UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING COPTIC SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPT

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

By

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Norman, Oklahoma

2022

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COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of so many. On this page, I thank a few people without whom I could not have mustered the energy I needed for this.

First, I thank my thesis committee for all the work they have put in:

Dr. Manata Hashemi, my thesis advisor and committee chair, who not only prepared me for this through her classes, but also by spending a huge amount of time helping me conceptualize, theorize, and literally bring this thesis into existence. You have helped me in many, many ways, and I am forever thankful.

Dr. Alexander Jabbari, without whom this thesis would have lacked so much depth, historical analysis, critical approaches, and theoretical frameworks. Thank you for the many hours spent with me working on preparing me for such a huge project.

Dr. Deonnie Moodie, whose insight and academic conversations were incredibly helpful in conceptualizing of this project in a multi-faceted approach. Thank you for your support, your willingness to just talk, and help me put my thoughts to paper.

Secondly, I thank my parents, Caroline Boctor and Raymond Kamel, without whom I couldn't have done any of this. Their consistent support in every manner through countless all-nighters (I am also thankful for a 7-hour time difference) and conversations that touched directly on their lived experiences as Copts helped in more ways than they could imagine. Discussions with my mother about our day-to-day lives helped me shape my thesis, and my

father's work as a journalist and political analyst helped me keep track of the million threads of this thesis. I thank my brother, Ramez, for always cheering me up.

Last, but in no way least, I thank my friends who helped carry me through this as gracefully as possible. As an international student, they were my family when my family is about 7000 miles away. Thank you, Nayifa Nihad, my co-year and my savior, who has been there for me for *years*, and without her I could not have completed my MA, much less my thesis. I also thank Neira Kadić, a true friend, neighbor, and genuine mentor who at times singlehandedly carried me through grief, anxiety, and a whole lot of joy. To Menna Elsayed, who has been home when I couldn't be home, I thank you so much, and I am grateful for the long conversations and laughter shared with Asser. I thank Shohini Saha and Agnitha Xavier for having been my longest friends far from home, and despite being so far, always felt so close whenever I needed them, always present at the drop of a hat. Lastly, I thank Kamal and Mira for having always helped me be who I am.

Finally, I thank my cohort, and the incredible support I received from staff and faculty at OU, especially to Katie Watkins, my academic advisor and casual superhero, as well as Dr. Rebecca Cruise, who helped me many times during my degree.

Abstract

The Coptic community of Egypt operates daily under pressures from state, society, and the Coptic Orthodox Church, and yet are expected to be an invisible minority that places its national identity over its ethnoreligious one that it is often ostracized for. This thesis explores how Copts navigate the concept of space in Egypt, and more importantly, how, through a process of cooptation, creative subversion of, or opposition to the systems they operate under, build space for themselves outside of what they had been restricted to. This thesis explores ideas of visibility, panopticism, and hegemony as I discuss the historical and sociological intricacies of Copts in Egypt engaging in quiet practices and loud actions.

Introduction: Passion Week

Passion Week, or Holy Week, is the English name for what Copts call *Isbu' al Alam*, or the week of pain, that resides in the last week of Lent and starts with Easter. For Coptic Orthodox Christians, it almost always comes a week after Catholic Passion Week. As I write this introduction, the Coptic community in Egypt stands at the end of one Passion Week and the beginning of another. Over the last few days, the Coptic community in Egypt experienced four incidents in a heavily sectarian week. It started with the murder of Bishop Arsanius of Moharram Bek, Alexandria, a beloved community man, as he was returning from prayer on the beach. It then continued to ensure that Copts have and continue to be seen as second-class citizens in Egypt when online spaces broke out in controversy around a traditional vegan restaurant specialized in serving the Egyptian national dish, koshari, refusing to serve a Coptic woman and her 4-year-old food due to public observation of Ramadan. Responses to the incident were heavily sectarian and attacked Copts heavily, bringing us to the third incident of a famous newspaper publishing an article that called non-Muslims *kuffar*, or infidels. Finally, it ended with the seeming kidnapping and forced conversion of a Christian woman, Mariam Wahib, in Beni Soueif. As the Coptic community gets ready for their actual Passion Week, fear of congregation in churches to celebrate has risen once more, and tensions among the Coptic community, the Church and the State has risen unlike anything we have seen in years, with Pope Tawadros II making a bold statement condemning a failing state security apparatus.

In this thesis, I answer the research question: How do Copts today build space for themselves in contemporary Egypt? I discuss the positionality of the Copts as a people and their struggle to create space for themselves in today's world informed by a historical and sociological perspective. Often, a discussion of Coptic struggles today takes for granted the multiple systems of oppression Copts operate under in hegemonic conditions. I attempt to elucidate those conditions to better understand and contextualize Coptic presence in Egyptian society. I frame my argument in the context of building space specifically because, as I discuss later on, Copts are often placed under restrictions that specifically confine their presence to private cultural spaces, or more specifically the Coptic Orthodox Church. I propose that Copts today mostly function in different ways and methods, but essentially, argue that some Copts often find themselves engaging with different discourses that they are expected to operate under based on their historical positionalities and their ethnoreligious identity, and they engage in building spaces through either coopting those very same discourses, resisting them, or creatively subverting them to serve their own purposes.

This thesis follows Copts historically through chapters one and two. In chapter one, I discuss the identity of the Copts and the most important markers in their history up to British occupation. I further discuss their historical identity in relation to the national unity discourse and the rise of the Patriarch-President pact in the second. Chapter three discusses the modern-day positionality of Copts using frameworks of hegemony, space and (in)visibility in order to set up chapters four and five, which more specifically examine the *how* of building Coptic space. I focus on quiet practices and day to day techniques in creating space for Copts in chapter four,

and finally I spend chapter five discussion the louder actions and activism of the Copts today in formal, semi-formal and online spaces.

I would like to clarify a few points specifically. Throughout the thesis, unless stated otherwise, I use Coptic to refer to Coptic Orthodox institutions, people, or communities. While I do acknowledge the presence and importance of the Coptic Catholic and Coptic Anglican/Presbyterian churches and communities in Egypt, my focus lies specifically within the hegemonic institution of the Coptic Orthodox Church (COC) and its people. While some of the experiences may be shared, I do not claim to have an exhaustive thesis that addresses their specific concerns. I also use Islamic/Muslim institutions in this paper to specifically mean Egyptian Islamic/Muslim institutions, which contextually hold a very different context and connotation than here, in the US, where the thesis is being written and published.

For this research, I use a multi-modal approach. I rely in Chapters 1 and 2 on historical accounts and primary sources that include newspapers and Coptic magazines. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 rely on the use of social media research and interviews that I conducted with 8 Coptic people ranging in ages from 21 to 36 years of age. While not all the interviewees are currently in Egypt, all grew up there until at least the age of 14, and all of them return in a consistent manner. Four out of eight are Cairenes, and all of them grew up in the northern part of Egypt. All the interviews were conducted in Egyptian Arabic, our native tongue, and they have been carried out anonymously. Key identifying details (names, locations, etc.) have been altered to protect their identities. Interviews lasted between 90 and 180 minutes and were conducted remotely via VOIP applications like Zoom.

Chapter 1: What Makes them Different?

From 451 CE to pre-nationalism

Often, it is understood that when people refer to Copts that they are referring to adherents of the Coptic Orthodox Church. More familiar ears would ask if you are talking about the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Catholic Church, or any of the many other churches that have taken Copt up as a prefix indicating the Egyptian nature of their beliefs. Today, "Copts" is understood as a shorthand for referring to Egyptian Christians altogether. However, as popular national unity narratives would proudly advertise, Copt simply means Egyptian. The word originates from the Arabization of the Greek word for Egypt, *Agyptios*, to *Qibt*.[1] For a long time then, *Qibt* was used to refer to the Egyptians, and evidence for that can be found even in correspondences between the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and Egyptian rulers. A much earlier look into history is, however, necessary to understand what distinguishes the Copts.

This chapter is an abridged dive into the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church, its adherents and its interactions with the systems operating around it. As the chapter recounts Coptic history between the solidification of its identity as ecumenical reject and its presence as an afterthought in the legally pluralistic system of the Ottomans, I elucidate the historical reasons and desires that allowed for Coptic identity being merged into the national unity discourse that later led to further Coptic restrictions and a deeper need for building space.

[1] Harper Douglas, "Etymology of Copt," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed April 22, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/copt.

ONE NATURE UNDER GOD

Perhaps what most people are familiar with in Coptic history is the heavy influence the Church's patriarchs have had on early theology. Western Christians might be familiar with Origen and Athanasius of Alexandria and their proto-Orthodox commitment to the faith, whether in helping create the Septuagint or in fighting the Arian doctrine, referred to by most today as the Arian heresy.[2] However, not long after the start of the Ecumenical councils, the Coptic Orthodox Church (COC) fell out of favor with the catholic church.[3] In 451 CE, the Council of Chalcedon was held where in defending against the Nestorian doctrine,[4] patriarch Dioscorus I was branded as a heretic of the *monophysite* tradition,[5] and excommunicated from the Councils.[6] The difference in Christological tradition among the council and the COC lies in the specifics of the nature of Christ, a belief that had been rebranded as the *miaphysite* tradition in recent years as an attempt to reconcile the COC with the still ongoing Ecumenical councils of today.[7] While feelings of alienation among the COC clergy and adherents, especially with the continuous presence of Arians among the ranks of the community, were unpleasant as they were, this problem was exacerbated due to the Byzantian investment in the harmonious existence of Christians under the Edict of Milan in 313. The Byzantine emperor Marcianus then exiled Dioscorus I and appointed Pretorius, beginning a tradition of papal disputes in the non-Chalcedonian COC that lasted multiple centuries – a struggle between the locally appointed

[2] The Arian doctrine is a belief about the nature of Christ that posed him as between God and Man.
[3] Lower case c catholic refers to the ecumenical union of churches before the Great Schism of 1054.
[4] The Nestorian doctrine described Christ's divinity and humanity as two distinct beings within Jesus.
[5] The Monophysite theological position states that the divinity and humanity of Christ combined within Jesus, unseparated. It is more commonly known as the miaphysite tradition today, and stands in opposition to the diaphysite doctrine non-Chalcedonian churches have taken.
[6] Iris Habeeb el Masri, *From the Foundation of the Church By Saint Mark to the Arab Conquest*, The Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt (California: The Middle East Council of Churches, 1978), 303-304.
[7] Pope Shenouda III, *The Nature of Christ* (Cairo: St Shenouda Monastery, 1997).

patriarch and the foreign imposed one. Having been defined as the "other" during a moment of imperial subservience to another empire, the COC and its community became very protective of its patriarchs, a theme that continues throughout Coptic history.

An uneasy relationship of power defined the moment in history prior to the Arab Invasion of 639. The Sassanid Empire had just been defeated by the Romans in Egypt, and the patriarch, Benjamin I, had been witness to the invasion. Heraclius of Rome was eager to resolve the tensions once more between the miaphysite COC and the churches at the center of the empire and came up with a well-crafted theological distinction that attempted to reunite their Christological differences. In order to implement this forced reconciliation between the two parties, however, he chose Cyrus of Alexandria.[8] Cyrus, after attempting and failing to convince the stubborn Coptic community (which was mostly restless due to the exile of Benjamin I), turned to military violence, and while this wasn't the first time Copts had faced violence at the hands of Romans, or more specifically Byzantines, the ruler was particularly violent, implementing "methods of terror and physical torture".[9]

INVASION OR CONQUEST?

Very interestingly, Cyrus of Alexandria, whom historians believe is the character in Islamic and Arab history known as al Muqawqas, had a particularly good relationship with the Arabs before they entered Egypt. In a correspondence between him and the Prophet

[8] Mark N. Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt, 641–1517: The Popes of Egypt, Volume 2* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 3.
[9] Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity: The Popes of Egypt, Volume 1*, Illustrated edition (Cairo New York (N.Y.): The American University in Cairo Press, 2017) p116-117.

Muhammed (PBUH), he refused to convert to Islam, but he sent over multiple gifts, including traditional Coptic textiles, and most importantly, Mariah the Copt, who holds quite an idolized position in the hearts of many Egyptians today.[10] Mariah went on to become one of the Prophet's wives, and is often referenced as a symbol of not only national unity between Copts and Muslims, but as a specific tale of the closeness of the Coptic Egyptian community to the Prophet's heart. Often, this tale is a focal point of Arab-Coptic relations, likely a diversion from the actual events of the conquest.

Amr ibn al-'As conquered the northern part of Egypt first after crossing the Egyptian border in 639 CE. Initial interactions between Arabs and Copts are quite disputed and are uncertain up until today. It is true that some sources, specifically apocalypses, document interactions between the Arabs and the Copts as initiating an era of darkness and decline (*Shenute's vision* specifically appears to discuss that), and the *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun* (written sometime around the 10th century CE in Arabic) warns of a horrible deterioration of the Church and its adherents; but certainly other writers disagree.[11] George the Archdeacon's version of history tells the story of a monophysite church tortured under Cyrus of Alexandria that supported a change of conditions if it meant its own freedom from torture.[12] Evidently, the return of patriarch Benjamin I to the papal chair at the hand of Amr Ibn al-'As and his reinstitution in Alexandria is documented, even if the dates are not exactly accurate, and is reported to have been given reign over his churches and people as a *dhimmi*, or a person of the

[10] Suleiman A. Mourad, "Christians And Christianity In The Sīra Of Muḥammad," in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 1 (600-900)*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (BRILL, 2009), 57–71, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004169753.i-960.18.
[11] Robert G. Hoyland, "Apocalypses and Visions," in *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1998), 257–335.
[12] Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt, 641–1517,* 5.

book.[13] This is a particularly notable moment, where the Coptic Orthodox Church no longer is treated as another sect in a theological debate, but is officially understood as a *dhimmi* institution required to pay the jizya to stay protected within Egypt – the precursor to the concept of the *millet*.[14]

FROM DHIMMI TO MILLET

Coptic-Arab interactions have been underlined from the beginning by what is called the Pact of Umar, yet with the advent of the Ottomans in the 16th century, a new system was being developed. Copts had been ruled per the pact that the second Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab made with the people of Jerusalem when he conquered it in 637 CE. The Umari Pact was used by Muslim leaders to rule non-Muslim communities across the medieval Near East. Some of the conditions we had already mentioned – paying the jizya and wearing specific items of clothing (initially the *zunnar*) – but some others included not constructing any new houses of worship.[15] In return, the *dhimmis* would gain safe haven and be guaranteed safe passage outside of the Caliphate is they so desired.[16] This was offered to Benjamin I when ibn al-'As came to Egypt.[17] Different rulers enforced the Pact of Umar in different ways, according to the tensions rising

[13] Robert G. Hoyland, "Benjamin I, Patriarch of Alexandria," in *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1998), 132–35.
[14] Jizya is a tax that is implemented on the *dhimmis* living within Islamic lands. Originally, it was meant to help support the building of the empire, but as time moved on, it became more symbolic.
[15] The *zunnar* is a belt or girdle non-Muslims wore to indicate their status.
[16] Karen Barkey and George Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy," *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (January 2016): 24–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2015.1101845.
[17] Hoyland, "Benjamin I, Patriarch of Alexandria."

and occurring between the different groups in Egypt, allowing for leniency or strictness if need be.[18]

With the advent of the Ottoman empire in the 15th century, a new system was devised that evolved the pre-existing pact of Umar. This was a way created by the Ottomans to divide and conceptualize different communities in the empire. Under the new system, each group was called a *millet*, and they were divided based on different factors, mainly religion, ethnicity, and in some cases language.[19]

Millet as a word is still used today in Egypt colloquially (pronounced *milla*) to mean "affiliation". It's based on the Ottoman system of the same name, where the word in this case would refer specifically to *dhimmi* organized religiopolitical communities in the empire.[20] The Ottoman empire created three main umbrella *millets* each with their own autonomous hierarchical structures (if present): Greek/Rum Orthodox, Armenians, and Jews.[21] This is no way fully encompassed the full diversity and structure of the different communities that were actually within the borders of the empire that spanned from Europe to North Africa, but two main factors dictated these groupings: not every group present was recognized by the Ottomans; and whenever there was possibility for an umbrella term to encompass smaller groups, the Ottomans took the opportunity to do so. That was the case for Egypt's Copts, who

[18] Tritton, *The Caliphs And Their Non Muslim Subjects,* 120.
[19] Kemal H. Karpat, "Millets and Nationality: The Roots of Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 141–70.
[20] Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, 1st edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[21] Efrat Aviv, "Millet System in the Ottoman Empire" (Oxford University Press, November 28, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195390155-0231.

were put under the Armenian *millet* due to the non-Chalcedonian nature of the theology of both churches.

The *millet* system mainly achieved two things. The first was a proper codification of the new and updated Ottoman conception of the Umari pact. This meant that it ensured that the state was held accountable to the millets and vice versa.[22] Different obligations were held through that same *millet* system, including the jizya, which at this point was more symbolic of the *dhimmi* status of the millets rather than anything.[23] Secondly, it ensured that there was an intercessor, or a representative, present for the millet that is within the reach of the local government. If their community members were to ask for something or do something, it would have to go to the hierarchical councils of the millet, which would then bring it to the state. We must understand that the millet system was in no way a citizen-forward system – modern concepts of citizenry are anachronistic and do not apply to the time.

The millet system of singular hierarchical representation is largely the basis for how the Coptic Church in many ways had already been operating, and understanding the system helps us moving forward in making sense of clerical activity. Under the Ottoman millet system in Egypt, many Copts found solid footing for prosperity – the Gohari brothers, for example, were incredibly wealthy and influential within the Church despite being laymen.[24] This possibility for upward social mobility had not been present for Copts since the Arab Conquest and was the

[22] Barkey and Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System."
[23] Bruce Masters, "The Limits of Tolerance: The Social Staus of Non-Muslinms in the Ottoman Arab Lands," in *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era*, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16–40.
[24] Iris Habeeb el Masri, *From the Arab Conquest to the Present Time*, The Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt (California: The Middle East Council of Churches, 1978), 305-308.

beginning of lay involvement within Church *and* state politics. The true boom, howeverm would come a few years later under Muhammed Ali.

LIFE UNDER THE PASHAS

Muhammed Ali Pasha was Egypt's Albanian ruler that rose to power after the French expedition left in 1801, taking advantage of the power vacuum created by their withdrawal and his appointment as Viceroy in 1805. He was a visionary in many ways, specifically set on modernizing Egypt and aspiring to gain favor of and perhaps compete with the European Great Powers. He is credited with many things, including being the Father of Modern Egypt. He claimed to have wanted religious equality among all his subjects, perhaps inspired by the statehood models of Europe, and thus modernization in Egypt was on its way, but it could not begin without his declaration as independent of the Ottoman Empire in addition to creating his own dynasty.[25] This further pushed his need for creating a distinct characteristic and loyal population in Egypt.

The modernization and religious equality clauses came with particularly good bearings for Copts. He allowed them to ride horses, wear indistinguishable clothing (except for white turbans, reserved still for Muslims), and even ring church bells for the first time.[26] He was also reported to have been on close enough terms with Salih Attallah (a Coptic layman) and Patriarch Petros of the time that he allowed for and aided the rebuilding of St Mark's Cathedral

[25] Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity*, Paperback edition (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).
[26] Ibid, 15.

in 1818.[27] His close connections and openness to the Copts helped create the material conditions for the Coptic enlightenment.[28] He was particularly favorable towards using their services for managing taxation and land surveying systems – especially with his new economic system of monopoly in Egypt, this was crucial to him.[29] People like Basilious Ghali and Guirguis el Gohari became quite important during his time, earning the titles of *Mu'allim*, a title reserved for the taxation diwan masters.[30]

THE "ENLIGHTENMENT"

Muhammed Ali's death in 1848 was preceded by a few years where he was senile and unable to rule due to the death of his oldest son, but he was followed in rule by Khedives Abbas I (1849-54) and Sa'id (1855-63). Their reign witnessed Patriarch Cyril IV, who came into one of the strongest eras for the Coptic Church, with an already existing diwan for the patriarchate that gained interest through waqf. Nicknamed the Reformer, of *Abu Islah*, Cyril set out to modernize the church through three main areas of reform. First was creating an administrative process for his patriarchal diwan that mainly dealt with managing personal status laws. This mainly solidified and facilitated his role as the millet leader, and in fact was in line with the expectations from him as head of the hierarchical order of the Copts. Secondly, he was set on "reforming" the ecclesiastical order. Reform here meant less structural changes for the clergy,

[27] Iris Habeeb el Masri, *From the Arab Conquest to the Present Time,* 319.
[28] Heather J. Sharkey, "The Ottoman Tanzimat Edict of 1856 and Its Consequences for the Christians of Egypt: The Rashomon Effect in Coptic History," in *Copts in Modernity: Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Melbourne, 13-16 July 2018*, ed. Elizabeth Agaiby, Mark Swanson, and Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, Text and Studies in Eastern Christianity, volume 22 (International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2021), 21–38.
[29] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 19.
[30] Diwan is similar to a ministry, and was part of the hallmark governmental reforms that Muhammed Ali enacted in Egypt.

and more an attempt at bringing forward a more educated, less poor class of priests. This took shape specifically in changing the alms-based system priests lived on and replaced it with a salary that came from the waqf *and* donations from mass. Finally, he was concerned with education – in addition to teaching at al Azbakeya, he constructed the Coptic Patriarchal College. He also brought in the first privately owned printing press to Bulaq, and with the help of Khedive Sai'd, trained priests to use it.[31]

Abu Islah was undoubtedly inspired and threatened by the Presbyterian experience in Egypt, since these reforms took quite a Protestant missionary nature to them. The Presbyterian church was one of the first and most influential missionary churches in Egypt, one that came directly from the US. Their influence on the COC was not more obvious than with Cyril IV's tirade against iconography, a very traditionally Coptic aspect of Christianity that he tried to move away from due to its "backwardness".[32] Historian Paul Sedra is particularly wary of calling this reform period the enlightenment due to its specific anti-poverty nature – Cyril IV seemed to be particularly concerned with the notion of "modernization" above all else, which aligned with the Khedival vision for Egypt.[33] Cyril IV's waqf reforms did not direct church funding particularly to charitable causes outside of education, and thus it seemed that the middle and lower classes of Copts within the millet were particularly ignored in favor of presenting a more modernized elite. This certainly brings up a question of what Cyril IV's motivations were, but it seems like his reforms were for the sake of the state as much as they were for the community – or rather aligning Copts with state policy and vision. Certainly, it has been proven to Cyril IV that his

[31] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 21-26.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Paul Sedra, "Writing the History of the Modern Copts: From Victims and Symbols to Actors," *History Compass* 7, no. 3 (2009): 1049–63, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2009.00607.x.

millet's best interest, or at least his Church's best interest, was close to the Khedive, seeing how his people's fate transformed with Muhammed Ali.

HATT-I HUMAYUN

While Cyril IV was busy in his enlightenment period, an edict came from Istanbul that was incredibly influential in the lives of millets across the empire. In 1856, after the end of the Crimean war, Sultan Abdulmecid realized that his bid for European support would never materialize while maintaining millets as second-class citizens.[34] This was particularly relevant because missionaries had spread across the empires and could see firsthand the treatment of Christian millets. Thus, to appease them, he decided to put forward the Hatt-I Humayun, or the Humayun Decree, of 1856, which restructured millets from the North to the South. It had four important aspects: abolishing the jizya; allowing *dhimmis* to join the military; allowing the construction of Dhimmi houses of worship by direct order from the ruler; and the establishing of an administrative millet council per millet that combined laymen and clergy.[35] Never before had an Islamic Caliphate included such equalizing laws and rules, and indeed it was revolutionary for many, hailed as the epitome of religious tolerance in comparison to neighboring empires at the time.

Copts were not happy. First, despite the supposed independence of the Muhammed Ali dynasty from the Ottomans, this Hatt-i Humayun was still implemented in Egypt. Most

[34] Iakōvos D. Michaēlidēs, "Modernizing the Empire: The Ottoman Empire after the Tanzimat Period. Aspects of a Failed Experiment," in *Institution Building and Research Under Foreign Domination: Europe and the Black Sea Region (Early 19th-Early 20th Centuries)*, ed. Giōrgos Antōniou and Iakōvos D. Michaēlidēs (Epikentro, 2019).
[35] Ibid; Sharkey, "The Ottoman Tanzimat Edict of 1856 and Its Consequences for the Christians of Egypt: The Rashomon Effect in Coptic History."

historians reference Otto F Meinardus who claims that Copts had stopped paying jizya by 1815, and they had not had the need to go to the military.[36] This edict, then, forced them to be conscripted, and it is even reported that Cyril IV had to intervene on behalf of the Copts to prevent their conscription.[37]

The most important and positive aspect of the decree for the Copts, however, was the clause about creating a millet council. Different millet councils were created at different times. For example, as opposed to the Armenian millet leadership, which was sufficiently experienced to create a millet council almost immediately (often attributed to their administrative experience), Copts were in conversations about creating it for almost 20 years. The Millet Council then became one of the most important developments in the history of civil involvement within the COC since Muhammed Ali.

TURBULENCE IN AL MAJLIS AL MILLI

The Millet Council, also known in Arabic as *al Majlis al Milli*, was specifically supported by the elite and land-owning classes of the lay Coptic community, with the likes of Butros Ghali (an Egyptian Coptic elite whose close connections to the British would later secure him the title of Prime Minister of Egypt) at the forefront of creation efforts.[38] The council consisted of 12 lay members and 12 clerical members, men and women, and was to be chosen electorally every five years, and was supposed to help support the community by offering professional advice to

[36] Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, Reprint edition (Cairo New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2016).
[37] Sharkey, "The Ottoman Tanzimat Edict of 1856 and Its Consequences for the Christians of Egypt: The Rashomon Effect in Coptic History."
[38] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt,* 34.

the COC and the Coptic community on both lay and clerical matters. While initially there seemed to be unanimous support from both clergy and laymen on the creation of the council, by the time it was supposed to be governmentally ratified in 1874, Cyril V's position had started becoming a lot more anti-council.[39]

Cyril V is known as the patriarch with whom the first reform era came to end. He was seen as conservative and old-fashioned, stern on tradition and clerical matters.[40] The laymen of the council, on the other hand, were an elite, well-educated, rich class who were children of the reform-era of Abu Islah, and were keen on modernizing through any means necessary. They used different methods in order to circumvent COC restrictions posed by the antagonistic Cyril V and pose themselves as the forefront aides to the community's poor, securing a popular base of support. Cyril V saw them as a threatening presence to the church. Thus, in 1874, the same year the council was ratified, it was suspended by the patriarch.[41]

The damage had already been done, however. Many conditions came together to push the elite to force themselves on clerical and communal matters. First, at the moment this was happening, the Urabi Revolt was formulating,[42] and Ahmed Urabi's right-hand man, the voice of the revolution, was Abdullah al Nadeem, who called upon the laity in writing, Muslim and Christian, to help their poor.[43] Secondly, the Coptic elite started seeing action taken by Presbyterian (and later Anglican) missions in educating and helping the Christian poor. This might not have been particularly threatening to them, but certainly inspiring, considering that

[39] Samir Seikaly, "Coptic Communal Reform: 1860-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 3 (1970): 247–75.
[40] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt,* 104.
[41] Ibid.
[42] The Urabi revolt, led by its namesake, Ahmed Urabi, was revolt that attempted to fend off the British and their involvement in military affairs, securing the right of Egyptian officers at leadership positions within the military.
[43] Seikaly, "Coptic Communal Reform."

the millet population was quite poor all around Cairo and Egypt.[44] Third, Cyril V's meek efforts at aiding the poor in comparison to the seemingly large amount of revenue coming in from the Waqf was seen as horrible mismanagement of Church funds, and it certainly did not help that the community elites saw the patriarch and his clergy as poor and miseducated.[45]

The last condition that really solidified the breaking down of the monopoly the COC had over Coptic voices in Egypt was the British Occupation of Egypt after the 1882 battle of El Tell el Kebir.[46] Failure with the Urabi revolt broke down the last walls that kept the British at least nominally outside of Egypt, and with the entrance of the Anglican Church and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and their support for Coptic elites, Boutros Ghali and Basili Boutros laid the foundations for the Great Coptic Charitable Society in 1882.[47]

A FAVOURED MINORITY?

British occupation of Egypt in 1882 amplified and furthered many problems that the Urabi revolt sought to change, primarily the lack of high-ranking Egyptian officers in the army (at that time it was Turko-Circassians, yet this is an issue that persisted all the way until the revolution of 1952), and the increase of class divisions and poverty.[48] However, for the Coptic elite, this was a different story. Firstly, the elite had already been familiar with British interactions and involvement in the state – Boutros Ghali was a government official. Secondly, British Orientalist fascination with Coptic "ethnic purity" and closeness with the Ancient

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 104.
[46] William Roger Louis et al., eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[47] Ibid, 114.
[48] Louis et al., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*.

Egyptians worked in favor of the Copts – the CMS even published a few documents talking about Copts as upholders of Pharaonic heritage.[49] The Anglican mission and the CMS, being the two main British Christian organizations, were thus huge proponents of the elites who represented everything they could hope for – ancient faith and modern reformist ideology.

CMS and the Anglican Church thus were some of the first proponents of the creation of the Great Coptic Charitable Society (GCCS), a model for Coptic organizations in that period which once again started putting pressure on Cyril V for reform.[50] Support of those religious organizations was not just relevant religiously anymore, it was directly tied to the British forces in Egypt and the Khedivate. In 1882, empowered by their backing, Boutros Ghali and the rest of the laymen started reviving the Millet Council, which was still perfectly within their legal right. Cyril V was quite unhappy, and it could be attributed to his belief that the Coptic laymen had no business participating in clerical matters, or it could be attributed to his feelings of resistance to reform as a defense of tradition. At that point, his defense against reform could be constructed as an anti-Protestant action for ensuring that COC adherents do not convert outside of the national church. Some historians may try to place him as a nationalist, anti-British figure, but it seems more likely that this was more of a plea for the church itself. When Khedive Tawfiq was approached by the patriarch in hope of shutting down the council, he diplomatically denied the request, and tasked Boutros Ghali with finding a solution to mediate.[51]

[49] Mary Horbury, "THE BRITISH AND THE COPTS," in *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte* (UCL Press, 2003), 156.
[50] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 105.
[51] Seikaly, "Coptic Communal Reform."

New societies emerged with the prominence of the GCCS. In many ways, they were precursors to modern Coptic civil society organizations, where they attempted to further push lay involvement in the political aspects of the community. Three major ones started at the time – Jama'at al Tawfiq in 1891, which was groundbreaking due to the fact that its founders and members were middle-class non-elites that attempted specifically to help people who were not Cairenes; Friends of the Holy Bible Society in 1908, started by Basili Boutros which focused on education; and Al Mahaba, which was more secular.[52] All of these organizations, despite being different in nature, were supported by the GCCS, which also meant that they had tacit support of the British religious organizations too. Similarly, they all held the same political agenda as the Charitable Society, thus pressure on the Coptic Patriarch Cyril V to reform increased, now supported by more than just the elite. The reformists became more specific in their attacks – they set a clear goal - redistribution of the waqf wealth - and aimed their cannons at the church's fiscal mismanagement.

In 1892, Khedive Abbas II implored Ghali to resolve the Millet Council issue due to consistent outbursts from Cyril V.[53] Ghali sat down and made a compromise with the Patriarch that would have ended up in favor of the clergy, yet due to speediness on the Cyril V's part in publishing this before Ghali had a chance to properly convince and cultivate support from his peers, it was dismissed and rejected by the reformists, leading to demands for immediate re-elections of the council.[54] The patriarch obviously refused, and a very public media war ensued between the two factions, leading to the exile of Cyril V to the Monastery of al-Baramus briefly

[52] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 106-114.
[53] Seikaly, "Coptic Communal Reform," 255-256.
[54] Ibid.

before his return in February 1893.[55] Cyril V returned triumphantly to be given full autonomy over the fiscal matters of the church along with a newly formed committee of four.[56] The Church had won this round.

Here was a fight over the heart and soul of the Coptic community, specifically the lower- and middle-class communities, stuck between the elite laity and the Patriarchate's Holy Synod. The lay elites pushed for lesser power given to the Church, no doubt inspired somewhat by the Anglicans and Presbyterians of Egypt, veiled behind the distribution of waqf wealth among the Copts. The Church was trying to preserve tradition by ensuring that Church matters were purely out of laity hands, which to them seemed more and more set on "protestantizing" the Coptic Orthodox doctrines. The reformists saw this in Abu Islah's terms, as a fight between the ignorant, poor and conservative clergy, and the progressive, rich elites. This period of time truly encapsulates the height of Church-Laity tensions, and paves the way for a new wave of Church reforms, restructuring of Coptic identity in the nation-building and revolutionary era, and a whole new host of political and non-political societies. The historical overview of the COC from its conceptualization as a theological other to its presence as an identarian faction residing within a larger system of administration and hegemony showcases the position that Copts have had, and the very public affair of breaking that tight hold clergy, and specifically the patriarch, had on the community. In brief, it shows us the struggle of building space was never just a one-front war against the state, but an active two-front one that had to undermine an institution whose only task was often representation of Copts, perhaps not by choice initially, but

[55] Ibid, 258.
[56] Ibid.

definitely out of a desire for preservation. In the next chapter, I discuss the evolution of Coptic identity and new ways of considering Coptic presence in Egypt.

Chapter 2:What Got them Here Today?

Identity, Status and Pacts

The Coptic Orthodox Church was set in its split between those who were demanding reforms on the side of the laity, and those who vehemently opposed them. Yet the COC did not exist in a vacuum – the wider scene saw huge changes in the Egyptian political scene. Urabi's failure to secure independence in 1882 led the British right to the Khedival palace, and with Lord Cromer on his way out, the scene was set just right for nationalist politics to develop at the turn of the 20th century. In this chapter, I explore the conditions that led to the current status of Copts in relation to their presence as a people in the nation building project that arose out of an anti-colonial movement, and their current situation today caused by deals struck behind closed doors.

SETTING THE SCENE

Deneshwai and the Nationalist Boom

In the period between 1890-1910, there was a rapid increase in print media, with almost 400 new periodicals in Egypt, and out of which 25% were in colloquial Egyptian Arabic.[57] This was a particular shift in Egyptian politics, since it allowed for the participation of a new class of people who were previously excluded, specifically middle- and lower-class folks. It also allowed for satire and caricature work to rise, specifically the work of Ya'qub Sannu', or as he was more

[57] Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 67.

commonly known, Abu Nadara (the Glasses guy).[58] Thus, when the infamous Deneshwai incident occurred in Egypt, popular criticism of the British and the Prime Minister, Boutros Ghali, who sat on the special tribunal that found the Egyptian villagers guilty, was imminent. The story about the incident goes that in the summer heat of 1906, one British officer died from a heat stroke, yet four villagers were blamed and executed, and most of the village's men were sentenced to floggings.[59] This led to the consolidation of the nationalist movement in both formal and informal politics.

In 1907, the already popular nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel, known for his paper, Al Liwa', founded the National Party (NP), which was distinctly anti-British in goal and purpose. Two more parties arose at the time – Umma Party and the Constitutional Reform party.[60] The three new parties were mostly in touch with the people via their publications – Mustafa Kamel, before his early death in 1908, would come up with the 10 points of the democratic party. Non-party members were also active in the periodical scene – Abdallah el Nadim, voice of the Urabi revolution, worked from exile, and later openly, and was particularly influential on Kamel.[61]

Nominal Independence

The illness of Cromer forced Lord Kitchener to replace him, and with the latter in Egypt and the specter of the war in Europe looming over the British, he decided to initially grant Egypt

[58] Ibid, 66.
[59] M. W. Daly, "The British Occupation, 1882–1922," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Volume 2: Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M. W. Daly, vol. 2, The Cambridge History of Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241, https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521472111.011.
[60] Daly, "The British Occupation, 1882–1922", 245.
[61] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians,* 67.

the Organic Law of 1913 – one of the first pieces of British-approved legal code in Egypt.[62] Yet with the Ottoman empire joining the Central Powers in 1914, martial law was declared on Egypt, effectively reversing any "democratic gains" the country has had.[63] As the first World War ended 1918, Egyptians once more called for their independence, encouraged by Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points.[64] In fact, on the 13th of November, 1918, only two days after the end of the war, Sa'ad Zaghlul formed a delegation (a *wafd* in Arabic) and went to the High Commissioner Wingate asking for independence, which led to his exile soon afterwards.[65] Sa'ad Zaghlul was a revolutionary leader at the time, seen as the successor of Kamel. In 1919, the conditions brewed just right for a revolution due to multiple factors, including the exile of Zaghlul, the purchase of cotton at below market value and the fact that the British used Egypt as a WWI garrison. By 1922, the 1919 revolution and popular mobilization secured the declaration of Egypt as an independent constitutional monarchy. With the creation of the 1923 constitution, the newly created Wafd party became increasingly popular, winning 179 out of 211 seats.[66] While this independence was mostly nominal, it was hailed as the first independence of Egypt, and many elites were satisfied with the results

[62] Mary Ann Fay, "From Occupation to Nominal Independence: 1882-1923," in *Egypt: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz and Library of Congress, 5th ed, Area Handbook Series 550–43 (Washington, D.C: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress), 42–48.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid; Daly, "The British Occupation, 1882–1922", 248.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Mary Ann Fay, "The Era of Liberal Constitutionalism and Party Politics," in *Egypt: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz and Library of Congress, 5th ed, Area Handbook Series 550–43 (Washington, D.C: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991), 49–68.

FORMING THE COPTIC NATIONAL IDENTITY

Who's who?

As Egyptian-British relations were becoming more tense, the Millet Council had similarly been in a fight with the Patriarch and the Clergy, and while Cyril V seemed to be keeping them at bay, the influence of Boutros Ghali as prime minister meant that reforms were in place for the new format of the Millet Council. They had yet to be enacted, and due to his assassination at the hand of Wardani for the Deneshwai incident in 1910, they had yet to come into effect.[67] Thus, pushed by other Council members, the Khedivate re-established the Millet Council in 1912, codifying the reforms.[68] The Council now became 12 members instead of 24, with 8 laymen and 4 clergy members, and the church and school waqf was given to them, as opposed to the church-controlled, richer monastery waqf.[69] The Clergy-Millet dichotomy was falling apart at that point. No longer was Coptic public opinion stowed away, but it was well publicized in multiple publications, and more importantly, through the societies that controlled them. In many ways, the split formulating was breaking what would otherwise be a private affair of a millet occurring in the private space of their house of worship (the COC), allowing for their visibility in spaces that were sectioned off from them.

The early 1900s were the moment many charitable Coptic societies rose to the top. There were few specifically elite societies. The most important out of all of them, which set the blueprint for all other Coptic charity organizations at the time, was the Great Charitable Coptic

[67] Samir Seikaly, "Prime Minister and Assassin: Buṭrus Ghālī and Wardānī," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 1 (1977): 112–23.
[68] Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity*, Paperback edition (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 112.
[69] Ibid.

Society. This was the work of Ghali and had the support of the Anglican church and the CMS, especially in their reform movement.[70] Soon after, Friends of the Holy Bible Society was created in 1908 by Basili Boutros, one of Ghali's friends and his co-member of the Millet Council, which was mostly focused on an educational outcome for the community.[71] There was similarly al Mahabah society in 1902, and it was supported directly by the GCCS, opening its first girl's school in 1908.[72]

Similarly, many Coptic non-elite societies were coming to the forefront, bringing forth the voices of a different class of professional, middle-class folks that did not directly relate to the Coptic elites. This opened a new range of Coptic involvement in different topics and interests, including the nationalist movement that would soon come afterwards. Not all of them were reformists or even supporters of the Millet Council. Those included Jama'et el Tawfiq, which we had already mentioned in chapter one. They were funded, too, by the GCCS, yet later took on a nationalist tone, and by 1919 had placed the nationalist struggle as its main goal.[73] One of the most important lay groups, however, was the Sunday School Movement (SSM), initiated by Habib Guirguis, a deacon in the Coptic Orthodox Church and a journalist who had been publishing al Karma since 1904.[74] Guirguis based the movement on the US and GB based movements in 1918, but it was specifically focused on the creation of a Coptic identity

[70] Ibid, 104.
[71] Ibid, 106-7
[72] Ibid, 112.
[73] Ibid, 116
[74] Mereet Hany Adly, "Internal Reformation Within the Contemporary Coptic Imagined Community: The Sunday School Movement and Mechanisms of Minority Survival," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 18, no. 2–3 (July 3, 2019): 75–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2019.1605578.

that differentiated the upcoming Coptic youth as a specific, vertical ethnie.[75] The SSM was led by middle-class graduates of Fouad University (now Cairo University), and believed in a reform that stemmed from the tradition of the church led by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch. This would later become the main ideology of Nazir Gayed Rofa'il, who would become the 117th Patriarch of Alexandria.[76] In 1947, they would create their own publication, revealing a lot more about their character and ideology.

Finally, there were many non-Coptic societies and groups that formed that would later become essential in the Coptic story and the formation of the national identity. The Wafd party was one of the political groups (and later parties) with the most national and Coptic support, especially after the death of Kamel and the growing irrelevance of the National Party he founded. The Wafd, however, was its spiritual successor, being distinctly pro-British (at least until 1936) with many Coptic thinkers like Tawfiq Doss and Makram Ebeid as its biggest supporters until the late 1930s.[77] On the other hand, however, there was the Society of Young Egypt (Misr al Fatah), which was established in 1933, a key moment when al Wafd was beginning to lose steam. Two 22 year old students of Fouad University created the group, launching into fame specifically after the creation of the Piastre Plan.[78] They would later become an organized party in 1936, and would create the first organized paramilitary group in Egypt under the name Green shirts, inspired by Hitler's Brown Shirts, and would indeed later

[75] Adly relies on A.D. Smith's definition of a vertical ethnie, which is "as a population known by group members and outsiders to have the following characteristics: an identifiable designation, a myth of common ancestry, common memories, traditions, culture and territory and a sense of solidarity"; Ibid, 3.
[76] S. S. Hasan, "The Warring Founding Fathers," in *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality*, 1st edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85–99.
[77] Fay, "The Era of Liberal Constitutionalism and Party Politics."
[78] Ahmed Abdalla, "Student Political Activism," in *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt, 1923-1973* (American Univ in Cairo Press, 2008), 37–61.

have two different paramilitary groups modeled after them.[79] The party became specifically more Islamic in nature, and they're also reported to have specifically fascist tendencies.[80] They would be known for forming an alliance with the last key player I will be mentioning – the Muslim Brotherhood, established in 1928 in Ismailia. Its founder, Hasan el Banna, was unsatisfied with present nationalist efforts, and thus created the group, and saw that the way forward would be the establishment of a new Islamic Caliphate.[81] They did have initial good interactions with some Coptic thinkers at the time, especially with Tawfik Doss, Akhnoukh Labib Akhnoukh and Karim Thabet serving as the Coptic representation on their High Advisory Council.[82] The relationship would start souring around the assassination of Hassan el Banna, where the Brotherhood reportedly were involved in the burning of a church in 1949.[83]

The Cross and the Crescent

Conceptions of national identity were essential in the pre-revolutionary era. Egyptians themselves, as we saw in the previous sections, were particularly divided on the nature of their nationalist ideologies, their self-conceptualization — were they Islamic in nature? Socialist? Was their nationalism rooted in primordiality? Copts tried to negotiate an identity amidst the conflicting definitions of what made an Egyptian, and more specifically, how they belonged to the notion of Egyptian.

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[79] Abdalla.
[80] James P. Jankowski, "The Ideas of Young Egypt in the 1930s," in *Egypt's Young Rebels: "Young Egypt," 1933-1952* (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), 44–78.
[81] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "The Brotherhood's Early Years," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2013), 20–45.
[82] Mariz Tadros, "The Copts and the Brothers from El Banna to Bad'i," in *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt: Democracy Defined or Confined?*, Durham Modern Middle East and Islamic World Series 25 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012), 83–97.
[83] Ibid.

The era of Mustafa Kamel's nationalism in 1908 ushered a beginning of a more unified national front with the introduction of the National Party, but two events really solidified the persistence of seeing Copts as the other no matter the ideological position they took. First was the Deneshwai incident and the subsequent special tribunal that was headed by Boutros Ghali, Egypt's Prime Minister and most infamous Copt. The incident happened in 1906, but Ghali was assassinated in 1910 by the bullets of Nassif al Wardani, and while the assassination was not political in nature as was claimed by nationalists, both Muslims and Copts interpreted it religiously -- Muslims were singing "*Wardani 'atal el nosrani*", or "Wardani killed the Nazarene" (a name used to other Christians in the SWANA region).[84] Similarly, Copts felt the tensions building up. Copts felt othered, and those who wanted to be active within the nationalist movement must have had to put aside their communal feelings of exclusion. Indeed, Makram Ebeid is recognized as having said that he was a Muslim by country, and a Christian by religion, recognizing the hegemony of Islam, and his role as a Copt in this nationalist process.[85] Per Berry and Kim's conceptualization of minority acculturation, this is a prime example of attempted assimilation.[86]

The second incident asserted a different understanding of the Coptic status based on the otherness, namely what could be considered separation.[87] This was the lay-led 1911 Coptic Conference (which was opposed by the COC clergy) that asserted the promotion of Coptic

[84] B. L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics: 1918-1952* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 1986), 13.
[85] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 79.
[86] John W. Berry and Uichol Kim, "Acculturation and Mental Health," in *Health and Cross-Cultural Psychology: Toward Applications*, ed. P. R. Dasen, John W. Berry, and N. Sartorius, Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology Series, v. 10 (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 207–36.
[87] Ibid.

interests separately as an integral part of the nationalist movement – a form of Coptic nationalism, perhaps. Among the demands were the assertion of Sunday, the Christian sabbath, as a national day-off, and increase of public funds for different Coptic projects, including the many schools that were being created by the Coptic charitable societies.[88] The differences between the two understandings of Coptic existence were exacerbated in the upcoming few years, with different ideologies asserting themselves.

Indigeneity, Minority Status, and Visibility

Debates on the national identity of Copts occurred in the wider context of Egyptian nationalism, and thus often mirrored and interacted with the wider public ideologies and debates. One such ideology was that of Pharaonism, which was dedicated to looking at Egyptian-specific markers (instead of Islamic or Arab) for nationalist mobilization. This idea arose among European interest in Ancient Egypt; Egyptian school curricula started including the topic as early as 1874, with later college courses occurring in the early 20th century.[89] It became much more integrated in the nationalist debate by the early 1920s with the discovery of the Tutankhamun tomb, and kept alive in the minds and codices of different parties and societies, from el Wafd to Misr al Fatah, and was largely perpetrated by Taha Hussein.[90] Copts had a head start on this specific concept in relation to themselves – in early interactions with the British, specifically the CMS, they were hailed as direct descendants of Ancient Egyptians.[91] Indigeneity was key to this ideology – similar to how Copts in the Middle Ages referenced themselves as

[88] Saba Mahmood, "To Be or Not To Be A Minority?," in *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 66–107.
[89] Michael Wood, "The Use of the Pharaonic Past in Modern Egyptian Nationalism," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 35 (1998): 179–96, https://doi.org/10.2307/40000469.
[90] Taha Hussein was one of Egypt's leading literary minds, most famous for his novel *Al Ayyam;* Ibid.
[91] Horbury, "THE BRITISH AND THE COPTS."

indigenous inhabitants of Egypt in the face of the Arab conquests and the different caliphates, Copts at the turn of the 20th century certainly did so too, seeing that their connection to the past and the integration and continuation of their history was a specific strong point in their arsenal. Certainly, Guirguis's Sunday School Movement referred to the indigenous nature and this historical continuity in his Sunday School Movement, and he even published in his magazine, al Karma, different articles that supported this particular thought process, linking the Coptic calendar to the Ancient Egyptian calendar.[92] Even earlier, Iqladiyus Yuhanna Labib al Miri published Ain Shams magazine for the first time on the day of Nayroz, or Coptic New Year (11th of September), which is seen as the prototype blueprint of Coptic nationalism in the modern state.[93] Iqladiyus Labib promoted the use of Coptic, linked the Christian trinity to the Egyptian trinity of Isis, Osiris and Horus, and pushed for the use of Coptic names only (even excluding Greek names, which had been tradition in naming even Coptic patriarchs).[94] This general trend is generally referred to as "Coptism".

Coptism meant separation, an admission of the "minoritization" of Copts in Egypt, which drew a minor schism with the drafting of the 1923 constitution. Article four was a proposal supported by the British that charted Copts, among Bedouins and Jews in Egypt, as a minority, and guaranteed their separate rights and their control over their own affairs in minority, or millet, councils.[95] Being a fraught term and seen within the context of the British tactic of

[92] Adly, "Internal Reformation Within the Contemporary Coptic Imagined Community"; Gubran Ne'mat Allah, "A Brief Look in the History of the Copts," *Al Karmah*, November 1, 1904.
[93] Hiroko Miyokawa, "The Revival of the Coptic Language and the FormatIon of Coptic Ethnoreligious IdentIty In Modern Egypt," in *Copts in Context: Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity*, ed. Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017).
[94] Ibid.
[95] Mahmood, "To Be or Not To Be A Minority?"

"divide and rule", there was instant disagreement that drew attention not just from Copts, but also from Muslim nationalist leaders. Coptic leader Tawfik Doss supported the article yet painted the debate with a brush that specifically presented the issue of minority rights as an anti-colonial move, where issues are solved without external validation. Some nationalist leaders like Saad Zaghloul and Taha Hussein, as well as Coptic thinkers Makram Ebeid and William Weesa all opposed this argument, which paints a stark juxtapositional image considering Article 149 of the same constitution, which asserted that Islam is the state religion.[96]

It is important to pause and discuss how Egyptian identity has been and continues to be inherently Islamic in legal and social nature, and how images of national unity – the cross and the crescent – intersect it. While Coptism as an ideology might be much weaker now, there is a tacit unspoken understanding and orally-transferred communal knowledge perpetrated in churches and households of the indigenous nature of Copts.[97] This is often associated with the current material conditions of the Copts, who are aware of – at least through existing as Christians in a Muslim majority country – of their status as inherently marginalized and othered. Vivian Ibrahim, however, argues that Copts, in their participation in the 1919 revolt and the national project moving forward as integral participants in the nation-state have become an invisible minority that had to exist under the label of national majority – their needs as Copts were to become secondary to their duties as Egyptians.[98] By defining minorities as Saba

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid, 100.
[98] Vivian Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent: Plural Identities and the Copts in Contemporary Egypt," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 14 (November 14, 2015): 2584–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1061138.

Mahmood initially does in her book *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, the majority then understands any minority-specific rights or advocacy as inherent deviation from the national unity image, which subsequently invites internal and imperialist discord into national affairs – something that has been referred to as *fitna* for shorthand.[99] *Fitna*, or religious strife, often is weaponized against religious minorities and specifically Copts in Egypt whenever any form of Coptic advocacy has arisen. Thus, Coptic visibility has always been a double-edged sword.

Coptic visibility and contribution in the 20th century national project was always interestingly framed, often coupled with other non-Coptic (and specifically Muslim) nationalists to specifically portray national unity – Copts were rarely allowed to take center stage due to the implications that this might have. While Copts in the early days of the Wafd party were the largest contributors in its highest ranks, the leader of the party Saad Zaghlul and the Coptic members themselves were quite concerned with that image, to the extent that the Wafd official publication released multiple different articles asserting the racial homogeneity and sameness of Copts and Muslims.[100] Some of the most popular Copts of the era are also recognized solely for their contribution to the national project – Bishop Sergious is famed for being the first Copt to ever speak at the minaret of al Azhar in 1919.[101] Similarly, Esther Fanous is best known for her aid in creating the Egyptian Feminist Union under the aegis of Huda Sha'rawi.[102]

[99] Mahmood, "To Be or Not To Be A Minority?"
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent."
[102] Adel F. Sadek, "Christianity in Asyut in Modern History," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Middle Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra and Hany Takla (Oxford University Press, 2015), 99–113.

Political Indolence in the Last Days

Coptic participation, however publicly obscure it already was, started to wane within the last days of the kingdom of Egypt. The appointment of Patriarch Yu'anas XIX, who was close aid of Cyril V, amid rumors of the Palace's intervention in the Papal elections caused whatever little faith the Coptic community had in the clergy to dissipate. While this was happening in 1928, the Millet Council was gaining wider popularity as its demographic shifted away from landowners to professional middle class laymen.[103] This then became the main form of political participation for Copts as the Wafd party split into two camps, Coptic parliamentarian representation decreased, and the rise of Misr al Fatah and the Muslim Brotherhood as prominent political actors, where the former became an official party in 1936, and the latter joined parliamentary elections in 1942.[104] Thus, when the Millet Council failed to hold elections in 1949 and was effectively suspended for a year and subsequently weakened, Coptic participation took a strong hit.

REVOLUTION AND CONSOLIDATION

Anticipating Revolution

The decline of the Wafd was sure but slow – despite their heavy presence among the ranks of Egypt's many changing Prime Ministers, there were many internal disputes and pressures brought on by external ones due to their efficiency. The main problem in 1936 was their failure to secure the proper terms of independence for Egypt, as the British maintained

[103] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt,* 130-132.
[104] Weston Bland, "Copts, the State and the 1949–1950 al-Majlis al-Millī Electoral Crisis: Articulating Community in a Time of Anxiety," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 30, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 303–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2019.1619978.

10,000 people in the Suez and controlled Sudan, and indeed were seen as too weak.[105] Similarly, in 1944, they were seen as collaborators, as they gave British more control to aid in their repulsion of Nazi Germany's attack on Egypt, orchestrated by Rommel.[106]

After the end of the second World War, Egyptians were once more upset since they have yet to gain independence, especially after participating heavily in the war efforts. Furthermore, with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Egyptian military's loss in the Arab Israeli war lead to huge contempt towards the British and Farouk, who both were held responsible for the loss.[107] Similar to Urabi's movement, a new movement called the Free Officers movement which constituted of Egyptian military personnel who were deeply unhappy with the rule of the British politically and militarily, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser.[108] The Free Officers plans for revolt would solidify on the 25th of January, 1952, when the British launched an attack on the police barracks of Ismailiyah, leading to the death of 50 officers, and on July 23rd, anticipating an attack from the King, the Free Officers began their popularly backed coup d'état, and by the 26th, King Farouk abdicated.[109]

Enter Nasser

The revolution of 1952 transformed Egypt completely. The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) was created with nine members, three of whom were to become Egyptian presidents – Naguib, Nasser and Sadat. Despite Nasser having been elected the head of the

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Hazem Kandil, "Prelude," in *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012), 7–14.
[108] Ibid; Fay, "The Era of Liberal Constitutionalism and Party Politics."
[109] Ibid.

Free Officers in 1950, the RCC decided to elect Mohamed Naguib as president of Egypt.[110] Naguib was popular with the old guard and within the army, yet it would not be long before Nasser would see him more of a nuisance than he was worth – his vision for a democratic Egypt contradicted that of Nasser's who believed the country was not ready for a democracy yet.[111] Nasser would subsequently then lay the first stone of creating the Egyptian security apparatus in Modern Egypt in order to have a tight control of the Egyptian public sphere, as well as Naguib's sympathizers within and outside of the army.[112] In 1953, all political parties were dissolved and banned, and despite never fully formally entering the Egyptian political sphere, the Brotherhood was banned too due to lack of cooperation and an alleged assassination attempt on Nasser's life.[113] Finally, in 1954, Naguib was deposed by the RCC and Nasser took over as president.

Trouble in the Suez

Building the Aswan High Dam was essential for Nasser's legacy as the revived Mohamed Ali, father of Modern Egypt – it would secure financial independence, control the flooding of the Nile, and would produce electricity for Egypt. Thus, when John Foster Dulles used his influence to declare Egypt bankrupt and prevent the previously agreed upon World Bank and US loans to finance it as a result of the 1955 Czechoslovakian-Egyptian arms deal, a chain of events starting with Nasser's immediate action to plan for ways to fund it started a chain of events that would result in a tripartite aggression from the British, French and Israelis, known

[110] Fay, "The Era of Liberal Constitutionalism and Party Politics."
[111] Hazem Kandil, "The Dark Side of Militarism," in *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012), 15–42.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Fay, "The Era of Liberal Constitutionalism and Party Politics."

today as the Suez Crisis.[114] Nasser was fighting a hopeless war on three fronts.[115] Thus, he called on the US and the USSR, who could not stand a reversion back to the imperialist systems of yesterday, and needed to consolidate their power. By the first week of November, the three aggressors withdrew.[116] With that, British presence in Egypt was over.

Coptic Woes

Changes in the 1949-1956 area where particularly difficult for Copts as they dealt with the wider national atmosphere, while also struggling with their presence as the other. Firstly, Patriarch Yusab II, who was elected after Macarius died, was locked once more in fights with the re-elected Millet Council of 1950, fighting specifically about the everlasting issue of the Waqf. The wider Coptic community was more vocal in independent and informal politics and were unsatisfied with both of their positions. One of the main stars of the scene at the time was the Sunday School Movement, and its publication, the Sunday School Magazine, under the editorial hand of Nazir Gayed Rofa'il. In December of 1950, the magazine's editorial board ran a piece titled "O People, Wake Up", addressing the people and telling them to take action in relation to the failing Millet Council and the corrupt Church.[117]

Disillusionment with elite Church politics was increasing, which made the transition in 1952 much more palatable for the Coptic community. Indeed, three articles published in SSM right after the revolution give us an idea of the Coptic public's position. The first talked about excitement for the abolition of elite titles like Bek and Pasha, and how those titles have

[114] Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal, "Code Word de Lesseps," in *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (New York: Arbor House, 1987), 119–30.
[115] Kandil, "The Dark Side of Militarism."
[116] Ibid.
[117] SSM Editorial Board, "O People, Wake Up," *Sunday School Magazine*, December 1950.

specifically hindered communal politics by empowering the clergy and the Millet council.[118] The other two adopted language from the 1952 revolution, specifically the language of purification, or *tathir*. Sunday School Magazine published the articles in the September 1952 issue, calling for the purification of the corrupt church, addressing Patriarch Yusab II directly and calling him and his personal assistant out for simony.[119] It is important to note that this was not a one way street – Coptic Bishop Boutros Guirguis and Ghitas Beshara released an article for Nayrouz in 1952 for their magazine, al Iman, that briefly mentioned tathir in a dismissive note, saying that that the true purification is that of the heart, in an attempt to coopt the language.[120]

Taken

The tathir movement claimed its first (and last) victim, Malak, the personal assistant of Patriarch Yusab II, but it soon waned, devolving once more into a frustrated community between a warring clergy and council. The tensions were particularly strained since in the eyes of the community, the only political participation post 1953 was indeed represented in these two inefficient institutions – after Nasser ended the rule of al A'yan (elites and landowners), and dissolved political parties, there were no more Copts in formalized political processes apart from the one selected to be the token Copt in Nasser's government.[121]

Frustrations reached their peak in 1954, when a group called the Coptic Nation, or Jamaet al Ummah al Qibtiyah, kidnapped Patriarch Yusab II.[122] While it only lasted a day and the

[118] Dr. H, "The King That Abdicated His Throne," *Sunday School Magazine*, September 1952.
[119] SSM Editorial Board, "Message to Pope Yusab II," *Sunday School Magazine*, September 1952; Nazir Gayed, "What Do Those in the Church Do?," *Sunday School Magazine*, September 1952.
[120] Ghitas Beshara, "A Year Passed and a Year Came," *Al Iman*, September 1952.
[121] Mahmood, "To Be or Not To Be A Minority?"
[122] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt,* 168.

group was eventually apprehended, it was the materialization of multiple different frustrations occurring at the time. Firstly, it was a commentary on the general mistrust in the ecclesiastical order and in the Patriarch specifically. Secondly, while debates about the nature of the group are still discussed today, many believe it arose as a foil of the Muslim Brotherhood due to its slogan, modus operandi, and structure, as a way to counteract the rise of Islamist groups in Egypt.[123] Vivan Ibrahim, on the other hand, raises questions about the genuine nature of the group, suggesting it could have been a government plan, considering the highly orchestrated nature of the story, and the immediate release of the perpetrators.[124]

Why would the government orchestrate this play? It seems that for the first time, many clergy surrounding Yusab II agreed with the Millet Council on the necessity of isolating him. Thus, this attack was a prelude to his exile in 1955 to a monastery in Assiut until his death in 1956.[125] Moreover, Nasser was looking to consolidate his power, and while he had control over student, communist, and socialist groups in Egypt, he did not fully have the control over the Coptic church yet. Similarly, the attack in 1954 could have been a prelude to weaken the council further by plunging them into fights over leadership with the clergy, especially that he also axed communal courts in 1955 – a decision that left the council with very little power.[126] He further assured his dominance with two acts, where in 1957 he issued a presidential decree deciding on

[123] Mahmood, "To Be or Not To Be A Minority?"; Samuel Tadros, *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity*, 1st edition (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2013).
[124] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 171.
[125] Ibid, 174.
[126] Adly, "Internal Reformation Within the Contemporary Coptic Imagined Community."

the new form of Patriarchal Elections, pulling the vote from the council, and in 1960 he consolidated control of the Waqf under the government.[127]

THE PRESIDENT-PATRIARCH PACT

Coptic Christian avenues of political participation shrunk greatly, and thus the population would mostly fall under the aegis of the Coptic Orthodox Church and its clergy. Nasser here was in a perfect position to further his control over Copts, and all he needed was the right person in the patriarch's seat. Pope Cyril VI, or Pope Kyrollos, came to be an ideal person for the role, and indeed until his arrival, no patriarch had the intense sense of charisma or level of cult of personality that he would have, rivaled only by his successor Shenouda III.

Cyril VI

Cyril VI's character and circumstances of his ascension help us contextualize the events that would come next. Iris Habeeb el Masri, the Egyptian Coptic historian of the 20th century talks about the monk Mina and his dedication to prayer as a young man, and later for his healing powers in the period before his papacy.[128] Samuel Robinson called him a radical ascetic who brought his lifestyle openly to the patriarchy with his election, something that was not familiar whatsoever at the time.[129] Cyril VI holds a position unlike any other in the Coptic community. However, Cyril VI was not particularly a reformist – him bringing in his ascetic lifestyle with him to the patriarchy meant that he often saw the church solely as a spiritual

[127] Ibid; Mariz Tadros, "The Patriarch-President Pact and the People in Between," in *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 61–81.
[128] Iris Habeeb el Masri, *From the Arab Conquest to the Present Time*, The Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt (California: The Middle East Council of Churches, 1978), 434-437.
[129] Samuel Robinson, "Matta El-Meskeen," in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern*, ed. Ståle Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), 415–26.

institution and was often distracted from his patriarchal duties.[130] Cyril's limited reforms were mostly spiritual and educational in nature – he worked on the reviving Coptic heritage and ending fears of simony.[131] His asceticism often put him at odds with bishops who grew up in the SSM movement.

The Nasserist-Cyrillic Friendship

Political life in Egypt was quite rife with tension in the 1960s, yet for Egypt's Copts, there was a breath of fresh air that came with Nasser's anti-Islamist policies.[132] Different factors were occurring at the same time that would define the circumstances surrounding Cyril VI. Firstly, many Copts who grew up educated in the reformist era found themselves flocking to become priests or monks, a phenomenon that was called a "migration to the church", which resulted in the production of many future church leaders.[133] This created a strongly opinionated clergy that came to exist in Cyril VI's time. Secondly, one of the legacies of the Ottoman Empire that still survived in Egypt was the 1856 Hatt-I Humayun, especially when it came to its laws regarding construction of places of worship. This was reinforced in 1934 by Minister of the Interior El Ezaby Pasha, who was in an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, where he released the Ten Conditions for building new houses of worship.[134] This made it impossible to build churches without securing the right permits and permissions from the state – a tedious process thar would often take months and years.

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[130] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt,* 176.
[131] Ibid, 178.
[132] Kandil, "The Dark Side of Militarism."
[133] Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak*, Third Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
[134] Alaa Al-Din Arafat, "Church-State Relations:Copts between Citizenship, Coptism and Millet System," *JOURNAL OF POWER, POLITICS & GOVERNANCE* 7, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.15640/jppg.v7n1a1.

Cyril VI thus needed something from Nasser, and Nasser would benefit from Cyril VI's friendship in keeping his community in check. Cyril would go ahead and use his close friendship to Nasser to bypass the Ezaby conditions, and in fact Nasser financially supported the building of St Mark's Cathedral in el Abbasiya, Cairo.[135] Further, the already weakened Millet Council was starting to cause Cyril VI trouble, and it would have been against Nasser and the RCC's interests to have a divided Coptic community that existed politically outside the control of the Pope. Thus, with support from Nasser, Cyril VI froze the council in the early 60s, and quieted down clerical dissent.[136] In exchange, the pope ensured Coptic support for Nasser – when Nasser resigned in 1967 at the heels of the Naksa, Cyril paid him a visit informing him that the entire Coptic community had his back.[137]

This transactional relationship between Nasser and the pope would then come to be solidified as what Mariz Tadros (2013) calls the President-Patriarch act, recreating the millet council of the Ottoman empire. In exchange for the Pope controlling the Coptic community and being its sole representative, the state would be guaranteed the tacit support of the Copts, or at least the Coptic representative and main interlocutor.

The Fighting Monk

Nazir Gayed Rofa'il was on route to become one of the most important figures in the Coptic church — he was one of the products of Habib Guirguis's Sunday School Movement in 1918, and was there with the beginning of the 1947 publication of the Sunday School Magazine. He had already been involved in working with different Coptic societies in the 1940s, and in the

[135] Tadros, "The Patriarch-President Pact and the People in Between."
[136] Bland, "Copts, the State and the 1949–1950 al-Majlis al-Millī Electoral Crisis."
[137] Tadros, "The Patriarch-President Pact and the People in Between."

1950s he chose monastic life among with other prominent figures such as Youssef Iskandar (later Matthew the Poor) and Saad Aziz (later Bishop Samuel).[138] Gayed's tenure as managing editor in the Sunday School Magazine saw many controversial and blunt articles that focused on church reform through tradition revival – or revivalism. He advocated for this ideology as Nazir Gayed Rofa'il, as Father Antonious al Suryani, and as Bishop Shenouda under Cyril VI.[139] He chose the last name for himself because that was the name of a militant Coptic leader in ancient times, and his work was often fiery and confrontational, getting into disputes with the Patriarch over educational reforms and lay popular democratic participation in church matters, specifically in the Patriarchal elections. In 1971, the death of Cyril VI set the stage up for Bishop Shenouda to take the patriarchy.

The Sadat Years

Bishop Samuel and Bishop Shenouda were both candidates for the upcoming Papal elections, and Shenouda was by far younger and more charismatic. More importantly, he had the support of Mamduh Salem, Egypt's Interior Minister, who vouched for him in a private meeting with Anwar el Sadat, Egypt's president who succeeded Nasser, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, Nasser's advisor and journalist friend and Egypt's Deputy Prime Minister, Abdel Salam el Zayyat.[140] Sadat wanted to choose the charismatic young leader, and initially they seemed like they would get along – when the president met the freshly appointed Patriarch, he was offered

[138] S. S. Hasan, "Roots and Branches," in *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality*, 1st edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 71–84.
[139] Hasan, "The Warring Founding Fathers."
[140] Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, "The Militant Monk," in *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*, First Edition (London: Wm Collins & Sons & Co, 1982), 161–65.

an increase of up to 50 churches a year, 25 more than Nasser and Cyril VI ever agreed upon.[141] Sadat later would come to regret this decision, as Pope Shenouda the III, once Nazir Gayed Rofa'il, was a Coptic activist at heart.

It was only a matter of time that something soured the relationship between the fiery pope and the man of peace. Three different incidents – the Khanka burning, the Apostasy law of 1977, and Shenouda's 1977 trip to the US – were particularly influential in that tension that would come and be particularly transformative in the future of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

First, the Khanka burning of November 1972 was the first time that Shenouda III truly got to present the intensity of his character, proving to be a thorn in the side of the government for years to come. On the 6th of November, a church under construction around a building where the Holy Bible Society was headquartered in a city on the edge of Cairo, al Khanka, was burnt down and destroyed.[142] At that time, and up until now, due to the Ezaby laws we had already mentioned, Copts often didn't have permits for churches, and thus met in buildings that have not been officially consecrated and performed liturgies – one of the largest causes of sectarian violence.[143] The destruction claimed multiple Coptic shops and houses, too. On the 12th of November, almost a week later and in open defiance to the president, Shenouda III sent priests to go and perform liturgy on the ruins of the church, a symbolic gesture that drew angry crowds but thankfully no tensions.[144] Sadat was unhappy due to these new developments, yet Shenouda's actions were more importantly a reflection on the rising scene of Islamist politics

[141] Ibid.
[142] "NEW CHURCH STRIFE REPORTED IN EGYPT," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1972, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/11/15/archives/new-church-strife-reported-in-egypt.html.
[143] Mariz Tadros, "Overview of Sectarian Incidents (2008-2011)," in *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 45–60.
[144] Haykal, "The Militant Monk."

that surrounded the former. This is mostly due to the fact that Sadat could not rely on Nasser's support base, and so in constructing a new image for himself as the pious president, Sadat actively supported different Islamist groups, the biggest of which was the Muslim Brotherhood.[145] This was greatly unsettling to Copts, and to Shenouda specifically – he had been an active political leader in 1949 when the brotherhood was accused of burning a church, and in 1952 when they were involved in the killing of Copts in the Suez.[146]

The Apostasy Law project of 1977 that was proposed by al-Azhar and backed by the president was yet another attempt that Sadat made to secure his image as a pious Muslim, especially ahead of his 1978 trip to Jerusalem. The law proposed to punish any form of apostasy, and the vague nature of the text would have allowed for different attacks on Copts, in addition to deeming any form of religious conversion to Christianity illegal.[147] Shenouda III responded by calling a conference on the 17th of January, 1977 in Alexandria in order to pray on and release a church statement on the bill, which once more was in open defiance of the president.[148] Shenouda also made a public call for all Copts to fast for three days. It did not help

[145] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 2018), https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400890071/html.

[146] Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES, "SUEZ MOB MURDERS COPTIC CHURCHMAN; Body Dragged Through Streets in First Religious Flare-Up of Anglo-Egyptian Strife," *The New York Times*, January 6, 1952, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1952/01/06/archives/suez-mob-murders-coptic-churchman-body-dragged-through-streets-in.html.

[147] Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "The Copts of Egypt (Vol 95)" (Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, 1996).

[148] Sa'id el Shahat, " ذات يوم 17 يناير 1977.. أخطر مؤتمر مسيحى فى الإسكندرية يرفض دعوة السادات لـ«قانون الردة», January 17, 2017, https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/1/17/ذات-يوم-17-يناير-1977-أخطر-مؤتمر-مسيحى-فى-الإسكندرية/3058941." اليوم السابع

that this came right before the 18th and 19th of January Food Riots of 1977 in Cairo, which was brought on by Sadat's own infitah policies causing unemployment and increased food prices.[149]

Finally, Shenouda III's involvement in Egyptian international affairs was not welcomed by Sadat. This manifested in two main ways exemplified in his April 1977 trip to the United States. Firstly, the pope was welcomed by about 500 people of the Coptic diaspora that he had been fostering since his ascension to the chair, and the diaspora had been starting to rise as a new political factor employing their shared Christianity with the West to enact pressure on Sadat.[150] One such organization was Shawky Karas's American Coptic Association, which was unhappy with the lack of state protection for churches.[151] Shenouda's meeting with Carter was also unsatisfactory for the sitting president, since Shenouda condemned Israel, effectively undermining the Camp David Accords of the upcoming year – in fact, the pope would double down and refuse any naturalization with the Israeli government, and banning by Papal Decree Coptic pilgrimage to al Quds.[152] Shenouda was well-liked by Carter, and as he was being greeted out of their meeting, the latter addressed him as leader of 7 million Copts, a number that was 3 times as much as the state official 2 million.[153]

[149] "THOUSANDS IN EGYPT RIOT OVER PRICE RISE," *The New York Times*, January 19, 1977, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1977/01/19/archives/thousands-in-egypt-riot-over-price-rise-students-and-workers.html.

[150] ALFONSO A. NARVAEZ, "Followers Greet The Coptic Pope On U.S. Arrival," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1977.

[151] Paul Sedra, "Activism in the Coptic Diaspora: A Brief Introduction," *Jadaliyya - جدلية*, September 13, 2012, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27046.

[152] Al Jazeera Staff, "First Visit by Coptic Pope since 1967," *Al Jazeera*, November 26, 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/26/egyptian-coptic-pope-pays-historic-visit-to-jerusalem.

[153] Haykal, "The Militant Monk."

Securing a Replacement

Sadat's distaste and apparent disagreements with Shenouda III pushed him to move in different ways to undermine the pope. As early as 1972, Sadat was pushing for the re-institution of the Millet Council in order to find another avenue for church-state relations, replacing the pope as mediator. Sunday School Magazine wrote in late 1972 dismissing the idea and advocating for at least replacing the name with Church Councils instead.[154] In 1973, the council would eventually come back, yet Pope Shenouda III had managed to integrate it within the church ranks, and the composition would be different enough from what Sadat had hoped, and the members would be supportive of the Pope.[155]

Frustrated, Sadat turned to personal relationships he had with opposition in the clergy, and that mainly was present in Abbott Matta al Miskin, who had an initially close connection to Shenouda, yet they fell out much later due to theological reasons.[156] Matta was, as opposed to Shenouda, quite supportive of the president, and outwardly spoke in favor of el Sadat's visit to al Quds. Sadat also attempted to connect with different people, including Bishop Samuel, Shenouda's rival from the patriarchal elections. Thus, on the third of September, 1981, having secured more than one connection with people who could step in to take over Shenouda's position, Sadat acted and arrested opposition in Egypt – this included everyone from Nawal el Saadawi, famed Egyptian feminist, to Mohamed Hassanein Heikal.[157] He also arrested 170 bishops, yet did not move against the pope until the 5th of September, where he was deposed

[154] SSM Editorial Board, "Millet Council... Why?," December 1972.
[155] S. S. Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality*, 1st edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133.
[156] Robinson, "Matta El-Meskeen."
[157] Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, "3 September," in *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*, First Edition (London: Wm Collins & Sons & Co, 1982), 227–41.

and sent to St Bishoy's Monastery.[158] He simultaneously appointed a committee of five bishops, including Bishop Samuel, but did not include Matta al Miskin, most likely because he was a monk and not an official member of the clergy.[159] The committee officially served the purpose of leading the church without the pope, and to "return the church to its traditional role".[160] Clearly, Sadat had found a different method in which he could enact his own version of the President-Patriarch pact while excluding the Patriarch. These events are usually referred to as Black September.

Death and Change

It's popular belief that the events of Black September and how they transpired in 1981 were God's divine plan for saving Pope Shenouda III from the bullets of Abud el Zumur's firing squad that riddled Anwar el Sadat and Bishop Samuel almost exactly one month later, on the anniversary of the October War. Sadat's death brough on Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, who did not reinstate the patriarch until 1985.[161]

The return of Pope Shenouda III saw a different personality to him – he had mostly lost the bite to his bark, becoming much less confrontational and much more willing to fall in line with the state. A new President-Patriarch pact was reinstated. Under Shenouda, parishioners were instructed to vote for the National Democratic Party, and clergy members that dissented faced excommunication.[162] On the opposing end, Mubarak once more promised to and successfully delivered on reigning in Islamist groups – between 1995 and 2005, 30,000

[158] Ibid.
[159] Ahmed Elmiligy, 2007 ,*خطاب السادات لعزل البابا شنودة*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzD0Br_2pIY.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Tadros, "The Patriarch-President Pact and the People in Between."
[162] Ibid.

members of Islamic groups were detained.[163] This shift in policy helped regain relations, and outwardly friendly relations ensured, since goals once more aligned. Mubarak was well aware of this and used Sadat's reign and the turmoil Egypt saw in the later 70s and 80s to remind the population, and Copts specifically, what awaited had it not been for him – he was known for saying it was either him or the Brotherhood.[164]

While sectarian violence did not die down, it was mostly attributed to lone wolves, or different separate incidents that often were solved in State Security sponsored *galasat solh*, or reconciliatory councils.[165] Shenouda did not react as outwardly to violence or many sectarian incidents, often using his Wednesday lectures to calm people down. Sana Hassan assesses this as a form of self-restraint as a strategic method moving forward.[166]

A Consolidated Church

Like the role of the COC during the Ottoman period as a caregiver for its millet, Pope Shenouda's COC had the time in his new role within the President-Patriarch pact to restructure Egypt's bishoprics in order to provide as much access to his people.[167] He appointed 64 bishops in his time, and divided up the largest bishoprics into smaller, more centralized ones in order to have better administration and control, as well as better distribution mechanisms. For the rule to be successful, he improved educational levels of priests. He also could never truly enact this

[163] Gerges, *Making the Arab World*.

[164] ON, 2021 ,خبر اليوم - سامح عيد: مبارك قال للأمريكان يا أنا يا الأخوان, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7ZoaVLi9EQ.

[165] Mariz Tadros, "Mitigation, Management and Resolution of Sectarianism under Mubarak," in *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 97–118.

[166] Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt,* 119.

[167] S. S. Hasan, "Centralizing the Church Administration," in *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality*, 1st edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 123–35.

without large-scale mobilization, where he managed to integrate lay people via the institution of *khidma*, or service. Movements like Sunday School were directly creating *khudam*, or service people, and *shamamsa*, or deacons. He had made sure that lay people were well-steeped into the church, where they could subsequently aid lower-income communities. Many of the programs he started included literacy programs, skill workshops, and vocational training.[168] Similarly, he focused on youth, with the Youth Bishop being appointed and creating programs specific to them – Church Boy Scouts, musical and choir groups, and even theatrical groups, like the LoghosTeam. Under his aegis, new forms of media arose, specifically the three main Coptic channels that brought the church to home – Aghapy, Coptic TV (CTV) and MESat.[169]

By integrating social life as a form of Coptic devotion to the church, the pope in many ways offered a full-on social alternative to state-sponsored or even secular activities and programs. This might have been a parallel to Protestant and Catholic organizations globally, or even Islamist organizations locally, yet it mostly served to fully bring in Copts and in many ways offer a dependency on the church, which would come in handy in keeping his pact, and ensuring that he is the main socio-economic provider for his people in true neo-millet fashion.

A (Mostly) Quiet Church

Fully integrated into the neo-millet system that the state has created for the Church, most sectarian strife until 2007 or so went with little comment on the side of the Copts. There were three main exceptions to this trend.

[168] Paul Sedra, "Activism in the Coptic Diaspora."
[169] Angie Heo, "Examining the Role of Media in Coptic Studies," in *Copts in Context: Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity*, ed. Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

Conversion and personal status law were key in the debates between the Church and the State. Being one of the most controversial laws for the church, the Coptic personal status law regarding divorce has been a hot button issue since the height of the Millet Council's power — while they allowed it in 1938, Pope Shenouda issued a decree in 1971 prohibiting, and in 2008 the church won a landmark case that basically canonized that decree in Coptic personal status law, moving the law from de facto to de jure.[170] Closely interlinked in this era is the issue of religious conversion. One of the ways Copts have been able to circumvent the divorce laws has been mostly the conversion from Christianity to Islam, getting a legal divorce, and then returning back to the Church. Apostasy law of 1977 would have codified the impossibility of that, yet however, in practice, that was already difficult — in 2007, many Copts were refused their second change of religion back to Christianity by the Ministry of Interior. This was a wholly public affair and the church indeed did intervene on behalf of the "a'idin", or the returnees, in order "to bring its people home".[171] These issues would become much more public and prominent in 2004 and in 2010, with Wafaa Qonstantin and Camilia Shehata, who reportedly converted but publicly denied that after a brief stay in the church.

The second issue was that of Coptic representation and its relation to Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code, or the *izdira'* article – defamation of religion. The common idea is that this article is often applied unequally to Islam, yet not at all to Christianity, leaving an uneven playing field. This issue was most prominent in two pieces of media – Azazeel and *Baheb el Cima*.

[170] Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age,* 123-128.
[171] Ibid, 139-40.

Azazeel, a novel by Youssef Idris, present the story of the Council of Chalcedon through the eyes of an Upper Egyptian monk.[172] The author presented a favorable presentation of the Nestorian Heresy, which compromised the divinity of Christ per popular Islamic beliefs about Jesus, as well as demonizing Pope Dioscorus, one of the most important figures in Coptic history.[173] While carefully avoiding the minority discourse, Coptic Bishops attacked the book strongly, explicitly citing how they would not accept a Muslim explicating Christianity.[174]

Baheb el Cima, on the other way, was a movie created by Osama Fawzy, who was Christian himself. It dealt with the topic of religious extremism, specifically Orthodox dogmatic beliefs.[175] Bishops were angered by the representation of the main character as a very strict Coptic Orthodox father who hates all forms of art out of fear and devoutness. The rhetoric here shifted, quantifying the "Christian-hood" of Fawzy, and asking if Muslims are so ready to accept Coptic images that harmed them, mobilizing the national unity image in their favor.

Third, the issue that proved to be particularly problematic and the most serious out of all of them was the issue of Max Michel, who in 2006 called himself Bishop Maximos, head of the Orthodox Church of Athanasius in el Moqattam and Head of the Holy Synod. The Church's grievances with the state in this case was the seemingly complete disregard for the splintering of the Church and its allowance for a non-recognized member of the laity to take up the title of

[172] Saba Mahmood, "Secularity, History, Literature," in *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 181–207.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid, 194.
[175] Samia Mehrez, "The New Kids on the Block: Bahib Issima and the Emergence of the Coptic Community in the Egyptian Public Sphere," in *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice*, Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies 13 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 188–207.

Bishop of a different church and openly defy Shenouda III's power.[176] Max Michel was not officially stopped until 2007, causing this to be one of the first incidents in which the pope showed large-scale discontent with the president in this era.

Storms Brewing

Towards the end of Mubarak's rule, tensions had been arising, whether it was the case of Camilia Shehata or Naga' Hammadi or the burning of the 'Omraniya church in 2010. The lack of active Church advocacy led to the creation of multiple political groups in response that were either led by Copts or had significant Coptic support. Two of these movements were that of Kefaya, whose founder George Ishak was Coptic, and the Maspero Youth Union (MYU), which was completely Coptic-led. Kefaya was focused on coalition building, and aimed to boycott the 2005 elections, and indeed had significant Coptic support.[177] The MYU on the other hand mostly consolidated around the burning of the Omraniya church in 2010, and really launched into advocacy with the All-Saint's Church Bombing on New Year's Eve, 2011.[178]

These movements had been active and were a large part of wider Coptic dissent that was brewing. Indeed, in 2010 when further sectarian strife occurred in the city of Nag' Hamadi, the Pope for the first time stayed quiet and did not stop the people protesting, who took to the Cathedral and to Tahrir Square (the site of the 2011 revolution in the future). This was indicative of a weakening in the pact, but the security apparatus of the state reigned the church

[176] Mariz Tadros, "The Politics of Backroom Vendettas," in *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 83–96.
[177] Paul Rowe, "Building Coptic Civil Society: Christian Groups and the State in Mubarak's Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 111–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200802548147.
[178] Candace Lukasik, "Conquest of Paradise: Secular Binds and Coptic Political Mobilization," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 107–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2016.1144910.

back in via collaborations with Islamist groups to coordinate public verbal attacks on the Pope.[179] On the 25th of January 2011, the Pope actively declared that no Copts should participate in the revolution, indicating a return to normal. However, things quickly fell apart since the damage had already been done.

The Fall of Mubarak and the death of the Pope Shenouda in 2011 and 2012 respectively killed the President-Patriarch pact that existed between them, and in the following chapters, I will be exploring how Copts, under the new regime and the pact of Tawadros and the Military have managed to circumvent, live with and survive with it.

[179] Tadros, "The Politics of Backroom Vendettas."

Chapter 3: How Now?

Space, Image, and Invisibility

One of the key points to understanding the 25th of January revolution in Egypt was the 11th of February 2011, a point that for many Coptic Christians was met with fresh excitement. As uncertain as the future was, there was a hopeful note in the air when Mohamed Hosny Mubarak declared his resignation in a 30-second speech delivered by his VP, Omar Sueliman.[180] In this chapter, I discuss the first months of the "new Egypt" and through it I build a framework to understand the conditions under which Coptic Egyptians operate today in terms of public and private spaces, what it means to be an Ideal Copt, and the practice of strategic invisibility.

END OF THE LINE

After 18 days on the streets of Tahrir Square and in every major square of public gathering spot in Egypt, the 11th of February marked a day of transformation and celebration. For Egypt's Copts, like most other Egyptians under thirty, this was the first time they would see a different president than Mubarak. The Coptic Orthodox Church stance, like most other news outlets and institutions hastily made a shift in their policy towards the revolution, quickly putting Bishop Musa, Bishop of the Youth at the forefront with an article in the Sunday School Magazine edition of February 2011 describing the revolution as a "tsunami of youth" – a very noticeable tonal shift from Pope Shenouda III's positionality against all forms of Coptic

[180] ذاكرة ماسبيرو, *بيان تنحي مبارك عن الحكم يلقيه اللواء عمر سليمان*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qI012rfUdf0.

participation in the revolution.[181] The latter would eventually go ahead and specifically ensure his participation in the post-revolutionary democratic moment of the 3/19 constitutional polls – a highly polarizing moment in the country when his participation was truly needed due to the Muslim Brotherhood's attempts to pack the polls in favor of "Yes".[182] Al Keraza magazine, the Church's official publication that mainly discusses the patriarchy, published its first two editions of 2011 in April, emphasizing patriarchal participation in the referendum, yet taking a surprisingly neutral tone towards the revolution altogether.[183]

Church-community tensions were running high, however, especially since the Pope's stance was not forgotten, and the intense silence of the clergy by patriarchal order was loudly heard by those who risked their lives protesting.[184] Those same youth were creating an environment that proved to themselves and to the church, more than any other point, that hierarchical clerical order no longer had the same level of control it did before, and like the hierarchical state, it was ready to be questioned. A stronger image of national unity had never existed, literally, as images of Copts surrounding Muslim protesters as they engage in Friday Prayers spread like wildfire across Egypt and beyond (Figure 1).[185] Similarly, Dylan Martinez captured a photo of two Egyptians, shoulder to shoulder, holding a cross and a Qur'an up high

[181] Anba Musa, "About the events of the 25th of January Revolution," *Sunday School Magazine*, February 2011.
[182] Al Jazeera Staff, "High Turnout in Egyptian Constitutional Poll," March 19, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/3/19/high-turnout-in-egyptian-constitutional-poll.
[183] al Keraza Editorial Board, "The Church amid Events and Changes," *Al Keraza Magazine*, April 1, 2011.
[184] Magdi Guirguis, "The Copts and the Egyptian Revolution: Various Attitudes and Dreams," *Social Research* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 511-530,551.
[185] Daily Mail Reporter, "Images of Solidarity as Christians Join Hands to Protect Muslims as They Pray during Cairo Protests," Mail Online, February 3, 2011, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1353330/Egypt-protests-Christians-join-hands-protect-Muslims-pray-Cairo-protests.html.

(Figure 2).[186] This new mode of citizenship allowed for Copts to find renewed avenues of participation as fully-fledged citizens of Egypt without the need for an interlocutor, bringing the disenfranchised from middle and lower class Copts to the forefront of the revolution.



Figure 1



Figure 2

[186] Alan Taylor, "Three Weeks in Egypt," *The Atlantic*, February 9, 2011, https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2011/02/three-weeks-in-egypt/6/.

The moment resembled and indeed represented a 1919 national unity image that was hopeful, optimistic, and quite short-lived. As the Muslim Brotherhood rose as winning stakeholders in the March 19th referendum, Copts started to heed caution, but the desire to remain participants in the new national project was strong. Plus, they were stranded between a slow fading of the national unity images and a return to pre-revolutionary conditions on one end, and an untrustworthy clergy on the other whose weak stances were simply insufficient. Nothing truly exemplified this more than the events of October 9th, 2011.

BLOODY SUNDAY

On October 9th, Coptic protestors, led specifically by the Maspero Youth Union, went to protest the poor treatment of the state towards the case of the burning of a church in Al Marinab, Aswan. Officials initially refused to even acknowledge the space as a sacred site, calling it a rest stop on the road instead of a church.[187] The protestors met in front of the Maspero Building for Broadcast and Television, a favorite spot for Coptic youth protestors (hence the naming of the MYU), and engaged in singing hymns. Then, it seemed that in an instant the military appeared and killed 24 Copts who were protesting peacefully. State media actively worked on popularly mobilizing Muslims against Copts by claiming they were attacking the military, literally begging the people to go and save their Muslim brethren.[188]

Pope Shenouda III did not say anything until the scheduled Wednesday lecture he held in the Cairo Cathedral, where he outright stated that they were unarmed and peaceful, and that

[187] Mariz Tadros, "Egypt's Bloody Sunday and Its Ripple Effects," in *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 183–99.
[188] Ibid.

they were killed by live bullets and by getting crushed by armored vehicles.[189] While their martyrdom was initially declared, much to the cheers of the attendees in the Pope's lecture, their families were pushed into not pursuing official martyrdom from the church or the state, seemingly a result of state pressure on the clergy.[190] This was an all-time low for church-community relations, and it would particularly show when, on the 6th of January (Coptic Orthodox Christmas eve), as the pope greeted the seated military, Coptic MYU activists shouted "down with the military" in the background on live television.[191] Yet, no matter the cost of living under Pope Shenouda and his various shortcomings in the eye of the community, his death on March 17th, 2012 was a historical moment that rivaled the fall of Mubarak for Copts. Pope Shenouda's death a marker for the end of an era of state-church veiled infighting, and a new one of complete complicity under Pope Tawadros II.

A NEW POPE

I emphasize a homogenous relationship between Tawadros II and the military state since this truly represents a near perfect Church-State entente, and while this was not as apparent in effect initially, it materialized fully on the 3rd of July 2013, when Tawadros prominently stood by Sheikh Ahmed el Tayeb, Sheikh of el Azhar, behind Abdelfattah el Sisi as he declared publicly the deposition of Mohamed Morsi, first elected president of Egypt. This entente, as previously discussed, has had great effects on the day-to-day life of Copts in

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[189] شبكة يقين الإخبارية, *ملخص كلمة البابا شنودة فى عظة الأربعاء/ أحداث ماسبيرو*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXhuNeW70oM.

[190] Miray Philips, "The Transformative Politics and Memory of the Maspero Massacre," Tahrir Institute For MIddle East Policy, September 10, 2021, https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/the-transformative-politics-and-memory-of-the-maspero-massacre/.

[191] R0llanza, 2012, *هتاف "يسقط حكم العسكر" اثناء تحية البابا للمجلس العسكرى*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pE46H1iHUAA.

Egypt.[192] Since then, Pope Tawadros II has made multiple statements and acted in multiple ways since that indicate this specific relationship. I briefly discuss a few in the next paragraphs.

Pope Tawadros, two weeks from Christmas of 2015 – a fraught time for most of Egypt's Christians due to the large number of sectarian incidents that occur around sacred days – declared that the future of Copts is only secondary to the importance of the nation, and speaking for them, he proclaimed that they were not scared of any explosions.[193] This paled, however, in comparison to actual Christmas eve prayers, where Abdelfattah el Sisi, president of Egypt, would visit Christmas liturgy for the first time ever, much to the surprise of the parishioners yet not to the well-rehearsed response from the Pope and the clergymen.[194] El Sisi said a word regarding national unity, almost explicitly declaring his intention for arrival as a televised photo opportunity in order to exemplify the spirit of the nation, amid chants of "*eid wahda*".[195] Similarly, Sisi would do this again in 2016, where the pope would declare el Sisi the "fourth pyramid" and every year since then, with the exception of 2021 due to COVID.[196] Since 2018, however, they would take on a new meaning, as liturgies were held in the newly constructed largest house of worship and the largest cathedral in the Middle East North Africa

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[192] AlArabiya العربية, *مصر السيسي يلقي خطاب تنحية مرسي*, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41J8L4GPMyc&t=47s.

[193] Ashraf Sadek, " البابا تواضروس الثانى لـ«الأهرام» :الأهم مستقبل الوطن وليس الأقباط نحن فى يد الله ولا نخشى التفجيرات الإرهابية," *Ahram Daily*, December 27, 2014, https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News/51408/76/350758/حوارات/البابا-تواضروس-الثانى-لـ«الأهرام»-الأهم-مستقبل-الو.aspx.

[194] Followme News 001, *بالفيديو .. السيسي يفاجئ الكاتدرائية بالحضور فى قداس عيد الميلاد المجيد للتهنئة بعيد الميلاد المجيد*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7GU_FBzkJE.

[195] Literally meaning "one hand", this slogan is often used as shorthand for either "Muslims and Christians are one hand", or with its more popular use during the revolution, "the people and the military are one hand". Here, it signified both.

[196] اليوم السابع, "#انت_زعيم_يا_سيسى | #البابا_تواضروس فى عظته بـ"قداس #عيد_الميلاد": #السيسى و #البرلمان والدستور' هرم رابع' https://t.co/p3nE47rulA," Tweet, *@youm7* (blog), January 6, 2016, 7, https://twitter.com/youm7/status/684875109774049280.

region – the Cathedral of the Nativity of Christ. The Cathedral was a megaproject meant to satiate Copts within the larger megaproject of the New Administrative Capital of Egypt, where it was opened on the same night as the Al Fattah al Alim Mega-Mosque.[197] During the highly publicized opening ceremony, el Sisi declared "we are one, and will remain one".[198] The physical building then serves as a very public populist appeasement of the state's end of the President-Patriarch pact in alignment with Egypt's military capitalism form of progress. Paul Amar describes these projects as parapopulist in the sense that they provide only short-term benefits for the proletariat from labor or economic gain, yet in the case of the Cathedral in Egypt's NAC, this on its own serves in many ways to assert the presence of Copts in Egypt.[199]

Pope Tawadros inherited a fickle system from Pope Shenouda, one where people simultaneously have been slowly seeping out of the political and social control of the church, while holding him to the same standards they upheld his predecessor in, deeming him as inadequate in a lot of ways. Pope Tawadros has had severe issues with the people and the clergy, especially that multiple trying incidents occurred during his time. The Coptic community today doesn't just face uncertainty in its relationship to the church — their relations with their state and the wider community remains an integral part of their day to day lives, and while the church has been able to mitigate the relationship with the state, it may attempt to but ultimately fails to fully be the interlocutor between Copts and their surroundings, whether out of personal rejection of this role on the end of the Copts, or due to the sheer impossibility of

[197] BBC Staff, "Egypt Opens Middle East's Biggest Cathedral near Cairo," *BBC News*, January 7, 2019, sec. Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46775842.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Paul Amar, "Military Capitalism," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 50, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 82–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2018.1448601.

regulating minute interactions while living in a dominant hegemonically Muslim society. In this next section, I expand on the central issue facing Copts in contemporary Egypt as compounded by issues of society, state, and church.

SPACES AND BELONGING

I conceptualize the dynamics of Copts in society mostly as an expression of public space and private cultural space, and belonging in relation to a wider, more dominant, hegemonically Muslim society that has built its relationship with Copts based on narrow confinement of their existence and identity to certain expectations in non-demarcated spaces. I pose the President-Patriarch pact (which I sometimes refer to as the Church-State entente) *and* society itself as enforcers of this dynamic.

In expanding on my ideas, I rely on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. Gramsci defines it as a framing of the world in the point of view of the hegemonic ruling class as the most just, legitimate, and beneficial structure for the larger populace, with social and economic structures that embody it.[200] In Egypt, hegemonic Muslim society functions exactly in that way, where multiple different hegemonic aspects of Egyptian society (cultural, legal, political and social) are seen as the normalized mode of existence, despite being distinctly a result of an Egyptian Muslim institution that has ruled the state for many years. Gramsci also highlights how hegemony is deeply interlinked with the idea of counter-hegemony, as non-hegemonic groups may find themselves in opposition to the current systems of power that enforce the status quo. Copts are not always acting in a counter-hegemonic fashion, yet in my upcoming framework, I

[200] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Reprint, 1989 edition (London: International Publishers Co, 1971).

highlight the presence and prominence of counter-hegemonic activity in their efforts to build space. I expand on this using different examples of Coptic interactions with hegemonic Muslim society.

To begin with, Vivian Ibrahim states that the position of Copts in Egypt as a form of religious (and legal) pluralism, one that efficiently deals with dhimmis and Muslim subjects in separate forms.[201] What that realistically means is per the Egyptian constitution, while "Islam is the religion of the state" according to Article 2, "the principles of the laws of Egyptian Christians and Jews are the main source of laws regulating their personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders" per the 2014 version.[202] This perpetuation of what her and Paul Rowe call a neo-millet or a quasi-millet system is instrumental in maintaining the Church-State entente that Tadros explores, where Copts can never truly achieve full citizenship as subjects of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is the interlocutor for all of their needs. In its simplest form, this is represented in the constitutional fact that the President must be a Muslim, excluding Coptic citizenry de jure from rights their Muslim counterparts have access to. This legal distinction is basis for much more cultural and societal markers of difference that make themselves prominent in Coptic lives daily in public space.

Hegemonic culture and society rely on the spread and normalization of certain cultural practices in public spaces. In Egypt, many Islamic hegemonic practices are seen as integral to the identity of the nation that Copts learn as a second nature. First, the prominence of the call to prayer, or *azan*, broadcasted publicly 5 times a day per the five prayers that Muslims are

[201] Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent."
[202] "Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt" (Egyptian National Authorities, January 18, 2014).

expected to adhere to daily. The *azan* specifically is a very public, performative affair that asserts the Muslim identity of the streets with every call.[203] This is contrasted with Church bells, often heard only within the immediate vicinity of the street (as it often is surrounded by a Coptic community). The default greeting of *assalam alaykum* and its response of *wa alaykum al salam*, a distinctly Muslim greeting, often is expected and enforced – two of my interviewees, Lamia and Sandra, 24 and 36, describe how multiple times, amplified by the political context of Egypt, their good mornings were met with *wa alaykum al salam*. Similarly, public celebrations of festivals and feasts are allowed for the distinctly Islamic (Ramadan, the *waqfa*s before the Eids, and the Eids themselves) and national celebrations, yet Copts are allowed only public recognition of the 7th of January as Coptic Orthodox Christmas. This is contrasted with Easter, which, since it is not theologically recognized by Islam, is ignored by the state, choosing instead to recognize the day after, Sham el Nessim – a distinctly pagan, Pharaonic holiday. Most of my interviewees discussed the discomfort they felt in learning Qur'anic texts and hadiths in school as part of the Arabic curriculum when many of their colleagues did not know the first thing about Christianity.

"It was even in the small things. In football practice, I was the only Christian, and they would always start with the fatiha, [204] but I never knew what to do with myself, since I didn't know the words."- Lamia, 24

Lamia's words echoed throughout the other interviews, with people who mentioned several small incidents that felt constantly excluded them. None of them cited these as

[203] I use performative in the same way Judith Butler does, where it is defined as outward expression of identity.
[204] The devotional prayer said by Muslims as a way to be blessed in beginning new things. Literally means the opener.

particularly egregious, but they noted their repetition. Perhaps something they all mentioned too, maybe due to the timing of the interviews, was the heightened sense of religiosity people felt during Ramadan, especially considering how that translated into an enforcement of public fasting on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This is best exemplified in a recent incident where, in Ramadan of 2022, during Lent fasting for Copts, a *koshari* restaurant in Cairo refused to serve a Coptic woman and her daughter food as "it was inappropriate".[205]

Coptic Visibility

A question of the visibility of Copts must be asked in order to assess what it means to be Coptic in day-to-day life and in interacting with within this hegemony. The average Copt has no phenotypically distinct features from the average non-Copt in Egypt. There are, however, four ways – name, markings, dress and miscellaneous audio-visual cues – in which Copts are often "clocked" as such in Egypt, and once Copts are visible, they become "racialized" – understood and treated as different.

Name

Christian names are often distinct from Muslim names in Egypt. Names like Michael, George, or Peter are Christian in that they are not Arabic in origin, neither in their anglicized forms nor in their Arabicized forms (Mikha'il, Guergis, or Botros). Similarly, common names for women are ones that may be Western in nature, like Caroline, Silvia or Sandra. Some may be Coptic in heritage specifically, as in relating to the Coptic language, the most prominent being

[205] Lent-fasting for Copts means a vegan diet, and *koshari*, Egypt's national dish, is a popular vegan food most Copts eat for its accessibility. Selvia Botros, "نزلت النهارده جبت بنتي من الحضانة، كان عندها تمرين روحنا جري على هناك...، وباباها خلص شغله" Facebook, April 10, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158382613526791&set=a.10150946181096791&type=3.

Mina, and are often distinctly associated with Copts. Copts who have these as first names are immediately identified as such, and even if not, a distinct ritual has been developed and commonly understood between Christians and Muslims in Egypt to identify the other's religion — asking for the second, third, and fourth name until a clearly racialized name comes up. In Egypt, the naming system is often not defined by a last name, or a kinya as other Arabic-speaking countries would call it. Instead, children take on their father's name, who in turn takes his father's name, and so on. Two of my interviewees with distinctly Coptic names (altered for this interview) described taking on different names in one-off interactions with people in Egypt, like taxi drivers, to avoid being racialized.

Coptic Tattoos

Coptic tattoos are of an uncertain origin, but many Coptic adherents often have a distinctly green, blue, or in more recent years with the rise of modern tattoo shops, black Crosses (often a distinct Coptic cross). Coptic tattoos on the right wrist or thumb are quick modes of identifying people, and a trained Egyptian eye, Coptic or Muslim, often goes to quickly scan for it (example in Figure 3). These tattoos, regardless of their reasoning, are often done in mawalid (pl., sing. molid)[206] or in Church yards at a young age, and are worn as a sign of pride – one popular Coptic hymn for children says "I am Christian, and my cross is tattooed on my hand, and it is in my heart, dearer than my eyes".[207] Because mawalid are distinctly a class-based affair, many Copts who are upper and middle class do not have it. However, new meanings are being cast for tattoos in general in Egypt as it experiences a tattoo boom. Lamia,

[206] Mawalid are popular celebrations based on pagan Egyptian tradition that celebrate a hagiographic history of saints. There are Muslim and Coptic mawalid in Egypt, and are often distinctly celebrated by lower class people.

[207] 2014 ,*ترنيمه انا مسيحى*, توماس ونيس صمؤئيل, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzfrZSYUKgI.

who did not have a cross until recently, got it done as a sign of devotion at a place she considered to have better hygiene.



Figure 3: Coptic cross tattoo on the wrist of the author's father. Credit to author's mother.

Dress

In terms of dress, this is a particularly gendered issue. While not all non-hijabis in Egypt are Christian, all Christian women are non-hijabis, especially in urban areas, often making this a marker for their "clocking". Per a Pew poll in 2014, 96% of Egyptians prefer some form of veiling for women in public, and thus a clearer distinction between Christian women and non-Christian women is being drawn daily.[208] Coptic women are then othered on two axes – a gendered and a religious basis – where their lack of hijab can be seen as "promiscuous". It is important to note, that as of recent years, policies of modernization and what Galal Amin

[208] Jacob Poushter, "How People in Muslim Countries Prefer Women to Dress in Public," *Pew Research Center* (blog), January 8, 2014, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/08/what-is-appropriate-attire-for-women-in-muslim-countries/.

would call the khawaga complex shifted public perception of hijab and veiling in upper class spaces, where hijabis or veiled women might not be allowed or looked down upon.[209] However, as the interviewees would say, this is not the dynamic on the streets and in daily life, as all of them recounted the experience of, specifically during Ramadan, having men (and at times women) say "astaghfirullah" to their faces.[210]

Much less so but similarly, for men, since Islam explicitly prohibits Muslim men to wear gold, Christians who do are often publicly identified as the other. These come in forms of necklaces that would often contain crosses and again are a sign of devotion, or gold wedding rings.

Miscellaneous audio-visual cues

Copts at times can be recognizable through speech patterns – they might intentionally skip out on saying "prayer be upon him" when invoking the name of the Prophet or if it is invoked in front of them, or they might refuse to say *wallahy* ("by God", a common way Egyptians use to make an oath), and instead say *bi'amana* or *sada'ny.* Other ways Copts may be recognized is through distinct stereotypes – Copts are understood to have "big noses" and "large behinds". I cite two tweets specifically indicative of a larger trend that confirm this, the first asking why Copts have big noses, with a reply stating "not just their noses," implying

[209] Galal A Amin and David William Wilmsen, *The illusion of progress in the Arab world: a critique of Western misconstructions*, 2006, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10413280; Aswat Masriya, "Why Are Veiled Women Denied Entry to Bars in Egypt?," *Egyptian Streets* (blog), April 16, 2014, https://egyptianstreets.com/2014/04/16/why-are-veiled-women-denied-entry-to-bars-in-egypt/.

[210] Astaghfirullah is an invocation for God's forgiveness, often said when impure thoughts pass through a person's mind. The implication is that, during the month of fasting, these impure thoughts were caused by the women that are unveiled.

heavily their behinds are a marker and calling it provocative.[211] The other is a tweet heavily sexualizing Coptic women through the same trope.[212] This is a particularly gendered stereotype that often comes with different dynamics to assumptions of promiscuity of Coptic women, as confirmed by Twitter trends.

The Muslim Gaze and the Ideal Copt

Copts in hegemonic society deal with what I call the Muslim gaze – the panopticon in dominant Egyptian society.[213] Similar to how the white or male gaze work, it is a function of a hegemonic culture looking at the society and the other within it through their own lens. This causes Copts to be specifically hyperaware of their ethnoreligious identity as the other in public space once they are made to be visible, and thus are expected to act in certain ways. Copts often find themselves forced to project different images enforced by two hegemonic powers – society and the COC. The state, being the definition of the ruling class in this case, are present in enforcing both of these images, as they enforce hegemonic culture and are closely associated with the church since they hold power over it. I outline in the upcoming section the two main sets of specifications Copts are expected to adhere to in public spaces per the specifications of hegemonic society and the COC. Both sets of specifications coincide to create the *ideal* Copt.[214]

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[211] Architect. [@Sukseih], "@shadenHilaly مش منخيرهم بس," Tweet, *Twitter*, January 22, 2018, https://twitter.com/Sukseih/status/955487589519298560.

[212] The magic 🪄 [@Killerlove448], "@chriofmusman المسيحيين دوله عليهم طيز ملبن," Tweet, *Twitter*, January 21, 2022, https://twitter.com/Killerlove448/status/1484625540267053062.

[213] Michel Foucault, "'Panopticism' from 'Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison,'" *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 1 (2008): 1–12.

[214] My framework of the ideal Copt is based on Mahmood Mamdani's framework of "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim". See here: Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 766–75.

The Ideal Copt in the Eyes of Society

In Chapter 2, we discussed the implications of minority status, specifically as outlined by Saba Mahmood in her book, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. Reusing that same framework, we can conclude that the "minoritization" of the Copts comes at great risk to their national belonging, something that caused the COC to heavily reject it. However, by virtue of existing in a hegemonic culture that has linked nationalism so closely with the religious and cultural practices of Egyptian Islamic institutions, being non-Muslim casts doubts on the status of Egyptian loyalty either way. Thus, it is understood that an ideal Copt often has to affirm and reaffirm their national belonging and loyalty by posing themselves as non-threats to hegemonic Muslim society. The main way Copts are allowed to and are expected to do so is through the context of national unity discourse. Through national unity, or the "Cross and the Crescent", Coptic citizens assure the invisibility of their needs and concerns. This, in turn, assures that the Coptic question does not interfere with the national project.[215] An Ideal Copt denies the Coptic self and embraces the Egyptian aspect of their identity, embracing hegemonic Muslim positionalities, cultural aspects and traditions. We see this in Pope Tawadros II, *the* Ideal Copt, and his responses to sectarian strife, assuring that attacks on churches and on Copts is a symptom of the terrorism *all* Egyptians experience, not just Christians – effectively attempting to de-Copticize the issue.[216] Moreover, as seen in Ramadan, Coptic citizens that are most

[215] Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent."

[216] Fatma Shawky, "البابا تواضروس: سعداء بزيارة بابا الفاتيكان والإرهاب يستهدف المسلمين والمسيحيين," Youm7, April 21, 2017, https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/4/21/البابا-تواضروس-سعداء-بزيارة-بابا-الفاتيكان-والإرهاب-يستهدف-المسلمين-والمسيحيين/3199327.

celebrated are those who "await Ramadan more than Muslims". In a twitter trending hashtag, "Why is Ramadan in Egypt Special,"[217] multiple Coptic participants declared their excitement as Copts for Ramadan, and different news sources published stories about Copts participating in the Ramadan celebrations.[218] Many of my interviewees described changing their lexicon, using *Masha 'Allah* instead of *bism el saleeb*,[219] or saying PBUH in order to "fit in". In my interviews, most Copts, despite exploring some grievances they had with the wider society, often found themselves talking about how they always had Muslim friends, and that "there was no difference", before momentarily returning to explore the very differences they felt wedged between themselves and Muslims. In fact, the intent on ensuring not to say Christian or Muslim, another sign of national unity, often found the interviewees and myself almost entirely omitting the word Muslim altogether when talking about the issues, substituting it for "people who aren't Christian". When pointing this out to Lamia, she laughed and acknowledged how this is a sign of how taboo discussing Coptic issues often are. Five out of the 8 interviewees also condemned Coptic bias against Muslims, using the word *'onsoreya*, the Arabic word for discrimination or factionalism, often used as a substitute for racism, assuring their commitment to national unity ideals and how they are active participants in it.

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[217] #ليه_رمضان_فمصر_مميز

[218] نبيل مصطفى [@n_m_gaafar10], " مصر بكل من فيها نسيج واحد كل المناسبات مشتركة وكل المشاعر مشتركة وكل القلوب مشتركة فهذا الشعب هو الذي صنع الكتالوج وليس له مثيل على وجه الأرض. على فكرة لي صديق مسيحي مسافر يحرص كل عام أن تكون إجازته فى رمضان علشان يفطر معانا من عشرات السنين. كل عام وكلنا بخير." Tweet, *Twitter*, April 1, 2022, https://t.co/VSCdDh7Iqq; سكاي نيوز عربية [@skynewsarabia], "قصة أبانوب المصري.. مسيحي ينتظر شهر رمضان كل عام" Tweet, *Twitter*, March 31, 2022, https://t.co/7OmijcoH3K; https://twitter.com/n_m_gaafar10/status/1509863285046325253; https://twitter.com/skynewsarabia/status/1509483594489679873.

[219] Both are phrases that are intended to keep the evil eye away, implying that something or someone is particularly good or beautiful.

The Ideal Copt in the eyes of the COC

The COC is in favor of disseminating this image of the ideal Copt per the Muslim gaze. Yet, it further amplifies it. An ideal Copt is proud of his Copticness, and is always successful in everything they do.[220] They do not drink, and perhaps do not publicize their eating of pork, but are instead active participants in the church, whether in Khidmah (religious service) or Bible study.[221] In his study of Coptic masculinity and social change, Kartveit (2020) argues that the ideal Coptic man, compared to Muslim masculinities, is often engaged in a parallel form of hegemonic masculinity that does not necessarily intersect with its Muslim counterpart, but is never less. Often Coptic masculinities are placed in opposition to Muslim hegemonic masculinities — on the issue of sexual harassment, for example, Kartveit explores how Coptic men think of what "other" men do (despite actual real-life evidence pointing to Coptic men being similarly poised to be harassers in the Egyptian street).[222] Similarly, Febe Armanios's (2002) study on the ideal image of Coptic femininity displays the Coptic woman as a specifically virtuous woman who keeps her family away from mistrials — a keeper of tradition who, like the Church itself, helps keep Coptic people safe from the larger hegemonic structures under which Copts operate.[223] Even then, in many ways, idealized Coptic femininity still runs somewhat parallel to Muslim femininity — in May of 2012, Bishop Bishoy, the secretary of the Holy Synod, made a statement specifically stating that Coptic "girls" should learn from veiled Muslim

[220] Shanudah, *Intilaq al-ruh / The release of the spirit.* (al-Qahirah: Majjalat al-Kirazah, 2012).
[221] Mina Ibrahim, "A Minority at the Bar: Revisiting the Coptic Christian (in-)Visibility," *Social Compass* 66, no. 3 (September 2019): 366–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768619856296.
[222] Bard Helge Kartveit, "Being a Coptic Man: Masculinity, Class, and Social Change among Egyptian Copts," *Men and Masculinities* 23, no. 3–4 (August 1, 2020): 516–41, https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18804000.
[223] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images of Gender in Modern Coptic Society," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 2002): 110–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/714004436.

"women" and dress more modestly, citing the dress depicted in paintings of Mary, Mother of Jesus.[224]

What Happens in Church…

It is only in private cultural spaces, which I define as spaces in which minority cultures are dominant and normalized, where the expected facade of the Ideal Copt can indeed fall if even momentarily. For many Copts, outside of their own homes, this space constitutes the Church. Considering the reforms that Cyril VI started and Shenouda III amplified, the church here might specifically mean the physical location in which Coptic Christians meet, but it socially includes a lot more than that. Many of my interviewees told me about growing up in the church space and described it as a location in which they would hang out socially among friends and family. It was, and remains, a place where they head to partake in many social activities — 7 of my interviewees were involved in the practice of Khidmah at one point of their lives, two of whom were Khidmah leaders, showing great involvement within the church. All of them attended Sunday School on a regular basis, and for those whose parents ensured their regular church attendance as younger children talked about how their friends were all Christian Copts at first. As young adults, all of them expressed their affinity towards the Church as a space still as a place that at the very least holds memories for them.

"I didn't have to worry about being Christian. Everyone around me was too." – Boules, 21

[224] Al Masry Al Youm, "Coptic Women Protest Bishop's Statements on Dress," *Egypt Independent* (blog), May 18, 2012, https://cloudflare.egyptindependent.com/copts-protest-against-statement-calling-coptic-women-imitate-muslims-news1/.

In many ways, Church is a place where Copts may go to practice a form of strategic invisibility from society. Building on Ha's work in Emotions of the Weak, which proposes that Copts make willful efforts to dismiss negative feelings from being othered in day to day interactions, I propose that this invisibility serves as a way to escape the necessities of image in front of non-Copts.[225] This strategic invisibility, defined as a conscious action of agency in reaction an inhospitable dwelling place by Karen Lollar (where the dwelling place in this case being the wider Egyptian society), is actively condoned by the church in creating what my interviewees called a state within a state, or a society within a society, represented in offering complete Coptic alternatives to many marks of Egyptian society, including up to resorts where church youth conferences can occur.[226] This strategic invisibility is part of the image of the Ideal Copt, one who "…will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets," per Matthew 12:19, a verse often repeated to Copts as kids. The President-Patriarch pact necessitates strategic invisibility – if Copts can air their grievances and deal with them privately, and Coptic issues find their place solely within the Church, they cease to be a governmental problem, but rather an intra-communal one. Ibrahim's previously mentioned discussion on how the national unity discourse makes Coptic issues invisible is echoed perfectly in the concept of strategic invisibility – the Muslim gaze expects an invisible minority that prioritizes its Egyptian identity over its Coptic identity.[227]

[225] Hyun Jeong Ha, "Emotions of the Weak: Violence and Ethnic Boundaries among Coptic Christians in Egypt," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 133–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1201586.
[226] Karen Lollar, "Strategic Invisibility: Resisting the Inhospitable Dwelling Place," *Review of Communication* 15, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 298–315, https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2015.1116592.
[227] Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent."

This strategic invisibility is similar to Glissant'sh (1997) right to opacity, is similarly a method to circumvent the transparency expectations of Copts that continuously define their interactions. [228] It relies on a form of asymmetry of information — while Copts are aware by virtue of having lived within systems of institutional Egyptian Islam of the mechanisms and how to navigate the culture, Muslims often are unaware about much regarding the Copts unless what is publicized through daily interactions. In this asymmetry, strategic invisibility can be seen as a counter-hegemonic structure, yet this tactic is not only accepted by the state and society, but also actively condoned by the church. In many ways, this is mainly a strategy that interacts primarily with pre-existing private cultural spaces, and does not necessarily aim to build new spaces for Copts. In being tacitly accepted by the majority of Egyptians, Copts and otherwise, I find it hard to particularly specify it as a counter-hegemonic strategy.

As a more direct mechanism by which to create spaces of belonging, some Copts feel the need to expand out of the designated private cultural spaces, important as they are, or even expand the reach of these spaces. Sometimes these spaces in their status quo fail to provide the necessary needs for them. Copts may feel inadequate or unrepresented in those spaces or under those images of the Ideal Copt. Either way, some Copts also look outwards in how to build spaces in the areas that have been marked off for them. Over the next two chapters, I illustrate how Copts have and continue to build spaces for themselves, and the techniques they use to do so.

[228] Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189–94.

Chapter 4: Quiet Practices

How ordinary Copts resist and disengage in ordinary ways

Daily interactions of the Copts do not necessitate a form of organized political movement. However, in their actions as a politicized group of people whose every action is put under severe scrutiny from the hegemonic Muslim societal gaze, they often take up practices that may diverge from the expected norm due a litany of different factors, internal and external. These actions, while often politicized, may not be perceived by the actors as political in themselves. Alternatively, they may be seen as small, individual acts of resistance. In the public space, or the street, Copts "forge identities, enlarge solidarities, and extend their protest beyond their immediate circles to include the unknown, the strangers," according to Asef Bayat.[229] Bayat defines these acts as social nonmovements, the "collective actions of non-collective actors" that share certain factors, especially as a form of social change under authoritarian regimes that the sub-altern, whether it be the poor people of society or minority groups, undertakes.[230] However, I find that the nature of the resistance I discuss in this chapter and the next might exist either within the umbrella of non-movements, movements or somewhere in between, and instead I define the practices I discuss in this in terms of "quiet practices", separated from other techniques of building space by being intentionally kept under the radar if possible. Using that definition, I outline different forms of quiet practices that Copts engage in on a day-to-day basis within the framework of everyday resistance, mostly as Coptic solidarity, quiet encroachment, and disengagement.

[229] Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2. ed (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2013), 13.
[230] Ibid, 15.

EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

I mainly build on the tentative definition of everyday resistance authored by Johansson and Vinthagen in their book*, Conceptualizing Everyday Resistance*.[231] Their definition attempts to reconcile different frameworks yet pays attention to few key points which I find essential in understanding Coptic day to day resistance. Firstly, it does not propose political intentionality as a necessary precondition to ascribing certain acts as resistance — private and non-political goals might be equally valid, and a clear intentionality, as they describe, is often hard to assess to an observer, and thus limiting it privileges the politically conscious and elite, ignoring much of the subaltern.[232] Secondly, they reject the idea that any form of expression of "difference, opposition, protest, deviation or individuality" must be labeled resistance — a particularly necessary distinction since often Coptic existence is an expression of difference to hegemonic society and church views, and thus it would broaden our category of resistance beyond meaningful understanding.[233] They also describe everyday acts, even if private, when acted upon en masse, may force hegemonies to "at least respect" and "give space to" counter hegemonic practices.[234] Finally, they reject the dichotomy of extraordinary resistance and everyday resistance, and accept, as I do, the presence of a continuum that links both. This is particularly helpful in my definition, for as we will see later in this chapter and the following one, many acts of everyday resistance often have an oscillating relationship with clear, extraordinary acts of resistance that move both ways.

[231] While the term comes from James Scott, my utilization of Johansson and Vinthagen's framework specifically differs in that it sets stronger parameters for what constitutes everyday resistance.
[232] Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen, *Conceptualizing "Everyday Resistance": A Transdisciplinary Approach*, 1st edition (Routledge, 2019), 29-30.
[233] Ibid, 24.
[234] Ibid, 31.

Coptic Solidarity, or Ihna Welad Ma'modiya Wahda

One of the concepts I pose in terms of everyday resistance is a concept of Coptic solidarity. What I choose to define as solidarity here is a concept where individuals often find themselves acting in support of one another in order to facilitate otherwise much more systematically difficult tasks. The intricacies of visibility heavily complicate this, since this solidary often is quiet. Based on Johansson and Vinthagen, I pose that if either the act of solidarity is ambiguous while the identity of the resister is clear, or if the identity of the resister is ambiguous while the act is clear, solidarity occurs in day-to-day interactions as a form of creative use of resources allocated by hegemonic powers.[235]

"Other Copts would always say, Ihna welad ma'modiya wahda (we are children of the same baptism)" – Maria, 23

All my interviewees agreed that intra-communal solidarity did exist in certain aspects where the previous conditions were available. As Copts who exist in a system that often ostracizes them, finding other Copts in key positions becomes not only necessary for building space and asserting belonging, but something my interviewees might look for. Nour, 24, who currently serves in the army, mentioned that their commanding officer in the army is Coptic too, and that has made their life easier, especially that they try to help them go on more vacations than their Muslim counterparts. Other stories from the informants helped solidify what Maria declared – Copts often find themselves using the phrase, *ihna welad ma'modiya wahda*, in order to declare that through their shared visibility as Copts in that moment, they are

[235] Johansson and Vinthagen, *Conceptualizing "Everyday Resistance."*

creating a connection in order to simplify an otherwise complex task for Copts in Egypt, or just to indicate that this space may be a safe one, akin or parallel to a private cultural space.

In situations where Copts are highly visible and expected to be so, whether by function of showing their ID cards, where they have to declare their names, or when their cross tattoo or dress is visible, Copts may find "resisters" enacting ambiguous forms of resistance, like moving their papers along in bureaucracies, or finding jobs. John, 26, when asked about the process for finding new opportunities for Copts in Egypt mentioned:

"Everyone knows that Orascom hires mostly Christians, it's an open secret."

Tweets from Muslims agree, and add other companies that prefer to hire Christians, typically owned by Copts in Egypt, from Amun Pharmaceuticals owned by Tharwat Basili to Maged Samy's Wadi Degla Sporting Club. Orascom itself is owned by one of Egypt's most famous Copts, Naguib Sawiris. These companies may be notorious for "preferring Christians", but this comes within the context of a much more hostile environment towards Copts in the workspace. Coptic solidarity is one form of everyday resistance, but different manifestations of it depend a lot on circumstances surrounding the communities, specifically class.

Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary

In discussing the Coptic community's quiet practices, we must discuss the everyday resistance of the poor. Class dynamics in Egypt are heavily segregated, with a thinning middle class and increased impoverishment of the poorest echelons of society. While Asef Bayat discusses the social nonmovements of the poor and specifically discusses the concept of "quiet encroachment of the ordinary", which he differentiates from James Scott's definition of

everyday resistance that it is the encroachment of the poor on the resources of the state, the rich, or the public, I find that it fits particularly within Johansson and Vinthagen's definition.[236] More importantly, quiet encroachment is perfect exemplification of the idea of a quiet practice I discuss in this chapter altogether.

Garbage Woes

Bayat's framework is well-exemplified in the majority Coptic community of the Zabbaleen, or Garbage Collectors.[237] Egypt's Zabbaleen is a community that moved from the neglected parts of Upper Egypt to the outskirts of Cairo, specifically to the Muqattam hill, under Nasser in the 1950s. They have since then been working in the garbage collecting business, which from the beginning was not regulated by the state, but they inherited it from the inhabitants of the area.[238] Later, they introduced the use of pigs to aid them in their work, as they specifically consume organic matter in the garbage, and now they have become essential to their work. Mariz Tadros explains that their use of pigs in a majority Muslim country that looks on pigs as dirty, unholy creatures pushed the community away even further into marginalization. Tadros's argument specifies their marginalization on three inter-connected counts — class, profession, and (ethno-)religious identity. Indeed, the community's profession altogether and presence as the de facto garbage collectors of Egypt could be considered a process of making space in the first place, as their interpersonal relationships with hegemonic

[236] Bayat, *Life as Politics,* 80.

[237] This community has been the subject of many studies, yet in planning for attempting to interview a few members of the community, especially with my current restrictions in my inability to return to Egypt due to COVID, I was heavily discouraged from doing so by researchers who have done similar fieldwork due to the hostile nature of Egypt. I will thus instead rely on studies of other scholars, as well as news and interviews conducted by different media outlets and YouTube creators.

[238] Mariz Tadros, "The Undesirables of Egypt," in *Copts in Context: Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 34–51, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6wgmcb.

society created different bonds that enabled them to live life and solidified their position as the main cleanliness workers for all of Cairo.

The Zabbaleen's presence has been quite fraught with problems. In 2002, Egyptian authorities, in an effort to "modernize", went and struck contracts with private multi-national corporations (MNCs) that took over the work of the Zabbaleen, cutting down on the amount of work done by them. Many Egyptians up until today pay two separate fees, one for the Zabbaleen, and one for the companies that work in parallel (and fail). According to Laila Iskandar, former Egyptian minister of the Environment and currently an activist working with Canadian-based NGO Rising out of the Ashes (ROOTA), Cairo is cut into four sectors, two of which are under official control of the Zabbaleen, and two under those of the MNCs. However, the main loss of the Zabbaleen was not just the fee, but the material they reclaim — the community is well known and documented for being one of the most successful community-based recycling groups globally. Those materials are a large part of the income that the community undertakes. Thus, in 2017, when the government introduced yet another plan for improving sanitation called "Garbage Huts" huge disagreements ensued — it was an initiative for state-sponsored recycling, where citizens would be rewarded for bringing forth recyclable garbage to designated huts in the streets.[239] While the initiative has failed, it caused a lot of anger when it debuted since the Zabbaleen felt like they were cheated out of their most important resource and left only with organic waste.[240]

[239] Mehwar TV, *90* 2017 *دقيقة | "معتز الدمرداش" يناقش قضية غضب الزبالين من "مشروع اكشاك شراء القمامة",* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTftQrsrRy4.
[240] Ibid.

One of the hardest obstacles the Zabbaleen faced was the H1N1 epidemic, also known deceptively as the Swine Flu. Due to WHO incompetency and cultural ignorance, in 2008, there was a presidential decree that called for the culling of all pigs in Egypt, which specifically affected the community, since, in the words of Shehata el Me'ades, union leader of the Zabbaleen in Egypt, the pig is "the Zabbal's friend".[241] The loss of all their pigs hugely affected their income and livelihood, yet they lacked support from Copts, the Church, or the state. While PMs like Georgette Kaleeny promoted a form of reparations for the culling of pigs, Kaleeny still washed her hands from pigs and the population as one that is involved with pigs.[242] The church itself does not provide any official support publicly, and worries about their involvement in the 2017 crisis was disputed and denied by el Me'ades, possibly in an effort to not make this a sectarian issue.[243] The Church's main interaction with the community is through Father Samaan, main priest of Samaan el Kharaz monastery in the cave.[244]

Garbage Dreams[245]

The conditions for survival today for Egypt's Zabbaleen partially exist within the realm of quiet encroachment. One of the main things that have changed since the H1N1 pandemic is the reintroduction of pigs in the community despite outrage from the state and society. While the reintroduction is currently a well-known fact, for a while, up until 2014, there was uncertainty about it, until el Me'ades challenged the government and society to find one case of H1N1

[241] Nehal Suleiman, "عودة الخنازير.. 'صديق الزبال' وحل سحري لأزمة 'تلال الزبالة' بشروط صحية," Al Watan, July 25, 2018, https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/3550040.
[242] Tadros, "The Undesirables of Egypt."
[243] Mehwar TV, *"معتز الدمرداش" يناقش قضية غضب الزبالين من "مشروع اكشاك شراء القمامة 90 دقيقة /"*.
[244] Tadros, "The Undesirables of Egypt."
[245] The subtitle is named after Mai Iskander's 2009 movie, Garbage Dreams; Mai Iskandar, *Garbage Dreams*, Documentary, 2009.

because of the pigs.[246] The slow reintroduction of pigs happened semi-illegally under the government's nose in spaces designated to no longer have that breed of animal. They had continued to slaughter pigs by hand instead of mechanically like they previously had been doing.

Similarly, Zabbaleen continue to operate in all zones of Cairo today, getting their own money from individuals separately from the fee people pay as part of the electricity bill, literally encroaching silently in garbage collecting trucks on the areas designated to be MNC zones. They also have been using electricity from street poles to run their recycling businesses, something that has got many of them into trouble, yet they view as necessary in their line of work and the service they provide to the community.[247]

Most importantly, Zabbaleen exemplify a unique form of encroachment, perhaps with the help of Father Samaan, on the resources of global NGOs registered with the Egyptian Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE). Many of these organizations, like ROOTA, offer a form of assistance that may help in "modernizing" or assisting the area by increasing educational opportunities and diversifying the economic endeavors of women specifically in the area. However, a lot of the Zabbaleen have been interviewed and deny the

[246] VideoYoum7, قناة اليوم السابع, *بالفيديو..مربو الخنازير بمزرعة «منشية ناصر» يتحدون الحكومة: اثبتوا حالة إصابة بالحمى*, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJHVVAcmmMo.

[247] Mekameleen TV — 2018 ,قناة مكملين الفضائية, *من حي الزبالين .. هنا يجمع 80% من قمامة القاهرة*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3mrmHKMaWs.

narrative of shame that is associated with them, but instead explain that the purpose of this education and economic diversification is mostly in evolving and improving their work.[248]

It must be noted that their own dwellings may be considered a form of resistance in aiding with quiet encroachment — the style of houses, called ashwa'eyeat, comparable to Brazilian favelas, is named so for its random building style, with no official incoming infrastructure, often causing the residents to "steal" resources (like water and electricity). In this case specifically, the ahswa'eyat of the area is particularly useful as it makes it harder for outsiders to enter and navigate the area, making creative use of strategic invisibility outside of sanctioned private cultural spaces directly associated with the church that the state expects to have access to.

Disengagement

The daily life of a Copt often poses some sort of a choice. By being Coptic, one is forced to strike a fairly tough balance of being a devout Copt who engages with the Church, its institutions and its multiple branches that often place a physical and metaphorical barrier between themselves and hegemonic society and being a sufficiently engaged Egyptian who places their nationality and cultural citizenship to Egyptian society above their Copticness. While the three pillars most relevant to Egyptian Copts — the state, the Church and dominant society — often force this form of being, Copts may decide to disengage from one part of this identity and embrace the other. The concept of disengagement used in this paper echoes

[248] 24 فرانس / FRANCE 24 Arabic, 23 ,2014 *جامعو القمامة في مصر*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33PWWyh3_F8; Mekameleen TV — قناة مكملين الفضائية, *من حي الزبالين .. هنا يجمع 80% من قمامة القاهرة*.

Carolyn Ramzy's use of the same concept, presenting (dis)engagement as a form of performative agency that may be ambiguous or subversive in order to maintain and build spaces that might be traditionally inaccessible to Copts.[249] I especially showcase it as a form of everyday resistance.

Disengagement presents itself in different forms, may take different sides, and may cause different effects based on the conditions of Copts and their general surroundings. I present disengagement in two main ways — disengagement from the Church, and disengagement from hegemonic society. Either way, there is a form of leaving behind a certain part of the Coptic image to find oneself better engaged with the other, perhaps even to the extent of denying one completely over the other. While disengagement can be overtly political and may take a form of a movement, in this chapter, I focus on the aspects which most resemble a social nonmovement.

Disengaging from the Church

Why disengage?

There are many reasons for why Copts might want to disengage from the COC. Firstly, not every Copt grew up in the Church, and thus may have never had a close relationship to the church growing up.

"Most of my friends at college don't believe that I am Christian today. Even if I tell them, they think I'm joking" – Joana, 22

[249] Carolyn Ramzy, "To Die Is Gain: Singing a Heavenly Citizenship among Egypt's Coptic Christians," *Ethnos* 80, no. 5 (October 20, 2015): 649–70, https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2014.943260.

Joana told me this while slightly giggling through my disbelief, considering that her name sounds specifically Coptic. Joana grew up going to liturgy and Sunday school, something that most of my interviewees had described doing at some point or another. Joana specifically however disengaged and continues to disengage from the church, and attempts to subvert her presence as a Coptic Christian on her college campus by being quite knowledgeable about society in general, using asymmetry of information in her favor to blend in. Her personal upbringing was echoed in other interviewees who had similar experiences. Other Copts, on the other hand, who grew up in the church and went to Catholic schools in Egypt ended up reporting a much closer connection to their Copticness, declaring a much less hostile situation growing up, feeling discrimination much later in life. Both Maria and Sandra, who were specifically my only two upper-middle class interviewees for example, mentioned that until they left Egypt, they had been very involved in Khidmah, preparing for Sunday School, and church altogether.

Other factors often are involved in disengaging altogether, and many Copts cite that despite perhaps going to Church and finding themselves believers, they still found societal pressure to engage with being a Copt in school, college or work a lot, and maintaining their duality of Copticness was hard. This was particularly made harder by a litany of stereotypes, many of which were particularly gendered. Lamia told me,

"At some point during college I was always self-aware of how I smelled and presented. There was an online trend for a while suggesting Copts were 'oily', in addition to the regular one about Copts having an odor."

These stereotypes were so well ingrained into the minds of my interviewees and affected them daily. Many of them recalled something similar, especially as kids in school and even beyond. They also mentioned during Arabic language classes how they were particularly singled out during days where they studied Qur'anic verses and hadiths discussing pork and alcohol, were sometimes they were seen as drunks and people who lived a "haram" life. While at least partially based on truth (Coptic Christians are theologically allowed to drink and do not have the same Halal dietary restrictions as Muslims), these latter stereotypes remain still particularly harmful for Copts. Similarly, as they grow older, their othering based on their drinking remains an important factor in their lives.[250] Lamia specifically recounted an anecdote where, around her Muslim best friend of many years, she found herself still hesitating in reaching for a glass of wine when presented with the opportunity at a fancier art event in Cairo. Some further stereotypes are particularly gendered, specifically that Coptic women are more promiscuous — often a result of associating hijab with "'iffa" (modesty or chastity). Thus, faced with all of these pressures, a few interviewees mentioned that they put up a barrier between themselves and their Coptic identity as a method for coping.

Lastly, one of the most prominent reasons for disengagement comes from the church itself as push factors. Joana, a 22-year-old Copt, recalled to me a story about her brother:

"[He] went to talk to the priest about some doubts he had with the church. After some conversation, he got asked to not return. Do you know how old he was at the time? 15 or 16."

[250] Ibrahim, "A Minority at the Bar."

Theological doubts and debates are certainly a prominent factor in pushing away Copts, even if it does not come to a conflict situation like Joana's brother. Another interviewee, John, a 26 year old Copt who currently resides in a diasporic community and is a theologian by training, describes how the clergy in his point of view lacks the spiritual acumen to properly respond to theological claims. Sandra, 36, while assuring that her relationship with the church remains strong, describes tension resulting from a personal connection to one of the theological rivals of Pope Shenouda III. Church responses to theological questions has always been fraught, and Pope Tawadros II continues the tradition — a sarcastically edited video by an anti-Coptic channel of him attempting to respond to a child's question which is relayed via his mother showcases the Church's stance, where he explicitly instructs the mother to not let her kid, as his guardian, "read too much philosophical readings".[251]

> *"I never liked the patriarchal structure of the church – wearing the veil, the communion/menstruation debate, and so on. I hated how they treated my mother after my father left us. They put the blame on her." – Karma, 21*

Karma's comments about her mother's attempts at a divorce with her father, who had not been in the picture for more than a decade, illustrate another major problem the church has – hierarchical patriarchy. Many evidence in the church point to this general trend of misogyny. The March 2012 comments on women's clothing was one, and similarly, the ongoing debate of women's communion during menstruation has been a constant for many years now, where the church's stance had been initially negative but currently occupies an ambiguous

[251] 2017 ,الجوابُ الصَّحيح لِمَن بَدَّل دِينَ المَسِيح, *عادل امام يدافع عن البابا تواضروس (كوميدى)*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inFxFX4kGlM.

space.[252] Another particularly gendered issue of systematic sexism most interviewees seemed to be aware of at some level was that of Sally Zakhary's, a Copt living in Orlando, Florida who was sexually assaulted by a Coptic priest during confession as an 11 year old girl. Zakhary started a movement called the Coptic Survivor movement that pushed investigation into the priest, who was defrocked.[253] On that note specifically, Joana mentioned that for her, the church specifically is no longer a safe space due to an attempted case of sexual harassment.

When I asked Nour about their queerness as my only non-binary interviewee, he told me that he did indeed find it much harder to reconcile queerness with going to church, *"and seeing people tell me I am going to hell made it worse".* Noah's queerness was not an individual case, as the church has taken a strong anti-LGBTQ+ church. In 2017, after a concert by Mashrou Leila on the 22nd of September, where Rainbow flags were raised on Egyptian soil publicly by activists Sarah Hegazy and Ahmed Alaa in honor of the openly queer lead singer Hamed Sinno, the pope decided to condemn the LGBTQ+ community once more.[254] The church indeed held not one, but two different conferences on the dangers of homosexuality – one in the October following the incident, and the other in November of 2019.[255] Finally, with the advent of COVID,

[252] EgyptWatch, "Exclusive: Coronavirus Ignites Conflicts inside Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church," *EgyptWatch* (blog), March 25, 2020, https://egyptwatch.net/2020/03/25/exclusive-coronavirus-ignites-conflicts-inside-egypts-coptic-orthodox-church/.

[253] @sallyzeeee, "My Name Is Sally Zakhari and I Was Raised in the Coptic Orthodox Church. When I Was around 11-12 Years Old (1998-1999) a Coptic Priest...," Instagram, July 14, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/sallyzeeee/.

[254] A S A, "البابا تواضروس يكشف موقف الكنيسة الأرثوذكسية من زواج المثليين," Al Masry Al Youm, September 27, 2017, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1197614.

[255] Egyptian Streets, "'Volcano of Homosexuality': Coptic Church to Hold Conference to 'Treat' Homosexuals," Egyptian Streets, September 28, 2017, https://egyptianstreets.com/2017/09/28/volcano-of-homosexuality-coptic-church-to-hold-conference-to-treat-homosexuals/; Amira Hesham, " البابا تواضروس يختتم مؤتمر المثلية الجنسية: الوقاية.. التعافي," Al Ahram, November 17, 2019, https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2326078.aspx.

Tawadros II claimed that the pandemic was God's punishment for homosexuality and atheism.[256]

> *"I don't go to confession anymore." Lamia drops her voice when I ask why and brings her phone closer to her, "After I told my priest about how I have been dating my boyfriend who is Muslim, some people followed me. They took photos. Soon, I was called to the police precinct – the report is closed now, but it was scary."*

Lamia had been living in an interfaith relationship she had been hiding, and after going to her confessional father for guidance on this, he quickly filed a police report in a move that strongly and closely echoed the real-life circumstances of Wafaa Qustuntin and Camilia Shehata. Lamia had no intentions of conversion, nor did she think about leaving her faith. Yet this form of conservative ideals was also reason to push Lamia and many other Copts to disengage. Indeed, general church conservatism left many of my interviews lacking something within the church itself, perhaps turning to other expressions of Christianity.

One final reason, which seemed to echo quite strongly throughout the whole interview process, was a general dissatisfaction from the hierarchy and clergy of the church. Boules recounts his general distrust towards the hierarchy due to their general role in creating a highly gendered, politicized and classist intra-communal society. He describes a story that his mother, head of the Sunday School branch in his church, told him, where it was discovered that priests

[256] Ahmed Badrawy, "بالفيديو.. البابا تواضروس: إجراءات مصر لمواجهة فيروس كورونا حاسمة وقوية," Shorouk News, March 29, 2020, https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=29032020&id=77d006d6-8d9d-4af6-9f87-c4ced649a805.

get their salaries from the tithe, which has been administratively out of effect since Cyril IV. He describes how he felt betrayed knowing that what is offered to the poor is taken from them by the clergy supposed to help them. Throughout all of the other problems, interwoven within them, was a general distrust towards the church hierarchy. In some cases, the frustration was towards Church-State collaboration — Joana's distrust towards a weak hierarchy unable to protect its people was apparent. In others it was mostly related to clerical consolidation and mismanagement of the community affecting the church as a private cultural space that almost all my interviewees felt a special affinity to, if at least through memories.

How do they disengage?

Now that we understand why Copts disengage from the church, we can begin to understand how they do so. The most common form among my interviewees is an implicit distancing of oneself from the church or Copticness as a whole. I found myself agreeing with Lamia, Boules, and Joana who all described how they simply could not keep up with Coptic expectations, and even though Boules and Joana had particularly "clockable" names (the former more than the latter), their disengagement didn't necessarily come in the form of attempting to hide that they are Christian in sustained situations. They, however, found themselves often distinguishing themselves as the "Indifferent Copt" — a specific trope that shows Copts as passive participants and tacit consenters to various harmful images that actively harm the Copts. While Lamia initially felt comfortable being the invisible Copt, something Joana too participated in, they both shared that they felt like they had to remain uncomfortably silent, or even participate, in uninformed conversations regarding Coptic stereotypes or beliefs. Boules simply did not have the option. Their active denial or correction of the general course of

conversation could have particularly altered their image, making them subject to the phrase, "it's just a joke," and potentially the label of "mota'aseb".[257] However, their participation, whether passive or active, actively aids in their perception as perhaps "indifferent", a "cool" Copt who thrives socially by validating or comforting Muslim audiences in their own biases and jokes. In other words, they actively make space for themselves within Muslim hegemonic culture by subverting the image of the Ideal Copt. This may or may not be accompanied by a decision to move away from communal and ritual aspects of the church, like liturgy, Khidmah, or Bible Study.

For the three interviewees that came from Damietta, another possibility that was particularly popular attending the Anglican church instead. Karma and Joanna describe feeling much more comfortable and much less under pressure in those spaces, where their showcases of faith did not need to be as Orthodox while maintaining a form of community based around their distinct otherness as Christians in a hegemonic Muslim society. This did not always need to be a particularly scandalous affair, yet community awareness of a Copt attending mass at a non-Coptic church, specifically a protestant one, may have been call for clerical concern.

More explicitly, some Copts decide to actively ditch their religious identity altogether. Indeed, three of my interviewees started out the conversation by declaring to me that they no longer consider themselves Christian, despite still being labelled and perceived as Copts.

[257] While not exactly zealot or intolerant, muta'aseb contextually places its meaning somewhere in between.

Disengaging from Hegemonic Society/Culture

Why disengage?

A presence of a strong community fostered by the church and the creation of the previously mentioned church-led institutions and intra-communal activities has made it possible for Copts to indeed maintain a complete and whole existence within the church without compromising their needs and desires. Disengaging from hegemonic society isn't particularly opposed to church teachings, especially as Pope Shenouda had been a large proponent of disengaging from politics post his 1985 release.[258] Often, as was the case with Pope Shenouda III himself, disengagement is a response to the persecution Copts face from society. This persecution can include anything from othering, as evidenced by the stereotypes that my interviewees describe, or more brutal attacks. Most of my interviewees recalled a specific bombing that was particularly impactful on them – the bombing of the All-Saint's Church in Alexandria that occurred on New Year's Eve of 2011. When asked about the general feelings of their families and surroundings, all interviewees mentioned a variation of fear and sadness, and some explicitly mentioned a specific pent-up anger they had.

"This was the first time sectarian violence had made its way outside of the South of Egypt; it felt closer to us." – Karma, 21

Karma, of course, was correct – for my interviewees, who were all northerners, this rang true. In other informal conversations I had with Coptic friends, we reflected that for our generation, the All-Saints Church bombing also might have been the earliest we were

[258] Ramzy, "To Die Is Gain."

particularly aware of our own Copticness, and more specifically, otherness, on a scale larger than ourselves.

How do they disengage?

Disengaging from societal expectations is often multi-faceted. In its purest forms, it presents in a monastic form, something the Coptic church takes pride in bringing to the world. Pope Shenouda III encouraged a particularly spiritual life, and a monastic Coptic church boomed during his time. Yet monasticism is not the only way, not is it something that most people see as feasible in the first place.

Carolyn Ramzy discusses the implications of many taratil and taranim (psalms and hymns) and their use as a performative agency in order to reject the moniker of national unity and all "Earthly citizenship" in favor of a heavenly one.[259] She particularly brings forward taranim that invoke messages like, "but I am not from here, I have another home". In a society that often doubts the belonging of Copts, disengaging from expectations is not a particularly unexpected response but it ironically plays into Coptic ostracization to a certain extent. A rise in desires and acceptance for martyrdom rhetoric in their immediate communities was certainly felt by my interviewees. Maria specifically told me how when the news of the April 2017 bombings came to them, they were already in mass, and claims of instantaneous belonging to God's heavenly kingdom as martyrs were immediately hailed in liturgy. Indeed, martyrdom as a response has been defaulted to by Copts, which Paul Sedra describes as a result of assuming

[259] Ibid.

Copts are a passive community doomed to crisis by virtue of their minority status.[260] Ramzy argues inversely so, however, where she uses Butler to explain that one can indeed gain agency from sites of wounds.[261] This reintroduces the concept of disengagement not as one of passivity but one of active agency through asserting a subversive form of building space.

Copts find other ways in disengaging from hegemonic expectations, one of which has been the previously mentioned ideology of Coptism, or a reassertion of indigenous belonging and assertions of cultural citizenship that lie outside the accepted framework of national unity — this often engages in some form of "Coptic first" identity that engages indigeneity as a way to gain a form of belonging, capitalizing on older rhetoric that includes ideas of gatekeeping what it means to be Coptic, especially from a large number of "indigenization" rhetoric that is often used by Muslims to break down Coptic back to its original literal meaning (Egyptian) as opposed to the publicly used and understood meaning today (Coptic Christians of Egypt). This rhetoric is particularly popular around national unity discussions, and often arises around the holidays. Copts may attempt to reclaim the meaning by asserting their presence as the sons of Pharaohs, or the origin of Egypt, and directly relating it, like Iqladiyus Labib did in the early 20th century, to their Christian identity. Often, this Coptism identity tries to revive Coptic heritage — many Copts may write their names in Coptic characters on social media, and often participate in Coptic learning groups. One particular group specifically calls it the original *lafz* or spoken

[260] Paul Sedra, "Time to Reject the Language of Coptic Victimhood," Jadaliyya - جدلية, August 10, 2012, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/26844.
[261] Ramzy, "To Die Is Gain."

form. The pinned post for a Facebook page with 44k likes describes the language as one of the most phonologically close languages to ancient Egyptian and takes pride in that.[262]

Coptism bleeds into the idea of delineating Copticness and gatekeeping it from certain aspects of hegemonic society, rejecting its use in the national project or in non-Coptic ways. It is an important practice of building and perhaps maintaining spaces that already exist. In illustrating this, I use two different artist who use Coptic art and assess their positionalities and the response of the Coptic community to them. These two artists are Victor Fakhoury and Ahmed Al Sabrouty. Whereas Fakhoury had particularly gained notoriety for engaging in neo-Coptic iconography and applying it to the martyrs of the Maspero Massacre, Al Sabrouty on the other hand was published in Al Dostour with the his pieces depicting Egypt's national soccer team (which has notoriously excluded Copts from participation) in the style of the Fayuum mummy portraits ahead of Egypt's participation in the FIFA World Cup 2018.[263] Fakhoury's use of neo-Coptic art has been particularly celebrated on many different Coptic pages and in multiple Coptic magazines.[264] His use of a distinctively Coptic form of art to depict a Coptic massacre in modern Egyptian history that is contested up until today suggests a form of agency within the framework of victimhood. More importantly, it describes a completely Coptic identity and community interacting with itself and expressing itself on its own terms regarding a topic that the hegemonic society (and to a certain extent, the church) have somewhat looked

[262] Speak Coptic اتكلم قبطي, "عن اللغة القبطية," Facebook, April 26, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FSpeakCoptic%2Fposts%2F822890004979808&show_text=true&width=500.

[263] Nada Gamal, "سعي لا يضمن حتمية الوصول.. واقع الأقباط مع كرة القدم في مصر," *Vice* (blog), February 16, 2022, https://www.vice.com/ar/article/g5qdab/سعي-لا-يضمن-حتمية-الوصول-واقع-الأقباط-مع-كرة-القدم-في-مصر.

[264] Yosra El Gendi and Marco Pinfari, "Icons of Contention: The Iconography of Martyrdom and the Construction of Coptic Identity in Post-Revolutionary Egypt," *Media, War & Conflict* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 50–69, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219866137.

negatively upon and often finds uncomfortable to discuss, placing Coptic imagery at the center and forefront. On the other hand, Ahmed Al Sabrouty — a Muslim — depicted the Egyptian national team, a topic already out of the reach of Coptic people as is, using a form of art that, while it may not be particularly distinctly Coptic, has been used by Coptic iconographers historically. All of the players being Muslims was certainly a point of contention, and the words associated the project were certainly provocative of a deeper religious meaning despite assurances from the artist that this was an appeal to ancient Egyptian heritage. Al Dostour's front page published the story with the iconography, and the words "Your Blessings, Virgin Mary" written in red.[265] The project, called Egyptian Hymn, vexed many Copts, specifically with the painting of the Egyptian Coach in the style of the Pontokrator pose – usually reserved for Jesus. The inherent difference between what was expected of Copts and their reaction, not dissimilar to the situation with Azazeel or *Bahib el Cima*, was particularly apparent in the response of Fatma Naout, a Muslim journalist often identified with being a moderate voice that supports Coptic rights specifically. Naout often gives herself authority to speak on behalf of Copts (most recently accepting an apology from Al Masry Al Youm on behalf of Copts for an article published implying that Copts were kuffar), and her name, being ambiguous, causes some form of pause, perhaps assuming that she is Copt herself.[266] Naout Facebook post

[265] Ma_Abader [@AbaderEgypt], " الفنان احمد الصبروتي جريدة الدستور اللي رسم صورة كوبر بالشكل ده . هو مَش فاهم الجرم اللي عمله . ده اسمه ازدراء أديان واضح جدا !!! نطالب محاكمة احمد صبروتي دي واقعة تهكم وازدراء .. والامر يحتاج الي وقفه وليس شجب فقط .. لدينا من المحامين الكثر وعليهم مسؤلية . https://t.co/QK0YpdfJZ8," Tweet, *Twitter*, June 20, 2018, https://twitter.com/AbaderEgypt/status/1009461789732560898; Zeinab Atris, " راسم اللاعبين بالفن القبطي: كوبر 'الرسول' وصلاح 'الملك'," Al Dostour, June 17, 2018, https://www.dostor.org/2212986.

[266] The number one suggested question for Fatma Naout when you look up her name is, "Is Fatma Naout Christian?"

thanked the artist for portraying such an important form of Egyptian art.[267] Many of her commenters, whose names indicate they are Christian, seemed to disagree with her in comments, and an outrage on Twitter ensued where many Copts called for the invocation of Article 98 of the Penal Code (defamation of religion). In this case, there is public and outward disengagement from the tacit role of accepting that Coptic representation should be accepted regardless, clearly delineating a separate Coptic identity even if not necessarily referencing a Coptism ideology.

This general disengagement from orthodox COC theology while maintaining a form of disengagement from hegemonic society offers up the idea of creating a form of building space that exists under neither institutional umbrella, truly, but somewhere in between, forcing new connections to be formed between Coptic adherents and larger superstructures around them.

Different forms of disengagement, resistance, and belonging all offer different forms building spaces for Egypt's Copts, engaging with discourses of visibility, strategic invisibility, and identity politics. They all, however, have a strong relationship with different modes of Coptic loud actions.

[267] Fatima Naoot, "محمد صلاح وجه مصر ... من وجوه الفيوم," Facebook, July 8, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/148198625220755/photos/a.684523421588270/2199687300071867/.

Chapter 5: Loud Actions

Representation, Activism, and whatever lies in between

Active participation for Copts does not just find itself restricted in the daily every day mundane-ness of everyday resistance, quiet encroachment, and specifically the restricted nature of quiet practices that often coincide with nonmovements. In many ways, Copts have had an active, strong and particularly loud participation in Egyptian life. This occurs both directly and subversively. In this chapter, I assess trends of Coptic participation under the hegemonic structures that they operate under, namely the Church, the state, and society. I clarify now that Coptic political participation does not have to be oppositional to any of these specific pillars, since politics are not inherently counter-hegemonic, yet indeed that making space for Coptic people can come in many shapes, forms, and political leanings. I discuss four main modes of loud actions in making space: disengagement, formalized Egyptian politics, semi-formal activism, and online spaces.

LOUD DISENGAGEMENT

Despite discussing disengagement specifically as a form of quiet practices, it is important to address it also as a form of loud activism that is particularly important and relevant in certain cases. The two cases I use is the 2011 revolution, and the rise of charismatic trends.

Copts in the 2011 Revolution

Many scholars have already engaged with the presence of Copts during the 25th of January, 2011 revolution, an event hailed as the most important political event in modern Egyptian history since the 1952 revolution. While I have no intention of repeating their work, I build on it to enunciate the point of Coptic political participation and making space in what Egyptians thought would be the foundation of the new democratic nation. This participation particularly came in the context of active refusal from the church's active support of the regime, and thus there is an element of disengagement ingrained in this political resistance, yet as I illustrate, some of the disengagement appears specifically in different ways.

A lot of Coptic activism relies on visibility, and Coptic activism at the time was no different. It officially worked initially against the desires of the Coptic church specifically in how it relates to public and private space. An open defiance of the hegemonic Coptic expectation of strategic invisibility spelled a new form of loud Coptic activism. The notion of building space in a heavily changing political scape necessitated a ditching of old ideas of fear that overtook most Coptic actors in the Mubarak era. The participation of the average Copt in el Tahrir square was thus sufficiently emblematic of this new wave.

The Maspero Youth Union, which as Candace Lukasik illustrates, has been active since the Omraneya incident of 2010, had worked to promote Coptic interests across socioeconomic lines, particularly with strong affiliations towards representing the middle and lower classes. Their framework, Lukasik reports, was as specifically so that they could both achieve Coptic

goals and similarly continue their common struggle with the rest of Egyptians.[268] While the context of their participation remained to be within the national unity discourse of 1919, there seemed to be positive involvement on the end of Coptic activists, as those in the square seemingly existed outside of the purview of broader Egyptian society's expectations, as they were openly defying the church and the state. As Lukasik argues, the MYU broke down during the revolution certain aspects of the strategic invisibility Copts had been living under, and "made visible what has been left invisible in Egyptian politics", in a form of multi-stakeholder-ism in the new Egyptian republic.[269]

The main form of loud disengagement can be seen through an incident we briefly discussed in Chapter 3, which was Egypt's bloody Sunday, or the Maspero Massacre of the 9th of October. One of the key moments in this was the distinct fall in the semi-utopian unity between Muslims and Christians that existed for a brief time. When SCAF called on citizens through state media to save the Army from the attacking Copts, it was a sign of this visibility limits of Copts in society failing an unseen test. Yet the very protest itself displayed a very specific use of Coptic visibility — reliance on disengagement from society to politically mobilize. As Ramzy displays, Copts themselves started using their disengagement to "gain agency from sites of wounds". Copts wore white robes that said "Martyrs available" — a victimization technique that allowed them to use their persecuted status specifically as a persecuted

[268] Lukasik, "Conquest of Paradise."
[269] Ibid.

minority to gain a specific form of political power and capital in society by longing for heavenly citizenship.[270]

The Charismatic Movement

Disengagement can occur in many ways, and may take a theological stance that disengages from both society and the COC. Gaetan du Roy and Carolyn Ramzy explore divergent forms of Coptic belonging that do not particularly invoke COC teachings and indeed may defy them as a form of building space that might not be particularly feasible in Egyptian society. To contextualize this, many of my interviewees described that the church's current response to sectarian incidents as perhaps ineffective, or insufficient, but more importantly, all of them shared the sentiment of "what else can they do?". There is a clear understanding that while the responses might not be effective, it is a bigger problem than just the Church — their response perhaps can take a sharper tone, but at the end of the day it is truly risking the menial yet still technically existent security the President-Patriarch pact affords the Copts of Egypt. A frustration with the ineffective nature of Church responses and publicized theological stances of the Church that seemed to not resonate with many who saw themselves getting the short end of the stick daily perhaps was the start of an increased following for a pre-existing yet renewed form of charismatic theology in the Egyptian sphere. Charismatic theology is one perhaps most associated with a deeply spiritual return to the "simple nature of the Gospel", often known for having weaker theological positions, as it is not a central part of the belief. Famously, Charismatic movements do not shy away from being very loud, and very visible.

[270] Ramzy, "To Die Is Gain."

Du Roy traces back modern-day Charismatic movements to Cyril VI's healing mysticism, and more directly to Matta al Miskin.[271] He describes how Father Samaan in particular, priest of the historic Samaan al Kharaz monastery in the rocks in al Muqattam, uses Charismatic and "Protestant" techniques (reminiscent of Pentecostal gatherings) that have attracted many people. One of the most attended nights was during the month following the Maspero Massacre, which was a large prayer organized on 11/11/2011 modeled after "World Prayer Day", called "Laylat al Rugu' ila Allah" — or the "night of return to God". Du Roy describes that many of the Copts who attend Father Samaan's prayers share a notion of putting Christian as their primary label, rather than Copt.[272] Samaan's theology was echoed closely in his friend Father Makary Younan, one of Egypt's media sensations – a priest that was particularly known for his exorcisms, speaking in tongues and similarly charismatic preaching. While Father Samaan similarly performed exorcisms, Father Makary perfected its public presentation, attracting Christian and Muslim audiences alike. His Charismatic theology offered a much deeper spiritual connection than the Coptic Orthodox official theology could truly provide, and was, like Father Samaan, closely connected and influenced by Protestant (specifically Pentecostal) preachers like Oklahoma's own Oral Roberts.[273]

Lastly, Ramzy brings us to Maher Fayez, Egypt's most famous *muranim* (hymn singer) currently, who is famous for authoring and singing the Coptic church's most famous taranim. She describes his rise to fame in similar terms to du Roy's description of Father Samaan, being a

[271] Gaetan du Roy, "Father Samaan and the Charismatic Trend within the Coptic Church," in *Copts in Context: Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity*, ed. Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 66–79.
[272] Ibid, 76.
[273] Febe Armanios, "A Charismatic Coptic Priest: Abouna Makary Younan (1934-2022)," *Public Orthodoxy* (blog), January 27, 2022, https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/01/27/charismatic-coptic-priest/.

charismatic experience in its own right. Fayez describes his non-conformity to the Coptic church, and his desire to go back to a simpler theology in understanding the Gospel.[274] Ramzy's experience as an ethnomusicologist helps us understand his use of neo-Pentecostal pedagogies in the use of auto-tuning and lyrics in order to secure and build a particular space which offers a form of Christian belonging existing in a hegemonic Muslim society within the public space that is Egypt, preaching a form of heavenly citizenship she introduced us to in her paper To Die is to Gain. These forms of charismatic movements engage loudly with Copts publicly, often broadcasted on TV, and help in forming ecumenical connections spanning more than just Coptic Orthodox Christians. Loud disengagement generally is a unique form of loud action, which is heavily contrasted with the next section, specifically discussing a cooptation of what we have examined as a hegemonic discourse in order to build space.

COPTS IN FORMALIZED EGYPTIAN POLITCS

One of the ways Copts have been able to make space has been active participation in formalized state politics. Egypt's political system is officially a parliamentary democracy. Since 2014, Egypt has officially been under the rule of former Minister for Defense Abdel Fatah el Sisi in an authoritarian regime. One of the main pillars that el Sisi regime has been built on from day one has been the national unity discourse — indeed, el Sisi never had to fight for the creation of a President-Patriarch pact, since Pope Tawadros II has been a willingly cooperative figure to

[274] Carolyn Ramzy, "Autotuned Belonging: Coptic Popular Song and the Politics of Neo-Pentecostal Pedagogies," *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 3 (2016): 434–58, https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.3.0434.

secure Coptic rights. Tawadros II's presence behind the future president and next to Ahmed el Tayeb (Sheikh of al Azhar) on the 3rd of July was key in presenting the national unity narrative.

While Coptic sectarian incidents have been strongly present in Egypt, specifically with Church explosions and shootings, the strong participation of Copts in formalized state institutions exists in part because of the President-Patriarch pact, especially with the revitalization of the Holy Synod's Committee for Civic Participation, but also partly as Tadros and Habib point out, because of a "never again" approach to Islamist politics, as Copts were ardent supporters of the *Tamarod* (literally Rebellion) campaign that helped ouster Morsi, and many Coptic leaders supported SCAF's massacre against Rabi'a.[275] Coptic presence in state politics indicate attempts to build space and find a seat at the table within the existing dynamics of power today via the framework of representation politics.

Measures for Coptic involvement in state politics can be seen in the 2014 Egyptian Constitution, where a new article, no. 180, was added that specifically included using a quota system for Christians, women, youth, and people with disabilities. While the article text specifies a percentage to youth and women, it simply states that "these percentages [must] include a proper representation of Christians and people with disability".[276] This has been a particularly important addition for Copts. While there has always been representation for Copts in the parliament, mostly through presidential appointments, this has never been codified, but had been done out of the president's own volition. Coptic representation in the 2011-2012

[275] MEMO Staff, "On Anniversary of Rabaa Massacre, Coptic Leaders Hail the Army's 'Resistance of Terrorism,'" *Middle East Monitor* (blog), August 15, 2014, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140815-on-anniversary-of-rabaa-massacre-coptic-leaders-hail-the-armys-resistance-of-terrorism/; Mariz Tadros and Akram Habib, "Who Speaks for Coptic Rights in Egypt Today? (2013–2021)," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (February 18, 2022): 183, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020183.
[276] "Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt."

elections was particularly sectarian in nature, especially with the presence of two main blocks — the Islamist Block and the Liberal Kotla Block. With the Kotla winning a total of 34 seats (or 6.83%), the parliament was heavily Islamist in nature (70%), with a heavy-set marginalization for Copts and women. There were only 11 Copts in the entire parliament.[277] Thus, with the arrival of the 2015 parliamentary elections under president el Sisi, there was an increased presence for Copts running in the parliament, with 39 representatives in the final lists, 36 of whom elected and 3 appointed by the president. This comes out as 6.5% of the 596 seats in the parliament, yet it remains to be the highest number for Copts in the parliament at any point in time.[278]

However, when I asked my interviewees about their opinion regarding Coptic involvement in the parliament, most of them either were unaware of any vocal Coptic involvement whatsoever, or simply said it barely mattered. Indeed, there has been barely any vocalization regarding Coptic matters in the actual parliament. Most of the actions of Coptic parliamentarians in media perception has not involved the Coptic question. Faiqa Faheem, for example, a Coptic PM in the 2015 parliament, declared that Christians and Muslims are one fabric.[279] Febe Fawzy, from the 2020 parliament, spoke against an ex-Coptic priest who was spewing Islamophobic rhetoric in Australia.[280] Hana Anis, another PM, was also recorded to

[277] Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 223-225.

[278] Mostafa Rahoma, "من التهميش إلى التمكين: الأقباط فى «الرئاسة والبرلمان والمحافظات»," Al Watan, April 30, 2019, https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4137396.

[279] Farida Ali, Magda Badawy, and Mahmoud Badawy, "«نائبة قبطية: «المسلمون والمسيحيون نسيج واحد»," Sada el Balad, January 8, 2018, https://www.elbalad.news/3114561.

[280] Mariam al Beheiry, "النائبة القبطية فيبى فوزى ترد على زكريا بطرس بعد تصريحاته المسيئة," *Al 'An*, November 14, 2021, https://www.alaanonline.com/2021/11/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%a6%d8%a8%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a8%d8%b7%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a%d8%a8%d9%89-

have made a statement in supporting the building of mosques in her diverse hometown of al Zagazig.[281] It is fair to make the assessment that Coptic parliamentarians have been particularly useful to push a narrative of national unity in the new Egyptian government. Yet this can also have a positive impact in terms of Coptic representation in government. Coptic accessibility to the Egyptian government as elected members indeed is a new phenomenon that has never been present this strongly since the first parliament in 1923 under el Wafd party, and thus most Copts have not seen themselves as particularly present in the parliament like they are now. This form of representation politics, however, does represent a form of a visibility trap — because Copts in the parliament are so visible, they are very much under the governmental panopticon and immediate societal and church criticism, creating a form of a self-correcting and self-policing mechanism. While this panopticon does extend to everyone in Egypt currently as an authoritarian security-military hybrid state, it operates differently for people who are involved in official state mechanisms.

Coptic involvement in state politics is not solely parliamentarian. Two governors of the "New Governors Movement" batch appointed in 2018 were Copts — the governors for Damietta and Daqahleya.[282] This is an improvement from 2011, when a Coptic governor resigned immediately after being assigned due to outrage from his governorate of Qena. Similarly, Nabila Makram abdel Shaheed currently serves as Coptic representation as the

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[281] Ahmed Asala, "النائبة القبطية هناء أنيس تواصل دعمها لتشييد مساجد الزقازيق," Al Gomhoria, April 15, 2022, https://www.gomhuriaonline.com/Gomhuria/974411.html.

[282] Rahoma, "من التهميش إلى التمكين."

Minister for Immigration in the current cabinet.[283] It is notable that it has been somewhat of a running joke among Copts for years that the Minister for Environment seat has always been "reserved" for Copts, specifically Coptic women as a double minority – most prominently Laila Iskandar and Nadia Makram Ebeid – especially as the *only* Coptic representation, and so this has been a welcome change.

Most recently and most importantly, the current president of the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) in Egypt as of February of 2022 is Boules Fahmy Iskandar, a Coptic judge.[284] What is particularly significant about this decision is the position Boules Fahmy occupies — not only does the President of Egypt swear an oath to the president of the SCC, but the President of the SCC may at any point, due to any outstanding circumstances that might occur to the president, assume his responsibilities during transitional periods, especially with the removal of a VP position under the 2014 constitution. This is particularly pressing since the President of Egypt constitutionally must be a Muslim, and online discussions have raged on regarding this topic – yet simultaneously, by being there, Boules Fahmy Iskandar *did* break a barrier, creating space and forcing engagement with the idea of Coptic citizenry, as is apparent with the questions asked on Mekameleen TV, and the responses from experts.[285]

Coptic presence in formalized state politics does not offend the sensibilities of hegemonic societal opinion, the Church, or the state. Being highly visible as Copts is an

[283] Aboulfotouh Kandil, "Egyptian Minister: Sisi Opponents Abroad Will Be 'Cut to Pieces.,'" *People's World* (blog), July 25, 2019, https://peoplesworld.org/article/egyptian-minister-sisi-opponents-abroad-will-be-cut-to-pieces/.
[284] Ibrahim Ayyad, "Historic Decision to Appoint Christian Judge as Head of Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court`," *Al-Monitor*, February 15, 2022, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/02/historic-decision-appoint-christian-judge-head-egypts-supreme-constitutional.
[285] Mekameleen TV — قناة مكملين الفضائية, *بعد تعيين بولس فهمي .. هو ينفع دولة مسلمة قاضي قضاتها اللي ممكن يبقى رئيس مصر في أي وقت يبقى مسيحي؟* , 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4KHwZj95I4.

exemplification of coopting a national unity discourse to build space — essentially an amplification of the Ideal Copt image. This national unity discourse then by definition often excludes a lot of other parts of the Coptic community who might be seen as "Bad Copts". While we do not have as clear of examples currently, we can rely on Coptic MP responses in 2008-09 with the H1N1 epidemic to view how this exemplification of the Ideal Copt image placed specific pressures, stigma on the Zabbaleen for their association with pigs in their work, as MPs Ibtessam Habib and Georgette Kaleeny found themselves denying consumption of pork and excluding the community from access to that same image.[286]

SEMI-FORMALIZED ACTORS AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF CIVIC SPACE

The lack of civic space in Egypt in general can be formally attributed to the July 2019 law, commonly known as the Egyptian NGO law, in formalizing what has been implicitly been in effect — a deep restriction on freedom of speech and expression formalized through NGOs in Egypt.[287] All NGOs in Egypt under this law are subject to being tried at any point in time for being non-compliant with the conditions the Ministry of Social Solidarity set forward for it. Thus, most Coptic Civil Society organizations today are charitable organizations that lack political activity in anyway shape or form.[288] Mina Ibrahim explores the necessities of

[286] Tadros, "The Undesirables of Egypt."
[287] Amnesty International, "Egypt: Authorities Must Repeal the Outrageous NGO Law," January 10, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/5154/2022/en/.
[288] Mostafa Rahoma, "خريطة الجمعيات الخيرية المسيحية في مصر.. بالأسماء," Al Watan, July 3, 2019, https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4245880.

maintaining a quiet profile for those charitable organizations, since they must maintain certain relationships as "silent neighbors" under the state's political radar.[289]

The lack of Coptic civil society forces the presence of semi-formalized actors to take some sort of action that can and may be viewed as legitimate, in ways that civil society organizations might have been able to otherwise but are unable to since they do not really exist (freely). I define "semi-formalized" in this case as actors who operate with some form of authority that often lacks proper formality, perhaps through a large following or proximity to certain issues or key figures. These semi-formalized actors work in very specific ways to maintain their positionality in Egypt, walking the walk of visibility while projecting as much as possible of the image of the Ideal Copt. This can present in an emphasis on national unity, a support for state systems, or maintaining good relations with society and church. I use two main examples to prove this argument: Bishop Macarius of al Minya; and Shehata el Me'ades, head of the Zabbaleen Union in Egypt.

Bishop Macarius

In this section I resort mostly to Tadros and Habib's research on Bishop Macarius of Minya, as they have collected significant information on the situation. I argue that in the case of Bishop Macarius, he treads a very specific space in Egyptian polity, and by resorting to a framework of visibility and projecting the image of a Good Copt while maintaining second-hand authority granted by Pope Tawadros II and his position in the church, his advocacy has been and continues to be crucial in building space for Copts in the wider society.

[289] Mina Ibrahim, "For the Sake of Marguirguis: The Coptic Christian Khidma as a Divine Community," *Endowment Studies* 4, no. 1–2 (December 11, 2020): 66–91, https://doi.org/10.1163/24685968-04010001.

First, it is important to understand the Al Minya, one of Egypt's governorates with the largest Christian populations, has been the center of sectarian violence for years. Over the last 6 years, al Minya has witnessed two shootings on Coptic parishioners on a trip to a monastery, multiple cases of expulsions and killings, and most prominently in terms of making national news, the beating and degradation of Suad Thabet.[290] Suad Thabet is 70-year old Copt who was beaten and stripped naked in her village of al Karm in al Minya by a mob of 40 people due to suspicions of her son's involvement in an interfaith affair with a Muslim woman.[291] The case got a lot of media attention at the time, and public calls for the arrest of the perpetrators littered social media platforms, despite the governor downplaying the situation. The president himself publicly supported her, addressing an apology to her and to all Egyptian women.[292] Pope Tawadros II refused to give commentary, but instead passed the word to Anba Macarius, who had spoken on this more than once before. Bishop Macarius, while not the Bishop of al Minya himself, had been practically running the bishopric as Bishop Arsanious, seated Bishop, was suffering from Alzheimer's.[293]

By engaging in a form of high visibility of this sort, Bishop Macarius was aware of the weight placed on his shoulder, as is apparent in every interview he has done in that period. In an open interview with the BBC in 2016, he was very clear in outlining a few points that

[290] Tadros and Habib, "Who Speaks for Coptic Rights in Egypt Today?"
[291] Jane Arraf, "After 2016 Assault, A Coptic Christian Grandmother In Egypt Fights For Justice," *NPR*, May 26, 2017, sec. The Two-Way, https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/05/26/529508192/after-2016-assault-a-coptic-christian-grandmother-in-egypt-fights-for-justice.
[292] معلومة لايف M3loma Live, *عاجل / أول تعليق من السيسي على السيدة المسيحية المصرية : متاخديش على خاطرك..* ,.., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNT2MS8zSPQ. 2016
[293] Tadros and Habib, "Who Speaks for Coptic Rights in Egypt Today?"

remained in his rhetoric for every subsequent interview.[294] First, he was unsatisfied with the security apparatus and the usual mechanism of "urfi" councils, or reconciliation councils, that occurred informally instead of the official institutions. He outlined that the security apparatus could have done better, and that urfi councils result in "humiliating" results for Copts. Second, his dissatisfaction did not extend to President el Sisi, whose apology, in his eyes, was going above and beyond. Third, his non-belief in urfi councils was not just from a Coptic perspective, but he saw that as a "state of the law", Egypt should not implement informal institutions whatsoever. Fourth, his outrage towards what happened was not from his perspective as a Copt — he was defending Egyptian morality, and every Egyptian should feel incensed about the situation as it touched all of them. Finally, in an interview in January of 2020, he said that he is absolutely satisfied with whatever judgement comes from the Egyptian courts, despite attempts at being pushed to say something to the contrary by the Coptic host.[295] Bishop Macarius, in outlining these points, effectively did two things — he managed to criticize the government in a highly visible situation, no longer resorting to strategic invisibility as most Copts had been used to, but he also attempted to frame it in a way that did not greatly veer away from the expected image of the Ideal Copt, by maintaining a discourse of national unity throughout the whole discussion and keeping in mind the President-Patriarch pact. In fact, in May of 2020, during horrible weather conditions, Macarius personally went out to provide

[294] BBC News عربي, *بلا قيود مع أسقف عام المنيا وأبو قرقاص الأنبا مكاريوس*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLlhvRQJxzo.

[295] AL Horreya TV, *بصراحه: تعليق الأنبا مكاريوس على الحكم في قضية سيدة الكرم ؟*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaOzzzFE6TM.

blankets and food to homeless people on the streets of Al Minya, a gesture of national unity itself.[296]

Tadros and Habib outline that the effects from this situation were partly positive in relaying this message of Coptic woes to a larger audience, but inversely it came with negative outcomes to Bishop Macarius specifically, and partly to the church. In doing what he did, Bishop Macarius was blocked from being the Bishop of all of Minya — instead, his bishopric was divided into three, where he was given only rule of the city of Al Minya. Simultaneously, it was an indication of state security interference in Church affairs, as reports of closed-door meetings between the security apparatus and the patriarchate surfaced, something that had not happened this explicitly since the Naga' Hamadi affair of 2010.[297] Since then, Suad Thabet's attackers were cleared in December of 2020, and keeping to his word, Bishop Macarius has not since commented publicly on the situation. The Egyptian Public Prosecutor Office ordered an appeal to be made, but there had been no new developments in the case.[298]

Shehata el Me'ades

Having previously mentioned and discussed the presence of the Zabbaleen community in Egypt, I will focus more directly here on the positionality of Shehata el Me'ades, Union Leader of the Zabbaleen, in the Egyptian public sphere and in topics that relate to the position

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[296] 👑دينا بنت الملك👑 [@bntelmalek70], "# الانبا_مكاريوس - الأسقف العام بالمنيا في هذه الاجواء الصعبه والسيول 🙏🙏🙏 يجول يصنع خيرا. ويقوم بتوزيع البطاطين والطعام ربنا يبارك خدمتك https://t.co/yrxNfCjzGo," Tweet, *Twitter*, March 12, 2020, https://twitter.com/bntelmalek70/status/1238167698816880642.

[297] Tadros and Habib, "Who Speaks for Coptic Rights in Egypt Today?"

[298] النيابة العامة المصرية [@EgyptianPPO], " أمر السيد المستشار النائب العام بتكليف المكتب الفني بمكتبه بدراسة أوجه الطعن على الحكم الصادر ببراءة المتهمين في الواقعة المعروفة بواقعة 'سيدة الكرم'، وذلك فور إيداع محكمة الجنايات التي أصدرت الحكم أسبابه.," Tweet, *Twitter*, December 18, 2020, https://twitter.com/EgyptianPPO/status/1339909674712387586.

of Zabbaleen in Egypt. First, it is important to note, simply for assessing general trends towards his person, that the word el Me'ades is the Christian equivalent of Hajj in Egypt — someone who has made pilgrimage to al Quds (which is where the word comes from). Shehata el Me'ades is then, like his community, closely linked to being Coptic in the minds of most of those who interact with him.

Secondly, unlike most trade unions in Egypt, the Zabbaleen Union (henceforth ZU) is not a registered trade union with the Ministry of Social Solidarity nor the Ministry of Manpower (the Egyptian equivalent of the Ministry of Labor). It is also not a registered organization with the Ministry of the Environment. It does, however, exist semi-legally and semi-formally as it was established in 2012 with a grant from a US-based NGO that came in 2010, possibly motivated by the plight of the Zabbaleen in a post-H1N1 Egypt, or the release of the Mai Iskander movie "Garbage Dreams" in 2009.[299] While it seems that none of the ministries have formally included nor recognized the ZU officially in their efforts to "clean" Egypt, there have been some of permits and permissions granted to them, specifically that they are mentioned in some Ministry of Local Development Plans briefly without specifying details.[300] El Me'ades's position then is as clear as the ZU itself — he's commonly known as the head of the Zabbaleen and the leader of their ZU. El Me'ades is perhaps a leader in the sense of being the capital provider for the Zabbaleen of Egypt, and the public spokesperson, but his officiality stops here,

[299] Mostafa Suleiman, "منحة أمريكية لتأسيس أول نقابة لجامعي القمامة فى مصر," *Al Arabiya*, February 11, 2010, https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010%2F02%2F11%2F100075.html; RT Staff, " نقابة الزبالين المصريين تساهم في تشجيع السياحة," *Russia Today Arabic*, January 5, 2019, https://arabic.rt.com/business/993035-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9/.

[300] See https://www.mld.gov.eg/ar/projects/details/1020.

with some authority lent to his name through permits, public recognition, and self-identification.

Shehata el Me'ades is not exactly known for being the most helpful nor conducive person to the rights of Zabbaleen altogether among the Zabbaleen themselves. In 2011, he discouraged their protests and his close relationships with the security state led to negative consequences for the people living there, according to famous journalist Rasha Azb.[301] There is a notable class difference between his own dwellings and those of the Zabbaleen that live around him and in Mansheyet Nasser, where he has continuously claimed being rich on TV, no doubt in an effort to save face as someone associated with an impoverished job.[302] Yet it is important to note that whenever el Me'ades appears in order to discuss the conditions of the Zabbaleen, he does indeed strongly advocate for the inclusion of the Zabbaleen in state-wide plans for garbage collecting plans that has often intentionally excluded them. One of the biggest cases in the Zabbaleen's political sphere was the 2017 plan of Garbage Huts, a topic we addressed before, which essentially robbed the Zabbaleen of recyclable materials. When Shehata appeared on TV on multiple channels in the following days, he clearly and officially complained about the government and the lack of inclusion of the ZU to the table when discussing the Ministry of Environment's plans to clean the streets. He did so, however, while offering an alternate plan that would include all of the Zabbaleen and "clean up all of Egypt",

[301] رشا عزب [@RashaPress], " كلمة السر فى احتجاجات الاقباط الطائفية فى منشية ناصر شحاتة المقدس رجل على علاقة وطيدة بالامن وكان بيشتم فى الثورةو رجالته ضريونا فى التحرير," Tweet, *Twitter*, March 8, 2011, https://twitter.com/RashaPress/status/45259219825475584.

[302] VideoYoum7, قناة اليوم السابع, *حقيقة أغنى جامع قمامة فى مصر.. قالوا عنى أغنى من ساويرس وبلاقى ساعات رولكس فى الزبالة*, 7 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32JUWixEi08.

and specifically advocated for the increase of pig breeding as it would help the ZU a lot.[303] El Me'ades had gone on TV multiple times to advocate publicly for the Zabbaleen during that period, taking a large amount of heat and clearly classist rhetoric from TV show hosts, parliamentarians, and general spectators, all in an effort to present himself as a nationalist who specifically cared for Egypt and was willing to offer his own personal resources, at no cost to the government, in exchange for finding employment for the Zabbaleen. In one video, a parliamentarian is seen chastising and screaming at him for a solid 5 minutes and continuously lies on TV as evident by the complete failure of the Garbage Huts.[304] He has also continuously advocated for the Zabal as an agent with dignity, denying narratives of stigmatization that are present against them. [305] His increased presence in public conversations as a semi-formalized actor did indeed actively push for the increase in the Zabbaleen's role in Egypt altogether, fighting against the state itself and their MNC contractors. In 2020, for instance, he claimed that the Ministry of Local Development and the Ministry of the Environment have both failed to provide him with the necessary protection equipment for collecting garbage safely during COVID-19, yet simultaneously claimed that working in garbage for decades caused the Zabbaleen to have a natural immunity to COVID. [306]

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[303] Mehwar TV, *"دقيقة | "معتز الدمرداش" يناقش قضية غضب الزبالين من "مشروع اكشاك شراء القمامة 90*

[304] Dream TV Egypt, 2017 ,*العاشرة مساء| برلمانية تفتح النار على "نقيب الزبالين" وتوجه له التهم على الهواء,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDKepW4vgn8.

[305] Aya De'bes, " نقيب الزبالين: جاهزين لتنظيف البلد.. أكشاك 'بيع زبالتك' اختفت ومكسبها كان بيروح لناس معينة.. 'أتخن زبال' مكسبه 5 آلاف جنيه شهريا.. قولت للحكومة 'هاقفلكوا زى العمل الردى لو مضمنتش حقنا فى الشركة القابضة,'" Youm7, June 18, 2018, https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/6/18/نقيب-الزبالين-جاهزين-لتنظيف-البلد-أكشاك-بيع-زبالتك-اختفت-ومكسبها/3837239.

[306] Aya De'bes, "نقيب الزبالين يطالب وزير التنمية المحلية بتمكينهم من بدء عملهم لنظافة الأحياء," Youm7, January 18, 2020, https://www.youm7.com/story/2020/1/18/نقيب-الزبالين-يطالب-وزير-التنمية-المحلية-بتمكينهم-من-بدء-عملهم/4586309.

Shehata's advocacy, while certainly self-serving to a large extent and at times at the expense of the Zabbaleen themselves, certainly is a form of building space by publicly engaging, like Bishop Macarius, in visibility politics, bringing forward the plight of one of Egypt's most vulnerable populations, oppressed as Tadros tells us under the weight of religion, class and profession, to the forefront of the Egyptian court of opinion. Like Macarius, el Me'ades uses a form of semi-formalized authority, partially brought on by his position, and partially by his carefully chosen words and his appeal as a traditional Upper Egyptian man (a combination that at the very least earned him sufficient amounts of media attention). Yet his rhetoric is obviously carefully constructed. In presenting himself as the head of the ZU, he doesn't deny his Coptic-ness, yet his rhetoric heavily avoids "sectarian talk", except maybe for discussing the highly religionized topic of pigs. In what seems to be a very well-crafted response, on two separate occasions, he claims that the rising cost of halal red meat (beef and lamb) is directly proportional to Copts being unable to buy the Zabbaleen's pork, and that a return is much needed to help his fellow Muslim before the Christian, and "if it's the matter of pork not being Halal, then the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, you have your religion and I mine".[307] Similarly, when he discusses cleaning the streets, he actively refuses to mention or involve the rhetoric of Copticness, often actively separating himself from the institution of the COC (which had made no effort to engage him, either). Finally, in presenting his arguments, he always is careful to separate his criticisms from the President. Like Macarius, his rhetoric invokes distaste towards certain ministers and ministries, perhaps parliamentarians and government plans, but he presents as a fan of el Sisi's policies through and through. In his house, next to framed

[307] Mehwar TV, *90 دقيقة | "معتز الدمرداش" يناقش قضية غضب الزبالين من "مشروع اكشاك شراء القمامة"*; VideoYoum7, *بالفيديو..مربو الخنازير بمزرعة «منشية ناصر» يتحدون الحكومة*, قناة اليوم السابع.

photos of Pope Shenouda III and Cyri VI, there are similarly two framed photos of Pope Tawadros II and Abdelfattah el Sisi, hung beside a poster saying "Muslims + Christians = One Hand".[308] In another video, we see a clearer image of his decor, where besides an Egyptian flag resides a photo of Sheikh of al Azhar, Ahmed el Tayeb, below an icon of Saint George on one end and that of the Virgin Mary on the other. [309] The message being sent is clear — as proudly Coptic as he is, he is an Egyptian before anything else, and he clearly exemplifies the Makram Ebeid quote, "I am Muslim by state, Christian by religion". His Copticness, apparent in the litany of Coptic iconography in his house, does not prevent him from having an image of the highest Muslim religious leader in the land, nor does it prevent him from praying on the Prophet's name when invoked, nor from using hadith if need be. This exemplification of a national unity discourse present through a projected image of the ideal Copts is useful in toeing the line between public opposition to government policies and the ardent nationalist Copt who in today's Egypt must support the president in every act they take and place religion second to the nation.

ONLINE SPACES

The murder of Khaled Sa'eed in June of 2010 and the subsequent creation of many Facebook pages and Twitter accounts under the name of "We Are All Khaled Sa'eed" was the first step in coordinating the largest revolution which had its roots in an online space. The 2011 Egyptian Revolution has since been dubbed "the Facebook Revolution", or "the Online

[308] VideoYoum7, قناة اليوم السابع, *حقيقة أغنى جامع قمامة فى مصر.. قالوا عنى أغنى من ساويرس وبلاقى ساعات رولكس فى الزبالة*.

[309] الاعلامى اشرف ابو دنيا, *استغاثه من شحاتة المقدس للسيد الرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي عايز حقي يا رايس*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxO-1_k_35c.

Revolution", to indicate a new era of using online tools to coordinate and enact real, physical, public political change. Since the initial revolutionary blip in the security apparatus's inadequate response to online activism, Egypt has since been much more adamant in its monitoring of online spaces.

Much more specific censorship had been applied since, especially after the Mashrou' Leila incident of 2017,[310] Law 180 of 2018 was passed, specifically regulating, and banning any electronic posts of any social content that may oppose constitutional practices, public morality, or inciting violence, discrimination, racism or hatred.[311] Many public figures online had been subject to these laws, even prior to their codification in the 2018 law. Most prominent of those is Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has been in and out of jail since 2011 for his writings. It is safe to say that online presence in Egypt is then a fraught space that requires a certain amount of finesse, yet many Coptic activists have taken to online spaces since there have been very limited political avenues otherwise. In this section, I will explore different modes of visibility and political resistance that different actors and Coptic online activists have used, as well as different topics they have approached. In doing so, I assess different ways of building online spaces for Copts, seeing what forms of Coptic-ness they engage in. I divide Coptic online activism into three main thematic trends, the secular, the religious and the transnational/diasporic. While it is the case that none of these trends are particularly pure, and activists may fall under more than one, or veer into different trends, I pose that these

[310] In 2017, Mashrou' Leila, a Lebanese band with an openly queer lead singer, played at a concert where two queer activists, Ahmed Alaa and Sarah Hegazy, raised the rainbow flags on Egyptian soil openly for the first time. This led to a severe crackdown on Egypt's queer community, the most severe since the 2001 Queen 52 incident.
[311] Abdelfattah El Sisi, "Law for Organizing Journalism and Media and the High Council for Regulating Media," Pub. L. No. 180 (2018), 180, https://manshurat.org/node/31481.

categories have a meaningful significance in allowing us to categorize and conceptualize the different ways these differ from each other.

Religious Trends

These forms of activism are often religious in nature, whether in use of tactics or motivation behind the activism. They often differ in their purpose and motivation, yet they share a thematic core of being concerned for the religious status of the Copts as an ethnoreligious minority. In this section, I specifically use two main examples — the Faith Protectors Association (FPA), and *Adma Zar'a*.

FPA on their Facebook page, @RabttHmatAlayman, claim to be a group of Coptic Orthodox youth claiming legitimacy from academia and formal education who defend the Coptic faith and repel any threats the church may face, specifically against "non-Orthodox" ideas. Three main founders are credited — Mina Asaad Kamel, Emad Maurice Labib and Mina George Nazir. John, my interviewee who is a theologian, specifically stated that they use false academic evidence in order to advance a pro-Shenouda II church, one that is in many ways fundamentally opposed to Tawadros II. While they are currently a lot milder in tone, their most active period was between 2018 and 2020, despite having existed since 2014. Their main points of contention with Pope Tawadros II were very specific, yet they created a specific environment online that is particularly noted in responses to them.

Briefly, their arguments included Tawadros II's brief reforms in the church. First, they heavily deplored his stances, weak as they were, on the communion of menstruating women,

seeing it as an attempt to "break down the Church".[312] Similarly, they were unhappy with the Pope's positionality on accepting George Habib Bebawy, Coptic thinker who was excommunicated by Pope Shenouda III in 2007, and soon after his death, they shared a few posts on the COC's previous positionality from him.[313] When called out for posting a video of Shenouda III criticizing him on the day of his death, they compared him to Arius. Lastly, one of their biggest fights was the closing of churches during COVID, claiming that this was indicative of a weak, faithless church.[314]

The presence of the FPA online created a form of a Coptic equivalent of the aptly dubbed Haram Police online — a phenomenon of online hardliners who, as the name suggests, police religiosity. Many tweets made fun of them for a litany of reasons, including their faux hardliner ideology and their overzealous nature.[315] In many ways, the FPA stopped being just the main group of social media activists but expanded to include hardliner traditionalists who formed the Coptic Haram Police. Despite their negative connotation, it is important to try and assess them objectively for what they are — a group of Copts who aim to build spaces for the traditionalist factions to have space within the church in opposition to the hegemonic nature of

[312] Faith Protector Association, "عن كتاب المرأة والتناول للراهب يؤئيل المقاري!," Facebook, April 16, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/RabttHmatAlayman/photos/a.496341633719173/1182123975140932/.

[313] Faith Protector Association, " البابا شنودة الثالث يوضح من هو جورج بباوي وكيف كان وكيف أصبح وكثير من تفاصيل تعليمه الخاطئ في الاكليركية ثم انضمامه لكنيسة أخرى.," Facebook, February 4, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/RabttHmatAlayman/posts/4048851571801477.

[314] Faith Protector Association, "Shared a Post by رابطة حماة الإيمان القبطية الأرثوذكسية," القس اثناسيوس اسحق Facebook, June 25, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/RabttHmatAlayman/posts/3405109682842339.

[315] Andrew Youssef, Ανδρέας Ιωσήφ, أندرو يوسف [@AndrewNAYoussef], "شروط الالتحاق برابطة حماة الإيمان! 😄 https://t.co/DNvnWapknW," Tweet, *Twitter*, April 23, 2020, https://twitter.com/AndrewNAYoussef/status/1253395610792857602; Ramses.. [@andrew_ramses], " خليت دي صورة الهيدر علي تويتر بس يارب حماة الايمان مينخوروش ورانا https://t.co/QU1ov1dw4p," Tweet, *Twitter*, July 25, 2020, https://twitter.com/andrew_ramses/status/1287000113886437381.

the Church in political space, with goals to enact active change by pressuring the Pope into adopting more Shenouda III-like stances.

On the other hand, Adma Zar'a, or *Blue Bone*, is a Facebook page that reports to give the history of Copts in Egypt. Their seeming positionality is historical visibility in order to provide context for the current situation of Copts in Egypt, specifically to engage change for the better for Copts in Egypt. Their Facebook page description delineates their territory as one of displaying the history beyond the daily words. Their name, blue bone, is an epithet that was and continues to be used against Copts, and as such they are reappropriating it, reclaiming it, and repainting the narrative in a new light. Their historical purview ranges from the 2017 bombings in Alexandria and Tanta all the way until the oppression of Copts under Roman rulers. Using historical evidence, they mostly work towards securing space for Copts today by comparing the current situation to historically more violent times. In many ways, they employ a very specific technique that attempts to respond to forms of normalized historical revisionism common in discussing Coptic history. They offer an alternative form of education. They also do not just focus on history, but they relate to modern day events. Adma Zar'a is not the only page that does this — many other pages, like *Bustan al Qiddisin* for example, do the same thing, yet Adma Zar'a has a wider non-Coptic audience as evidenced by the comments, especially since the page description is historical and not as diluted as other pages are, which have a lot of Coptic religious messages. Many of these pages often are policed by Muslims who attack most of the posts in one way or another, thus the page often engages in a loud activism battle online.

Secular Trends

Many Coptic activists and bloggers employ a more secular approach to build spaces — a view on Coptic citizenry as Egyptian citizenry informed by their ethno-religious status, rather than having a religious backdrop to their points of view. I'll discuss some of these bloggers/activists and the rhetoric they use to assess some of the trends we see within this larger thematic concept.

One of the biggest cases in Coptic political activism as of recently has been the situation of Patrick George Zaki (PGZ). PGZ is a researcher and a master's student in Bologna, Italy, who had written an article titled "Expulsion, Murder, and Exclusion: One Week's Result in the Daily Life of Egyptian Copts" in 2019. His article specifically outlines how life for Copts in Upper Egypt is unlike life for anyone else through the lens of exploring one week of sectarian strife in Assiyut.[316] PGZ was arrested in February of 2020, and while he was not the first Copt to be arrested in high profile activism (Ramy Kamel, MYU leader, was already in prison at the time), his presence as a Coptic research who had been studying in Italy reignited Egyptian collective memory in remembering Giulio Regeni, the Italian researcher in Cambridge who was kidnapped, tortured and killed in Egypt in 2016. Indeed, Italian support for Patrick George Zaki, especially from Regeni's family and Amnesty Italia, has been immense — to the extent of giving Zaki citizenship to Italy.[317] PGZ's arrest continued until 7th of December 2021, after 22 months

[316] Patrick George Zaki, "تهجير وقتل وتضييق: حصيلة أسبوع في يوميات أقباط مصر!," Daraj, July 9, 2019, https://daraj.com/19504/.

[317] Ahmed Sowan, "مقال صحفي عن الأقباط يقود باتريك جورج إلى محاكمة استثنائية," *Egypt 360* (blog), September 16, 2021, https://masr.masr360.net/%d8%a3%d8%ae%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d9%85%d8%b5%d8%b1/%d8%ad%d9%82%d9%88%d9%82-%d9%88%d8%ad%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%aa/%d9%85%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%84-

of detention, where he was released awaiting trial on emergency court.[318] Patrick George Zaki's public blogging is limited, but it illustrates a key point here — PGZ was not approached by the Church nor was he even acknowledged in the Egyptian public sphere. He has dropped in between the crevices of the Church-State entente very intentionally, his name mostly echoing among the leftist circles of Egypt and Italy's NGOs.

Other individual actors find themselves on the online sphere, specifically seeing that their physical participation in the Egyptian street is strangled. One of those cases is another MYU leader and Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights Researcher, Mina Thabet. Thabet's physical presence got him arrested multiple times in Egypt, and he "self-exiled" in order to escape Egyptian repression and currently resides in the UK.[319] Mina Thabet's activism has thus been focused on his social media, where he has 8741 followers on his personal Facebook profile. While his activism is not focused just about Coptic issues — he has posted in support of Palestine, LGBTQ+ rights, and the large number of people who have been forcibly disappeared or arrested in Egypt – he still provides an important voice for many Copts. Most recently, the Coptic community witnessed the murder of a priest in Ramadan, and following that, Mina made a Facebook post outlining the lack of state protections for Copts under Sisi, which was shared

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%d8%b5%d8%ad%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%b9%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%82%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b7-%d9%8a%d9%82%d9%88%d8%af-%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%aa%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%83-%d8%ac%d9%88%d8%b1%d8%ac-%d8%a5/; MEE Staff, "Italy's Senate Votes to Give Citizenship to Jailed Egyptian Activist Patrick Zaki," Middle East Eye, April 14, 2021, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/italy-senate-egypt-patrick-zaki-activist-citizenship-granted.

[318] Amnesty International, "Egypt: Further Information: Student Released from Detention; Trial Ongoing: Patrick George Zaki" (Egypt: Amnesty International Ltd., February 11, 2022), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/5213/2022/en/.

[319] Nada Selim, "دفاع مينا ثابت: انتهاء التحقيق معه بعد توجيه اتهامات أبرزها قلب نظام الحكم," Youm7, May 19, 2016, https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/5/19/دفاع-مينا-ثابت-انتهاء-التحقيق-معه-بعد-توجيه-اتهامات-أبرزها/2724967.

43 times. [320] His rhetoric did not attempt to sugarcoat or invoke national unity discourse — his rhetoric implored people to start defining these incidents as hate crimes, not sectarian incidents. In his post, he does not engage with hegemonic society in the same way Copts are expected to. He engages by attacking the state and hegemonic society, critiquing lack of freedom of expression stifling any form of democratic improvement or religious dialogue.

Mina Thabet is not alone in engaging non-stereotypical rhetoric regarding Egyptian Copts. Bassant Maximus (@BassantMaximus on Twitter) is a fashion designer and entrepreneur. She is also a Coptic activist with 41.4k followers, whose tweets engage with all forms of Coptic discourse, criticizing hegemonic society and engaging in critiques of the COC, in how it affects women and different Coptic social groups. A lot of Maximus's rhetoric engages with Coptic citizenship and delineating Coptic identity and rights using a primarily feminist lens. In a tweet commenting on a news article that called non-Muslims in Egypt *kuffar* (infidels), she specifically engages in dismissing the rhetoric of the national unity, attempting to shed light on hatred received by Copts.[321] She similarly discussed the topic of virginity tests present in churches in Upper Egypt, approaching it as a Copt but from a secular feminist lens.[322] She particularly brought light publicly to something all of my interviewees experienced — non-hijabi

[320] Mina Thabet, "يعني بجملة الحزن، جدي الله يرحمه علمني ديمًا أقول الحق ولو على رقبتي. ولاني عاجز عن تغيير الواقع، علي الأقل لن اتوقف عن قولة الحق.."، Social Media, Facebook, April 8, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/M.thabet17/posts/5718048131556232.

[321] بسنت ماكسيموس [@BassantMaximus], "ده خبر في جرنال مصري و ده العنوان و ده المحتوى ،مواطنة ماي آس عشان لما نقول اننا عايشين وسط ناس مستنيين فتوى عشان يسيبونا نعيش يبقى مابنبالغش. المواطنة يعني حقي الكامل دون اعتبار اعتقادك ده في حقي عامل ازاي.مش عايز تعمل اكل و تبيعه براحتك بس من حقي كمواطن اني آكله طالما بيعتهولي https://t.co/PpsLIKEDVq," Tweet, *Twitter*, April 12, 2022, https://twitter.com/BassantMaximus/status/1513870740206100481.

[322] بسنت ماكسيموس [@BassantMaximus], "بالمناسبة دي هقولها و اتمنى التجريس يجيب نتيجة، فيه كنايس كتير فالصعيد و اتوقع كمان فالقاهرة بيدعموا خوض الستات لكشوف العذرية قبل الجواز. الحقيقة مش هتكلم في صحة ده دينيًا لأنه لا يعنيني، كشوف العذرية اعتداء على الستات و غير اخلاقي و يعتبر جريمة في حق الستات دي و خصوصيتهم!", Tweet, *Twitter*, April 1, 2022, https://twitter.com/BassantMaximus/status/1509951717101785089.

and specifically Coptic women's larger likelihood to be harassed in the streets.[323] Maximus has also engaged in rhetoric explicitly delineating Coptic identity as non-Arab, and specifically calling out people who claim to be Coptic (meaning Egyptian) while not being Christian, asking why they refuse to give their kids Coptic names, in an attempt to showcase that it is a rhetoric used to downplay Coptic oppression without actually acknowledging it, with people on her thread engaging with the idea of "Muslim privilege".[324]

High visibility actors like Mina and Bassant provide highly detailed accounts and commentary from people that non-Copts might have not engaged with before, and in allowing themselves to escape the strategic invisibility rhetoric and bringing Coptic issues to the panopticon of the Hegemonic Muslim gaze, they find themselves making space while actively receiving a lot of hateful comments from non-Copts who see this as a form of fitnah. Their work, however, is crucial in the rise of similar protestors who engage in similar rhetoric, publicizing using social media incidents that happen to them, instead of it being an open secret Copts alone share privately. Similarly, in bringing in rhetoric of "hate crimes" and "Muslim privilege", these activists in the online sphere bring back the "western" discourse and framework of minoritizing the Copts, using concepts that apply to minority rights abroad. In fact, Maximus herself tweets comparing the murder of the Priest Arsenious in Alexandria to the murder of George Floyd and chastises the "progressive" youth who spoke for that but not for

[323] بسنت ماكسيموس [@BassantMaximus], " و اي ست هنا مش محجبة جزء من التحرشات الاكسترا فالشارع اللي بتتعرضلها بسبب انهم بيعتبروها مسيحية ، خصوصا فالمناطق الشعبية. بقالي كتير عايزة اقول الكلمتين دول بس بما اننا بنثير البلبلة بالمرة," Tweet, *Twitter*, February 9, 2022, https://twitter.com/BassantMaximus/status/1491340497029562368.

[324] بسنت ماكسيموس [@BassantMaximus], " ليه مفيش حد حتى من المصريين غير المسيحيين التقدميين نابذي التعصب و محبي الاله حابي قرر يسمي ابنه مينا؟ كلنا عارفين أنه اسم مش مسيحي الأصل يعني," Tweet, *Twitter*, January 26, 2021, https://twitter.com/BassantMaximus/status/1353906900279185409.

Copts, effectively drawing and redrawing conceptual borders of the Copts in Egypt.[325] This particularly interesting comparison reverts ideas of rejecting minoritization that Copts have so closely held dear, and attempts to use well-established frameworks of minority and civil rights in order to make a point.

Transnational/Diasporic Activism

While this piece focuses on making space for Copts within Egypt, it is important yet to bring in diasporic activism for Copts, most importantly because with the online presence present today, diasporic activism has become transnational in nature. Coptic diasporic activism, as I have mentioned before, has been present since Pope Shenouda III. As is the case with most transnational activism, the advent of online tools that allowed for easier and faster dissipation of news has been key, and most importantly the rhetoric that is used. Magdy Khalil, one of the Coptic Diaspora's most prominent activists, had used English-language articles and speeches to call on the Western world to save the *indigenous, Pharaonic descendant* Coptic Christian minority in Egypt, playing well into tropes that the Anglican Church Missionary Society in Egypt in the 1880s perpetuated, effectively also delineating Coptic identity as inherently separate from the colonial Arab. While this is problematic rhetoric, it has effectively gained the attention of the West and specifically US Evangelicals. Certainly, the rhetoric regarding Copts perpetrated on websites like Christianity Today offers a very sympathetic and unnuanced view that ends up

[325] بسنت ماكسيموس [@BassantMaximus], "Egyptians on the Internet Had More to Say to George Floyd's Death than the Late Hate Crime against a Priest That Left Him Dead within Minutes. God i Love the Progressive Woke Egyptian Youth❤️," Tweet, *Twitter*, April 8, 2022, https://twitter.com/BassantMaximus/status/1512365486838882307.

being extremely in favor of Copts at the expense of global Islamophobia. This rhetoric has been key for Khalil.[326]

Yet transnational activism takes a new form and has a new address: Instagram. Currently, many different pages on Instagram have been designed specifically by Copts, for Copts, both inside and outside of Egypt. I specifically talk about four pages: Coptic Queer Stories (@copticqueerstories); Coptic Survivor (@copticsurvivor) and by extension its founder Sally Zakhary (@sallyzeeee); Progressive Copts (@progressivecopts); and Coptic Talcho (@coptic.talcho). Between them, different modes of belonging, assertion and building space are present.

I start with Coptic Queer Stories, the oldest out of all the pages, which started in August of 2018. CQS exists as a website outside of Instagram, and is focused on, according to their bio, "Coptic LGBTQ+ in the diaspora redefining/reclaiming gender, sexuality, race, religion & queerness". It is a page of 2238 followers. A lot of their work involves representation and presentation of Coptic queers in diaspora, where the majority of the posts involve interviews with Copts who are publicly queer. CQS aims to broaden the notion of Coptic identity, both for those living inside Egypt and outside it. One of their initiatives, the Parents and Friends of Coptic Queers, aims to create solidarity networks globally — they provided workshops on allyship, and simply provided zoom celebrations for Coptic Eid, until 7th of January 2021. Their story highlights and resources on their linktree page are specifically where we can track a lot of their transnational solidarity. First, they featured the stories of Ahmed Alaa and Sarah Hegazy and their exile to Canada. Similarly, the supported Malak el Kashif, Egyptian trans activist, when

[326] Mahmood, "To Be or Not To Be A Minority?"

she was arrested. Specifically, they also supported Patrick George Zaki, especially as a gender and human rights researcher in the EIPR. Secondly, they participated with Progressive Copts in issuing a statement against the COC church's position on the LGBTQ+ community, which was published on Medium.[327] With the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, they also collaborated with PC once more to release a video response on Tawadros II's statement that it was caused by "homosexuals and atheists".[328] Lastly, their linktree and website provide a link to an open google document that contains Resources on Coptic and Egyptian queerness. While many of the resources are aimed towards the diaspora, many of them aim to direct Coptic queers in Egypt to different LGBTQ+ organizations Bedaya and Mesahat, as well as queer-friendly mental health professionals. A lot of the interviews and conversations discussed various forms of existence as Copts and LGBTQ+ folks. There were people who rejected their Coptic-ness, suggesting a form of disengagement, and those who worked on reconciling the two. This form of rhetoric that offered a multiplicity of existence was not as common to see in wider Coptic activism, and such I find it important to note.

Following CQS, I focus on Sally Zakhary and the Coptic Survivor movement. While Sally does not make explicit mention of them, I believe it is important to contextualize the moment in Egyptian street/social media politics. On the 1st of July, 2020, an Egyptian Instagram account under the name Assault Police (@assaultpolice) accused Ahmed Bassam Zaki of being a sexual

[327] Progressive Copts, "Open Statement Against the Coptic Church's Position on the LGBTQI+ Community," *Medium* (blog), January 16, 2020, https://medium.com/@info.progressivecopts/open-statement-against-the-coptic-churchs-position-on-the-lgbtqi-community-e89f824acf8b.

[328] Progressive Copts, *Response to Coptic Pope Who Blamed COVID19 on Queer & Atheists*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PccPcHdhvsQ.

predator.[329] Over the next few days and weeks, many more victims of Ahmed Bassam Zaki came forward anonymously by sending messages to the page. Moreover, the few weeks that followed saw the rise of the hashtag #endthesilence or #مش_هنسكت. By the end of July, allegations of the now infamous Fairmont Case came to light despite happening in 2014.[330] At the risk of being reductive, it is fair to claim this was the equivalent of an Egyptian #MeToo movement in how it took all of Egypt by storm, even causing an amendment to the harassment laws of Egypt — a long term goal of Egyptian feminists. Eleven days after the first post by Assault Police, Sally Zakhary, a Coptic Egyptian Orlando resident, shared her assault story with the world, and on the 17th of July, 2020, she founded the Coptic Survivor Movement. On both platforms, she shared that the Coptic priest known then as Reweis Aziz Khalil assaulted her as an 11-year-old.[331] Zakhary said the Coptic church had been aware for 20 years, but indeed within a few days of her going public, on the 14th, the priest was defrocked. Over the next few days, Sally called for other victims in the US and abroad to come to her, where she was collecting evidence and indeed made plans to meet with Pope Tawadros and Bishop Macarius, yet they fell through for being dissatisfactory.[332] Zakhary and her movement's interactions with the church in Egypt caused the church to actively mobilize in confronting pedophilia and sexual abuse among its ranks.[333]

[329] @assaultpolice, "Ahmed Bassam Zaki Is a Sexual Predator Who Preyed on a Shocking Number of Women and Underage Girls All around Egypt.," Instagram, July 1, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CCGZtEaF8Si/.
[330] The Fairmont Case involved wealthy Egyptian young men who drugged and subsequently assaulted a girl in one of Cairo's richest hotels, the Fairmont.
[331] @sallyzeeee, "My Name Is Sally Zakhari and I Was Raised in the Coptic Orthodox Church. When I Was around 11-12 Years Old (1998-1999) a Coptic Priest..."
[332] @sallyzeeee, "We Are Not Backing Down!," Instagram, July 16, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/sallyzeeee/.
[333] Nardine Saad, "With Ouster of Priest Accused of Pedophilia, Coptic Church Confronts Sexual Abuse," Los Angeles Times, July 28, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-07-28/coptic-church-sexual-abuse-metoo.

Zakhary's work was also a precursor to the rise of the accusations regarding a Coptic doctor and his wife who assaulted children, where the couple were strong elements of the church — the doctor, Michael Fahmy, was a deacon of the church. The Pope's weak statements on the 24th of January 2021 elicited a lot of negative and distrustful comments from Copts altogether.[334] As time went on, the Coptic church's interactions with Sally became more confrontational — preventing her from speaking in Toronto on the 6th of December, 2021.[335] Most recently, with the defrocked priest's death in 2022, instead of getting a lay funeral, he was given a priestly one. Sally Zakhary's story is not over and continues to happen right now. It must be noted that throughout her entire page, Sally Z has had to constantly and consistently reaffirm her belonging and love to the Coptic Orthodox faith, that she is not anti-Priest but anti institutional defense of abuse and pedophilia. She continuously used and uses Christian language in her posts, perhaps affirming her positionality and invoking a form of Butler's concept of performativity by outwardly and clearly expressing her Copticness.

Progressive Copts published their first post was in May 30, 2020, where they posted an icon of Black Jesus Christ by Robert Lentz called "Jesus Christ: Liberator" with the words "I can't breathe" overlayed on the image.[336] This is particularly in context of the George Floyd murder at the hand of the Minneapolis police. This page is diasporic in nature, creating political content for the diaspora that is Christian and Coptic in nature, and as the title of the page suggests, it

[334] @speakup.00, "#المتحرش_م_ف قضية على تواضرس البابا رد," Instagram, January 24, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CKcIe2vhiJz/.

[335] @sallyzeeee, "IN THE NAME OF JESUS, WE WILL NOT BE SILENCED 🙏," Instagram, December 6, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/sallyzeeee/.

[336] @progressivecopts, "#BlackLivesMatter #ICantBreath #Minneapolis 'Jesus Christ: Liberator' Icon by Br. Robert Lentz, OFM, Edited. #Copts #Coptic #ProgressiveCopts #RelatableTheology #StreetsTheology #racism #CopticIcons #ByzantineIcons," Instagram, May 30, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/progressivecopts/.

takes a progressive political stance. Here, progressive is used as a form of "leftist" — this is indicated through a comment in which they deny the label liberals to a commenter. BLM-specific content took up the majority of the first few weeks of the page, calling for Coptic/Arab solidarity with global Black liberation (in a US context). Much of the content was centered on the diaspora, understandably, yet many were not. The page issued a eulogy for Sarah Hegazy on the day of her death, one of the Queer Activists who escaped Egypt after the Mashrou Leila concert in 2017. The page has also collaborated with CQS and SZ/Coptic Survivor on multiple different occasions. Most recently, they held an event on the 18th of April discussing Bishop Arsanious's murder in Alexandria, Egypt.

Finally, we look at Coptic Talcho. Previously Coptic Activism, this page's title uses the Coptic word for healing in its title, and while seemingly being diasporic itself, it focuses a lot more on Coptic affairs in Egypt. First created on August 4th of 2020, the page had a few introductory posts on Copts. They also specifically discussed certain incidents and phenomena — disappearance of Coptic women (specifically the case of Ranya Abdel Masih), el Zabbaleen, Copts in Egyptian football, Queerness, and Suad Thabet. One post in particular went viral: on January 29th, 2021, Coptic Talcho posted an album on Instagram strongly chastising the clothing brand NOTFOUND for using the monastery of Samaan el Kharaz (the monastery where Father Samaan is) as a location for a clothing/marketing photoshoot. This monastery is right by Mansheyet Nasser, where the majority of the Zabbaleen live. The post blamed the founders for exploiting the Zabbaleen and the church during COVID times by underpaying the church, and similarly using a religious site in one of Cairo's lowest income neighborhoods for "aesthetic"

purposes.[337] Part of the general distaste towards this project similarly was the response of Dina Tarek (@dina.tarekk), one of the founders, where she said "Egypt doesn't deserve anything good" in response to calls to bring it down. Coptic Talcho's post gained 3721 likes at the time of writing and many comments of people both supporting and disagreeing. What remains to be the most interesting is the rhetoric used in the post. In many ways, this is not unlike posts discussing cultural appropriation in US or general Western contexts. Like Thabet and Maximus, this page is introducing a new form of discourse and language to understanding Coptic issues. It is also worth pointing out that, and this might be a lack of awareness on the page's side, the Church actively rents out the area and the monastery as part of a series of games that adults can play at, including rock-climbing, ziplining, and a ropes course.[338] One must truly question whether the Zabbaleen community or Father Samaan truly cared for this particular incident, especially that there was not much word about this from them, yet the disparity between what specifically was highlighted as a Coptic issue and what might not be at all is particularly interesting.

The presence of transnational/diasporic activism exists from what we see in two main modes — hyper specific issues that might have been much harder to enact in Egyptian civil space, whether it is because Copts abroad do not necessarily have to adhere to certain ideals of an Ideal Copt, or because it might be otherwise illegal or dangerous in Egypt. This category encompasses Coptic Queer Stories and Coptic Survivor/Sally Zakhary. The other category is generally forms of coalitions and solidarity building that amplify Coptic voices and use Coptic

[337] @coptic.talcho, "Dear @/Notfoundco , the Coptic Community Will NOT Back Down.," Instagram, January 29, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/coptic.talcho/.

[338] صدى البلد, صدى البلد - اخطر العاب دير سمعان لتحدى الخوف, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGYd0X4MztU.

identity as a form of agency. Coptic Talcho and Progressive Copts are categorized here. All of these forms of activism, however, depend on the concept of high visibility of central ideas, people, or goals, which then maintain connections transnationally by creating solidarity networks among different organizations abroad and in Egypt, as well as relying on individual support from individual actors globally. They try to form and build space through expressing and projecting, similarly, new delineations of what being a Copt means, fighting directly (especially as a mode that might not be available to people in Egypt) or bringing in new frameworks to the public sphere.

Conclusion: *Good Morning Church… What's in the Heart is in the Heart*

As I wrapped up every interview, I asked the interviewees one last question – what does an Egypt where Copts are not marginalized look like? One response said that Egyptian soccer teams would accept Copts on the team. One said an ideal Egypt would not need a national unity discourse. Some talked about better education for all Egyptians so there is clearer understanding of Copts. A few discussed legislative options, some more political discourse, and some indicated a need for an intersectional feminist lens to look at this. One said that Copts should not be scared to live their daily lives or go to church.

Throughout the thesis, we have explored the conditions that created Copts as they are today, from the discourse of their national belonging to the land they are indigenous to, to their positionality as a minority and what that may signify, to their performative actions in shouldering the national unity discourse for safety purposes. The Copts find themselves between a rock and a hard place, the Church on one end policing their movements, which is in turn policed by the state, and a society that struggles with their relationship with Copts on the other. Copts may find themselves restricted in their public lives outside of church, and in order to build or make spaces for themselves, they have to engage with discourses they had no hand in creating in the first place. Yet like any minority globally, Copts have learnt to make use of what they have.

This thesis has extensively delved into the lives of the Copts of Egypt, and posed that their lives are dictated by forces that have been both historically and socially imposed on them

by virtue of being a long-standing minority. Thus, Copts often have to enact different forms of actions and practices in relation to these systems in order to make space for themselves publicly. Many Copts may choose to coopt, as is the case with Copts involved in formalized state politics. Some may engage in creative subversion of these systems – the quiet encroachment of the Zabbaleen is a subversion of strategic invisibility that creeps upon the resources of the state in order to promote their interests publicly and quietly. Similarly, Bishop Macarius's creative and careful use of the national unity discourse he operates under helped break into an area of civil society politics sectioned off not only from Copts, but from Egyptians in general. Outright opposition of these discourses is also an option, whether is it Coptic disengagement from the *ideal Copt* image or a direct embrace of visibility online.

The framework I use of quiet practices and loud movements is an important part of my argument. In understanding the liminality that exists between the spaces which Copts occupy today and the spaces they long to make, especially under the Muslim gaze, it is important to understand that Coptic actions and practices are often exposed to the panopticism of hegemonic powers, be it state, COC, or society. This presents both in the function of people as heralds of cultural hegemony on one end, and the literal surveillance of the state on the other. Thus, discussing Coptic action in public, demarcated spaces they long to present themselves in is better understood not in terms of visibility, but in terms of volume. Quiet practices and loud acts often are visible, yet *how* visible is the key question. "Good morning church, and what's in the heart is in the heart", goes the proverb in Egypt – enforced images of national discourse and hegemony may reign, but there's an unshakeable visibility and recognition of the position of the other.

What this thesis discusses is a highly specific, ex-Ottoman, post-colonial context and an ethno-religious minority that has been actively restricted from engaging with its citizenship status, yet the frameworks and theories I use, illustrate and engage with here can perhaps be used to interact with different ethnic and religious minorities in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. Already, conversations about this thesis with peers and colleagues show similarities in terms of securing agency for different groups like the Shi'ites of the Sunni Arab world and their usage of different methods in order to build space, or the relationships between Baha'is, hegemony and nationalist discourses in different contexts regionally. Furthermore, understanding how people build spaces under the panopticon of hegemonic society using daily interactions, especially with the advent of new social media platforms (from Instagram activism to the usage of Tiktok) may help give meaning to parallel activities when discussion civic action in authoritarian regimes.

This research works to answer a lot of questions, yet many more could be asked. One thing to ponder is certainly the interactions between the Coptic Orthodox Church's adherents and other non-COC denominations in Egypt. The question of non-COC Christian positionalities in Egypt raises the question of minorities within minorities. Further, an exploration into ecumenical coalition building among different churches in Egypt and how that complicates Christian positionality in Egypt as a whole would be interesting research to explore more. I would also like to explore the intricacies of intersectionality in Egyptian identity politics, specifically the unique challenges of Copticness and Egyptian racial and ethnic diversity, as well as Copticness and queerness. A non-monolithic Coptic population equals a non-monolithic set of desires, needs, and questions.

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