led to a lowering of the intensity of punishment and humiliation; especially in first phase after the Revolution, but seemingly with enduring effects until the present. Teachers made more nuanced remarks, for example, that beating should be administered ‘intelligently.’ Students referred to the arbitrary nature of punishment: ‘a teacher’s punishment depends on which student he is facing’. Students’ statements also reflected the distinction between disciplinary and repressive or illegitimate violence (Sobhy Forthcoming). ‘Disciplinary’ physical punishment was largely accepted: ‘we have a brotherly relationship with some teachers and we can accept beating from them because there is a human relationship and the beating is ‘brotherly not oppressive’ (*akhawi mesh qahri*)’ and ‘beating is sometimes in ‘official’ things, for example if I arrive late, there is beating’.

While there may be a positive ‘direction’ towards less violence, this does not imply a reversal of normalized patterns of beating and humiliation in secondary education; this also applies to the younger grades where such patterns are even more prevalent. News and social media continue to report on cases of severe punishment by teachers, including one shocking incident that led to the death of a preparatory school child in 2015. The ministry continues to announce its regulations prohibiting physical and

emotional punishment, but actions against teachers are rarely taken. Even in cases of severe violence that end up in court, teachers still receive unexpectedly light sentences. Interviewed teachers did not shy away from referring to the harsh punishment they resorted to: ‘we start with words first and if there’s no effect, then we use kicks (*bil-shalut*)’; or ‘we beat the students based on the principle of ‘beat the tied one and the loose will be afraid’ (making an example of some students to intimidate others); and ‘I curse their fathers and mothers and say go away you son of a shoe (*imshi ya-ibn il-gazma*) and you can write that down’. Interestingly, students in the same schools however referred to limited beating in the school. Secondary students in 2016 cannot have a direct impression of school relations before and after 2011, so their comments have to be understood as echoing a general perception and/or are a reflection on the difference between secondary and preparatory schools, where beating is more widespread, being directed at more vulnerable less challenging younger students. As one student put it: ‘in preparatory there is a lot of beating of course, but not in secondary’, ‘the teachers know the difference: in preparatory the students don’t talk, but in secondary they talk back’. Boys continue to be the main recipients of corporal punishment and there is strong continuity with pre-2011 gendered patterns and discourses. For example, teachers in the girls’ public general school explained that girls at this age should not be beaten, that the maximum is ‘verbal violence’ and ‘normal curse words like donkey and stupid’. Teachers agreed that boys on the other hand are casually kicked and beaten with sticks and that ‘a boy would not respect the teacher without beating.’ Finally, Despite the shocking cases of mass sexual assault especially linked to political mobilization since 2011, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that there has been a reduction of everyday sexual harassment as women become bolder in confronting attackers and highly publicized stricter punishments were introduced into the law in 2014. Further research is needed to ascertain such changes.

## Conclusion

Violent physical and emotional punishment has become a prominent and normalized aspect of student experiences in public schools in Egypt and especially in working class (technical) schools. The normalized deployment of physical violence in schools may not be surprising where physical and emotional violence are common features

of social relations in the home, in the workplace and in the public sphere. Exposure to violence was most clearly structured by gender, where beating was disproportionately applied to boys and policing of sexuality to girls. Social class is inextricably linked to these gendered dynamics and was a major determinant of the frequency and severity of punishment, as seen in the differences between working and middle class schools and within each school. It is critical in the case of Egypt to also appreciate that corporal and emotional violence by agents of the state and the deteriorating state of education are part of this structural stress. Teachers do not only deal with the stress, uncertainty and deprivations linked to their declining economic and social status, but possibly with everyday patterns of repression and humiliation in their encounters with the state and with higher educational authorities. The patterns of punishment in schools are an expression of this structural stress as much as they are by-products of the regime's social policy, its style of governance and its strategies of legitimation (Sobhy Forthcoming).

In sum, the structural violence of poverty, as well as the everyday violence of police and state authorities, against men especially, are preserved and extended into these violent practices against students, and they are extended in a manner that is mediated by class, gender and the host of contextual factors operating in the schools. Male students often then reproduce this violence, not only on their colleagues in the commonly described trends of rising violence in schools, but also on weaker teachers and on women. In the public sphere and in the context of the schools, the most obvious form of violence by students against women takes the form of sexual harassment that takes on humiliating features, and includes threatening behavior and verbal aggression. Sexual harassment in fact becomes a constant feature not only of female student experiences but also of the everyday business of schools (see also Sobhy forthcoming). This recalls Bourdieu's (1998) law of conservation of violence. The constellations of violence circulating in schools do not represent a mechanical reproduction or conservation of one type of structural or physical violence, but are diffuse responses to these different forms of violence that are mediated by the various modes of stratification and relations of exchange inscribed in their environment.

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