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Blessed Are They Who Are Persecuted, for Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven:

Religious Resistance among Coptic Christians in Egypt



SIDA Minor Field Study

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During a memorial service for the victims of a terrorist attack that claimed the lives of twenty Coptic Christians, an angry crowd chants, "We will sacrifice our blood and our souls for the Cross!" The attack took place during the midnight mass that marked the Coptic Christians' New Year celebration. The suicide bombers delivered their deadly message shortly before the end of the mass. It is 2011 and the first the first day of the New Year when a Coptic friend and I are watching the memorial service on TV from a living room in Upper Egypt. She is smiling and crying silently. She turns to me and says, "Look! They are not mourning, they are celebrating." What these people were celebrating in this strange intermingling of anger, tears, and pride, was the martyrdom of the departed. My friend later told me that the wife of one of the deceased had worn white clothing instead of black to celebrate that her husband had received the crown of martyrdom and now resided in the Kingdom of Heaven. After an emotional service, where one of the clergy men leading the prayers breaks down in tears, Bishop Youanis gives a standard greeting where he thanks President Mubarak for his condolences. The crowd starts shouting, "No, no, no, we will not thank Mubarak!" My friend looks at me with great surprise and informs me that the crowd's behavior is highly controversial. Many Copts hold negative sentiments towards the regime. However, they are rarely expressed publicly in this way. The memorial service ends as the coffins of the martyrs are carried away.

Why do many Copts celebrate their dead instead of mourning them? Why is there such distrust in the government? What function does religion have in a society that gives birth to these phenomena? These are enigmatic questions that are rooted in deeper questions relating to the ontological perceptions of the believer. How does he or she view their sociopolitical reality? What cosmological ideas are prevalent? Most importantly, how do these ideas interact? The reason why so many Copts celebrate the deaths of these people is related to the sociopolitical conditions of Egypt, their cosmological perceptions, and the function of religion in Egyptian society. The celebration of martyrdom by a large number of Copts is an act of resistance against what they perceive to be an oppressive social system. The purpose of this paper is to understand how the ontology of many Copts influences their resistance against what they perceive as an oppressive social system.

This thesis examines the forms of resistance among Coptic Christian against what many of them perceive as a discriminating social system. In my research, I have examined the dynamic between

the cosmological ideas of many Copts and their perceptions of the sociopolitical conditions of Egypt. Many Copts have been accused of contributing to their own marginalization in society by clinging to their social isolation and excluding themselves from politics (Sidhum in Scott 2010:177). It could seem as though these Copts have conceded to the role as passive victims. Conversely, many Copts generally claim that the tension is getting worse. They perceive that the violence against them is increasing and that they are faced with more hostility. Consequently, either many Copts have indeed conceded to the role as passive victims, or their resistance has taken a form other than a conventional political or social movement. However, Copts are not a monolithic group. There are some Copts who demonstrate and are politically active. The point is that the lack of conventional social resistance seems to be a prominent tendency among the Copts. This is the group of Copts this thesis is representative of. I have examined why there is a lack of conventional social resistance, and if acts of resistance can be found outside the political and social spheres. This thesis answers the following questions:

1. What factors have contributed to the fact that many Copts have chosen not to resist in conventional social and political spheres?

2. Has their resistance taken another form?

In response to my first question, I argue that a large number of Copts perceive that there is a discriminating culture against Christians in important state institutions and within the overall society that has contributed to their choice to withdraw from social and political spheres. Many Copts would argue that this discriminating culture is due to ideas within Islam that are hostile against Christians. Because they perceive that they are being met with hostile and discriminating attitudes many Copts fear that open resistance would have serious repercussions. In response to my second question, I argue that central elements within the Copts' religious life during the last few decades can be regarded as a religious resistance movement. Religion has become a path for resistance because, within the Copts' cosmological perception of reality devotion to God in times of hardship will salvage the soul of the believer or even change the path of history.

In the following section, I describe the research methods used in this study. In section three, I present the theoretical background of my argument. I begin this section by discussing a theory that

argues that forms of resistance can be found outside political spheres. In addition, I illustrate the importance of ontological understandings when studying conflict and tension in religious societies. Section four summarizes the history of the sectarian tension. The fifth section describes the religious social organization of Egypt. I illustrate that religion has a communal function that shapes the nature of the religious tension. In section six, I identify factors that have contributed to many Copts' choice to withdraw from the social and political spheres of society. In section seven, I argue that the Coptic religious revival has central elements to it that can be seen as a religious resistance movement. In addition, I examine central symbols and myths within this movement that communicate ideas of resistance.

2.0 METHOD

My aim in this section is to create a transparency in the research process. I begin by describing the field where I conducted my research. Then I describe the methods used. My final topic in this section is the limitations of my study.

2.1 The field

This research is based on an ethnographic field study in Egypt. The field study lasted for nine weeks and took place at three different sites. Because my informants have requested to remain anonymous, I do not name some of these sites. My primary site was a city in Upper Egypt, where I lived in the household of a clergy member. Living with a clergy member allowed me to quickly gain trust within the Coptic community. The disadvantage with this arrangement was that I mostly spoke with people who were active members of the Church. It is generally understood by Copts that the sectarian tension is worse in Upper Egypt than the rest of the country. Jayson Casper, who works for Arab West Report, an electronic publication that systematically monitors Christian-Muslim relations, claims that the tension is worse in these areas because the state is more absent, the population is poorer, and there is a higher percentage of Christians compared to the rest of Egypt (Casper 2011). The second site was in the Cairo area, where I stayed with a Christian organization. Being there allowed me to interview Coptic Christians with more socially diverse backgrounds than my informants in Upper Egypt, and to learn more about the Coptic Orthodox dogma. The third site was Cairo. While there, I interviewed experts in the field and performed participant observations at religious sites that are important to the Copts. Traditionally, anthropologists tend to stay in one community for an extended period of time to gain in-depth data about the informants' everyday lives. I concede to that my choice not to do so might have lost me some in-depth analysis on the subject; however, I feel that since the religious tension is not geographically isolated to one particular city it would be a very static frame of mind to isolate my research to one city. As the influential anthropologist Clifford Geertz said, "We don't study villages, we study in villages (Geertz in Tucker 1997:13)." In retrospect, I feel that the decision to split my time had many advantages; such as allowing me to see how the sectarian tension affected different social groups and gain more knowledge about the Copts' faith.

2.2 Participant-Observation

Participant-observation is a method where the researcher participates in the life of the people he or she is studying. In my observations, I have studied power relationships, ways of provision, social structures, and dominant ideas governing society. The general idea behind participant observation is to take the role of the learner rather than the teacher because one must understand a cultural reality before one can pose the right scientific questions (Agar 1986:12). The researcher must search for the question as well as the answer. The major strength of the method is that it allows the researcher to learn aspects of a phenomenon that cannot be learned through questionnaires and other more conventional research methods (Malinowski 1922:18). By living with the group that one is studying it is possible to attain more in-depth knowledge about their everyday life (ibid.7). Participant-observation, therefore, allows one to gain a greater insight to the emotions involved in the issue, which is important since human behavior is not strictly governed by our intellects (Agar 1989:43).

The major weakness with my choice to use this method is that I do not speak Arabic. So regrettably, a lot of the information on everyday situations was lost to me. I did not employ any professional translators, but I often had friends translating for me. A problem with not having professional translators is that the translation of friends might not be very reliable. In difference to a professional translator they might be selective and mix their translation with their own interpretations. Another weakness with my choice to use this method is that usually anthropologists stay in their field for a longer time period in order to get in-depth understanding of the situation. Since I only had the opportunity so stay in the field for two months my understanding of the situation is limited. The main weakness of the method itself is that it does not capture the scope of a phenomenon. Participant-observation focuses on qualitative data rather than quantitative. I hope this study gives a fair representation of many Copts experience of their reality in terms of how they perceive the sociopolitical climate and their cosmological understandings.

2.3 Interviews

The purpose of the anthropological interview is to collect data on cultural information, such as life stories, worldviews, customs, and beliefs (Haviland et.al 2008:55). Anthropologists generally use two types of interviews; informal and semi-structured. Informal interviews involve data

collection through conversations and can be conducted anywhere. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher generally uses prepared questions and takes extensive notes (ibid.54). The questions are usually open ended in order to let the informant govern the content of the interview as much as possible. The questions also vary in relevance to who the researcher is interviewing. The researcher may use follow-up questions when something is unclear or of particular interest (Laforest et al 2009:4). For this study, I interviewed two main categories of informants: those with varying degrees of expert knowledge of the Copts situation and those who are members of the Egyptian Christian community. The interviews with the Coptic community were spontaneously organized, and the informants were selected because they spoke English. I occasionally used interpreters, but abandoned this strategy because the interpreters often started to argue with the informant. In all, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with members of the Coptic community, of which most of lasted about forty-five minutes to an hour. The topics were how they perceive their relationship with the Muslim majority, the state, and the importance of certain religious symbols and myths. I had four interviews with experts. These interviews were semi-structured and the questions varied in relevance to the person's particular area of expertise. These experts were Jayson Casper who works with the Arab West Report; Sameh Fawzy, Coptic political writer and researcher with expertise on Muslim-Christian relationships; an expert on Coptic theology wishes to remain anonymous, and another anonymous informant that works for an organization that offers trauma healing to Copts who suffered religious discrimination. In addition to the semi-structured interviews I conducted dozens of unstructured interviews where I asked a certain informant specific questions about a cultural phenomenon. I also gathered information via the many daily encounters with informants.

The major weaknesses in my interview method were language and representation. The problem with language was that the English skills varied between informants, and many of them would have been able to express their point of view more clearly if they had been able to communicate in their native language. To give a more accurate description of the informants' responses, I have left direct quotes unedited. The other weakness in my interview method is representation. Because I mostly spoke to English-speaking informants, the elderly and the peasant class are underrepresented because they generally only speak Arabic. The elderly might have had important information on the development of the religious tension since many of my younger informants claimed that their older relatives felt that the relationship between Muslims and Christians were better when they were

young. In my interviews, I did not conduct any semi-structured interviews with people from the peasant class. One member of the clergy said that the sectarian tension affects the peasants more emotionally because they do not have the intellectual tools to analyze it. Therefore, individuals from the peasant class might have given a less intellectual interpretation of the situation, and perhaps had a more spiritual interpretation of the religious tension. This contrasts with my middle class informants, who although they often identified ideas within Islam as the key issue, often brought up sociopolitical empirical factors contributing to the religious tension such as problem with political underrepresentation.

2.4 Limitations

This study has three major limitations: time period, representation of the Copts, and representation of the Egyptian population. Firstly, in January of 2011, shortly after I left Egypt, thousands of Egyptians protested against Mubarak's regime. This uprising eventually forced Mubarak to resign from office, and is likely to change the power structures within the country. Therefore, the data presented in this study—particularly the data concerning the government—is representative of the time before the demonstrations. A second limitation is representation of the Copts. Since most of my informants were middle class active church members from Upper Egypt, this is the group this thesis is primarily representative of. These are also the people that are of most interest to my study because they have been important in the revival of the Coptic Church. I have little anthropological data on upper class Copts from metropolitan areas. Many upper class Copts have a more secularized lifestyle and are likely to have a less religious interpretation of the problem. The peasant class is also underrepresented in this study. Their perception of the religious tension is likely to be more similar to the middle class perception than the upper class. This is because the secular ideas generally supported by the upper class require an education level that the peasant class does not have. Therefore, they are more likely to understand the tension in religious terms rather than secular. Lastly, I have not interviewed any Muslims for this study, because I suspected it would make it more difficult to gain trust in the Coptic community. Additionally, I had the limited duration of my field study to consider and wanted to maintain focus on the Coptic community. I will, however, briefly describe ideas within political Islam when it is necessary to understand many Copts' ideas on a topic.

3.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

My argument in this paper is influenced by James C. Scott's theories of resistance and Bruce Kapferer's ideas on the dynamics of religion and nationalism. Scott's ideas are essential because his research focuses on non-confrontational forms of resistance. This perspective is important since many Copts are afraid of speaking openly about the religious tension, fearing that confrontational resistance would have serious repercussions. However, his research focuses on mainly on class conflict; therefore, it is not fully applicable to the situation in Egypt as the Coptic community is not a separate economic class. Therefore, Kapferer's explanations of how cosmological principles interact with political ideas are essential to understanding the underlying mechanisms of the sectarian tension.

3.1 Theory on Resistance

Scott criticizes mainstream theories of resistance which claim that acts of opposition must be organized and large enough to threaten the state in order to qualify as resistance. He claims that this definition is influenced by lingering leftist romantic ideals of wars of national liberation (Scott 1985:28). Scott argues that the problem with limiting the scope of resistance to large-scale political movements is that suppressed classes rarely have the luxury of organized resistance. Open resistance of a repressive social order can be dangerous for the individual or even suicidal (ibid. XV). When organized resistance happens, it is usually crushed in its early stages and has catastrophic effects for the individual (ibid.29). Hence, the research on resistance needs to move beyond the scope of rebellion and also focus on the mundane forms of everyday resistance (ibid.29). Scott's thesis is based on his study of class conflict among peasants and landowners in Malaysia. He finds that these peasants practice a type of everyday resistance which includes elements such as foot-dragging, slander, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, and sabotage. The advantage of these forms of resistance is that they require little or no coordination or planning and avoid direct confrontation with authority (ibid.29). Consequently, to understand class conflict, one must study the oppressed class outside the arenas of upper class power, such as financial and political spheres, because everyday forms of resistance are unlikely to be observable there. However, Scott claims that his thesis should not be interpreted as a romanticization of these methods because they rarely achieve change (ibid.30). Rather, his point is that research on

resistance must have a focus that is broader than the effects of the resistance (ibid.331).

In his review of Scott's work, Michael Adas claims that Scott's analysis has strong empirical dimensions and is a convincing argument for social scientists to study what appear to be banal phenomena of class struggle (Adas 1987:151). However, he feels that Scott does not make a satisfactory argument of where the boundary of resistance lies. For example, what separates the ordinary thief from someone who steals with the intention of resisting an oppressive class structure? Adas argues that this lack of distinction risks diluting the analytical categories of resistance (ibid.151).

In this thesis I have used two aspects of Scott's argument: first, that resistance must have a broader definition than the results resistance accomplishes; and second, that one must look for resistance outside conventional social and political forums. For example, Copts have sometimes openly resisted through demonstrations, however, it has often resulted in arrests or even violence. The political climate is so sensitive that if the Copts were to create a separate Coptic political party whoever held a rank in that party would most likely be assassinated (Hannā in Scott 2010:179). The Copts, therefore, face many difficulties with open resistance, and Scott's theory of searching for more non-confrontational forms of resistance is applicable. Due to Adas's critique of Scott's work, my thesis also requires some distinction of what is defined as resistance. The essential problem with Scott's work is that one cannot easily determine the intention of the actor in committing an act such as sabotage. The difference between a common act and an act of resistance is the motivation of the actor and what the action is intended to communicate. Acts such as petty theft and sabotage will not be a part of my analysis because it is very difficult to determine the intention of the actor. Instead, I will mostly analyze the religious celebration of symbols and myths, focusing on what the celebration communicates. The intentions of actors partaking in religious celebrations are more easily grasped than those of a thief, because religious celebrations is a form of communication between believers and spiritual forces; this message can be understood and analyzed. Therefore, my focus is somewhat narrower than Scott's.

3.2 Theory on the Influence of Cosmology in the Formation of Nationalist Ideas

Kapferer writes about the connection between nationalism and cosmology. According to him, nationalism is an ideology created by Western society that has been exported to the world through the expansion of the capitalist system (Kapferer 1988:19). The idea of nationalism was not uncritically adopted by non-Western societies. In these societies, the ideas that constitute nationalist ideology became fused with the cosmology. Nationalism and cosmology cannot be understood separate from each other because together they constitute an ontology (ibid.20). For example, Kapferer studied the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and found that the logic of the conflict is governed by both political and religious reasoning (ibid.29). The Sinhalese population is Buddhists and within this cosmology, one's identity is determined by one's place in the social order (ibid.11). This social order is governed by divine principles of hierarchy (ibid.11). These divine principles have now been infused with the modern nation state. Generally, Buddhist mythology speaks of evil as a force that comes from outside the society and tries to disrupt the divine hierarchy (ibid.22). Furthermore, when evil appears in the myth, it is generally stricken down violently (ibid.62). Consequently, the Sinhalese interprets the Tamil's struggles for independence as an evil force disturbing the divine hierarchy, and therefore, they violently fought the Tamils. Their cosmological understandings strongly influence their perception and behavior in the conflict.

In his review of Kapferer's work Michael D Woost claims that Kapferer poses many of the right questions, but criticizes the assumptions Kapferer makes in his analysis (Woost 1994:913). Primarily that he treats cosmology as a monolithic system and does not take into account individual differences. Furthermore, Woost claims that Kapferer's argument of the connection between cosmology and nationalism obscures other factors influencing the nationalist ideology such as discursive practices on gender and family (ibid.913).

I agree with Woost that Kapferer poses many of the right questions. The questions of how cosmological perceptions influence modern ideas of nationality and how these ideas influence the actors within a particular society are important questions indeed. In my work, I use Kapferer's theory as a tool to understand the importance of cosmology in the Copts' creation of a nationalist identity. Furthermore, the Egyptian state and its negotiation between Islamic ideas of citizenship and secular ideals very clearly illustrate the importance of cosmology in modern state building.

Regarding the critique on Kapferer's works I aim to avoid a monolithic interpretation of the Coptic community; I do not claim that this research is representative for the entire community but for a large scale movement among the Copts. Regarding the importance of other discursive elements in the formation of nationalist ideology, such as ideas of gender and family, I would argue that in Egypt these discourses are highly infused with religion to the extent that it makes them nearly impossible to separate.

3.3. Conclusions

In this study, I analyze forms of resistance that are non-confrontational. In the context of the political climate for the Copts in Egypt, "non-confrontational" means forms of resistance that are exercised outside the political sphere. As I stated in my introduction, I have identified forms of resistance in the religious life of the Copts. I will be analyzing certain religious symbols and myths that communicate resistance against what the Copts perceive as an oppressive social system. Therefore, I have also found Kapferer's ideas on the importance of understanding the ontology of the actors useful. I will analyze how cosmological ideas relate to the formation of nationalist ideologies and how cosmological beliefs influence the behavior of the actors involved.

4.0 HISTORY OF THE SECTARIAN TENSION

The current tension between Muslims and Christians in Egypt is the result of a long and complex history. Here I focus on three main historical periods that can help us understand the current situation of the Copts in Egypt. These periods are: the Muslim Rule until the Colonial Era, the Colonial Era until the Free Officers Revolution, and the Free Officers Revolution until the end of Mubarak's regime.

4.1 The Muslim Rule until the Colonial Era

At the time of the Muslim conquest in 641, Christians constituted about 80% of Egypt's population (Henderson 2005:156). The social status of the Christians would come to change when Muslims came to power (ibid.156). Within Islam, there is a concept, *dhimma*, which refers to non-Muslims living in a Muslim country. The term means the protected people and essentially preaches tolerance against other religions; however, it is a form of hierarchic tolerance (Scott 2010:22). The *dhimma* was linked to the *jihad* theory and the obligation for Muslims to either by force or persuasion convert non-believers to Islam (ibid.17). Jihad would cease if the non-believers either converted to Islam or submitted themselves to their Muslim rulers and paid *jizya*, a poll tax placed on the *dhimma* (ibid.16). It should be noted though that this is a controversial subject and not all researchers agree that jihad was considered an obligation for all Muslims.¹ Partly as a consequence to the *jizya*, many Christians converted; about 300 years later, Christianity was no longer the predominant religion in Egypt (Makari 2000:89). It was then that Muslims started to refer to unconverted Christians as the *Qibt* (from the Greek *Aegyptos*). *Qibt* became *Copt* in English. The original meaning of the word referred to the inhabitants of the Nile valley, but now it has become synonymous with Christian Egyptians (ibid.89). The level of discrimination against the Copts varied under the Muslim rule. The variations depended on whether or not the ruler at the time viewed Egypt as an autonomous regime or a part of the Sunni Empire. When the ruler viewed Egypt as a part of the Sunni Empire the Islamic identity of Egypt became important. The idea of citizenship based on an Islamic identity excluded religious minorities (Zeidan 1999:54).

1. For a contrasting view on the discussion whether jihad was an obligation for all Muslims, and how jihad was interpreted see, Anwar 2007: 23-24; Hulsman 2007; Burslem, Hulsman 2008.

Other factors that have contributed to sectarian tension include economic factors, social crises, and rulers' manipulation of religious sentiments to gain political support (ibid.55).

During the colonial era, France initially occupied Egypt from 1798-1801. After the French occupation, it was claimed as a part of the Ottoman Empire. The final colonial power to claim Egypt was Great Britain in 1882 (Swedish Institute of International Affairs 2010). This long history of sectarian tension and colonial rule makes the situation in Egypt very complex. In the early Islamic state, the Copts were treated as second-class citizens. From early history, their status within Egyptian society has been connected to the state's varying relationships with Islam. Many Copts see the Egyptian history as colored by cycles of Islamic oppression against them.

4.2 The Colonial Era until the Free Officers Revolution

The British were mostly interested in using Egypt for cotton production, neglecting the domestic economy (Swedish Institute of International Affairs 2010). This eventually led to an uprising among the Egyptians headed by two major parties: the nationalist party *al-Hizb al-Watani*, and the *Wafd* party. The nationalist party promoted a liberal Islamic state (Makari 2000:92). The *Wafd* party, which consisted of both Christians and Muslims, wanted a secular state. Despite this fundamental difference, the parties had one thing in common: discontent with their colonial rulers.

Independence was eventually won in 1922; the following year, the constitution of Egypt was written. Compared to the previous constitution, the new one was significantly more secular, and the Copts had a high degree of political participation (Scott 2010:40). However, the constitution was clear on one important point, that Islam would become the official religion of the state (ibid.93). In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded, a party that called for a return to the “pure form of Islam,” where religion and state should be unified (ibid.9). As a consequence, the political debate concerning Islam’s role in the Egyptian state became increasingly conservative. This led to a decline in the secular agenda which had been dominant during the revolution. This decline was reinforced by the weakening of the *Wafd* party, which was having problems with internal strives and disagreements with the monarch. As a result, there was a rise in sectarian tension. This religious political agenda would soon come to change. In 1952, Gamal 'Abd al-Nassir and the Free Officers Revolution overthrew the monarchy and took power (ibid.94). Two things are important to

remember about this time period. First, that when secular ideals were governed by the state, the Copts had a high degree of political participation. Second, the secular ideals of the state became increasingly less important as the support for political Islam grew.

4.3 The Free Officers Revolution until the Fall of Mubarak's Regime

Nassir promoted what he called Arab Socialism; because he himself was a socialist, he did not promote a religious state and had a relatively tolerant view of religion. However, Nassir's ideology had elements of national romantic propaganda, which emphasized the Islamic heritage as a part of the Egyptian identity. This identity was often portrayed in juxtaposition with the Western world (Makari 2000:94). Nassir died in 1970 and was succeeded by his Vice President, Anwar as-Sadat.

Sadat used Islam and right-wing Islamists to legitimize his own rule and fight leftist elements within society, which had come to dominance during Nassir's regime. The defeat by Israel in 1967, after the Six-Day War, made many Egyptians fear that the defeat was a divine punishment for the Egyptians' lack of faith (ibid.95). Sadat took advantage of these sentiments and portrayed himself as the protector of Islam; he was often seen on public television worshipping during the Friday prayers (ibid.95). To further enforce this public image, Sadat changed Egypt's constitution in 1971. His first amendment made principles of shari'a law one of the main sources of legislation. In 1979, he further amended the constitution, making shari'a law *the* main source of legislation. The exact amendment reads, "Islam is the religion of the state, Arabic is its official language, and principles of Islamic laws are the main sources of legislation" (ibid.95). He also frequently attacked the Coptic Orthodox Church in public speeches, claiming that they were conspiring with Egypt's enemies against the state. In addition, he released many of Nassir's political prisoners, who were part of Islamic organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood (Zeidan 1999:57). These factors contributed to an increase in anti-Coptic sentiments and sectarian violence. In June 1981, this culminated in the worse communal violence Egypt has seen until that moment. In al-Zawiya al-Hamra, a Cairo working class district, a Christian man shot at a group of Muslim men who were occupying his land. These men intended to build a mosque there to prevent him from building a church. In response to the shooting, Muslims set fire to Christian houses and barricaded the doors, trapping the residents inside (Hasan 2003:109). In all, 100 people died, 112 were wounded, and 270 were left

homeless (Nisan 2002:149). Sadat's regime blamed the sectarian tension on the Coptic pope and sent him into exile; the regime also incarcerated 170 bishops and priests (Hasan 2003:109). As a consequence of the violence, Sadat arrested over 1500 people, Muslims and Christians (Vatikiotis 91:420). Many Copts claimed that the police were responsible for the extreme degree of violence because they did not intervene until the situation had already spun out of control (Boles 2001:26). Ironically, despite his empowerment of Islamic extremists, Sadat was eventually assassinated by a Muslim extremist because of his political alliances with the West (Hendersson 2005:159).

Hosni Mubarak succeeded Sadat in 1981. The conditions of the Copts improved under Mubarak in comparison to Sadat's rule, because his regime took actions to fight Islamic extremism. In this process, he cooperated with the Islamic moderates to isolate and crush extremist elements. Nevertheless, this cooperation also led to a continuation of the discriminatory trends within the political sphere (Zeidan 1999:57). From the time he took office, he ruled the country under martial law, using the pretext of fighting extremism. Therefore, Mubarak and his closest circle made all the important decisions for the country. The regime was highly totalitarian and the party totally dominated domestic politics (Swedish Institute of International Affairs 2010). The government was widely unpopular among the majority of Egyptians who were tired of the negligence and corruption (Zeidan 199:57). At the time of the research, Mubarak was still in office; he was forced to resign on the 11th of February 2011 due to massive protests against his regime.

It is hard to deny that Christians have been increasingly marginalized in the Egyptian society over the last few decades (Hasan 2003:3). The International Religious Freedom Report of 2010 claims that although the Egyptian constitution provides religious freedom, it is not followed in practice. Christians are discriminated in the labor market and education system (U.S. Department of State 2010). The state does not recognize conversions from Islam to Christianity, and those who convert are often persecuted. The attacks on Christians are becoming more severe and frequent. In January 2010, the director of Egyptians Against Religious Discrimination stated, "I think the sectarian violence, or rather the violent attacks against non-Muslims in Egypt, has been escalating in the past year" (ibid). For example, there have been lethal attacks with many casualties against Coptic Churches during important celebrations two years in a row.

Since the 1950's, Egypt has experienced significant economic and social changes. The country has experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization combined with enormous population

growth (Zeidan 1999:55). These factors have all led to a high unemployment rate and a deterioration of the social conditions for many Egyptians (ibid.55). Political Islam was seen as an oppositional force to Mubarak's regime (ibid.55). In particular, the Muslim Brotherhood has gained increased political importance over the last decades. Since its founding, the Brotherhood has become increasingly liberal and gained much popular support from a wide variety of social classes. Through their sociopolitical programs of aiding the poor, they are seen as addressing problems that the government has not (Scott 2010:53). They were also crucial to the success of the protests that forced Mubarak out of office. It is unclear how the revolution will come to affect the Copts' situation. Though the Copts I have spoken to feel positive about the movement towards a more democratic society, they are concerned about the roles that the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam will have in the new Egyptian state.

4.4 Conclusions

Sectarian tension in Egypt has a long history. The tensions have not been constant because there have been times of peace. The level of sectarian tension has largely been due to whether the contemporary rulers saw Egypt as an Islamic state, or based citizenship on indicators other than religion. In modern times, the Egyptian state has had varying relationships with Islam. After the Revolution of Independence, secular ideals dominated; however, the secular ideals declined and religion is now again a determining factor for citizenship. Furthermore, political Islam is widely supported among the population of Egypt. The religious tension has been further aggravated by the overall decline of Egypt's sociopolitical conditions. Sadat's regime in particular contributed to a drastic increase of sectarian tension. Though the situation became somewhat better during Mubarak's rule, sectarian tension still remains.

5.0 RELIGIOUS IDEAS IN THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF EGYPT

The last part of my contextual presentation describes the social organization of the Coptic community and how it is strongly influenced by religious ideas. One must understand the importance of religious ideas in the social organization of Egypt in order to comprehend why individual disputes between Muslims and Christians sometimes turn into sectarian conflicts. Furthermore, one must understand that it is not only a matter of a division of religious beliefs, it is a matter of a social division. Therefore, I firstly discuss the importance of religion in the formation of kinship lines. Secondly, I discuss the central role the Church plays in the life of the Coptic community.

5.1 The Religious Kin

In Egypt, kinship lines are formed on a religious basis. From the moment a person is born, he or she has a religious identity. For example, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, baptism and confirmation are performed during the same ritual. In comparison to other Christian traditions, such as the protestant, there is no ritual where the believer must confirm one's faith. The institutional world also reflects the deep connection between religion and identity since one's religion is also stated on one's national ID card. Marriages are also formed on a religious basis; both Muslim and Christian family law prohibits Coptic men from marrying Muslim women (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). When I asked a priest why this law exists, he explained that in Coptic Christianity marriage is seen as a relationship between not two but three parts. These parts are man, woman, and God. Therefore, he claimed, a marriage between a Muslim and a Christian would be blasphemy since they do not believe in the same God. The married couple's kin consequently also shares the same religion. In an unorganized economy such as Egypt, the kin serves fundamental economic and social functions. The purpose of cultural traditions in which religious groups only marry each other is to ensure that the religious solidarity in the community is maintained throughout generations (Leach 1976:68). The religious identity is a factor that maintains solidarity within the kin, and furthermore, within the Coptic community. In kinship societies individuals strongly identify oneself with one's kin. Therefore, any attack on the individual is also an attack on the kin. This phenomenon is further strengthened by Egypt's culture of honor. So, an attack on a Christian could be seen as an attack to that individual's kin and the entire Coptic

community. Conversely, a crime committed by a Christian, could result in violent retribution against the Coptic community or Coptic churches.

5.2 The Church's Importance for the Coptic Community

The leadership of the clergy serves an important purpose for the Coptic community. The Coptic community relies on their clergy to lead them because it is believed that they have a deeper understanding of God's will (Meinardus 2006:23). The clergy of the Coptic Orthodox Church is highly revered by their congregation. The priests are generally chosen for their great devotion and trust within their community. Becoming a priest is considered a great responsibility towards one's community because a priest is expected to devote his life to the task. When Copts have a social encounter with a clergy member they kiss his hand—the same sign of respect they give relics and icons. Furthermore, the clergy's guidance is also sought in matters that are not religious. The Coptic Orthodox confession differs from the Catholic because its emphasis is rather on life guidance than repentance. Copts seek the wisdom of their priest to advise them in difficult decisions. For example, many women seek advice from their priest about whether they should marry a suitor. The guidance of the clergy is not only sought by individuals; Copts also rely on them to lead the community as a whole. During the recent decades, the clergy led by Pope Shenouda has been an important political representative for the community. I observed the importance of this function during an incident that occurred after the Christmas Mass in the city where I stayed. At the time, January 2011, there was a threat from a terrorist network directed at all the Coptic churches in Egypt. This threat had been preceded by a terrorist the attack against a church in Alexandria. After the service ended, the young men of the congregation formed a human shield around the clergy in order to protect them from potential attackers. When I asked one of my informants why they would choose to do this she responded, "We all feel that we can die, but we can't lose them. It's like you can die but your children can't. They are our fathers and we are their children, but in some aspects it's the other way around." Conclusively, the Copt's social system is dependent on the clergy to lead them both as individuals and as a community.

The Coptic Church also has important social functions. In addition to their religious role, the Church often provides other social services. This is particularly true in the poorer villages in Upper Egypt, where the state is largely absent and the church might be the only social gathering place.

One priest who had built a church in a poor village in Upper Egypt said the following when I spoke to him in November of 2011:

"I started from zero, but I had a vision of this beautiful church. Before I came there was no spiritual people, no church, and no servants [of God]. This was empty land. Because I told you that Christian people in Egypt are unhappy without a priest and a church. Maybe it is less important to people in Cairo because they have clubs and other places to go to, but in Upper Egypt, the church is everything. When the church is open, the people go outside to come here. The church is a gym, it teaches the girls handicraft, and it offers education. Before the church, people here were lost. . . . They were not happy. You could see it in their eyes."

The same church also offered help to the poor, daycare, and recreational activities; it is soon to offer health care to those who could not afford such services. This phenomenon is not isolated to this particular church—many Coptic churches provide similar services. In conclusion, the Church provides the Coptic community with many services that in wealthier societies generally are provided by the state. The fact that the Church has so many important social functions, puts another perspective on the difficulties Copts face when building churches. The legal problems Copts have with building churches will be further described in the following chapter.

The importance of the Church has increased during the last decades as the social segregation in society between religious groups has widened. It should be noted that the segregation is social, and not economic or demographic. Most of my informants said that they interacted with Muslims professionally, but not privately, because the religious tension was too difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, some of my informants also claimed that they had Muslim friends so there are individual differences. The social segregation is worse in poorer rural areas than metropolitan areas. Munīr Fakhrī ‘Abd al-Nūr, secretary general of the liberal Wafd party, says that for most of Egyptian society:

“There is a major cut and break in the texture. . . . Muslims and Copts are not mixing together anymore. . . . They don’t mix in my constituency. I can see that I can feel that. I go and sit in the cafes in the small streets of the very, very popular quarter. There are no Copts. I go to the churches, you find all the Copts there where they do everything (Munīr Fakhrī ‘Abd al-Nūr in Scott 2010:71).”

The clergy has been accused of encouraging this segregationist behavior, in particular the political retreat, since within Coptic Christianity it is seen as a sign of godliness to withdraw from society (Scott 2010:77). When I asked a member of the clergy about these accusations, he felt that these accusations were unjust and that the segregation of the Coptic community has to do with fear. He claimed that people go where they feel safe; if the Coptic young men would feel safe going to the football field, they would do so rather than play in narrow back alleys. This fear is also something that became very evident in my interviews. For example, one of my informants claimed that if he were to invite a Muslim to his home the Muslim would take advantage of the situation by finding out ways to harm him and his family. In conclusion, the perceived threat from the Muslim community has increased the importance of the solidarity within the Coptic community and the Church's political and social functions.

5.3 Conclusions

Social organization in Egypt is part of a religious logic. Generally, the religious communities marry among themselves; in a kinship-structured society, this constitutes a significant social divide. The Copts consider marriage a divine contract, and therefore, the belief in God is present in fundamental social structures. The commitment to their God is also evident in the importance the Coptic community places on the leadership of their clergy. The Church also has many social functions, which consequently constitutes a religious logic in the social organization. These social functions have become more important as the Coptic community has become increasingly segregated in Egypt. What is important to remember is: first that this divide exists; second, that Egypt is a highly religious society where difference in the ideas of what constitutes the ultimate truth, are important enough to create this divide in society. This complex interaction between the individual, the kin, the Church, and religious beliefs is the reason individual disputes sometimes escalate into violent clashes. Within Egyptian culture, an attack on the individual can be interpreted as an attack on the entire religious community and the religious beliefs it embodies.

6.0 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE COPTS' SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION

In this section, I examine what factors have contributed to many Copts choice not to resist in conventional social and political spheres. I illustrate that many Copts claim that they are being denied political participation, rather than choosing not to participate. Furthermore, they experience that they are systematically being discriminated by the security apparatus and the juridical system. They believe that the discriminating culture within these central state branches derives from the main problem, which they perceive to be Islam itself. They think that there are ideas within Islam that are hostile to Christianity. Therefore, they have not chosen these forums of resistance. Furthermore, they experience that they are faced with discriminating and sometimes even hostile attitudes from the majority of the Muslim community. They experience these attitudes as threatening; as a result, they have chosen to withdraw from many spheres of society. Furthermore, the fear of violent retribution by extremist Islamists is an important reason why many Copts generally do not resist in confrontational ways. The final factor contributing to many Copts inability to resist through conventional social and political spheres is an internal disintegration of their community caused by the many conversions to Islam and the mass migration of Copts from Egypt. Therefore, this section examines many Copts' perception of the state, the Muslim community, and the disintegration of the Coptic community.

6.1 Views on the State

I will now discuss the three parts of the state that many Copts most often identify as problematic: the government, the security forces, and the juridical system.

6.1.1 The Government

In my interviews, I found that many Copts feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens. They believe that they are being discriminated because they are not given proportional representation. In comparison to the demography of Egypt, the Copts are underrepresented in the parliament, holding only 2% of the seats (International Report on Religious Freedom, US Department of State 2010). The degree to which they are underrepresented is unknown since the exact percentage of Copts in the Egyptian population is disputed. The Egyptian statistical office,

CAMPAS, computed that the Copts make up around 6% of the population (Hulsman 2008). On the other hand, the Coptic Orthodox Church estimates that Copts account for 12-18% of the population (Scott 2010:8). According to the Religious Freedom report, however, Copts are estimated to make up about 8-12% percent of the population (U.S. Department of State 2010). Regardless of which estimate is correct, the Copts are clearly underrepresented. Since Nassir's regime, many Copts would claim that they have been denied positions of power, except for a few symbolic nominations. According to them, this has not been an official policy, but has been prevalent in the political culture of Egypt (Zeidan 1999:58). One of my informants said, "In general, they [the government] say we are together and have the same rights, but in fact it is not like this. In fact, the big positions are for them [Muslims]." Furthermore, reserving positions of power for Muslims has been part of Egypt's history long before Nassir and is rooted in history; there has been a tendency in the Middle East to base citizenship on religious rather than geographical borders (Kumaraswamy 2006:64). This is because there is an idea in classical Islamic jurisprudence that non-Muslims should not be in a position in society where they have power over a Muslim (Scott 2010:108). This idea comes from a Qur'anic verse, which states, "And never will Allah grant to the Un-believers a way to triumph over the Believers (sura 4:141)." However, it should be noted that all supporters of Political Islam do not support these ideas; rather, they argue that non-Muslims should have the right to be politically active (Scott 2010:10). Nevertheless, the idea that non-Muslims should not hold power positions in society remains in the political culture of Egypt and is often used to discredit Coptic political candidates. For example, when Coptic politician Munīr Fakhīr 'Abd al-Nūr ran for office in 1995 and 2000, his opponent distributed flyers with Qur'anic verses as arguments against a Christian as a political candidate (ibid.108).

Cornelis Hulsman, editor in chief for the Arab West Report, states that there are other reasons for the Copts political underrepresentation. For example, few Copts are active in political parties, because they believe they will be discriminated against in these parties. According to Hulsman this can become a form of self-fulfilling prophecy; a small number of Copts in Egyptian political parties makes it difficult for Copts to be nominated for a position on the electoral list. Another reason he mentions for why few Copts are elected is that the electoral system divides Egypt into electoral districts. There are very few electoral districts where Copts form a majority; therefore, it becomes

difficult for Coptic candidates to get elected (Hulsman 2011). In conclusion, Copts seem to be underrepresented in the parliament partly because of an implicit discriminatory policy based on religious beliefs. The political underrepresentation is further complicated by the electoral system, which makes it difficult for minority candidates to get elected. Because of this, many Copts generally feel that they are being excluded from political participation

In my interviews, it became clear that many Copts believe that the government cared more about maintaining its own power than protecting its people. This neglect showed itself partly in the government's perceived unwillingness to stop sectarian strife and prosecute perpetrators of sectarian violence, and partly in the occasional manipulation of sectarian elements when it suited its interests. They think that the government denies that the Copts are being persecuted within Egypt, and therefore, does not deal with the problem. For example one informant said the following:

The current government has a strong relationship to Islam, but the way that they explain this relationship is more wise. Sadat was very aggressive and incarcerated bishops and the Pope. He wanted to make shari'a law the only law. The current government prefers their own goods before the goods of Islam. They play with Islamism when it suits them and secular ideas when that fits their purpose. I believe as many Christian believe that the government is behind violence between Christians and Muslims on regular occasions to distract from their own incompetence, sometimes by encouraging violence, sometimes by not addressing violent attacks.

It should be noted, however, that the government has a program against extremism. After several bloody attacks on tourists and government officials, Mubarak's regime initiated a series of clampdowns against extremist elements in society. Nevertheless, many Copts view this initiative with distrust since similar attacks on them have been ignored (Zeidan 1999:57). This distrust is further strengthened because the government has done little to change the discriminatory policies against Copts within the state institutions. In conclusion, the Coptic community has little trust in the sincerity of the Egyptian state's efforts to protect the Christians. This distrust is another factor contributing to many Copts' unwillingness to turn to politics for help in resisting what they perceive as an oppressive social system.

6.1.2 The Juridical System

In Egypt, the principles of shari'a law are the main source of legislation (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). It should be noted though that these are *principles* of the law; Egypt's legislation is, therefore, not comparable to for example Iran's fundamentalist application of the law. According to Lombardi, a researcher of Islamic law, the Egyptian law is consistent with liberal constitutionalism. He claims that the Supreme Court has an overall modernist view on shari'a; however, it also avoids taking a clear position on the more controversial issues of legal theory (Lombardi in Scott 2010:59). There have also been legal cases conflicting with this overall modernist position. For example, Nasr Abū Zayd, a Muslim intellectual, was forcibly divorced from his wife on the grounds that his view on the Qur'an had rendered him an apostate (Scott 2010:59). Therefore, the extent to which Egypt is a religious state is an issue of debate. The majority of Egyptians support the influence of shari'a law (ibid.6). My informants from the Coptic community, however, were against shari'a, since they feel that Islamic law is biased towards favoring Muslim interests.

Family law is a complex part of the Egyptian law. The Egyptian legislation states, "The personal status law of all Egyptians, regardless of their religion, is governed by Islamic law." After the abolition of the shari'a and *milli* courts (the courts of the religious minorities) in 1955, non-Muslims kept the right to apply non-Muslim personal status law in family disputes. The state recognizes "three heavenly religions": Islam, Christianity, and Judaism (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). When there are inter-sectarian disputes between spouses of different Christian denominations it also falls under shari'a law (Scott 2010:86). One consequence of this is that the law does not recognize the marriage between a Muslim woman and a Christian man. Since Egypt is a very patriarchal society, the marriage would require a Muslim woman to subordinate herself to a Christian man; according to shari'a, Muslims should not subordinate themselves to a non-Muslim (ibid.23). Another consequence is that a Christian child of a parent who converts to Islam automatically is considered Muslim. If only one of the parents converts, custody of the child is generally given to the Muslim parent (ibid.87). If the child disputes this forced conversion in the courts his or her religious identity as Christian is not acknowledged (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). This type of conversion concerns children up to 18 years of age there have been claims that the age limit

has been lower, but legal practice has shown that the age limit is 18 (Hulsman 2003). One informant told me a story about a woman he knew. Her father had converted when she was a teenager so she was legally considered Muslim. This woman is now middle aged and has never viewed herself as Muslim, but the state refuses to provide her with papers supporting her Christian identity. Conclusively, when viewing the jurisprudence of inter-religious disputes there seems to be a bias within the law toward favoring Muslims.

These religious qualities of the law also extend beyond shari'a. For example, an Ottoman decree from 1856 which places restrictions on building churches is still partly in effect. According to this decree, the construction of a church required written permission from the head of the state, first the sultan, later being the president. This law was changed in 2005, but human rights groups report that some local officials refuse to permit new churches to be built without a supporting document that is practically impossible to obtain; this document is a presidential decree authorizing the existence of a church that has been established during the monarchic era (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). One informant commented:

It [The state] takes the shape of the civil state. They say it is civil, it is the secular, but the core is very religious. It takes form in the constitutions itself, the main source of the law. Normally, building a church should go to the civil city council, but suddenly we have to go to state security. We have to have permission from the president himself, even if we are repairing a toilet.

Another religious quality of the law is that the judicial system does not acknowledge conversions from Islam to Christianity. There are no statutory prohibitions against conversion, but since local officials refuses to recognize these conversions legally it constitutes a prohibition in practice (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010).

One serious problem with the judicial system and its role in the religious tension is the unwillingness to sentence perpetrators of sectarian violence (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). For example, in 2000, a dispute in al-Kosheh between a Coptic merchant and a Muslim client escalated into sectarian violence. Twenty Copts and one Muslim died. The Coptic community was outraged when the court did not find any of the ninety-six defendants guilty of murder (Scott 2010:74). The court's justification for this verdict was a lack of evidence to convict a single defendant, since the murders were committed by a mob (Hulsman 2001). The rage of the Coptic community was only partly settled in 2003, when two defendants

were finally found guilty (Scott 2010:74). The International Report on Religious freedom states that this unwillingness to punish perpetrators of violence against Copts has created a culture of impunity (U.S. Department of State 2010). In conclusion, many Copts perceive that the judicial system contributes to the Christians status as second-class citizens. Furthermore, Copts perceive that the court favors Muslims interests. Because the Coptic community to have low confidence in the judicial system it makes them unwilling turn to the justice system for support in inter-religious conflicts.

6.1.3 The Security Apparatus

During my research, many Copts claimed that they are being discriminated by the security apparatus, which they perceive as an Islamic institution. In principle, the security apparatus is an extension of the government but can be discussed as an independent category, because, in contrast to the government, it mobilizes quickly when conflicts appear (Casper 2010:8). Furthermore, the police and military become a target for frustration since they are the visible manifestation of the state in people's everyday life. Many Copts feel that they are underrepresented in both the police force and military. Furthermore, the admissions for Christians to the police and military academies are believed to be restricted (Zeidan 199:58). To what extent the Copts are discriminated within the security apparatus is hard to say, since the exact percentage they make up of the population is disputed. In addition, there are hardly any Copts in the higher ranks within the security apparatus (Scott 2010:83). Therefore, many Copts regard it as an Islamic institution. One informant said:

Most of them [the police and military] are Muslims and that is discrimination in itself. They do not choose Christians to an extent which would fairly represent them. A lot of the government is corrupt and discriminating, and therefore, the police act in that way. No Christians expect the police to help them.

One of the reasons Christians believe they are being discriminated by the security forces is the police's conduct when handling illegal churches. One priest I spoke to who had founded an illegal church claimed that the police harassed him by regularly calling him into the police station to answer random questions. The same man also told a story of how a police officer had made phone calls to several Muslim men in the village encouraging them to form a riot against the illegal church. However, the riot never occurred and one of these Muslim men whom were a friend of the

priest had informed him of what the police officer had done. Other cases of the security forces persecuting Christians have been documented by the International Religious Freedom Report, which claims that the police have repeatedly surveilled and harassed suspected converts from Islam to Christianity (U.S. Department of State 2010).

Many Copts think that the security apparatus ignores the religious tension. Many Copts tell stories of the police either appearing unreasonably late at scenes of conflict, or standing by at the scene of a conflict without intervening. One informant claimed:

What I saw before about many events that happen in Egypt, the police every time came late. Only to say that "we are here," but they came late, very, very late. Like what happened in Naga Hammadi [sectarian violence initiated by an extremist who killed six Copts after their Christmas Mass in 2010]. They came after all the houses were burned. The phone wires were cut, so that they can say "we did not know." But the imam announced before in the Mosque that "we will attack the Christian people." So they must have known.

Similar stories were spread after the terrorist attack in Alexandria. According to Coptic sources, the soldiers assigned to guard the church left their post shortly before the explosion. If they had not left, they would have been within the blast range of the explosion. Regardless if this is what actually happened these stories show that many Copts have a very low confidence level in the security apparatus. Two of my informants—independently from each other—said as we were walking by the soldiers guarding the church, "These are the same people who are trying to kill us." Naturally, this creates a feeling of insecurity within the Coptic community. In conclusion, many Copts do not see the state security apparatus as a solution to their problem; rather, they perceive it to be a part of the problem. This lack of confidence in the security apparatus further aggravates the problem with the government's perceived unwillingness and inability to protect them from extremist elements within society.

6.2 Views on Muslims

Many Copts have a dualistic view on the Muslim population, and they identify two different kinds of Islam: a more moderate version and an aggressive version. Furthermore, many feel that the majority of Muslims follow the more aggressive version. In "both versions of Islam," there seems to be dissociation between being Muslim and committing acts of kindness. The perceived aggression

from the Muslim majority is the main reason why Copts have withdrawn from the social spheres of society. Therefore, I will present these two opposite views.

6.2.1 Moderate Islam

Most of the Christians I have spoken to do not feel that all Muslims are hostile towards them. However, there is a perception among many Christians that Muslims who treat them well are far from their religion. One informant said: "The really Muslim people who are very close to his faith and is dealing with the verse of the Qur'an, he will treat you bad. If he is far away from his faith he will treat you good." To be "far away from Islam" can mean that the person has a more secular lifestyle. However, when a Muslim is described as being far from his or her religion the person is often perceived as being closer to Christianity. An additional example can be seen in one informant's answer to the question of whether she felt that all Muslims treated her badly or if it were only some Muslims, "Most of them not good. In the school we have Muslims, but they have Christian behaviors." When I asked this woman to clarify what she meant by "Christian behavior," she replied, "We must look to the God all the time. If anyone wants help we give him help." Hence, there is a dissociation between being Muslim and committing acts of kindness. There is a dualistic perception where Islam is deeply associated with immoral behavior and Christianity with moral righteousness. In conclusion, most Christians feel that not all Muslim individuals are aggressive towards Christians; however, they still strongly associate Islam with hostility.

6.2.2 Aggressive Islam

The majority of the Christians I have spoken to feel that the major factor contributing to the escalation of the religious tension is the rise of an aggressive interpretation of Islam in Egypt. They perceive that most Muslims treat them with hostility. Many Copts claim that there has been a development during the last four or five decades during which conservative interpretation of Islam has become increasingly influential in Egypt. Some of my more educated informants claimed that this development was due to the many Egyptian men who went to work in the Gulf countries. Most of them went to Saudi Arabia, which lacks religious pluralism and has more conservative interpretations of Islam. These workers then brought these conservative ideas of Islam to Egypt. Sameh Fawzy, an expert on Muslim-Christian relationships, thinks that the main problem is not

religion; however, he agrees that the returning guest workers from Saudi Arabia contributed to the rise of a more conservative form of Islam. He adds that this conservative interpretation became so influential because the returning workers with their newly acquired wealth constituted the new ascending class in Egypt. He argues that the descending classes generally tend to mimic the culture of the rising classes in various ways, such as dress code, language, and social lifestyle (Fawzy 2010). One can draw the conclusion that political Islam is widely supported in contemporary Egypt (Scott 2010:6). However, is not a matter of two types of Muslims either following moderate or extreme Islam; we are rather speaking of a spectrum. Neither is it a matter of which interpretation is the “true Islam,” they are different forms of Islam. As political Islam has become more popular, it has also become more diversified (ibid.4). For example, take the Muslim Brotherhood: although the organization has a history of extremism and still has members who support these ideas, the majority of the followers now are more open to diversity (ibid.53). Nevertheless, during the second half of the century the Copts faced more personal and collective discrimination. In addition, the violence against them increased (International Report on Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State 2010). This indicates the growth of more hostile ideas as well.

Most of my informants felt that the religious tension mostly affects them personally in the form of discrimination in everyday situations. They feel that when the discrimination happens, it is often not explicitly said to be because of religion, but that it is disguised. Many feel that they are being discriminated against in public transportation. Some tuk-tuk, taxi, and bus drivers will not stop for them. Women can be identified as Christians in public, because many of them does not cover their hair and tend to wear more westernized clothing. Men can be identified as Christians through religious tattoos, by wearing religious symbols, or by wearing religious garments such as the priests robe. Other stories I have heard about this disguised discrimination is that some vendors will refuse to sell their merchandise to Christians. The vendors do not explicitly name this as the reason, but simply tell them to leave. Many Copts claim that they are also discriminated within the education system, which many of my younger informants perceived as a serious problem. For example, the universities accept a lower percentage of Christians than they are believed to make up of the population (Zeidan 1999:58). Another form of this everyday discrimination that many Copts frequently speak of is discrimination in the labor market, which is perceived as a quite serious matter since the unemployment level is high. One informant stated, "When you are searching for a

new job, if you know someone they can solve it under the table, but if you do not you probably will not get it. It is not easy for a Christian to find a job." Many Copts claim that they have a more difficult time being hired for government jobs. The International Report on Religious Freedom also supports this claim and critiques the government on this point, stating that the conduct of the government has a modeling effect on society, and therefore, causes further entrenchment between the religious groups (U.S. Department of State 2010). One Coptic woman told me about when she had an appointment to meet with the head of the faculty in the school where she worked. When she showed up to the meeting without wearing a veil she was asked to leave immediately.

The veil is a reason why many Christian women face difficulties, since it is a visible manifestation of their religious identity. Because many Christian women do not wear veils and have more westernized clothes, they may suffer sexual harassment in public places. They may get sexual comments yelled after them, stones thrown at them, or demeaning religious comments such as calling them unbelievers or saying that they will go to hell. One informant told the following story:

I was at a funeral with a girl whose father died. It was around the time when school was finished so we met some primary school boys that started throwing stones. We said to them: "stop!" Then a Muslim woman came by and said "it is because of what you are wearing." I mean we came from a funeral; we did not wear anything very tight or so.

Sexual harassment can also happen to Muslim women, of course; however, there is a common perception among Christian women that it happens more frequently to them because they are not veiled. It could be argued that this has more to do with normative ideas of female sexuality and women's clothing than religion; however, since these normative ideas are highly influenced by religion these cases of sexual harassment are a form of religious discrimination.

Another form of religious hostility that Christians face on a regular basis is hostile preaching by certain Muslim preachers, *imams*, during the Friday prayers. For Muslim Friday prayers, loudspeakers on the top of the minarets are used, which creates a powerful and very public religious statement. In the city where I stayed, my informants claimed that there were a couple of imams who repeatedly aggressively preached against Christians. They told me that it was common to hear demeaning sermons about the Christian dogma, including accusations of being polytheistic and

insulting comments about Christian saints or Jesus. The sermons sometimes referred to the Christians with demeaning names such as the following: “dogs,” which are considered very unclean animals in Arabic culture; *kafir* (meaning unbeliever), which is a demeaning term since a person without faith is considered a bad person in Middle Eastern culture; and “unclean,” contrasting that term with the Islamic pursuit of cleanliness and purity. Other times, the messages were said to be very violent, threatening to kill Christians, their Pope, and their bishops.

Many Copts perceive Islam as diabolical. One important reason for this perception is that they see certain Qur'anic verses are hostile towards Christians. There are some verses in the Qur'an that speaks of the relationship between Christians and Muslims. One of the most controversial ones is: “Oh ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors; they are but friends and protectors to each other because they are the enemies of Islam and its people (sura 5:51).” The more radical interpretation of this verse is that Muslims should not have social relationships with non-Muslims. Interpretations that are more moderate claim that the sura only refers to Jews and Christians, who oppose Islam and threaten the Islamic community (Scott 2010:137). Regardless of the possible interpretations of the Qur'an, since verses like this one have been used by spokesmen of aggressive interpretations of Islam, the Qur'anic verses are perceived as very threatening by many Copts. One of my informants, an employee of an organization that offers trauma healing to Copts who suffered religious discrimination, claimed that many Copts believe that Muhammad was inspired by the devil when he wrote the Qur'anic verses; hence, everything Islamic is demonic to them. Furthermore, the main reason Islam is perceived as diabolical is the violent methods associated with jihad. One informant said the following: "The act of killing itself is accompanied with verses from the Qur'an, as if they are presenting a sacrifice for their God. Human beings become a sacrifice for their God." Another informant I spoke to felt that a God that speaks of killing is not a true God. She perceived that these violent sermons are the words of Satan. I also met a group of young girls who had written a song in which the lyrics spoke of terrorists as devils who had given the Christians "the evil eye," and how they had to drive out this evil. In a worldview in which one believes in God and the Devil as the ultimate forces of good and evil, it is a quite logical conclusion to perceive something that is threatening to one's life and religion as evil. This perception also has implications for how the sectarian tension is perceived, because the problem is not only about social factors, such as fair political representation, but it is

also perceived as a conflict between ultimate truths. In conclusion, many Copts experience an intolerant and discriminating attitude from the majority of the Muslim population. Because these intolerant attitudes sometimes take on extreme and violent forms, this discrimination is perceived as very threatening. Due to the strong belief in ultimate spiritual forces of good and evil, this threat is often interpreted in religious terms. As I clarified in part five, many Copts claim that this perceived threat from the Muslim community is the main reason for the Copts' social withdrawal from society.

6.3 The Disintegration of the Coptic Community

Many Copts perceive two main problems caused by the religious tension: first, that they are being treated with hostility due to aggressive interpretations of Islam; and second, internal decline and fragmentation of the Coptic community. The Coptic community is in crisis because of the demographic decline. Cornelis Hulsman, editor-in-chief of the Arab West Report, claims that the percentage of Copts in the population is lower than what is generally assumed. He claims that because of frequent conversions, lower birthrates, and large-scale migration, the Copts now make up as little as five or six percent of the population (Hulsman in Scott 2010:8). In particular, the problems with conversions and migration have caused a form of anxiety over the future existence of the Coptic community in Egypt. I will now describe the Copts' view on these two phenomena.

In Egypt, conversions are a very sensitive issue and a source of much sectarian violence. This is largely due to Egypt's culture of honor. For example, recently, Egypt's Copts have met a lot of rage from fundamentalist groups in the Middle East because of a controversy of conversion. This controversy has been responded to with terror attacks against churches in Iraq and Egypt. One version of the story is that the wives of two priests left their families and converted to Islam; they were then forcibly brought back by the Coptic Church and were held against their will within a monastery. The other version of the story is that these women were deceived or forced to convert to Islam and then voluntarily returned to the Coptic community. This becomes such a sensitive topic because the issue is larger than the personal religious preferences of these women. Due to the culture of honor, their conversion brings shame to their family, their kin, and the Church. Furthermore, the aggression with which this was met reflects an issue larger than the issue with these women: it is about Islam itself. Wives of priests are expected to hold more strictly to the

Christian cultural customs than other congregation members, and therefore, have a high social status. Because of this status the shame of losing them to Islam would be much greater. Conversely, some Muslims would rejoice in their conversion because of the shame it would cause the Christian community (Jabrah Ayyub Khalil, Hulsman 2004).

When talking to Copts about these issues, it is very clear that conversions are a sensitive topic. Copts tell many stories of conversion that often include elements of deception, violence, or sexually predatory Muslims. For example, I heard a story about a teenage girl who was invited home by her Muslim classmate. When the girls walked in the door, the Muslim girl's brothers were there and threatened to rape the Christian girl. Rape has severe social consequences since a woman is expected to be a virgin at marriage. Consequently, a raped woman can be left with the choice of remaining unmarried, and therefore, without a social status, or potentially marrying her rapist. In this case, marrying her rapist would probably also include converting. The girl then asked if she could just clean herself in the bathroom quickly, which her captives agreed that she could do. She then walked into the bathroom and took her own life by throwing herself through the bathroom window. Suicide is generally not condoned within Christianity, but in this particular story, the girl is considered a martyr because she was willing to die rather than defile her honor. Some of these stories might be true; several allegations of forced conversion have been documented (Scott 2010:76). However, the main point of telling these stories is not to evaluate the truth content of them since it is an impossible task. Rather, I see them a symptom of anxiety caused by a perceived threat to one's community. Converts are problematic in all social constellations because it questions the legitimacy of the group. Portraying the conversions as often being forced deals with the problem of the convert. Many Copts, however, voluntarily convert, often because of reasons that are not primarily religious. It can be a way to be granted a divorce, since Muslim family law allows divorces and Christian law does not (Scott 2010:1). Furthermore, it is the easiest way for a girl to escape her family (ibid.77). Social and economic pressure also contributes to the high conversion rate (ibid.1). Conclusively, conversions are a problem for the Coptic community. The forced dimension of these stories are partly a way to deal with that members of their community makes strategic choices about something as deep as religion—the very fundament of their community's solidarity.

Another important reason for the decrease of the Coptic population is migration. In general, people leave Egypt because of economic hardship and to escape discrimination and violence (Meinardus 2006:49). The problem of unemployment is further exacerbated for the Christians because they experience that they are discriminated in the labor market. One of my informants claimed that the employer discrimination can be as blunt as to advertise in print that they only are seeking Muslim applicants. The mass emigration among the Copts started during the reign of Sadat. The desire to leave Egypt is a noticeable phenomenon, particularly among young people. However, they speak about lacking opportunities in Egypt rather than a longing for the other country. One type of migration is that many Copts have moved to the United States, Canada, and Europe (Meinardus 2006:49). The other type is that many Coptic men go to the Persian Gulf countries to work. These men generally do not intend to settle there, but see it as a step toward earning enough money to migrate to the West. One informant claimed, "Most of the people that work in Kuwait, try to go from Kuwait to America. They take it as a step, and then they go out. It is breaking lots of family ties, and friendships. Migration in general is not an easy step, but it is happening due to deeper strong pressure." These two types of migration weaken the Coptic community within Egypt in different ways. One informant commented on the migration to the West:

It affects us in two ways. The first way is that the percentage [of Copts within the population] is falling down. Number and percentage has to be reasonable because the Coptic Christian community is the largest Christian community in the Middle East. To have this silent exodus changes the ratio. It changes the demography. The second effect it has created is that many of the good ones—the educated with money—are the ones that are ready to leave. You take the cream of society and take them away. What is left is the poorer less educated, which are an easier target and they are easily pushed down. It becomes a serious matter. Many people want to leave; it has been a continuous pressure for a few decades.

It is difficult to obtain visas for residency in Europe and North America and those who are eligible for citizenship are generally the elite of the Coptic community. The migration to the Gulf also weakens the Coptic community. The men who work in the Gulf are only able to return home a few weeks a year, though their families stay in Egypt. It has been argued that the absence of men would cause an emancipation of women (Khafagy 1984:19). In contrast, I would argue that it has created a situation where many "single" mothers are left alone to deal with a highly patriarchal society. To

some extent, they are disempowered by the absence of their husband. Women speak about the trauma of their family being leaderless, of their children crying when their father comes home because he is a stranger to them, and the feeling of being left alone with the burden of raising a family. The migration is such a large phenomenon that several people fear that eventually there will be no Christians left in Egypt. Some informants even claimed that they believe the government neglects the situation of the Copts in a conscious strategy to make all the Christians leave through a mass exodus. The migration is breaking the traditional bonds of the community. The economic kinship ties are still intact, but there is an emotional and sociopolitical crisis occurring, which further weakens the Coptic community's ability to resist through conventional sociopolitical means. To illustrate this, one informant described what he felt needed to happen for the situation to improve for the Coptic community.

Any guy my age [The informant was in his twenties] goes to the Gulf, Europe or America. Then he comes back a few weeks for his visa, and then works a year in Europe. He is not working for his country. He creates nothing here, no heritage. I know these are strange words. I think we need more stable projects. If they would stay here we could form stronger groups. All the statistics of Christians are not true. Between a hundred guys they say there are seven Christians. This gives them a political power and they can tell us what to do. People would be better organized if they stayed here.

The disintegration of the Coptic community is perceived as a severe problem. In a society where kinship lines are fundamental and the social organization is based on a religious classification, this demographic decline further weakens the Copts' ability to resist through conventional social and political forums.

6.4 Conclusions

Many Copts see themselves as discriminated by the state, which they feel favors Muslims. They see the state as an Islamic institution, and they believe that this religious bias transfers to the practice of important state branches. Many Copts claim that the government is mostly interested in maintaining its own power, but manipulated Islamic interests when it is suited to its interests. Furthermore, they view the security forces with much suspicion because they doubt their sincerity in protecting Copts. The juridical system is also viewed as having an Islamic bias, since the main source of legislation is principles of shari'a law. In addition, many Copts believe that this religious

bias also transfers to the education system and government jobs. There seems to be a problem with the Egyptian state's treatment of religious minorities. This is due to religious reasoning influencing important branches of state, which is derived from an intellectual tradition within political Islam. These factors all contribute to a Coptic political withdrawal from society and an inability to use conventional political and juridical power spheres to resist what they perceive as an oppressive social system.

Many Copts also think the majority of the Muslim population has hostile ideas towards them. They believe this problem is getting worse. Most Copts would agree that not all Muslims treat them with hostility, but they still strongly associate Islam with aggressive ideas towards them. They feel that there exist ideas fundamental to Islam that are against Christians. For many Copts, this perceived threat from Islam also takes on a religious dimension, since they perceive parts of Islam as diabolic, in particular the Islamic concept of jihad. One can say that political Islam has gained much support in Egypt, though the number of followers that have hostile ideas against Christians is hard to say. Nevertheless, since the second half of the century there has been increased violence and a more discriminating social climate for Christians, which unfortunately seems to indicate the growth of more hostile ideas as well. This perceived threat is the major reason for many Copts' choice to withdraw from the social sphere, causing the social segregation of the Coptic community. This perceived threat also contributes to why most Copts rarely resist in direct confrontational ways: they fear violent retribution from extremist elements within the society.

The final factor weakening the Copts ability to resist in conventional political and social forums is internal fragmentation. The traditional kinship structures that tie together the Coptic community are being weakened by emigration and religious conversion. This leaves the Coptic community in a state of crisis and weakens their ability to resist through sociopolitical means.

7.0 RELIGIOUS FORMS OF RESISTANCE

In this section, I answer the question of if there are other forms of Coptic resistance outside the conventional social and political spheres. I argue that the Copts' religious revival has central elements that can be interpreted as a spiritual opposition movement opposing hostile ideas against them. The Church of course has many other spiritual agendas, but this religious resistance is an important dimension. What separates this movement from an ordinary religious movement is the strong emphasis on symbols and myths that communicate resistance. Furthermore, the existence and nature of the movement is highly influenced by a cosmological perception that in times of hardship it is beneficial for an individual to devote oneself to God.

I first illustrate that there is a religious revival among the Copts, as well as the importance of the historical context in which it arose. Later, I argue that because of a desire to attain closeness to God, the Coptic community has gathered around its religious leaders. Next, I examine the symbols and myths that the Coptic community has unified around during this movement. These symbols and myths are important because they are the means by which many Copts communicate their resistance against ideas of Islamic superiority. The symbols and myths are as follows: first, a historic identity that makes primordial claims to the land on behalf of the Christians, therefore resisting the idea of Egypt as an Islamic country; second, the neo-martyr as a symbol that turns those defeated in this life into victors in the next life, resisting the idea that the perpetrator is the winner; and third, the belief that God intervenes on their behalf in conflicts, resisting ideas of what religion constitutes the ultimate truth.

7.1 Increased Devotion to Religious Life

In order to argue that the religious revival of the Copts can be seen as a form of religious resistance movement, I will first illustrate that there in fact has been a religious revival, and furthermore, explain the importance of the historical context in which this revival arose. Since Nassir's revolution in 1952, there has been a pattern of increased religiosity among the Coptic Christians (Scott 2010:66). A member of the clergy claimed that although Christianity in Egypt is being weakened by a decrease in the number of Christians, it is growing stronger in the level of devotion the Christians show in their faith. For example, nowadays many young people were more

interested in learning about their religion. This Christian revival is also visible in the monasteries, where there has been an increased interest among both men and women to devote their lives to God. Priests, nuns and monks that I spoke to all confirmed the fact that more and more people chose this path in life. Professor Meinardus, the foremost scholar within Coptic History Studies, commented on this increased devotion to religious life: "The unprecedented revival of the Coptic Church during the second half of the century is one of the great historical events in the world of Christianity (Meinardus 1999: 3)."

One major contributing factor to the revival of the Coptic Church is the Sunday School Movement. The first Sunday schools in Egypt were founded as early as the late 19th century; however, in the 1950's, it started to become an influential movement (Scott 2010:67). Around this time, many young, educated men joined the movement. These men were frustrated with the religious discrimination they faced in society. Many of them joined monasteries in order to be accepted as leaders within the Coptic Orthodox Church. The most important of them was Nazīr Gayyid, the steward of the movement, who would later become Pope Shenouda III (Hasan 2003:61). Shenouda saw education as essential in preserving a vital Christian spiritual life within an Islamic society (Meinardus 2002). These men represented something new: they were an educated elite who were better adapted to face the power structures of modern society than their predecessors were (Hasan 2003:61). Central ideas within this movement included Coptic patriotism and resistance against discrimination (Scott 2010:67). Besides the movement's strong political undertones, it also had another important goal: to restore the Coptic Church to its former glory (Hasan 2003:4). This is also the reason the movement was so successful in unifying a scattered Coptic community. It managed to form solidarity around symbols and myths that are emotionally potent for Coptic Christians, such as "pious suffering" and martyrdom (ibid. 2003:1).

It is not a coincidence that this Coptic revival happened at this particular time: their revival has paralleled an Islamic revival in the Middle East that started in the latter half of the 20th century (Scott 2010:66). As a consequence, the conditions for the Copts steadily deteriorated during this time, particularly, since Egypt increasingly entered the Islamic intellectual orbit (Hasan 2003:3). Many Copts claim that feel that the hostility towards them is getting worse. One could interpret the deterioration of the Copts social conditions and the Coptic revival as simply correlated phenomena; however, when examining the nature of the religious symbols around which the Coptic revival has

formed solidarity it becomes clear that it is more than a desire to live a more spiritual life. It is a way to resist hostile elements within their society.

7.2 Increased Devotion to Religious Leaders

I argue that the reason the Coptic community has gathered around religious leaders in particular is because the Coptic Orthodox Church is believed to be the manifestation of God's will on earth. Since the 1950's, many Copts have withdrawn from the political scene (Scott 2010:66). During the last few decades, the Coptic Orthodox community has been politically represented by the clergy, headed by Pope Shenouda. The Pope acts as the spokesperson for millions of Copts (ibid.69). In addition to Pope Shenouda's political involvement, there have also been cases where the clergy have encouraged or discouraged their followers to vote for a particular candidate (ibid.69). The Coptic clergy has been frequently criticized for leading their people politically (ibid.70). It is important to note, however, that the Church has no explicit political agenda, other than that the Christians should be fully acknowledged citizens with equal rights as Muslims (Fawzy 2010).

When I asked the Copts who represents them politically, many answered "Pope Shenouda." For example, informant responded with the following:

Sometimes Pope Shenouda speaks for us, sometimes the businessmen people. But we follow Pope Shenouda. Sometimes bishops, and sometimes priest speak for us. Many priests speak about our problems to newspapers, but they still wait for Pope Shenouda. Every time something has happened he has wisdom. So they wait for his words to see what he has to say.

Some informants also felt that the Pope was forced into this position because there were no secular candidates to take his place, due to the political discrimination against the Copts. I believe that is certainly one aspect of the issue. Nevertheless, I would argue that the other key reason why many Copts have chosen to gather around the clergy instead of organizing any other forms of social movements is because they believe the clergy to better understand the will of God. Within Coptic Orthodox Christianity, the Church is seen as the earthly manifestation of God's will (Meinardus 2006:23). It seems as though the Copts ascribe a holy charisma to the clergy. For example, the majority of Coptic homes have pictures of respected bishops or popes on the walls. They are often

portrayed with other religious motifs such as saints or pictures of Christ. The holy charisma ascribed to the clergy is mostly evident in the Copts' love for their pope. His portrait is on numerous religious items. For anyone who visits his Wednesday sermons in Cairo the level of devotion he is given is evident. I asked one of my informants why these men are considered holy. She explained to me that it is not necessarily their title as priest or bishop that makes them holy; rather, it is the time they devote to bible studies and in communication with God that fills them with the Holy Spirit. The idea that the clergy have a deeper understanding of God's will is crucial in order to understand the Copts' high level of devotion to their clergy. It is also essential in understanding the political role the clergy has had during the last few decades.

7.3 Importance of a Religious Historic Identity

I argue that Copts emphasize a historic identity as a means of making primordial claims to the land on behalf of their religious group. This historical narration can be interpreted as a resistance against the idea of Egypt as a Muslim country. My point is not that the Copts' historical identity is altogether constructed. Rather, I argue that all narrations of history are to some extent constructed; we do not remember history—we interpret it (Botros 2006:177). In this interpretation, people tend to use historical frames to explain and justify a social reality (ibid.174) The devotion to historical myths gives the believers a cohesive past and unites their identities (Castelli 2004:30). In the case of the Copts, two identities are prominent in their view on their historical identity. First, they see themselves as protectors of an ancient Church. Second, they see themselves as heirs of the pharaohs. Furthermore, these two identities are both connected.

The Copts' identity as "protectors of an ancient Church" gives their own suffering an explanation and a historical context. The strong attachment to this identity turns their suffering into a form of resistance in a spiritual battle. The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian Churches. It has undeniably had a very bloody history with many who were killed because of their faith (Meinardus 2006:33-34). It is believed to have been founded by the apostle Mark in 64 AD (Henderson 2005:155). The Copts are proud that their Church was founded by an apostle of Christ. Saint Mark was eventually executed because of his preaching and died the death of a martyr (Meinardus 2006:33). He is considered to be the first patriarch in a line that descends to the current

Pope Shenouda, who is the 117th patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church (ibid.140). The heritage of martyrdom and suffering is very important to the Copts. Since its founding, the Church has been persecuted for periods of time. They see the great number of martyrs within their Church as evidence of the Copts' devotion to Christ (Meinardus 1999:1). This is a heritage that the Copts repeatedly emphasize and are very proud of. One of my informants said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." This means that their Church still exists because their ancestors suffered for Christ and defended Christianity with their lives. The identification and glorification of their people's historic suffering gives deeper meaning to their own suffering.

Within Christianity, one who suffers for Christ will receive salvation in the afterlife (Castelli 2004: 85). The principle of reciprocity governs all social relationships. Furthermore, the nature of what one gives also determines what one will receive (Leach 1976:5). The Copts are in a reciprocal social relationship with God, where they believe that their suffering for Christ will be reciprocated in the afterlife. Consequently, although it might appear as though they are taking the role as the passive victim, they are actually taking a role which makes them the winners in the afterlife. An example of the historical narration that clearly illustrates this is the story of Saint Demiana and her forty virgins. She was the daughter of Mark, a Roman official. She was to be married at the age of fifteen, but refused because she wanted to devote her life to Christ. She chose a life of celibacy, and forty other women followed. Because of this, Copts regard her as the founder of female monasticism. Later, the Roman emperor Diocletian persuaded Saint Demiana's father to convert from Christianity and kneel before a pagan god. When the news of her father's conversion reached Demiana, she left the nunnery to see her father (Christian Treasures Organization, et.al. 2011). She said to him:

““What have I heard about you? I wish I had heard the news of your death rather than knowing that you have forsaken God, who created you, and worshiped what is made by hands. How could you deny your Savior who shed His blood to save you and kneel down to stone idols inhabited by Satan? What you did, my father, is cowardly and shameful. If you insist on what you have done and do not repent by denouncing the idols, then you are not my father and I am not your daughter. It is better for you, O my father, that you die as a martyr and live with Christ in heaven forever than to live as a pagan here and die with the devil in hell forever (Christian Treasures Organization, et.al. 2011).”

This statement clearly illustrates that this world is less important than the afterlife, and that social

pressures to convert should be resisted. Her father repents, and returns to his faith. When the emperor hears of this, he tries to force Mark to denounce the Christian God. However, this time he resists and eventually dies the death of a martyr. The emperor then tries to force Demiana to convert. Demiana persists in her faith despite unspeakable torture and attempts on her life. When she eventually dies the death of a martyr as the Roman soldiers chop her body in to pieces and feed her to the beasts, God himself comes down to earth to resurrect her soul and reward her with three heavenly crowns. For her persistence in her faith and holiness in life she is considered the highest of the female martyrs within the Coptic Orthodox Church (Christian Treasures Organization et.al. 2011). In this narration the one who is persecuted has the moral high ground in comparison to the persecutor and the convert who gave in to profane pressures. This identification with martyrs, as resisters against a social pressure to convert, is something that the Copts take very seriously, and actively chooses. For example, there is a tradition within Coptic Christianity to tattoo a Coptic cross to the inside of one's wrist. The symbol of the cross represents their faith, and religious rituals that include bodily mutilations such as tattoos generally represent permanent stages in life (Leach 1971:66). Therefore, this tradition communicates that they will be faithful to their God throughout life. Furthermore, the exposed positioning of this tattoo communicates a resistance to these perceived external pressures to convert or in other ways abandon one's faith.

The Copts consider Egypt to be their holy land. Of course, Jerusalem and Bethlehem are also their holy land, but the Copts have a strong connection to the land of Egypt. There is an oral tradition within Coptic Christianity that narrates the journey of the holy family in Egypt (Meinardus 1999:16). It is foretold that there were numerous sites where young Jesus made miracles happen during his flight from Herod. The Copts are very proud of this history and many pilgrims visit these sights (ibid.24). Therefore, the Copts see Egypt as a very special place for Christianity, since it is holy land which Jesus himself has blessed. Due to this history, their identity as protectors of Christianity in Egypt becomes much more important to them.

There is a popular belief among the Copts that they are the true Egyptians and the heirs of the pharaohs. They believe that the roots of Christianity in Egypt can be traced back to the pharaonic era. Because the culture requires that one marries within one's religion and Christianity was the dominant religion at the time of the Arab invasion, many Copts consider themselves to be the heirs

of those who did not convert to Islam. Therefore, they consider themselves to be the true owners of the land. They feel that their culture has been under strong pressure to adapt to Arab culture since the invasion. To counteract this process, there has been a movement in which the Copts have revived identity markers of their pharaonic heritage. The most interesting identity markers in this context are the ones used to illustrate a similarity between Coptic Christianity and pharaonic religion. The emphasis on the pharaonic identity can be seen within modern Coptic icon painting in which there is a trend to include ancient Egyptian religious motifs in their art. For example, there is one icon painting where the flight of the holy family is portrayed with the symbol of the god Horus (Meinardus 2002:23). The reason for this is that the Copts feel that there are many similarities between Christianity and the religion of the pharaohs. One pharaonic myth that is given these Christian qualities is the myth of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, who are seen as a primitive version of the trinity. The father Osiris was a just god who ruled well with his wife Isis by his side. However, he was deceived by his brother Seth who killed him and dismembered his body. Isis, overcome by grief managed to find all the scattered parts of her husband's body, and with the help of the gods, managed to bring him back to life long enough to become pregnant with his child Horus. Horus would later come to kill the evil force personified by Seth, and rule Egypt with righteousness (Kamil 2002:16). One of my informants pointed out the similarity with Christianity: the spirit of the father lives in the son who defeats evil and saves humankind. Another important symbolic similarity in this story is between Isis and Virgin Mary and their divine offspring (Kamil 2002:16). Traditions that originally celebrated Isis have survived into contemporary times and now celebrate the Virgin Mary (ibid.18). Another example is the revival of the Ankh Cross, which is popularized on t-shirts, necklaces, and other religious items. The idea that the cross is a symbol for Jesus victory over death is originally an Egyptian idea. The pharaonic gods handed this life-bestowing symbol over to the pharaoh, who then became the incarnation of God on earth, therefore transcending death. The Christians then transferred the Ankh's symbolism of eternal life to the crucifix. The emphasis on this ethno-religious heritage has gained increased importance through the influence of the Sunday School Movement (Scott 2010:67). What is interesting about this revived emphasis on the pharaonic heritage is that it makes primordial claims not only between the Coptic people and the land, but between Christianity and the land. Furthermore, this idea is also linked to the idea that the Copts are protectors of Christianity in Egypt. These similarities between the pharaonic and the

Christian faith are the reason often given by many Copts for why Christianity still exists in Egypt despite the history of persecution. One informant said:

Many North African countries were all Christian, but they all turned to Islam but Egypt. Christians there did not have very strong roots. Egyptians are the first that believed in eternity, as is evident in the pyramids. They were also the first to believe in judgment after death, and the existence of one god.

This could be seen as a resistance against the idea of Egypt as an Islamic country. One informant claimed: "The Muslims think this country is for them, not for us, and that we came after them. But when you look to history all Egypt was Christian." Therefore, this emphasis on the pharaonic aspects of Coptic culture could be seen as a tool used to make primordial claims to the land. In addition, since the Middle East has strong tradition of connecting citizenship with religion, and because Egypt has a religious social organization (as discussed in section five), these primordial claims are not only for them as an ethnic group, but also as a religious community. In this historical narration, they are the true owners of the land, and Christianity is the true religion. This is also related to their identity as protectors of an ancient Church Christianity in Egypt, since many Christians see themselves as the victims of a long-term unjust persecution by the invading Muslims.

7.4 Importance of Neo-Martyrs

In order to understand the act of martyrdom one must see the martyrs as the believer sees them. Then one will see that it is actually a form of resistance. I have already discussed the importance of suffering and martyrdom for the Coptic historic identity. However, the Copts' idea of martyrdom extends well beyond reconciling a social reality with a violent past. Therefore, I find it necessary to raise neo-martyrdom as a separate topic since the idea of martyrdom is still considered a contemporary social reality among many Copts and have a considerable emotional potency.

Martyrdom is partly a reciprocal social contract between the martyr and God. Within all forms of Christianity, the act of martyrdom is central; Christianity even has its roots in an act of martyrdom. Jesus sacrifice on the cross conquered death for humanity and enabled eternal life for his followers. Therefore, the crucifixion is the most central creed within the Christian dogma. The Christian

martyrdom is partly an imitation of Christ (Castelli 2004: 82). One of my informants said, "All began with the blood of Jesus, and continues with the blood of martyrs." To deny one's faith is considered sinful within Christianity (Matthew 26:69-75). Therefore, martyrdom is an act of witnessing. To stand by one's faith despite external pressure is the ultimate leap of faith. However, reciprocity is key, and Christians believe that the ultimate sacrifice also comes with the ultimate reward. After the terror attack in Alexandria, the church in the city where I stayed put up a large black banner in honor of the martyrs which read the following: "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony (Revelation 6:9)." This bible passage describes the apocalypse when Jesus, the lamb that was sacrificed for the salvation of humanity, grants the martyrs eternal life. Therefore, one of the most emotionally powerful aspects of martyrdom is that what happens to the believer in this life is rendered unimportant in comparison to the belief in eternal life in heaven (Castelli 2004:54).

Martyrdom holds an even more central role in Coptic Christianity compared to many other branches of Christianity. The reason for this is that the act of martyrdom takes control over the narrative (Castelli 2004:33). It has the ability to turn the victim into the victor and the killer into the defeated. When it comes to Coptic martyrdom, Copts idealize a pacifist form of martyrdom. One informant said, "We don't ask them [the martyrs] to attack others. This is not the Coptic martyrdom, but if death comes to us, we are not afraid. We have a belief that we will be in the Kingdom of God." Because of this idea of the noble victim, martyrdom has the double effect of raising the martyr up to a state above humanity, and lowering the perpetrator to a state below humanity (ibid.201). One informant said: "The martyr is above the killer. I am above your gun. Your gun can kill my body but you give me a new life a stronger life." This is the paradox of martyrdom. The moment of death is both a tragedy and a moment of joy because the martyr has begun a journey to holy, purer form of existence (ibid.131). Conclusively, martyrdom turns the defeated in this life into a winner in the battle of ultimate truths.

Neo-martyrs in the Coptic Orthodox Church are generally Christians who have been killed by Muslims because of their faith, in contemporary times (Rubensson 2008:235). This is important in understanding most Copts' view on martyrdom. They not only view their ancestors as victims of bloody religious persecution, but see this as a continuous pressure causing their Church to be under

a constant threat of extinction (Zeidan 1999:16). One informant said: "Although the first martyr has fallen in the year of 68 AD, the last might have fallen just a few hours ago." In studying neo-martyrdom, it is evident how the historical narration of Coptic martyrdom is transferred to contemporary events. The attack that killed six young Coptic men after the Christmas mass in Naga Hammadi is an example of this. One of my informants told me a story about one of the young men who were murdered. The day before the attack he had given away all his possessions. Before he went to the church, he told his mother "This is the last day you will see me, because today I am going to my wedding." The word wedding in Coptic literally translates to crowning. Furthermore, to die for one's faith is often described as receiving the crown of martyrdom. The crown in Christianity represents the reward that will be given in the Kingdom of Heaven and is generally seen in opposition to the cross, which represents suffering. The Bible reads: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12)." In the Coptic historical narrative, the martyr is usually called by Jesus or an angel to bear witness to his or her faith (Meinardus 1999:107). Hence, the important detail in this story is that it is believed that the young man knew he faced death, and still he chose the path of martyrdom. Another parallel to the historical mythology of martyrdom is the idea that commitment to one's faith in spite of suffering, in particular in spite of death, will make Muslims convert. In the historical myth of martyrs, it is common that when the witnesses of the execution sees the martyr stand by their faith in spite of death they are convinced that Christianity is the true faith and converts (ibid.107). There is a tradition within Coptic Christianity to often respond to acts of violence with non-violence. It is considered a sign of spiritual strength and purity to be able to forgive one's enemy. The Bible reads: "But I say to you, that ye resist not evil: but whoever shall strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39)." In Pope Shenouda's Christmas sermon during the Christmas mass, shortly after the terrorist attack in Alexandria, he said, "We will continue believing in the God that preaches love and forgiving one's enemy." An informant that was listening to the sermon with me said, "You see what he did? He compared their faith to ours." Some of my informants said that they hoped that the Muslims would listen to the speeches of the Pope and the Bishop and realize that Christianity was the true path. There is an idea that this spiritual strength associated with martyrdom will show the true path to followers of Islam.

These neo-martyrs and the resistance they represent are celebrated within Coptic culture. For example, there is a music video about the terrorist attack in Alexandria on Coptic television. The music video shows pictures from the funeral of the young men, and pictures of one of the boy's weeping mother. Then the lyric says: "Don't cry anymore my mother. I am with Jesus now. Why are your clothes black? You should dress in white, because I am with Jesus now." The victims of the attack in Alexandria received a similar tribute. In social media, many Copts expressed their grief by changing their profile pictures on the social community Facebook.com to pictures of white crosses with a black background, or other pictures with similar symbolism. Most Coptic churches held memorial services during which they simultaneously mourned and celebrated the victims' martyrdom. After the service, one of my informants commented that she thought everyone who went to the service left the church with the desire to become martyrs. She was not alone in this perception. After the attack, which happened shortly before the Coptic Christmas, there was a great concern that a Coptic church would be attacked again. A video clip started to circulate online which encouraged Muslims to join the jihad and bomb a Coptic church on Christmas. The clip also showed instructions on how to make a bomb and addresses of Coptic churches in Egypt. Because of this threat, I asked an informant if she and her family were going to church on Christmas. She responded, "We are not scared. Everyone knows something will happen, but everyone will still go. We would be glad to sacrifice ourselves." Hence, the martyr is not a passive recipient of violence—martyrdom is an active choice. To go to the church despite of a bomb threat is an act that strongly communicates resistance against hostile elements within society. The heavenly reward is certainly an important aspect of martyrdom; however, death in itself is meaningless unless it communicates something. When martyrdom is put in context against the power it resists, it gains meaning. The act of martyrdom should be understood as a refusal to assimilate (Rubensson 2008:246).

Martyrs and what they represent are also celebrated in the Copts' religious practice. The Copts believe that the martyrs are alive in heaven. Therefore, they are considered to be the highest members of their Church, as they are the righteous winners in a spiritual battle. One informant said:

We had the Islamic, the Ottoman, and the new era. All the time we have martyrs. They are part of our family. It is a line of honor in our family. All the time they stood strong and defended their faith. They had normal life but they had very strong situations in their life. And we can learn from them. As they suffered and won we can suffer and win. They are very inspiring to us.

Furthermore, in Middle Eastern culture there is a belief that one cannot only speak to the dead, but that they can speak back (Meinardus 2006:12). One informant said: "I talk to St. George sometimes, and then he comes to me. I know this does not happen in Europe, but it happens in Egypt." Herein lies the power of martyrdom for the believer; it blurs the boundaries between this life and the next and connects these realities (Castelli 2004:123). In prayers, the believer has a spiritual communication with martyrs who intercede in the believer's prayers with God. This personal spiritual relationship with martyrs strengthens the believers in their faith and in the struggle that the martyrs embody. The celebration of martyrs is thus a continuation of the resistance the martyr represents.

7.5 Importance of Divine Intervention

I argue that the increased religious devotion is partly a form of resistance in which the Copts ask God to support them in their cause. Copts believe that miracles are not only a part of a historical past, but that God still aids his people through miracles. This is linked to a cosmological perception in which one must show one's devotion in prayers and fasting in order to be given this heavenly reward.

The belief in the omnipotence of God is important to understand why many Copts believe that miracles are a contemporary reality. Copts perceive biblical stories as historical events rather than purely symbolic stories. (Meinardus 2002:93). This is because Copts have a theological view on history. This means that they discern divine will in historical processes. They believe that God directs the faith of human beings, and particularly the Copts' faith, in accordance to a cosmic plan (ibid.19). In this historical narration, miracles are common and are seen as God's victory over Satan (ibid. 93). In my research, I have discerned that the Copts generally discuss three types of miracles that are related to the religious tension: first, miracles intended to inspire persistence in one's faith in spite of persecution; second, miracles intended to protect the Copts; and third, miracles intended to punish the evildoers.

The miracles intended to inspire persistence in one's faith are usually interpreted as God communicating that he has not abandoned them despite times of hardship. The Copts' historical

narration is filled with miracles like this. For example, in times of severe persecution, it has been reported that religious icons have been seen sweating or bleeding (Meinardus 1999:119). For example, in 1989, an icon of St. Mary was reported to be crying blood (Meinardus 2002:9). These miracles have been interpreted as the saint partaking in the suffering of the Copts (Meinardus 1999:121). Sometimes these reported miracles are interpreted to have been omens of hard times to come. One informant told me that St. Mary appeared before the massacre of Christians that took place during the reign of Sadat. As she appeared the sky and the moon was colored blood red. The informant then explained that this was interpreted as an omen of coming hardships. Many informants also told me stories about other miracles involving St. Mary, the most recent one being an appearance above a Coptic church in Cairo in December 2009. In the following Christmas, there was a terrorist attack during the Coptic Christmas mass, and six people died. Some of my informants had traveled there to see this reported miracle, which went on for days, and others had seen the many videos of it via the video-sharing website Youtube.com. My informants told me that St. Mary appeared in the form of light and a flock of doves. The dove is a symbol of St. Mary, and within Christianity, light is traditionally a symbol of holiness, purity, and truth. In addition, her symbolic importance as “the mother” is important since she cares for her people and protects them against social threats (Meinardus 2002:9). One informant said:

"It is very common for St. Mary to appear. She is the one that comes the most. She is the mother of God. She is the greatest of saints. She is our mother. The general message is that the Church in heaven and God is watching over us."

Pictures of this miracle also appeared in a music video on Coptic television; the lyrics stated that one must be like Christ and stand by one's faith despite persecution. These miracles are interpreted as a sign of God's love for his people and an encouragement to keep resisting the evildoers. Many Copts also see these reported miracles as a confirmation of the righteousness of their beliefs in comparison to the Muslim faith. Therefore, the celebration of these miracles can be seen as a form of resistance against dominant religious belief, particularly the interpretations of Islam that consider Christianity to be the religion of the unfaithful.

Miracles intended to protect them from evildoers generally involve attacks on churches. One informant said, "We have seen the hand of God spread out, like with Moses. There were some guys

who were trying to steal the cross from our church. My father who witnessed this said that he saw John the Baptist himself come down to protect it." Another informant told me a story about a miracle in his hometown in October 2009. Some Christian boys had taken some sexual pictures of a Muslim girl and some Muslims had responded by attacking the church with petrol bombs. At the time, the church was filled with worshipers who feared for their lives. My informant then said that one of their saints had then been seen on the roof catching these bombs and miraculously saving the church. The interventions of saints have obvious miraculous aspects to it. However, due to their theological historical narration Copts also ascribe miraculous qualities to phenomena that appear to be more natural. One informant told me a story about a bishop who intended to build a new church. The problem was that a police officer came by the construction site and informed the bishop that he intended to put a halt to the construction. The bishop then warned him not to become the enemy of God, which the man ignored. Soon after this incident, this man was killed in an accident, and the church construction could continue. My informant considered this event to be a miracle. It is no coincidence that these miracles concern churches: the Copts face many difficulties in building them, and they are often the sites of religiously motivated communal violence. Therefore, they are potent symbols. Hence, these miracles show both God's love for his people and support for their cause. Therefore, the celebration of these miracles resists discriminatory policies on building churches, and they are perceived as divine support for the Coptic cause.

The third type of interventionist miracle occurs when divine intervention is intended to punish the evildoers. One informant said, "Sometimes when we don't get our rights from the court, we take it from the judge of God." The divine punishment is generally preceded by acts of violence. One informant told the following story: "After the persecution in January 2000 in Southern Egypt, where thirteen people were murdered, people saw that fire tongues were jumping from Muslim house to Muslim house, skipping the Christian houses and jumping to the next." Another informant told me a similar story. Muslims in a village had burnt down a church and killed Christians. God had then intervened and sent heavenly fire to burn down Muslim houses. In addition, as Muslims tried to put the fire out, it only grew in strength. Heavenly fire as a form of punishment must be seen in context of their religious historical narration, since it is a form of punishment God uses in Christian mythology. The Bible reads: "Then the lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the lord out of heaven; (Genesis 19:24)." God destroyed the cities because the people were

sinners who had turned away from the righteous path. Furthermore, before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah he spared the few that were still faithful to him (Genesis 19:16). Due to the belief in God's omnipotence, it is logical to believe that he can intervene to bring justice on behalf of his people when they are being persecuted. One informant said, "The way I describe it is this: God almighty can do all things. It is just the way that it is understood in this culture. You do not need it [miracles] in the West. No one is persecuting you. We need it." The celebration of these miracles gives conflicts a religious dimension, where one side is identified as evil and the other as good. Furthermore, it quite clearly resists ideas of which religion represents the ultimate truth.

In Coptic Christianity, there is a cosmological connection between divine intervention and increased devotion to religious life. Heavenly rewards come to those who are faithful. Therefore, it is important to show one's commitment through prayers and fasting. Most Copts believe that these rites can change the path of history. For example, the Copts believe that the prayers of St. Athanasius, the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria caused the fall of the ruling princes who had maintained a heterodox theology (Meinardus 2006:19). Another example is that they believe that the persistent prayers of the monks in the monastery of St. Macarius caused the fall of the despised Umayyad Dynasty. A very central myth within Coptic Christianity also illustrates this connection. This is a story that was retold to me in various versions by several of my informants. The story takes place in the 10th century, when the Muslim ruler Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah makes an ultimatum to the Pope Abraham ibn Zur'ah. The ultimatum is that the Pope must move Muqattam Mountain or his people will be persecuted. In order to avoid persecution of his people, the Pope accepts the challenge. The Copts then pray and fast for three days. On the third day, St. Mary appears to the Pope and leads him to a righteous man who will be able to perform the miracle. The man chosen by God to be his tool is a humble tanner. The Pope, the tanner, and the Coptic people then join together and pray "God have mercy," and finally, the mountain moves (Shenouda 2007:590). Today, this mountain is believed to be situated outside Cairo and is a pilgrimage site. In conclusion, there is a strong belief within the Coptic faith that devotion to religious life can change the course of history. Furthermore, they believe that God has done and is capable of doing extraordinary miracles on behalf of his people. Therefore, to devote oneself to religious life and pray for better times is an act of resistance that is based in the idea that it can have empirical consequences.

7.6 Conclusions

Since the 1950's, the Copts have decreased their participation in the political sphere, which many Copts attribute to being denied access to these spheres. This does not mean, however, that the problem has vanished. In contrast, it has become worse. Therefore, I have examined whether acts of resistance can be found outside the conventional political and social spheres. Politics is certainly one arena of power commonly turned to when people want to achieve social change; however, it is not the only power sphere available. Within the ontological perception of the Copts, the most powerful arena of them all is the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, I have argued that the increased devotion to religious life among the Copts can be seen as a religious resistance movement. What distinguishes this movement from an ordinary religious movement is its strong emphasis on symbols and myths that communicate resistance against ideas of Islamic supremacy. Furthermore, they believe that this increased devotion to their God can influence conflicts on their behalf in either this life or the next. In my argument, I first illustrated that their religious revival has paralleled an Islamic intellectual movement that contains elements of hostility against them. I further claimed that when studying the nature of this Coptic revival, these phenomena do not seem to be simply correlated. Second, I illustrated the logic from their ontological perception of the world in turning to religious leaders, rather than political leaders. I then discussed central symbols around which many Copts have formed their solidarity, arguing that they represented ideas of resistance. The first of these symbols was a historic identity that made primordial claims to the land on behalf of them as Christians, therefore resisting ideas of Egypt as an Islamic country. The second symbol I discussed was the symbol of the neo-martyr, which illustrates that Copts perceive this as a conflict that is not only a conflict of this world, but as a conflict of ultimate truths in which they are the winners. Finally, I discussed the importance of contemporary miracles. I argued that because they perceive these miracles as a proof of their righteousness in this struggle, the celebration of these miracles is a form of resistance against the idea of them as *kafirs* (unbelievers). Miracles illustrate the cosmological connection between increased devotion to religious life and changing the path of history.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

"People come to me tired of this persecution and say that God has abandoned us, but I say to them: did you really ask God have mercy? Or did you ask Human Rights have mercy? United States have mercy? I want to see these people protesting in the streets go into their churches and get down on their knees and pray *Kirieli Ison* [God have mercy in Coptic]. Our ancestors once moved a mountain with their faith—we can do it again.

This quote is from a sermon given by a priest during a meeting with the young women of his church. The belief that faith can literally move mountains has powerful ramifications for the believers' view on reality. The divine is not just an abstract spiritual being, and reality is not only governed by human actions, but is primarily governed by a spiritual force that is capable of extraordinary things. From this cosmological perception, it is logical to turn to religion rather than human rights organizations to resist discriminating elements within society; the power of God is perceived as greater than the power of man.

First, I argued that the reason why many Copts do not resist in conventional social and political forums is because they perceive that they are discriminated in these forums. They believe that they are being denied political participation. In addition, they perceive that they are discriminated by the judicial system and the security apparatus, which makes them unwilling to turn to these forums to fight for their cause. They believe that this is due to a discriminating culture that has its roots in Islamic ideas that are hostile against Christians. Furthermore, many Copts feel that the majority of Muslims are also a part of this discriminating culture. Therefore, they are hesitant to openly resist in other social forums because they fear violent retribution from extremist elements within society. The Coptic community also suffers from internal fragmentation, which weakens the community and, consequently, their ability to resist through conventional political and social forums.

Second, I have argued that the religious revival of the Coptic Orthodox Church has central elements to it that can be regarded as a religious resistance movement. During the last few decades, many Copts have shown an increased devotion to religious life. This process has paralleled a development of heightened intolerance towards them. In this process, the Coptic community has gathered around religious leaders because they believe that the Church is the earthly manifestation

of God's will. In addition, their religious revival has centered on religious symbols and myths that express a resistance against persecution. The first symbol is a historical identity, which makes primordial claims to the land on behalf of their religious group. The second is a glorification of the neo-martyr. This glorification takes control of the narration and turns the victim into the victor in the battle of ultimate truths. The third symbol is contemporary miracles; God is believed to intervene on their behalf in conflicts. There is a cosmological connection between these miracles and increasing one's devotion to religious life. Therefore, I have argued that the Coptic religious revival is a resistance movement opposing intolerant ideas against them, and against dominant ideas of what constitutes the ultimate truth.

Studying forms of resistance that are not exercised within conventional political spheres is important in order to understand social change. In order to know where to look for resistance, one must understand the ontological perceptions that govern society. In a highly religious society such as Egypt, where religious ideas govern essential parts of the social structure, it is logical that oppositional movements are also influenced by cosmological ideas. A cosmological conviction that claims that this world is not important in comparison to the afterlife is not a belief that should be taken lightly, since it has fundamental effects on the believer's perception of reality. However, even in highly religious societies, cosmological beliefs are hardly the only factor influencing human behavior. Factors such as the economy, politics, and environment are also important. My point is that we must study how these phenomena interact in the ontology of individuals. Egypt has recently experienced a historical political change. This might create a change in the ontological perceptions if it results in fundamental changes within Egyptian society and the Christians obtain full rights as citizens. However, recent terror attacks against Coptic churches, along with the government's passive reaction, indicate that it will be a long time before Copts will be considered equal citizens in Egypt.

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