

**Christians victims of the growing Islamist non-Islamist divide;  
the urgent need for peace and reconciliation**

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**Cornelis Hulsman (ed.)  
10 September 2013**



## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	4
<b>2. Background and data collection</b>	6
<b>3. The Context of Muslim-Christian Relations in Egypt</b>	11
3.1 From St. Marc to Egypt's liberal period, ca. 50 - 1952	11
3.2 Muslim and Christian revivalism during military rule (1952-2011)	15
3.3 Coptic Christians during the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, 2011-2013	31
3.4 Siege mentalities dominate	65
<b>4. Religious Diversity in Egypt</b>	66
<b>5. Controversies regarding statistics of Christians in Egypt</b>	70
<b>6. Main factors fueling the conflict</b>	80
6.1 Apostasy as a source of conflict	80
6.2 Church building as a source of conflict	84
6.3 Lack of mutual dialogue	86
<b>7. Analyzing Trends in Media Reports on Egypt's Christian Community</b>	86
7.1 Media reports from 2005-2010	87
7.2 Media reports from 2011-2013	91
<b>8. Fear for the Future</b>	94
8.1 A Framework of Animosity: Religion as a factor in political dialogue	98
8.2 Use of the Constitution in highlighting sectarian differences	101
8.3 The Media, Government-funded churches and radical preachers	103
8.4 From horizontal to top-down violence	108
8.5 After the June 30 Revolution and Coup d'état	109
<b>9. Conclusion</b>	111
<b>10. Bibliography</b>	117

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This text differs from the texts published by Missio and MRG in the citations of references to articles in *Arab-West Report*. These texts had been presented to them on a moment that our database was still not restored following a deliberate destruction on June 27. These citations have been added now.

## **Note on Transliteration**

We have used the transliteration system for Arabic names as used in *Arab-West Report*, which is based on the Library of Congress. Some Arabic authors, however, do not like their names to be transliterated since they publish under a different spelling. In those cases, when the names are mentioned the first time we have put the transliteration of the Library of Congress system in parentheses: Amr Darrag ('Amr Darrāj). Arabic terms or quotations of Arabic sentences are always quoted according to the system of the Library of Congress (cf. <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/arabic.pdf>).

# 1. Introduction

Cornelis Hulsman

The attacks on 60 Christian institutions, mostly churches, in Egypt on August 14 and 15, 2013 were brutal and severe. Not since 1321 AD have so many churches been burned. With this wave of attacks has come a major setback in Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt.

Attacks on Christian institutions create fear and compel Christians to emigrate, particularly the better-educated with relatives outside Egypt.

Christian migration will further weaken the Christian community in Egypt. Christian leaders and scholars have repeatedly warned for the consequences of a disappearing Christian community. In the past 20 years several Muslim leaders joined and also warned of the negative consequences for Arab countries should Christians gradually disappear.<sup>1</sup>

The recent, widespread attacks on churches and Christian institutions in Egypt have not occurred in a vacuum. Rather, there are several factors that have led to the current dramatic situation for Christians in Egypt. We must place events in their wider context of political developments in Egypt which includes the role of the Muslim Brotherhood since its establishment in 1928, the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood between the Egyptian Revolution of January 25, 2011 and the crackdown on the Brothers in August 2013. In order to do so we must continue to collect empirical facts and investigate these events to determine their causes and why they tend to yield so many different and often conflicting responses.

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<sup>1</sup> George Sabra, lecture at the European-Arab Conference, "The Contribution of Religious Minorities to Society," Vienna University, July 2, 2013. See also Cornelis Hulsman, "The Peacebuilding Prince," *Christianity Today*, February 13, 2008, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/february/27.64.html>. A more complete transcript of the interview with him was placed on [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info).

Many of the problems that currently exist are related to the weakness of the state. Laws and regulations are poorly implemented. Transparency is equally poor. The consequence is a state where the will of the strongest prevails. In this situation there are Egyptian cultural traits that are as understandable as they are unhelpful in addressing the current problems Egypt is experiencing.

I would like to thank Prof. Jan Opsal of the Misjonshøgskolen in Stavanger, Norway for reading the draft text. The Misjonshøgskolen had invited me in October 2012 to provide the Bjoern Bue's Human Rights Memorial Lecture about love amidst fear and conflict: Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, 2012.<sup>2</sup>

Also, AWR intern, Eline Kasanwidjojo, has read the draft text and provided valuable comments which I much appreciate.

I also would like to thank Dr. Amr Darrag of the Freedom and Justice Party, Dr. Amr Soliman and Rawi Camel-Toueg of the Free Egyptians Party and Dr. George Massīhah of the Wafd Party to respond to the many questions I had. Our own AWR interns Rob A. Forster and Hina Fathima have each written valuable chapters. AWR's Sawsan Gabra Ayoub Khalil and Yosra El-Gendi have assisted with internet search. Jenna Ferrecchia did the language editing and citations. It should be clear that of course I remain the final responsible for the text you find here.

The process of writing this text wasn't easy: During the writing process rapid and dramatic changes have taken place in Egypt. Our database had been deliberately destroyed on June 27, 2013 which made access to previous data very hard. For that reason we were also not able to provide links to our own articles online but have done so with a general link to our

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<sup>2</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Bjoern Bue's Human Rights Memorial Lecture for 2012; Love amidst fear and conflict: Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt 2012," *Arab-West Report*, October 22, 2012, <https://www.arabwestreport.info/bjoern-bues-human-rights-memorial-lecture-2012-love-amidst-fear-and-conflict-muslim-christian>.

website in the hope that articles and reports will later be accessible again after a lengthy recovery process. I am grateful to my wife Sawsan Gabra Ayoub Khalil to help me through the period of writing this report.

## **2. Background and data collection**

Cornelis Hulsman

I first came to Egypt in 1978, but I have been living here since 1994. I began focusing on Muslim-Christian relations during my research for my Master's Degree in Development Sociology in 1981-1982. Since then I have been involved in Christian development projects in Egypt and in media reporting since 1994.

In 1995 I was asked by a Dutch, Christian organization to research claims that Christian girls had been kidnapped and forcefully converted to Islam. I, however, found a different story. I went to locations, met with families, clergy, and lawyers, and when possible talked with Muslims to hear their side of the story. There were conversions, but the reasons were, in actuality, far more complicated than had been reported. In some cases Christian girls were trying to escape domestic violence, in others there were love stories and efforts to marry into a slightly higher social class.

These methods have become characteristic of my work: traveling to the location of a conflict or cooperation, documenting my findings in the greatest details possible, and meeting with as many different people as possible in order to hear different perspectives. I have compared media reports to interviews, police reports, and whatever evidence I was able to find. I have travelled extensively through Egypt since 1978 and have a very large network of connections which have been very helpful in providing explanations and contacts to others in areas where I not yet established a contact.

In all work it is extremely important to be able to evaluate the credibility of the sources. There are a number of factors that influence this credibility:

- What was the connection of a person interviewed to a particular event?
- If the person interviewed was personally involved, how could this have impacted his/her view on a particular situation?
- What was the length of time between the event and the interview? It is clear that the amount of detail that can be extracted from a subject's memory is directly related to the time elapsed since the event.

It is also important to compare stories on the same event from several autonomous sources. Similarities and differences show the possible lines of contention.

I have given great importance to producing transcripts of each interview as they offer the full context in which interviewees have made their statements. By dating each transcript according to when the interview took place, this often helps to place accounts in a wider context.

Understanding context is essential to determining causality. What was the history of a conflict in a particular area? What factors played a role: socio-economic, cultural, or religious? It is fair to assume in most situations that human beings' actions are propelled by contextual factors.

Muslims and Christians share a number of values that also color their reporting of events: ardent piety, preservation of honor and avoidance of shame, and a strong allegiance to one's own community as opposed to individualism. At the same time, these cultural traits can cause great tensions if borders are crossed; that is, if one's religion, whether Islam or Christianity, and/or honor is believed to have been violated. Revenge is, unfortunately often practiced. But when one party is stronger than the other party, it could take more passive forms, for example misrepresentation of a particular story. The influence of culture in



responding to conflict could be easily mitigated with laws that are widely recognized as fair and would indeed be implemented indiscriminately.

Our center was severely debilitated on June 27, 2013 when our database that had documented all our work since 1995 was deliberately destroyed, along with the backups that we had made. This has made it impossible to make direct reference to earlier work of mine. I have therefore simply only referred to [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info). We are working on trying to restore the database from different files as much as possible, but this might be months of work. The destruction of our database also shows that we will need to search for a much safer location to host our data.

The *Arab-West Report* database was intended to provide context, for example, to search for previous incidents at locations where an incident had taken place or to obtain more background about a person involved in a particular situation. The database was also helpful in drawing comparisons between similar events and discovering patterns.

Much reporting is very shallow, selective, and often serves partisan objectives. Very few people make the effort to explicitly hear all parties and listen to arguments, which does not mean that no pertinent and sensitive questions can be asked. On the contrary, one must do his homework; search in available data before interviewing someone. No subject should be too sensitive to be discussed.

A major problem in situations of tension and conflict is that narratives of different sides often deeply contradict each other. Contradictions can be due to deliberate slants favoring one side and slandering the other. These circumstances always necessitate further inquiry. Often, however, one comes to a point where contradictions are apparent and empirical data are missing.

It is only normal that when people find holes in their empirical data that they try to compensate that by theorizing in order to make sense of the

situation as they perceive it. There are dangers involved in that process because this can result in conclusions that cannot be backed up by empirical facts. It is even worse when facts are discarded because they do not fit a certain belief, conviction, or ideology. We have tried, since we started our work, to describe as many situations as possible in detail. We have made interviews that show the perspectives of different participants and only then, with as much data as possible does it become possible to draw certain conclusions.

Searching for facts, details, and context is often not appreciated by certain political activists, as it can dilute the partisan message they want to give. Of course, providing context should never serve as an excuse for whatever violence or aggression.

What we are witnessing in Egypt is a lack of communication between people of different convictions who mostly only see and trust the discourse in their own circles. Because of a lack of transparency, people begin to theorize and speculate, which is usually aimed at confirming one's own beliefs. Facts are then manipulated under such favorable conditions and used for propaganda. With this knowledge, one must navigate cautiously through potentially unbalanced information. Claims demand verification and if they cannot be backed by facts that should be mentioned as well.

I have compiled many notes in notebooks since the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution. I was therefore able to refer back to meetings with various Egyptian leaders and scholars and events in my text.

It has been my aim to be as transparent as possible and provide references to sources. A large number of the interviews have been recorded throughout the years. Only rarely in such recorded interviews were off-the-record comments made. But I have also met throughout the years with many senior Egyptian diplomats who shared their knowledge but, as with diplomats from other countries, I was not allowed to quote them. They, however, share information with me to provide me with background

information. I have also seen and heard things that were not intended to go public. I have had personal e-mail correspondence with many different people. Also most of this was not intended for public use. Yet, if this was relevant in the text I have used this, but also explained in the text of footnotes when I could not provide my sources.

I am deeply indebted in my work to people like Prof. Dr. Otto Meinardus (1925-2005) and Rev. Dr. John Watson (b. 1939), who have given me fantastic insight in their contacts with Egyptian Church leaders. Meinardus was extremely well informed, but also practiced self-censorship in his publications because he wanted to maintain his connections with senior clergy. He thus has been pressured by Copts in Germany who had complained to Pope Shenouda to withdraw what he called his “yellow bad book,” because this contained a paragraph these German Copts and the Pope did not like.<sup>3</sup> John Watson was less inclined to self-censorship and published several critical comments on Pope Shenouda, who he found to be authoritarian and at times activist, lacking wisdom in selecting people around him and not allowing people to challenge his beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Both scholars have been extremely open in sharing views and information with me for which I am deeply grateful.

In my reports I am writing what I believe to be true. I deeply believe that establishing the facts and honesty will help Christians and Muslims in Egypt best since this can help all to understand the complexity of Muslim-

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<sup>3</sup> Otto F. Meinardus, „Die Wüstenväter des 20. Jahrhunderts; Gespräche und Erlebnisse,“ Augustinus Verlag, Würzburg, 1983. The controversial pages are pages 43-44, where a monk suggested his guests to smoke hashish. This was not in line with the image of holiness of monks and thus was not supposed to be written.

<sup>4</sup> John H. Watson, *Among the Copts*, Sussex Academic Press, 2000. I have extensively corresponded with John Watson over email about several comments made in the book. In this he provided more details. I have included Dr. Rodolph Yanney, a Copt in the USA, in this email correspondence, which later unfortunately was lost. Watson had built a tremendous personal archive, meticulously documenting everything he obtained. However, when he became sick and had to move to a smaller house in June 2007 and was not able to find a place where his archive could be kept he threw away his tremendously rich archive. Meeting with John and Jacky Watson, November 16-18, 2011.

Christian relations. Based on this knowledge, we can then respond and reduce tensions to help all peoples to live in peace with justice.

Christian migration from the Arab World could well result in the end of Arab Christianity in a few decades. I agree with Prince Hassan bin-Talaal (Hassan Ibn-Talāl) of Jordan that this would be a tremendous loss for humanity.<sup>5</sup> Arab Christianity has its roots in this part of the world. This is where the Christian Church was founded and grew. The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt dates its roots to the first century and has a tremendously rich heritage which would largely disappear if Coptic Christians would ultimately emigrate.<sup>6</sup> The Arab World has always been a very pluralistic world, but the migration of Christians and other minorities diminishes this diversity. Pluralism has been enriching nations throughout history and loosing pluralism is bound to have negative consequences for the countries concerned. It will also affect relations between countries in the Arab World and the West and relations between Christians and Muslims in the West.

### **3. The Context of Muslim-Christian Relations in Egypt**

Cornelis Hulsman

#### 3.1 From St. Marc to Egypt's liberal period, ca. 50 - 1952

Egypt is a country with a complex history dating back thousands of years and its modern culture incorporates influences from many great

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<sup>5</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "The Peacebuilding Prince," <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/february/27.64.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia — and How It Died*, Harper One, 2008. Reviewer Derek Leman calls this book "a balanced reading of the loss of a treasure of knowledge and culture the world is too ignorant about to mourn. While meeting all the standards of academic rigor, the book manages to avoid tedious prose. While firmly recognizing and decrying Islamic violence, Jenkin's account recognizes both the culpability of non-Islamic violence and the reality in which religion becomes an excuse for violence seeking power," <http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/2009/01/30/book-review-the-lost-history-of-christianity-philip-jenkins/>.

civilizations, from Pharaonic to Greco-Roman, from Coptic Christian to Islamic.

Both Christianity and Islam came to Egypt shortly after their respective founding. Neither are newcomers to the country; in fact, both religions are deeply rooted in Egypt's cultural fabric as is apparent through its physical landscape containing many ancient churches and mosques.

However, Christians were strongly persecuted in the era of the Roman Empire, in particular during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305 A.D.). This radically changed when Emperor Constantine (306-337 A.D.) came to power and later converted to Christianity himself. Many Egyptian Christians, certainly most Orthodox clergy, consider the 4th and 5th centuries to be the golden age of Egyptian Christianity--the days of many of the great church fathers of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the days that Egypt turned into a predominantly Christian country. The decline of Egyptian Christianity came after the schism at the Council of Chalcedon between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians<sup>7</sup> in 451 AD followed by the persecution of the Egyptian Church by the Byzantine Church. The persecution the Church has faced in these centuries has deeply influenced the self-perception of the Egyptian Church and the belief that persecution is by necessity a consequence of Christian faith. Church leaders have used it repeatedly to strengthen their position over their flock, providing internal security in a world that is largely seen as hostile, thus creating a strong distinction between fellow believers and those not belonging to the same religious community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Chalcedonian corresponds roughly to what we now identify as western Christianity: Roman Catholic, Byzantine, Eastern Orthodox (including Greek and Russian), Protestant. Non-Chalcedonian refers roughly to eastern Christianity: Oriental Orthodox including Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, and Ethiopian.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy; the Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity*, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004). I discussed the book with Prof. Meinardus after publication. Meinardus then immediately drew a line between the use of the self-perception of martyrdom by early Coptic patriarchs and Pope Shenouda who has strongly promoted the cult of saints and martyrs.

Byzantine oppression propelled many Copts to see the Arabs who invaded from 639-641 A.D. as liberators from the Byzantines.<sup>9</sup> The Arabs called the Christian inhabitants of Egypt “Qibt” an abbreviation from the Greek *Aegyptos*. The word Copt therefore means “Egyptian”. Over the ages the word has become synonymous to Christian Egyptian.

The first generation of Copts after the Arab conquest received many privileges including being granted former Byzantine property, but by the end of the 7th century the first arguments commenced between Muslims and Christians about the nature of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> In the 8th and 9th century the young Muslim government found itself in need of greater resources in order to maintain the wars in which they were involved abroad and placed increasingly heavy taxes on all Egyptians, including Copts who had to pay the *jizyah*, a poll tax for Christians only but which also meant they would not serve in the army. Many Christians even converted to Islam in an effort to avoid the *jizyah*. But only Muslims paid the *zakāh* or alms.<sup>11</sup>

The history of Christians in Egypt since the Islamic conquest has been seen by many Christians as a mixed blessing. Some rulers did acknowledge the contributions of Christians, giving them high-level government positions, which made it possible to build some of Egypt’s greatest churches while at other times Christians were persecuted, as in the 11th to 14th century when many churches were being destroyed.<sup>12</sup> The treatment of Christians in Egypt has also been affected by external influences such as Arab-Western antagonism following the Crusades.

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<sup>9</sup> Muslim-Christian history in Egypt is full of different perspectives which often can result in heated arguments. Christians speak of a conquest. Most Muslims speak about the “opening” of Egypt for Islam. There is often insufficient understanding that different perspectives are possible.

<sup>10</sup> Lecture Prof. Harald Suermann, March 19, 2009, published in [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info).

<sup>11</sup> How much more tax did Christians have to pay over Muslims in the same period? Also this part of Egyptian history can result in debates between Muslims and Christians.

<sup>12</sup> Life for Christians under the tyrannical and temperamental Caliph Hakim bi-Amr illah Abu was particularly challenging – including being forbidden from riding horses, being forced to wear black and churches being burned and replaced by mosques. Strangely enough, Hakim's own mother was Christian.

When the French invaded Egypt in 1798 they found a relatively small and weakened Church. There were hardly any Christians left in the Delta, which had become almost entirely Muslim. At the time, Christianity was concentrated in Upper Egypt (southern Egypt) where large isolated areas were entirely Christian. Those Christians who held higher positions in society tended to live in Cairo. The position of Christians improved tremendously in the 19th century during the autocratic rule of Muhammad Alī (1806-1849), who introduced many economic and educational reforms. The *jizyah* was abolished in 1856 and the Christians joined the army. From that point onward, Christians and Muslims were taxed equally. Many Christians began to migrate from Upper Egypt to the Delta because of the better economic opportunities found in the north.

Part of Muhammad Alī's educational reforms was to begin allowing Catholic and Protestant foreign missions to enter the country and establish schools. As a result, many Orthodox Christians converted to these Western denominations, which created feelings of resentment among many Orthodox leaders towards Western Christian influences and they denounced Western missionary activities. Still, at the same time, these events helped initiate a reform movement in the Coptic Orthodox Church that in the mid-20th century became known as the Sunday School movement. The Sunday School movement was, in large part, a reaction to the growing presence of Protestant missionaries and the secularization of the educational system. Through telling Bible stories and the lives of martyrs and saints at Sunday School (though of course the schools were on Fridays), stories where the emphasis when performing the Christian rites was more on individual spirituality than blind faith, they aimed to inspire young people through religious education.

Upper Egypt, isolated for centuries, opened up considerably in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Canals, roads, and later, railways significantly improved the communication between Upper Egypt and Cairo where the better educational and economic opportunities were. Copts started migrating, slowly at first, then later in larger numbers from Upper Egypt to

Cairo, primarily. It is estimated that around 1925 80% of all Egyptian Christians lived in Upper Egypt. Today, an estimated 50% of all Egyptian Christians lives in Upper Egypt.<sup>13</sup> This reflects a significant migration from the villages to the cities and from the cities in Upper Egypt to Cairo, and since the 1970s many of the better educated Christians have tried to find a way to Western countries, primarily the United States, Canada, Western European countries, and Australia. Migration has had a tremendous effect on the Christian communities in Egypt. Many areas in Upper Egypt that were predominantly Christian have seen an increase in their Muslim population due to migration, conversion and, Christians having, on average, smaller families.

For a symbol of national unity between Christians and Muslims, Egyptian media often refers to the nationalist revolt in 1919 when Muslims and Copts stood hand in hand in opposition to the British occupation of their country. The Coptic support for the nationalist movement was followed by Copts achieving high positions in the ruling Wafd Party and government.

### 3.2 Muslim and Christian revivalism during military rule (1952-2011)

In 1928 Hassan Al-Bannā (1906-1949), teacher of Arabic, founded the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement that sought to reform and develop the society by reviving Islam. The group grew rapidly and from 1945 onwards became militant in resisting British presence in Egypt. They attacked Jewish businessmen who supported Zionism and in 1948 thousands of members volunteered to fight alongside Palestinians against the foundation of the state of Israel.

Prime Minister Mahmūd Al-Nukrāshī Pasha feared the Brotherhood's both the increased militancy and popularity and the rumors that they were

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<sup>13</sup> Estimate made with prof. Nicolas S. Hopkins when we worked on the book *Upper Egypt; Life along the Nile* edited by Nicolas Hopkins, Moesgard Museum, Denmark, 2003.



plotting a *coup d'état*, causing him to disband the Brotherhood. Scores of members were imprisoned. Al-Nukrāshī Pasha was assassinated by a student member of the Brotherhood. Al-Banna immediately condemned the assassination, stating that terror is not acceptable in Islam. On February 12, 1949 al-Banna was supposed to negotiate with a government minister who never turned up. When he stood waiting for a taxi he was shot and later died from his wounds. His funeral was remarkably enough attended by prominent Coptic politician, William Makram 'Ubayd (1879-1961).<sup>14</sup>

Also among Coptic Christians a revival moment emerged after the Second World War developing into what became known as the Sunday School Movement. Whereas the Sunday School Movement was more religious, the smaller 'Ummah al-Qibtīyah (Coptic nation) was more secular and militant.

The revival moments among both Muslims and Christians had in common both attracted their own youth and were intended to strengthen their own identity with various degrees of religiosity.

Both communities, however, were led by their own aristocracy that based its power on great wealth and land holdings that had been obtained in the 19th century.<sup>15</sup> These were largely lost after the 1952 *coup d'état*, or revolution, in which military officers came to power, some of them members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview Freedom and Justice Party leader, Dr. Amr Darrag, July 22, 2013. Dr. William Makram 'Ubayd's grandson Amin Makram 'Ubayd who is deeply critical of the Brotherhood confirmed this. William Makram 'Ubayd years earlier stated that he was Christian by faith and Muslim by culture, a statement appreciated by many Muslims but much less so by Christians including his grandson. His political qualities and frequently made positive statements about Muslims and Muslim culture has made it possible for him to obtain his prominent political position.

<sup>15</sup> These were large estates that were given by the Egyptian khedive to prominent Muslim and Christian families with the purpose to take the responsibility for development and withholding taxes for the government. Karim from the Christian Qiliny family explained me his family history, December 12, 2011. Grandfather was not only rich but also well-educated and cultured.

Gamal Abdel Nasser (Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāssir) had had close contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood since the 1940s. Members of the Brotherhood had fought alongside army officers in Palestine, and had been armed and trained by them for deployment in the Canal Zone in the year preceding the revolution. The Brotherhood had agreed to assist the revolution, mostly by maintaining order, protecting foreigners and minorities, and encouraging popular support for the army.<sup>16</sup>

Gamal Abdel Nasser made great strides to close the sizeable gap between the landed aristocracy and Egypt’s *fallahīn*, or peasants and serfs. The differences in wealth were extreme with many rich people living in huge mansions surrounded by the mud brick houses of the peasants. The land of the Coptic and Muslim aristocracy was nationalized, re-divided, and given to the poor. Much attention was given to making education available for all. Nasser also developed the concept of Arab nationalism, giving Egyptians a sense of pride and nationhood. But the autocratic Nasser also built up a police state with help of the Soviet Union and treated all opponents ruthlessly, both on the left and the right.

Nasser clashed with the Brotherhood because he refused to share political power and promulgate an Islamic constitution.

Hassan al-Hudāybī (1891-1973), the second General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood (in office 1949-1972), was criticized within the Brotherhood, partly because of the government’s efforts to discredit him. Hudāybī was able to muster strong support from the Brotherhood’s leaders as well as from the rank and file. The secret apparatus of the Brotherhood was dissolved and its leaders expelled. This, however, did not prevent the regime from orchestrating a crackdown in 1954 when a Muslim Brotherhood member attempted to assassinate Nasser, who in turn accused the Brothers of planning to overthrow the government.<sup>17</sup> Whether the

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<sup>16</sup> Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 144-151.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Muslim Brotherhood indeed planned a *coup d'état* or whether it was a claim Nasser used to destroy the Brotherhood remains disputed between Muslim Brothers and their opponents until today.

Nasser sought full control of Egypt and not only faced the Brotherhood, but also the militant 'Ummah al-Qibtīyah (Coptic Nation), who were frustrated with corruption within their own church. The protests culminated in the 'Ummah al-Qibtīyah kidnapping the Pope Yousab II on July 25, 1954 and forcing him to sign a letter of abdication, an act unprecedented in Coptic history. The police returned the Pope to the patriarchal residence, but from this moment on a committee of bishops practically ruled the Church until his death.

The role of Nazīr Gāyid, Editor-in-Chief of the Sunday School Magazine, later to become Pope Shenouda, was strange. He did not denounce the kidnapping, but opened a discussion about the succession of Pope Yousab (Yūsāb). Shortly after that he became a monk, a prerequisite to eligibility for the papacy. Meinardus, Watson, Tarek Heggy (Tariq Hijjī), some senior monks, and even one senior bishop suspected Nazīr Gāyid to be extremely ambitious and wanting, already in 1954, to become pope himself. The bishop even stated that there were links between members of the Sunday school Movement, to which Nazīr Gāyid belonged, and 'Ummah al-Qibtīyah and that Nazīr Gāyid operated on the line between the two organizations.<sup>18</sup> Nazīr Gāyid became Father Antonios . When Pope Yousab passed away in 1956, Father Antonios indeed presented himself as a candidate for the papacy. This was unheard of in this day and the bishops then changed the electoral rules making it obligatory for a candidate to be at least 40 years-old and a monk for 15 years. Pope Kyrillos was elected, but after his death in 1971, Father Antonios, who now had become Bishop

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<sup>18</sup> I received these comments when I was working on summarizing Prof. Dr. Wolfram Reiss' thesis about the Sunday school movement in 2002. The concerned clergy do not want to see their names published but are ready to speak about this if this is off the record.

Shenouda, was again candidate and this time was elected and became Pope Shenouda.<sup>19</sup>

While within the Coptic Orthodox Church a struggle was going on between the old guard, traditionalists, and modernizers who wanted change towards more conservatism (Nazār Gāyid/Pope Shenouda), the Muslim Brotherhood was shifting towards militancy. This shift likely went unnoticed by Copts who were too much involved in their own struggles.

Sayyīd Qutb (1906-1966), a prominent Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, was imprisoned following the crackdown in 1954. The grassroots popularity of the Brothers in combination with the suppression by Egypt's rulers compelled Qutb during his imprisonment to develop the concepts of *jāhillīyah*, ignorance of divine guidance and *jihād*, seen by him as an armed struggle that is preceded by an ideological maturation of the individual. Yet Qutb died before he could define what exactly would be considered *jāhillīyah*: leaders, governments, or individual people.<sup>20</sup> However, Qutb's concept of *jāhillīyah* paved the way for future Islamist insurgents, in the 1980s and 1990s building on Qutb's concept, to start a campaign against what they came to see as *kāfir* (infidel).<sup>21</sup> This resulted in the concept of *takfīr*, declaring leaders and others *kāfir* (nonbelievers/people who have left Islam), providing an ideological justification to kill others.

Qutb was released in 1964 and arrested again in 1965 for an alleged plot against Nasser for which he was executed in 1966. Was he indeed plotting

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<sup>19</sup> This was not without opposition in the Coptic Orthodox Church, for example from the charismatic father Bishoy in Alexandria who wrote a strong worded pamphlet against his candidacy but when Pope Shenouda was elected Father Bishoy accepted this and agreed with the pope that his pamphlet was destroyed. Father Bishoy passed away. We, later obtained a copy from his widow and gave this to John Watson who analyzed this for *Coptic Church Review* see: John H. Watson, "The Transfigured Cross; A Study of Father Bishoi Kamel," *Coptic Church Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 and 2, 2002, [http://www.copticchurchreview.com/Coptic/Home\\_files/2002%20Sp.Sum.Vol23.%231.2.pdf](http://www.copticchurchreview.com/Coptic/Home_files/2002%20Sp.Sum.Vol23.%231.2.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, Translated by Jon Rothschild (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 57.

<sup>21</sup> John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 285.

against Nasser or was it an excuse to get rid of the influential ideologue, who had developed a theory to oppose rulers? Qutb did not call directly for violence, but violence has often been justified by ideas Qutb had developed. It later resulted in the murder of Anwar Sādāt (1981) . In the Muslim Brotherhood different streams developed, one wanting to return to the ideas of founder Hassan Al-Bannā and others wanting to follow Sayyīd Qutb. They became known as the *Qutbiyīn*. Muslim Brothers were frequently rounded up, leaders spent many years in prison and many were tortured. There are good reasons to believe that these heavy-handed experiences have radicalized their ideas. Many escaped abroad and later influenced people such as Osama bin Laden (Usāmah bin Lādin) and Āyman al-Zāwāhirī. Since the 1980s new groups developed such as the jihad, Jamā'āh al-Islāmīyah and Takfīr wal Hijrah.

President Nasser died in 1970 and was succeeded by his vice-president, Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), who widened the gap between modernizing and conservative forces. Sadat wanted to create his own powerbase and did so by trying to dismantle the powerbase of his predecessor (which was made up of prominent leftists, secular-oriented Nasserists, and Communists) and through giving more space to Islamists who had, up until that time, been persecuted by Nasser. General Guide al- Hudāybī was succeeded by Umar Al-Timisani (1904-1986, in office 1972-1986) ('Umar Al-Tilmisānī), who was open to cooperation with the Egyptian state. Sadat created a grey area; the Brothers were tolerated and encouraged, but never obtained a legal status. Sadat also created the Jamā'āh al-Islāmīyah as a student movement in Egyptian universities. Sadat used them as a bulwark against both leftist opponents and more extremist Islamists, not realizing that the Jamā'āh al-Islāmīyah would later radicalize and ultimately one of their members would kill him.

Islamists, or Muslims advocating political Islam, differ from one another mainly in terms of their level of determination and methods of defending their principles, but all believe that Egypt, and other predominantly Muslim nations, should be ruled by Islamic principles, foremost through

the application of the *sharī'ah* (Islamic law). They believe that this would bring justice in contrast to the widespread injustice that was thought to be the consequence of military rule.

In 1971, Pope Shenouda II was elected patriarch, the first patriarch who had his roots in the Sunday School Movement.<sup>22</sup> He was more activist and assertive than his predecessors in what he believed to be defending Christian interests and led the opposition against the application of the *sharī'ah* on a national level, resulting in frequent clashes with the president, and an increasing number of incidents in which not only Christians, but also Muslims, have been killed and their property was destroyed.<sup>23</sup>

The increased religious fervor has also resulted in greater Muslim and Christian missionary fervor. The number of Christians converting to Islam has grown rapidly, particularly from Sadat's time to the present. Church leaders do not have statistics, but the estimates have been growing. Some Muslims also converted to Christianity; their numbers have always been nominal, but their arrests have often resulted in high-profile attention in Western missionary and Christian rights organizations which, with reasonable success, have been able to attract stories in Western (Christian) media.<sup>24</sup>

Conversions from one religion to the other have two major effects:

- 1) It creates fear in Egypt among Christians who have had friends or family members convert to Islam, that perhaps other Muslims may also try to convert their children to Islam; and

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<sup>22</sup> Wolfram Reiss, *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche*, Lit Verlag, Heidelberg, 1996. I have made an extensive English summary of this dissertation for *Arab-West Report*.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Shenouda was definitely less assertive after he was allowed to return to Cairo in January 1985 after his monastic arrest and was later challenged by more assertive groups from within the church.

<sup>24</sup> Prior to 1994 I had collected a lot of personal stories based on material from various Christian organizations and human rights lawyers. I lost the collection because I had left for Egypt in 1994 and the people I had left the collection with in the Netherlands found the material too sensitive and decided to destroy this.

2) The high profile attention for Muslim converts to Christianity creates fear and anger among Muslims toward Christian missionary activities and generates increased enthusiasm among Muslims to try to reach Christians with the message of Islam.

The political clashes in the 1970s in which both Muslim Brothers and Christian leaders were involved coincided with a growing contention over the estimates given of the percentage of Coptic Christians in the population. Coptic Christians, often supported by Muslim liberals, provide estimates ranging between 10 and 20%. Western scholars, however, believe their percentage to be closer to 6%, which would make the percentage of Christian youth converting to Islam in comparison to the natural growth of the Christian community substantially higher.

The tensions during the Sadat years reached their low point in 1981 when Sadat arrested thousands of Muslim leaders and hundreds of Christian leaders, both clergy and non-clergy, in reaction to clashes between Christians and Muslims. Pope Shenouda was sent into internal exile in the Monastery of Bishoy in the Wadī Natrūn between Cairo and Alexandria. Nonetheless, Sadat was not without support in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Many leading Copts in the 1980s disagreed with Pope Shenouda's almost militant defense of the Church in Egypt.

Father Mattá al-Miskīn, the father of Coptic monastic reform, told *Time* Magazine in 1981: "Shenouda's appointment was the beginning of the trouble. The mind replaced inspiration, and planning replaced prayer. For the first years I prayed for him, but I see the church is going from bad to worse because of his behavior...I can't say I'm happy, but I am at peace now. Every morning I was expecting news of more bloody collisions. Sadat's actions protect the church and the Copts. They are from God."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Sara C. Medina, "Religion: Egypt's Copts in Crisis," *Time*, September 28, 1981, <http://content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,953135,00.html>. Published only one week before the murder of President Sadat on 6 October 1981.

A week later, Sadat and Bishop Samuel, then head of the committee of Bishops replacing Pope Shenouda, were killed by Muslim militants during a military parade on October 6, 1981. President Mubarak then succeeded Sadat and gradually released the imprisoned leaders. Pope Shenouda was allowed to return in January 1986. He reduced the influence of bishops who had opposed him and after a bishop had passed away, he divided their respective bishoprics into smaller units. This brought bishops closer to the people, but also reduced the scale of their influence.

Pope Shenouda's relationship with the government had changed, becoming less confrontational and with more emphasis on trying to find solutions, in concert with Egyptian officials. Pope Shenouda also sought contact with Muslim Brotherhood leader, 'Umar Al-Tilmisānī.<sup>26</sup>

The Islamist influence remained. They expanded to student campuses and many student organizations in the 1970s. Upon graduation, they worked to gain control over the professional syndicates in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. They have succeeded in this effort, at least in part, within the syndicates of medicine, engineering, and law. Later on, financial mismanagement or allegations of it has lost them some popular support.<sup>27</sup>

In 1996 Hoda Awad, Coptic Evangelical and Professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo, published a book on the Muslim Brotherhood studying their performance in Egyptian Parliament in the period 1984-1990.<sup>28</sup>

Presidents Nasser and Sadat had not allowed competing political parties, but President Mubarak, on pressure to democratize, accepted

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<sup>26</sup> I was repeatedly told by Bishops and Coptic intellectuals in the 1990s and 2000s that the two leaders had reached some kind of a mutual understanding.

<sup>27</sup> Several meetings with a former member of the Jamā'ah al-Islāmīyah, not dated.

<sup>28</sup> Hoda Raghīb Awad and Hasanin Tawfiq Ibrahim, "Al 'Ikhwān al muslimūn wa alsīyāsah fī Misr: Dirāsah fī al tahālufāt al 'intikhabīyah wa al mumārasāt al barlmānīyah lil 'ikhwān al muslimīn fī zil alta'adudīyah al siyāsīyah al mukāyadah (1984 – 1990)," Al Mahrūsah Center, Cairo, 1996.



parliamentary elections in which different parties could participate, but the electoral laws were fixed prior to each election to benefit Mubarak's own National Democratic Party (NDP).

In the 1984 parliamentary elections, the first since 1952, each party needed a minimum of 8% of the vote for entry. A new cooperation formed between the Muslim Brotherhood and the New Wafd Party, the successor to the very party of Sa'ad Zaghlul that had given great opportunities to Coptic politicians in Egypt's liberal period, 1921-1952. Muslim Brothers joined the New Wafd Party, and together they obtained 58 of the 454 elected seats. Enduring law allows the president to nominate 10 members of his choosing. In 1984 this included four Copts and their inclusion became convention for Mubarak.

The cooperation between the New Wafd Party and the Muslim Brotherhood went sour, and in the elections of 1987, the Muslim Brothers joined the Labor and 'Ummah Parties. The Islamic alliance that was then formed obtained 60 seats, while the New Wafd Party obtained 35 seats.

The New Wafd Party and the Muslim Brotherhood boycotted the 1990 elections resulting in a resounding victory for President Mubarak's National Democratic Party.

Prof. Hudá 'Awad, has drawn from this period the lesson that the Muslim Brothers' aim is attaining power.<sup>29</sup> They have inserted themselves in various social organizations, serving people's needs, but also seeking their support in elections. "They are well organized and flourish because other parties have to a large extent neglected serving people on a grass root level. Every time the Muslim Brotherhood thought they were able to reach their

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. scholar, Walter Geertz, points out that many liberals hold this against the Brotherhood but, she asks: Is it not normal that each political movement is trying to increase its influence? E-mail correspondence, August 28, 2013.

objectives their political ambitions were running high, creating fear with autocratic governments and they got crushed.”<sup>30</sup>

Since the thwarted assassination attempt of President Mubarak in June 1995,<sup>31</sup> the Egyptian government has arrested thousands of Islamists and military courts have convicted many of them for subversive activities. I attended some court sessions and at that time first met with Abū Al-‘ilā Mādī, Muslim Brotherhood member until 1996 when he founded the Wasat Party.

The government secured a great victory for the National Democratic Party in the November 1995 parliamentary elections; 417 for the NDP, only 6 for the New Wafd Party, 7 for several other smaller parties, 13 independents, and 10 nominated by the president.

It is hard to estimate what percentage of Egyptian Muslims then sympathized with the Muslim Brothers and related groups, but Magdī Hussaīn, Editor-in-Chief of the Islamist publication *al-Sha‘ab* was estimating in the mid-nineties only 30%.<sup>32</sup>

Islamist militant violence continued to plague the country. Muslim Brothers continuously advocated non-violent approaches, but some of their younger and more impatient members who felt wronged joined the then militant Jamā‘ah al-Islāmīyah and *jihad* movements who attacked police, Christians, in particular jewelers because they needed money, and

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Dr. Hoda Awad, July 20, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Many Islamists claim this assassination attempt was alleged. I remember, however, that Mubarak was in Ethiopia and that his motorcade was attacked which made him immediately return to Egypt. This was widely reported in Egyptian media and provided a good excuse to arrest perhaps up to 20,000 Islamists.

<sup>32</sup> I have interviewed Magdī Hussaīn repeatedly in the mid-nineties. On several occasions I was in the company of U.S. journalist, Sunni Khaled.

sometimes tourists with the purpose of harming Egypt's tourism industry to pressure the Egyptian government.<sup>33</sup>

Immediately after the attack on a church in Abū Qirqās (February 1997), which left nine Christians dead, Dr. Hamdī Zaqqūq, Minister of Endowments, vowed during a press conference to bring all private mosques under government control, as at least one of the shaykhs in Abū Qirqās had been preaching radical sermons for years, helping to create a negative atmosphere toward the government and Christians.<sup>34</sup>

This course of action affected tens of thousands of independent private mosques. All preachers were required to have government licensing, a stipulation against which some Islamists protested. "Why license only Muslim preachers and not Christian priests?" they have repeatedly asked prior to the January 25 Revolution. Once preachers were licensed they were subject to the control of the Ministry of Endowments. A preacher therefore could be charged and tried "if he violates the basic principles of Islam or calls for violence".<sup>35</sup>

The government's determination to combat extremists intensified after the killing of 58 tourists in Luxor in November 1997, a terrorist attack which caused a sharp slump in tourism for nearly two years, costing Egyptians billions of dollars in income.

This attack was followed by an effective crackdown on militancy. Reports of attacks or attempted attacks on the Egyptian police, political leaders, Coptic Christians, Muslim opponents to Islamists, and tourists ceased. Christians, including Coptic Orthodox Bishop Dimitrius, in Mallāwi, a city

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<sup>33</sup> Far reaching internal discussions took later place that have made these groups denounce violence. It is questionable if all members equally fully supported this.

<sup>34</sup> Christians in Abū Qirqās had told me about the radical sermon and I had asked the Minister during the press conference of the Cairo Foreign Press Association how he would respond to such radical preachers. His response was that he was aware of such preachers. His response was to bring mosques under government control and oblige only licensed preachers to preach.

<sup>35</sup> About what is a call for violence opinions, however, differ.

292 km south of Cairo that was once a hotbed of extremism, told me in the 2000s that their city has become much safer. Shops that were once closed had reopened; foreigners were able to visit the city once again.<sup>36</sup>

Peace returned to the country. This paid dividends for the tourism industry, but those years of extremism have also left deep scars in society. Older Christians and Muslims frequently speak with some nostalgia about the days before the religious tensions in the 1970s, when relations between Muslims and Christians were generally amicable. The violent extremism of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s and conversions of mainly young, Christian women has resulted in a fear of Muslims among Christians, especially in areas affected by tensions, and curbed inter-religious relations. This becomes obvious when one asks young Muslims or Copts if they have close personal friends outside of their own religion. Although, good friendships between Muslims and Copts still exist, all appearances indicate a decline from the substantially more tolerant 1960s.

The government followed a development plan of augmenting businesses to provide jobs for the poor. The trickle-down effect was minimal, however, while the government's care for the poor was mainly limited to subsidizing bread, food products, and fuel, an instrument that was widely abused by the privileged. Mosques and churches have built hundreds, if not thousands, of hospitals and clinics autonomously throughout the country to address needs of the poor that the government was largely neglecting. Many mosques and churches also provide social activities, attempt to reduce illiteracy and poverty, get engaged in education, and have income and employment-generating projects. Many of these mosques were related to the Muslim Brotherhood and were deeply involved in addressing grassroots needs. Projects such as these have increased the strength of religious organizations in their respective communities.

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<sup>36</sup> In 1998 I wanted to go from al-Qussia to Mallāwi to take the train but was refused to enter the city for security reasons. Yet from 2001 onwards I was able to lead several Holy Family pilgrimages to Mallāwi and surroundings.

The parliamentary elections in the year 2000 were different from previous elections because the Supreme Constitutional Court had ruled that all polling stations had to be monitored by judges. The elections resulted in 353 seats for the NDP and 35 independents who, after being elected, joined the NDP. The New Wafd Party obtained only 7 seats, other smaller parties, 10, independents related to the Muslim Brotherhood, 17, other independents, 20 (including five Nasserites), and presidential nominees, 10.<sup>37</sup>

The Egyptian government was walking on a tightrope. They have responded to some Christian requests such as declaring Coptic Christmas a national holiday in 2003 or allowing the high-profile commemoration in 2000 of the arrival of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, according to Matthew 2, two millennia ago, but on the other hand had to show they had sufficient attention for Islamic concerns.

The Palestinian *Intifādah* and the harsh Israeli responses (2000-2005) and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq (2003) have strengthened Islamist and anti-Western sentiments. Egyptian media, meanwhile, frequently published highly critical articles about Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and question whether they sincerely believe in democracy. The Brotherhood saw this as an attempt of the government to tarnish their image.

In 2005, only two months after the first multi-candidate presidential elections parliamentary elections brought 88 "independents" into parliament, who were known to the electorate as members of the Muslim Brotherhood. One of these independent candidates was Mohammed Morsi (Muhammad Mursī), later Egypt's president. The Muslim Brotherhood had to field candidates as independents since they were not allowed to form a political party. The NDP initially earned only 40% of the seats, but many

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Collins Dunn, "Egypt's Parliamentary Elections: An Assessment of the Results," *The Estimate* XII, 23, November 17, 2000, accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.theestimate.com/public/111700.html>.

independents not belonging to the Brotherhood rejoined the party giving it a soaring majority. Election monitoring became more and more important and these elections were better monitored by human rights organizations than any previous parliamentary election. Hoda Awad found this parliament better balanced than any of the previous parliaments.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as in the past, these elections were not free of electoral violence and manipulations. More than 800 Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested for fighting with NDP supporters who attempted to bar Muslim Brotherhood supporters from going to the polling stations. Muslim Brothers believe they were entitled to more seats and said that rigging and intimidation cost them several seats. Mubarak appointed 4 Copts in this Parliament. Another presidential appointee was Azhar scholar, Dr. ‘Abdul Mu’tī Bayūmī, long-time supporter of our work and co-founder of our NGO, the Center for Arab-West Understanding, who was to oppose the religious argumentation of the Brothers.

The 2010 parliamentary elections were described by Egyptian human rights organizations as the most fraudulent in Egypt’s history ever. The electoral system was manipulated in favor of the National Democratic Party and what’s more, there was widespread fraud at polling stations. The result was an overwhelming victory for the NDP and an expanding distrust in Egyptian elections. This became one of the catalysts for the January 25 Revolution in 2011.

Copts had nothing good to expect from a revolution in which Islamists, with whom they had clashed on several occasions, were expected to be the winning party. There had been frequently recurring tensions between Muslims and Christians, mostly triggered by conversions and church building, and at times social problems in combination with a mostly absent government.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Dr. Hoda Awad, July 20, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> See extensive reporting in [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info) throughout the years.

A shocking interview with Dr. Salīm Al-'Awwā with Al Jazeera TV occurred in September 2010 in which he claimed the church has its own militia and hides weapons and ammunition in monasteries and churches, preparing for a war “against the Muslims”.

Al-'Awwā was flooded with criticisms in Egyptian media, still his statement permeated Islamist circles due to his prominence among them. Nothing, however, was further from the truth.<sup>40</sup> Regrettably, Salīm Al-'Awwā, once prominent in the dialogue between Muslims and Christians, had lost faith in the process, primarily because of Pope Shenouda's involvement in the Wafaa Costantine conversion case (2004) and Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburger lecture (2006). Loosing people for dialogue is sad. What's worse is if disappointment turns into inflammatory allegations. This case shows how important it is that sensitive issues are properly settled in Egyptian law and are accordingly implemented. Salīm Al-'Awwā later tried to play down the effects by stating that media had misrepresented his views, but the impact on the growing distrust between Christians and Islamists could not be reversed.<sup>41</sup>

In the same period, Metropolitan Bishoy commented in a private meeting that Copts are the original inhabitants of Egypt and Muslims are guests. This was picked up by a journalist and highlighted in Egyptian media. If such a distinction were to be made in other countries there would be practically no original inhabitants in any country. But the outpour of media responses also showed the questionable role the media often plays; fueling controversy for profit rather than presenting a non-sensationalized story. Pope Shenouda's highlighted that role of the media in his response to this sensationalized reporting.

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<sup>40</sup> I wrote a lengthy analysis in *Arab-West Report*.

<sup>41</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “AWR Editorial: Intolerant Climate in Egypt and Media Manipulations Result in Row Around Bishop Bishūy,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 43, Art. 32, October 25, 2010, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2010/week-43/32-awr-editorial-intolerant-climate-egypt-and-media-manipulations-result-row>.

Salīm Al-'Awwā has clout in Islamist circles. The Jamā'ah al-Islāmīyah had, after years of theological debates, denounced the use of all violence in 2001. The Muslim Brothers had done so in the 1950s. Making such dangerous allegations thus only could contribute to a belief among Islamists that double standards were applied. The media should thus be much more restrained in presenting unfounded claims with violent repercussions.

The period up until the Revolution was mostly characterized by Muslim Brothers' continuous attempts to increase their political role, while the government promoted fear of the Brothers, in and outside Egypt. One leading Egyptian human rights activist believed this so strongly that he told me in 2010 that despite all of its corruption, he still preferred the Hosni Mubarak (Husnī Mubārak) government over Muslim Brotherhood rule.<sup>42</sup> Many Egyptian liberals and Coptic Christians expressed similar sentiments. This is understandable in an atmosphere, where the government was using fear for Islamists inside Egypt and in dealing with foreign governments. With only little communication between Islamists and non-Islamists the policy of creating fear was effective.

### 3.3 Coptic Christians during the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, 2011-2013

On January 25 I was with a Dutch/Belgian group in Alexandria. Through the window of our restaurant we suddenly saw a large group of demonstrators who tried to get into a major shopping street in 'Ibrahīmīyah but were stopped by riot police. No one expected this to be the beginning of a revolution. Egyptians in our restaurant spoke of the poor. On January 26 and 27 it was relatively calm, but on January 28 demonstrations were announced after Friday prayer. That morning we attended church at the Coptic Orthodox pilgrimage site of 'Abdal Massīh

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<sup>42</sup> I have known this activist well for several decades. He is still active and probably does not want his position then to be known. I doubt he had many contacts with Islamists and probably spoke more from a position of fear.



al-Manahrī. The priest spoke in his sermon about being more loyal to God than to worldly authorities. We then went to Bayahu, a small predominantly Muslim village with a remarkable historical church.<sup>43</sup> Father Yo'annis of Qufadā accompanied us, and to keep us safe, made sure we were at Gabal al-Tāyr before the end of Friday prayer, which was another Christian pilgrimage site in a predominantly Christian area. Father Yo'annis was continuously on his mobile phone with local people and informed us about what was happening in the area.

At around 4:00 PM we received news that the police had fully withdrawn from the streets. This has had great consequences for the police. Many police stations were attacked throughout the country, and a number were burned. Policemen and officers were targeted in the streets, showing a widespread hatred for the police. Who targeted them? Mobs incited by Islamists? That is the prevailing opinion. Christian human rights activist and stringer, Rā'id al-Sharqāwī, told me later that the police withdrawal was unnecessary. The police knew the demonstrations were coming and had been strong enough to face the demonstrators, who, Rā'id said were continuously exaggerating their numbers. They were repeatedly speaking about million-man marches, but Tahrir (Tahrīr) Square cannot hold more than 300 to 400,000 demonstrators if one calculates that the total surface area holds 4 persons per square meter.<sup>44</sup> Who then had made that decision and why? Prof. Latifa Fahmy (Latīfah Fahmī) of the American University suspects a conflict between then president, Mubarak and his Minister of

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<sup>43</sup> The Church of St. Ibscharun is believed to have been flown in the 15<sup>th</sup> century from Kilini in the Delta to Bayahu, some 500 km further south. The church is thus the result of a miracle. Prof. Meinardus agreed with my hypothesis that it is likely that the small church was rapidly built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century without a license but Christians telling Muslim authorities of those days about a miracle which means a heavenly building permit. Meinardus compared the story of the flying church to the Holy House in Loreto, Italy, in which the Holy Family lived and which was miraculously flown from Palestine to Loreto by four angels just before the final expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land. Loreto has been a pilgrimage location since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Did this story influence the story of the flying church in Bayahu?

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Rā'id al-Sharqāwī in a teahouse at Tahrir Square, March 23, 2011.

Interior, Habīb al-'Adlī. She also confirmed reports that the army did not want Gamal Mubarak (Jamāl Mubārak) to succeed his father.<sup>45</sup>

Amānī Al-Khayāt, TV presenter and one of the volunteers of Mohammed el-Baradei (Muhammad al-Barād'aī) explained it was easy to get large numbers of people to Tahrir. There was widespread frustration about the increasing gap between the rich and poor. Equally pervasive was the frustration about police brutalities. Egypt's Facebook youth<sup>46</sup> wanted more democracy. Small groups of youth went into different parts of town, particularly the poorer quarters, and called local people to join them in the demonstrations, who came in large numbers, both non-Islamists and Islamists.<sup>47</sup>

Muslim Brothers saw a chance for regime change and the army saw a chance to get rid of Gamal Mubarak, who was set to succeed his father in 2011. Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign on February 11, 2011. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took over. During a European-Arab conference in Crete I questioned whether this was a revolution. Was it not more of a *coup d'état* because the army had taken over and more or less tried to keep the *status quo*? Abū Al-'ilā Mādī, founder of the Islamist Wasat Party, disagreed with me and called this a revolution since he saw the overthrow of Mubarak as the beginning of more changes.<sup>48</sup>

Since January 25, 2011 three main power blocs have been struggling for maximum influence in the post-Revolutionary period: the military, Islamists, and non-Islamists. Christians are mainly found in the camp of the

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<sup>45</sup> Interview October 21, 2011. Dr. Latifa Fahmy is well connected. She knew, for example, Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak.

<sup>46</sup> Young people, mostly students and young graduates, who used Facebook to rapidly share messages and connect.

<sup>47</sup> Interview Amānī Al-Khayāt, March 28, 2011. Rā'id al-Sharqāwī attended.

<sup>48</sup> Arab-European Conference at Crete, April 12-15, 2011.

non-Islamists.<sup>49</sup> Neither the Islamists nor the non-Islamists (mostly liberal) are united, but it is clear that Islamists of different convictions want the country to become more Islamic, while non-Islamists want to separate religion and government by varying degrees. Islamists have the support of a large part of the population along with a number of wealthy businessmen; however, among non-Islamists and liberals in particular, one finds other prominent, wealthy Egyptian businessmen, some of the largest among them were well connected with the Mubarak regime, which was known for its corruption, i.e. deep connection between politics and business. Both groups of businessmen have been funding political parties of their own liking.

Liberal Egyptian legal scholar, Nabīl Ahmad Hilmī, states that throughout Egypt's modern history since Muhammad Ali "a sharp split" has taken place "at the level of intellectuals in the society, between those of western education and culture and others of Arab and traditional Islamic culture, which led to a conflict between the two sides and which had negative impacts on democratic development and constitutional reform."<sup>50,51</sup>

It is this sharp split that is so well reflected in the discussions about the role of religion in the Constitution. The same split is, however, much less evident among the masses of the Egyptian population.<sup>52</sup>

Discussions about revising the Constitution began immediately after President Hosni Mubarak stepped down on February 11, 2011. The old

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<sup>49</sup> Youssef Sidhum, the influential editor of the Christian weekly, *Watani*, warned in an interview on December 8, 2011, that it is wrong to speak about a divide between Muslims and Christians. He saw the divide between Islamists and non-Islamists, most Christians are siding with the non-Islamists.

<sup>50</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Nabīl Ahmad Hilmī: A Liberal scholar advocating amending Article II," in Cornelis Hulsman (ed), *The Sharia as the Main Source of Legislation? The Egyptian Debate on Article II of the Egyptian Constitution*, (Vienna: Tectum Verlag, 2012), 207.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Geertz points to underestimating the humanities in Egyptian studies which has played a major role in people not being capable to engage in mutual understanding despite existing big differences, email August 28, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Cornelis Hulsman (ed), *The Sharia as the Main Source of Legislation? The Egyptian Debate on Article II of the Egyptian Constitution*, (Vienna: Tectum Verlag, 2012).

Constitution was frozen, Parliament was sent home, and the military stepped in. Only five days later, on February 16, the SCAF formed a committee consisting of Islamists and non-Islamists under the chairmanship of Tāriq al-Bishrī to formulate amendments to the Constitution that would ease the transfer from a military government to a civilian government over a six-month period. Al-Bishrī is a widely-respected judge with Islamist sympathies, but he was also a friend of the prominent late, Christian jurist, William Qilādah (Qilada (1924–1999), a personal friend of mine who encouraged us to start the *Religious News Service of the Arab World* that later became *Arab-West Report*. Qilādah spoke highly of his friend al-Bishrī, who had written a popular book about the Copts.

The SCAF announced on February 26, 2011 constitutional amendments that eased restrictions on eligibility conditions for presidential elections, limited the number of presidential terms to two four-year periods, and ensured full judicial monitoring of elections.<sup>53</sup>

The amendments favored parliamentary elections before writing the Constitution, which was opposed by liberals who argued that the Constitution would need to be written first since it would set the boundaries for powers of both the parliament and the president. Liberals also feared that the Muslim Brothers were much better organized and thus would need less time to prepare themselves for elections.

Liberal and Christian intellectuals and writers brought back the discussion on Article II of the Constitution that specifies that “the principles of Islamic *sharī’ah* are the main source of legislation.” Many rather wanted to see that the *sharī’ah* is a main source of legislation, as it was prior to 1971, because Egypt is an overwhelmingly religious society where traditional values have a much larger appeal to the wider public than those of Westernized

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<sup>53</sup> Mona El-Hennawy, “Commission announces proposed changes to Egyptian Constitution,” *Egypt Independent*, February 28, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/commission-announces-proposed-changes-egyptian-constitution>.

Egyptian liberal intellectuals or Christians, such a change was highly controversial.

An opinion poll of Dr. Fatma El-Zanaty (Fatimah al-Zanātī) and Muhammad El-Ghazaly (Muhammad Al Ghazālī) found that 93% of the Muslims wanted to keep Article II unchanged. This includes many non-Islamists who found it unrealistic to pick a fight on a subject they were bound to lose. Christians understood that outright removal of a reference to *sharī'ah* was not realistic but nevertheless, an overwhelming majority preferred a change from “the main source” to “a main source.” Leading church leaders were more cautious and with liberal leaders advocated that the text of Article II would remain unchanged.<sup>54</sup>

Islamists actively campaigned for an approval of the amendments in the referendum of March 19, 2011. More than 14.1 million voters, or 77.3 percent, approved the constitutional amendments. Despite the efforts of high-profile public figures such as Amr Moussa (‘Amr Mūsá) and el-Baradei to throw out the proposed amendments, ‘only’ 4 million, or 22.7 percent, voted against them.<sup>55</sup> The polling went well, with no major fraud reported, and as many had to wait in line for over three hours, this referendum came to show a true willingness of 40% of the electorate to engage in the new democratic era.<sup>56</sup>

The March 19 referendum was followed by a Constitutional Declaration by the SCAF.<sup>57</sup> This prepared the road for the formation of political parties and parliamentary elections in December 2011-January 2012, with a voter

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<sup>54</sup> Hulsman (ed), *The Sharia as the Main Source of Legislation?*.

<sup>55</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “Egyptian Voters Approve Constitutional Changes,” *New York Times*, March 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/21/world/middleeast/21egypt.html?pagewanted=all>. Supreme Elections Council website, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://referendum2011.elections.eg/84-slideshow/155-result.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Diana Serôdio, “Analysis of Electoral Results since the Revolution,” in: Cornelis Hulsman (ed), “The Development of Egypt’s Constitution: Analysis, Assessment, and Sorting through the Rhetoric,” MISSIO, Aachen, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Egyptian Government Portal, “Constitutional Declaration 2011,” <http://www.egypt.gov.eg/english/laws/constitution/default.aspx>.

turnout of 54%, which resulted in a massive victory for Islamist parties. These elections were largely peaceful. They were not perfect, but they certainly were the freest and most honest elections since 1952.

Political Party	Ideology	Number of seats	Percentage (508=100%; percentages are rounded off)	Christian members in this parliament 1)
Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)	Islamist	213	41.9	
Smaller parties in coalition with the FJP	Mostly Islamist but also the left-wing Nasserist party Karama of later presidential candidate Hamdīn Sabāhī	22	4.3	Karāmah:1 Amīn 'Iskandar
El-Nour	Conservative Islamist	123	24.2	
Wasat Party	Islamist/centrist	11	2.2	
Total Islamist Parties		369	72.6	
New Wafd Party	Liberal	38	7.5	1 – Margaret 'Āzir
Egyptian Bloc	Liberal/Social democrats	33	6.5	Social Democrats: 1 – 'Imād Jād
Remnants of		32	6.3	

the old NDP				
Smaller parties and independents	Mix of Liberal, Leftish, centrist	26	5.1	El-Horiya: 1 – Ihāb Ramzī  Independent: 1 Sāmih Makram ‘Ubayd, later joined the Free Egyptian Party in the Egyptian Bloc
Total non-Islamists		129	25.4	
Total elected		498		
Nominated by the SCAF		10	1.9	5 – George Massīhah, later joined the Wafd Party, Suzī Nāshid, Marial Malāk Hannā Grace, One member for Egyptians abroad who never turned up
Total		508	100%	10

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- 1) The Christian members in this parliament tried together to address the issue of creating a law to regulate building houses of worship, something that has been tried in many previous parliaments. The FJP opposed this claiming that the time to discuss this was not good. Christians have heard this argument before in previous parliaments.

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<sup>58</sup> “Egyptian Elections: Preliminary Results [UPDATED],” *Jadaliyya*, January 9, 2012, accessed March 2, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3331/egyptian-elections-preliminary-results-updated->

Clashes followed between the Islamist-dominated Parliament and the SCAF about the formation of the Constituent Assembly as no consensus could be reached over the proportions allotted to Parliament and major groups in society.<sup>59</sup> Parliament wanted more representatives in the assembly while the SCAF opted for fewer representatives from Parliament and more representatives from major organizations in society such as trade unions, the Azhar, churches, and a host of other organizations.<sup>60</sup> In the end, it was decided among the legislative body that 50% of the assembly members (50 members) would be from within the Parliament and Shūrā Council and the rest from outside and, on the 25th of March, 2012 from the 2,078 candidates, 100 were selected.<sup>61</sup>

Parliament then worked on adopting a law to exclude prominent members of the former regime from participating for a period of ten years in politics. This view was later reflected in Article 232 of the Constitution: Preventing the leaders of the dissolved National Democratic Party from exercising political work and run for presidential and legislative elections for a period of ten years from the date of the Constitution. Of course this did not bode well with the old guard.

The constitutionality of the parliamentary elections was disputed in court since members of political parties had also been running as independents while the purpose was to reserve two-thirds of the seats in parliament for representatives of political parties and one-third for independents. No one had expected Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) to rule on June 14, 2012, only two days before the beginning of the presidential elections, that one-third of the seats in Parliament were invalid, which in turn

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<sup>59</sup> "Egypt parliamentary committee rejects SCAF criteria for constituent assembly," *Al Ahrām Online*, April 28, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/40418/Egypt/0/Egypt-parliamentary-committee-rejects-SCAF-criteri.aspx>.

<sup>60</sup> Serôdio, "Analysis of Electoral Results".

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.; Gamal Essam El-Din, "Islamists dominate Egypt's Constituent Assembly," *Al Ahrām Online*, March 25, 2012, accessed March 11, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/37606.aspx>.



resulted in the dissolution of the Parliament.<sup>62</sup> It was believed that the SCAF had been behind this ruling. Whether that is true or not is impossible to say, but this belief has certainly motivated large numbers of non-Islamists to oppose a vote for Ahmad Shafiq, an air force general-turned-politician.

Muhammad Morsi, chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party founded by the Muslim Brotherhood, won in the second round on June 16 and 17, with a turnout of 51%, with a narrow majority of 51.7 percent of the vote. His rival, Ahmad Shafiq, received 48.3%.<sup>63</sup> Certainly not all who voted for Morsi were Islamists. He also received support of non-Islamists, who rejected a return to an army-led government.

The outcome of the presidential elections shows that Islamists no longer had the sweeping majority they had in the Parliamentary elections. It also shows that there are a large percentage of swing voters, or people switching from voting Islamist to voting for Mubarak's last Prime Minister.

The dissolution of Parliament by the SCC and the election of President Morsi led the SCAF make amendments to their March 2011 Constitutional Declaration on June 17, 2012. These amendments limited the powers of the president and expanded the military's role, notably giving it a heavy influence over the writing of the country's next constitution.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Political Chaos in Egypt: Parliament Dissolved, Presidential Elections to Continue," *Arab-West Report* newsletter, June 15, 2012. Muslim Brothers blamed judges who had been nominated in the Mubarak days and thus were not believed to be neutral.

<sup>63</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Engagement, not Fear Needed with Egyptian President Mursi, Muslim Brotherhood candidate Muhammad Mursi wins the second round of Egypt's presidential elections," *Arab-West Report* newsletter, June 25, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> "SCAF expands its power with constitutional amendments," *Egypt Independent*, June 17, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/scaf-expands-its-power-constitutional-amendments>.

After only one week in office, President Morsi picked his first fight – he issued on July 8 a decree to reinstate the dissolved parliament.<sup>65</sup> The SCC, however, immediately overturned his decision on July 10, 2012.<sup>66</sup>

President Morsi thus turned his attention to the Shūrā Council, or Senate, elected in January 2012, and gave it the prerogatives of the dissolved lower house in Parliament for which it was not designed. This council has a total of 270 members, of which two-thirds (180) were elected in direct elections. The remainder (90) was appointed by the SCAF (taking the prerogative of Hosni Mubarak, who prior to the revolution could nominate one-third of its members). In Egypt, the Shūrā Council has been known for its relative impotence, which had been further diminished by the SCAF's March 30, 2012 Constitutional Declaration, where it was defined as a purely advisory and consultative body.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the voter turnout was significantly low, amounting to only 12.2% of the electorate,<sup>68</sup> which some also think reflected the lack of faith of the people in the SCAF-led polling process.<sup>69</sup> Also here the Islamists dominated with the Freedom and Justice Party taking 58% of the seats, the Nour 25%, the New Wafd Party 7.7%, and the Egyptian Bloc only 4.4%. Non-Islamists were underrepresented, but this was largely the result of a boycott of several non-Islamist parties of these elections. It was this council that President Morsi started using as a legislative body to make up for the problems of not having a properly functioning parliament.

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<sup>65</sup> Jayson Casper, "Mursi Reinstates Egypt's Parliament," *Arab-West Report*, 2012, Week 28, Art. 46, July 8, 2012, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-28/46-mursi-reinstates-egypts-parliament>.

<sup>66</sup> "Egypt court overturns President Mursi parliament order," *BBC News*, July 10, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18789992>.

<sup>67</sup> Diana Serôdio, "Interview with jurist Dr. Ahmed Talaat on the new Egyptian Constitution," *Arab-West Report*, Week 16, Art. 21, April 18, 2013, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2013/week-16/21-interview-jurist-dr-ahmed-talaat-new-egyptian-constitution>.

<sup>68</sup> "Turnout in 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of Shura elections 12,2," *Pharaohs Today*, February 18, 2012, accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.pharaohstoday.com/Eng/2012/02/18/turnout-in-2nd-stage-of-shura-elections-12-2/>.

<sup>69</sup> Salem Mostafa Kamel, "Shura Council Elections See Low Turnout and Voter Apathy," *Atlantic Council's Egypt Source*, February 2, 2012, accessed March 8, 2013, <http://www.acus.org/egyptsource/shura-council-elections-see-low-turnout-and-voter-apaty>.

The vast electoral victories of the Islamists have created great fear among non-Islamist Muslims and Christians for the direction the country would take.

President Morsi was aware of this, and in July 2012 met with Christian leaders who expressed their concerns.<sup>70</sup> In August 2012, President Morsi appointed four assistant presidents of different political trends: Samir Marcos, a liberal and Coptic Orthodox Christian; Dr. Pakinām Sharqāwī, a female Muslim scholar not associated to the Brotherhood; Dr. 'Issām al-Haddād of the Muslim Brotherhood; and 'Imād Abd al-Ghaffūr of the Salafī Nour Party. This indicated for many an effort to unify the country.<sup>71</sup>

Unification efforts have also resulted in discussions suggesting that Christians and Jews should be ruled according to their respective religious principles in their personal and religious affairs.<sup>72</sup>

George Massīhah, former Member of Parliament for the Wafd Party, said that Morsi initially had an approval rate of 87%. His first steps, incorporating non-Islamists and Christians in his team and his idea to shift powers from the president to an elected parliament, were well received. Initially non-Islamists also believed they could have an impact on the formation of the new constitution.<sup>73</sup> This optimism in those days also made it possible for a diversified Egyptian multi-party delegation to visit the Netherlands, October 8-11, 2012.

The turning point was the Supreme Constitutional Court preparing a ruling that would have dissolved the Constituent Assembly and the Shūrā

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<sup>70</sup> Episcopal Bishop Mounir was in this meeting and described Morsi on July 22, 2013, as a very nice man but not capable for the job.

<sup>71</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "AWR Welcomes President Mursī's Appointment of Assistant Presidents," *Arab-West Report* Newsletter, August 29, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/awr-welcomes-president-mursis-appointment-assistant-presidents>.

<sup>72</sup> 'Ādil Munīr, "Article for Christians in Constitution," *Arab-West Report*, Week 36, Art. 1, September 2, 2012, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-36/1-article-christians-constitution>.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with George Massīhah, June 20, 2013.

Council. This would have forced Morsi to restart the process of writing the Constitution and would have deprived him of his only legislative council. Muslim Brothers demonstrated before the SCC, preventing judges from entering court and issuing their expected ruling. Morsi issued his highly controversial decree on November 22, 2012, granting himself unlimited powers, in his view to protect the nation from the Mubarak-era power structure that would put the expected rulings into effect. Judges went on strike, deciding that they would not return to work until Morsi withdrew his decrees. Some 200,000 demonstrators against this decree filled Tahrir Square. On November 26, members of the Supreme Judiciary Council, which oversees the nation's court system, met with Morsi to discuss his decrees. No agreement was reached and demonstrations continued.<sup>74</sup> His Christian advisor, Samir Marcos (Samir Marcus), resigned in protest on November 29 because Morsi had neither consulted him nor most other presidential advisors and assistants. Decisions appeared to have been made surreptitiously from within a tight group.<sup>75</sup> The Constituent Assembly sped up the decision making process and non-Islamist members of the assembly, including all church representatives, resigned in protest. Yet, the draft was approved by the assembly on November 29 and sent to the President, who called for a referendum provoking tens of thousands to demonstrate in front of the Presidential Palace demanding Morsi to postpone the referendum, leave office, and accusing him of acting as a "Pharaoh". Deadly clashes took place after, allegedly, Muslim Brotherhood supporters confronted the protesters.

Tensions increased with President Morsi's refusal to meet with the members of the Constitutional Court on December 2 when they were to present their verdict on the legality of the Constituent Assembly. Most courts across the country suspended their activity on this day as well. The Judges' Club leaders threatened not to supervise the referendum, further

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<sup>74</sup> Hamza Hendawi, "Egyptian courts suspend work to protest Morsi decrees," Associated Press, November 28, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Meeting with Samir Marcos, January 14, 2013. He repeated he was not against political Islam but wants to see proper democratic procedures.

complicating the voting process. The Egyptian judiciary was mostly appointed in Mubarak's days and these tensions signaled major cracks between the judiciary and the presidency that only became worse in the months to come.

On December 8, the President did rescind most of the powers he had granted himself on November 22, but he did not postpone the referendum. That in turn resulted in often violent demonstrations against the referendum and clashes between pro and anti-Morsi protesters.

Islamist preacher, Safwat Hegazy (Safwāt Hijāzī),<sup>76</sup> stated in December 2012 in a counter demonstration that 60% of the demonstrators against the proposed Constitution were Christians.<sup>77</sup> Many of them were not only demonstrating against the Constitution, but also publicly demanded the downfall of Morsi. Hegazy responded in "a message to the Egyptian church from an Egyptian Muslim. I tell the church if you conspire and unite with the opposition to bring Morsi down, we will have another talk." The crowd chanted many times, "Allahu akbar" in response, clearly approving Hegazy's rousing statements. The phrase, "we will have another talk" was perceived as a threat.

Hegazy continued that he has a recording of a meeting of leaders of opposition parties with George Ishaq and Mona Mina who, according to Hegazy, said they will fill the squares with demonstrators. George Ishāq is a Christian activist and one of the founders of the Kifāyah movement (not linked to any religious beliefs) against President Mubarak. Mona Mina is an obvious Christian name, but not a well-known personality. Leaders of

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<sup>76</sup> Hegazy has repeatedly stated that he was not a Muslim Brother but an independent Islamist wanting the unity of all Islamists. He, however, frequently seen in Muslim Brotherhood circles and has been rewarded by president Morsi for supporting him with a position in the National Council for Human Rights.

<sup>77</sup> George Massihah agreed that the percentage of Christians in these demonstrations indeed had been large, interview, January 25, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, Daniela de Maria, Ahmed Deiab, "AWR Interviews Safwat Hegazy," July 25, 2013, *Arab-West Report*, August 21, 2013.

the National Salvation Front opposing Morsi had apparently met with two Christians who were supposed to be able to attract many Christian demonstrators. The crowd responded to Hegazy with chants, “Our souls, our blood we sacrifice for Islam”. Similar chants can be heard in Christian demonstrations with the same rhythm, but with slightly different words, “Our souls, our blood we sacrifice for the cross”. Both verses express a willingness to die for one’s faith.

Safwat Hegazy continued after the Muslim slant for martyrdom: To the church we say: yes, you are our brothers in this country, but there are red lines and our red line is the legitimacy of Dr. Muhammad Morsi. The crowd chanted, “Allahū akbar” in response.<sup>79</sup>

The video was widely distributed. Copts perceived Hegazy’s warning as a threat.

The referendum took place in two rounds on the 15 and 22 of December despite all violence and was approved by 63.8% of the voters. With a high number of voting violation reports and a low turnout of just over 32.9%, it did not speak to a resounding victory for its proponents and challenged its legitimacy.<sup>80</sup>

Political Science Professor, Dr. Hoda Awad believes that the decree of November 22, the Muslim Brothers pushing the Constitution through despite substantial opposition, and incidences of violence is the moment that the army starting to prepare for the removal of President Morsi.<sup>81</sup>

From this moment the situation began to deteriorate:

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<sup>79</sup> “Safwat Higazi threatens Egypt’s Copts [Eng. Subs] صفوت حجازي يهدد اقباط مصر” YouTube, December 14, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh5QpEMjHmA>.

<sup>80</sup> Zaid Al-Ali, “The new Egyptian Constitution: an initial assessment of its merits and flaws,” Open Democracy, December 26, 2012, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/zaid-ali/new-egyptian-constitution-initial-assessment-of-its-merits-and-flaws>.

<sup>81</sup> Interview Dr. Hoda Awad, July 20, 2013. Dr. Amr Darrag believed in an interview on July 22, 2013, however, that the army has been making plans much earlier.

- Most non-Brotherhood advisors of the President, also people known as Islamists, resigned.<sup>82</sup>
- Signals repeatedly indicated that Morsi was not getting along with both security forces and the army and that tensions between them increased.<sup>83</sup> Meetings with Samir Marcos,<sup>84</sup> Volkhard Windfuhr,<sup>85</sup> Ra'id al-Sharqawī,<sup>86</sup> George Massīhah,<sup>87</sup> but also Dr. Usāmah Farīd, one of the president's advisors on economic issues,<sup>88</sup> and Egyptian diplomats<sup>89</sup> all indicated the same. The Muslim Brothers were accused of trying to set up a separate entity in an effort to get control

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<sup>82</sup> "Morsi's advisory team less diverse after months of walkouts; Morsi's presidential team is half its original size after 7 months; half of the remaining 10 are Brotherhood members," *Al-Ahram Online*, February 19, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/65135/Egypt/Politics-/Morsis-advisory-team-less-diverse-after-months-of-.aspx>.

<sup>83</sup> "One of the first indications was general al-Sisī warning that he would act against any group using violence," *al-Dustur*, December 12, 2012, [www.dostor.org](http://www.dostor.org). Saad Eddin Ibrahim claimed on December 12, 2012 that the number of Muslim Brotherhood militants is estimated to be around 200,000 to 300,000, <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=363557&IssueID=2712>.

<sup>84</sup> Meeting with Samir Marcos, January 14, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Meeting with Volkhard Windfuhr, January 15, 2013. Windfuhr is correspondent of *Der Spiegel*, Chairman of the Cairo Foreign Press Association and came first to Egypt in 1955. He is extremely well connected in Egypt and told me that the ties between General al-Sisī and the Muslim Brotherhood were severed. Where in the past bridges and alliances may have been possible between army and MB this now seems to be over, he said on January 15.

<sup>86</sup> Ra'id al-Sharqawī said on February 7, 2013, that security/army officers "are boiling." They do not want to serve under a Muslim Brotherhood government. Efforts are made to make Morsi break with the Guidance Office, Khaīrat al-Shattir and Badia, make them fail.

<sup>87</sup> Meetings with George Massīhah on January 25 and April 15; security does not like the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>88</sup> Usāmah Farīd said on February 9 that Security and police are opposed to Morsi. The reason is that they are corrupt and do not want to give up corruption. Dialogue should take place without setting prior conditions but the National Salvation Front sets conditions. They are overstepping democracy. Democracy is majority rule and respect for institutions, not protests. Since political consensus is not possible we should focus on economy first. If they don't join they will be seen as obstructing economy.

<sup>89</sup> An Egyptian diplomat told me on January 17 that he knew of resistance against Morsi among army and security. He also believed that the highest ranking officers would not act but would officers in 2<sup>nd</sup> rank start to act? The same diplomat told me June 18 that he would participate in the June 30 demonstrations. Either we get rid of Morsi or we will be under their (MB) rule for a long time to come. Many syndicates stated they will participate. Labor organizations, 7,000 police officers will demonstrate, judges will participate. Another diplomat said on April 6 that 3000 radical fighters had entered Egypt. Islamists are not willing to let power go.

over the normal police. Minister of Defense, al-Sīsī stated in January that the army would not accept the establishment of a separate security apparatus. He did not mention the Muslim Brotherhood in this regard, but for Samir Marcos it was clear that he meant the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>90</sup> Stories about tensions between President Morsi and the army started appearing in the media.<sup>91</sup> Attacks on Brotherhood offices and demonstrators took place with the police elicited either delinquent responses or none at all. This has added to feelings among Islamists that they are under siege.<sup>92</sup>

- President Morsi did not get along with several other ministries that, with the Ministries of Defense and Interior, were described as *feloul*, loyal to the old regime. This included the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Tourism, and Antiquities.<sup>93</sup>
- Several Muslim Brotherhood Ministers had difficulties in exerting influence on their own bureaucracy. The Minister of Agriculture was mentioned as an example.<sup>94</sup>
- President Morsi also did not get along with the Egyptian judiciary. He appointed a new prosecutor who was rejected by most judges. Morsi also tried to retire the older judges in order to allow a greater number of younger judges to replace them who might be more Muslim Brotherhood-friendly.
- Media were continuously highlighting various mistakes of President Morsi: the economy being in shambles and the Northern Sinai

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<sup>90</sup> Meeting with Samir Marcos, January 14, 2013. Claims of Western Copts that the Muslim Brothers were setting up a religious police he, however, strongly dismissed. There were some people talking about this but nothing of this had been carried out.

<sup>91</sup> For example: Ahmed Eleiba, "Collision course? Are the military and the Muslim Brotherhood heading towards a confrontation?" *Al Ahram Weekly*, March 13, 2013 <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Print/1865.aspx>.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Ra'id al-Sharqāwī, February 7, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with George Massīhah, June 20, 2013. An Egyptian diplomat confirmed this.

<sup>94</sup> Meeting with Ahmed al-Hudāiby, Egyptian Business Development Association, on March 26. He then said that the Minister and Upper Level of the bureaucracy lacks vision. The Middle and lower level resists change, primarily out of fear of losing jobs. The only response he saw in creating parallel institutions such as AMC- Agricultural Modernization Center and IMC – Industrial Modernization Center.



constantly plagued by unrest and violence. Freedom and Justice Party leader, Amr Darrag, who is closely associated to the Muslim Brotherhood, does not deny mistakes were made, but finds the way this is presented, only or primary blaming the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi highly unfair. “We controlled nothing,” he said and are now blamed for things over which we had no control.<sup>95</sup> This is disputed by others but it shows a Brotherhood under pressure.

- Artists were ridiculing President Morsi. Rida Abdul Rahmān created a donkey with the backside with the trousers and boots of a soldier and the face of Muslim Brother, by many recognized as Muhammad Morsi and displayed this on an art exhibition in a church on May 9, 2013. The pastor did not want to act as censor, but also showed fear for consequences. After the opening evening Rida’s donkey was taken away. Rida wanted to make a political statement against the Brotherhood and claimed they only got to their position of power through the army. He said he was not afraid of consequences. We have now more freedoms, he said, than under Hosni Mubarak.<sup>96</sup>
- Ethiopia building a much larger complex of dams than had earlier been planned. They would have never tried to do this in the days of Mubarak who had threatened to bomb any project that would reduce the flow of water to Egypt.<sup>97</sup>

President Morsi’s responses were surprising. Decisions were made that only further fueled the fire, such as the nomination of ‘Ādil Al-Khayāt, a member of the Jamā’āh al-Islāmīyah, as the governor of Luxor, the very city where members of the Jamā’āh al-Islāmīyah killed 58 tourists and 4 Egyptians in November 1997. George Massīhah calls Al-Khayāt as a human being a good person, but also found the decision of the President so close to the announced demonstrations on June 30 unwise. “Did he want to give the message that he was in full power and did not care about the

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Dr. Amr Darrag, July 22, 2013.

<sup>96</sup> Reda Abdel Rahman responding to my question during the exhibition on May 9, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Widespread media reporting but also extensive talks with an Egyptian diplomat, June 18, 2013.

coming demonstrations?”<sup>98</sup> The Minister of Tourism told Morsi that he had to choose between either him or Al-Khayāt. Morsi gave in and Al-Khayāt was removed.

Deeply shocking was the barbarous murder of Shī’ah Shaykh, Hassan Shihātah, and three of his followers on June 24, 2013.<sup>99</sup> Shaykh Hassan Shihātah used very sharp language to criticize Sunni Islam. It is for example Sunni doctrine to believe that the ten companions of the Prophet Muhammad are promised Paradise but Hassan Shihātah stated “may God curse them [Sunni Muslims] and their ten”.<sup>100</sup> This and similar attacks on Sunnī doctrine prompted Salafī Shaykh, Muhammad ‘Abdal Maqsūd, to attack people who disparage the followers of the Prophet in the June 15, 2013, conference calling for the support of the revolution in Syria in Cairo Stadium. The language was obviously directed against Shi’ah Muslims, Shehata was not directly mentioned. The audience applauded. President Morsi attended and did not say a word.<sup>101</sup> The short time span between his words and the murder makes many believe that he was to blame. Just hours after the murder, Salafī Shaykh, Khālīd ‘Abdallah, stated on the Salafī Al-Nās channel that he was satisfied with the death of Hassan Shihātah.<sup>102</sup>

President Morsi remained silent and did not denounce the murder. It heightened the fear for what some Islamists could do to anyone with adverse beliefs. Morsi added to that fear because he did not clearly denounce this violence, giving the impression of accord. Was this because

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with George Massīhah, June 20, 2013.

<sup>99</sup> “Maqtal Al Qiyādī Al Shi’ī Hassan Shihātah Fi Masr,” YouTube, June 24, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmZRmV51p-A>.

<sup>100</sup> “Al Mutashayī Hassan Shihātah Yasub Al Sahābah,” YouTube, April 26, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNzYFMJgDoQ>.

<sup>101</sup> “Al Shaykh Muhammad Abdal Maqsūd fi hudur Al raīs Mursī: Al Hurrah la ta’kul min thadyīha, itrud al shī’ah min masr,” June 15, 2013, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIEkhu50i8>.

<sup>102</sup> “Khālīd Abdalla yakshif kāyf qutil Hassan Shihātah al qiyādi al shi’ī alazy sabb al sayīdda Ā’ishah wa Abū Bakr wa ‘Umar wa ‘Uthman,” YouTube, June 24, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrPXELbciKc>.

he feared losing his more radical supporters if he would speak out? The murder gave another strong impetus for people to ask for his resignation.

The Tamarrud (“rebellion”) movement was founded by a group of youth activists on April 28, 2013. They drew up a petition asking for the resignation of President Morsi and calling for massive demonstrations to that effect on June 30. The activists were able to send thousands of volunteers out in the streets to collect signatures from the public. The movement claimed on June 29 that it had collected more than 22 million signatures.<sup>103</sup> Though there is no way to verify the numbers, the campaign was viewed favorably by media, youth movements, labor organizations, and others. I have seen people taking the forms to their own friends and work floor and asked people to sign. I also know that several people have signed more than once.

Several Islamist preachers issued warnings indicating that efforts to remove Morsi would result in violence. Islamist preacher Safwat Hegazy had repeatedly stated that “if a person throws water on Morsi (figuratively: if someone approaches Morsi), we shall throw on him blood (figuratively: kill him).” Hegazy gets questioned about this on Egyptian TV on June 18 and explains this is an expression for someone who is dear to you. He continued, if they remove Morsi on June 30 then they will appoint an army council. He threatened that if this would happen Islamists would make a march of one million that would remove the council on July 5. And if they (the army) bring a temporary president we will go to the presidential palace and remove the interim president. “We are warning not to touch the legitimacy.” And “be careful with Islamists. Do you think Islamists cannot make a pure Islamist revolution?”<sup>104</sup>

On June 20, Hegazy denied to having membership in the Muslim Brotherhood or any political party, but he acknowledged supporting the

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<sup>103</sup> AP, June 29, 2013.

<sup>104</sup> “Safwat Hijazi yuhadid al majlis al ‘askarī fi hāl al inqilāb alá Mursī,” YouTube, June 18, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk19AYj00Bg>.

resistance in Syria with weapons. He says he is not a trader and does not do this from Egypt,<sup>105</sup> but many wondered that given access to weapons that these may also be used in Egypt.

Hāzim Abu Isma'īl, Salafī preacher and former presidential candidate, warned before June 30 that life ammunition could be used. He mentions no party in relation to this, but again this was received as a threat from Islamists.<sup>106</sup>

Other preachers have made similar warnings.

On June 30 large numbers of demonstrators poured in the streets. Opponents of Morsi claimed Google Earth had published figures suggesting 33 million demonstrators were on the streets. Google denied the claims.<sup>107</sup> Al Jazeera News Channel, generally seen as biased towards Muslim Brothers, suggested through calculations and experts analysis that the number of those who protested against Morsi in Cairo could not have exceeded 800,000 in Cairo and 4 million across Egypt.<sup>108</sup>

On July 1, President Morsi received an ultimatum from General Al-Sīsī that he had to respond to the will of the people. One way of responding would have been to call for early presidential elections. Morsi spoke with al-Sīsī, but on July 2 rebuffed the army.<sup>109</sup> The answer came on July 3. Al-Sīsī addressed Egyptians on TV, in the company of Shāykh Ahmad al-Tayīb of

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<sup>105</sup> "Safwat Hijazi :Aywa anā Tājir Silāh" YouTube, June 20, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7cNtEzH5ks>.

<sup>106</sup> "Abū Isma'īl Yuhadid Biqatl Al Masriyīn yūm 30. 6 bil rasās al hay," YouTube, June 14, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7WehcWkJXk>.

<sup>107</sup> Daud Abdullah, "Google throws a spanner in Al-Sīsī's works," *Middle East Monitor*, July 26, 2013, <http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/resources/commentary-and-analysis/6682-google-throws-a-spanner-in-al-sisis-works>.

<sup>108</sup> "Al Jadal Bish'an al hushūd al mushārikah fi 30 Yunyū," YouTube, August 1, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9PLmZB7Xgo>.

<sup>109</sup> Shaimaa Fayed and Paul Taylor, "Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi Rejects Military's Ultimatum, Country on Edge," *Reuters*, July 2, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/02/egypt-mohammed-morsi-ultimatum\\_n\\_3532051.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/02/egypt-mohammed-morsi-ultimatum_n_3532051.html).

the Azhar and Pope Tawadros II, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and announced that Morsi was ousted. ‘Adlī Mansūr, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court would be interim president, he explained, as is specified in the Constitution if there is no president and no successor to a president.<sup>110</sup> Al-Sīsī did not want to repeat the experience of the SCAF of having officers rule the country. Muslim Brothers were upset about Pope Tawadros and Shaykh al-Tayeb so clearly taking side in favor of Morsi’s ousting.<sup>111</sup> Shortly after the statement, the police arrested Morsi, closed most Islamic TV stations, and arrested staff.

Was it a *coup d’état* or not? No, opponents to President Morsi said. This was a revolution and the army responded to the wish of millions of people. Yes, others said, Morsi was removed by the army after he had refused to call for new elections. Since there was no parliament that could have sent him away, the army was the only institution left that could oust Morsi.

Islamists were furious, organizing large sit-ins in several parts of the country. The most important of these was at Rāba’a al-‘Adāwīyah Mosque in Madīnat Nasr where Muslim Brother leaders frequently met, addressed the crowds, and also had their own media center with a satellite transmitter. On July 8, tensions arose with Islamists organizing a march against the premises of the Republican Guard, which included children. Clashes were inevitable and resulted in over 50 deaths among the demonstrators. Following this, the speeches at the Rāba’a al-‘Adāwīyah and other locations became more aggressive.

Yaqīn (meaning “no doubt”) Channel broadcast on July 10 responses from demonstrators at Rāba’a al-‘Adāwīyah. One shaykh used the camera to state that everyone at Rāba’a al-‘Adāwīyah is ready to commit suicide. He accused General al-Sīsī of having created a civil war:

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Hoda Awad, July 20, 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Dr. Amr Darrag, July 22, 2013. Statements later in the Rāba’a al-‘Adāwīyah sit-in I went to on July 23, 24, and 25 were formulated with much more frustration and anger about the widespread Christian opposition to Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Warning.. (Sīsī) Know that you have created a new Taliban and new Qa'ida in Egypt. All of these crowds will be dispersed (and turned) to suicide bombers and they will destroy you and destroy Egypt and you are the one who destroyed Egypt. You made new Mujāhidīn and people giving themselves to martyrdom (justification for suicide attacks). Know that if every one in ten of these detonates himself in a group, you must know that you are the reason. You are the one who instigated terrorism and you are the one who started it. I am warning you, return things to their order otherwise you will find these crowds detonating Egypt. You are the one who is making a civil war between Muslims and non-Muslims, you are the one who is making a civil war between Muslims and secularists and you are the one who is making a civil war between Muslims and Shi'ites. You are the one who wrote the death certificate of the [National] Salvation Front<sup>112</sup> and its men, you are the one who wrote the death certificate of the rebels<sup>113</sup> and you are the one who wrote the death certificate of everyone who opposed president Morsi and opposed the legitimacy of the (ballot) box. I am warning you Sīsī. Stop obstructing these crowds or these crowds will explode at you. Beware, this is a message of one of millions of people. I am telling you Sīsī, beware Sīsī, you created a new Taliban and a new Qa'ida in Egypt and you are the one who made the terrorists. Take these words as a lesson and tomorrow you shall see. Salāmu Allaikum Wā Rahmah Allah.<sup>114</sup>

The opinions expressed were not very different from what I heard during July 23-25 when I visited the Rāba'a al-'Adāwīyah sit-in. Leaders were repeatedly speaking of the wish for peace but also warning that if their sit-ins would be dismantled that this could result in civil war. The shaykh was

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<sup>112</sup> Coalition of political parties that had been opposing President Morsi.

<sup>113</sup> Leaders of the Tamarrud movement.

<sup>114</sup> "Ihzar yā Sīsī. Ihnā handammarak windamar Masr," YouTube, July 10, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn3QH1w6czI>. The shaykh's name was not given.

thus clearly inspired by the speeches he must have heard in the previous weeks.

The phrase with warning that Egypt will explode was repeatedly mentioned in other programs.

Yaqīn Channel interviewed the same shaykh again on August 21, who this time apologized for his angry language, that his words should not be taken literally and that he in no way wanted a civil war. Each person who dies, regardless who he is, is one too much. We are all Egyptian, he spoke.<sup>115</sup>

The talks of Safwat Hegazy and this shaykh reminded me of Egyptian intellectual, Dr. Tarek Heggy (Tāriq Hijjī), who spoke years ago about Egyptians being fond of big talk, exaggerations, and blowing things up. That is part of the way Egyptians express their emotions. This is often very counterproductive, particularly in a tense climate where many strongly feel mistreated.

Where some engaged in big talk, others were involved in miscalculations. Dr. Amr Darrag, for example, had obviously not expected the army to remove the president. On June 30, when he was still the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, he wrote me, “It will pass. Egyptians will never let violence prevail.” When a senior leader did not expect this, it is likely that other senior members of the Brotherhood close to the president did not expect this either, despite the signals media and opponents of the Muslim Brothers had been receiving about a possible collision with army and police since December 2012.

Dr. Amr Darrag acknowledges that the protests against the president “were real,” but “they were made use of to justify this military coup,” since they responded only to demonstrators wanting the president to resign and not the demonstrators in favor of Morsi. Also, none of the demonstrators

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<sup>115</sup> “Hām Jidān we Jadīd. Radd Sāhib Video Hanfajjar Masr wa Tahdīd Al Sīsī,” YouTube, August 21, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joHUGBGZXS0>.

“was asking to suspend the constitution. No one was asking to dissolve the Shūrā Council, nobody was asking for a complete coup. Nobody was asking for shutting down TV stations. Nobody was asking for the arrest of our leaders including the speaker of the Parliament.” Amr Darrag does not believe that if Morsi would have called for early elections that this would have changed the course of history. “They could have removed him and that was it. Why all the other measures I just mentioned? This is not about the president. Why demonizing the Muslim Brotherhood day and night in all stations and all of the sudden we are terrorists. We are charged of all evil in the world. It is a campaign.”<sup>116</sup>

On July 23, 24, and 25, I met with leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Rāba’a al-’Adāwīyah. I found a siege mentality; leaders and ordinary people presenting themselves as the victims, blaming Christians and many others for having supported the ouster of Morsi. They knew well that Morsi had lost popularity, but argued for his return, referring to several Western leaders whose approval rating during their reign had also dropped far below 50% but finished their term regardless.

Pictures of people killed in demonstrations were displayed as the martyrs for democracy. General al-Sīsī was called a traitor who deserved to be court-marshaled. Speeches were often very provocative, claiming democracy and rights had been inhibited. Much of the rhetoric I was hearing was very uncompromising. Discarding mistakes made, focused on own rights and the wrongs of their opponents.

I also met with several bishops, finding tremendous distrust in Muslim Brothers’ statements and referring to videos online with statements of Brotherhood leaders and Morsi supporters they found inciting. I was presented with one video that showed the Brotherhood Guide, Muhammad Badī’, giving instructions to President Morsi, thus indicating it was not Morsi, but the Muslim Brotherhood that was ruling the country. One bishop even stated that he would not mind the military remaining in

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with Dr. Amr Darrag, July 22, 2013.



power for the next ten years, because Egypt is not yet ready for democracy.<sup>117</sup>

Amr Darrag is obviously one of the most important Freedom and Justice Party/Brotherhood leaders meeting with non-Egyptian dignitaries. On August 8 he met with Dutch Foreign Minister, Frans Timmermans, and writes, “It was a very good meeting. He was impressed by the fact that one of the members of our delegation members was a Christian lady.” Muslim Brothers have done this repeatedly in the past, trying to get Christians to understand their position. Not many trust them, but some are willing to engage in talks and show a certain understanding of their position.

On August 12, immediately after Ramadan, the army announced that the sit-ins – that were so disruptive for traffic in Cairo (not just disruptive of traffic, residents affected as well) – would have to end. Catholic Bishop Yuhannā Qultah told *Arab-West Report* on August 13 that he disagreed with that move. He believed that even if the Muslim Brothers would want to protest for another ten years that this should be possible.<sup>118</sup>

On Wednesday, August 14, the army and police moved in with live ammunition, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded. On the same day massive violence broke out throughout the country. Police stations, churches, Christian schools, and sometimes also shops owned by Christians were looted, destroyed, and burned. We have made calls with clergy in many different cities. In Fayoum, Beni Suef, Maghāghah, Minya, and Assiut the police had been attacked by thugs calling for “Islāmīyah” and had fully disappeared from the streets. Video images show horrible atrocities against police. In these areas churches, Christian institutions, and shops were also attacked, looted, and burned.

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<sup>117</sup> Meetings during the same days. All talks were confidential.

<sup>118</sup> Yosra El Gendi, “Interview with Bishop Yohanna Qulta on the risk of a civil war in Egypt,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 33, Art. 1, August 15, 2013, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2013/week-33/1-interview-bishop-yohanna-qulta-risk-civil-war-egypt>.

Bishop Makarios of Minya stated that Christians had asked the police for protection, but they apologized for not coming.<sup>119</sup>

Many Christians believe Muslim Brothers to be involved and having been part of these mobs that were a mix of everything--the poor, members of the Jamā'āh al-Islāmīyah, Salafīs, and also Muslim Brothers.<sup>120</sup>

Dr. Amr Darrag, however, explicitly denied Brotherhood involvement. "All violent events on police stations, churches, etc. were done by thugs driven by state security to blame it on the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>121</sup>

It is known that state security has frequently employed thugs in the past, but was this also the case in this instance? Without investigation this would only be speculation. Would state security drive thugs to attack police stations? That seems far-fetched to me, but not to many Muslim Brothers, showing a total lack of trust in the security because of their history.

General al-Sīsī ordered that all destroyed churches be rebuilt by the army.<sup>122</sup> With this public offer of assistance to Christians al-Sīsī has achieved that Christians would remain staunchly pro-army, but also underscore his campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood. Both Coptic Orthodox Pope, Tawadros, and Catholic Patriarch, Ibrahīm Sidrāk, responded with statements supporting the law enforcement of army and police.<sup>123</sup> The Church leaders need the help of the army, but partisan statements also carry the risk of local grassroots Islamists seeing vulnerable Christian

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<sup>119</sup> "Al'anba Makariūs Uskuf Al Minya wa Tasrihāt 'ājilah minh 'an harq al kana'is," Interview, August 14, 2013, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRioMVTtT1M&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player&desktop\\_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DKRioMVTtT1M%26feature%3Dyoutube\\_gdata\\_player&nomobile=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRioMVTtT1M&feature=youtube_gdata_player&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DKRioMVTtT1M%26feature%3Dyoutube_gdata_player&nomobile=1).

<sup>120</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Egypt is burning; reconciliation urgently needed," *Arab-West Report*, Week 33, Art. 2, August 15, 2013, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2013/week-33/2-egypt-burning-reconciliation-urgently-needed>.

<sup>121</sup> E-mail correspondence with Dr. Darrag, August 15, 2013.

<sup>122</sup> "Egyptian military chief vows to rebuild Coptic Churches," *Fox News*, August 16, 2013.

<sup>123</sup> Cindy Wooden, "Catholic, Orthodox leaders in Egypt say army is fighting terrorism," *Catholic News Service*, August 19, 2013, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1303542.htm>.

neighbors as an extension of the army. These Islamists have seen the violence used against them and have seen their leaders being arrested. Was this risk of pitting Christians against Islamists that made Pope Tawadros decline al-Sīsī's offer of the army rebuilding churches. Christian and Muslim businessmen are making now donations to rebuild the destroyed churches. On September 5, Pope Tawadros met with a high level delegation of the U.S. Congress, again, intended or not, for Islamists, pitting Christians in an anti-Islamist camp.<sup>124</sup> It certainly is not easy to be a church leader in such a deeply polarized society.

Meanwhile Muslim Brothers continued making statements “denouncing aggressions on churches.”<sup>125</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood-supported Anti-Coup Alliance wrote that it

Condemns and does not condone any act of violence against houses of worship, citizens, or properties. And although some Coptic leaders supported or even participated in the coup, no such attacks can be justifiable. We also strongly condemn police treachery in leaving thugs to vandalize properties and houses of worship while focusing on killing protesters in all governorates. We reject attempts by the tyrannical coup regime to orchestrate and fuel inter-religious discord in a bid to cover up its ongoing criminal acts against citizens.<sup>126</sup>

The same group also announced new demonstrations for a Friday of Rage:

Despite our deep pain and sorrow following the August 14 Rābī'a massacre and others committed since the bloody coup,

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<sup>124</sup> “Al Babā Tawadrus Li wafd Al Congress: Hark Al Kanā'is guz' min thaman nuqaddimuh libiladina” *Youm 7*, September 5, 2013, <http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1236939>.

<sup>125</sup> E-mail correspondence with Dr. Darrag, August 16, 2013, referring to his Twitter, Facebook, and statement by Dr. Mourad Ali, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2034776>.

<sup>126</sup> Statement August 16, 2013.

the crimes of the coup regime have only increased our steadfastness and firmness in rejecting it and determination to remove it. The struggle to overthrow this illegitimate regime is an obligation, an Islamic, national, moral, and human obligation which we will not steer away from until justice and freedom prevail, and until repression is conquered. Our revolution is peaceful, and we will continue to mobilize people to take to the streets without resorting to violence and without vandalism. Violence is not our approach. Vandalism only aims at distorting the image of our peaceful revolt and finding justifications for the coup leaders to continue to govern. We call on the great Egyptian people to gather in all revolutionary squares on the Friday of Rage.<sup>127</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood call for protests from many different mosques and go to Ramses Square, Cairo's busiest interchange, ended in much bloodshed with people mixing with arms between unarmed demonstrators and firing live ammunition from army helicopters. The Muslim Brotherhood was blamed for the violence. They certainly must have known that thugs hired by different political interests often have mixed in previous demonstrations in order to disrupt and discredit them. Was thus calling for such a large demonstration an act of wisdom?<sup>128</sup>

Islamists respond that this was their only way of expressing their rejection of acts to dismantle the Muslim Brotherhood. Also Muslim Brotherhood leaders have paid a high price; some of them have lost their children. Many of them have been arrested.

Dr. Amr Darrag wrote on August 22:

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<sup>127</sup> Press release August 16, 2013. Maha Azam explained in the Guardian of August 15, 2013 that "There is still time to side with those committed to democracy in Egypt; The irony for some is that the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters remain the upholders of the ballot box's legitimacy." <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/15/democracy-egypt-irony-muslim-brotherhood>.

<sup>128</sup> See also: Cornelis Hulsman, "Friday of Rage; violence, no signs of reconciliation," *Arab-West Report*, August 17, 2013.

We have issued in the strongest language statements denouncing the aggressions on churches, killings in Sinai, attacks on police stations...but they insist to keep lying about that. They want to tie this with us to justify our killings, arrests, and all other aggressions. Hundreds of our colleagues are being detained and the campaigns continue. There is no-one to turn to other keep protesting in the streets and get shot at. Now they are modifying the constitution by a small committee of 10 people without any sort of transparency or discussion. Compare this to what we did and we have been criticized for. The world is so unjust.

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, an Egyptian human rights organization, concluded in a press release: "EIPR .. holds the leadership of Islamist groups politically and criminally liable for the incitement and hatred issuing from some of its prominent leaders, both on the national and local levels, which accused the Coptic religious leadership of conspiring to remove the former president. This rhetoric only feeds the current wave of sectarian attacks and exacerbates the consequences."<sup>129</sup>

Dr. Amr Darrag responded:

This statement clearly proves two of the main points I have been raising:

- Attacks started the moment dispersing the sit-ins started, which gives a good indication that this was pre-planned by somebody, not as a reaction, because at that time people were busy with the discernment. They also took one pattern everywhere. Both this report and the statement of Bishop Makarios indicate the deliberate slow response (or actually no response) by the police to provide proper protection. If you add

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<sup>129</sup> August 25, 2013.

to these two points, the absence of any investigation of the incidents till now, as well as the history of security forces pushing for such events, and the quick and ready accusation of the Brotherhood, it is very clear in mind how this happened. Meanwhile, security forces may have been fueling some of the illiterate ordinary people to push them to commit such crimes. But the purpose is very clear to me.

Egyptian media reports started to report that thugs related to the Egyptian state security police were involved.<sup>130</sup>

But for the National Salvation Front, in which most political parties opposed to Islamists are united, the violence Egypt has witnessed is directly related to the Muslim Brotherhood. On Monday August 19, 2013, they issued a very strong worded statement:

During these sensitive moments, the Egyptian people and their nation's institutions are writing a significant chapter in their historical national battle for democracy. Egypt has been stricken by an unprecedented wave of terrorism that is not less destructive than the unfortunate terrorist attack on the USA of 9/11/2001. Egyptians today are enduring the war declared on them by the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization whose mask has dropped to uncover their true terrorist nature.

The National Salvation Front is fully confident that Egyptians and their institutions are entirely capable of scoring victory on the Brotherhood and its terrorist allies both locally and abroad, we confirm the following:

- 1) The present conflict in Egypt is not one between two political factions but is one between the Egyptian people and their institutions on one side and murderous terrorists that kill and burn on the other.

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<sup>130</sup> *Al-Ahram*, August 22, 2013, *al-Masry al-Yawm*, August 25, 2013.

It is normal to see the Egyptian people strongly united with and supportive of, its police and armed forces to face this terrorism and to achieve the objectives of the Egyptian revolution.

2) The NSF confirms that Egyptians have finally discovered the Muslim Brotherhood's true identity as an international cult with undeclared sources of funding and unclear governance holding secret meetings in different foreign countries but the wisdom acquired during 7,000 years of history led Egyptians to strongly refuse to be ruled by such a cult. NSF believes that it is high time for the international community to accept that Egypt is at war with terror.

3) The NSF condemns and denounces the terrorist attack by Islamic militants in Al-Arish that ambushed two mini-buses and resulted in the barbaric execution of 24 unarmed and off duty soldiers.

4) The NSF strongly deplores the double standard adopted by some western countries, one that gives political cover to a terrorist organization. Some of these countries are repeating their failed experimentations of the past by creating terrorist monsters who will not miss turning against them in time.

5) The NSF believes that steps must be taken towards restoring the lost balance in the Egyptian foreign policy. Egypt must continue to engage in dialogue with the democratic nations of the world, both people and governments, to remind them of the true principles of democracy that the Egyptian people are fighting long and hard to achieve in their quest for freedom and justice for all. Rights that are today challenged by the Brotherhood.

6) The NSF is dismayed by the continuous threats by some countries to cut economic aid to Egypt. The Egyptian people, as well

as other nations receiving similar aid, are starting to realize that the aid provided is not out of goodwill, or care for the poor and needy, but rather is a price paid by the rich to manipulate the will of developing sovereign nations. The Egyptian people will not put limitations on their free will or compromise the sovereignty of their nation. They will not compromise on their natural rights to determine their future.

7) Despite the attempts of the Brotherhood with the help of foreign nations to have Egyptians retract, NSF insists that Egyptians are strongly behind the road map that was declared and are strongly determined to implement it in the shortest possible time and to join the universal train of democracy.

8) The people of Egypt will be forever grateful for the honorable positions of support expressed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates in particular and also by Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain and other Arab countries who support Egypt's war on terror which is a threat on the whole region and on all the human values in this world.

Long Live Egypt free and united.

The statement presents no opportunities for compromise, regardless of statements that the Brotherhood denounces all violence. The rejection of compromise appears to be a tit-for-tat response to efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood to exclude the old guard around Hosni Mubarak, many of whom were related to wealthy businessmen.

Rawi Camel-Toueg of the Free Egyptians Party provided further explanation:

There is no transparency about the income of the Muslim Brotherhood, nor about who is a member or not. After the 2011



revolution they promised to legalize their status with the Egyptian authorities to operate within the laws of Egypt. They, however, did not register the Muslim Brotherhood, and instead, created the Freedom and Justice Party which did operate as a backstage organization for the Muslim Brotherhood.

It is further widely believed that they have armed militia in Egypt and links to like-minded organizations abroad such as Hamas in Gaza. The preaching at the Rāba'a al-'Adāwīyah and Nahdah squares was full of hate. Muslim Brotherhood leader Muhammad Al-Biltajī stated that the attacks in Sinai can stop immediately provided that Morsi is returned to power. For Rawi this is a clear link to wanting one's way under the threat of terrorism. The day the sit-ins were cleared was also the day that all masks were dropped, showing that terror was their plan B. At least one police station was attacked by an RPG and all the officers killed and mutilated: No peaceful party or organization or demonstrator have RPG and know how to aim and fire it effectively unless trained to do so and financed to buy such arms. Churches and government institutions were simultaneously attacked while the fire brigades were prevented to enter the areas on fire. This shows planning, premeditation and training of people without emotions.

There is no reason for the NSF or anyone to believe the Muslim Brothers that they are against violence and terror. Unfortunately we heard too many statements from the Muslim Brothers that they never respected and we were fooled once and twice but these were political lies and hypocrisy but now that blood is involved and that lives of Egyptians is at stake we would be really fools to continue to believe them.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> E-mail correspondence with Rawi Camel Toueg, August 28, 2013.

Muhammad El-Baradei, the most important member of the group and since July 14, 2013 deputy prime minister, resigned on August 14, 2013 due to the violence used to remove the Muslim Brotherhood sit-ins. El-Baradei still believed in non-violent solutions, but when he resigned he was denounced as a traitor by many in the NSF, the interim government, and the Tamarrud Movement. This shows how deeply fragmented Egypt is.

The problem with the Muslim Brotherhood is that they have tried to seek support from more militant Islamists and allowed them to speak from their platforms, inciting people. Demonstrations with people full of holy fire for a cause they believe in mixed with armed Islamists and thugs, including those hired by their opponents, have not served them well. The Muslim Brotherhood is on good terms with Hamas too which is widely believed in the local media to be involved in the violence in Northern Sinai. For the National Salvation Front these are major reasons to declare the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization of more than half a million members and many sympathizers, to be a terrorist organization.<sup>132</sup>

### 3.4 Siege mentalities dominate

Different parties have shown very little readiness to make compromises. Polemical and inciting language was frequently heard as well as threats and Islamists speaking about being ready for martyrdom. There was a siege mentality among both non-Islamists prior to Morsi's ousting and among Muslim Brothers after his ousting. Both present themselves as the victim of the other. I have also heard often talks about revenge. Both mistrust and fear the other. Both have been accused of whipping up sentiments and employing thugs. There is definitely much misinformation and transparency has been lacking. At times serious miscalculations were made as to how the other side could respond.

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<sup>132</sup> E-mail correspondence with Amr Soliman, Free Egyptians Party, August 20, 2013– Soliman expresses great personal respect for Dr. Amr Darrag of the Freedom and Justice Party and Muslim Brotherhood but believes he should show more self-critique for his own organization.

Large numbers of Christians during the Mubarak regime preferred Mubarak over Muslim Brothers. Fear was deeply rooted and mutual contacts were practically non-existent. Christian activists were especially negative about the role of army and security during the Maspero massacres, October 2011, which had left 27 Christians dead, but in the second round of the presidential elections fell back into the old pattern of preferring former air force general, Ahmad Shafiq, over Muslim Brother, Muhammad Morsi. Morsi has attempted to overcome mistrust, but efforts collapsed after his decree of November 22, 2012. Christians were well represented in the December demonstrations before the Presidential Palace. Many Christians also volunteered in the Tamarrud campaign to force Morsi to resign. Pope Tawadros, siding with General al-Sīsī in ousting Morsi placed Christians in a clear pro-army and anti-Brotherhood camp. The massive attacks on Christian property were linked to this. The Muslim Brotherhood denied all involvement, but they cannot deny inciting speeches.

Investigations into what is truth and what is alleged are urgently needed in order to create a good basis for, dialogue, compromise and acceptance of the other. This, however, won't be easy to achieve.

## 4. Religious Diversity in Egypt

Cornelis Hulsman

Egypt's population is approximately 94% Muslim and 6% Christian. There are some notable differences between Egypt's Muslims and Christians. Muslims are generally very conservative; resulting in conservative dress, stricter morality codes and a desire for *sharī'ah* to play a role in Egyptian legislation.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Fatma El-Zanaty and Muhammad al-Ghazali, "Opinion poll on canceling or keeping Article II of the Egyptian Constitution," in Cornelis Hulsman (ed), *The Sharia as the Main Source of Legislation? The Egyptian Debate on Article II of the Egyptian Constitution*, (Vienna: Tectum Verlag, 2012).

Most Muslims do not want violence and are focused on making a living, just like their Christian brothers, and do not want to be involved in the continuous political and (physical) confrontations between Islamists and their opponents.

Egyptian society can be divided into these groups:

The Muslim Brothers want to reform and develop society by reviving Islam. They number between 500,000 and 1 million and members pay 10% of their income to the organization but if a member is killed or arrested due to activities performed for the Muslim Brotherhood their families receive support. Muslim Brothers are Sunni Muslims and their members are free to choose which school of Islamic jurisprudence they adhere to. The organization is very hierarchical; decisions are made at the top and carried out by lower ranking members. Therefore, the members do not control the organization's direction. Membership registration and sources of income are not publicized due to a long history of state-led suppression, therefore estimates of the groups finances vary greatly. The Muslim Brotherhood formed the Freedom and Justice political Party (FJP) and advised its members to join this party. The FJP, however, is not only limited to Muslim Brotherhood members. In the 2011 and 2012 elections they appear to have had a secure following of at least 5 million voters which, with swing voters, could increase to 10 million.

Salafīs want a society that adheres to conservative Islamic values, mostly along the lines of the teaching of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855 AD). Most Salafīs joined the January 25 revolution only after former President Mubarak resigned; thus revealing their tendency to be loyal to the ruling head of state. The Salafīs are not a unified group; different factions are linked to particular shaykhs (*shuyūkh*). Some shaykhs, such as Yassir Burhamī of the al-Nour political party (*hizb al-Nūr*), are deeply involved in politics while others only want to preach *da'awa*, the call to Islam as they understand it, without interfering in politics. In the January 2012 elections the Salafī el-Nour party obtained around 7.5 million votes. On January 1,

2013, the *al-Watan* political party split from the el-Nour party and many Salafīs appeared to be disappointed with their political leadership. Under the category of Salafī one also finds the Jihadi Salafī, namely Salafīs who permit armed struggle - if certain conditions, formulated by individual shaykhs, have been met. Many non-Jihadi Salafīs strongly disagree with Jihadi Salafīs and overtly distance themselves from them.

The FJP, al-Nour and other Islamist parties obtained around 75 % of the vote in the January 2012 parliamentary elections. President Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, however, was voted in with 51% of the vote; showing a decline in the Islamist vote. The electoral support for Islamist political parties dropped substantially during the year president Morsi was in power but we will never know to what extent as elections were not held.

Feloul (*fulūl*) are people linked to the former National Democratic Party of President Mubarak. Many of the higher ranking staff in ministries, governorates, police, universities, judiciary, media, and other positions of influence were linked to this party. It obtained much support due to a system of clientelism. Based on the 2005 elections, the freest elections before the January 25 revolution, the party obtained around 2/3 of the estimated 10 million votes. Many of their former electorate can now be classified as swing voters.

Sufīs are Muslims more focused on mysticism and ethics and, despite Sufism having millions of followers, most are not politically active. Sufī leaders, such as Ahmad al-Tayeb, head of the influential Azhar institute, are often involved in Muslim-Christian dialogue. Some politically active Sufīs had previously obtained positions in the National Democratic Party, and some established their own political parties.

The number of Egyptian Shi'ites is very small. A Shi'ite spokesman speaking in 2012 believed there were several thousand Egyptian Shi'ites but since there are not any records and numbers are often exaggerated I

believe that number to be much smaller. Salafīs and Jihadi Salafīs are extremely prejudiced about Shi'ites as the Shi'ite line of succession (after Prophet Muhammad) is seen as incorrect and offensive to the line of succession that the Salafīs adhere to.

Liberals, social democrats and other parties advocating the separation of religion and state would potentially be able to obtain 20-25% of the vote. Many of these voters, however, are Christian.

Atheists or freethinkers in Egypt do exist; numbers are hard to estimate but they may be in the thousands. Many of them are well educated and most of these freethinkers are probably Muslim by birth but include some Christians. The problem with freethinking in Egypt is that overall there is very little respect for people who do not believe in God or who express doubts about the existence of God.

Christians make up around 6% of the Egyptian population. This percentage is disputed by most Egyptian Christians but convincing evidence for a larger Christian population has never been presented. Around 95% of the Christian population belongs to the Coptic Orthodox Church, half of the remainder is Catholic and the other half is spread between 17 different protestant denominations.

Jews have a great history in Egypt dating back to the Prophet Jeremiah's escape to Egypt before other Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon, around 600 BC. Due to political tensions and migration most have left the country. There are only 15-50 Jews left in Egypt, and most are very old.

There are also small numbers of Baha'i and other minorities in Egypt.

The Egyptian law only recognizes three religions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. This law allows followers of these religions to have houses of worship, their own institutions, etc. However, it is a great hindrance for non-recognized religions such as the Baha'i. Furthermore, an Egyptian

citizens' religion is stated on their ID card. A few years ago the law was changed to allow the person's religion to be omitted from the card but if that is requested the authorities are suspicious of it; therefore it is rarely requested.

## **5. Controversies regarding statistics of Christians in Egypt<sup>134</sup>**

Cornelis Hulsman

The discussion about the number of Christians in Egypt is of crucial importance in the discussions about Muslim-Christian relations.

The difference in numbers has a tremendous impact on whose border lines are not to be crossed. Leaving Islam or Christianity is such an affront for Muslims and Christians, for both leaving one's religion is considered to be a shame for the family and wider religious community. But Muslims, because of their great numerical overweight, have more opportunities to avoid such a shame than Christians have.

This makes Christians feel treated as a minority; people who exist, but who have to accept that they are numerically much smaller than Muslims.

Honor and a widespread strong sense of belonging to a religious community make people attach great value to the public appearance of religion, including mosques and church buildings. Some of these buildings are indeed colossal, and not only because of the number of worshippers, but for Christians seeking increased visibility.

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<sup>134</sup> The text of this chapter was earlier presented at the conference "The Contribution of Religious Minorities to Society," Vienna University, July 1-4, 2013. Much more detail is found in Cornelis Hulsman, "Discrepancies between Coptic Statistics in the Egyptian Census and Estimates Provided by the Coptic Orthodox Church," MIDEO 29, 2012, 419-482.

Muslims and Christians are also deeply aware of the religious background of people in top positions. Many more conservative Muslims are sensitive to maintaining a Muslim image in their region or country and do not want Christians to change this. The two Christian governors of Qena in the last years of Hosni Mubarak had a hard time of being accepted by the majority of Muslims in their governorate. Some shunned them for reasons of religion, while others accused them of being holdovers from Mubarak's days. Christians, in turn, tend to see Christians in top positions as the people who can advocate their interests. Thus, a Christian minister is not only seen as the head of his ministry, but also the person who is expected to advocate the interests of the wider Christian community even though he himself may not see his role this way.

Statistics have a great political relevance in Egypt in the discussions about Christian presentation in the public domain, in particular the number of churches and Christians in top positions. The larger the claim of the number or percentage of Christians, the higher claims can be to build churches and request the government to nominate Christians in top positions. But if the number or percentage of Christians is believed to be smaller, many of their claims, Christians fear, also can be dismissed.

Discussions are also often highly ideological rather than supported by empirical facts. The more specific ideologies are dominating, the more empirical facts that do not fit are explained away. Among Coptic Christians, inflated numbers and a strong belief of being persecuted often go hand in hand. On the other hand, however, Coptic Christians with an open eye to empirical facts see how diverse and complicated Muslim-Christian relations often are and are less inclined to sweeping ideologically-motivated points of view that highlight persecution over possibilities of cooperation.

Because of the various outcomes associated with the number of Christians, it is no wonder that their reported proportions varies between 5.5 and 20 percent of the population. The proportion of 5.5 – 6% is based on an



extrapolation of the figures provided by the CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics) in the last census of 1996. The estimate for 2013 is then calculated on the basis of the ongoing decline that can be seen in their statistics since the 1960s. Western statisticians, researchers of the PEW Foundation, and many Muslims accept this range.<sup>135</sup> Various polls, including the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey, provide ranges of the proportion of Christians between six and seven percent of population.<sup>136</sup>

The percentage of 20 is clearly exaggerated, but probably the overwhelming majority of Egyptian Christians believes, based on claims made by their own leaders, that their proportion of the population ranges between 10, mentioned in most media,<sup>137</sup> and 15 percent, which Pope Shenouda claimed in 2008. The problem with these estimates is that no Egyptian Christian leader has made their methods available to any independent statistician. Coptic businessman, Tharwat Basīlī, member of the Coptic Orthodox Community Council, stated in an interview in 2011 that he has access to all figures, but nothing is shown to independent researchers.<sup>138</sup> We just have to believe the numbers provided. Many liberal

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<sup>135</sup> See for more details Cornelis Hulsman, "Discrepancies between Coptic Statistics," 419-482.

<sup>136</sup> The population sample for the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey provides a percentage of about 6 percent Christians. See Fatma El-Zanaty and Muhammad al-Ghazali, "Opinion poll on cancelling or keeping Article II of the Egyptian Constitution," in Cornelis Hulsman (ed), *The Sharia as the Main Source of Legislation? The Egyptian Debate on Article II of the Egyptian Constitution*, (Vienna: Tectum Verlag, 2012), 37.

<sup>137</sup> Most media in the past decades have been providing 10 percent as estimate. Metropolitan Bishoi did so as well in my interview with him. Also Yousef Sidhom, editor-in-chief of *Watani*, has used this estimate in several meetings I have had with him in the past ten years. The percentage of ten is the most 'diplomatic' figure, finding a middle way, avoiding debates and based on what is most often claimed.

<sup>138</sup> Jaber Al-Qarmuti, "Dr. Tharwat Bāsīlī makes shocking remarks: Copts in Egypt are 18.5 million," *Al-Ahram al-Arabi*, January 7, 2012,

<http://arabi.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/947/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1/%D8%AF-%D8%AB%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%81%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1---%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A.aspx>,

in 'Amr al-Misrī, "AWR Daily Overview, January 15, 2012: Accurate Figure – Census of Copts is 18.565.484 million," *Arab-West Report*, Week 3, Art. 4, January 14, 2012,

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-3/4-awr-daily-overview-january-15-2012-accurate-figure-census-copts-18565484-million>.

Muslims accept those proportions, not because they have done any research, but most likely because they trust their Christian sources or it suits them well.<sup>139</sup>

Why did Pope Shenouda make his statement for the first time in 2008? I know from Coptic activists and clergy throughout the years that Copts wanted him to speak out about the number of Christians in Egypt. I also know from an interview with Metropolitan Bishoy that Pope Shenouda had asked all bishops for figures, that some had provided this and others had not.<sup>140</sup> Bishop Paphnotius of Samālūt told me in 2011 that he had until that moment not provided the Pope with figures of his diocese, but was now working on these.<sup>141</sup> Bishop Paphnotius was not the only bishop who had not provided figures, and thus the Pope could not have had complete figures from his own bishops in 2008. Was the Pope pressured? He was a strong-willed man who was not easily manipulated, but did the pressures on him to speak out become overwhelming? We don't know.

It is also difficult to maintain the higher percentages, as researchers have estimated the percentage of Christians between the 15th and 18th century to be around eight percent. That percentage increased somewhat in the 19th century and early 20th century due to better health and education of Christians and decreased again since the 1920s.<sup>142</sup> It is thus not possible to present a percentage between 10 and 15 percent, particularly because no verifiable evidence has been provided.

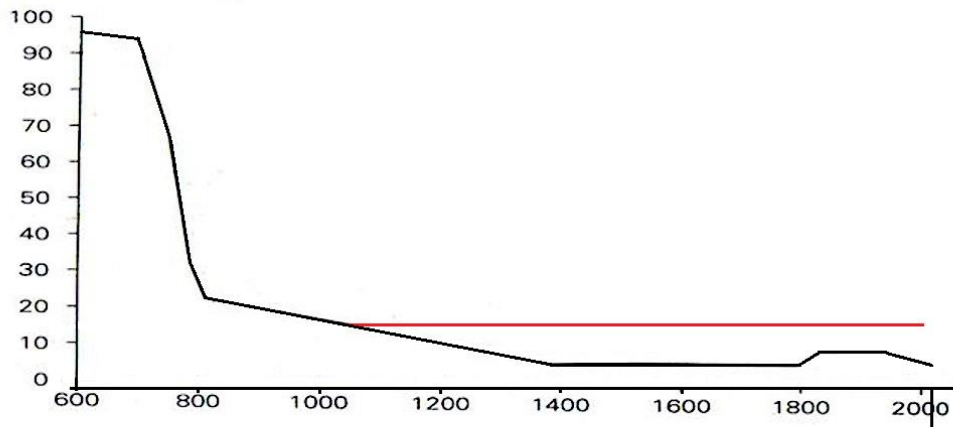
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<sup>139</sup> An example can be found in Hulsman (ed), *The Sharia as the Main Source of Legislation?*, 210

<sup>140</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "AWR Editorial: Intolerant Climate in Egypt and Media Manipulations Result in Row Around Bishop Bishūy," *Arab-West Report*, Week 43, Art. 32, October 25, 2010, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2010/week-43/32-awr-editorial-intolerant-climate-egypt-and-media-manipulations-result-row>.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Bishop Paphnotius, September 29, 2011.

<sup>142</sup> Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998).



Black line: percentage of Christians in Egypt from the arrival of Islam until 2013, based on research of Philippe Fargues, 2013 adjusted by Cornelis Hulsmann

Red line: Pope Shenouda III claimed, however, in 2008, a percentage of 15 percent.  
This violates all estimates and counts of previous centuries.

It is remarkable that the Christian discourse on statistics has changed. Arguments for human rights and equality in the first half of the 20th century were based on principles of equality and arguments that Christianity in Egypt predates Islam.

AWR researcher, Jenna Ferrecchia was able to trace the beginning of substantially higher population figures than the CAPMAS to the 1960s and demonstrated links between numbers or the percentage of Christians to political arguments.<sup>143</sup>

More recently, AWR researcher, Jaco Stoop, checked the numbers of Coptic activist, Najīb Jabrā'īl, who claimed in September 2011 that in the first months of the Revolution over 100,000 Copts had fled the country out of fear for Islamists taking over. Jabrā'īl wanted to make a political statement: "If emigration of Christians, who constitute nearly 16% of the Egyptian population, continues at the present rate, it may reach 250,000 by the end of 2011," he said, "and within ten years a third of the Coptic population of Egypt would be gone."<sup>144</sup> His numbers were disputed by Coptic leaders and he could offer no evidence. His claims were nevertheless widely

<sup>143</sup> Jenna Ferrecchia, "Coptic Population Figures in English Print Media," *Arab-West Report*, March 11, 2012, <http://arabwestreport.info/coptic-population-figures-english-print-media>.

<sup>144</sup> "100,000 Christians Have Left Egypt Since March: Report", *AINA*, September 27, 2011, <http://www.aina.org/news/20110926194822.htm>.

disseminated by political activists and published in various media,<sup>145</sup> adding to the already existing Coptic fear for Islamists.

Ferrecchia's and Stoop's work strongly suggests a political use of percentages. The same phenomenon can be seen in other Middle Eastern countries as well.

Efforts to increase numbers are related to Christians seeing their influence in society decline. One only has to return to Egypt's liberal period between Egypt's independence in 1921 and the military *coup d'état* in 1952. In that period, Coptic Christians occupied prominent positions in society in general, including government. This has declined tremendously after military officers took power. Many, in particular intellectual Copts, look with nostalgia to the days when they were able to play a greater role in society.<sup>146</sup>

Shoring up numbers then helps to strengthen the arguments for a larger Christian share in public space. Westerners sympathetic to these Coptic claims were ready to argue eloquently on their behalf. One of the first to do so was Edward Wakin, who stated in 1963 that Copts made up 16 percent of the population. No evidence was provided and his arguments lacked consistency over the years.<sup>147</sup> Copts, however, loved it and began quoting him<sup>148</sup> and thus the circle was born; Wakin and later other Westerners claiming numbers based on information, received from Copts and Copts referring to those Western publications as 'evidence' of their higher numbers.

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<sup>145</sup> Jaco Stoop, "Coptic migration figures of EUHRO disputed," *Arab-West Report*, Week 26, Art. 40, June 28, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-26/40-coptic-migration-figures-euhro-disputed>.

<sup>146</sup> My good friend Dr. Amin Makram 'Ubayd, for example, does so.

<sup>147</sup> Hulsman, "Discrepancies between Coptic Statistics," 436-437.

<sup>148</sup> Edward Wakin's son Daniel wrote upon the passing of his father in 2009, "Even 40 years later, Egyptian Copts would contact Mr. Wakin in appreciation of the book." URL: [http://www.fordham.edu/campus\\_resources/enewsroom/archives/archive\\_1732.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/campus_resources/enewsroom/archives/archive_1732.asp). I have been in numerous meetings whereby Copts would refer to Wakin in the support of their claim of higher numbers of Copts.

Since the 1960s, and in particular the 1970s, when Pope Shenouda (1971-2012) clashed publicly with President Sadat, media attention for Coptic Christians became more important. Presenting inflated figures to (international) media became handy in an apparent effort to put pressure on the Egyptian government because of both perceived and real discrimination. Copts claim U.S. President Jimmy Carter received Pope Shenouda in 1977 as the representative of seven million Egyptian Christians, an estimate that was about five million higher than the official statistics in Cairo at that time. Did Jimmy Carter indeed claim this or was this later attributed to him? If he claimed so, he almost certainly obtained this number from Copts preparing this important papal visit.<sup>149</sup> Until today Copts use this as ‘proof’ that their numbers in Egypt are indeed higher than the CAPMAS found.<sup>150</sup>

Another “proof” was provided by Dr. David Barrett in the World Christian Encyclopedia of 1982. Barret then claimed that the proportion of professing Christians was 6.6 percent and the proportion of so-called crypto Christians is 12 percent. The name “Encyclopedia” sounds very impressive but claims were made without any reference to any verifiable research.<sup>151</sup>

Until 2008, Pope Shenouda never publicly stated the number of Christians in Egypt. This he left to bishops and priests. The Egyptian government no longer wanted to have the continuous arguments with Christians about numbers and thus no longer included the question about religion in the census of 2006. The government also no longer needed this since the Ministry of Interior had changed the paper identity cards into a

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<sup>149</sup> A senior diplomat from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo confirmed this on April 30, 2012. Jimmy Carter had no own sources for Coptic statistics. Figures in official U.S. documents, he said, including the CIA yearbooks, State Department and USCIRF reports are all estimates with a strong political bent.

<sup>150</sup> Bishop Bissenti [also spelled as Picienti], bishop of Helwan and prior to this personal secretary to Pope Shenouda, for example, refers to Jimmy Carter as ‘proof’ of higher numbers. A senior U.S. Embassy diplomat told me that President Carter could not have obtained the number he used except from Coptic Christians. Hulsman, “Discrepancies between Coptic Statistics,” 453.

<sup>151</sup> Hulsman, “Discrepancies between Coptic Statistics,” 447-449.

computerized system with very difficult to falsify plastic cards with the religious identity of each citizen. The Ministry of Interior, unlike the CAPMAS, has no culture of transparency and numbers remained secret. That allowed Pope Shenouda to make in 2008 his first ever claim that Christians are 15 percent of Egypt's population.<sup>152</sup>

Inflated figures are widely believed to be true in Christian circles, in particular because senior Christian leaders have supported claims of higher proportions. Because they are so markedly different from the figures presented through the CAPMAS and other government agencies, this has strengthened the Christian belief that government figures are doctored. It is true that elections have been repeatedly rigged and it is equally true that other government figures are not always very reliable. Christians are also presenting examples of mistakes made in census taking.

In Christian demonstrations prior to and after January 25, 2011, I have frequently heard demonstrators arguing emotionally that they are second-class citizens based on them strongly believing that the number of Copts is much higher than the representation they see in various positions in society.<sup>153</sup>

While a certain margin of error in the figures presented by the Egyptian census is possible, it is not possible that the census is as far off as these Christian proponents claim. Western researchers have also investigated the work of the CAPMAS and are convinced that they have done their work since the late 19th century rather well.<sup>154</sup> Most Egyptian Christians, however, do not believe this.

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<sup>152</sup> 'Amr Bayyūmī & Rajab Ramadān, "Pope Shenouda: There are 12 million Christians in Egypt. The church knows the size of its population and we do not agree with the declared figure [CH: of the Egyptian government]," *al-Masry al-Yawm*, October 26, 2008, in: *Arab-West Report*, Week 44, Art. 40, <http://arabwestreport.info/node/21011>. This newspaper article reports about Pope Shenouda's statement on CTV.

<sup>153</sup> Christians I have met in demonstrations at Maspero prior to the bloodbath on October 9, 2011. Also Christians in other demonstrations would frequently made similar statements.

<sup>154</sup> Hulsman, "Discrepancies between Coptic Statistics," 419-482.

Inflated figures have thus contributed to Christian distrust of the government. They have also contributed to a call for disproportionate representation of Christians in various positions in government when compared to the actual Christian presence in a country. Inflated figures have thus strengthened the widespread Christian belief that Christians are discriminated against, which they are, but not to the extent as is believed. In this way, the great discrepancy in figures presented between Christian sources, the government, and Muslims using government figures, has contributed to tensions between Christians and Muslims who believe Christian figures to be inflated. Some even see religious minorities for that reason as trouble makers. An even smaller number believe that Christians therefore need to be taught a lesson, that is, by responding with violence when Christians for example claim numbers these Muslims believe not to be true to achieve objectives to which these Muslims disagree.<sup>155</sup>

The differences between Muslims and Christians on the proportion of Christians in Egypt does not only concern the percentage of Christians nationwide, but also on village level. In October 2011, I was in the village of Marīnāb after Christians had expanded a local church and local Muslims had burned it down. Local Christians claimed to have much higher numbers in the village than local Muslims believed to be true.<sup>156</sup>

Tensions based on lack of transparent numbers are unnecessary; especially because both Christians and Muslims know that the Egyptian Ministry of Interior no doubt has accurate figures because of the new computerized ID system. This new system was initiated in the 1990s and mentions one's religion, but the figures are not published and not verifiable.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Christians had to be taught a lesson," *Trouw*, January 3, 2011, translation of the Dutch article was placed in *Arab-West Report*, [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info).

<sup>156</sup> An extensive report was placed on [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info), see also <http://jandirksnel.wordpress.com/tag/marinab/>.

<sup>157</sup> Coptic businessman Hany Aziz and contact person between church and Egyptian government in a meeting on June 15, 2013. Hany Aziz is, however, not the only Coptic leader who would point to figures of the Ministry of Interior.

Since the 1990s, the Ministry of Interior has assumed the function of documenting the number of Christians from Egyptian census authorities. When this system was introduced, Christians rightly complained about government bureaucrats giving some Christians, mostly through careless manual transmission of data, a Muslim I.D. Corrections have been made, often through a most tedious process, and there appears to be no more Christians complaining of having received an I.D. card wrongly stating “Muslim” as their religion.

In 2011, a senior police officer told me that numbers were not published to avoid a public discussion.<sup>158</sup> The fact, however, is that the continuing lack of transparency makes the discussion on numbers of Christians, related to various political objectives, continue.

Transparency of Coptic statistics, making them accessible for verification by qualified researchers, is essential to reducing tensions based on unrealistic claims. Only when information becomes public without manipulations can a sincere discussion about equality between Muslims and Christians begin. A system could then be introduced that would secure equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of religion. An honest and fair law for building churches would also greatly reduce the existing tensions.

For the time being, however, the ideals for a society with equality for all Egyptian citizens regardless of religion is far off. Egyptian society is intensely polarized and distrust between different parties is running deep. Many Coptic Christians, and in fact Arab Christians, do not welcome a discussion on Christian population figures for this reason. Prof. Dr. Berge Traboulsi (Trabūlsī) of Haigazian University, Beirut, strongly opposed my presentation at Vienna University. Of course Christians in the Middle East

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<sup>158</sup> On December 8, 2011 I took the first class train to Maghagha to visit father Yo’annis. In the train I was sitting beside a police officer in civilian dress who was on his way to Maghagha to vote in his home town for the parliamentary elections.



exaggerate, as all Arabs do, he said, but I should not highlight this. Highlighting this would be harmful, he believed. Along these lines, investigation should not be the objective, but selecting truth that helps Christians in the Middle East best. I have met with many Coptic activists and clergy throughout the years who explained similar views.

In such circumstances, where partisan interests dominate, obtaining full transparency alone is insufficient. Much more needs to be done to regain trust before parties can work together in building a new post-revolutionary country in which everyone, also Coptic Christians, can have their rightful place.

## **6. Main factors fueling the conflict**

Cornelis Hulsman

### **6.1 Apostasy as a source of conflict**

Egypt is a very religious nation and Egyptian Muslims and Christians are strongly focused on the concepts of honor and shame. For Muslims it is shaming if a Muslim leaves Islam; if someone leaves Islam he/she is then called an apostate and large numbers of Muslims believe that this is punishable by death. When a Muslim converts to another religion it creates great social unrest which in turn gains much (international) publicity, thus adding to this unrest. In the 1990s al-Azhar scholar Dr. ‘Abdul Mu’tī Bayūmī argued that no human should sentence a Muslim convert to death, as punishment for leaving Islam would be delivered only by God. Shaykh Muhammad Sayyīd Tantawī told me that any Muslim is allowed to leave Islam but he would not be allowed to speak about his conversion since that would create social unrest. In spite of this, that is precisely how some (mainly Western) missionary groups try to use conversions from Islam to Christianity; publishing their conversion in the hope that others will follow.

However, a Muslim who leaves Islam but was born to Muslim parents cannot change their religion on their ID card. Muslim apostates who have advertised their renunciation of Islam have at times been arrested for creating religious unrest, had their passports taken away from them (mostly by family members) or faced numerous other problems. Most, if not all, apostates who have previously become the center of unrest relating to their renunciation of Islam have left Egypt.

I have met very few Muslim apostates throughout the years who have not encountered problems but those who have not had problems avoided publicizing their decision. I cannot imagine that Egyptian State Security did not know about them but as long as they avoided becoming the center of public unrest they also did not actively pursue them.

During Morsi's presidency, some shaykhs were talking about establishing a religious police but moves have never been taken to implement this idea.

The conversion of Christians to Islam is much more problematic because of the numbers involved, there have also been accusations of kidnapping and forced conversions to Islam.

There are unconfirmed estimates that around 10,000 to 15,000 Christians annually convert to Islam. However, this is an estimate that Christian leaders obtained from Egyptian security officials and thus one should be aware of the possible political motivation to present such an estimate.<sup>159</sup> The precise figures, however, are known to only the Egyptian Interior Ministry. I saw, in 1998, at the Dar al-Iftāa' at al-Azhar, the books in which the confirmation of the Islamic creed by non-Muslims is registered. Shaykhs told me that there are other locations within Egypt where this procedure is also possible and that all books are then kept in the Interior Ministry. The Interior Ministry knows the precise figure of converts to

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<sup>159</sup> Bishop Yohanna Qulta told me he obtained his estimates, prior to the January 25 revolution, from high ranking Egyptian security officials. Why did they "leak" these figures to him? Giving him honest figures or was it an effort to scare Christians? The bishop does not know.

Islam as converts change their religion on their identity card, which is a fully computerized system. Numbers, however, have never been published.

Prior to the Wafaa Costantine issue in 2004, priests were allowed to see Christian converts to Islam prior to the procedure's completion. Priests involved in this process complained that when they met the potential convert, in most cases, they had already made a firm decision. Consequently only very few potential converts did not continue the conversion procedure.

The case of Wafaa Costantine was critical. She was unhappily married to a priest and wanted a divorce but her bishop refused due to a highly restrictive divorce procedure. Wafaa Costantine ran away and filed a formal request to convert to Islam with the police. Pope Shenouda wanted Wafaa to meet with a group of clergy, including bishops, before the completion of her conversion. Demonstrations took place at a prominent Christian's funeral in the Coptic Cathedral. Dr. Amīn Makram 'Ubayd, a family member of the diseased and a friend of mine, attended the funeral and found the demonstrations during the well-attended funeral "utterly tasteless." Pope Shenouda's office announced that he had returned to his monastery in protest; Pope Shenouda's typical method of expressing his anger. He also called priests, including friends of mine, to the monastery who listened to Pope Shenouda's explanation as to why he was angry. Wafaa Costantine was, under this pressure, returned to the church and spent four days with clergy before she made a statement that she wanted to remain Christian. This resulted in Muslims considering her Muslim because she had converted to Islam (based on her report to the police) but for Christians she had not converted because the formal procedure, ending in changing her identity card, was not completed. Wafaa went to a monastery and was not seen afterwards. A few months later my wife Sawsan Gabra Ayoub Khalil and I met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs who told us that she believed that Pope Shenouda had overplayed his hand. The Wafaa Costantine issue attracted media attention for many

years, particularly as Pope Shenouda did not want the media to meet with her. Islamists such as Zaghlūl el-Naggār claimed she was dead; it was speculation but nevertheless damaging.

Another critical story was that of Camilia Shehata, also the wife of a priest with marital problems. I met Camilia with her husband and small child in May 2011. The publicity surrounding her case was rife with untruths. As other Egyptian women do when they encounter marriage problems, she left their home temporarily to stay with family and friends. Christians in the area immediately suspected that she had been kidnapped to convert her to Islam. On the other hand, Salafī Muslims presumed on the basis of these Christian claims, that she must have converted to Islam but was forced to remain Christian. They used Wafaa Costantine as ‘proof’ that the church was pressurizing Christians not to convert to Islam.<sup>160</sup> This resulted in hundreds of, mainly Salafī, demonstrations to ‘free’ Shehata which terrified Coptic Christians. I therefore helped her to emigrate to a Western country.<sup>161</sup> In a meeting with students from Vienna University and Salafīs in Alexandria in May 2012 I told Salafīs they had been wrong in claiming that she was forced to remain Christian. They were surprised to hear about my meeting with Shehata and her husband and accepted that she was not forced to remain Christian.

On March 1, 2011, Muslims in ‘Atfih were angered by the fact that a Muslim girl had developed a close relationship with a young Christian man, as in Islamic law, Muslim girls are not to marry non-Muslims. In fact, only Muslim men are allowed marry Christian or Jewish girls since children are automatically Muslim if they have a Muslim father. A Christian lawyer from the village told me that this was not the first time this had happened. At this time there had also been problems concerning a church being built without a permit. There were clashes about these issues

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<sup>160</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “Fabricatie van geruchten bedreigt christenen Egypte,” *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, May 14, 2011, [http://www.refdag.nl/opinie/fabricatie\\_van\\_geruchten\\_bedreigt\\_christenen\\_egypte\\_1\\_563464](http://www.refdag.nl/opinie/fabricatie_van_geruchten_bedreigt_christenen_egypte_1_563464).

<sup>161</sup> She doesn’t want her new country and address to be known. The family wants to stay out of the public eye.

in March 2011 which resulted in some Muslim deaths. However, Muslims held Christians responsible for this conflict and burned the church after Friday prayer on March 4, 2011. Local soldiers who were present did not intervene.

However, Salafī leaders, Shaykh Muhammad Hassan, Shaykh Safwat Hegazy and a few other preachers intervened to calm local Muslim sentiments and the army later rebuilt the church. Samir Marcos, however, was not too happy about this. This is not a task of religious leaders but of the government, he commented.<sup>162</sup>

*Arab-West Report* has, throughout the years, repeatedly described how conversions became the basis of sectarian tensions.

## 6.2 Church building as a source of conflict

Christians often claim that the Ottoman Hamayouni law, dating to 1856, is the basis of current day restrictions on Christians building houses of worship. However, legal experts from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs argue that, with the disappearance of the Ottoman caliphate and Egyptian independence in 1923, no Ottoman laws survive.

More important are the restrictions introduced by Minister of Interior Izzaby Pasha in 1934.<sup>163</sup> Interestingly enough, these restrictions were introduced in a period when Christian politicians were influential. Interestingly enough these restrictions were introduced in a period when Christian politicians were influential.

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<sup>162</sup> Personal meeting with Samir Marcos, January 14, 2013.

<sup>163</sup> Ten rather vague conditions that had to be met before any application was presented to the president for approval, including possible objections from local Muslims, number of Christians in an area and the distance between the proposed church and the nearest mosque. The conditions served, in practice, to hinder Christians obtaining permits.

For decades Christians have been pleading for a new law concerning the construction of Christian houses of worship and equal regulations for both mosques and churches. Christian lawmakers have repeatedly raised this in various parliaments, but the proposed law has never been introduced.

As a consequence of these restrictions on church construction, Christians have repeatedly tried to build churches without permits. In areas where Christians are the majority this was often possible but in other areas, where the percentage of Christians was much smaller and already local tensions existed, such efforts could easily result in Muslim-Christian tensions.<sup>164</sup>

Following the January 25 Revolution, Christians saw a chance to build large new churches or expand existing churches, particularly in areas where the percentage of Christians is substantially higher. In areas where Christians were much smaller in number such efforts have often resulted in tensions.<sup>165</sup>

Incidents tend to be randomly reported, and frequently involve very few facts about the factors leading up to the incident. Most tensions between Muslims and Christians are clearly related to church building and restoration.

Since the second half of the 1990s Christians made increasing efforts to pressurize the Mubarak government through media campaigns in the Western press. This was understandable because of the restrictive church building laws, but it also added to growing tensions between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, in specifically in areas where such tensions were common.

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<sup>164</sup> For an example see Cornelis Hulsman, "Gewalt zwischen Christen und Muslimen im heutigen Ägypten: Abu Fana als Fallbeispiel," in: Karl Pinggéra, *Christentum im Schatten von Pyramiden und Minaretten; Beiträge zu Geschichte und Gegenwart der Koptische Kirche*, Evangelische Akademie Hofgeismar, 2009.

<sup>165</sup> See also: Cornelis Hulsman and Jenna Ferrecchia, "Post-Revolutionary construction in Egypt," *Arab-West Report*, Week 12, Art. 68, March 22, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-12/68-post-revolutionary-construction-egypt>.

*Arab-West Report* has extensively covered problems concerning church building which clearly underline the analysis presented here.

### 6.3 Lack of mutual dialogue

Some clergy and shaykhs work together to develop Muslim-Christian relations but most Christians prefer to confine themselves to their own community. However, when that happens tensions are more likely to develop. More dialogue is most definitely necessary. The Bayt al-'Aila initiative of al-Azhar is an example of a good initiative involving senior religious leaders but which is also involved at grassroots level, for example, Father Yo'annis and Salafi Shaykh, Hamdī, in Qufadah, Maghagha, have formed a constructive working relationship.

## **7. Analyzing Trends in Media Reports on Egypt's Christian Community**

Hina Fathima

Egypt's Christian community has been variously portrayed in the media, both foreign and domestic. As a minority it does face discrimination in the country but it also has the possibility to act, even if the desired outcomes are often not obtained. However, several media articles tend to either subject the community to a narrative of victimhood only or are using events in a biased narrative against the government and Muslim community in Egypt.

The articles used for this analysis range from 2005 to 2013, spanning an eight year period, a clear shift can be observed in media reports after the downfall of the Mubarak regime. Several media reports prior to the 2011 revolution mention that Christians and Muslims in Egypt live in unity with occasional instances of violence. However, post the revolution, the major

narrative thread describes the existence of sectarian tensions and uses the language of fear and victimhood to describe challenges faced by the Coptic community.

Apart from the trend observed in the transition period post the 2011 revolution, which saw a rise in sectarian violence, a few distinct narratives can be observed in each period before and after the revolution. Prior to the revolution few articles did briefly mention feelings of unity among Egypt's Christians and Muslims. Most of the incidents of violence reported between the two religious communities revolved around three key problems: church construction, land issues, conversions and related love affairs. Reference to religious sectarianism in Egypt increased after the revolution. Many articles painted a picture of blame and victimhood: the censure mostly falling on Muslims and government for oppressing the minority Christian population. Although these accusations might contain vestiges of truth, the presentation of the arguments was disparaging rather than being critical, questioning the intent and bias of the author.

The security vacuum after the fall of Mubarak's regime on February 11, 2011, had led to increasing attacks against Christians who feared for their security. As a result, quite a few articles employ a language of fear which consequently feeds to increase the atmosphere of terror, regardless of their extent of truth. The rise of the Brotherhood has increased perceptions of fear that 'Islamists' (generalized) will attack Christians. However, the articles found provide no hard evidence to support the claim that the Brotherhood has deliberately incited violence against the Coptic community. The claims thus seem to be mostly based on long-harbored perceptions of fear of Islamists rather than any hard evidence. Several articles used harsh language to dramatize incidents of violence. Only a few articles remain neutral and analytical in their assessment of Egypt's situation, without falling prey to language of blame, fear, or victimhood.

## 7.1 Media reports from 2005-2010



Most of the chosen Egyptian media outlets such as, *Ahram Online*, *Egypt Independent*, *Daily News Egypt*, and the *Egypt Gazette* had only a limited number of articles stored in their online database. The oldest articles to be found were released in the year 2010. An added complication was that the database of *Arab-West Report*, the most extensive database with articles from Arabic media and summarized in English was deliberately destroyed on June 27, 2013, by someone who thus far has remained unknown. Hence, our analysis for this period relies more on foreign media due to lack of information from local news outlets. A range of narratives were found, from being factual, biased to being highly emotionally charged.

Before the revolution most media articles attempted to identify the reason for clashes between Muslims and Coptic Christians in Egypt without rushing to stick the label 'sectarian' violence. Fights broke out due to differing claims over church construction, vendetta killings, and family and land disputes. Articles published in the *New York Times*,<sup>166, 167</sup> *Al-Ahram*,<sup>168</sup> *NY Sun*,<sup>169</sup> and the Associated Press<sup>170</sup> refer to the archaic church building law in Egypt which requires Copts to go through a tedious procedure to receive permission. *USA Today*<sup>171</sup> sounds similar in vein as well, "Egypt's [Coptic Christians], complain of discrimination but generally live in harmony with the Muslim majority. Violence flares occasionally, particularly in small southern communities."

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<sup>166</sup> Neela Banerjee, "Coptic Christian Fights Deportation to Egypt, Fearing Torture," *New York Times*, June 6, 2007, accessed August 19, 2013, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A03EEDE1E30F935A35755C0A9619C8B63>.

<sup>167</sup> Mona El-Naggar, "Egyptian Christians Clash With Police," *New York Times*, January 10, 2007, accessed August 19, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/08/world/middleeast/08egypt>.

<sup>168</sup> Dina Ezzat, "Mubarak orders "immediate containment" of Coptic-police tension," *Ahram Online*, November 24, 2010, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/571/Egypt/Mubarak-orders-immediate-containment-of-Copticpoli.aspx>.

<sup>169</sup> Youssef Ibrahim, "Coptic Christians Voicing Frustration With White House As Persecution Widens in Egypt," *The Sun*, May 22, 2010, <http://www.nysun.com/foreign/coptic-christians-voicing-frustration-with-white/86971/>.

<sup>170</sup> "Egyptians riot after 7 killed in church attack," Associated Press, January 7, 2010

<sup>171</sup> Associated Press, "Police guard churches in Egypt after Muslim riot," *USA Today*, October 22, 2005, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2005-10-22-egyptchurches\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2005-10-22-egyptchurches_x.htm).

Reading such articles, one gets an impression that these incidents of violence over church issues or vendetta killings appear to be isolated events in an atmosphere of general unity rather than an indication of underlying sectarian tensions. The articles do mention the lack of measures taken by the government to provide equal rights to its Coptic citizens.

Some articles speculate whether such incidents are indications of underlying or upcoming sectarian tensions in Egypt. An article by the *New York Times* for example, investigates the marginalization felt by the Coptic community. It concludes by saying that sectarianism does exist in Egypt, but is under a state of denial by state authorities in order to create a veneer of harmony among its populace. Michael Slackman writes, "Egypt is an authoritarian state held in line by a vast internal security force, about twice the size of the army. Certain topics are out of bounds. People know it is taboo to say openly that a sectarian problem exists. So they are cautious."<sup>172</sup>

Another article published in 2007 by the *New York Times*, noticed a rise in "religious fervor" in Egypt where national identities are dissolving into religious ones, causing people to deal with each other as Muslims and Christians rather than as Egyptians. Mona El Naggar (Muná Al-Naggār) states, "Egyptians have been united historically by a strong sense of national identity, allowing the Muslim majority and Coptic Christian minority to live in peace, for the most part." However, she continues, "The general sentiment among Egypt's Copts is that they are being squeezed into a tighter space, and there are increasing complaints of discrimination."<sup>173</sup> The rise in religious incitement is seen as one sided-led by the Muslim community and harming the Coptic Christians to a greater extent. It is clear from these media reports that even before the 2011 revolution there was growing evidence for a rise in religious identity in

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<sup>172</sup> Michael Slackman, "As Tensions Rise for Egypt's Christians, Officials Call Clashes Secular," *New York Times*, August 2, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/02/world/middleeast/02egypt.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/02/world/middleeast/02egypt.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&).

<sup>173</sup> El-Naggar, "Egyptian Christians Clash With Police".

Egypt which evolved rather dramatically after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak.

Apart from either being neutral or speculative some articles use harsh and dramatic expressions to pin blame on Muslims, a Muslim government or Islam in general. Even *USA Today*, which mostly stays neutral, introduced theatrical expressions like “some 5,000 Muslim rioters rampaged” and “thousands of police manned barricades,” presumably, exaggerating the incident as it does not offer any evidence to support the numbers quoted.<sup>174</sup>

Consider the title of the article published in the *Sunday Morning Herald* (SMH), an Australian Newspaper, which says that “Knife-wielding Muslims attack Egyptian churchgoers.” The title is very suggestive. It creates a picture of a bunch of barbarians running around town wielding knives and attacking docile churchgoers. However, upon reading the article one realizes that it was only three individuals and not a horde of Muslims that started the attack.<sup>175</sup>

*AINA*, an Assyrian news agency known to frequently produce biased reports against Muslims, published a misleading and provocative article with the title “The Cultural Genocide of Egypt's Christian Copts.” Genocide is a strong word with grave implications for the parties involved but it is used to emphasis persecution and oppression of Egypt's Coptic Christians.<sup>176</sup>

Even though events reported are true the emotionally charged narrative exaggerates and invokes fear among non-Muslim readers while Muslims will be offended of the provocative, exaggerated and generalized language that is used to describe Muslims and Islam. Articles such as these just tend

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<sup>174</sup> Associated Press, “Police guard churches in Egypt after Muslim riot”.

<sup>175</sup> “Knife-wielding Muslims attack Egyptian churchgoers,” *Sunday Morning Herald*, April 15, 2006, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/knifewielding-muslims-attack-egyptian-churchgoers/2006/04/14/1144521508126.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Mary Abdelmassih, “The Cultural Genocide of Egypt's Christian Copts,” *AINA*, June 14, 2009, <http://www.aina.org/news/20090613211135.htm>.

to drive non-Muslims and Muslims apart instead of non-Muslims and Muslims together seeking to address the reasons for the tensions and violence Christians experience.

In contrast, an article by *Ahram Online*, is sympathetic to the problems faced by Egyptian Christians, especially the community's poor outcomes in the 2010 elections without departing on an emotional rant. Yasmine El-Rashidi (Yasmīn Al Rashīdī) writes that "[For Egypt's Copts] this election year has been a brutal one. Long the subject of alleged persecution and marginalization, the election run-up was marred with markers of the endeavored annihilation they have been crying foul against for years."<sup>177</sup>

Although the government is responsible for perpetuating discrimination against Egypt's Christians and encouraging the denial of sectarian strife there are two ways the media portrays this. One is by anointing blame through harsh language along with lack of evidence, which makes for a rather off-putting read. The other way which makes for a good analysis is by staying factual, citing evidence, and employing a narrative which identifies the problems and their causes rather than making huge, unprompted generalizations.

## 7.2 Media reports from 2011-2013

Media reports published after the revolution use language that presents fear due to increased sectarian strife. There is little or no reference to religious unity unlike in articles written prior to 2011.

Many articles put the blame on the government and Muslims in the country for the troubles facing the Coptic community. Not only do they use

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<sup>177</sup> Yasmine El-Rashidi, "Amidst clashes and threats, Copts feel marginalized in Egypt elections," *Ahram Online*, November 28, 2010, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/5/603/Egypt/Egypt-Elections-/Amidst-clashes-and-threats,-Copts-feel-marginalize.aspx>.

strong language but also provide a narrative of Coptic victimhood and paint a picture of fear in Egypt.

*AINA* reports about an ultimatum apparently given by a Muslim family who demanded the return of a Muslim girl alleged to be in the custody of a Coptic family, married to a Christian man. The article states that, “Copts are currently living in terror, saying they take the ultimatum very seriously and expect the worst tomorrow after Friday prayers.”<sup>178</sup> The article uses dramatic descriptions and is rather repetitive about the actions of Muslims and how they are terrorizing Christians.

Some reports went much further in charged accusations against Islamists in general and the Morsi government. They employ a language of fear which incites emotions of terror and suspicion toward the Islamists parties in Egypt, especially toward the Muslim Brotherhood. An example is provided by an article of Nabil E. Malek (Nabīl Malik), president of the Canadian Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (CEOHR), in the *Montreal Gazette* that is highly geared towards demonizing Islamists and elevating the suffering of Christians. It links the attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt to the September 2011 attacks in America as evidence of a broader cultural war. Consider this quote, “The Islamic regimes that replaced the ousted dictators [in the aftermath of the Arab springs] seem to be bent on clearing away the remaining Christians of the region.”<sup>179</sup> Huge claims are made without a solid argument or evidence. The organization represents a noble cause but the article leaves much to be desired.

An article posted on “Copts.co.uk” calls attention to violence against the Coptic Christians in a way which increases insecurity regarding the state of existence of the community. The post is extremely biased, using the

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<sup>178</sup> Mary Abdelmassih, “Christians in Egyptian Town Threatened With Violence Over Missing Muslim Girl,” *AINA*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.aina.org/news/20130425195513.htm>.

<sup>179</sup> Nabil A. Malek, “Attacks on Christians in Egypt Are Part of a Broader Cultural War,” *Montreal Gazette*, May 2, 2013, <http://www.montrealgazette.com/opinion/Opinion+Attacks+Christians+Egypt+part+broader+cultural/8308022/story.html>.

language of 'us' versus 'them'. The narrative is prophetic, claiming that current Christian persecution in an 'Islamic world' is a sign of return to old times, "a time when Christians in many countries around the world are more threatened, and are living more precariously, than they have for centuries." It is also highly blame oriented, for instance it says, "Muslims worldwide shed the blood of innocent Christians with increasing impunity." Another outrageous generalization states that, "Islamic values have been revived, including not only rigor in dress codes but also hostility toward Western ideas and principles."<sup>180</sup>

It is understandable that this website sympathizes with Christians in Egypt but such preposterous statements made in this article and to a lesser degree in other media outlets do more harm by increasing the very religious tensions that they seek to call attention to eliminate.

Although there appears to be a co-relation between increasing violence against Egyptian Christians and rise of Islamists to power, most articles provide no evidence to justify this relation but rather speculate based on popular perceptions of Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood in the country instead of also considering factors as the general absence of security in the country. Reporting needs to be more factual, having more eye for detail which would help the reader better understand particular situations.

*Ahram Online* provided a different narrative, "Of course, Christians have their own problems related to the right to build churches and limitations on accessing certain [high-level executive and security] positions, but these problems have been there for a very long time; they are not the product of the revolution."<sup>181</sup> The article rationalizes the fear of the rise of the Islamists by explaining that the discrimination Christians are facing now have

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<sup>180</sup> Robert Spencer, "Will Pope Francis Challenge Muslim Persecution of Christians?" March 16, 2013, [http://www.copts.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=4741&Itemid=41](http://www.copts.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4741&Itemid=41).

<sup>181</sup> Dina Ezzat, "On Coptic Christmas, Egypt's Christians voice guarded hope for future," *Ahram Online*, January 7, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org/Egypt/Politics-/On-Coptic-Christmas,-Egypts-Christians-voice-g>.

existed long before Muhammad Morsi became President. The article further expresses mutual feelings of brotherhood among both Christian and Muslims communities in Cairo in contrast to many other media channels such as *AINA* or *Fox News*.

Paul Sedra, Associate Professor of history at the Simon Fraser University, rejects in *Jadaliyya* the narrative of victimhood when addressing Copts in Egypt. "Copts are not victims by virtue of their minority status. The language of victimhood...assumes a passive community that is resigned to a fate of decline and possibly eviction and requires salvation by an external force."<sup>182</sup>

This article offers a fresh perspective to view the current problems in Egypt especially those facing the Coptic Christians after the revolution. The narratives have clearly changed after the revolution of 2011, showing an increase in sectarian strife and discrimination but also in polemical articles.

It would definitely be worthwhile to look out for more distinct and nuanced analyses on the current situation in Egypt, like the one provide by *Jadaliyya*, since much current reporting contributes more to deepening divisions instead of considering all facts and analyzing them without speculations and ideological biases.

## **8. Fear for the Future**

Robert A. Forster

The ousting of Hosni Mubarak was initially greeted by Copts with optimism and positive developments were made between Christians and Muslims during this time of revolutionary zeal.<sup>183</sup> These developments,

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<sup>182</sup> Paul Sedra, "Time to Reject the Language of Coptic Victimhood," *Jadaliyya*, August 10, 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6814/time-to-reject-the-language-of-coptic-victimhood->.

<sup>183</sup> Cornelis Hulsman (ed.), "The Context of a brutal Attack on a Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria, January 1, 2011: Analysis based on 15 years of research in Christian-Muslim relations in

however, turned out to be short lived and currently the future status of Copts in Egypt remains uncertain in an atmosphere of increasing sectarian violence.

Organizations tracking trends of sectarian violence in Egypt have noted a steady rise since the mid-2000s. The *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights* stated that from January 2008 to January 2010 there were “at least 53 incidents.”<sup>184</sup> From 2010 to 2012, the number of incidents rose from 45, to 70 in 2011 to at least 112 in 2012.<sup>185</sup> USCIRF notes how the death toll in 2011 surpassed that of “the previous 10 years combined.”<sup>186</sup>

The exponential rise is linked to three recent trends within Egyptian society. First, the anti-authoritarian revolutionary philosophy that inspired the revolution permeated throughout Egyptian society and led to an increased mistrust in the police and the Ministry of Interior. This has contributed to a previously existing ‘trust deficit’ between authorities and civilians and an increase in negligent practices by police officials and the judicial system.<sup>187</sup> Second, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and their Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) saw a political movement form in opposition to the political dominance of the Brotherhood and what was perceived as strategic maneuvering by the Brotherhood and its allies to secure long term political power. Coptic Christians who worried about potential political marginalization and increased repression brought on by religious affiliation formed a part of this opposition. Third, smuggling from

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Egypt,” MISSIO, 40, <http://www.missio-hilft.de/media/thema/menschenrechte/studie/41-egypt-attacks-2011-en.pdf>.

<sup>184</sup> “Two Years of Sectarian Violence: What Happened? Where do we begin? An analytical study Jan 2008-Jan 2010,” Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, <http://eipr.org/en/report/2010/04/11/776/778>.

<sup>185</sup> Mariz Tadros, “Copts under Mursi: Defiance in the face of denial,” Middle East Research and Information Project, 43 (2013).

<sup>186</sup> U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report (Covering April 1, 2011-February 29, 2012), March 2012, 55.

<sup>187</sup> An NGO, “Police for Egypt and People (والشعب لمصر الشرطة),” was set up in 2007 in an attempt to close this gap and inspire more confidence in the Egyptian Police. See website: [http://people-police4egypt.org/about\\_en.htm](http://people-police4egypt.org/about_en.htm).



Libya and Syria meant that there was an increased availability in light firearms.<sup>188</sup> Further supplies raided from the military and police during the January 25 Revolution added to this cache. These arms in conjunction with lack of policing and high unemployment have led to an increase in exploitative violence (for personal or material gain) and sectarian violence. Violence and discrimination against the Copts was not uncommon under the Mubarak regime, as already noted, cases have been on the rise leading up to the Arab Spring. There are a few factors that have a strong significance in this analysis and form key aspects of the Egyptian political milieu at this time. This includes the drastic rise in unemployment, which was a factor in the January 25 Revolution and the downfall of Mubarak's regime. Estimates vary, but at more than 50% there are a vast number of mainly young men who are eligible to participate in the incidents. This was also a variable that led to the downfall of Muhammad Morsi's regime. The other factor that forms part of the political milieu and the collective conscious of those in it is the 'victimhood' of the Coptic Community. Copts get attacked because they are an exposed group. The culture within government institutions allows for impunity and negligence to occur, but in the case of the Coptic Community it happens more so as a general acceptance has allowed it to do so. A third element has to do with political strategy. In this case that would be when a regime uses certain elements to unite the population and distract them from political issues that really matter like jobs, security and education.<sup>189</sup> These elements are useful to point out and form overarching themes within the analysis. The aforementioned aspects of the 'trust deficit' and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, however, will be used as the main framework of analysis.

### *Lack of a Legitimate Centralized State Security*

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<sup>188</sup> Eray Basar, "Report Update: Unsecured Libyan Weapons – Regional Impact and Possible Threats," Civil-Military Fusion Centre, November, 2012, [https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/medbasin/Holder/Documents/r022%20CFC%20Monthly%20Thematic%20Report%20\(Update\)%20\(02-NOV-12\).pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/medbasin/Holder/Documents/r022%20CFC%20Monthly%20Thematic%20Report%20(Update)%20(02-NOV-12).pdf).

<sup>189</sup> Benny Avni, "Egypt's scapegoats: the Arab Spring souring for Copts," *The New York Post*, May 11, 2011, [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/egypt\\_scapegoats\\_uZZNsttb6Wyck0JGQz2toNn](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/egypt_scapegoats_uZZNsttb6Wyck0JGQz2toNn).

A major reason for the fall of Hosni Mubarak is founded in what Bradley Hope labeled the “trust deficit” between ordinary citizens and the apparatus of state security.<sup>190</sup> This ‘deficit’ evolved as the result of decades under the repressive ‘rule by law’ system instituted by the Mubarak era Ministry of Interior, the State Security Intelligence (SSI) and police. This repression was primarily enabled by an Emergency Law, which had been instated since the year 1967.<sup>191</sup>

As noted in a 2005 HRW report, “the Emergency Law, law no. 162 of 1958 allowed for arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention without trial, and [created] an atmosphere of impunity in which torture and ill-treatment [flourished].”<sup>192</sup> In addition to this, torture was not uncommon and according to Al Nadeem Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence there was an escalation in cases between the years 2003-2006 in direct relation to “a political stir demanding democracy and justice.”<sup>193</sup>

In the face of their failure to keep control during the events of January 25 as well as the responsibility for the estimated 686 protestors who died during those weeks, police legitimacy took a sharp downturn in the eyes of the public.<sup>194</sup> The further inability of the SCAF and the Morsi government to implement the needed reforms increased the so-called ‘trust deficit’. The reforms that did take place could be described as half-hearted at best and primarily consisted of changing the name of the State Security Intelligence

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<sup>190</sup> Bradley Hope, “January 25 Anniversary: Egyptians, their police and a trust deficit,” *The National*, January 25, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/january-25-anniversary-egyptians-their-police-and-a-trust-deficit>.

<sup>191</sup> “Egypt: Country Summary,” Human Rights Watch, January, 2005, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k5/pdf/egypt.pdf>.

<sup>192</sup> “Torture in Egypt: Facts and Testimonies,” Al Nadeem Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, 2007, p. 24, [http://alnadeem.org/files/Torture\\_in\\_Egypt\\_2003-2006\\_english.pdf](http://alnadeem.org/files/Torture_in_Egypt_2003-2006_english.pdf).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Mai Shams El-Din and Safaa Abdoun, “Death Toll 686 since Jan. 25 Protests, say Rights groups,” *Daily News Egypt*, March 9, 2011, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2011/03/09/death-toll-686-since-jan25-protests-say-rights-groups/>.

to National Security, and firing a few hundred police officers.<sup>195</sup> This changed little. During the first 100 days of Morsi's presidency the Al Nadeem Centre reported 34 cases of death, 88 cases of torture and 7 cases of sexual assault, as well as 247 cases of police brutality throughout Egypt.<sup>196</sup>

This decrease in overall police legitimacy as well as their static *modus operandi* led to an increase in crime and alongside it, sectarian violence in Egypt.

## 8.1 A Framework of Animosity: Religion as a factor in political dialogue

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and their eventual role in Egypt's government from June 30, 2012 to July 4, 2013 was tumultuous, but they maintained a presence in Egypt, which by the early 2000s allowed them to become the largest opposition party to Mubarak. This development was the result of Mubarak's opening reforms to allow other non-official parties to participate in the legislative elections. However, as noted by Muhammad Sayyid Sa'id from the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, in this process "only the Brotherhood had the national reach [to] cash in on the new openness."<sup>197</sup> This remark highlights the organizational abilities of the Muslim Brotherhood to leverage considerable political strength and it was this ability that made the organization efficient at filling the civilian power vacuum after January 25. The Brotherhood's 'national reach' became the backbone of its electoral campaign in the first half of 2012.

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<sup>195</sup> Dina Rashid, "Reforming the Egyptian Police?" *Foreign Policy Magazine*, July 8, 2013, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/07/08/reforming\\_the\\_egyptian\\_police](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/07/08/reforming_the_egyptian_police).

<sup>196</sup> "Egyptian Police Torture 88, Kill 34 under President Morsi: Rights report," *Ahram Online*, October 15, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/55595.aspx>.

<sup>197</sup> Daniel Williams, "Banned Islamic Movement now the Main Opposition in Egypt," *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/09/AR2005120901818.html>.

Sectarian ideas were quickly incorporated into the political dialogue in post-revolutionary Egypt. The Coptic Community represented a smaller voting bloc during the presidential elections and during the first round an estimated 50-60% of the Coptic Community participated, around 1,6 million.<sup>198</sup>

For natural reasons it was assumed that the Copts would not vote for the Brotherhood's FJP, which spoke from an Islamist platform, in comparison to the secular Ahmad Shafiq. This established the first paradigms of contention between Coptic and Islamist groups in post-revolutionary Egypt.

Not surprisingly, Ahmad Shafiq, who served as the last Prime Minister under the Mubarak, was viewed by many as a *fulūl* and as a potential saboteur of the newly founded democratic process. Shafiq's success in the first elections, held May 24, was unjustly attributed to Coptic support. As a result various Islamist hard-liners were quick to accuse them of betraying the revolution.<sup>199</sup> Tariq al-Zumur, from Jamā'āh al-Islāmīyah, for example, demanded an apology from Copts because he believed them to have supported Shafiq.<sup>200</sup> Accusations such as this were unfounded and officials from the church were quick to refute any claims of loyalty to the past regime. Father Francis Farid, Deputy of the Beni Suef Coptic Orthodox Bishopric, called the accusations "baseless", on the grounds that, "the church does not have the ability to instruct its followers to back a specific runner [...], many [...] voted for Hamdin Sabbahi, some for Amr Mousa and some supported Morsi."<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> 53% of 85 million are allowed to vote. The Coptic electorate is about 6% of 45 million.

<sup>199</sup> "Coptic Figures deny links to Shafiq's electoral success, fear polarization," *Egypt Independent*, May 28, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/copts-figures-deny-links-shafiqs-electoral-success-fears-wave-polarization-news-1>.

<sup>200</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, "Egypt: Islamists vs. Copts: An Animosity that Seeks Any Excuse to Attack," The Gatestone Institute, July 20, 2012, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3123/egypt-islamists-vs-copts>.

<sup>201</sup> "Coptic Figures deny links," *Egypt Independent*.

According to the state-run newspaper *Al-Ahram*, around 40-50% of Copts voted for Shafiq, about 30% for Hamdin Sabbahi and the rest for Amr Musa and other candidates.<sup>202</sup> An opposition newspaper, *The Egypt Independent*, noted, “the largest portion of votes won by Shafiq came from the Nile Delta region, which does not contain large Christian electorates.”<sup>203</sup>

By the second round of the Presidential elections held on June 16-17, 2012, it seemed that the decision for individual Copts was pre-determined by external expectations. The speculative article by Sa’id Shihātah published by *Ahram Online* is convinced of where Coptic ‘loyalties’ lie.<sup>204</sup> The Coptic journalist Sāmih Fawzī, described the general Coptic attitude towards the FJP candidate: “if [Morsi] wins, the Muslim Brotherhood will control the main positions, namely parliament, presidency and maybe the cabinet.”<sup>205</sup> Similar thoughts were voiced elsewhere and printed in the media, which in turn fueled further speculation about Copts.<sup>206</sup>

The fear of political dominance by Islamists was further propagated by the results of earlier elections for the People’s Assembly of Egypt and the Shūrā Council that winter, where the Islamist bloc consisting of the FJP headed Democratic Alliance, and the Islamic bloc received 71.5% of the seats.

The general Coptic point of view was skeptical, if not hostile, towards a potentially Islamist regime. Eyeing each other early on with this level of skepticism and without the presence of any effective reconciliatory gestures from either group, the direction of the relationship between the

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<sup>202</sup> Said Shehata, “Copts between Shafiq and Morsi: an Easy Choice,” *Ahram Online*, July 12, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/4/0/44639/Opinion/Copts-between-Shafiq-and-Morsi-an-easy-choice.aspx>.

<sup>203</sup> “Coptic Figures deny links polarization”.

<sup>204</sup> Shehata, “Copts between Shafiq and Morsi”.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> See Hassen Jouini, “Egypt’s Copts back Shafiq as anti-Islamist bulwark,” *AFP*, June 16, 2012, [http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iJ9pglrHdJe8O5axXuUIJZOT\\_Brg?docId=CNG.0f3f4ddfe67fce9a5379477400b6da78.461](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iJ9pglrHdJe8O5axXuUIJZOT_Brg?docId=CNG.0f3f4ddfe67fce9a5379477400b6da78.461).

two groups was evident. Claims of ‘Coptic betrayal’ became a repeated point of contention between hardline Islamists and Copts, and thus secured the Coptic position as an oppositional faction to the Brotherhood.

Many of the accusations against Copts did not follow any particular rational narrative, but rather formed an overall framework within which sectarian violence was rationalized as political violence in order to preserve the delicate position of Islamists in government as well as Islam and traditional societal values. This shift from sectarian violence to political violence created an ideological framework whereby the targeting of ‘oppositional’ groups, rather than ‘Coptic’ groups became more acceptable and the Morsi government was accused of exacerbating these sectarian differences for political gain. This next section will look at some of the methods the Morsi government encouraged a framework legitimizing sectarian violence as suppression of dissent, including legal methods such as the 2012 constitution and rhetoric disseminated through the media and government funded mosques.

## 8.2 Use of the Constitution in highlighting sectarian differences

One of the first tasks undertaken by the Morsi regime was the writing of a new constitution, which was signed into law by Morsi on the December 26, 2012. Although Egypt was not to become a religious state, the overtly Islamic tone of the document was “grounded in the very preamble” with a significant increase in religious references in comparison to the 1971 Constitution.<sup>207</sup> Unsurprisingly, this led to immediate opposition from Coptic and other minority communities and there was a fear that some articles could be susceptible to a more Islamist interpretation should the People’s Assembly and Shūrā Council decides to do so.

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<sup>207</sup> Hulsman (ed), “The Development of Egypt’s Constitution,” 49.

In response to the constitution the new spiritual leader of the Coptic Church, Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria, who took office November 18, 2012, said:

The constitution is for us all to live together, a common life, we need each other. This is the constitution that will bring us together [...] any additions or hints that make the constitution religious will not be acceptable, not only to Copts but to many sectors in society.

To this he added if the constitution addresses one part of the community and ignores another “it will take society backward.”<sup>208</sup>

Pope Tawadros’s statement touches on an important aspect in regards to the 2012 Constitution: the method in which it was drafted. Constitutions are difficult to draft in the best of political situations, and the 6-month time limit set by the SCAF, made it more so. Coptic fears of the Islamic dominance by the legislature and presidency saw themselves play out for the first time in the constitution drafting process as they were sidelined by other actors. Moreover, the apathy of the Islamist members of the 100-person constitution drafting committee to the withdrawal of Christian and liberal members in protest of its drafting process did not serve to build bridges between factions.<sup>209</sup>

The MISSIO Report entitled “The Development of Egypt’s Constitution,” presents a thorough analysis of articles that could impede on religious freedom and were of concern to Copts, including articles IV, CCXIX, XLIII and XLIV. Although not directly threatening to non-Muslim Egyptians, these articles acted as a safeguard to ensure a continuous political role for high-level, if not necessarily Brotherhood affiliated, Muslims in

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<sup>208</sup> “Egypt’s Coptic Pope against ‘religious constitution,’” *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 11, 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/egypts-coptic-pope-against-religious-constitution.aspx?pageID=238&nid=34062>.

<sup>209</sup> Zaid al-Ali, “Egypt’s Draft Constitution: An Analysis,” *Open Democracy*, November 8, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/zaid-al-ali/egypts-draft-constitution-analysis>.

government, and thus, highlighted sectarian differences. Article XLIV, which forbade the act of insulting of prophets and messengers, was contentious as there were several cases that invoked it in conjunction with Article XCVIII of the penal code, the so-called ‘contempt for religion’ laws, to justify the arrest and imprisonment of individuals and groups.

Fear of Islamic domination was increased by the president’s ability to appoint one-tenth of the Shūrā Council skewing the legislative process in his favor.<sup>210</sup> The president could also appoint the heads of almost all independent agencies, which must then be ratified by an already potentially stacked Shūrā Council. This acted to limit the checks and balances against the president.

Despite claims, the constitution did not necessitate the creation of an Islamic state.<sup>211</sup> However, the constitution acted to highlight sectarian differences between the ruling party and Christian minority and placed them further at odds with each other. Coptic fears for Islamic dominance were heightened by some of the executive powers held by Morsi. Furthermore, ‘contempt for religion’ laws did, however, have a role in the suppression of Coptic dissidence and were invoked on several occasions as a political tool or as a justification for targeting certain individuals and groups.

### 8.3 The Media, Government-funded churches and radical preachers

The ascent of political freedoms in post-revolutionary Egypt brought with it the ascent of freedom of speech. The lifting of censorship laws, however, also brought with them a darker element as previously sidelined preachers espoused discriminatory and bellicose rhetoric on state and privately owned television stations. It is impossible to measure the effect of this

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Hulsman, “The Development of Egypt’s Constitution,” 60.



rhetoric on encouraging sectarian violence. However, its importance lies in the wider audience now attained as well as potential effects, both real or imagined, that affect the attitudes of the two parties.

The potentially discriminatory and belligerent statements made varied in their intensity and their reach. A discrepancy in the rhetoric of preachers is also highlighted.

One such case can be seen in statements made by Shaykh Muhammad Hassān, a member of the Shūrā Council of Muslim Scholars. Shaykh Hassān was accused hypocrisy in his attitude to Christians by the Egyptian actress Hālah Sidqqi. She noted how he had originally issued statements for Copts to be afraid of Islam, but changed his tone during the Brotherhood's rise to power, asking for them to support Morsi.<sup>212</sup> There have been other accusations against Muhammad Hassan, including claims that during the civil strife after Morsi's ousting, he encouraged followers to carry arms.<sup>213</sup> This was something he has repudiated in later statements. Politically, Shaykh Hassan is a moderate Salafī, and reports from before January 25, 2011, have him challenging the killing of Christians in the name of Allah.<sup>214</sup>

The actual debate surrounding what Shaykh Muhammad Hassān has said or not, is of significant importance as it illuminates the suspicion of others surrounding such personalities and the potential power they hold. It also

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<sup>212</sup> "Hala Sidky attacks Sheikh Muhammad Hassan: He was attacking Christians in the previous regime and now calls on them to not fear of Islam," *al-Anba*, June 2, 2012, <http://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/egypt-news/297830/%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82%D9%8A> – Arabic.

<sup>213</sup> Bisam Ramadan, "On Video: Muhammed Hassan: I exonerate to Allah from blood... Do not enter the fray carrying arms to demonstrations," August 20, 2013, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2047846> – Arabic.

<sup>214</sup> Farrag Ismail, "The Hassan-Ghoneim battle," *al-Arabiyya*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2011/11/22/178571.html>; "Sheikh Mohammed Hassan: I challenge any Muslim on the face of the earth who authorizes the killing of Christians," *Al-Arabiyya*, November 10, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/11/10/125627.html> – Arabic.

demonstrates the prevalence of what Dr. Mariz Tadros dubbed the ‘dual discourse,’ whereby Brotherhood members often say one thing, but their actions are often lacking in conviction.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, it shows the ease in the Egyptian political milieu to attribute statements to others, to defame or to manipulate: a tactic usually familiar to counter-intelligence scenarios.<sup>216</sup>

There was also a hypersensitivity to statements even loosely affiliated with the Brotherhood. Muhammad Sa’ad Khaīrat al-Shattir, the original Presidential candidate for the FJP and second in command of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a member of the Committee for Legitimate Rights and Reform, which issued a fatwa online forbidding Muslims to wish Copts a merry Christmas in January 2012.<sup>217</sup> In an interview with the Salafī Shaykh, Muhammad Salah, he disagreed with such reports, claiming that anti-Islamist media exaggerated them. Statements such as ‘*kulle sana wa enta tayeb*’ (happy new year), Shaykh Salah said, were acceptable, however formulations indicating an approval or Christian dogma were not.<sup>218</sup>

Preachers such as the ultra-conservative Hishām al-’Ashrī actually contributed to the increased feeling of fear in the Coptic community. Al-’Ashrī is the founder of the *Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice*, which aimed to ensure people were applying the “law of God” to their daily lives. As quoted in a January 1, 2013, *al-Watan* newspaper interview, Al-’Ashrī was convinced that “Islamic law is not a conviction [...] and must be applied against their will.” His organization had plans to,

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<sup>215</sup> Tadros, “Copts under Mursi”.

<sup>216</sup> The insecurity of electronic means of communication is well known and easily manipulated. The Twitter account of Khaīrat al-Shattir, for example, is hacked at the time of writing by the hacker group Anonymous. See the Twitter account @khairatAlshater and tweets around the time of June 30, 2013.

<sup>217</sup> “First Christmas for Egypt Copts under Islamist rule,” *Al-Arabiya*, January 27, 2013, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/01/07/259008.html>.

<sup>218</sup> Cornelius Husman, “Interview with Sheikh Muhammad Salah,” *Arab-West Report*, May 16, 2013, [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info).

amongst other things, institute a dress code for men and women of all creeds, ban alcohol, and to “invite Christians to the Islamic religion.”<sup>219</sup>

Al-'Ashrī became outspoken during the Morsi era and was noted for other statements in the media. In addition to his famous interview in *al-Watan*, he also called on Copts to join Islam on the January 2, 2013, on the al-Balad network.<sup>220</sup> In another interview on January 2, 2013, on Online TV, al-Ashri clarified many of his points made in the *al-Watan* interview.<sup>221</sup> In an interview on January 10, 2013, on the al-Tahrir TV, he stated; “there is no such thing as a Christian religion” and called on them to join the true religion.<sup>222</sup>

In reaction to such statements, Al-'Ashrī was accused of ‘contempt for religion’ by the lawyers Bashīr Jabbar and Soma Mansūr in early 2013. It was further said that his statements would “disturb public security” and that they were “a flagrant assault on personal freedom and thought” that would divide the country into “the Muslim and the Infidel.”<sup>223</sup> In the public sphere, Al-'Ashrī's statements had a polarizing effect and met with either support or defiance. In an example of the latter, the media presenter Yūssif

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<sup>219</sup> All quotes from “The Founder of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vices homeland: Coptic women to be forced to wear a veil, deny massage and liquor,” *al-Watan*, January 2, 2013, <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/106752> - Arabic.

<sup>220</sup> “Hashem al'A'shri Invites all Copts to Enter Islam,” YouTube, January 2, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4MzWAMM1aU>.

<sup>221</sup> “Founder of the Promotion of Virtue: invite Christians to enter Islam, and forbid the wear of tight clothes,” *Aden al-Ghad*, January 2, 2013, <http://adenalghad.net/news/35665/> - Arabic.

<sup>222</sup> “Egyptian Cleric Hisham Al-A'shri: It Is the ‘Dream of My Life’ to Wage War against Israel; There Is No Such Thing as a ‘Christian Religion’,” MEMRI, January 10, 2013, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3716.htm>.

<sup>223</sup> “Officials accuse the founder of the Promotion of Virtue in contempt of religions and attempting to divide the nation,” *al-Shorouk*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=05012013&id=40795f8f-62c0-439a-8b5e-7ba06c49dab6> - Arabic.

al-Hussīnī tore up Al-'Ashrī's interview in *al-Watan* in disgust, poignantly stating: "this is my response to Al-'Ashrī."<sup>224</sup>

Statements by more radical preachers served to heighten animosity and encouraged resistance towards Islamic rule. As a result the Brotherhood officially distanced itself from such individuals. In response to questions regarding the *Prevention of Vice* organization, the Brotherhood spokesman Mahmūd Ghuzlān replied: "the case of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice is within the jurisdiction of the authorities and not individuals or groups. It is not anyone's right to intervene."<sup>225</sup> Egypt's Grand Mufti, Alī Gum'ah, clearly stated on the matter that, "this sort of idiotic thinking is one that seeks to further destabilize what is already a tense situation."<sup>226</sup> Samir Marcos, the Coptic scholar and former assistant President to Morsi, again lends further credence to the presence of 'dual discourse.' Marcos expressed that the Coptic response to these statements at the time where exaggerated due to Morsi's in-action to Al-'Ashrī's suggestions.<sup>227</sup>

However, Al-'Ashrī was primarily noticed because his statements were deemed shocking by elements in society. They highlighted a political pathway that many in Egypt did not wish to follow and many of his television interviews revolved around him explaining previous statements and amending previous claims. When the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice was finally launched in late March 2013 its media coverage had disappeared within a week.

There are several cases where imams or Muslim Brotherhood members are rumoured to have aided in the incitement of violence, but most are difficult to prove and prone to exaggeration or other fictitious elements.

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<sup>224</sup> "Video .. Hosseini in response to the founder of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, tears up the interview published in *Al-Watan* newspaper on the air," *Akhbarak*, January 2, 2013, <http://www.akhbarak.net/>.

<sup>225</sup> Yasmine Salah and Shaimaa Fayed, "Preacher alarms many in Egypt with calls for Islamist Vice Police," *Reuters*, <http://www.Reuters.com/article/2013/01/09/us-egypt-islamists-idUSBRE9080M720130109>

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Personal meeting of Cornelis Hulsman with Samir Marcos on January 14, 2013.

## 8.4 From horizontal to top-down violence

The framework encouraged by the polarization of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections; the 2012 constitution and the wider dispersal of Islamic rhetoric on television, radio and the internet, served to justify sectarian violence as political violence and frame it as the suppression of dissent rather than the suppression of minorities. With this shift came the disturbing shift of who committed the violence. This changed from the usual 'horizontal' violence between civilians to an increase in 'top-down' violence, which was perpetrated by the state. The attack on St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo on April 7, 2013, is an example of such. This was a landmark event because the Cathedral is also the papal seat and had previously been sacrosanct.<sup>228</sup> In a funeral for four Copts killed in another sectarian attack in Al-Khusūs the weekend before, hundreds of mourners gathered. Both parties claim that it was the other side that began throwing stones. According to *Ahram Online*, the mourners began chanting, "ash-shāb urīd isqāt an-nizam" and "leave, leave," in reference to Morsi's government.<sup>229</sup> Video footage shows that the lawyer and human rights activist, Nagīb Gibrāil, led the chants.<sup>230</sup> Soon the violence escalated and assailants on surrounding rooftops began shooting birdshot at the Cathedral and people on the ground started throwing Molotov's.<sup>231</sup> The level of accusation towards security forces' involvement in the actual attack varies. Some claim the police were implicit because, although they set up a security perimeter, several attackers got through. One video clip shows a man with a pistol running through the perimeter to one of the church

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<sup>228</sup> Tadros, "Copts under Mursi".

<sup>229</sup> Salma Shukrallah, "Attack on Cairo Cathedral mourners leaves one dead," *Ahram Online*, April 7, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/68656/Egypt/0/Attack-on-Cairo-cathedral-mourners-leaves-one-dead.aspx>.

<sup>230</sup> YouTube, April 7, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMn39AHnMpg>. Referred to in Cornelis Hulsmann, "Muslim-Christian clashes in Alexandria and Matay; harmony in Qufada," *Arab-West Report*, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/muslim-christian-clashes-alexandria-and-matay-harmony-qufada>.

<sup>231</sup> Robert Johnson. "New Footage of Cairo Cathedral Attack Confirms Worst Fears of Egyptian Christians," *The Business Insider*, April 29, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/attack-at-st-marks-coptic-church-in-cairo-2013-4>.

window and firing rounds in through it.<sup>232</sup> This impression is maintained as policemen briefly stop attackers throwing stones at the Cathedral, only to let them continue a moment later. Multiple tear gas canisters are also shot towards the building, rather than into the crowds that surround it, effectively besieging the people inside.<sup>233</sup> Incidents such as those that occurred at St. Mark's and Maspero, lend credence to the thesis that sectarian violence had attained a distinctly political feel after January 25.

## 8.5 After the June 30 Revolution and Coup d'état

In the lead up to and during the June 30 demonstrations Copts played a strong role in the opposition. Sharīf Ramzī, the founder of *Copts without Chains*, stressed the need for Coptic Egyptians to “put their hands in the hand of fellow Muslims” in order to “overthrow the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood and erase their insolence.”<sup>234</sup> In response to this, Islamists, especially in Upper Egypt, increased tactics of oppression. One example is the death threat delivered to Christian shops in Beni Suef as a pre-emptive action before June 30.<sup>235</sup>

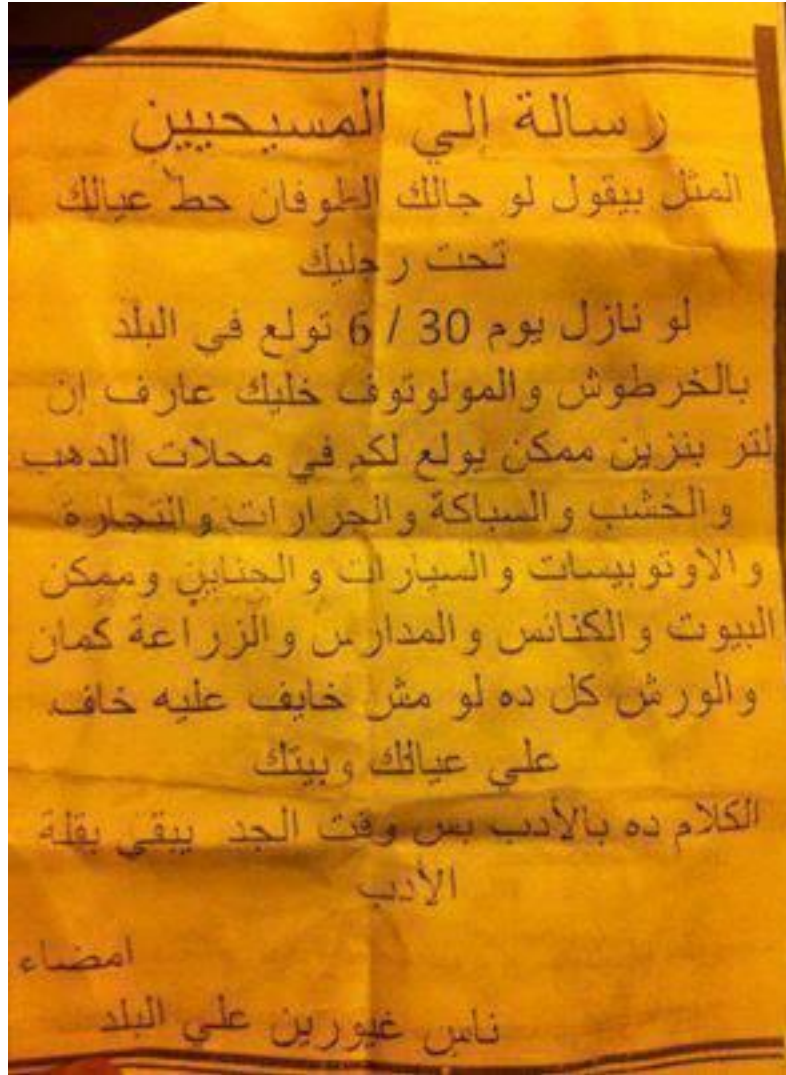
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<sup>232</sup> “The Events of the Attack the Cathedral of St. Mark Abbasia 7.4.2013,” YouTube, April 23, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z5kUpUEqPI>.

<sup>233</sup> Johnson, “New Footage of Cairo Cathedral Attack.”

<sup>234</sup> Imera Hashem, “‘Copts Without Chains:’ We will go out into the fields to call for an early presidential election and civil constitution. There will be no sectarian demands,” *Ahram Gate*, July 21, 2013, <http://gate.ahram.org/News/362098.aspx> – *Arabic*.

<sup>235</sup> Ayman Lotfy and Mohamed Ali Momen, “Christians in Beni Suef leak threatening pamphlet,” *Youm 7*, June 29, 2013, <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1139032> – *Arabic*.



A Message to Christians: As they say, if the flood comes to you put your kids under your feet. If you go out on the 30th of June to burn the country by birdshots and Molotov, you have to know that one litre of petrol might burn all of your gold, wood, and plumbing shops - tractors, businesses, buses, cars, gardens and maybe your houses, churches, schools, farms and also workshops and if you're not worried about all this, fear for your children and house. This message is made politely, but when the time is serious,

we will end the politeness. Signed, people who are protective of the country.<sup>236</sup>

The belligerent parties stayed true to their threat. After the ousting of Morsi's government, the overall situation for Egyptian Copts has worsened dramatically. By 10.05pm on August 14, 2013, as the last two sit-ins of Morsi's supporters in Cairo were brutally cleared from the Rāba'a and Nahdah squares, the Minister of Interior, reported on Al-Jazeera that seven churches had been attacked across Egypt that day. According to Isaac Ibrahim, from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights the number of churches attacked lay at 44 by August 23, this count including only churches that were destroyed in part or fully.<sup>237</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

Cornelis Hulsman and Rob A. Forster

Dr. George Massīhah of the Wafd Party summarized the problems of Egypt well when he stated that problems started when the Muslim Brotherhood tried to exclude the *feloul*, the old guard around Hosni Mubarak that was still very much in control of several key ministries and organizations in the country. The Brotherhood had experienced years of oppression but had become a threat to the second and third layers of people in authority after the top had been wiped out after Mubarak was forced to step down. The Muslim Brotherhood now gets vilified for all that has gone wrong during Morsi's one year reign, in so far as he was able to reign with so many institutions that he had alienated.<sup>238</sup>

Much of the current critique on president Morsi is one-sided. Wa'el Haddara, former presidential advisor, not a member of the Muslim

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<sup>236</sup> Message translated by Erica Wenig with a contribution by Robert A. Forster.

<sup>237</sup> "Rise in Violence Against Copts in Egypt," *Deutsche Welle*, August 23, 2013, <http://www.dw.de/الأقباط-ضد-العنف-از-دياد/a-17039377- Arabic>.

<sup>238</sup> Telephone conversation with Dr. George Massīhah, September 8, 2013.



Brotherhood or Freedom and Justice Party, listed in a document his personal experience with president Morsi. Yes, he has made serious mistakes and the opposition to him was strong but there were also efforts to do well for the country. "Certainly some of those mistakes relate to Christian-Muslim understanding. Specifically we likely under-estimated the real fear many Christians had."<sup>239</sup>

Dr. Amr Darrag of the Freedom and Justice Party repeatedly went public to express sorrow for the mistakes that happened and expressed a willingness to talk. But how to start talks when force is used and opponents to the Muslim Brotherhood want to declare the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization?<sup>240</sup> Any one from any of the non-Islamists parties who advocates talking with the Muslim Brotherhood gets attacked. There is, among Egypt's ruling elite, very little sympathy for such talks.<sup>241</sup>

Work has started on revising the Constitution that had been narrowly adopted in December 2012, this time without the Muslim Brotherhood. Where non-Islamists, rightly, complained that the previous constitution had insufficient support in society the revision will not do this either as long as a major party in society is excluded.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> E-mail correspondence with Dr. Wa'el Haddara, September 8, 2013. His document can be obtained through AWR.

<sup>240</sup> Amr Darrag, "Egypt's Blood, America's Complicity," *New York Times*, August 15, 2013 [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/opinion/egypts-blood-americas-complicity.html?\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/opinion/egypts-blood-americas-complicity.html?_r=2&); "Amr Darrag to el-Destour: No negotiations without the return of Morsi," August 27, 2013, <http://dostor.org>; Mounir Adib, "Brotherhood 'ready for dialogue'," *Egypt Independent*, August 28, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-ready-dialogue>.

See also: Interview with Dr. Darrag in *al-Watan*, August 29, 2013, <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/288616>. And his firm denouncement of the assassination attempt on the life of the Minister of Interior, September 5, 2013, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31294>.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> For the list of members see:

<http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=69738>, accessed September 10, 2013 and World Bulletin, September 8, 2013,

<http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=117300> Islamists are included including people said to be associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Dr. Amr Darrag wrote on September 10 that none of them, however, is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egyptians need to urgently work towards national unity. There are definitely important questions that need to be asked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Their secrecy and thus lack of transparency, however understandable after years of suppression, is an area of concern and so is the ideology around martyrdom and witnesses having seen members or people close to the Brotherhood involved in violent acts.

Christian mistrust against the Muslim Brotherhood runs very deep which explains that the overwhelming majority is currently pro-army. This hasn't done well with grassroots Islamists, probably including Muslim Brothers, who have attacked Christians and to each Christian mistake<sup>243</sup> respond with massive retaliations that are totally excessive and out of any proportion with security authorities that foremost seek to protect it instead of protecting the general population.<sup>244</sup>

There have been efforts to mutual contacts but they have been much too little and infrequent.

Media have mostly contributed to partisan reporting, contributing to fear, mistrust and hate mongering which has made efforts to find a way out in which all parties feel that a good compromise has been reached extremely difficult.

Media also systematically overestimate the percentage of Christians in Egypt. This is done for political reasons and avoid the anger of Coptic Church representatives who often resist to accept that Christians are, in fact, smaller in number than they, for political reasons, like to see.<sup>245</sup> Thus anyone who states that the percentage is much likely smaller than these

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<sup>243</sup> Such as in al-Khusus, where it was Christian who first drew his gun and killed a Muslim, March 2013.

<sup>244</sup> Telephone conversation with Dr. George Massīhah, September 8, 2013.

<sup>245</sup> Repeatedly journalists told me they were told by their editor to use the ten percent figure "because everyone uses this." And with this ten percent they would avoid Coptic critique. Journalists using higher percentages usually had political motivations to do so.

representatives believe gets attacked. Islamists see these overestimations, which only add to frictions and lack of trust. Church representatives would do better in providing verifiable data if they want researchers and others critical of their claims to accept their claims.<sup>246</sup>

The government is weak, laws are poorly executed with as consequence that the law of the strongest is applicable. The issues that frequently cause tensions, such as church building and conversions, are well known but are poorly if at all addressed. The government also repeatedly denies the existence of issues of concern to the Christian community.

The current climate makes it likely that the Coptic community will be targeted for a while to come despite statements of Freedom and Justice Party leaders as Dr. Amr Darrag who explicitly opposes such violence.

Former president Morsi, despite his flaws in leadership, was the first democratically elected Egyptian president in Egypt's history. The feeling of elation of grassroots' members of the Brotherhood who voted for him has been replaced with disillusion with the democratic system and broader society who supported his removal. With the lack of any real efforts of political dialogue, in addition to repression and marginalization by security forces, it will mean the only method of showing discontent is through anti-social means: either protest, or for a small group, violent action. While lashing out at the state, the Coptic community is also likely to be targeted. In addition to 'betraying the revolution' and sabotaging Brotherhood plans, 'undermining democracy' can now be added to the list of Coptic wrongs and those antagonistic towards them are unlikely to let them forget it in the short term.

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<sup>246</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Interview with Dr. Philippe Fargues about Coptic Statistics," *Arab-West Report*, Week 52, Art. 17, December 20, 2008, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2008/week-52/17-interview-dr-philippe-fargues-about-coptic-statistics>. Demographer Fargues is clear that the church has never given any independent researcher any verifiable data that resulted in an academic publication and thus we just have to believe what church representatives say.

Further threats are presented with the myriad of conspiracies involving collusion between Christians and the al-Sīsī government security agencies. Such claims have already surfaced on Ikhwanonline.com after August 14. One article accused Christians of having opened fire from a Church on Murād Street onto an al-Haram demonstration.<sup>247</sup> Another article weaves a conspiracy that the security services actually hired thugs to burn churches as a method to put pressure on Western Christians and possibly increase international support for al-Sīsī's government.<sup>248</sup> On the Rāba'a 'Adawīyah stage, before the clearing began on August 14, 'Āssim Abdel Māgid claimed that Copts and communist were supporting al-Sīsī in the killing of Muslims.<sup>249</sup>

'Horizontal' violence is likely to continue, however, possible coalition-building attempts between al-Sīsī and Copts may lessen incidents of government discrimination and top-down violence.

This may, however, be to the detriment of Copts as a new trend is noticeable in that Copts, as Christians, can be used by the ruling power to legitimize the *coup d'état*.<sup>250</sup> By offering protection to the Christian community and doing things such as donating time and resources to, for example, rebuild destroyed churches, it is possible for Western regimes to justify the giving of aid and arms to an undemocratic (=not elected) regime. There is also a fear within Egypt that the West will use the targeting of Copts by Islamic extremists as an excuse to intervene. This is something

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<sup>247</sup> Ahmed Morsi, "Police and Churches fire on al-Haram march in Giza and Muraad Street," *Ikhwan Online*, August 16, 2013, <http://ikhwanonline.com/Article.aspx?ArtID=159992&SecID=230> – Arabic.

<sup>248</sup> Samir Ismal'el, "Anba Maracas: The government is using Christians to justify their attack on the Muslim Brotherhood," *Ikhwan Online*, August 22, 2013, <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.aspx?ArtID=160492&SecID=230> – Arabic.

<sup>249</sup> "Assem Abdel Majid in response to al-Sisi's letter on the Raba'a al-Adawiyya stage," YouTube, July 24, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpPLY2j47Gc&feature=youtu.be> – Arabic.

<sup>250</sup> Others call it a second revolution but fact is that the army interfered on behalf of a large group of demonstrators.

that the Copts and Muslims have firmly announced that they do not want.<sup>251</sup>

Many issues, such as unemployment, migration of the better educated and in-group/out-group mentality, which tears at the fabric of Egyptian society, are not likely to disappear in the short term. Recent developments allow, if the military carries out its promises, for a new election that may be more secular in its stance and less prone to Coptic resistance.

The most important element that must be achieved to improve the current dilemma is compromise. A majority of groups that form the Egyptian political milieu have shown a complete neglect of compromising with other actors – a situation made worse by hardline rhetoric and the killing on both sides that occurred after June 30. Without this the situation for Egyptian Copts and Egypt as a whole will remain tense and be difficult to improve.

Efforts to oppose polemic (media) reporting and language need to be supported to lay the basis for bringing different parties together.

Egypt needs a Truth and Reconciliation Commission such as South Africa had in the mid-nineties. This, however, needs people who are non-partisan and widely accepted by opposing parties. It will not be easy to find such people and the acceptance of parties involved.

Cairo, September 10, 2013

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<sup>251</sup> “Egypt’s Copts issue document rejecting Western interference in internal affairs and the government is working to convince the outside world the facts of the situation,” *al-Quds*, August 25, 2013, <http://www.alquds.com/news/article/view/id/458257> – *Arabic*.

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## **About Us; the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation (CIDT), Center for Arab-West Understanding (CAWU) and Arab-West Foundation (AWF)**

CIDT, an Egyptian not-for profit company, CAWU, an Egyptian NGO and the AWF, a Dutch NGO, were all established around the Egyptian electronic magazine *Arab-West Report* (AWR). AWR was established with the purpose of correcting misinformation that could result in aggravating Muslim-Christian and Arab-West relations. In over fifteen years of work we have seen and documented many instances where biased reporting actively contributed to an escalation of tensions.

AWR's database has been deliberately destroyed by a vandal on June 27, 2013. We are currently working towards restoring as much as possible of our valuable and unique database and seek an academic library where data could be stored and would be safe.

We are working with multiple organizations in order to meet Egyptian legal requirements on companies and NGOs; CIDT produces AWR, CAWU is responsible for intern activities and organizing dialogue meetings, AWF publishes AWR and provides strategic advice to CIDT and CAWU.<sup>252</sup>

The focus of all three organizations is on contemporary Muslim-Christian and Arab-West relations because in this area in particular there is much ideological misreporting. AWR is also reporting on Muslim-Christian tensions since they tend to cause Egyptian Christians to leave the villages they have inhabited for centuries, reducing pluralism in areas where Muslims and Christians have shared mutual sorrows and joys in once pluralistic regions. Christian demography is rapidly changing, which surprisingly has drawn only modest interest among researchers. Our attention to Muslim-Christian relations is also important because ideologically-based reporting misrepresents one party or the other, be he or

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<sup>252</sup> See also the explanation with two organigrams on the website of the Arab-West Foundation, [http://www.arabwestfoundation.com/?About\\_AWF:Cooperation\\_AWF%2C\\_CIDT\\_and\\_CAWU](http://www.arabwestfoundation.com/?About_AWF:Cooperation_AWF%2C_CIDT_and_CAWU).

she either Muslim or Christian, which adds to tensions and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This reporting should be understood in the widest sense of the word; not only media reporting, but also the reporting of interest groups and activists or statements made by politicians. Too much reporting (but not all!) and claims are motivated by political interests and ideologies. Our purpose is to be as accurate as possible in reporting what we find on the ground and based on this try to understand why events have occurred as they did. Only then others will be able to use this information for the sake of making improvements.

Good critique of current reporting requires much investigative work and this in turn is only possible with support for our work.

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