



The Lived Social Contract in Schools: From protection to the production of hegemony

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a framework for studying the social contract along the four parameters (4Ps) of protection, provision, participation and the production of hegemony. To appreciate the differentiated experience of how these parameters are lived, this framework is applied to schools as arenas that uniquely capture the dynamics of power and legitimacy in society. The education sector reflects broader transformations in the state bureaucracy, in social policy and in the lived experience of key elements of the social contract from the rule of law and gendered violence to formal and informal privatization, everyday forms of participation and the narratives and practices around nationalism and neoliberalism that legitimize these changes. Applying this approach to the case study of Egypt updates earlier propositions about an Arab social contract and nuances the notion of a tradeoff between provision and participation rights in understanding regime legitimacy. It underlines the critical changes to protection and legitimation over the past decades and the implications of the outsourcing of various elements of the social contract to market, charitable and religious forces. Drawing on rare research inside schools catering to different social classes before and after the 2011 uprising, the article describes how their realities reflect the transformations of lived citizenship in this historical juncture. Egyptian schools reveal a 'lived social contract' that is underpinned by selective retraction of protection, a collapse of provision, impoverishment and Islamization of participation and a resulting disengagement from the production of hegemony.

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1. Introduction

Major philosophers including Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau have used the concept of the social contract to understand the development and legitimacy of the state. One of the most famous applications of the concept in political science refers to welfarist authoritarian Arab regimes (Loewe, Zintl, & Houdret, 2020). The central premise of conceptions of an Arab social contract is that stability and the authoritarian durability in Arab countries have been predicated on an arrangement whereby a set of economic and social rights are distributed to citizens in exchange for accepting limited political representation (Heydemann, 2007; Hinnebusch, 2006; Ianchovichina, Mottaghi, & Devarajan, 2015). These treatments of the social contract therefore imply a tradeoff between social and political rights, or an 'authoritarian bargain'

where citizens are denied effective representation but granted considerable welfare benefits; a pattern especially relevant to state-socialist and oil-rich states across the global South (Desai, Olofsgård, & Yousef, 2009). The authoritarian bargain can be seen as paralleling arguments about rentier states; where instead of the state taxing citizens who then demand political rights, (oil) rents are used to provide social rights while political rights are denied; and the famous axiom is reversed: no representation without taxation.¹ Beyond oil-rich states, it is a pattern that has also been critical in the experience of European fascism. For the Arab region, the turn to neoliberal policies and the subsequent failure of many states to fulfill their part of this contract has therefore been seen by many authors as a strong contributor to the Arab Uprisings that took off in 2011 (see, e.g.; Hanieh, 2013; Joya, 2011; Kaboub, 2013; Mitchell, 2012; Roccu, 2013). Some regimes had however attempted to balance this withdrawal of provision with limited forms of political inclusion, but in some cases, this seemed to

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¹ See Herb (2005) for an overview and critique.

strengthen protest movement (Egypt) while in others it did not (Morocco).

There are a number of analytical costs for thinking about social contracts in terms of a tradeoff between socioeconomic and political rights. First, focusing on social and political rights ignores a wide array of critical issues relating to the reach of the rule of law and the prevalence corruption; which appeared very prominently in the Arab uprisings. Second, focusing on the repression of political challenges to the regime does not give adequate attention to the reach of other forms of repression into the daily lives of different sectors of the population, also fueling their grievances. Third, macro level treatments of economic and political rights do not allow for a systematic study of how these realities and narratives are lived and how they shape everyday experiences of citizens. Fourth, focusing on provision and participation does not give sufficient attention to the discourses, values and identities promoted to legitimize the economic and political order, nor to how they are reproduced, contested or ignored by citizens. Even without considerable retraction of social rights, regime legitimacy could be severely shaken by a blatant failure to fulfill the obligation of protecting national security (like losing territory in a war). Fourth, the other part of the bargain of the social contract is not only that citizens refrain from challenging the regime, but also involves the income, time and labor they are required to provide in return for belonging to the polity. Adequate attention to this dimension requires a tracking not only of the tax burden and its distribution, but also of other critical citizen obligations like compulsory military service. Finally, even if the tradeoff holds, its implications for dynamic situations are unclear. That is, even if the provision of social rights had render blocked participation more palatable and even if vast external rents impede participatory accountability, this does not tell us what happens when social rights are retracted. Therefore, before addressing such dynamic questions around the social contract, more systematic theorization is needed to include the other two parameters of protection and legitimation and the dimension of lived experience.

The aim therefore is not to introduce hitherto unexplored factors, but rather to theorize a number of elements into an integrated framework that addresses overall trends and that can be applied to everyday lived realities.² While the article applies the framework to a case study in the Arab region, the various analytical tools stemming from the literature on social contracts, citizenship and hegemony are applicable to any political system. Using the lens of education is also applicable to most modern societies. As Bourdieu put it, “the sociology of education lies at the foundation of a general anthropology of power and legitimacy” (1996, 5). The methodologies and categories he applied in studying French education have been refined and applied to other contexts in the global North and South. This article builds on this literature by charting a new course within the anthropology of education that provides a systematic exploration of lived social contracts; bringing both citizenship studies and the anthropology of education closer to larger political concerns.

In developing and applying the 4Ps Framework, the article brings together a wide range of secondary and primary data. In terms of primary research, it builds on unique ethnographic research in secondary schools (grades 10–12) in the Greater Cairo area and analysis of official textbooks. Since 2008, I spent close to 500 hours inside six schools catering to boys and girls from differ-

ent social classes, interviewed over 200 stakeholders from over 20 schools, and analyzed nationally unified textbooks in all citizenship related subjects from the late Mubarak era to the present.³ I can only cover here a slim portion of the rich ethnographic data I analyze more fully elsewhere (Sobhy, forthcoming). In the following section, I lay out the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the 4Ps Framework. I then explain the underpinnings of the methodology of reading lived social contract through education. The third section briefly sketches the background to the case study by describing the overall parameters of the 4Ps in Egypt. The subsequent sections are organized around each of the four parameters of the social contract. Each section explains how these overall trends are manifested and illuminated by everyday realities experienced by the nation's youth in schools. The conclusion brings together the overall findings and arguments.

2. The 4Ps framework for studying social contracts

Major philosophers from Hobbes and Locke to Kant and Rawls have used the notion of the social contract as a means to understand the development and legitimacy of the state. Social contract theory is essentially concerned with public justification, i.e., “of determining whether or not a given regime is legitimate and therefore worthy of loyalty” (D’Agostino, 1996, 23). It aims to show that members of some society have reason to endorse and comply with the fundamental social rules, laws, institutions, and/or principles of that society (D’Agostino, Gaus, & Thrasher, 2019). In the most basic sense, the social contract can be understood as the de-facto arrangement whereby the state guarantees security, order and the rule of law and citizens must in turn surrender their rights and obey its dictates. Tax payment, military service and enrolling children to state approved schools are some of the key obligations of citizens under modern social contracts. These elements are often spelled out in legal documents. Constitutions are codifications of the social contract, where basic rights and duties as well as parameters of national identity and common values are spelled out. Modern states are also widely expected to provide political rights and to make sound economic decisions. The state’s role in safeguarding and promoting citizen welfare is also often explicitly stipulated in constitutions as well as reference to the dominant economic ideology. Because the explicit and implicit rights of individuals vis-a-vis the state are central to the social contract, the concept is rather closely linked to concepts of citizenship. However, while citizenship *rights* are central to modern social contracts, the idea of a contract pushes us to think in terms of the expected *obligations* of each party under the contract.

In order to analyze these state and citizen obligations, the article proposes a framework that builds on citizenship categories but adapts them to the broader lens of the social contract. The literature on citizenship has categorized rights into different clusters and categories, including the famous Marshallian classification of

³ I conducted research in one girls’ and one boys’ technical school, one girls’ and one boys’ general and one girls’ and one mixed private schools. 56% of secondary students were enrolled in the technical track, 33% in the general track, 3% in private schools, while 8% enrolled in the religious Azhar track (MOE, 2007, Annex2, 77). My pre-2011 ethnographic research inside schools amounted to about 480 h and 149 interviews with 6 school principals, 34 teachers and 109 students, combined with interviews with teachers and students from other schools across the city. I carried out most of the post-2011 interviews from 2016 to 2018 with 40 students and teachers from 12 different schools in Greater Cairo and 15 stakeholders; including researchers, members of textbook committees, journalists, teacher syndicate leaders and practitioners in NGOs and donor agencies. I analyzed the 2009/2010 textbooks for the three years of secondary education in all tracks and specializations, and reviewed the relevant changes in textbooks for the subsequent years until 2016/2017. I focused particularly on the key subjects of National Education (Civics) and Arabic Language, while also analyzing History and Religious Studies textbooks.

² To go back to the Arab region, various scholars have analyzed the importance of ideological or national factors. In relation to social contracts, Hinnebusch (2015, 2006) theorized the important distinction between Populist Authoritarian and Rentier Monarchy. Various scholars have also theorized legitimacy and legitimation under authoritarian regimes (see Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004). Others have made the link between corruption and the uprisings, although the focus here is on a wider notion of protection under the law that impacts various facets of everyday experience.

civil, social and political rights (Marshall, 1950). The framework proposed here uses the alternative labels of protection, provision and participation, or the 3Ps to refer to the three primary obligations of the state.⁴ This usage builds on the commonly used classifications of rights, but introduces critical modifications to accommodate elements critical for legitimacy as well as everyday lived experiences. First, under the social contract, the state's role in protection includes establishing and maintaining the rule of law emphasized in the Marshallian notion of civil rights, but also includes other fundamental forms of protection. If the original idea of the social contract was that states provide security, law and order in return for obedience of its dictates, then the category of protection aims to capture this central parameter of law and order as well responsibility to protect national security. These two primary roles of the state are almost always explicitly enshrined in constitutions and therefore unequivocally part of the social contract. Despite the complexity of defining national security, it is impossible to address legitimacy in a model that does not take into account *major* changes affecting this basic function of the state. This expanded notion of protection enables this framework to systematically address issues that touch on the rule of law like elite and petty corruption, those that relate to equality before the law like classed and gendered access to state protection, as well as those that relate to protection from major national threats like the failure to protect borders or contain insurgencies. These elements are critical for the lens of the social contract because perceptions of how well the state performs its role on these fronts are critical for legitimacy. This notion of protection therefore brings together issues around domestic legal protection and protection from major foreign, insurgent or environmental threats. Citizens have the corresponding obligations to abide by the law and oftentimes to perform military service, which can shape the lives of men and women across generations.

The second cluster of obligations relates to provision and refers to the welfare payments, goods, services and opportunities provided by the state. This includes social rights, but is expanded to accommodate the normative expectations that modern states make sound economic decisions that maintain or expand citizen welfare. Social rights refer to the wide range of transfer payments and public good and services financed by the state, whereby it replaces the market as a distributive mechanism (Stephens, 2010). Such payments and services can be provided to all citizens, like education, or only to those deemed to be entitled to state support, like welfare payments to citizens falling below a certain income level. Measures of sound economic management abound and so do disagreements about them, but the focus in building a broad image of legitimacy is on *major* trends and shifts in the elements that affect the everyday lives of citizens and their standards of living; as typically reflected in measures of unemployment, income distribution and inflation. The obligations of citizens in relation to provision refer to their various legally mandated material contributions (taxes for short) as well as their labor and time contributions. The third cluster of roles refers to different forms of civic and political participation. The role of the state in relation to participation includes guaranteeing political rights; including the right to vote and run for office in genuine periodic elections, to belong to a political party or to engage in protest activity. I include however other freedoms of expression and association under this cluster. Although these are often considered basic civil rights, they are qualitatively different from the more basic protections implied in the foundation of the social contract and they fit better under the rubric of participation. In sum, using the labels of protection, provision and participation encompasses the broad

definitions of citizenship rights while expanding and modifying them in ways that reflect the normative roles of states and citizens under the social contract. However, a focus on the 3Ps alone does not explain why certain groups of people should pay more taxes, why compulsory conscription is sometimes warranted or why a certain issue has become a matter of national security.

Beyond the three Ps of provision, protection and participation, there is a fourth domain that is critical for understanding the social contract. Legitimacy does not simply happen when the state somehow manages to meet most of its obligations. Legitimacy is deliberately created and must continuously be nurtured and maintained. Studying lived social contracts therefore necessitates a systematic appreciation of how the dominant order is legitimized or 'the manufacturing of consent' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). At the most basic level, a dominant ideology whether it is free enterprise, social democracy or religious nationalism is often delineated in official discourses and constitutions. Official discourses continuously define national security and propagate politically relevant values on individual, religious, cultural, gender, economic and environmental rights that justify the various parameters of protection, provision and participation. Citizens, corporations and other entities could of course have significant scope in creating and debating these dominant discourses. Especially in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1971) elaborated the notion of hegemony to describe how the ruling classes, especially through schools and the media, shape and normalize the very ideas and values that legitimize the status quo as common sense; that is, 'hegemonic'. The modern state has very formally adopted this role by instituting mass education and in fact stipulating compulsory enrollment of the nation's children into institutions that instruct them in the dominant language, identities and values. Citizens of most modern states have the obligation to surrender their children to be socialized by the state, or institutions approved by the state.

I use the term 'production of hegemony' to refer to these practices that seek to create hegemony, without assuming that they succeed in doing so. In fact, I stress the ways in which the production of hegemony by the state can be fragmented, investment in it inconsistent, its results unpredictable and the reproduction of its messages among youth consequently very weak. The production of hegemony encompasses not only the explicit articulation of nationalist and ideological constructs, as enshrined in constitutions and referenced in official rhetoric, but also the range of strategies, activities, silences and saliences that implicitly and explicitly legitimize the dominant order, in the media, in schools and beyond. This includes the discourses, practices, rituals and symbols that explain citizen and state obligations along the 3Ps and link them to collective identity, values, history and destiny. Beyond sending their children to state-approved schools, citizens are sometimes officially or unofficially expected to participate in the discursive or ritualistic production of hegemony and these expectations are variably policed, enforced and rewarded.⁵ They are also expected to observe prohibitions on certain symbols, discourses and forms of organizations, such as prohibitions on Nazi, white supremacist, anti-Semitic or jihadi practices. In sum, to understand social contracts, systematic analysis is needed not only to provision and participation, but also to protection and the production of hegemony and to the obligations of the state and the citizen in relation to each of these parameters. Diagram 1 summarizes the elements of the social contract and the state and citizen obligations relating to each of the 4Ps.

⁴ The 3Ps categorization can also be found in some literature on children's rights (see Mayall, 2000). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is seen as providing rights of children to protection, provision and participation.

⁵ This ranges from small symbolic practices or observing limited prohibitions, on burning the national flag for example, to saluting the national flag in schools, to far more pervasive demands like participating in ruling party rallies, or displaying photos of leaders in public spaces.

Finally, while I do not address the vast literature around the concept of legitimacy, I am implicitly suggesting, following social contract theory, that the success of the state in fulfilling its obligations under each of the 4Ps offers a solid indication of how its legitimacy is perceived. A deficit in legitimacy does not of course mean that a regime will collapse or that citizens will risk conducting a revolt against a repressive state. Authoritarian regimes in particular stay in power through a mix of factors including coercion, legitimation, cooptation, elite change and external support (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004). I also do not address questions around whether or when uprisings or instability might occur. The literatures on mobilization and collective action have emphasized that grievances should be seen as *necessary but not sufficient* conditions for collective action, which is shaped by resources, networks and opportunities (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000, 70). This article's contribution is to operationalize the four elements as critical to citizen grievances; thus highlighting some of the links that can be further explored between changes in the 4Ps and the resources, networks and opportunities that inform oppositional mobilization.

3. Studying the lived social contract in education

While the overall trends along the 4Ps can provide a solid image of the social contract, a focus on lived experiences adds critical insights on the workings of the social contract and their impact on different categories of citizens. In this, I am building on the literature that privileges lived experiences and everyday enactments of citizenship (Isin, 2008). As Isin and Turner (2002, 4) explain, contemporary citizenship theory constructs citizenship not simply in terms of legal rights but “as a social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights”, which has led “to a sociologically informed definition of citizenship in which the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings, and identities”. The notion of lived social contracts therefore builds on the insights of the literature on ‘lived citizenship’ as “the meaning that citizenship actually has in people’s lives and the ways in which people’s social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens” (Hall & Williamson, 1999, 2). The focus on lived realities invites a qualitative inquiry that focuses on differentiated everyday experiences and enactments of rights and duties. The analysis of the case study below shows the depth and color that the focus on lived experiences along each of the 4Ps can add to the overall context. The framework could also be applied in both narrower and broader ways, from comparisons across different historical eras to the conditions of different subsets of the population. Here, I use the focus on lived experience and the field of education to demonstrate the workings of this framework and the insights it generates.

Education is not only a component or mirror of the social contract, but represents a key arena for the production of hegemony and a key transmission belt that links the domains of social contracts with regime stability. Because of its typically large size relative to the civilian state bureaucracy, the education sector mirrors the major transformations of public institutions and their social and political implications. It is a fairly universal modern phenomenon that can be studied in any global context. The workings of the education sector also have critical implications for development as investments in the economic, social and political future of a country. For these reasons, and because of its reach into every household, education is often a key concern of citizens and governments and a key sector where international development assistance is directed. In fact, this framework also offers a systematic approach that can be easily adapted to analyzing and comparing education systems, where instead of the mainstream emphasis

on access, quality and equity, the elements of provision, protection, participation and values are all integrated in one comprehensive framework that focuses on lived realities. Education also has critical links to political developments, including instability and the likelihood of protest.⁶ Above all, education informs the experiences and values of citizens across social class and gender over an extended period of their formative years and is therefore an ideal site for an ethnography of lived social contracts.

The article proposes an approach that uses ethnographic study of education to produce insights that systematically link school realities with the broad parameters of protection, provision, participation and legitimation in society. The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this approach are shaped by the sociology and anthropology of education that studies schools to examine arrangements of power and legitimacy in society (Bourdieu, 1996). Scholars such as Michael Apple and Lois Weis have provided important insights for surpassing the more rigid models of earlier studies, where schools were seen as vehicles for reproducing the dominant order and class structure. Processes of legitimation in schools are not assumed to be ‘successful’ in instilling certain values and dispositions, nor in fact coherent or unified (Apple & Weis, 1986). In this light, ethnographic programs of analysis were seen as more appropriate in aiding the understanding of what schools actually do (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2000; Sewell & Hauser, 1980). Scholars like Stephen Ball, Deborah Youdell and Veronique Benei have used Foucauldian approaches to subjectivation to bring educational ethnography to bear on issues of neoliberalism, nationalism and gender relations. Based on these approaches, a political ethnography of education like the one employed here uses insights from the everyday discourses and practices in schools to understand patterns of governance and legitimation in society.⁷

The proposed approach of reading lived social contracts in schools requires a focus on certain aspects of school relations to capture the lived dimensions of each of the 4Ps, in addition to analysis of curricula and school activities and mapping of critical trends in the sector. Studying the production of hegemony in schools requires a study of texts as well as everyday rituals, discourses and practices. It involves an examination of representations of national identity and common values and how the dominant order and its obligations are legitimized, what kind of investment is placed in establishing its hegemony and how these discourses are enacted, received or resisted by young people. In terms of participation, the focus is on the rights and freedoms reflected in everyday forms of representation, organization and expression available to students and teachers, from exam questions and wall journals to student elections and forms of independent unionization of teachers. In authoritarian states, looking through the lens of education shifts the focus to how everyday deviations from the dominant script are policed, punished or overlooked and the classed and gendered repression and censorship that touch the lives of wide segments of society, not to the repression targeted at activists and political opponents. Education can of course reflect in rich detail the provision component of the social contract: the reach of public services, their quality, the scale of gendered, regional and religious inequalities, as well as major patterns in the management of the sector that shape opportunities for welfare. This is done by mapping overall trends in the sector as well as appreciating their everyday manifestation in schools. Finally, examining the domain of protection in schools provides a solid idea of the reach of

⁶ This is especially true in the case of widespread unemployment for educated youth and due to the association of higher levels of education with political participation (see Campante & Chor, 2012 for an overview).

⁷ For more details on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this approach, see (Sobhy, forthcoming).

The Social Contract		
	State Obligations	Citizen Obligations
Protection	Territorial integrity, National Security Law and order Life, property, environment Equality before the law, gender, race... etc.	Military or social service (compulsory or voluntary) Allegiance to state Law abidance
Provision	Social rights: Transfer payments Public services: education, healthcare, infrastructure, public spaces Economic management: employment, standards of living	Taxation, dues and other contributions Time and labor power Disclosure of private information
Participation	Political rights, elected representation Freedoms: of expression, association, organization, information	Participation and recognition of elected bodies (compulsory or voluntary)
Production of Hegemony	Promotion of narratives of identity, ideology and political values	Enrolling children in schools Observing limitations on anti-systemic practices

Diagram 1. The elements of the 4Ps framework of social contracts.

rule of law, the upholding and fair application of relevant laws and regulations, equal access to means of redress, issues around petty corruption and the protection of students from physical and emotional harm. Finally, the overall context in a society and the specific issues it struggles with will fine-tune the focus of these inquiries.⁸

4. Background: the 4Ps in Egypt

Before going to the ethnographic detail, this section offers essential background on the case of Egypt by charting the major overall patterns relating to the 4Ps. Egypt was one of the key cases used in the literature on Arab social contracts pioneered by leading Middle East scholars like Raymond Hinnebusch and Steve Heydemann. These foundational works describe the wide range of benefits provided to citizens, the denial of participation rights and the hegemony enjoyed by the postcolonial regime. Egypt is also an example of the shift from the welfarist social contract under Nasser (1950s–1970s) to a crony capitalist arrangement corresponding to changes in the post-1980 global order under Sadat and Mubarak, stemming especially from Washington Consensus policies (Hinnebusch, 2020; Heydemann, 2020). Some of the subsequent changes in the late Mubarak era (2003–2011) are well documented in terms of a crony neoliberal turn that started with structural

adjustment in 1991 and was perpetuated by a series of IMF loans—typically signed after waves of arms purchases (Mitchell, 2012). These patterns have undergone critical ruptures, reversals and intensifications since the uprising of 2011. That cycle of mass mobilization brought about the removal of Mubarak and the relatively free elections that led to the one-year presidency of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, who was removed by the military in 2013 paving the way for the current presidency of Abdulfattah al-Sisi.

The scale and nature of the withdrawal of protection in Egypt goes beyond notions of neoliberal cronyism, and extends to a kind of generalization of corruption and informality that amounts to a breakdown of the rule of law. This is more vivid in the ethnographic discussion below, but some indicators could begin to introduce the overall picture. Egypt ranks very low on indicators of corruption and in 2018 ranked close to the bottom of a measure of the rule of law, and cronyism is a prominent feature of key spheres like industrial policy (El-Haddad, 2020).⁹ In addition, the size of the informal sector in Egypt, where workers have no legal protections, has been continuously increasing from the 1980s until the present; currently representing up to 70% of the economic activity (AfDB, 2016; Elshamy, 2018; OECD, 2018). This retraction of the rule of law is a result of an increasing impoverishment and 'securitization' of the police and judiciary. The overall transformation since the late Mubarak era is broadly conceived as re-direction of the

⁸ In this study, I focus on rights that would seem basic and taken for granted in other societies, where studies would focus on finer points and the reach of rights to specific disadvantaged populations. For example, whereas I refer to normalized physical and emotional punishment, studies in the global North, where prohibitions on corporal punishment are largely observed, have assessed the ways in which students of color or those with disabilities are more likely to receive severe forms of school discipline and therefore do not enjoy the same levels of protection as their peers (see Cameron, 2006).

⁹ According to Transparency International, Egypt's 2017 score of 32 in perceptions of public sector corruption puts its rank at 117 out of 180 countries. This is similar to its pre-2011 rankings on the same indicator (Alissa, 2007). Egypt ranked 110 out of 113 nations in a 2018 report on perceptions of how the rule of law is applied in a host of areas including the justice system, regulatory enforcement, security issues, fundamental rights, government powers, and corruption (WJP, 2018).

functions and resources of the police towards regime security and away from the regular functions of public security. This is translated in the sense of diminished access to policing functions for the poor, with the revival of communal arbitration methods and reliance on private security for those who can afford it (see [Ismail, 2006, 2012](#)).

In terms of the protection of national security, a slow and steady deterioration under Mubarak was guided by considerations of guarding regime security rather than the national interest ([Shama, 2013](#)). In the past few years, there have been three major changes that reflect the retraction of this fundamental form of protection: the hasty transfer of sovereignty over strategic Red Sea islands to the regime's biggest regional ally, Saudi Arabia; the uncontained Jihadi insurgency in Sinai and the imminent threat to Egypt's access to Nile water due to the management of conflicts over water resources with neighboring countries. There have been significant changes in relation to citizen duties in relation to protection. Compulsory military service was a critical component of the postcolonial social contract and its legitimation centered on the army's role in the removal of the monarchy, ending British occupation and fending off the 1956 tri-partite aggression and responding to Israeli occupation in the 1973 war. The subsequent signing of the peace treaty with Israel was not accompanied by wide scale de-mobilization, but rather to the expansion of the role of the army in the economy, which arguably informs perceptions of conscription among Egyptians ([Abul-Magd, 2014; Sayigh, 2012](#)).

In terms of provision, the privatization and reduced quality of a wide range of services, along with reduced social rights and poor economic management, have affected most sectors of society. Successive cuts to energy, food and water subsidies as well as social health and pension insurance all lowered living standards ([Vidican-Auktor & Loewe, 2020](#)). From 2015 to 2018, the number of people living under the (very low) poverty line of 735 EGP (43 USD)/month rose from 20 million to 31 million people (from 27.8% to 32.5% of the population) ([Saleh, 2019](#)). Official youth unemployment rates have almost doubled over the period from the 1990s to the present and now range from 30 to 35 per cent ([World Bank, 2019; ILOSTAT, 2019](#)). There is no unemployment insurance to speak of and other welfare provisions for poverty, disability, sickness or old age are limited in adequacy and coverage ([Vidican-Auktor and Loewe, 2020](#)). Citizens are therefore essentially obliged to access basic services privately or by resorting to (religious) charities. This has contributed to widening wealth and spending gaps ([CAPMAS, 2017; Diab, 2016](#)). The tax burden borne by citizens is inequitable and lacking in transparency due to informality and tax evasion. The tax rate is low and not progressive and therefore most of the tax and social insurance burden is borne by the formally employed.¹⁰ As it was before 2011, taxing the rich was not the solution to compensating for reduced spending on public services and Egypt's tax-to-GDP ratio has been decreasing since 2002 ([OECD, 2018](#)).¹¹

Limits on political participation and freedom of expression were already a key component of the postcolonial social contract. The late Mubarak era saw a measure of political liberalization that contributed to the growth of social movements culminating in the uprisings. Since 2014, the war on terror and the turbulent regional context have been used to legitimize a range of measures that undermine almost every area of expression, representation, organization and associational life and have produced tens of thousands of political prisoners ([Hamzawy, 2017; Rutherford, 2018](#)). In terms

of the production of hegemony, successive Egyptian presidents have used different discourses and narratives to legitimize these realities. These narratives were dominated by championing social justice, anti-imperialism and ending British occupation under Nasser (1954–70). With economic liberalization under Sadat (1970–81) and the shift in alliances from the Soviet Union to the United States, official references to the declared principles of social justice, anti-imperialism and Arab nationalism progressively declined. By 2007, the Constitution was finally purged of references to socialism and replaced with the declaration that “the economy of the Arab Republic of Egypt is founded on the development of the spirit of enterprise.” Sadat's legitimacy was significantly constructed around ending the Israeli occupation of the Sinai and Mubarak tried to draw on some of this legitimacy by emphasizing his role as a senior officer in 1973, but in later years the focus had already shifted to fighting Islamist terrorism. The legitimation shifts of the regime did not only relate to economic ideology and regional conflict, but critically to the use of religion. Sadat promoted Islam at the center of moral and political identity, primarily to compete with the popularity of Nasser's secular Arab Socialism. Different phases under Mubarak were characterized by lenience with violent groups, limitations on politicized groups, empowerment of non-oppositional Salafi groups and the promotion of de-politicized evangelical and charitable piety ([Roussillon 1998; Sobhy, 2009](#)). The current regime has had a far more violent relationship with oppositional Islamists, purging the Muslim Brotherhood from political life and fighting a protracted insurgency in Sinai, but the reliance on Salafi groups and non-oppositional piety has not lost its appeal. The following sections bring in the results of the ethnographic research on how these overall trends are manifested in everyday lived experiences. However, instead of starting with protection however, discussing patterns of lived provision, coupled with some hard facts on the sector, serves to better contextualize the setting.

5. Provision: disinvestment, privatization and clientelistic mismanagement

Egyptian public education was especially renowned for its high quality until the 1970s. Paralleling trends in other public services, it has witnessed remarkable deterioration since then. In terms of quantitative indicators, it should be noted however that official school enrolment figures have been improving over the past decades. The official primary enrollment rate has now reached about 95% in a truly massive system where close to twenty-two million students are enrolled ([MOE, 2018](#)). However, while the numbers may indicate that access to education is rising, quality and equity have been declining so rapidly as to render such access meaningless. The results of a 2010 national standardized examination in Arabic, science and mathematics showed that average student scores were less than 50%, with large variations within the system ([MOE, 2014, 63](#)). In the 2007 TIMSS international ranking, 53% of Egyptian 8th grade students did not satisfy the low international benchmark in Mathematics and 45% were below the lower benchmark in Science ([UNICEF, 2015, 39](#)). This was already 5% lower than Egypt's 2003 scores ([MOE, 2007, 46](#)) and Egypt has not taken part in the test since then. Confirming the progressive deterioration of learning in the system, Egypt's rank in the international examination for Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2016 was the second lowest in the world.

These changes affected social segments differently creating a more fragmented and unequal social contract. The overall low performance is coupled with one of the highest rates of disparity in the region ([Ersado and Gignoux 2014](#)). The divergent realities in the three types of secondary schools where I conducted my

¹⁰ In 2005, a major tax 'reform' effectively removed any semblance of progressive taxation, capping all taxes at 20 percent ([Diab, 2016](#)).

¹¹ The income tax rate for the highest earners was briefly raised to 30 percent in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, but was revised down to 22.5 percent in August 2015 and a ten percent tax on income for stock trading introduced after the Revolution was suspended within months of being introduced.

research: Technical, Public General and Private General is meant to capture these differences that reflect the quality and achievement gaps in lower grades (Ersado and Gignoux, 2014). When I started my fieldwork, technical schools enrolled 56% of the students who continued from preparatory to secondary education, public general schools enrolled 33%, religious Azhar schools enrolled 8% and private general schools enrolled less than 3% of students (MOE, 2007), less than half of whom enroll in English language schools like the private schools I studied. For the majority in technical education, even official reports admit that most schools lack basic equipment, maintenance, teachers and technicians and that technical education is inadequate for meeting the needs of society and of internal and external labor markets (MOE, 2007, 278, Annexes 106). Although students in the general track are a more privileged group, they suffer from outdated and stifling curricula, instruction and assessment methods, rising costs in terms of private tutoring and low returns in terms of high unemployment (MOE, 2007). Private general secondary students represent the intellectual and financial elite of the country, who have better chances at securing places in coveted university faculties and formal employment, but must endure the same poor educational programs and more expensive tutoring in addition to their private schools fees.

Beyond numbers and figures, perhaps one example from the classes I attended can show some of the concrete translations of these trends. This computer science class in the girls' technical school proceeded in what came to be a familiar fashion. First, the teacher wrote the date, subject and title of the lesson 'Inserting Symbols' on the blackboard and spent some time directing casual insults at the students. Second, the teacher recited the following four sentences: 1) to insert a symbol, place the cursor where the symbol is to be inserted; 2) open the "Insert" dialogue box; 3) select the symbol and choose the command "insert;" and 4) note that operations applicable to normal text are applicable to symbols, like changing the size of the font or highlighting the symbol. The rest of the class time was spent on mechanical repetitions of these four sentences. First, students were asked to repeat each sentence after the teacher. Then, she dictated the sentences to them, stopping and repeating herself several times, as the students wrote them out in their notebooks. Finally, she dictated a homework question—and a frequent exam question—to the students: "what are the steps of inserting a symbol?" She then asked for the attendance sheet, counted the students, signed it and said that she would look at the notebooks next class to check each student's notes. The class ended. This was a third secondary class. There were no computers in the classroom. The lesson was one of a series of six lessons on the "Insert" function.¹² The learning conditions are certainly far better in general secondary schools and even better in private schools, but problems with assessment, rote learning and poorly developed curricula are common across the system.¹³ These realities contribute to very poor economic integration of youth, in light of poor skills, very high informality and limited employment opportunities.

The three key mechanisms that have perpetuated this decline in provision are decreased public spending and real wages, formal

and informal privatization of public services and mismanagement for clientelistic ends. Public spending on education in Egypt is low by international and regional standards and has been declining since 2000 (UNESCO, 2009; OECD, 2015). Average spending represented only 2.6% of GDP from 2009 to 2014, about half of the average OECD rate (OECD, 2015, 174). The numbers look worse when we take into account the size of Egypt's education system because spending on education per student in Egypt amounts to about 1100 USD PPP, while the OECD average is about 8500. Additionally, spending is very poorly targeted at improving either quality or equity. The ratio of spending per student in higher education relative to pre-university education, at 3.2, is almost three times that of OECD countries (Assaad, 2010) and the allocation of regional budgets is not based on socioeconomic or equity considerations (MOE, 2010; OECD, 2015, 88).¹⁴ In fact, instead of building schools in underprivileged areas, existing schools were converted into a multiple shift system that deprives two thirds of Egypt's students of learning and holistic development opportunities (Sobhy, 2019). The plans announced in 2018 for the introduction, in the very same year, of 'a new education system' for Egypt were in fact accompanied by a decrease in spending. The budget allocated to pre-university education for 2018/2019 represented only 1.4% of total GDP, dropping by a significant 0.3% from the previous year (MOF, 2018). The most troubling and critical implication of decreased spending is very low and inequitably distributed wages. The average salary of an Egyptian teacher has dramatically decreased in real terms, likely representing less than one fifth of its value in the 1970s.¹⁵ Based on available figures, the average monthly salary of a permanent teacher can be estimated at about 2725 EGP or 152 USD.¹⁶

This diminished spending and low wages are key drivers of the highly inequitable *informal* privatization that has become a defining feature of education and of other public services in Egypt. Low pay drove teachers to supplement their incomes through private tutoring, where they must coerce their own students to take private lessons with them.¹⁷ This has contributed to a de-facto informal privatization of education (Sobhy, 2012), creating increasingly inequitable conditions.¹⁸ The prevalence of tutoring has been increasing over time across all levels (Sieverding, Krafft, & Elbadawy, 2020) and substantially contributes to unequal learning outcomes (Ersado & Gignoux, 2014). The equity implications of this kind of privatization are relevant to teachers as much as to students, as reflected in the vast differences in the income teachers make from tutoring, based on the subjects they teach, the educational stage and the income levels in the districts in which they teach. In one official survey, only 1% of teachers in the basic education stage reported making monthly income between 10 and 15,000 EGP; i.e. close to teacher salaries in the 1970s (CAPMAS, 2014). These trends of extreme informal income polarization have their parallels across

¹⁴ The greatest allocations seem to go to strategic governorates where unrest might be possible and are in a sense granted to 'important' or strategic governors to allow them to expand their clientelistic networks.

¹⁵ According to a leading Egyptian education researcher, until the 1970s, a preparatory school teacher's salary was EGP 18 and at the time, a gram of 18c gold was worth 81 piasters, so the salary was equivalent to 22 g of gold. To have an equivalent salary today, teachers should earn 12,000 or 13,000 EGP (Personal Interview, September 2017).

¹⁶ This estimate is calculated based on the latest officially released Salary Table of 2014 and the numbers of public teachers as per the 2017/8 MOE Statistical Yearbook (Ch 4). The USD amount is based on the exchange rate of 17.9 EGP for the dollar in November 2018. Current nominal salaries might be higher but real salaries are lower than these dollar amounts due to continuous waves of currency devaluation and inflation.

¹⁷ A recent nationwide survey has shown that almost 70% of students enroll in private tutoring with their own teachers (ELMPS, 2012).

¹⁸ Analysis conducted by the World Bank suggests more than a quarter of learning outcome inequality in Egypt is attributable to circumstances such as socioeconomic background and place of birth (Ersado & Gignoux, 2014).

¹² The content of this lesson, the way it was delivered, the way it would be examined and the 'knowledge' and 'skills' it was meant to impart show just what kind of education is available in Egypt's technical schools (where 50 to 70% of secondary school students have enrolled over the previous decades). Students are never given assignments requiring computer use in the first place and are not really allowed to use the computers at the school. The class time is very short because this school is a double shift school, where class times are shortened to allow two school populations to use the same building.

¹³ By 2020, the distribution of secondary students had shifted somewhat with lower enrolment in the low quality technical secondary versus general secondary but more than doubling of enrolment in private general secondary (Sobhy, forthcoming).

the state bureaucracy, the quantitative evidence in the education sector shows the scale and impact of these trends.

Furthermore, the securitized nature of the social contract is reflected in the increases in teacher wages in recent decades. The significant increase in 2006 (Teacher's Cadre) as well as the 2014 increase were exclusive to teachers as a massive educated work force able to threaten to strike. However, the state attempted to only include the most vocal higher status teachers. For example, technical education teachers were excluded from the 2006 pay increase, until they organized protests and sued for their inclusion in the Cadre; displaying their capacity to disrupt regime security. Furthermore, a large proportion of teachers were simply not hired on the official pay scale, but rather on precarious and very poorly paid temporary contracts.¹⁹ These temporary teachers were disproportionately allocated to rural and poor areas, to lower educational stages and to technical rather than general secondary; further contributing to low unequal quality. After 2011, following protest and strikes by teachers, teacher pay increased in 2012 (along with other public sector employees) and again in 2014, and more than 100,000 temporary teachers were transferred to regular employment status. However, these increases were largely eroded by subsequent waves of inflation and annual increases since then have not compensated for the drop in real wages. Other sectors like the judiciary, the army and the police that are seen since 2014 as especially sensitive for safeguarding the regime's security have received unprecedented increases in salaries, benefits and privileges above their existing ones.²⁰

The mismanagement of resources in the system is critically driven by the desire to distribute clientelistic benefits and other profits to strategic actors, regardless of the effect on the quality of the service or considerations of equity. This can be seen in the liberties granted to the tutoring and private textbook industries (Sobhy, 2012), the mismanagement of human resource deployment creating vast simultaneous shortages and surpluses (MOE, 2014, pp. 65–68) and the failings and inefficiencies of school construction (Sobhy, 2019). After 2011, trends in the mismanagement of the sector have also seen little change including the expansion of employment, without a clear return on quality in a huge system of 1.85 million employees.²¹ A large wave of teacher hiring in 2015 (of about 30,000 teachers) ended up with teachers placed in locations where they were not needed and did little to alleviate a crisis of teacher shortages across the country (Al-Bayali, 2018). In terms of the social right of education and its management, the image of the quality, equity and opportunity offered by this public service reflects the overall decline of provision in Egypt.

6. Protection: retraction of the rule of law and gendered violence

While the disintegration of provision is critical for understanding the evolving social contract, it is the domain of protection that is most understudied and under theorized. I argue that this is the area where there have the greatest changes and the most critical ones for regime legitimacy and for lived citizenship. These changes touch every dimension of state and citizen roles in relation to protection (see Diagram 1), with wide ranging implications for everyday experiences of lived citizenship. In fact, the collapse of state

provision itself is critically facilitated by a progressive loosening of administrative and legal controls involving the chipping away at the very notion of the rule of law.

The withdrawal of rights to protection in schools is especially crystallized in two key phenomena: the disintegration of the regular functioning of schools and normalized physical and emotional punishment. First, the lax application of a host of rules and regulations extends to every aspect of school functioning, including enforcing student and teacher attendance, school codes on uniform, the implementation of any of a host of mandated activities, the protection of the integrity of examinations and whether teachers actually teach even if they enter the classroom. It touches every aspect of the functioning of the school as a disciplinary institution that observes, categorizes and examines (Sobhy, forthcoming). The stripping down of protection rights is critical to permitting the kind of perverse informal privatization practiced in the system. Before and after 2011, teachers had the freedom to exert different forms of pressure on students, including simply not carrying out instruction in the classroom, discriminating against students who do not enroll in tutoring, offering good grades and examination assistance only to tutees and using physical and emotional violence to intimidate students to enroll in tutoring. In the boys' technical school, attendance was around 50% in most classes and often reached about 10% in general schools, where students overwhelmingly depend on private tutoring. As occurs across the state bureaucracy, this retraction of the rule of law is designed to enable some citizens to extract resources denied by the state (adequate wages) from other citizens. The relaxing of protections is reinforced by citizens themselves as they carve out spaces of laxity and informality that allow them to survive under these conditions, in a way similar to what Bayat (2010) described as the nonmovement of the poor.

If such dysfunction of a public institution is difficult to imagine, the phenomenon of normalized cheating can demonstrate this kind of institutional breakdown. It brilliantly reveals the breakdown of the rule of law, its reasons and how it impacts different segments of society. Students in the technical schools were mostly transparent regarding the extent to which they rely on cheating to pass their exams. That is, they rely on enrolling in tutoring with the class teacher who coaches them on exam questions or simply provides them with answers during the exam or otherwise attempt to secure model answers for frequently occurring questions. Furthermore, according to school administrators, acceptable 'pass rates' for each cohort are effectively imposed on schools, so that if they report lower rates, they are either penalized or simply instructed to raise the grades so as to have a higher pass rate (and less grade repetition and backlog in the system). If this level of normalized cheating seems difficult to imagine, one could refer to a 2014 official report that revealed that over 35% of preparatory stage students cannot read and write (MOE, 2014, 63). This is already a gross underestimation as evidenced by Egypt's second to last ranking the 2016 international literacy exam (PRILS). With such poor literacy, the only way students could pass from one year to the next over eight years of schooling is through different forms of systematically tolerated cheating and automatic transition. From the perspective of students, if the system provides such little actual service/learning, then cheating is an appropriate response to avoid the further loss of status that would stem from withdrawal from schooling: A commonly repeated statement by technical school students described the prevailing system as: 'you pay, you pass; you cheat, you get a good grade'.

These patterns of normalized extralegality and complicity do not apply in the same way to the more privileged middle classes. General secondary and private school students do not experience such normalized cheating. Student grades in general secondary are fundamental for accessing subsidized higher education and

¹⁹ In 2010, it was estimated that the proportion of teachers on non-permanent contracts had risen to around 45% (OECD, 2015, 47).

²⁰ Accurate figures on public sector wages are not easy to obtain and net salaries, bonuses and benefits difficult to estimate. But to give one example, among their special bonuses, judges receive a monthly 'infection compensation' (which is meant to help cover additional health expenses resulting from illnesses contracted on the job) of 167 USD (3000 EGP), while doctors receive about 1 USD (19 EGP).

²¹ Teachers constitute 53% of about 1.85 million employees in MOE as reported in Al-Watan Newspaper on 30 March 2017.

there is a symbolic investment by the state in preserving the image of fairness of this critical bottleneck of social mobility for the middle classes. Therefore, issues around national examinations and cheating in general secondary exams become highly politicized and are discussed in the media every year, in stark contrast to the silence on normalized cheating in the technical track. This points once more to a securitized fragmented social contract, where the state only extends its protection so far as to offer the middle classes fairer chances of social mobility through access to the right to fair assessment, and consequently to subsidized university education. But even this level of protection to the middle classes has been undermined in recent years through further fragmentation and withdrawal of protection. Media reports about special examination conditions for students from elite families began to emerge on a small scale in the late Mubarak era and have only multiplied in recent years. While such cases are discussed cautiously in the state-controlled media, among students, the existence of 'VIP examination halls' and the payments that can be made to obtain exam questions and model answers are a regular topic of discussion. This provides additional justifications for students to cheat and deepens their sense of inequality and exclusion.

The second manifestation of the loss of protection is the painful reality of physical and emotional punishment to which students are subjected. The level of beating and humiliation in Egypt's schools is seen as unprecedented compared to earlier decades. In the late 1990s, around 80% of the boys and 60% of the girls in one study reported being beaten by teachers with the use of hands, sticks, straps, shoes and kicking (Youssef, Attia, & 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). As with nominal expansion of educational enrollment and nominal teacher attendance, there is a nominal expansion of protection over the same period. Official regulations definitively protect students from beating and humiliation, regular instructions to teachers indicate that 'physical and emotional punishment' is strictly forbidden and a 2008 law went further to criminalize beating.

The everyday realities in the public schools confirm these patterns and show the ways in which they are classed and gendered. The use of physical and verbal punishment ranges from severe to mild based on social class and gender. Boys in technical schools (working class young men) suffered the most verbal and physical violence (being slapped on the face, beaten harshly or humiliated using obscene curse words), even in my presence, followed by boys in general schools. In the striking statement of a student in the boys' technical school: 'There is no education in the first place... The teacher comes in, beats the guys around a little and leaves.' Public school teachers were fully aware that they could beat students with impunity and that students had no effective access to redress, whether through the school administration or through the police. As a teacher in the boys' general school told me: "You see me: I come in with a stick and a hose. I beat and I scold but they accept it. . . If not, I tell them here is the local police station, go complain if you want." The forms of punishment directed at girls in the technical and general schools were decidedly less severe and less corporal, but the pattern was still one of normalized extralegal punishment. As a student in the girls' technical school put it, 'they always hit and never talk gently... They talk with their hands or hit with the stick'. Furthermore, in both technical schools, students were often forced to clean the labs and perform other chores in the school. Reduced and privatized access to public safety was manifested in the failed struggles of public school actors to provide minimal levels of protection to girls and boys in the immediate vicinity of schools from sexual harassment or drug dealing, as well as within school premises, from health and safety hazards, including enforcing the collection of garbage by the municipality

or securing essential plumbing, cleaning and maintenance support. My post-2011 interviews point to a greater assertiveness on the part of students in rejecting physical and emotional punishment that serves to put some limits on these practices, especially for the older secondary school students. While this level of normalized punishment is already troubling, the level emotional and physical violence I witnessed is arguably doubled or tripled for younger students less capable of defending themselves.²² However, physical and emotional punishment of students is by no means unique to Egyptian schools and is common in other countries of the global South, although it is very difficult to compare its intensity (see Pinheiro, 2006). On the other hand, boys and girls in private schools were not systematically beaten or humiliated and students and teachers alike explicitly rejected the kinds of punishment prevalent in public schools.

While I deal elsewhere with the various issues around discipline and punishment in schools (Sobhy, forthcoming), it is important to note that the forms of punishment pervading Egyptian schools are less an expression of culturally sanctioned child rearing practices among the poor than the result of the deliberate negligence of the weak privatized state. The harsh style of punishment administered on students, including humiliation and rebuke, is essentially applied to teachers themselves (Naguib, 2006). To give one example, if teachers are harshly rebuked for classroom cleanliness, while insufficient cleaning staff are employed, they have an incentive to force students to perform such tasks and to intimidate them for not revealing these practices. Harsh punishment, usually framed as a response to some other infraction, can be helpful in pressuring those students who had not yet enrolled in tutoring, especially in the lower grades as well as in technical schools. Last but not least, resorting to harsh punishment is not separate from the frustration of their low pay, status and autonomy, with overcrowded classrooms and poor resources and with the stress and fatigue of having to earn their living through working additional hours of private tutoring or other jobs. I therefore emphasize how the retraction of provision goes hand in hand with the forms of punishment in the schools: the use of continuous negative labeling, physical intimidation and repression of contestation.

I have often wondered why young people do not simply abandon schools if they offer such poor learning and such poor treatment. In fact, high rates of unemployment and underemployment disproportionately affect educated youth and it is clear that the returns to education are decreasing (Assaad & Krafft, 2014). Male students however often referenced military service when explaining why they continued to enrolled in schooling. Compulsory military service for young men represents at the very least a loss of time, potential income and professional experience at the onset of the entrepreneurial and professional careers. For the majority of less privileged young men, it arguably represents an endurance of considerable emotional, physical and financial stress.²³ Withdrawal from formal education would therefore represent not only a loss of social status, but implies a very profound change in the conditions facing young men. Better marriage prospects and the increased freedoms outside the household during school enrollment were key factors for girls. Many young people

²² For the youngest students, according to a 2012 survey, 80% of respondents said that students in their primary school were subject to physical punishment, more than half saying that this occurred either daily or frequently (ELMPS, 2012). The percentage is somewhat lower for preparatory schools with 70% of respondents reporting regular physical punishment in their schools and even lower in secondary schools with 30% saying there was regular physical punishment and 50% saying students are never beaten (ELMPS, 2012).

²³ Formal educational attainment is the main criteria for determining the period of conscription (from one to three years), the types of posts and their location and, informally, the kind of treatment young men can expect to receive. Exemptions for entire cohorts of university graduates were common in the late Mubarak era.

therefore felt stuck in school and its difficult conditions despite their realization of the poor value of education.

7. Participation: surveillance, impoverishment and Islamization

It might not be surprising that these widespread infringements on protection and provision were accompanied by strict limits on various forms of expression, organization, association and representation. The restrictions on participation were driven by state surveillance, deepened through the impoverishment of schools and accompanied by wide ranging forms of Islamization. This securitization of education is reflected in various controls on all actors in the schools. Various levels and modes of surveillance are in place to ensure that all school discourses—including exam questions and student answers—are devoid of oppositional themes, especially under the banner of combating extremism and terrorism. State Security affiliated political communication representatives are reportedly represented in every educational district to monitor teachers and receive any reports by supervisors about oppositional discourses in the classrooms. The broader limitations on labor organization are also applied to teachers, whereby their rights to protest and organize or create independent unions are continuously undermined. The principal forms of ‘representation’ allowed is that of the official Educational Professions Syndicate, which is not only coopted and controlled by the state, but in fact officially headed by the Minister of Education ([Social Justice Platform, 2018](#)). With such overwhelming limits, many subtleties of participation that could be explored in other settings are absent from the Egyptian case.

It remains critical to note that the limited participation is not only the result of limitations on forms of expression, but also of the impoverishment of schools, the general weakening of the state bureaucracy and political calculations about the utility of participatory education. Although they are encouraged in theory, structures such as school clubs, student unions or any semblance of associational activity were effectively absent from the public schools where I conducted my research. Many school activities from debate clubs to art competitions are mandated by official regulations, but effectively exist only on paper in public schools. To give one example, the principal entered a classroom I was attending, asked the teacher to point out the ‘good students’ and asked them to leave the class with him so that he could present them to school guests as the supposedly elected Student Union representatives. Most students are also deprived of subjects that are meant to nurture talent, expression, team work, leadership, collaboration and a more holistic social and emotional development. They are deprived from every participatory skill or experience that could be nurtured in school activities. This stems from four factors directly emanating from the changing social contract. Reliance on tutoring to secure a livelihood means that teachers of subjects that do not count towards a student’s final score (like Sports, music or art) must either direct their efforts to other wage-earning activities or exit the profession. This leads to huge teacher shortages as well as widespread patterns of (largely undocumented) teacher absenteeism. The second reason is that most students enroll in multiple shift schools, where the curriculum is abridged and ‘less essential’ subjects are removed. Third, the state simply fails to provide schools with the minimum resources needed to carry out essential activities. Fourth, the regime may have developed a conviction that Egypt’s relatively vibrant public schools in the 1950s and 1960s equipped a generation of youth with oratory, organizational and leadership skills, as well as an ideological training in Arab nationalism and socialism, which the student movement in the 1970s put to use to oppose the regime.

Finally, apart from echoing the official line, the spaces of expression and participation found in schools were disproportionately occupied by religious themes. Actual activities in the schools ranged from Quran memorization contests to school radio programs saturated with religious content. Different religious themes were expressed on wall magazines and artwork in the different public schools. As highlighted at the onset, since Sadat the regime has been willing to give considerable space in the cultural sphere to Islamist forces that are seen as less oppositional. The observation that conservative, non-oppositional mainstream Muslim piety is one of the few areas where activities or forms of participation are tolerated is of course not accidental and is fundamental to the strategies and contradictions of the production of hegemony.

8. The production of hegemony: Nationalism, Islamism and Neoliberalism

These changes to protection, provision and participation had to be legitimized in official textbooks and everyday school rituals. In terms of textbook, defense of the nation against continuous foreign threats, the role of the army in protecting the nation and the duty of love and sacrifice for the nation were consistently emphasized in textbooks before and after 2011. The focus on defense of the nation is especially critical for legitimizing the drafting of young men into the army. Textbooks consistently highlighted the duty to fight and sacrifice for the nation. Such duty was often couched and legitimized in religious terms. In fact, secondary school textbooks often tackle nationalist themes, social values and even science through Islamist and Islamic frames of reference. For example, one National Education textbook defines the ‘good citizen’ as the one who adheres to religious teaching and improves his personal conduct for the elevation of the nation through ‘science and faith’.²⁴ Two different Arabic Language textbooks explained justice as stemming essentially from Islam and as ‘governing by what God has decreed (not the law, the constitution or upholding rights). The centrality of Islam in nationalist and citizenship discourses represents a clear exclusion of Egypt’s Christian population, but the textbooks go even further in obscuring the richness and complexity of Egyptian, Arab and Muslim intellectual heritage and history and in largely ignoring the history, contributions and struggles of non-Muslim civilizations ([Sobhy, 2015](#)). As highlighted at the onset, Islamization was part of the legitimizing narratives since the 1970s, despite the battles with radical Islamists. The repression that the regimes periodically unleashed on Islamists was “tempered by willingness to permit Islamization to make significant inroads into areas previously secularized” ([Springborg, 2003, 24](#)).

This oscillation between repression and accommodation is well reflected in the education sector. Education is often articulated in Egypt “as a matter of national security”. This terminology became especially prominent after a wave of terrorist attacks in the 1990s and confrontations between the state and Islamist groups. This culminated in a campaign to root out thousands of extremist teachers but seems to have amounted to transferring many of them away from the more liberal urban gaze. The discourse of education as a matter of national security became prominent again after the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamad Morsi in 2013, but culminated in token measures that were not followed through, like the “intellectual security clubs” discussed below.

Neoliberalism is also part of the legitimizing narratives in textbooks, but there is little consistent investment in promoting it. That is, while patriotic devotion and Islam are consistent recurring themes, neoliberal and ‘active citizenship’ are tangential in com-

²⁴ Past textbooks can be requested from the Ministry of Education archives. All translations from textbook excerpts are my own.

parison. In 2006, the mission statement of Egyptian pre-university education explicitly included the notion of active citizenship; a term that has been closely linked with 'neoliberal' notions of citizenship, focused on adapting to a withdrawal of earlier citizenship rights and adjustment to increasingly precarious economic conditions (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011). However, only one of the textbooks I analyzed offers an extended articulation of these notions through discussions of human capital, civil society and globalization. After 2011, despite recurrent promises of a complete overhaul of curricula—especially to 'combat extremism', only limited changes were actually put in place (Attalah & Makar, 2014). The main areas of change and contention related to whether and how the uprising and the subsequent events are portrayed and how the old and new regimes are discussed. While this may reflect the political developments in the post-2011 era from a supposed celebration and toleration of the Revolution to its demonization, these textbooks were taught simultaneously demonstrating the lack of a coherent narrative and the lack of minimal investment in creating one. Adding to the incoherence and contradiction, these politicized 'controversial' sections were often later removed and related exam questions retracted following media coverage of complaints by students and teachers.

My research with young people before and after 2011 reveals the limited and incoherent investment in discourses and rituals of legitimation and their weak resonances for students. Despite the nationalist rhetoric pervading textbooks, students expressed striking assertions of their lack of a sense of national belonging to the country. They explicitly linked this to their assessment of their everyday conditions especially in relation to protection and provision. Students shared reflections like, 'if we as a people benefit from Egypt, we would love it' and 'why should I love it if I am not getting my rights in the country?' The impoverishment of schools however equally undermines the promotion of nationalist and citizenship rituals, activities and narratives, like the officially mandated morning assembly, where the national anthem is sung and the Egyptian flag is saluted. A general secondary school student commented on the morning assembly ritual in his school as follows:

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

There was also no reproduction of any aspect of neoliberal citizenship in their discourses. Before and after 2011, students emphasized issues around their disorientation to provision and protection rights, including education, health, dignified treatment, safety on their streets and consistently highlighted the inequality in accessing those rights, based on socioeconomic background. The only aspect these textbook narratives seem to have succeeded in enforcing is the hegemony of mainstream Muslim piety, whose tenants were implicitly and explicitly upheld by most students and teachers. In fact, throughout the Mubarak era, the most visible battles around legitimation in Egyptian schools revolved around the morning assembly ritual and the flag salutation, which school actors often replaced or complimented with Islamic chants, instead of the official national anthem or flag salutation (see Herrera & Torres, 2006). Recent dynamics around legitimation relate to the attempt to introduce a new pro-military anthem in schools, which was often explicitly opposed by students. Reflecting the lack of commitment in imposing its narrative, students explained that the song was played for some time in their school, but then stopped. Similarly, various announcements were made about ini-

tiatives like the establishment of 'intellectual security clubs' in schools to nurture and monitor pro-regime narratives. However, my research since 2016 shows that these measures were little known and had little impact on the schools. There was little investment in establishing such clubs or following through with lectures on religious moderation. Overall, whether on exam questions or in the morning assembly, students and teachers critiqued, evaded and resisted echoing the regime's legitimizing narratives, despite heightened fear of repression (Sobhy, forthcoming).

9. Conclusion

This article has argued for an operationalization of the notion of social contract that builds on and expands concepts of citizenship. It examines state and citizen obligations with reference to the four parameters (4Ps) of protection, provision, participation and the production of hegemony. Protection encompasses the most basic functions of national security, access to and equality before the law, while provision refers to social rights, public services and economic opportunities and participation captures political rights and freedoms. The production of hegemony relates to the discourses and practices used to justify these obligations. For a more nuanced appreciation of how these arrangements are lived by citizens, the four parameters are studied through in-depth qualitative research in a particular field. Here, the education sector is privileged as a site where such qualitative study can yield rich integrated insights on all key parameters. I then applied this framework to the case of Egypt to examine the disintegration of the postcolonial welfarist social contract and the key features of its transformations before and after the Arab Uprisings. The trends in Egypt are not all shared across the region in a common Arab social contract, but tools like the 4Ps framework would enable better comparisons in the region and beyond.

The case of Egypt reflects the impact not only of neoliberal austerity and privatization, but also a creeping destruction of state institutions, the everyday corruption involved in these dynamics and the extent of physical and emotional violence carried out, especially against the poor and young men, to sustain these realities. The toleration and promotion of different forms of corruption and extralegal practices are also critical elements of the social contract when they become normalized and part of the expectations of citizens in their encounters with the state. In terms of protection, the article highlights how informal, extralegal and illegal practices constitute a critical component of the lived social contract of vast segments of the population. The retraction of the rule of law is not only nurtured by the regime, but also a process in which citizens are made complicit and in which they become invested, even if it allows them to derive only minimal benefits. This complicity and dependence explain why citizens may prefer, nurture and defend these arrangements over the complete exclusion that may result from a better application of the law. In the example of systematic cheating prevalent in at least half of schools, students become actively implicated and complicit in extralegal or corrupt practices. Critically, they lose their moral ground and become vulnerable to accusations, shaming, humiliation and remain susceptible to the revocation of their unearned gains. Parallels beyond the school appear brilliantly in the works of scholars like Singerman (1995), Ismail (2006), Elyachar (2005) and Bayat (2010) who have shown the dependence of the poor on webs of informal and extralegal exchanges and their agency in nurturing and seeking to expand these spaces. I stress therefore that it is not only political repression, neoliberalism or cronyism that define the transformation of the social contract in Egypt, but equally the various forms of informalization, precarization, deregulation, institutionalization of states of exception that amount to a selective rolling back

of everyday forms of protection under the law. These are phenomena that I place under the broad umbrella of permissiveness in explaining Egypt's "permissive-repressive neoliberalism" (Sobhy, forthcoming). So rather than focusing on a tradeoff between social and political rights, the changing nature of protection becomes central to the reconfiguration of the social contract and plays a critical role in the erosion of both provision and participation.

The description of the social contract as securitized and fragmented captures two more features of its transformation. The divergent patterns in different tiers of schooling show the extent of differentiation and inequality, not only in access to provision, but also to basic protections of body and dignity. The changes in teacher wages over the past decades demonstrate the move from fairly homogenous entitlements to highly unequal and divisive differentiation among public sector employees and among different tiers of the same profession, based on both formal (although rarely transparent) privileges, as well as access to extralegal sources of income and privilege. These changes have been guided by a supposed correspondence with considerations of regime security. Spaces of participation and representation continue to be securitized and Islamized, even if Islamist terrorism is constructed as the primary enemy of the state. Despite the repression of different forms of representation and organization, alternative political forces were allowed to take over the material and symbolic functions abandoned by the state. The spaces given to Islamist forces to provide services and to propagate alternative identities and values reveal the diminished will and ability to produce hegemonic narratives to legitimize the changing social contract. The poor work of legitimation that results from these features is highlighted in the everyday realities and rituals of schools and the ways in which young Egyptians receive, reproduce and contest these realities. In sum, the relationship with a wide range of social sectors is managed through privatization, permissiveness and repression and eased by encouraging charity and ceding spaces to Islamist service provision and solidarity networks, while sectors critical for regime security are provided with unprecedented privileges.

A formulation of the social contract that focuses on a tradeoff between provision and participation might suggest that expanding participation can compensate for the reduction of provision. This is in fact what many Arab regimes tried before they were hit by the uprisings. A more comprehensive conception of the social contract suggests that its legitimacy hinges on the dynamics affecting the parameters of protection and legitimation as well. Provision is still a key component of this contract and when the state does not meet its obligations on this front, it must try to compensate for the deficit of legitimacy. One possible strategy is that the drying up of the funds that sustained welfare provision could be compensated for by expanded taxation, which in turn can be better legitimized through enhanced protection and increased participation. Regimes could attempt to only make changes to legitimizing narratives, especially emphasizing external threats and the need for internal cohesion to confront them. Regimes could also nurture networks of extralegality and corruption that create new allies and produce complicit citizens dependent on the absence of the rule of law. The case of Egypt shows how in states with poor resources where provision disintegrates and participation is severely constrained, the durability of the ruling regime can hinge on a slow destruction of the state through a retraction of the basic function of protection and scaling down the imperatives of legitimation, while attempting to secure support and legitimation from external allies.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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