

**COPTIC ETHNOPOLITICAL MOBILIZATION ON THE ROAD TO  
AND BEYOND THE JANUARY 25 REVOLUTION**

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**İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY**

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**COPTIC ETHNOPOLITICAL MOBILIZATION ON THE ROAD TO AND  
BEYOND THE JANUARY 25 REVOLUTION**

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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Masters of Arts in Political Science.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Ali Zeynel Gökpınar

## **ABSTRACT**

### **COPTIC ETHNOPOLITICAL MOBILIZATION ON THE ROAD TO AND BEYOND THE JANUARY 25 REVOLUTION**

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This study examines why and how the Copts of Egypt mobilized in the last seven years, 2005-2012. To discuss the reasons behind the mobilization and its extent, this study integrates Harff and Gurr's (2004) ethno-political mobilization framework and Fox's (2002) ethno-religious conflict model. This study critically approaches both models, supplements them with relevant variables when necessary and employs field research data to analyze the issue in depth and offer an analytical perspective. The relationship between the majority Muslim community and Coptic community is decoded under the light of the neo-millet system while special attention has been paid to the entente between the Egyptian state and Coptic Orthodox Church. Research findings suggest that Coptic mobilization was part of the broader Egyptian mobilization and socio-economic and religious grievances played a significant role between 2005-2010. Nevertheless, after the January 25 Revolution Coptic ethno-political mobilization transformed and Coptic ethno-political movements challenged the Church on non-religious grounds and the state by actively demanding their political and religious rights, in contrast to pre-2005.

Key words: Coptic ethno-political mobilization, January 25 Revolution, socio-economic and religious grievances, Maspero Youth Union

## ÖZ

### 25 OCAK MISIR DEVRİMİNE GİDEN YOLDA VE ÖTESİNDE KIPTİ ETNOPOLİTİK MOBİLİZASYONU

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Bu çalışma Mısır'daki Kıpti cemaatinin etnopolitik mobilizasyonunun nedenlerini ve bu mobilizasyonun nasıl gerçekleştiğini incelemektedir. Etnopolitik mobilizasyonun sebeplerini ve boyutunu irdelemek için Harff ve Gurr'ün (2004) etnopolitik mobilizasyon modeli ile Fox'un (2002) etno-dinsel mobilizasyon modelini birbirine entegre etmektedir. Bu çalışma her iki modele de eleştirel yaklaşmakta ve gerektiğinde bu modellere ilgili değişkenleri eklemekte ve konuyu derinlemesine analiz etmek ve analitik bir bakış sunabilmek için alan araştırmasında toplanan verileri kullanmaktadır. Müslüman çoğunluk ile Kıptiler arasındaki ilişkiler neo-millet sistemi ışığında sorgulanırken ve Kıpti Ortodoks Kilisesi ile Mısır devleti arasındaki anlaşma Kıptilerin mobilizasyonuna etkisi bağlamında tartışılmaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları 2005-2010 yılları arasında Kıpti mobilizasyonunun Mısır'daki genel mobilizasyonun bir parçası olduğunu ve sosyo-ekonomik ve dini mağduriyetlerin bu süreçte önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Bununla beraber, 2011'deki 25 Ocak Devriminden sonra Kıpti mobilizasyonu dönüşmüş ve Kıpti etnopolitik hareketler, 2005 öncesi dönemin aksine, Kilise'yi dini olmayan zeminlerde Mısır devletini de dini ve siyasi haklarını aktif bir şekilde arayarak zorlamışlardır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kıpti etnopolitik mobilizasyonu, 25 Ocak Devrimi, sosyo-ekonomik ve dini mağduriyetler, Maspero Gençlik Birliği

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

Much has been written on the history of Eastern Christianity and Christians. Western travelers and missionaries have written extensively on their experiences among the Copts who have been considered the sons of Pharaohs. While these writings point to persecution of the Copts under Muslim rule, Muslim authors usually portray Muslim-Coptic relations as peaceful and harmonious. These characterizations make one to wonder which account is true and to question why the Copts do not revolt if they were persecuted or deny these accounts if they really lived peacefully with their Muslim fellows. Finding an answer to the first part of this question is the task of historians. The second part, however, requires extensive research on coexistence and conflict between both communities. Studying the Copts as a minority brings the often-mentioned persecution and victimization accounts together. Why did the Copts not mobilize or revolt? More importantly, why did the Copts mobilize recently? This study looks into one of those rare moments where the Copts mobilized.

## 1.1 Rationale, Relevance of Research and the Puzzle

Despite the growing body of literature on the Copts, our understanding of the Copts remains limited as scholarship focuses on so called sectarian relations and does not treat the Copts as a political actor but as *dhimmi* party to the neo-millet system. Why were the Copts not considered as a political actor? In order to fill the gap in the literature and for a sound analysis, this study treats the Copts as a political actor instead of understanding the community as a persecuted minority. This study's objective is to discuss the ethnopolitical mobilization of the Coptic community in the last seven years and analyze the reasons behind the mobilization in an analytical framework. The relevance and importance of this study stems not only from its attempt to address an understudied topic in the literature but also because of its new perspective on why the Copts mobilized in the last seven years but not 1980s or 1990s.

This study's main puzzle is "Why and how did the Copts mobilize from 2005 to 2012?" While this is the fundamental research question this study addresses, it also questions the role of religion, institutions, and socio-economic developments in the mobilization process. The fundamental identity marker between the Muslims and Copts is religion that is believed to be

the major sources of the conflicts. In order to deconstruct this phenomenon, this study examines the role of religion in the mobilization process with special attention if religion and religion-related issues facilitated or blocked mobilization. Another sub-question is how did religious and state institutions respond to the mobilization process? Discussing this sub-question will reveal the ambivalent role of these institutions and contribute to the literature that often considers such institutions as either facilitators or blockers of mobilization.

## **1.2 Methodology and Control of the Data**

This study's objective is not only to show what is unknown and test of ethnopolitical and ethnoreligious models, but also to delve into the world of a complicated and contentious issue. When political scientists cannot use statistics either because they do not exist or their validity is suspected as a result of "politics of numbers", research has to be done qualitatively. Therefore, this study employed a methodology combining literature review on Copts and Egypt and field research to interview Coptic people and collected data available only locally. I interviewed Coptic people (24) randomly but was selective about people's age range, sex, occupation, and educational level in order to keep the data I gather unbiased and not influenced by patterns specific to the participants. This study's qualitative research data was based on representative interview sampling that allowed me to ask open-ended questions to my interviewees. By doing so, I had the opportunity to understand how ordinary Coptic people make sense of social and political developments within and outside of the community. Questioning the relationship between the Church and the parishes, ordinary Copts' protest against the regime and the patterns and strategies of different protest types revealed the extent of and how the Copts have been mobilized. Overall, this study concurs with Creswell's (2008) propositions on how to make use of representative sampling and in depth interviews.

Pursuing field research in Egypt was a challenging but enjoyable task as it was difficult to get in touch with people since the Coptic issue is untouchable and makes people fear to speak. Therefore, I established different connections through university professors, friends, and Yunus Emre Institute's contacts and met people where they felt safe to speak such as cafes serving

mostly Western tourists in Zamalek, bookstores, or the campuses of Cairo University and American University in Cairo. Furthermore, I ensured my interviewees that I would use only their names' abbreviations that helped me to build a trustful relationship and make sure that no external factors influenced the interviews.

Analysis of the data was another challenge, as it had to be controlled for validity. To check its validity, this study reclassified the data gathered in the field and reread it to find out if there were any inconsistencies and irrelevant points. Then, I critically approached the existing literature in general and media reports and discussed this data by decoding my interviewees' stories. Research findings showed consistency and allowed me to find support from different sources.

### **1.3 Content**

The second chapter of this study summarizes Harff and Gurr's (2004) ethnopolitical and Fox's (2002) ethnoreligious frameworks by outlining them in a way to operationalize the theories for a more argumentative and analytic discussion. First, these frameworks are critically approached and their consistency and validity is examined. Harff and Gurr's ethnopolitical framework presents a general model to assess why and how ethnic groups mobilize and what kind of factors influence this process. Inequality and discrimination experienced in different areas such as politics, economy, and social life cause grievances and these grievances may result in mobilization. Second, this framework does not address religion's role in such mobilization process and therefore needs to be combined with Fox's (2002) ethnoreligious conflict framework that examines the role of religion, religious institutes, and religious matters as variables in a mobilization process. By incorporating these two models this study intends to avoid two things: an analysis based only on politics and economics on the one hand and another based only on religion. Last but not least, after discussing the strengths and weaknesses of both models, the scene is framed and additional variables are added.

The third chapter discusses the history of the Copts with a special focus on the community's relationship with the Muslim majority. First, the literature on the subject is explored and relevancy of this project is discussed with an emphasis on what is already achieved in the

literature and why this project is necessary. Second, I delve into the history of inter-communal relations with the objective of identifying historical sources of conflict, instead of summarizing the relationship. Further, this chapter points to continuities and ruptures inter-communal relations. The coexistence of the Copts and Muslims is assessed in the background and the impact of modernization and nationalism processes are analyzed in parallel. While the common wisdom on Coptic-Muslim relations considers the 1970s as the crystallization of inter-communal (for many sectarian) conflict, relying on recent scholarship this study finds that the conflict in the Egyptian nation state dates back to the foundation of contemporary Egypt. The entente between the Church and the state apparatus is analyzed in depth as it is the main determinant of conflict, cooperation, and possible mobilization. Third, another contribution of this study is to investigate intra-communal conflict within the Coptic community that may decrease the likelihood of group cohesion and mobilization. Finally, this study questions if this conflict is sectarian as it is labeled by the literature or inter-communal, as this study prefers to put it.

The fourth chapter of this study presents its research findings and discusses these findings by applying them to Harff and Gurr's and Fox's models. First, the ethnopolitical framework is discussed by considering every variable to measure the level of mobilization from 2005 to 2012. Then, the causes and extent of Coptic mobilization is analyzed in two periods: 2005-2010 and 2011-2012. The first period reveals how changing institutional design, involvement of new actors in long lasting relationship, and the increasing discontent in the broader Egyptian society influence Coptic mobilization. A reflection of this discontent and dire poverty and unemployment with the increasing publicity of religion is the escalating level of violence against the Copts. After the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution, one expects the targeting of the Copts, as the Revolution was achieved in cooperation. However, insecurity and inefficient state capacity caused further violence that led the Copts to enter streets without their Muslim fellows in contrast to pre-Revolution era. This period shows that Coptic ethnopolitical movements start to challenge not only national government but also the Coptic Orthodox Church and its leadership. While the Revolution's impact on the Copts was negative, since they experienced official discrimination and violence, Maspero being the ultimate example, the Revolution influenced Coptic mobilization positively, as they started to actively demand their rights. In sum, the



research findings discuss to what extent Harff and Gurr's and Fox's models explain Coptic mobilization and point to contradictions or weaknesses of these models.

## **Chapter 2 Theoretical Background**

Why and how do ethnic and religious groups mobilize? What contributes to ethnic and/or ethnoreligious mobilization? Students of political science have long been seeking answers to these questions. A prominent attempt is Harff and Gurr's ethnopolitical mobilization model. This model is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the Minorities at Risk Project (MAR), which was initiated by the second author in 1986. MAR examines ethnopolitical groups, and non-state communal groups that have political importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and includes data on 283 groups' grievances and mobilization processes.

This study uses Harff and Gurr's ethnopolitical mobilization framework to discuss the mobilization of the Copts and the relationship among the Egyptian state, the Coptic minority, and the Muslim majority. Nevertheless, some concepts should be clarified for the sake of this study before discussing the theoretical framework. In the context of this discussion,

ethnopolitical conflict refers to those conflicts that are between a national or minority group and the state (Harff & Gurr, 2004). In such situations, national or minority groups have claims against the state such as autonomy, use of ethno-national languages, religions, or improvement of political and social rights. By authoritarian regime, I mean competitive authoritarian regimes in which economic liberalization and the *façade* free elections are significant tools of the state apparatus to maintain its power-both on minority and majority groups (Blaydes, 2011; Levitsky & Way, 2010). By religious “violence”, I refer to those events, which are aimed at destroying the sacred places of the Copts and used violence against a “group” of Copts in order to harm them.

Harff and Gurr’s ethnopolitical mobilization model questions “why and how do ethnic groups mobilize and enter into open conflict with the governments that claim to rule them” (Harff & Gurr, 2004). Harff and Gurr build their model on earlier versions of Ted Gurr’s basic model on relative deprivation and ethnic conflict. According to the Relative Deprivation concept, which is “the perceived discrepancy between men’s value expectations and their value capabilities”, discontent arises as a result of group comparison regarding new modes of life, status, and expected improvements (Gurr, 1971; 2011, p. 24). Discontent seems to be the most basic factor in kindling the mobilization processes. The second step is the politicization of the discontent actualizes in violent means against political objects and actors in the third step (Gurr, 1971; 2011). Politicization of discontent, depending upon intensity and magnitude, may appear in different forms of protest and rebellion. Violence may be observed in the last phase as a result of unsatisfied demands (Gurr, 1993, 1994, 2000; Harff & Gurr, 2004; Olzak, 1998). However, that does not necessarily mean so, since there is evidence showing violence could be observed in the transformation process from the third phase to the fourth.

The basic ethnic conflict model which follows the casual sequence in the abovementioned framework can be explained as follows: “discrimination against an ethnic minority form *grievances* [my emphasis]; these grievances cause an ethnic group to *mobilize*; finally mobilized ethnic groups are more likely to take part in ethnic conflict in the form of *protest* and *rebellion*” (Fox, 2003). This sequence is more complicated than the above sequence and will be explored below.

## 2.1 Ethnopolitical Mobilization

Harff and Gurr propose seven concepts in a systematic way to explain what contributes to ethnic mobilization and how.

The first concept is *discrimination* in which they mean the inequalities the group members face in the political and social arena in comparison with other groups. An ethnic group is based on shared traits such as blood, language, culture, religion, and territory that mark the identity of group members. According to Harff and Gurr (2004), people resent and react against discriminatory treatment. This is because groups make comparisons of relative worth or rights based on their experiences (Horowitz, 1985). Nevertheless, their resentment and reactions may be constructive or destructive and sometimes apathetic. While some people try to overcome discrimination by channeling their energies to be successful, others may emigrate to avoid discrimination or challenge the political actors, or institutions which cause their resentment. Harff and Gurr (2004) propose that when people with a shared ethnic identity are discriminated against, it is likely that these people will react and organize as the degree of discrimination increases.

Discrimination can be sketched in different fields such as politics, economics, and culture. As a variable, discrimination can be traced in the abovementioned fields with low, medium and high levels. While government policies that treat ethnic groups unequally are the most obvious indicators of discrimination, some other forms of inequalities may be a result of historical discrimination or economic and cultural differences that give other groups advantages (Gurr, 2000; Harff & Gurr, 2004). They argue that the below principles are indicators of political and economic discrimination:

- a) Public policies that limit the group's participation in politics and access to political office (high)
- b) Low participation in politics compared with other groups in the society (medium)
- c) Proportionally few group members in elective offices in commercial, managerial or professional positions (medium)
- d) Public policies that restrict the economic activities or roles of group members (high)

- e) Limited group access to education, especially higher education (high)
- f) Low income, poor housing and high infant mortality rates compared with other groups in the society (medium)
- g) Proportionally few group members in commercial, managerial or professional positions (medium) (Harff & Gurr, 2004, p. 108)

However, Harff and Gurr seldom mention cultural discrimination, and do not specify what the indicators of the cultural discrimination are in their book's last version. Cultural differences are always important but they become more significant if ethnicity is not a marking factor. Gurr discusses cultural discrimination in an earlier study and mentions various aspects of cultural discrimination. Restrictions on customs, expression of traditions and values, practices related to a religion and behaviors are some but not all indicators of cultural discrimination. Nevertheless, one should also keep in mind that not all such practices are imposed by public policy though public restrictions and discrimination are the most important ones. In *Peoples versus States*, Gurr mentions the following as the most observed restrictions under the title of indicators of cultural discrimination, -their severity ranges from 0 to 3, (3 being the most severe restriction), in the *Minorities at Risk* study (Gurr, 2000, p. 44):

- a) Restrictions on observance of the group religion(s)
- b) Restrictions on speaking or publishing in the group's language or dialect
- c) Restrictions on instruction in the group's language
- d) Restrictions on celebration of group holidays, ceremonies, cultural events
- e) Restrictions on dress, appearance, behavior
- f) Restrictions on marriage or family life
- g) Restrictions on organizations promoting group's cultural interests.

Nonetheless, one should also be aware of the following points; firstly, although some restrictions are not imposed by public policy but by some different social groups which see

themselves as the majority or superior, it is the state that should protect and promote the rights of the minorities<sup>1</sup>. Also, cultural factors are always important for different social groups, be they ethnic, religious, or communal groups, however cultural aspects and discrimination become more remarkable as a cementing factor in non-ethnic groups (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). However, Gurr focuses on the salience of ethno-cultural identity to draw the multi-dimensional aspects of mobilization process rather than finding out “what really motivates the leaders and members of such groups...”(Gurr, 2000). Lastly, the impact of the cultural discrimination may reach a significant point that does not necessarily mean material interests may trigger collective reaction. Harff and Gurr do not provide a decisive direction where the grievances lead but try to draw the fundamental points.

The second concept in the ethnopolitical mobilization model is *ethnic group identity* that intensifies discontent and encourages people to take action since it helps people to find individuals in the same group who suffer from the same grievances. Finding like-minded people with similar grievances direct group members to take action and organize which may challenge the conflicting party. Harff and Gurr propose “the more strongly a person with an ethnic group that is subject to discrimination, the more likely he or she is to be motivated into action”(Harff & Gurr, 2004, p. 109). The salience of ethnocultural identity is a significant factor in this process since it helps people to differentiate from and compare with other people and thus strengthening the identity in the discriminatory process (Gurr, 2000). In addition, it is important to measure the strength of group identity since this variable shows us to what extent the individuals act in accordance with the group interests. The second proposition of Harff and Gurr (2004) is that the more the shared traits such as culture, common history, and religion, the greater the strength of group identity. The below points are used to measure strength of group identity (Harff & Gurr, 2004, p. 109):

a) The extent to which they share and use a common language (high)

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<sup>1</sup> While inter-communal and governmental discrimination are two different concepts and have different dynamics, sometimes they overlap and it is difficult to differentiate between them. Theoretically, states deny such policies but in practice one can trace such activities that are usually welcomed by the majority.

- b) The proportion of people who share a common religious belief (high, -if used for religious groups, otherwise medium)
- c) Visible racial characteristics (high)
- d) A shared history over one hundred years (medium)
- e) A common culture (low)

Group identity may be strong due to the perceived and experienced discrimination. Nonetheless, one should ask what factors strengthen the group identity more and contribute to collective action of the group.

Harff and Gurr (2004) refer to the concept of *cohesion of the group*, the third concept, which shows us the unity and strength of leaders and the networks of communication that link leaders with followers. This concept is important since ethnopolitical entrepreneurs have the ability to subordinate individual preferences to group preferences.

According to Harff and Gurr (2004), group cohesion increases if group members live in the same geographical area, widely accept their leaders' position and the established order within the group. While identity markers like race and blood are significant factors in group cohesion, religion is also a very strong source of group cohesion if its power is not removed by secularism (Gurr, 2000). Nevertheless, religion can also play a significant role in response to secularism.

One point Harff and Gurr observed during their research is group cohesion decreases if the leadership and the group are more democratic rather than being autocratic. That means there may be some factions that challenge each other, have disputes and weaken the loyalty to the group. In addition, according to Harff and Gurr, autocratic leaders may mobilize their groups better than others because democracy emphasizes individual rights whereas autocratic leaders seek group interests. The below factors are used to indicate group cohesion (Gurr, 2000; Gurr & Moore, 1997; Harff & Gurr, 2004, p. 109):

- a) Degree of acceptance of established social order within the group (high)

- b) Extent of acceptance of a common belief within the group (high)
- c) Number of the factions within the group (high)
- d) Extent of open conflict within the group (high)
- e) Number of identifiable leaders within the group (medium)
- f) Degree of acceptance of traditional roles of leaders (medium)
- g) Number of newspapers and radio stations used by the group (medium)

Although these factors are significant indicators, it is important to recognize that not all autocratic leaders are successful or willing to channel individual interests to group interests and in some cases, autocratic leaders may themselves exacerbate and weaken group cohesion. In addition, in countries where political transition is observed different factions may challenge traditional autocratic leadership by opening alternative channels to present grievances that do not necessarily mean weakening group cohesion. These points will be explored in depth in the discussion section of this study.

The fourth concept, *political environment*, refers to the regime type of a certain state. As it is known, in democratic countries basic rights are provided (at least expected) to the people whether they are from the majority or the minority. That means individuals that compose various groups have equality before the law, full political and civil rights, which is a sign of non-discrimination. Even if there is discrimination, having such rights allow groups to protest without using violence. However, in autocratic countries minority groups usually do not have such rights and cannot express their discontent since autocracies usually repress political activities against their governments (Gurr & Moore, 1997; Harff & Gurr, 2004; Tilly, 1978). While unexpressed discontent usually causes grievances to deepen, it is likely the state will repress protesting groups either by violence or cooptation (Gurr, 1993, 2000; Gurr & Moore, 1997; Harff & Gurr, 2004). Some democratic states respond with accommodation but that does not mean the grievances of certain groups are solved. Nevertheless, challengers respond with rebellion if political authorities use violence (Harff & Gurr, 2004). Use of violence is generally observed in autocratic regimes where state mechanisms accommodate a wide range of

suppression tools. According to Harff and Gurr (2004, p.110) the following are indicators of institutionalized autocracies:

- a) Concentrate most or all power in the executive (high)
- b) Restriction or ban on political parties, and sharp limits on civil rights and political participation (high)
- c) Political power usually transferred and distributed among members of a tiny political elite (medium)

In addition, one should also consider that not all autocratic regimes use violent means of power against minorities or social groups but they may employ other measures like threatening not to protest. Furthermore, mobilization does not only depend on autocratic regimes' use of violence but also on group leaders' ability and willingness to mobilize or hold the group. It is well known that ethnopolitical leaders may use historical memories, past victimization, and fear of future losses (Gurr, 2000). But this begs the question when do the ethnopolitical leaders and ethnopolitical groups respond with rebellion?

Harff and Gurr (2004) assume that the challengers will respond with open rebellion if the likelihood of the political authorities' use of violence increases. In contrast, the authors observe that if state authorities use extreme force like massacres, torture and genocide, the challengers will not challenge openly because of either their inability to organize in such cases or their fear since they witnessed what happened to others (Harff, 1987; Harff & Gurr, 2004). In such cases the severity of violence used by governments has a great significance since the decision to react depends on this variable. The means used to oppress the challengers and their indicators are as follows (Harff & Gurr, 2004, p. 111):

- a) Political mass murder and genocide (high)
- b) Massacres (high)
- c) Widespread torture and executions (medium)
- d) Forcible relocation of group members (medium)



e) Number of arrests (low)

Nevertheless, behaviors and mobilization of ethnopolitical groups do not remain the same all the time. Changes within group and in politics of the country affect behaviors of ethnopolitical groups. In transitional periods the mobilization of the groups can change due to the security and instability issues which may create fruitful opportunities for the groups (Gurr, 2000; Gurr & Moore, 1998). This proposition found support from different studies examining transitional societies and politics (Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Roeder, 1991). This point will be highlighted in my analysis since the recent revolution in Egypt caused significant behavioral changes in the mobilization of the Copts.

On the other hand, one should question if ethnopolitical groups are only influenced by internal political processes. This question also reminds readers whether such groups seek outside support. Obviously, many ethnopolitical groups seek support from international powers or their fellows' organizations abroad. On the other hand, the economic status (locally and internationally) of a country is significant factor that influences the extent and content of external support.

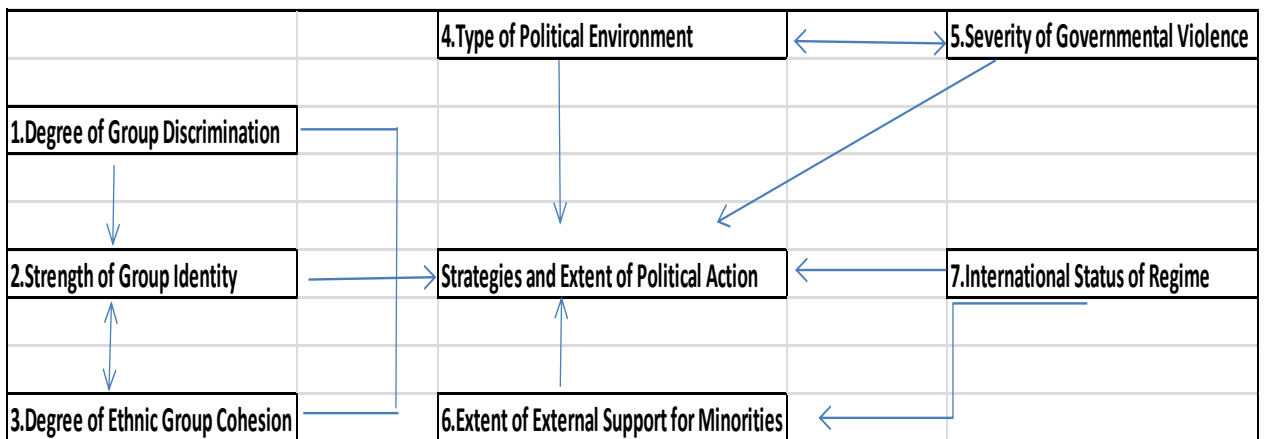
Accordingly, the last two concepts are *external support* and *economic status*. Although many ethnic groups pursue their policies according to internal political processes, some groups seek external support in their struggle against the state. The below factors are the indicators of external support (Harff & Gurr, 2004, p. 111):

- a) Weaponry and supplies (high)
- b) Mercenaries and military advisers (high)
- c) Provisions of safe havens for exiles and refugees (high)
- d) Provision of intelligence information (medium)
- e) Financial support (medium)
- f) Verbal encouragement and support (low)

The states that enjoy an abundance of resources are more likely to get the support of the international community. Harff and Gurr also argue that these states experience less foreign intervention compared to others that have fewer resources. Therefore, these authors argue that the greater international status attributed to a country, the less likely the challenger will find external support. High economic status is attributed to states that possess the following aspects (Harff & Gurr, 2004, pp. 111-112):

- a) Rank high in gross domestic product and gross national product (high)
- b) Control large reserves of scarce resources (medium)
- c) Control a high percentage of the global trade of valuable commodities (medium)
- d) Have a high level of per capita income (medium)
- e) Have a global network of trading partners (medium)
- f) Proportion of people with advanced degrees (low)

**Figure 1. Ethnopolitical Mobilization Framework**



### 2.1.1 Overview of the Model

### 2.1.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of Ethnopolitical Model

Harff and Gurr's ethno-political model aims at finding out what factors contribute to ethno-political mobilization, and why and how ethnic and communal groups mobilize and use violence (if any). Their model incorporates various factors such as the salience of communal identity, cohesion of the group, communal leadership and the political environment and shared group incentives that results in a significant contribution to the literature (Scanlan, 2001). Furthermore, this model tests the mobilization process with a large-n study that provides empirical and theoretical material to researchers.

However, although different students of political science have proved the explanatory power of this model (Fox, 2002; Saideman, 2002; Saxton, 2005; Shaykhutdinov & Bragg, 2011), some problems with this model, which are mostly a result of a large-n study, should be pointed out. Firstly and most importantly, though Gurr emphasizes the importance of culture and religion in his earlier works, he does not provide an extensive discussion of these catalysts in any of his works and seem to be underestimating these factors in his newer work. He argues that religion is rarely the root cause of conflict (Gurr, 1993). Furthermore, this model does not include different aspects of general conflict theory (Fox, 2002). Last but not least, despite Gurr's statement that this model could be used for analyzing inter-communal relations, this model is designed to analyze the mobilization of ethnic and communal groups against the states (Gurr, 2000). For example, while this model looks at the Coptic minority in Egypt, it does not include any evaluation of the relations between the Islamic groups and the Copts. This situation is a result of the Copts' religiously distinct ethnic minority position while the Islamic groups belong to the Muslim majority.

The strength of Harff and Gurr's model stems from its explanatory power for ethnic and religious mobilization, which overlaps with the Egyptian context to a certain extent. In addition, Harff and Gurr (2004) encourage scholars to add other variables if necessary. This model can be used in this study, which will discuss the state and Muslim majority's discrimination against the Copts of Egypt, if it is also integrated with the ethno-religious conflict model of Jonathan Fox. This integration is necessary since "religion" is a key variable in the Egyptian context. Furthermore, the integrated model provides a better understanding of the issue, as it considers

communal groups relations (ethnoreligious in the Egyptian context) and ethnoreligious and ethno-secular causes of the conflict. This model is discussed in the following pages.

## **2.2 Ethnoreligious Conflict Model**

Though there are different approaches to the study of religion and its role in the contemporary world, it is more important for this study to discuss the social functions of the religion in relation with conflict. In his extensive research, Jonathan Fox (2002) finds four fundamental social functions of religion that influence people's understanding and making sense of the world. From these functions he draws six hypotheses and integrates Minorities at Risk data with his findings.

First, religion provides a meaningful framework for understanding the world, offers solutions to human needs including a secure identity. Second, religious frameworks provide guiding instructions, and principles that allow people to arrange their behaviors. Nevertheless, this means that different religious groups will opt to implement their religious code of conducts that may cause conflict. Third, religion can also operate "as a link between the individual and the greater whole and provider of formal institutions which define and organize that whole" (Fox, 2002). Followers of religions usually build formal institutions to organize and manage their relationships within the group and with the external world. The current scholarship finds cogent empirical evidence that show religious institutes either facilitate mobilization or support status quo and hinder conflicts- but religious institutions' role is not limited to these points (Fox, 2002; Gurr, 1993; Marty & Appleby, 1993; Sahliyah, 1990). But the key issue here is the elites' interests and motivations.

Fourth, religion has the ability to provide the necessary means of legitimization of actions and institutions. Last, it is important to note that there are two overlapping points between the first two and the last two social functions of religion: (1) conflicts involving the defense and frameworks of religion naturally has religious legitimacy and (2) conflicts that start with non-religious issues but use religious legitimacy can be transformed into religious conflicts(Fox, 2002). For example, the conflict between the FLN of Algeria and the fundamentalists stemmed from economic reasons but transformed to a religious one.

Fox (2002) surmises six hypotheses that stem from his propositions regarding the relationship between the social functions of religion and conflict. These hypotheses are integrated into the Minorities at Risk model and elaborated below.

The first hypothesis states that “*religious discrimination*, whatever its cause, is likely to result in the formation of *religious grievances* within the ethnic group suffering from this religious discrimination” (Fox, 2002, p. 154). Obviously, as this study showed above while discussing Harff and Gurr’s model, individuals, people and groups react and show resentment against discrimination. Fox provides persuasive evidence that religious grievances increase as religious discrimination is more experienced. He shows that religious grievances in post-USSR period mostly derived from religious discrimination and as the level of the discrimination increased, the grievances expressed rose. Along with this example, the example of Naga people of India show that religious grievances may be overshadowed under political and economic discrimination but, in time, it may be expressed strongly. Overall, religious grievances can be felt not only at the time of occurrence time but also long after the discrimination. In addition, fears that religious discrimination will occur again may strengthen the religious grievances<sup>2</sup>.

The second hypothesis simply predicts that “religious grievances are likely to result in the mobilization for protest and rebellion as well as directly causing protest and rebellion among the ethnic group which has formed these grievances” (Fox, 2002, p. 156). However, the case is not that simple because while some grievances are active others may be passive or unaddressed. Fox, examining 105 ethnoreligious groups’ grievances found that mobilization increases as the number and/or level of active grievances experienced whereas passive grievances contradict this point and reduce the number of protests.

The third hypothesis argues that “provocative actions by a minority religious ethnic group are likely to provoke a negative reaction from the dominant ethnic group. This negative action can include religious, social, political and/or economic discrimination as well as other forms

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<sup>2</sup> Fear is usually attributed to the “grief” theory that assesses such issues from the perspective of psychology. I will not discuss such processes in this study, as my focus will be on mobilization rather than psychology of different communities.

oppression” (Fox, 2002, p. 163). Clearly, the majority group is expected to take a defensive position that will probably result in discrimination in different spheres. In the same vein, Fox finds that discrimination in every field rises considerably as the religious grievances expressed actively. On the other hand, many other grievances are expressed in religious terms and groups use these grievances under religious labels. This is so because while minority groups see it more operational the majority groups respond with more discrimination since they feel their religious frameworks are threatened. Such examples are Arabs of Israel, Palestinians of West Bank and the Shiites of Lebanon.

The fourth hypothesis states that “the presence of established religious institutions can facilitate mobilization for protest and rebellion regardless of the more basic causes of that mobilization unless the elites in control of these institutions have an interest in supporting the status quo” (Fox, 2002, p. 165). But the issue is here when and how elites mobilize their groups or support the status quo. According to Fox (2002, 2003), religious institutions and elites usually support two types of mobilization: 1) peaceful mobilization and 2) mobilization for rebellion. In the peaceful mobilization processes, institutions usually pursue group interests by legal means such as lobbying, and peaceful protest. On the other hand, in mobilization for rebellion there are organizations that use violence for seeking their objectives. Furthermore, the study of 105 ethnoreligious groups shows that religious elites show their support to the status quo through religious institutions when there is no or low level of threat to the religion. However, when religion is perceived to be at risk the elites protest but do not mobilize groups for rebellion unless their autonomy is threatened.

The fifth hypothesis theorizes that “the use of religious legitimacy can facilitate the growth of economic, political and social grievances as well as mobilization, regardless of the basic causes of that mobilization, unless the elites who have an influence over the use of religious legitimacy have an interest in supporting the status quo”(Fox, 2002, p. 171). There is clear evidence that shows religious legitimacy facilitates non-religious grievances when religion is not relevant to the conflict but hinders them if religion is at stake. When religion is relevant to a conflict then, religious issues become more discussed and the focus stays on religion. Fox finds that when religious issues are not relevant, as the causes of nonreligious grievances rise peaceful

mobilization increase. There is no direct and clear relationship between religious legitimacy and mobilization for rebellion unless ‘autonomy’ is a significant variable in the conflict.

The sixth and the last hypothesis predicts that “the presence of religious discrimination and disadvantages is likely to cause an increase in the levels of group identity and cohesion among the group which suffers from these disadvantages and discrimination” (Fox, 2002, p. 176). However, Fox finds that if there are other types of discrimination like political, economic or cultural, the group cohesion does not increase but rather decreases. This begs the question why it is so. This question will be answered in the following pages in relation with the Copts. On the other hand, if religious discrimination is the only issue, according to Fox, the group cohesion increases significantly. That shows us the power of religion as a cementing but complex factor.

### **2.2.1 The Strengths and Weaknesses of Ethnoreligious Conflict Model**

Fox’s study sheds light on the relationship between social functions of religion and conflicts. His model has been acclaimed by Robert T. Gurr and Scott Appleby since this study affirms previous studies’ results (those of Harff and Gurr) and fills a significant gap in the literature<sup>3</sup>. This study’s strength does not stem only from these points but also it provides a general framework that can be applied to different cases in different contexts. The study successfully shows that non-religious grievances can be voiced as religious and religious grievances may be overshadowed by other means of grievances as it traces different examples from different contexts. As Pace noted, this study also shows us how religion can operate like *ethnos* which produces and reproduces individual and social group identities (Pace, 2005). It is also important to note that this study is more interested in ethnoreligious communal groups rather than those identified as radical or jihadist groups. Last but not least, religious institutions’ role in conflicts

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<sup>3</sup> Both scholars’ comments can be found on the back cover of Fox’s “Ethnoreligious Conflict in the Late Twentieth Century” (Fox, 2002).

is sometimes not discussed enough. This study shows us that these institutions may use various strategies in mobilization and usually decide according to the threats posed to the religion not to the community.

In contrast to the abovementioned positive aspects of this theory, there are also some criticisms. First, this work is a product of a large-n study and the overall trend may not apply to each case. Second, as Zubrzycki noted in her harsh criticism, Fox does not distinguish cases whether they are based on theological grounds or fundamentalist means (Zubrzycki, 2004). However, it is difficult to categorize and treat each case differently since the study includes 105 ethnoreligious communal groups. These differences can be studied in case studies supported by theoretical and empirical data. Also, Fox considers the role of religious institutions only positive or negative whereas this study reveals that ambivalent approaches are also possible. Fox studies religious institutions as monolithic structures, usually led by a powerful priest. However, religious institutions can accommodate different currents that have different perspectives, not necessarily on religion and religious practices. Nevertheless, both Harff and Gurr's and Fox's models provide the necessary theoretical framework to study this thesis topic.

So far, I explained the theoretical framework of this study. Now, I will identify the parties of the conflict and set the discussion of this thesis.

## **2.3. Setting the Scene**

### **2.3.1 Parties to the Conflict**

This study discusses the conflict between the Egyptian state, the Copts and the Muslim majority. The first party to this conflict is the Egyptian state apparatus. The Egyptian state and its approach to the Coptic community will be analyzed at institutional level. The Egyptian state operates through an authoritarian regime and therefore its government which will be analyzed as a fundamental tenet. In addition, the Egyptian army and the Ministry of Interior's approaches to the discrimination against to the Copts and to the conflict will be discussed when it is relevant. These institutions do not only operate as basic tools of the state apparatus but also they also have the power to mobilize the Muslim majority.



The second party to this conflict is the Copts who are basically represented by the Eastern Orthodox Church<sup>4</sup>. The Church has always been central to the Coptic community and negotiated issues related to Christianity and community's interest with the Egyptian state. While an institutional analysis of the church will be provided, the role of the church in the formation of the grievances and mobilization process will also be explored. Nevertheless, the recent revolution has influenced the Coptic community remarkably, as it did to the whole Egyptian society. But the gist of the issue is the formation of the Maspero Youth organization that challenged the church and its leadership. This issue will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

The third party to this conflict is the Muslim majority. Despite the problems of taking the Muslims as a whole community party to the conflict, examining discrimination and violence against the Copts reveal that such practices are widespread in the Muslim majority. Further, identifying perpetrators of violence is almost impossible since the rule of law is not enforced and media usually reports that "unknown thugs" attacked the Copts. Therefore, the literature on Copts studies the issue by not identifying a certain actor but by enjoying the existence of multiple actors as it provides flexibility to analyze how discrimination, exclusion and violence are undertaken by different groups. For instance, most notable studies, those of Apostolov (1999), Pennington (1982), Iskander (2012) and Zeidan (1999) in the literature do not specify a certain actor but discuss the issue in the given context. Nevertheless, this study will examine the Muslim Brothers' and the Salafi trend's relations with the Copts when it is relevant and helpful to deepen the level of analysis. While the Muslim Brothers has been perceived as a threat to the Coptic community, some of the violent actions against the Coptic community have been attributed to the Salafi trend. Recently, both conflict and cooperation discourse among the Muslim Brothers, the Copts, and the Salafi trend took place. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the Salafi movement consists of many groups difficult to identify that do not necessarily have the same political agenda but share a common framework (A. Hamada, personal communication, March 19, 2012). Therefore, this study will use the term the Salafi

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the text, I use the term Church interchangeably with the Coptic Orthodox Church.

trend in order to describe this movement. In order to shed light on this processes, I will critically approach the assumptions of the abovementioned theoretical models and sketch the conflicting issues that have contributed to the mobilization of the Coptic community as discourse analysis or other measures do not fit to the models that I employed in this study.

### **2.3.2 Time Frame of the Study**

This study investigates the 2005-2012 period since the most meaningful issues related to scope of this study occurred in this era. 2005 is a turning point in the history of Egypt since the authoritarian regime allowed “competitive elections” to take place and initiated economic liberalization policies. The Muslim Brothers achieved to form a group in the Egyptian Parliament that was perceived as a threat by the Coptic community. Furthermore, different protest movements such as *Kefaya* (Enough) started to criticize the government and encouraged all people to do so. These civil attempts resulted in the overthrow of the almost thirty years old authoritarian government of President Mubarak. In the aftermath, I observe more protest led by the Coptic community while the Salafis and the Muslim Brothers achieved to form political parties and entered the Parliament in 2011 elections.

### **2.3.3 Additional Variables**

Along with the ethnopolitical mobilization framework’s and ethnoreligious conflict model’s variables, I will take regional differences as an additional variable. Upper and Lower Egypt historically have shown distinct patterns that are attributed to the hydraulic like nature of the country. While the Lower Egypt has presented prosperity and modernization, the Upper Egypt has been home to the poor and illiterate people. Thus, while many people migrated from Upper Egypt to Lower Egypt (especially to Cairo), the low level of education and welfare in Upper Egypt seem to be significant dynamics in the conflict.

In the next chapter, I will briefly sketch the history of the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Copts with a special focus on 2005-2012 and review the literature on this subject.



## **Chapter 3 Literature Review and Historical Background of the Conflict**

This chapter discusses the historical background of the remittent relationship in two ways. The first part of this section will examine and classify the literature on Coptic question. While many studies focus on the causes of discrimination and label the conflict as “sectarian”, some studies argue that there is no “Coptic question” in Egypt. In addition to these two currents, there are also studies focusing on modernization of Egyptian state, the Orthodox Coptic Church, and rise of Islamist fraternities in relation with the Copts.

In the second part, this study will track the development of inter-communal relations with regards to the establishment and consolidation of the modern Egyptian state. While the primary focus will be on Coptic-Muslim relations and the causes of the conflict, i.e. inter communal relations, intra-communal relations of the Copts will also be explored as the Coptic Orthodox Church’s modernization will shed light on State-Church and Church-community relations. Emphasis on Islamization of Egypt and the impacts of *Infitah* policies blinds one to see how the Copts’ internal dynamics played a role in (im) mobilization.

### **3.1 Literature Review**

As the Copts are seen the sons of pharaohs and the first community to follow Jesus Christ and disseminate Christianity, there is great amount of biblical canon devoted not only Coptic Orthodox beliefs but also to the Coptic language and culture. Nevertheless, this study concentrates on ethno-political mobilization of the community that narrows the literature that this study considers. The literature created by the students of political science, history and sociology can be divided into three categories; discrimination and sectarian conflict literature with an emphasis on Islamization, state of denial, and modernization in Egypt and in the Coptic community.

To begin with, the literature focusing on discrimination against the Copts usually documents exclusion and official discrimination of the Egyptian state in relation with the Muslim majority.

This body of literature analyzes the Coptic question through historic lenses with an emphasis of “Islamization” of Egypt referring to dominant role of Islam has played since 1970s. Ibrahim’s (1996) study is a primary resource with the depth of its historical and sociological analysis of Copts’ and their relationships with the Egyptian state and Muslim majority until mid-1990s. Nevertheless, this study, being part of Minority Rights publications, reflects a trend in western scholarship to study minorities in the Middle East as a whole rather than as single entities. Following this trend, Apsotolov (2001), Ayalon (1999), Chaudhry (1995), Rahman (1986) and Meinardus (2006) examine Copts relations with the “Islamic state and Islamized society” and Muslim majority in the broader Middle East as one of the many Christian minorities. Zeidan (1999) tracks how Islamization contributed to the persecution discourse of the Copts that marred the whole history of Copts as suggested by Sedra (2009). Counter arguments to this body of literature are offered by Sedra (1999) and Khawaga (1998) who point to overestimation of religion and sectarianism in studying Muslim-Christian relations, and refer to Coptic modernization as a turning point instead of exaggerating impact of 1967 and 1974.

The second body of literature is a reflection of the on the Egyptian state’s “denial of the Coptic question”. In 1993, Mohamed Heikal wrote an article negating the Coptic question and arguing that the Copts are part of the “Egyptian fabric” (al-Gawhary, 1996). This discourse is reproduced by the media and articulated to a discourse of foreign powers that want to create internal problems to weaken the Egyptian state and society. Heikal’s debate found widespread support both from the top institutions and the civil society highlighting to what extent this discourse is entrenched in the society. Since Tadros (2009) and Iskander (2012) decode this body of literature, which is usually in Arabic, there is no need to further this discussion. Nevertheless, there is also a moderate perspective that focuses on cooperation between the Copts and the Muslims and distancing itself from the victimhood and persecution. Makari (2007) focuses on the cooperation among the state and church institutions but rely only on official discourses that plague his study since official accounts show that there is no problem between the two communities, which is in fact a sign of problems.

The third body of literature is mainly concerned about Coptic modernity and history but also many subtitles such as identity, diaspora groups and media have articulated to this literature. V.

Ibrahim (2011) and Scott (2010) challenge the common wisdom on Coptic-Muslim relations that is usually presented peaceful in early 20<sup>th</sup> century and provide in depth analysis of how internal conflicts divided the Coptic community until Pope Shenouda rose to power. Hassan's (2003) study on Sunday School Movement digs the ground on Coptic modernization but recent reviews cast serious doubt on this study since the study pulls away itself from scientific methodology (Sedra, 2004). Further, Hassan (2003) portrays the two communities' relations as a sectarian dichotomy: Muslims versus Christians, which is not accurate.

Sub-branches of this body of literature focus on identity, diaspora groups and media in the last decade. Henderson (2005) discussed how demanding equality influenced Copts identity, Delhaye (2012) argues Coptic diaspora forced the Egyptian government to address some issues to protect its image in the international stage, and Brinkerhoff (2005) shows how interaction between the digital diaspora and ordinary Copts through internet resulted in demands of change. Iskander (2012) discusses the impact of media liberalization by showing how it shaped Coptic identity and discourse of sectarianism that alienated the community. The emergence of this sub-branch of literature resulted in new research on Coptic history and contemporary developments that led to Sedra (2009) to conclude "The Copts have become actors". However, nobody has studied the mobilization of the Copts yet and this study intends to fill this gap in the literature

The categorical difference between these three bodies of literature is being pro-Coptic or anti-Coptic. While the first and the third bodies are in favor of the Copts despite their different perspectives, the second body of literature is in line with the Egyptian state's discourse. Further, the first and third body of literature is concerned with scholarly research whereas the second is biased from the very beginning and methodologically may be subject to criticism. It is interesting to witness that the first body of literature is also obsessed with "sectarianism" and almost all of the research conducted on Copts somewhat related to "sectarianism". The result is, unfortunately, ignoring the socio-economic dynamics and problems of the Muslim and Coptic communities such as poverty, unemployment or the problems of youth since the state also use such a discourse with a different tone. Nevertheless, the scholarship on the Copts has been changing recently as new studies problematize internal and external dynamics of the

community and do not study only the Copts relations with the state as an oppressed minority. For example, Tadros (2009) and McCallum (2010) researched the entente between the Church and the State that showed us how the institutions act between each other but obey the rules of the game in public. However, this may also result in more sectarian conflict research, in contrast to “revolution hopeful” academic Saba Mahmood’s prediction that sectarian conflict will melt away, as the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis formed legal political parties after the 25 January Revolution (Mahmood, 2012).

### **3.2 Inter-Communal Relations**

In this part, I will discuss mainly three periods of coexistence and conflict. First, Egypt was one of the first places that Christianity was introduced and the Eastern Orthodox Christianity enjoyed autonomy after the schism that was an outcome of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The arrival of Islam to Egyptian soils caused many conflicts between the Muslims and Copts but six Coptic rebellions were of little use in practice but resulted in persecution discourse that still dominates Coptic history. Another continuity was increasing number of Copts converting to Islam and learning Arabic because of the advantages it offered. Second, during the pre-modern era the Copts had to deal with Crusaders with their Muslim fellows and Coptic middle classes managed to rise to senior positions in Mamluk bureaucracy. However, the Ottomans removed the Copts from senior positions and introduced the millet system that reconfigured the relations between Istanbul and Alexandria. Third, the modern times begin with Muhammad Ali Pasha’s reign (1805-1848) and Copts enjoyed higher position in governmental offices and the Coptic Church entered a phase of modernization following footprints of Muhammad Ali. The Hamayouni decree (1856) regulated state-society and inter-communal relations that showed continuity until recently with the entente established by the state apparatus and the Church. The crystallization of nation state idea indicates a rupture, as some Coptic movements and the Church developed some programs to revive Coptic identity.

To begin with, Egypt was one of the first places that Christianity was introduced and has a long history of Coptic existence beginning from the first century C.E. Throughout Roman history, the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Church fluctuated, as Rome wanted to have control over church by appointing patriarchs from the capital. However, the Coptic

Church and the Coptic community did not accept such appointments not only because it was direct intervention in church affairs but also because of the interpretation of the Holy Bible and the nature of Christ. At the Council of Chalcedon 451 CE, the Orthodox Coptic Church argued that Christ had one nature (monophysites), which is the unity of his divine and human beings in contrast to the Roman Church based in Istanbul that claimed Christ was both divine and human (Meinardus, 1999). This dispute caused an early schism between the Eastern Christianity and the Roman Church that still did not last.

Early in history, the term *Aigyptos* in Coptic language was used to refer to Egypt. *Gypt* meant Copt and therefore *Aigyptos* referred to Coptic people from Egypt. This has changed when ‘Amr ibn al-‘As conquered Egypt and introduced Arabic and Islam on the Egyptian territories. Since then, *gypt* has become *qibti*, meaning Egyptians who did not convert to Islam, as in three hundred years the Arabs achieved to Islamize and Arabize the country to a significant extent (Makari, 2007). As a result, the Coptic language also gradually lost its influence among the people and was used only in the Church.

During the early Islamic period (639-747), the Copts accepted Islamic rule since it brought an end to Byzantine rule and allowed the Copts to choose their own patriarchs and manage their own internal affairs. However, that does not necessarily mean the Copts did not challenge the Islamic rulers. The Copts rebelled at least six times but were defeated in all of their attempts which resulted in conversion of more Copts to Islam (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996). The impact of Islam and Arabic being mentioned, one should also add migration as a significant factor. There is evidence that between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries Arabs migrated to Egyptian peninsula as the birth rate increased and the appointed rulers of Egypt brought a large number of people with them (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996).

On the other hand, the good relations deteriorated during the rule of Ayyubids (1171-1250) and Mamluks (1250-1517) as the crusaders led a holy war against the Muslims. One should pay special attention to Salah al-Din’s reign not just because he was successful against the crusaders but more importantly since he appointed many Copts to high status and halted the so called “sectarian conflict”. According to Malaty (1993), two Copts were given the task to design the Citadel in Cairo which historically has been the government office until late 19<sup>th</sup>



century (quoted in Makari, 2007). Nevertheless, the Copts suffered from both the Western Christians and Muslims. On the one hand, they were subject to prohibition because their practices were in dispute with that of the western type of Christianity and they did not collaborate with the Crusaders. On the other hand, the Muslims turned out to be intolerant as the spirit of Jihad increased as they dealt with the Crusaders (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996). In addition, Ibrahim (1996) observes that the crusaders wanted to divide Ethiopian church and the Coptic Church in Egypt so as to gain power and this caused hostility against them among the Copts.

As the Mamluks consolidated their power, the Crusaders were removed from Egypt. During the Mamluks period, the conflict between the Muslims and the Copts was over the bureaucratic class. While the Coptic middle class dominated the bureaucracy, the economically rising Muslim middle classes aspired for such government positions (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996). Therefore, the Mamluks tried to resolve this tension by adjusting the bureaucracy but in 1517 the Ottomans conquered Egypt bringing an end to Mamluk rule.

### **3.2.1 Ottoman Empire, Muhammad Ali and the Copts as Dhimmis**

The Ottoman Empire employing the *millet* system offered the *dhimmi* (the protected people of the book) status to the non-Muslim communities living in the Empire. Makari (2007) describes three accounts of the Copts under Ottoman rule. First, according to the Coptic historian Malaty, the Ottoman rulers imposed heavy taxes on Copts, forced them to leave Nubia, imprisoning Pope Mark IV and making the Copts to wear different dresses (quoted in Makari, 2007). According to an English traveller, the Copts have been subject to discrimination until Mohammed Ali became the ruler of Egypt and conscripted the Copts (quoted in Makari, 2007). A third account is that of Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1996) who observes that the Ottomans removed the Copts from the administration apparatus. Nevertheless, while some Copts became wealthier and gained high status positions, those at the bottom suffered with their Muslim fellows since the only means to earn their living was agriculture<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The relationship between the Copts and the Ottoman Empire is not a well-researched area. While a more nuanced account of the relationship is needed, this study will not enter into such a discussion as this paper is on recent day relations.

Under Muhammad Ali's reign (1805-1848) the Copts enjoyed a relatively better period as he appointed some Copts to high status positions but excluded them from the High Council, which he consulted for the administration of the country. In addition, Jacques Tajar, a Coptic historian who wrote early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, claimed that Muhammad Ali never rejected the Copts' request to build new churches (quoted in Scott, 2010). Muhammad Ali aimed at building a modern and developed state, therefore he made use of all Egyptians but employed the Copts in financial institutes as it was their specialization<sup>6</sup> (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996; Scott, 2010). Scott (2010) finds Muhammad Ali's impact on the Copts significant as the Coptic Church followed Muhammad Ali's modernist policies, especially in education and the formation of a Coptic intelligentsia.

Muhammad Ali died while the Ottoman Empire experienced a painful period of modernization, *Tanzimat* that changed the status of the non-Muslim communities along with the modern, secular policies and institutions. The influence of the *Tanzimat* to Copts is the *Hamayouni* decree that tried to establish equality between the Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Sultan. The *Hamayouni* decree regulated the relations among the Copts, their Muslim fellows and the state as follows:

- a. The re-establishment of all previous laws concerning Copts, especially the independent personal status law,
- b. The formation of Lay Councils consisting of the clergy and secularists to administer the financial matters of the church and to discuss personal status affairs,
- c. Requests for church building to be presented by the pope to the sultan and a license to be issued,
- d. No one is to be punished nor prevented from preventing his (sic) rites and no one should be forced to abandon his religion
- e. Equality between Muslims and Christians in employment,

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<sup>6</sup> According to Scott (2010), Muhammad Ali stated that he does not want to see any difference between his subjects except them praying in different temples.

- f. Military training and participation is a duty for all males, regardless of religion,
- g. All terminology that discriminates between people on the basis of religion should be from the *diwans*, and offending people on a religious basis is forbidden<sup>7</sup> (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996, p. 11).

The Hamayouni decree's promise for equality was not fully realized as modernization process was a work in progress but eased church construction issues<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, according to Malaty (1993) Khedive Ismail has been the most tolerant ruler in Muhammad Ali's ruling family as the *Hamayouni* decree provided the Copts the opportunity to have better relations with Muslims at communal level and Khedive himself appointed many Copts to high-level administrative positions (quoted in Makari, 2007). Nevertheless, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the British forces occupied the country many missionaries arrived in the country to invite not only Muslims but also Copts to their sects. This created a sense of discontent among Muslims against Copts as some of them collaborated with the missionaries. That being said, the Church felt threatened as the missionaries reached poor people by offering them social benefits that caused alignment between the Copts and the Muslims and reformation of the church affairs (Makari, 2007). Last but not least, the formation of Lay Council is a significant example of state intervention in Coptic communal issues as the Lay Council became a secular, parallel decision making body that caused conflicts over the management of *waqf* endowments between this institute and the Church.

### **3.2.2 The Making of Egyptian Nation State and Crystallization of Coptic Demands**

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are marked by the spread of ideas, and magazines and newspapers as tools of information distribution. Similar to that of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt

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<sup>7</sup> This decree was amended in 1934 by the Minister of Interior's will. This amendment will be explored below in detail as it is the source of many Coptic grievances.

<sup>8</sup> According to Makari (2007), President Mubarak has changed this process in early 2000s. However, he does not elaborate on the new process and how it solved the problem. Unfortunately, there is credible evidence showing changing the process does not necessarily means getting permission to build or repair churches.

underwent such a process in which the Copts had the opportunity to own such establishments and gain political power. The struggle against British rule is a watershed in the country's history as both the Coptic and Muslim cooperation reached an unprecedented level. This was followed by the liberal nationalist *Wafd* era (1919-1952) that many Egyptians have nostalgia for it today because of the prevalent unity discourse. However, while early scholarship and national discourse is reflected as full of harmony, recent scholarship sheds light on inter-communal relations.

First, in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammad Abduh influenced Egyptian modernization by his combination of secular and Islamist ideas. Despite the fact that much of the tension was created by the press, prominently by *Jaridat al-Watan* and *Misr*, pan-Islamic emphasis on Egyptian nationalism led many Copts to distance themselves from the mainstream political parties (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996; V. Ibrahim, 2011; Makari, 2007; Scott, 2010). Nevertheless, given his merit, Buthros Ghali Pasha was appointed as the new prime minister in 1908, but actually it created hostility against the Copts. According to El-Feki (1988), an extremist member of the Nationalist Party assassinated the prime minister in 1910 that exacerbated inter-communal relations and caused reactions from the Copts (quoted in Makari, 2007). However, was the assassination of Buthros Ghali Pasha a reasonable enough reason for such a tension?

Despite the Egyptian discourse that Copts and Muslims were united against the British, Vatikiotis (1991) observed that the Copts sought protection from the British with the aim to strengthen their communal life. The result of this tendency can be cited as the crystallization of century long Coptic reaction to prevalent Islamic discourse; "they tended to isolate themselves in order to protect their interests against what they viewed as a rising Islamic sentiment" (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 208), as a result of the ongoing hostility. Gorst's (the British High Officer in Egypt) arguments that the Copts are not discriminated against, and in reaction to Buthros Ghali Pasha's assassination, the Copts held a Coptic Congress in Assiut to make demands in the name of their communities. Pennington (1982) notes that the Copts wanted Sunday to be national holiday as they joined the church mass, an end to official discrimination in public employment, and financial contribution to Christian schools. While no official response was

given to these requests, a Muslim congress was held as a counter action and rejected such demands.

Nonetheless, with the outbreak of the World War I national sentiments brought together Egyptians while the “other” remained somewhere in mind. At this point, one should bear in mind that the idea of pan-Islamism was not operational anymore and a liberal political wave was at stake. The 1919 Urabi Revolution of Egypt is said to be watershed as both communities did not hesitate to fight for the independence and unity of the country in which flags representing cross and crescent were used by many<sup>9</sup>. This was a result of *Wafd* Party’s domination of political sphere, which promised national unity to be based on secular ideals. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Makram ‘Ebeid, a member of aristocratic Coptic family, was an influential figure close to party’s leader Sa’ad Zaghlul. Reading between the lines, Makari (2007) implies that as secular nationalism gained momentum in the country, higher levels of tolerance and cooperation existed.

However, in 1922 when Egypt gained its conditional independence from Britain, the English rulers wanted to have power on four points including “protection of foreign interests and minorities in Egypt” (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 270). Led by Sa’ad Zaghlul and Makram ‘Ebeid the *Wafd* negotiated independence with the British that caused many Egyptians to think the Copts want to be protected by an outsider in case of conflict with the Muslims. This point was rejected both by the *Wafd* and the Copts during the parliamentary debates on the new Egyptian constitution. Nevertheless, early in 1922 when a draft constitution was proposed the Copts were offered proportional representation but they rejected it since fears were grown, since such a policy would deepen sectarian feelings (Scott, 2010).

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<sup>9</sup> Scott (2010) in his nuanced study shows us that cooperation among the Copts and the Muslims was not that great and such flags were rare. Nevertheless, Egyptian governments and people always invest in such discourse. In addition, Egyptian historians and literature do not contradict this point. I follow Scott (2010) as he examines both Egyptian and English documents and focuses on the period as a case study.

While the 1922 Egyptian Constitution stated that Egypt is an Islamic state and not mentioning any point regarding the status of the Copts, the state avoided to seeing the Coptic issue as a problem. That being said, the Copts were subject to Hamayouni decree but felt they were not given full citizenship rights as the constitution referred only to Islam. In 1934, in contrast to advanced Hamayouni decree, the Minister of Interior of the time, Al Ezabi Pasha issued a ten point statement making more difficult to build a church than ever. Saad Eddin Ibrahim documents these points as follows:

- a. Is the land on which the church is to be built empty or agricultural land, and does it belong to the person presenting the request?
- b. What is the distance between the proposed church and surrounding mosques?
- c. If the land is vacant, is it near to Christian or Muslim settlements?
- d. If it is close to Muslims, do they have any objection to it?
- e. Is there another church belonging to this denomination in the same town or village?
- f. What is the distance between the nearest church belonging to this denomination and the town in which the requested church to be built?
- g. What is the number of Christians living in the area?
- h. If the land on which the church is to be built is close to the Nile, or bridges or public utilities belonging to the Ministry of Irrigation, an approval should be sought from the Ministry itself. Also, if it is near to railway lines, the railway authorities should also give their approval.
- i. An official report should be made on all of the above points, and it should indicate the surrounding buildings to be requested spot on which the church is to be built, including the nearest shops, and the distances between these shops and the church.
- j. The person making the request should have all these papers signed by the head of denomination, and the engineer who is to responsible for that area, in addition to aforementioned approvals, and present all the requested papers (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996, pp. 11-12).

It will not be an exaggeration if one interprets the above ten points as the reasons why it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get a church construction permit, let alone to build a church. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find studies problematizing the abovementioned ten-point decree<sup>10</sup>, and questioning the role of the nation state in contemporary Coptic-Muslim relations. Meanwhile, Wafd Party's domination of national politics prevented disputes on the national level until Makram 'Ebeid's *Black Book* affair with the Wafd's leadership. 'Ebeid was second to Mustafa al-Nahhas, the then Wafd's leader and expected to be named as party secretary general. However, when al-Nahhas did not appoint him to this position that was perceived by 'Ebeid as sectarian. Therefore, he wrote a book called *Al-Kitab al-Aswad* (Black Book) in which he accounted how al-Nahhas and other top officials of Wafd were corrupt. To some accounts, this issue was raised as a result of King Faruq's will to diminish Wafd's power by emphasizing an Islamic discourse according to one account (Makari, 2007), whereas another account stresses the failure of Anglo British-Egyptian Agreement that was negotiated by 'Ebeid (V. Ibrahim, 2011). Nonetheless, Pope Macarius supported al-Nahhas by calling him the "leader of the people", a title given only to Sa'ad Zaghlul. This approach was criticized by many Copts but the Church succeeded to be the mainstream voice of the ordinary Copts, despite the dispute over this issue with the Lay Council (Majlis al-Milli).

### **3.2.3 The Free Officers Coup: Institutional Entente, Crystallization of Official Discrimination and Exclusion**

The Free Officers coup of 1952 started a new page in the history of contemporary Egypt and the Copts. Though the coup aimed at bringing the monarchy to an end, therefore the British influence on Egyptian politics, Gamal Abd al-Nasser became the pioneering figure combining his ideas on Arab identity with a socialist aspect, which was mostly used in international affairs but also become a significant current of Egyptian nationalism (Hinnebusch, 2009). Since

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<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that only Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1996) mentions this decree as part of his summary. Those who claim to pursue period studies (V. Ibrahim, 2011) or citizenship matters (Scott, 2010) do not cite this decree at all. Though Makari (2007) cites many arguments from Saad Eddin Ibrahim, he does not cite this decree that shows how he prefers to use the available literature.

Nasser, emphasis on Arab identity and a blend of Islam and Arab Egyptian nationalism created significant problems for the Copts as they felt they were not part of the nation. Further, Nasser's Land Reform and nationalization projects changed the structure of the Egyptian bourgeois as these programs relieved the Coptic bourgeois properties and welfare (Zeidan, 1999). More importantly, the Free Officers Coup introduced a modern military rule to the country and since then the Egyptian military became the pioneering tool of the state apparatus that was administered by presidents who had military backgrounds. Though a new president is elected after January 25 elections, the continuum in military's power is remarkable.

Though Nasser co-opted the Muslim Brothers (Ikhwan) that was perceived a threat to the secular regime and to the Copts by imprisoning its members and executing its leader Sayyid Qutb in 1966, the relationship between the Church and the regime relied much on personal relations of Nasser and Pope Kyrollos VI. Despite Pennington's (1982) claims that the Copts enjoyed more freedom during Nasser's era, Nasser's objective to create an official Islam discourse against Ikhwan resulted in religion classes being added to curricula and *Al-Azhar* started to exclude Copts (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996). Furthermore, while Nasser's free education campaign made the Copts to feel equal with their Muslim fellows actually it resulted in discrimination in public employment as Muslims were chosen over Copts. The Copts' demands in 1950s included equality in political and social areas, a solution to construction and renovation of the churches and conversion issues, and reversion of the confiscated *waqf* and bourgeoisie's lands. Though Anwar Sadat returned Islamic *waqf*'s properties in the 1970s, the Copts were left out of this policy. Indeed, according to Zeidan (1999), Nasser distributed Coptic lands to Muslim peasants, a policy that humiliated the community. How did the abovementioned settings of the Nasserist regime influence Coptic- Muslim and Church-State relations?

Two reflections of Nasser's policies towards the Copts are crucial to understand Church-State relations. The internal struggle-which will be elaborated in the section on intra-communal relations-, caused Pope Kyrollos VI to request from Nasser to weaken the *Majlis al-Milli*. Therefore, first, the Church's role as sole religious and political representative of the Copts crystallized (Hassan, 2003). Further, the Egyptian state's role as a mediator between the Church



and other groups- be it Coptic or Muslim- began in addition to its inherent interventionist approach in Church management. Second, despite the Copts' citizenship problems before the Nasser era, religion became their identity marker as the regime gave so much credibility to the church and negotiated the problems of the Copts only with the Pope, instead of implementing the rule of the law. The *entente* between the church and the state apparatus would fluctuate throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century but the church having sole power on its own community enjoyed political domination over the Copts. Nevertheless, one should examine the implications of this entente to understand communal relations

Such a policy resulted in three significant implications. First, the construction of churches depended on the personal relationships of the Pope and the President of the time. For example, Nasser granted to Pope Kyrillos the right to construct twenty-five churches per year. This is documented by Mohammed Heikal who was close to Nasser and the editor of the state owned *Al Ahrām* newspaper. He narrates how the Coptic Patriarch got permission to construct churches:

it was understandably humiliating for the Patriarch to find that any applications for building permits he made got lost in the labyrinth of the Ministry of Interior. So he approaches Nasser on the subject. Nasser was sympathetic, and asked how many new churches the Patriarch thought he needed. The answer was between twenty and thirty a year. Right, said Nasser, and immediately gave him permission to build twenty-five churches a year (Heikal, 1983, p. 158).

Another implication of the entente between the Church and the regime reflected itself in electoral politics. Though Zeidan (1999) claims that the Coptic community experienced lack of Copts in senior positions sternly, the Church and the regimes did not give much attention to this phenomenon. Not only Nasser but also Sadat and Mubarak, who were all army generals before becoming president, would negotiate with the Coptic Patriarchs over the names of the Coptic MPs, who were actually not elected but "chosen". Heikal (1983) mentions how these MPs were technocrats, far from ordinary Coptic people. What Heikal does not mention is that how these MPs were loyal to both the regime and the Church and sometimes acted as intermediaries. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the Nasser regime taking the Church as interlocutor opened a

new phase for the Copts in modern Egypt's history as continuously they were treated as subjects of the church whom negotiated with the regime for them.

### **3.2.4 Sadat and Shenouda III: Clash of the Leaders or Sectarian Conflict?**

When Israel defeated Egypt in 1967, many believed that it was a result of the lack of faith and therefore many took refuge in Islam. While some scholars argued that this was the crisis of Arab political thought (Ajami, 1981), some others claimed Islamism emerged in this period as a result of "disappointment with and insecurity felt under Nasser" (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 407). Nevertheless, Nasser did not resign but died in September 1970 as a result of a heart attack to be succeeded by his vice president, Anwar Sadat<sup>11</sup>. This was followed by the death of Pope Kyrillos VI in 1971 that caused harsh internal struggles over who will be the next patriarch. In sum, Nazeer Gayed Roufail who got the title of Shenouda was elected as the new pope whose papacy lasted over forty years and died in March 2012. From the very beginning, Pope Shenouda III showed a certain level of willingness to involve in politics and address the grievances of the Copts.

Despite the common knowledge that Pope Shenouda and Sadat confronted each other because of their personalities, indeed, the real causes were Pope Shenouda's will to change the Copts' destiny and Sadat's objective to be the "(Muslim) pious leader of the country". To achieve these ends, Sadat prayed publicly and appeared on state television on Friday sermons to show this image that gave him legitimacy in the eyes of people and Pope Shenouda did not hesitate to confront Mr. President. Furthermore, Sadat released Islamists that were imprisoned by Nasser to gain legitimacy to implement his *infitah* (opening) policy and oppress the leftists. Kepel (2002) argues by doing so Sadat lost his control on the *monopoly of ideology* (my emphasis). This was accompanied by socio-economic problems caused by the *infitah* that made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Therefore, Islamist movements like Ikhwan attracted people as they developed a social service network for needy people. This phenomenon gave legitimacy to the

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<sup>11</sup> Though it is not directly related to our subject here, one should be aware Sadat became the president since he was the vice president. Mubarak was more cautious about this issue and never appointed a vice president.

Islamists to assume political power but they did so indirectly through attacking the Copts instead of the state apparatus, to make symbolic violence.

While the abovementioned aspects of 1970s is crucial to understand the period, three issues heightened and intensified the conflict between two communities: Islam's increasing influence on society and political rise of Islamist groups, rising level of so called sectarian violence and Coptic emigrants' activism in the U.S.

First, while the rise of political Islam is mentioned above the Egyptian Islamist movements vary significantly from a radical discourse to a soft interpretation of Shari'a. For example, during the 1970s, a group called *at-Takfir wa'l Hijra* targeted Coptic churches because of radical interpretation of Islam and the relatively secular life style the Copts enjoyed. After the 1973 war, Sadat attempted to make a peace agreement with Israel that caused anger among Islamists and they thought Copts were playing a role in this process. To show their anger against the regime, Islamist movements targeted Coptic churches (Makari, 2007). Furthermore, the *infitah* that aimed at a liberal economic program was another cause of Islamists' grievances. While the Copts generally supported this program as it opened up new employment opportunities and emphasized a western oriented policy, the Muslims explained their discontent as it only brought poverty and disengagement from pan-Arabism (Pennington, 1982). Nonetheless, Sadat amended the Constitution twice in 1970s: first in 1971 when Article 2 stated "the Shari'a constitutes one of the sources of legislation" and second in 1979 in which Article 2 declared "the Shari'a is the principal source of legislation". While this amendment gave more legitimacy to Sadat in the eyes of the Muslim majority, the Copts felt threatened since this clause overlapped with the Islamists' agendas.

Second, the increasing level of sectarian violence intensified conflicting relations between Pope Shenouda III and Sadat. Beginning with the *Al-Khanka* incident in which a chapel was burned down by "unknown arsonists" (Nkrumah, 2012), Coptic-Muslim tension marked that decade as Pope Shenouda sent his priests to protest along with the ordinary citizens as a mass force. Further, Pope Shenouda III publicly criticized Sadat because of Sadat's reluctance to investigate violence against Christians, abeyance of the al-Oteify report's recommendation that Sadat should reconsider the legal framework of construction of churches and the *ridda* law that

proposed to punish people with the death penalty who convert from Islam to Christianity (Tadros, 2009). Achieving peace with Israel through Camp David, Sadat promised Israel to send tourists to Israel in order to increase relations between two countries. Since he could not promote the idea of Muslims visiting Jerusalem, he tried to send Copts to Jerusalem for pilgrimage. However, Pope Shenouda refused such an idea as Jerusalem was occupied by Israel and his Palestinian fellows were subject to Israeli violence. This is not only because he was against Sadat's policies, indeed, Pope Shenouda himself served as a soldier in Palestine territories after Israel declared its independency and Arab states interfered in the conflict.

Third, for Pope Shenouda protesting Sadat was not only criticizing him publicly but also taking refuge to a monastery in the desert and lobbying in the U.S. through the Coptic diaspora and cancellation of the Easter celebrations. Taking refuge in the desert is a political tactic to refrain from the public, leaving the opponent subject to public criticism and without a counterpart to negotiate. When Sadat visited the U.S., the Copts protested him in front of his American colleagues and by giving full page newspaper ads stating how the Copts of Egypt were persecuted (Ansari, 1984). Obviously, Sadat was humiliated in front of his "brother" Jimmy Carter and given his loose cannon personality he put Pope Shenouda under house arrest in Wadi al-Natrun forbidding him to contact public. The President also ordered the formation of a papal committee composed of five people to undertake Pope's duties that he expected to be cooperative<sup>12</sup>. Bishop Samuel who cooperated with Sadat was perceived as traitor whereas Pope Shenouda became the hero of the community that gave him the legitimacy to remove all of the factions against him. Nevertheless, Sadat was assassinated in 1981 by a member of an

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<sup>12</sup> As the Pope was put under house arrest, different power groups arose among the Copts. While the Holy Synod supported the Pope, some Bishops took different stances regarding the issue. For example, Bishop Samuel appeared many times with Sadat and asked the Copts to vote in favor of the amendment of the Article 2. Also, the Coptic diaspora supported Pope Shenouda by protesting the Egyptian government abroad but later on developed an independent approach that not necessarily consistent with the discourse of the church. For more information see: (Hassan, 2003). On the other hand, ordinary Copts supported Pope by chanting "Bi'l dam wal roh nafdik" (With our blood and our souls, we will vindicate you) (Hassan, 2003, p. 113).

Islamist group after Sadat arrested more than 1,500 people including Islamists, leftists and Copts.

### **3.2.5 The Mubarak Era: The Church-Authoritarian Regime Entente**

Succeeding Sadat, Mubarak's relationship with the church and the Copts was an uneasy one. The official relationship between Mubarak and Pope Shenouda started when Mubarak terminated Shenouda's house arrest in 1984 after the parliamentary elections. Naming Fikri Makram 'Ebeid as deputy prime minister and another Copt as minister of state, the Mubarak regime was able to lessen the communal conflict in the first half of the 1980s. Recounting on his relationship with Sadat and Mubarak, Pope Shenouda highlighted how Sadat was destructive whereas Mubarak engages in dialogue (quoted in McCallum, 2010). Despite Kepel's (2002) arguments that the increasing sectarian conflict in the 1990s is partly due to more political room given to Islamist groups<sup>13</sup> (quoted in Makari, 2007), Tadros (2009) claims that Pope Shenouda reconciled the church-regime relations earlier than Mubarak co-opted the Islamists. It was in early 1990s when *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* established a "state-like" organization in Imbaba neighborhood of Cairo that led to Mubarak to crack down on the Islamists. This phenomenon did not only threaten Mubarak's regime but more importantly the state apparatus itself. Surviving more than 25 years, the Mubarak-Shenouda relationship was marked by the solution of communal issues through personal channels between the two and the Church's political alignment with the regime until 2007<sup>14</sup>. How did Pope Shenouda- Mubarak manage to survive such a relationship?

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<sup>13</sup> Makari (2007) cites Kepel's work published in 1986 to explain the increasing conflict throughout the 1990s. I guess this is an editorial or writing process mistake since causally a book written in 1986 cannot explain the 1990s. Most probably, Makari wanted to cite Kepel's newer work published in 2002 as he includes this latter study in the bibliography.

<sup>14</sup> One should be cautious in assessing Pope Shenouda's support to the regime. Shenouda's support to the Mubarak regime does not necessarily mean support to the state apparatus. The Pope had many conflicts with the state apparatus most notably over church construction and repair issues. The church repair and construction permits usually got lost in the labyrinth of the Ministry of Interior, though Mubarak assured Shenouda.

The seemingly peaceful relationship between Pope Shenouda and Mubarak was a result of many factors, though both communities did not enjoy such a level of peace. First, Pope Shenouda was smart enough to eliminate the Bishops who cooperated with Sadat. To achieve his objective, he focused on internal affairs and created his own clique to have full control both on his community and relations with the regime (Hassan, 2003). Second, Mubarak came to power in a sensitive period, and tried to consolidate his power by reconciling both communities. Therefore, while he did not aim at cracking down on the Islamists until early 1990s, leaving his confrontational approach, Pope Shenouda showed gestures towards him. In early 1990s, when Islamist groups started to target tourists the President cracked down on Islamists harshly, putting them in jail. Throughout the 1990s, there have been attacks against the Copts in the following villages, Sanabo of Dayrout, Tima, Deir Mawas in 1992, Abu Korkas in 1995, Kush of Upper Egypt in 1998 and on many churches in Minya and Cairo that same year (Hassan, 2003). In contrast to his fervent reactions during Sadat's period and to Khanka incident, Pope Shenouda did not criticize Mubarak publicly and did not even announce fast sessions. At this stage, learned observers analyze the relationship as diplomacy (Hassan, 2003) or *entente* (Tadros, 2009) in a neo-millet system. Though neo-millet system is explained by Rowe (2007) and Sedra (1999) as unconditional support of the Coptic Orthodox Church in exchange for unconditional political support, Tadros's (2009) research shows that neo-millet system shall not be understood as so. And yet, how could be such a relationship built? Are Pope Shenouda's consolidation of power and Mubarak's crack down on Islamists analytical and persuasive enough for such an *entente*?

Pope Shenouda's article in the Church's mouthpiece *al-Kiraza* in 1980 argues that religious institutions should be part of social and economic development and regimes rejecting this idea are totalitarian (quoted in Al-Khawaga, 1998). Obviously, he wanted to increase his influence by managing social and economic affairs of the Coptic community through material means and by placing faith into minds and hearts of the Copts. Diversifying the Church's areas of action and his ability to circumvent any possible opposition to his authority required the Pope to alleviate the Copts' socio-economic burden on the state. This was the price paid for recognition of the Church as the sole authority on the community. The Church invested in Coptic hospitals, schools and provided social service through dense networks of churches that allowed it to

“reinvent” Copts and Coptic identity. This is crystal clear evidence of alternative social order in which the Church offered its services to the community that eased its control over the community. These services were operational because it gave the opportunity to the Church to alleviate grievances of the Copts. However, at the same time this phenomenon implies a drawback to Coptic mobilization. The following is a very telling statement showing how the neo-millet system worked. Asked about how they protested in the past or if they did ever protest, an interviewee told me “Whenever you suffered a problem, the Church offered its own service rather than allowing you to protest or, supporting you in your protest” (M.I., personal communication, March 12, 2012).

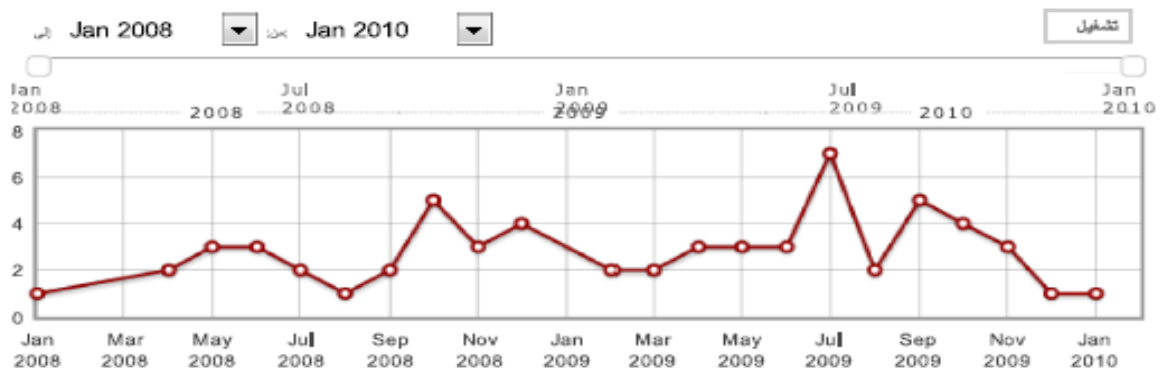
Third, as the years passed new players became party to the relationship. While the authoritarian regime strengthened, the security apparatus, the ministry of Interior, and the Coptic diaspora emerged as new players whose actions and discourses differed to an important extent. For example, while Mubarak gave permission to church buildings and repairs the Church had to deal with the Ministry of Interior since “paperwork” lasted over two decades or more. Much of the Copts grievances stem from such issues. The security apparatus dealt with many cases that made the Copts unhappy because of the methods used. Mariz Tadros mentions a significant case that reveals how the security apparatus handled such issues and deserves a citation at length:

In 2004 the wife of a priest, Wafa’ Constantine, left her marital home, where she was subject to domestic violence, and went to a police station, where she expressed her desire to convert to Islam. In light of the sensitivity of the person’s identity (Coptic priest’s wife), she was referred to state security apparatus, which held her until agents informed her family, church and community. In the absence of information regarding her whereabouts and the proliferation of rumors suggesting a possible kidnapping, hundreds of youth protested in the cathedral, calling for her return. Upon request from the church leadership and through the personal intervention of the President, the state security allowed the church access to Constantine, who subsequently expressed her desire to remain a Christian (Tadros, 2009, p. 278).

In the mid of the case, when violent demonstrations took place in front of the St. Mark Cathedral in Cairo, the headquarters of the Coptic Church, Pope Shenouda sought refuge in a desert monastery to protest the security apparatus. He did not return until calm was settled, the issue being solved and the streets were free of protesters (The Economist, 29/12/2004).

Last but not least, the Coptic diaspora invested in such cases and used a discourse of persecution in the countries they have been influential, namely the U.S., Canada and Australia. For example, the Free Copts sent a petition to the U.S. State Department in April 2010, claiming that Coptic women are subject to forced marriages and exploitation to urge the State Department to include such issues in 2010 Trafficking in Persons Annual Report (Ienco, 2010). Inclusion of such an issue, of course, would embarrass the state of Egypt and Mubarak. Nevertheless, Pope Shenouda did not welcome such initiatives but did not have control on Coptic emigrants as he did on the Copts of Egypt.

**Figure 2 Sectarian Violence Between January 2008-January 2010<sup>15</sup> (Retrieved from (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2010))**



The second reason for the confrontation between the Pope and the President was the increasing violence against the Copts. In May 2007, such an incident took place in Ayat district of Giza in

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<sup>15</sup> Though the EIPR uses the term “sectarian” to describe the violence against the Copts, I find this approach misleading since conflicts in Egypt have the potential to stem from personal or family matters that could easily turn into “religious matters”. Therefore, one should always ask “what is the conflict about?”.



Cairo. Rumors were circulated about a building used for religious purposes by the Copts that will be turned into a church after the Friday prayer. Though the Copts planned to do that, no action was taken. And yet, after the Friday sermon Muslim men and youth attacked Copts houses and shops, leaving 36 houses burned and seven shops looted in less than an hour (Loza, 2007). Even the semi-official Al-Ahram Weekly reported that security forces arrived three hours after the incident took place and implemented a wait and see strategy instead of intervening in the process and providing security. While this incident is an informative example since in most incidents the process is somehow similar, Pope Shenouda did not hesitate to write an open letter to Mubarak and publicize it blaming the security apparatus not taking action despite the intelligence it had (Tadros, 2009). Tadros argues that this should be interpreted as part of Pope Shenouda's withdrawal of political support in 2006 Shura Council elections. While such an interpretation is sound, it should be seen only as a temporary withdrawal since the below debate will show how Pope Shenouda supported Mubarak even in the wake of Tahrir Revolution in 2011.

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights reported, between 2008 and 2010, 52 violence incidents out of 62, took place in poor Upper Egypt villages. Despite EIPR's finding that there is a close correlation between poverty and sites of sectarian violence, one should be aware of the lack of state mechanisms, the reluctance of the security apparatus to respond violence, and the salient primordial tribal relations. The Egyptian state controls Upper Egypt through the security apparatus and the *de facto* agreement with tribes. But discontent among the Copts increased as the regime did not implement the rule of law, they were not represented proportionally and were treated as if they were "members" of *dhimma* but not as ordinary Egyptian "citizens". In most of the cases above, the state apparatus did not implement the rule of law but instead formed local reconciliation commissions usually led by Sheiks. Nobody would legally be questioned or sentenced but the Sheiks were expected to bring peace. In many cases, peace did not endure as it only serves cosmetic objectives.

Political representation has always been a contested topic in Coptic-Muslim relations as Copts claim they are unequally and disproportionately represented in the Parliament and the Shura Council. Nasser developed a policy of appointing Copts to the Parliament after negotiating

with the Coptic Pope. While many Copts have been unhappy with this policy, both Sadat and Mubarak continued to implement it not only to increase their legitimacy but also for cosmetic purposes such as giving messages to the Western world, primarily the U.S. Nevertheless, Copts in the street believe that Coptic figures in the Parliament and the Shura Council were “loyal” to both the regime and the papacy. Therefore, my interviewees told me such people do not represent them. However, given the territorial dispersion of the Copts, it is difficult to say they will gain more seats in the parliament than they have had. Below the readers can find statistics regarding the Coptic representation in the Egyptian People’s Assembly.

**Figure 3 Coptic Representation in the Parliament, 1976-2011<sup>16</sup>(Retrieved from(Makari, 2007) )**

| Year | Copts in Parliament | Elected | Appointed |
|------|---------------------|---------|-----------|
| 1976 | 8                   | 0       | 8         |
| 1979 | 14                  | 4       | 10        |
| 1984 | 11                  | 6       | 5         |
| 1987 | 10                  | 6       | 4         |
| 1990 | 8                   | 2       | 6         |
| 1995 | 6                   | 0       | 6         |
| 2000 | 7                   | 3       | 4         |
| 2005 | 6                   | 1       | 5         |

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<sup>16</sup> While only two Copts out of 498 seats achieved to enter the parliament in the 2011 elections, the interim ruler of the country, Marshall Tantawi appointed five Copts following the 1971 Constitution. One should be cautious here as many Copts were not put forward as candidates and many parties favored Muslim candidates. This shows us that the territorial dispersion of the Copts is not the only problem. Nevertheless, Rafiq Habib, the Vice President of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brothers, is Protestant Coptic who is mostly elected by Muslim votes. However, he is considered by most Copts as “traitor” since he joined the Muslim Brothers and embraced Islamist politics.

As shown in the above analysis, when conflicts arise the state apparatus does not treat the Copts as “individual citizens” but rather as “members of *dhimma*” as the practice of the state’s handling the issues shows. As I showed in the two cases above, the state apparatus negotiates with the Church and its leadership to react. This is also for the good of the Church since it wants full control on its community. However, many Copts oppose this policy and asks for respect to their fundamental rights. By negotiating with the Church and seeking local reconciliation, the state employs different strategies not to take responsibility by implementing the rule of the law. If the rule of the law implemented, the state apparatus would be responsible for not providing security. More importantly, on the macro view, the Mubarak regime did not implement the rule of the law as part of his strategy to gain legitimacy from both the Muslims and the Copts. There is evidence showing he threatened the Copts about the Islamists and created conspiracies if Muslims did not support him the Copts will cooperate with “external powers” to diminish Muslim rule.

### **3.3 Intra-Communal Relations**

Intra-communal relations of the Copts are marred by two factors for the last one hundred years: the church’s modernization and establishment of the Lay Council, and development of benevolence and philanthropy. Modernization of the Egyptian state, the importance of the *waqf* properties and its management and the ignorance of and corruption in the Coptic Church led these factors to be at the front of inter- and intra-communal relations. The below discussion will first focus on the philanthropic societies with regards to factionalism and struggle with the Church. Then, I assess how the modernization of the Church caused conflicts within the community and shaped its relations with the majority Muslim community. The objective of discussing these two points is to show how internal struggles and factionalism set a drawback to mobilization and opened the doors for government intervention while Coptic revival was gaining momentum.

One of the fundamental reasons of why such Coptic charity societies started to be established is the missionary activities that came to Egypt with the British rule. The Church realized the missionaries achieved to convert more Copts than Muslims. The conversion took place especially in Upper Egypt where people suffered from poverty. Nevertheless, as V. Ibrahim (2011) mentions, Coptic societies did not discriminate between the needy Copts and Muslims and helped poor Muslims as well. Meanwhile, one should differentiate between the religious-led and lay-led societies since they focused on different issues. The difference between the religious-led societies and others can be put as “these groups (religious-led) who were largely closely associated with the Anglican missionaries, and did not concern themselves with intra-communal institutional politics and power struggles but rather religious welfare”(V. Ibrahim, 2011, p. 103)

Some of the religious led Coptic societies can be cited as follows: *Asdiqa al-Kitab al-Muqaddas*, (the Friends of the Holy Bible Society) and *al-Jam'iyat al-Iman al-Khayriyyah*, (the Iman Benevolent Society). Established in 1908, *Asdiqa* was in close relation with the missionaries as the missionaries supported Coptic modernization and reform. This society achieved Coptic revival through its emphasis on education and spiritual work on the Coptic language and religion. From 1908 to 1940s, the society provided housing to students, coming from Upper Egypt and studying in the Delta and Cairo, visited the *fellahin* and poor villages where no church or means of praying existed. The society succeeded to attract more than thousands of people that contributed to Coptic modernization.

The *Iman* was established in 1899 to promote Coptic language and religious education that will gather the Coptic *ummah* (nation). The society paid many students' expenses and helped many Coptic families for their daily maintenance. Along with this, one of the fundamental achievements of the society was to facilitate the relations between the upper class and ordinary people through benevolent activity. A significant influence of the *Iman* was the idea of Coptic *ummah* in relation with language that resulted in a distinct Coptic identity. Nevertheless, as the nationalist senses increased in Egypt, both the *Asdiqa* and the *Iman* societies decreased their relations with missionaries and the Coptic cultural nationalism stayed in the background giving the first place to the anti-colonialist Egyptian nationalism.

Education has been the main focus of the Coptic societies be it religious-led or lay-led. Lay-led societies followed in the Egyptian state's footsteps in terms of modernization but especially in education. Some significant lay-led societies that did work in educational and societal realms can be cited as follows: *Jam'iyyat al-Mahabah*, (The Mahabah Society) and the *Jam'iyyat al-Tawfiq* (The Tawfiq Society). Both societies opened secular education institutes to raise new Coptic generations. For example, established in 1902, al-Mahabah provided secular education to Coptic girls for free. It also opened numerous schools in Cairo that operated throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, the *Tawfiq* was created in 1891 by the young, educated, secular, civil servant Coptic men (V. Ibrahim, 2011). The society's objectives included "creation of reforming leadership" and "reaction to British colonialism". The *Tawfiq* operated in social and educational arenas by opening schools and helping the poor but these activities articulated to the nationalist ideology of the 1910s prevalent in Egypt.

In summary, many Coptic societies were established beginning from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their final objective was to fill the "spiritual" vacuum highlighting the failures of the Church in terms of religious education. It was believed through charity activities young Coptic generations will get better education and learn more about their religion and culture. Though these societies were somehow in relation with the Church, religious ignorance and material corruptness of the Church were the main causes for the emergence of such societies. Nevertheless, the existence of so many Coptic societies meant factionalism, which manifested itself not only over the Coptic *waqf* administration but also at political mobilization. Dividedness among Coptic charities and the Church prevented the Copts from mobilizing against state authorities since they were busy dealing with internal problems.

### **3.3.1 The Resolution of the *Majlis al-Milli* Issue and A Devout Authoritarian**

The *Majlis al-Milli* has always been a conflicting subject between the Church and laymen. While the laymen argued that clergymen misappropriated *waqf* income and made a personal fortune whereas the community suffered poverty, the clergymen rejected such an idea and did not want to share power. What happened beginning from 1883 until the early 1960s is, until Nasser passed a special regulation to manage Coptic *awqaf* and reduced much of the Church properties, the *Majlis al-Milli* would make claims on *waqf* administration and income directly

to be channeled to the community and the clergymen will usually side with the Pope to secure their interests. The Patriarch hopefuls cooperated many times with the *Majlis al-Milli* promising to hand over control and yet did not fulfill their promises once they were elected. To put pressure on the Church, the *Majlis al-Milli* encouraged Coptic societies to rally against the Church and in response the Church created its own societies. Of course, this resulted in factionalism that plagued the Coptic community. More importantly, the conflict between the Church and the *Majlis al-Milli* involved the state either by the laymen's invitation or the church. For example, during Khedive Abbas Hilmi Pasha's reign (1892-1914) the laymen asked the Khedive to broker a compromise that resulted in their favor (V. Ibrahim, 2011). The Patriarchy also asked the state to intervene in times of crisis as documented by the acts of Cyril VI who served as Pope between 1959 and 1971.

The conflict continued until late Pope Shenouda brokered a resolution between the Church administration and the *Majlis al-Milli* by opening subcommittees to control Church activities efficiently but making sure that the *Majlis al-Milli* is chaired by himself (Meinardus, 1999). The lesson to be drawn from the above debate is that internal conflicts divided the Copts and limited the chance of Coptic mobilization. Nevertheless, the late Pope Shenouda did not only solved the historic *waqf* administration issue but also took the final steps in reforming the Church and centralizing it and having direct control over every diocese in the country. This was achieved through the Sunday School Movement that brought Coptic enlightenment under the Church leadership by providing education to Coptic children that promoted the distinct Coptic language and identity but being Egyptian as well.

### **3.4 Sectarian Conflict or Inter-Communal Conflict?**

The tension between the Muslims and the Copts is usually described as sectarian conflict with a loose use. However, despite religion being one of the fundamental causes of conflict, this study suggests to be more cautious when discussing this issue as there is persuasive evidence showing economic and social disputes constitute a significant part of the tension and usually articulate to a language of sectarianism. Sociologists like Mariz Tadros, Elizabeth Iskander and the EIPR use the term sectarian conflict without paying attention to nuances. Some others problematize Egyptian state's approach to the problem and takes the state as the unit of analysis that results

in a “state of sectarian denial” (Tadros, 2011b). Elizabeth Iskander argues that sectarian conflict does not only refer to religion but also to how the conflict is discussed in the media that is “*fitna*” in Egyptian media (E.Iskander, personal communication, March 25, 2012). EIPR (2010) goes one step further while discussing sectarian violence and use an all-inclusive definition that plagues this study<sup>17</sup>:

Any use of violence, regardless of degree or type, by an individual or group affiliated with one religion against an individual or group not affiliated with that religion, or against their property or houses of worship, if religious affiliation was one of the motives of violence or a factor in the escalation of violence included attacks on religious practices, places of worship or religious symbols (p.4).

However, I find good reason to believe that economic and social reasons are also important factors in this conflict. For example, an officer who worked for the Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Council that was established after the January 25 revolution, told me that especially in Upper Egypt and in poverty ridden neighborhoods of Cairo and Alexandria, social and economic problems turns out to create conflicting problems between the two communities (N. al-Ashwal, personal communication, March 27, 2012). Problems related to business, competition between two shop owners turns to a conflict between two communities since people want to stick to their fundamental identity markers as they need support from their communities to overcome such problems. Further, an EIPR officer told me that there are recorded cases in textile sector, for instance, that have “nothing to do with religion” but resulted in sectarian clashes (I. Assaad, personal communication, March 26, 2012). Last but not least, recalling that one of the most contentious issues, conversion, stems from practical socio-economic reasons that reflect the role of such factors without excluding the religious dimension. In sum, while religion plays a significant role in the Egyptian society and politics, this study suggests economic and social problems have salient roles in inter-communal

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<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, EIPR has deleted this paragraph from the study in the online- accessible version of the report. I was lucky enough to grab a paperback copy of the report that helped me to cross-check the information. Those interested in this report may access it from the following address: <http://eipr.org/en/report/2010/04/11/776>

relations. Therefore, to assess inter-communal relations accurately one should in every case ask “What is the conflict about?”.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

What is to be drawn from the above discussion with regards to this study? First, the Copts suffer from the citizenship issues, violence against the Copts and Coptic sacred places, political representation, and official discrimination. Second, the Coptic Church seems to be operating as a state-like institution or an authoritarian state within the authoritarian state, having almost full authority on its community and yet, its relationship with the state has transformed into a conflicting one until the Tahrir Revolution. During the Revolution the late Pope Shenouda asked Copts not to protest against Mubarak regime but many Copts did not even consider the Pope. Nevertheless, the Church managed to ally itself with the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the transitional military authority having the most influential power in the Egyptian state apparatus, by supporting the ex-Prime Minister (feloul) Ahmad Shafiq against an Islamist candidate. Third, the Copts ethnopolitical mobilization is not only related to their sufferings as a minority but also to their desperation of change within the Church and the State. The Copts’ desperation shows they wanted change not only in leadership but also in state of the arts of politics. To put it simply, they wanted to be citizens seeking all their rights themselves but not subjects destined to words of Mubarak and Pope Shenouda.



## **Chapter 4 Ethnopolitical Mobilization of the Copts: Internal, External, and Religious Processes**

This chapter discusses the ethnopolitical and ethnoreligious mobilization of the Copts between 2005 and 2012 in light of the previous two chapters and the data gathered during the field research conducted in Egypt between February-April 2012. The first part of this chapter will briefly discuss the basic model of Gurr with regards to the Coptic issue. While the fundamental variables of Gurr's model will be used, some additional variables will be employed to shed more light on this subject and give the whole picture. Both internal and external processes will be examined in this part first at the group level and then the governmental level, respectively. The group level analysis will exhibit characteristics of the Copts in terms of discrimination, group identity and cohesion. Government level of analysis will cover the responses of the state apparatus, its internal and international political and economic status.

In the second part, Fox's ethnoreligious conflict model will be combined with Gurr's model to assess the religious dynamics of the conflict. Here, both communal level relations and institutional conflict and cooperation will be tracked. Further, the results of the previous sections will be analyzed in depth and points contrasting Gurr's and Fox's models will be critically examined.

### **4.1 The Copts' Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Internal and External Processes**

Examining four cases of ethnopolitical mobilization, Harff and Gurr (2004) posit two different types of ethnopolitical groups, ethno-nationalists and group contenders. The distinction between ethno-nationalists and group contenders is that while the former communities seek autonomy or independence, group contenders clearly fight against discrimination without the objective of political autonomy. Though the distinction between the two groups is not rigid and these groups can be accommodated in the system if a compromise could be achieved, this study will employ the group contenders concept as the Copts do not claim independence and see themselves as an integral part of Egypt. The Copts have fought against official state discrimination and exclusion, demanding equal political and religious rights, public employment and promotion, and an end to state of insecurity caused by the state's non-

enforcement of the rule of the law that encourage the Muslim majority to use discriminate against the Copts. Below I track these topic by topic.

#### **4.1.1 Political and Economic Discrimination between 2005 and 2012**

Beginning as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Copts have always claimed that they are underrepresented in the Egyptian Parliament, compared to their share of the population. As Table 1 shows (p.34), in the last three elections the number of the elected Copts decreased gradually while the Mubarak regime substituted this situation by appointing Coptic Parliament members from his presidential quota. Nevertheless, one should examine why the number of elected Copts in Parliament decreased and why the authoritarian regime appointed Coptic members to Parliament.

According to Harff and Gurr's ethno-political mobilization model, limiting political participation of a community is an indicator of high level of grievance. While one might think there are public policies restricting the Copts' participation in political arena, there is no established official public policy preventing the Copts from being elected to Parliament. However, that does not necessarily mean the Copts are easily elected to Parliament. Compared to the Muslim community, Coptic political participation and representation is low but better than the Baha'is who are not allowed to become citizens if they do not convert to Islam, let alone have any political participation. To understand how this low level of political participation causes grievances one should look at the underlying reasons and dynamics. Therefore, the question is why do the Copts participate in politics in low level and what are the community's reaction to this phenomenon?

First, though there is no clear public policy restricting the nomination of the Copts to Parliament, the Copts have been underrepresented on candidate lists of the hegemonic political parties of Nasser, Sadat, and lastly Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP). Even if the Copts managed to be on the lists, despite their limited number, the NDP rarely nominated them as the in the first place in the national elections. The Copts running electoral campaigns competed with their rivals, be it NDP candidates, independent NDP candidates, or from any other political party, not only on the grounds of merit and political campaigns but also

religiously since other candidates urge their constituency to vote for Muslims. A Coptic activist, aged 22, who is also a regular visitor to the church, told me that not only the Muslim Brothers but also other NDP candidates vilified the Coptic candidates by arguing that these Copts will terminate Islam (B.G., personal communication, March 4, 2012).

Second, despite the vast number of Coptic officers in the state apparatus, except for Muslim religious institutions and courts, the number of senior Coptic officers in state institutions is quite rare (S. E. Ibrahim, 1996; Zeidan, 1999). Though the Copts are qualified enough to occupy such positions, the state apparatus has a tacit policy of not accepting the Copts to reputable institutions such as the Police Academy and the military colleges. Further, those who work in public institution can only rise to certain position since they will not be appointed and promoted to such positions as such positions are reserved only for Muslims. This signals a policy of exclusivist citizenship approach allowing only Muslims to occupy certain positions as they constitute “the core” of the nation and thus loyal to it. While such a policy is irrelevant given the Copts contribution to the construction of Egyptian nation-state, the Copts are unofficially forced to convert to Islam if they want to be part of administrative elite. This policy dates back to the Free Officer’s coup, which included no Copt in its ranks, and since then loyal Copts rarely could become senior officials. The Nasser regime did not hesitate to remove the Copts from political participation on the national level by not treating them as individual citizens and supported the rise of religious autocratic power within the Church (Philipp, 1988).

Nevertheless, one should also question if there is any increase in Coptic conversion to Islam and how was this encouraged by the Mubarak regime or the majority. Almost all of the interviewees I talked to during my field research told me that the Mubarak regime encouraged people more than ever to convert to Islam to advance in career or did not interfere when Salafist groups forced Copts to do so. As 35 year old, male unemployed Copt put it: “They want us to convert to Islam by making being Copt costly to us” (B.M.G., personal communication, March 12, 2012). However, it is well known that converted Copts do not become pious Muslims, as it is desired. So, why did the Mubarak regime want the Copts to convert to Islam? Has this been a state policy for long time but accelerated in the last ten years? The answer lies in the tactics the competitive authoritarian regime used to respond to the legitimacy challenges it faced. As I

showed above, the Egyptian state's imagination of citizenship is based on being Muslim and loyal to the state. In addition to this policy, the Mubarak regime wanted to show to the greater Muslim population that it demanded a more Islamic society that the regime was listening to the will of its people. By giving some more room to Islam in public space, the regime tried to have an official version of Islam competing with that of the Muslim Brothers or the Salafi trend but also giving some more room to the Salafi trend as a tactic to co-opt the Ikhwan (Creswell, 2008; Makari, 2007). The Salafi trend welcomed this approach as it had the opportunity to disseminate its worldview to ordinary Egyptians by making use of media and therefore compete with the Ikhwan. Given this phenomenon, it will not be wrong to argue official discourse by implicitly asking the Copts to convert to Islam created an alternative channel to discourses of the Ikhwan and the Salafi trend. Further, this policy simply increased Mubarak's legitimacy in the eyes of Muslim electorate, as Islamic discourse gained momentum and decreased the chances of Ikhwan to criticize the regime. Nevertheless, one might ask why the regime did not prevent forced conversion that was attributed to Salafi trend.

The Mubarak regime wanted to have the Salafi trend under control instead of removing them from the political and social scene since this policy would undermine the regime's legitimacy as the Salafi trend have a significant grassroots support especially in Upper Egypt and the Delta (Creswell, 2008). The regime was smart enough to use this fact by not hindering the Salafis from converting the Copts that overlaps with the state's policy, and also to threaten the Copts to be loyal to the regime.

The above two points indicating high (official discrimination in public employment and promotion) and medium (conversion) levels of discrimination causing another medium level grievance: low level of participation in political sphere. Knowing they will be discriminated against and have to be approved by the Church (unofficially) and NDP, and the high costs and probability of failure in running independent, they did not participate much in political processes. Therefore, while one might think the Copts voluntarily do not enter politics as their Muslim fellows did, the barriers created by the regime are the main causes of political exclusion. Nevertheless, compared to the past, the number of Copts on lists of either NDP or other political parties rose to 57 and 74, respectively, in 1995 and 2000 elections (Abdel-Latif,

2000). However, none of the 57 Copts were nominated by the NDP in 1995 and only three were named in the lists in 2000. Indicating an increase in Coptic political participation, these statistics decreased significantly in 2010 as there were only 81 Coptic candidates running for a seat out of 5,725 hopefuls, and only two Copts remained to the run-off (El-Rashidi, 2010). So, given all of the above points why to run for a seat in Parliament?

However, to gain more legitimacy the Mubarak regime always appointed some Copts from the quota given to the president to supplement by the general picture of the country. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, Mr. President would always negotiate the names of these MP's with the Church leadership. Therefore, these Coptic MP's have always shown loyalty to their patronage both to the regime and to the Church. Further, if Mr. President appointed five or six Copts to Parliament one of them would certainly be woman, a policy that shows the reluctance of Mubarak to give some more room to Copts and women. Part of the agreement included appointing two or three of these Copts as ministers, usually to less influential state ministries that have an international mission that actually contributed further to internal and international legitimacy of the regime. While this has been a policy of the authoritarian regime, Copts who have problems with the Church leadership criticized this situation thinking Mubarak paid only lip service.

In terms of economics, Harff and Gurr's proposed indicators of economic discrimination applying to Copts in a low level since the Egyptian state did not restrict the economic activities or access to material professional or managerial positions in the private sector except limiting access to some certain offices. However, the Copts cannot be Arabic teachers and gynecologists since Arabic is taught with Quran instead of an ordinary language book and it is thought that Muslim women showing their private organs to a Christian will commit "*haram*". Many Copts then ask why Coptic women have to show their private organs to a Muslim gynecologist. Or is it necessary to be Muslim to be proficient in Quran to be an Arabic teacher? These two policies resulted in Coptic hospitals and schools serving mainly to Copts but also attracting Muslim students and patients who search better quality service. Nonetheless, even the establishment of such institutions is evidence to the polarization of the Egyptian society.

Despite the nationalization policy of Nasser, the state employed hundreds of Copts in Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Works, and in transportation related institutes (Beshai, 1998). Nevertheless, one should bear in mind historically the Copts have expertise in accounting and finance, and this is why they largely employed by this ministry. Different sources like Beshai (1998) mention how *infitah* policy undermined the middle class making the poor poorer and the rich richer that caused many Copts to seek financial aid from the Church. On the other hand, rich Coptic businessmen operating in every area of the Egyptian economy invested heavily during this process and became part of the elite business class. More importantly, the Copts abroad invested in Egyptian economy during Sadat's *infitah* and Mubarak's liberalization policies. Therefore, Copts have a significant share of the Egyptian economy with their investments inside and outside of the country and the employment opportunities they provide. For example, there is a story among the Copts narrated from one generation to the other. A rich Copt asked about why there are so many Copts doing business, answers his Muslim fellow's question by saying "You did not allow politics, what is left is economics" (Bishop A., personal communication, February 24, 2012). For example, Egypt's richest businessman, Naguib Sawiris, who owns Orascom Group that operates in electronics, telecommunications, and media, is the largest private sector employer.

Harff and Gurr (2004) underline the importance of the political and economic discrimination since they do not want to derail their analysis by focusing on less important issues. However, I think "everyday discrimination", which Harff and Gurr would think a source of low level grievance, is as important as political and economic discrimination regarding the Copts since this has become a "regular social practice". The everyday discrimination occurs in the street, classes, hospitals, government offices, subway, ID check and other means of face-to-face communication. This phenomenon has become widespread in the last ten years as Egypt suffered from socio-economic problems and Copts were perceived as those who are rich and have external support.

Asked about how discrimination against the Copts work, a 45 year old male, to whom I will call AGBS, told me an example from his life that shows different aspects of state and society discrimination. Living in Australia, his uncle has given him the power of attorney to follow up

his businesses in Egypt. Three years ago his uncle asked him to take care of a court case regarding a business matter. Therefore, he asked a Muslim attorney to follow the case but was rejected. According to him, the cause was that the attorney showed reluctance when he first learned his name that indicate he is Copt. Negotiating the issue, the attorney wanted to check A.G.B.S.'s identity to make sure that he accurately has full name and surname. Realizing that A.G.B.S.'s religion is marked as Christian in his driver license and Muslim in his ID card, the lawyer promptly rejected him (A.G.B.S., personal communication, March 5, 2012). The Department of Population registers newborn Copts' religion as Islam in an effort to encourage them to be Muslim and increase the number of Muslims in the country. Last but not least, that's a very good example of the politics of numbers in a state where it is almost impossible to find statistics about minorities.

Another example can be given from schools where Coptic and Muslim pupils come together every day. In addition to state imposed way of learning Arabic, which means the Coptic pupils have to learn and memorize Quranic verses, the students I interviewed reported that they have been discriminated in high school and university. A 20 year old, female and computer engineering student IZ told me that during her high school years that she was given low grades despite her efforts. She remembers once that she got the highest point in an exam that was organized as an entrance to a nationwide Physics competition. She was told that her paper would be reread since some "irregularities" occurred. Not surprisingly her grade was lowered but a Coptic teacher objected to this decision forcing the committee to change its decision and include IZ in the competition team (I.Z., personal communication, March 2, 2012). There are many examples like this. For example, if a traffic police realizes you wear on Christ tattoo or necklace you may be subject to fine just because you are Coptic. As 33 year old, female Copt put it; "No one treats you badly until they figure out you are a Copt!" (N.H., personal communication, March 17, 2012). The extent of everyday discrimination reached to an unprecedented level in the last seven years as Egyptian society was boiling as unemployment and poverty prevailed and the state remained ineffective to respond socio-economic demands of Egyptians.

On the other hand, my interview results suggest that there is a significant “differentiation” phenomenon among the lower, middle and upper classes of the Coptic community with regards to the discrimination faced in the everyday life. Despite the general grievances (political representation, houses of worship, conversion) of the Coptic community, people belonging to the upper classes are less discriminated against in everyday life as they usually work in private sector, live in posh neighborhoods like in *al-Qahira al-Jadida*, *Maadi*, *Garden City of Cairo*, engage in less government work and have the opportunity to find a solution to discriminative problems. As 20 years old, female and computer engineering student IZ put it: “If you are from an upper class, you don’t experience such discrimination because you don’t engage with the ordinary Egyptians in everyday life. Even if you are discriminated against, you can change your life” (I.Z., personal communication, March 2, 2012). Socio-economic inequality is not only source of discontent but also a catalyst showing which sectors of the Coptic community express more grievances.

My interview with three professionals who work for foreign companies or run their own businesses, one as a senior administrator, another as an assistant, and the last as digital media expert reveal more on the differentiation phenomenon. DM is a 29 year old female and devout Coptic Orthodox who visits the historical Virgin Mary Church of the upper class Maadi neighborhood more than three times a week, told me that she did not encounter any discrimination as an individual until she uses public transportation and except those general problems regarding the community. As she remarks “If they (Muslims) see you’re wearing Cross, they harass you especially if you use public transportation” (D.M., personal communication, March 5, 2012). Thinking harassment occurs only because they wear Crosses will be mistaken. Coptic women do not wear their body with *niqab* or *headscarf* that contradicts Islamic Egyptian traditions. Another interviewee, a 52 year old, female and administrative assistant, MD has experienced significant discrimination at personal level only once. To get rid of discrimination, MD changed her job that actually shows the difference between belonging to low, middle and upper classes (M.D., personal communication, February 27, 2012). The last interviewee, a 36 year old male and digital media expert, KS, only recounted two personal discrimination cases and focused more on communal level problems (K.S., personal communication, March 25, 2012). In sum, this abovementioned fact suggests



that Copts at the upper level suffer less than ordinary Copts as they have different socio-economic life settings. Further, as in the case of KS, upper middle classes do not experience the same level of discrimination but speak out for the rights of their fellows and the community.

However, DM, MD and KS, as professionals work five days a week which means they cannot attend mass on Sunday, as most working class Copts do, which is the Holy day for Copts, since Sunday is a workday. How do they respond this problem? While all of them attend Church mass more than twice a week, the Coptic Orthodox Church holds mass three times a week to overcome this problem as Copts have to work on this day. As a Bishop at St. George Church of the old Cairo Mar Girgis neighborhood told me the Church, aware of this problem, tried to allay the grievances of the community (Bishop A., personal communication, February 24, 2012). By holding mass on different days rather than only on Sunday, the Church prevents further grievances and provides flexibility to its parishes. Should the Church insist on holding the masses only on Sunday, “the sacred holiday” would be a more contentious issue offering the Copts another reason to show grievances. The flexibility of the Church has prevented further mobilization.

In a nutshell, all of the three told me that they attend fasting and prayer sessions to protest discrimination and violence against the community and speak out for their Coptic fellows’ rights as the everyday discrimination has become widespread and systematic in recent years, which actually caused an important level of grievance that contributed to the mobilization process. However, one should question if the differentiation phenomenon causes any harm to group identity and cohesion? Does this phenomenon weaken Coptic mobilization?

#### **4.1.2 Coptic Group Identity**

The strength of group identity can be measured by looking at the number and content of the traits that a group shares (Harff & Gurr, 2004). The ethnic conflict literature examines strength of group identity by employing the concepts of blood, language, culture, religion, history and the place of residence (Bayat, 2009). This study argues that the fundamental identity marker of the Copts is religion as the Church has always been central to the psyche of the Copts and the Coptic revival was led by the Church leadership and clergymen. While providing educational

opportunities in parallel with the Egyptian national education curricula, the Sunday School Movement advocated Coptic students to learn the ancient Coptic language, the Bible, and community service. Meeting every Sunday after mass, Coptic students developed networks in the universities for solidarity and contribution to their community beginning from the 1940s. It has been argued that the Sunday School has reached over 85,000 Coptic participants in the early 1990s (Hassan, 2003). Another striking example is that the Coptic Church initiated sports activities such as football that now constitute the largest football league with over 700 clubs and more than 10,000 players and yet there is no Coptic player in the Egyptian national team (Al-Ahram, 17/08/2011).

The School's impact includes but not limited to giving a distinct sense of identity to the students by raising them as the sons of pharaohs and followers of St. Mark of Alexandria. During my field research I interviewed some Coptic students from the American University in Cairo and Cairo University who told me their Coptic identity was solidified during their studies at the Sunday School that they started to attend very young. Further, in line with the Church leadership's ideas, these students have established Coptic student organizations committed to helping poor Copts living in the poor villages of Upper Egypt. This brings us to the idea of centrality of the Church to the Copts daily life, and therefore their identity, since the Church undertakes a remarkable amount of social service through its vast church network. For example, the Church helps the poor in Upper Egypt not only by providing basic services but also through dense networks of employment that actually results in loyalty to the Church and pride in being Coptic.

Last but not least, the Coptic identity seems to be strong as it has articulated the notions of "persecution" and "martyrdom". The Church has developed a discourse of persecution and martyrdom since the armies of Amr al- 'As conquered Egypt. This discourse reached to an unprecedented level after the 1960s as the migration to United States, Australia and Canada resulted in strong Coptic diaspora groups that became more radical than their fellows in Egypt. Further, they relate this discourse with martyrdom since the Church considers those who suffered from discrimination and killed in conflicts with Muslims as "martyrs". Therefore,

whenever Copts have clashes with Muslims and are killed, the Church names them as martyrs, a policy that polishes the Coptic identity, if not strengthens it.

Though there are no visible racial characteristics between the Copts and the Muslims, the Copts differentiate themselves by drawing a visible Christ tattoo on their arms. All of the Copts (24) that I interviewed were wearing tattoos. Asked about why they exhibit such tattoos, my interviewees told me that it shows what and how they feel in addition to the convenience and security it provides. It also helps the Church to check the identities of those attending the Sunday mass, Liturgy, and entrance to Coptic sacred places.

Language, culture, race and place of residence are not as important as religion since these concepts are intertwined regarding the Coptic-Muslim relationship. First, the Copts do only use the Coptic language in religious ceremonies and only the Church sponsored people are able to study this language. Therefore, for centuries the Church publishes the Bible in Arabic as Copts have forgotten the Coptic language, except the words they learned in the Sunday School. Also, using this language in public is simply meaningless as nobody is able to communicate. During my field research I attended a Coptic mass on a Friday morning in which many religious songs were sang in Arabic and many could not join the parts in Coptic language. Second, it is difficult to argue there is a unique Coptic culture as the Muslims and Copts shared a common Egyptian culture. Third, some Copts argue they are pure successors of ancient Egypt with a primordial emphasis and, for them, the word Egypt dates back to Pharonic era whereas Muslims think it simply refers to an Islamic Egypt. While this debate has concrete background, generally there is no dispute between the Copts and Muslims unless an Arab nationalist emphasis on the Egyptian identity is put. The last concept, the place of residence, is not an influential identity marker since both Copts and Muslims base their identities on the territorial notion of Egypt. Egyptian people differentiate themselves geographically without considering ethnic or ethnoreligious roots. The basic distinction among the Egyptians is either being from the rural Upper Egypt (Nile Valley) as they call it in Arabic, Sa'idi and being from Cairo, the capital or the Delta that is considered to be near abroad.

Overall, despite the weakness of distinctive points I find the Copts group identity quite strong primarily based on religion but also has a primordial emphasis that finds its roots in the

Pharaonic Age. Nevertheless, while all Copts speak Arabic, the Coptic revival and the teaching of Coptic language has remarkable influence on their identity since it gives them a pride and offers opportunities to differentiate themselves from the Muslim “other”. Once the Copts were able to use their language in their daily life as a community, for example, the scene would be quite different.

#### **4.1.3 Church Leadership and Group Cohesion**

Harff and Gurr (2004) posit that as interaction and communication between the leadership and followers increases the group cohesion rises. However, if the number of factions or challenging groups increase group cohesion decreases. The dense network of communication and interaction link leaders with their followers and assert a unifying belief system or an ideology. Strong group leaders are usually able to subordinate their followers and mobilize them in certain directions.

The Coptic Church leadership has developed an advanced network of communication and interaction since Pope Shenouda III became the Patriarch in 1971. The Church newspaper, *al-Kiraza*, Sunday School Movement, social service, and improvement of transportation facilities all served to the enhancement of group cohesion and strength of Church leadership. Further, the Church expanded as internal migration to Cairo and international migration to the United States, Canada and Australia gained momentum, new churches were established to serve the parishes, increase their belonging to the Church and provide the Church control over them.

Though my field research does not contradict the strength of the group cohesion, it actually reflects different dimensions of the group cohesion. Asked about what do they think about the group cohesion and unity of the Coptic Orthodox community, almost all of my interviewees gave me examples proving the unity of the community. However, asking open-ended questions revealed to me that there are problems between the religious leadership and some followers. For example, 45 year old female RW revealed that she thinks the Pope has a political role and she did not like the Church’s alignment with the Mubarak regime (R.W., personal communication, March 14, 2012). She went further to argue that Pope Shenouda was too conservative even for Copts. To understand what kind of role has the Church in her life, I asked

her if she attends Church sessions. She told me that she rarely goes to church, which led me to question if there is a relationship between the frequencies in attending mass and group cohesion. After I finished my field research, I reclassified my findings with regards to church attendance and found those (8) who attend church sessions twice or more than twice a week usually follow the path of the Church and show inclination to be more conservative.

Despite the Protestant and Catholic denominations existence in Egypt, they do not compromise more than five per cent of the total Coptic community and have good relations with the Coptic Orthodox Church (Delhay, 2012). The only dispute between these Coptic Christian denominations is the case of conversion, which is a result of the Coptic Orthodox Church's stance towards divorce. The Coptic Orthodox Church does not allow divorce unless one of the spouses committed adultery and in case of conversion, and only the Coptic Orthodox Church has the authority to divorce,- which takes years-, if they would like to remain in Coptic Orthodox parishes. Therefore, Copts sometimes convert to other denominations or Islam to get rid of this strict rule.

In summary, this study finds the Copts' group cohesion high and the Church leadership strong as the Church is the sole authority on religious issues, the services it provide and the charisma and intelligence of the late Pope Shenouda III who unified the community around his leadership. The Copts organized fasting and praying sessions in March 2012 in *al-Moqattam* in large numbers for Pope Shenouda III who had health problems despite the treatment he had in the United States. When Pope Shenouda III passed away on March 17, 2012, while I was pursuing my field research in Cairo, Cairo streets were full of people making it impossible to wander around.

High level of group cohesion and strong leadership do not necessarily mean there is unity on which issues to address. Instead, conflicts within groups usually arise on which issue to address. For example, as 36 year old male and digital media expert KM told me many Copts does not want the Church to negotiate for them as they want to force the regime to deal with them as full citizens. He puts it as follows: "Mubarak always talked to Pope but not to us. We don't want Pope Shenouda to negotiate for us, we wanted to be treated as equal citizens but not as a minority under Pope Shenouda" (K.S., personal communication, March 25, 2012).

**Picture 1 Pope Shenouda III, Funeral Ceremony, March 20, 2012 Source: Al- Jazeera**



The Church and its leadership has almost been the “absolute” ruler of the community, therefore no group or individual could challenge it. Even those who reject this authority, as it is in the case of agnostic Buthros Ghali who was nominated as the General Secretary of the United Nation in 1991, individuals had to ask Pope Shenouda’s blessings (Hassan, 2003). In line with this phenomenon, the recently established Coptic groups like *Free Copts* and the *Maspero Youth* operate through non-religious means since they are smart enough to know, the number of their followers will decrease if they ever dispute the Church.

#### **4.1.4. The Political Environment in Egypt (Competitive Authoritarian Regime)**

The authoritarian Mubarak regime was on the brink of remarkable change in early 2000s since Hosni Mubarak had health problems and the ruling elite wanted to transfer power to his son Gamal Mubarak to maintain the regime. Gamal Mubarak was educated in the West, had management experience, was able to speak English and appointed as “Head of the Policy Committee” (Amin, 2011). The regime tried to portray Gamal Mubarak as the future president who will further modernize the country, cure economic problems and achieve prosperity.

The economic liberalization program went hand in hand with the façade political democratization program. In 2005, the first multi-candidate presidential elections were held in which the Ghad Party leader Ayman Nour competed against Mubarak getting 7.3 per cent of

the votes<sup>18</sup>. Further, in 2005 Parliamentary elections were also held on a competitive basis but consisted of three rounds that actually aimed at preventing non-NDP candidates entering the Parliament. Why did the Mubarak regime undertake such a reform process if he did not want democratization?

Two dimensions may be helpful in analyzing this issue; international and local dynamics. First, Egypt has been a major recipient of assistance from International Finance Institutions (IFIs) and the United States. IFIs' assistance regarding economic liberalization cannot be taken without a price since such institutions require recipient states to follow certain agendas by implementing "conditionality" policy (Blaydes, 2011). Further, the United States invested large amounts of funds through United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the bilateral agreement on military aid. International actors' pressure on Mubarak's regime for further democratization was reluctantly responded and sophisticatedly employed for regime legitimization. Second, the Egyptian nation has been desperate for many years since "change" did not come and no socio-economic or political improvement was achieved. By giving some space to opposition forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the regime was able to present itself as relatively democratic and to sustain control over the public. More importantly, it forced the regime to enlarge the managing elite network by "distributing" sources to lower levels, which, in turn, means electoral victory (Blaydes, 2011). Last but not least, what is most important for this study is that this policy resulted in political protest as the people realized there is no hope of change if Mubarak will bequeath power to his son.

Overall, while this case study confirms Harff and Gurr's claims regarding authoritarian regime's environment, it supplements this model with "competitiveness". Despite being a façade, reforms have had virtual influence on Muslim and Coptic Egyptians. This is significant since the regime's will to create fake opposition mechanisms backfired as the reforms were far from fulfilling people's demands but also signaling to the weakness of the regime.

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<sup>18</sup> Ayman Nour was sentenced to five years of prison for his "misconduct" during the presidential elections translating that he "rigged" the elections by winning 7% per cent out of 100 (Amin, 2011).

#### **4.1.5 Egyptian State's Use of Violence**

State or majority group led violence is one of the key concepts in conflict mobilization and transformation. Intractable conflicts usually contain political mass murder, genocide and massacres that are the highest level of oppression, which mobilizes ethnic groups to confront the state or majority groups. Further, widespread torture, executions and evacuations are less influential in the mobilization process but Harff and Gurr do not deny that such factors may be enough for mobilization. There is no record of Egyptian state's use of systematic violence especially against the Coptic minority during the whole history of Egyptian nation state except the Maspero massacre of 2011 (which will be explored below).

However, what Harff and Gurr's model does not mention is the state apparatus might always find another way of using violence. In Egypt, during Mubarak's era, all the people were subject to police violence, which caused them to say "Every Egyptian will experience police-led violence". This was a result of "state of emergency" that gave numerous unchecked mechanisms to the police department beginning from President Sadat's assassination until late May 2012, when it was dissolved by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. So, does only extreme and direct state use of force facilitate mobilization? This study supplements Harff and Gurr's model with the idea that the state apparatus sometimes encourage majority groups to use systematic violence against ethnopolitical groups by not punishing those who lead the violence. In the Egyptian case, the state apparatus did not prevent violence against the Copts even if it had the intelligence and did not enforce the rule of law to discourage the Muslims.

In summary, I find the Egyptian State's use of violence at medium severity as the state used extreme violence only once, but encouraged the Muslim majority to do so tacitly. Therefore, I assume the severity of violence do not cause a high level mobilization since violence becomes an everyday phenomenon that people get used to and after a while do not react.

#### **4.1.6 External Support to the Copts**

Ethnopolitical rebellion groups seek external support to challenge more effectively the state they are fighting against as they lack strategic means of sources. Therefore, assessing the extent of external support, Harff and Gurr (2004) suggest that if ethnic groups get external support



such as weaponry, mercenaries, financial support, and intelligence information the extent varies from medium to high-level support. Since the Copts do not assume autonomy or independence and do not have organized armed rebel groups, they do not get aid to this extent. To argue the Copts get verbal encouragement to protest will be unfounded since the only concrete material that we can assess as external support is international human rights groups investigations and the U.S. and France's warnings to the Egyptian state. For example, Christian Solidarity International, an evangelical institution working on Christian persecution, and Coptic Foundation for Human Rights published a report on how Coptic girls abducted by Muslim Egyptian so as to attract more attention of the U.S. President and United Nations and investigate it in detail (Christian Solidarity International, 2009). Further, ex-French Foreign Affairs Minister Alain Juppe stated that France understands worries of Copts and Maronites and France "was and will remain by your (Copts and Maronites) side"(Juppe, 2012, p. 1). However, this does not go beyond verbal support and actually backfires since Muslims think Copts are supported by Christian France and threaten Islam.

Overall, I find the extent and level of external support to Copts low and this support does not have a direct impact on the mobilization of the Copts. And yet, indeed, it has a counter-productive influence as there are always rumors arguing that Copts ask external support or betray the nation transmitted around among the Muslims. However, the influence of the Coptic diaspora groups is significant, as these groups usually draw attention of world public opinion, American Congress and human rights organizations (will be elaborated below). This phenomenon provokes the Muslim majority as they think that Copts get aid from international powers such as the United States or international organizations.

#### **4.1.7 International Economic Status**

Harff and Gurr's (2004) model suggests that regimes that possess significant scarce resources or those have a stable economy usually enjoy higher status as international powers are cautious in intervening in these countries' conflicts. However, rebel groups fighting resource-poor countries or weak economies are likely to get international support. Harff and Gurr's propositions regarding Mubarak regime's international economic status do not apply to Egypt due to the following three factors.

First, the Copts did not rebel in any phase of the conflict. Second, the Egyptian state do not possess any kind of scarce resource and its economy depends much on tourism revenues and foreign direct investment, which according to World Banks statistics “fell by 50 percent from 2009 to 2010 to an average \$3.7 billion, or under 1 percent of GDP, and even further in 2011 to \$0.9 billion” (World Bank, 2012). Further, the World Bank statistics also show that 19.5 % of Egyptians lived under poverty line in 2005 and that numbers rose to 22% in 2008. As of late 2011, the economic situation deteriorated further leading Daron Acemoglu to say “Fully 20% of the population lives in dire poverty” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). So, these statistics require one to question to why foreign powers did not intervene. The answer is the third factor and is threefold: Egypt is a significant ally of the United States and Israel that are party to the Middle East peace arrangements, namely Camp David order, simply Copts have never asked for such an intervention, and Egypt does not possess natural resources that may cause conflicts, as suggested in civil wars literature. Lastly, as a well-informed scholar argued the Western world did not hesitate to pay lip service even to democratization in the Arab world, let alone Coptic issue, in order to maintain the status quo (Norton, 2009). Why to interfere if nobody is asking and there is no interest?

#### **4.1.8 Geographical Differences**

The Nile has fed the Egyptians for centuries as if it is a hydraulic conveyor starting from African countries and passing to Upper Egypt by irrigating the fields and by disemboguing from Alexandria which is called the Delta region. The Delta and Lower Egypt have always enjoyed prosperity, as they were more suitable to agriculture that has been until lately the primary source of Egyptians’ income. Historically, these regional differences have markedly influenced Egypt’s destiny in terms of economy and governance (Monson, 2007). Industrialization and urbanization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries caused regional differences to be clarified as Lower Egypt was home to the capital city, Cairo and Alexandria a significant port town of the Levant. Therefore, people suffering from poverty in Upper Egypt migrated to Lower Egypt in large numbers in search of better employment opportunities in private and public sectors. The Copts coming from Minya and Assiut to Cairo attached themselves with the Church as a care provider and that fostered the Coptic identity.

While newcomers confronted with the challenges of modern life, those remained in Upper Egypt enjoyed a low level of state authority as the state apparatus could only exist there through the security apparatus that makes compromises with the tribes. While this is a historical problem of Egyptian state's centralization and given the lack of public authority and services, tribes have provided necessary services and administered their own areas. Therefore, different tribes have encountered conflicts over the administration of their areas, lands and delivery of the services. How does this phenomenon reflect itself regarding the Coptic problem in Egypt?

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR, 2010) finds that more than fifty per cent of the conflicts between 2008 and 2010 occurred in Upper Egypt. While EIPR labels them as sectarian conflicts, this study is more cautious about the source of the conflict. Therefore, in a modest way, this study suggests that socio-economic and tribal issues matter in mobilization.

#### **4.2 Integrating Ethnoreligious Model into Ethnopolitical Mobilization Framework**

Religious discrimination is likely to result in religious grievances, as there is a causal relationship between the two phenomena. In terms of protest, religious grievances appear as religious demands in two forms: passive and active. Passive grievances are those reactions to discrimination, whereas active grievances are demands for religious rights. However, is there a direct relationship between the level of active/passive grievances and protest? Answering this question reveals the most perplexing dilemmas of ethnoreligious groups. Fox (2003) finds that the more the passive religious grievances increase, the less the ethnoreligious minorities protest. However, active religious grievances result in more protest showing a positive correlation between demand and action. So, the question is why ethnoreligious groups protest more when they demand their rights but less when they react to discrimination?

While this question requires a high level of intellectual discussion, I will not answer this question right now to continue to adapt Fox's ethnoreligious model into Harff and Gurr's framework. One of the basic discussions of both Harff and Gurr's and Fox's models is that institutions may facilitate mobilization by bringing together adherents of groups and making use of already established communication channels. According to Fox (2003), two types of

mobilization can be facilitated by religious institutions: peaceful mobilization and mobilization for rebellion. While the first one is conducted in the legal political field by using peaceful methods such as negotiation, lobbying and peaceful protest, the latter is achieved through illegal means such as violence and terrorism. Nonetheless, when do religious institutions facilitate mobilization and what kind of mobilization do they lead. How does this relationship, if there is any, work?

Fox (2003) provides plausible and eloquent evidence that religious institutions tend to facilitate peaceful mobilization only when “religion is perceived to be at risk” (p. 166). Why, then one asks, do religious institutions not facilitate mobilization in other cases? The answer is that elites use such institutions to support the status quo for the sake of the religion and religious interests unless and until religion and these institutions are at risk. Why risk the material gains if religious grievances are low and religion itself is not threatened by other actors? Further, mobilization for rebellion is also influenced by religious institutions, as Fox (2002) shows, since such a mobilization is related to autonomy religious institutions may hinder such a mobilization process to protect their interests. It is interesting that Fox (2003) reports that mobilization is highest when there are formal houses of worship but not ecclesiastical networks that refers to religious leadership negative role in mobilization. That is, religious leaders and institutions do not always facilitate or support mobilization processes. However, in contrast to Fox’s claims religious institutions may remain ambivalent towards mobilization and facilitating or supporting mobilization until conditions are ripe and vital interests are threatened or destroyed by the opponents. Further, provocation plays a significant role during this process, as houses of worship and protests of the “other” may provoke the majority group and cause more discrimination against a group (Fox, 2002). Nevertheless, one should also ask if religious discrimination intensify the level of group cohesion.

Harff and Gurr (2004) theorize that the level of group cohesion increases if perceived or real discrimination rise or add to group identity. Fox (2003) finds exactly the vice versa of this fact, that is religious discrimination decreases group identity and cohesion rather than increasing it. So, why it is so? Why and how Harff and Gurr’s (2004) and Fox’s (2003) findings contrast each other?

One possible explanation is that the wide variety of discrimination in different fields that may cause “dissension” within the group regarding which is to be addressed first. This is why Fox (2003) concludes if there is only one type of discrimination the group cohesion is likely to be stronger. For example, if there is only religious discrimination the group may come together under one flag easily whereas if there is political and religious discrimination the group may be divided regarding which issue to address first. That is likely to cause the establishment of different factions within the group. How all of the abovementioned factors can be applied to the Coptic issue?

Four hypotheses of Fox’s ethnoreligious model have been discussed above briefly. The first hypothesis is that religious grievances are likely to result in mobilization applies to the Copts in one form: peaceful mobilization. I find that Copts both react to religious discrimination and demand for religious rights between 2005 and 2012 at medium level, but remarkably increasing from 2011 to 2012. Nevertheless, I will discuss how the Copts reacted to discrimination in detail below as the Church asks the parishes to pray and fast after discrimination incidents took place. However, some Copts also actively pursued their rights in the street and did not hesitate to protest both the Mubarak regime and the Church. This brings us to the second hypothesis that religious institutions may facilitate mobilization unless religious elites have significant interests in not doing so. This study finds the Coptic Church had an ambivalent stance towards Coptic mobilization as it did not hesitate to challenge the Mubarak regime when vital interests were at stake, did not support Coptic groups openly and yet did not discourage them to free the streets. The logic of Church’s stance can be put as not to actively operationalize mobilization channels but not to discourage protesters unless they threatened the Church’s interests. For the third hypothesis, the fact that there is more than one type of discrimination against the Copts causes lack of support to mobilization as the Church is seen the ultimate authority to protect the rights of the community. However, that does not necessarily decrease group cohesion of the Copts but indicates different methodological approaches to the problem. Fourth, provocation played a significant role during the mobilization process since Coptic and Egyptian media published widely on this issue by using a language of vilification and sometimes demonization.

### **4.3 Analysis**

How have the Copts responded to the abovementioned discrimination processes between 2005 and 2012? Given the theoretical foundations of this study, to what extent have the Copts been mobilized? If their level of mobilization was low or high, what were the causes?

This part of the study will analyze the data gathered from the field and literature to assess the overall mobilization of the Copts and answer the above questions. Successes and failures of the group will be examined; the Mubarak regime's responses to the mobilization will be critically discussed and Muslim majority's stance toward this mobilization will analytically be evaluated. To achieve this objective, this part will periodically be divided into sections the first section being from 2005 to 2010 and the second from 2011 to May 2012. The analysis will be based on institutional and communal relations and their interaction within and out of the group that presents an inextricable phenomenon.

#### **4.3.1 The Coptic Mobilization from 2005 to 2010**

From 2000 to 2005, the relations, on the communal level, remained relatively peaceful despite a certain level of mutual hostility. However, beginning with 2005, there is good reason to believe the conflict escalated as church construction, political representation and religious conversion surfaced and reached a level of friction especially among the middle and lower classes. The Mubarak regime allowed the Ikhwan members to run for parliamentary elections as independent candidates that actually caused hostility among the Copts.

In turn, at the institutional level, the Church and the regime relationship went beyond implicit entente as the Church officially announced that it supported Mubarak in the first multi-candidate presidential elections. Further, Pope Shenouda did not only publicly announced his support to Mubarak's NDP but also, as a 30 year old male BG told me, provided bus service to Coptic parishes to go to the ballots (B.G., personal communication, March 4, 2012). The prominent novelist Ala Al Aswany, a dentist by profession, narrates this fact by mentioning that one of his Coptic colleagues who is not interested in politics and has never taken the burden of going to the ballots, went to vote for Mubarak. When Aswany asks him why he did so, his friend tells him that he was at mass and the Church Priest asked him to vote for Mubarak

(Aswany, 2011). So, why did the Church announce its support publicly? Were there vital communal concerns to be lost if the support was not announced publicly?

Though McCallum (2011) argues that Pope Shenouda supported Mubarak as the thirty years old regime proved to be fairly peaceful and an alternative regime may not guarantee a tolerant treatment, the reality is that Pope Shenouda paid the price of the President's involvement in the Wafa' Constantine affair of 2004 and wanted to exclude other players from the entente with Mubarak. The case of Wafa' Constantine in 2004 showed the Church leadership that the Ministry of Interior and the Police Department sought a new role in the regime-church entente, and the regime did not back the Church as it did in the past. Pope Shenouda himself had to ask Mubarak to intervene and solve the problem. Therefore, the Church by publicly supporting Mubarak in the presidential elections wanted to reassure the entente and exclude the Ministry of Interior and the Police Department from the relationship. This was followed by a presidential decree easing the restrictions on church construction awarding the Coptic Church because of its support.

Nevertheless, the Church's objective was not only showing loyalty to the regime but also to reconcile the Coptic community-regime relationship as the Copts wanted to protest the regime over its handling of the Constatine case. By voting for Mubarak, the Copts would reassure security instead of an uncertain future under a possible Ayman Nour presidency, and the reform promising Mubarak regime would address the grievances of the Copts and protect them from attacks. Therefore, the Church and its leadership, given the important institutional interests in contrast to deterioration of communal conditions blocked the Copts from protest and mobilization early in 2005. The Church's stance changed gradually and according to the necessities of the day.

However, after the 2005 elections the Pope-Mubarak relationship deteriorated as the Pope gradually decreased his support. Why did the relationship transformed from open public support to indifference? One might think that after 2005 presidential elections and parliamentary elections in late November that year, in which the Ikhwan won 88 seats, the violence against the Copts increased and alarmed the Church as the ruler of the Copts. Rather, if this was one reason for the withdrawal of Pope's political support, the more important reason

was establishment of a parallel Orthodox church in Cairo, Mubarak's attempt to amend the Personal Status Law, state courts' ruling on divorce matters and violence against Copts.

First, as mentioned above, the Constantine affair caused a tension between the security apparatus and the church. The ministry of Interior that includes the police department allowed Max Michel to establish the Holy Synod for the Orthodox in Egypt and the Middle East. Such an establishment is naturally a rival to the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mark See and its Patriarch since it used similar titles and the founder, Max Michel, was suspended from the church by Pope Shenouda. Though Tadros (2009) interprets this as a "harsh personal and political message, raising questions as to whether the Ministry of Interior taking revenge for the Constantine affair" (p.279), actually it threatened the legitimacy of the Coptic Orthodox Church's authority and ability to manage the relationship with the regime. Given that the Egyptian state apparatus usually does not allow church construction and give new ID's to bishops, by allowing Max Michel to do so it created another Orthodox Coptic denomination that may be an alternative to the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mark.

Furthermore, Max Michel wore almost the same dress with Pope Shenouda and used archs and cross made of gold that are reminders of Pope Shenouda. As a response the Coptic Orthodox Church requested the President to stop this "farce" and not to allow others to wear the same ecclesiastical attire. According to Tadros (2009), Pope Shenouda thought they do not know where President Mubarak's orders got lost. However, Mubarak publicly announced that he does not intervene in religious affairs that meant he does not back the Pope. The Pope's answer to this was ardent: "if the state supports Maximos (Max Michel), the Copts will revolt". While this was a crystal clear warning to the authoritarian regime that Copts' support cannot be taken for granted, Mubarak's attempts can be interpreted as he does not want to rely only on the personality of the Pope Shenouda and his power, legitimacy or the church's institutional power over the community.

Nevertheless, Pope Shenouda's words also are clear proof of Fox's (2003) hypothesis that religious leadership may not mobilize or intervene unless vital interests of the religious institutions are at stake. The Maximos case posed a pure threat to the Coptic Orthodox Church and its leadership as it undermined the entente between the regime and the Church and



embarrassed the Church leadership, as it could not protect its rights and status in the eyes of the Coptic community. Saying the Copts will revolt, Pope Shenouda posed a threat to the regime as he could easily mobilize the Coptic community and protest the regime. The *Sawt al Ummah* newspaper reported on December 31, 2008 that the case was settled after a court ruling that denied to recognize Max Michel's official stamp on the grounds that there is already a patriarch for the Coptic Orthodox Church, and Max Michel's church buildings did not fulfill the law requirements (quoted in Tadros, 2009).

Second, in 2009 Mubarak's government proposed a draft law to amend the personal status law that aimed at changing the family laws of both the Muslims and non-Muslims. The amendments are said to ease divorce for the Copts but especially women since they are the most contentious issues within the Copts, Muslims and between the Coptic Church and the Egyptian state. According to Coptic Orthodox Church traditions Copts cannot divorce without the legal permit of the Church, which became a legal rule after Nasser nationalized Egyptian courts. Further, the Coptic Orthodox Church forbids marriage from other denominations on the grounds to protect Orthodox traditions and values. In case an Orthodox Copt marries to someone from other denominations, Muslim family law is applied for divorce. Last, those who get a divorce by converting to another denomination or Islam were not allowed to remarry in the Church.

The draft law provided the opportunity to those who wanted to divorce, to apply to the Egyptian State Family Courts instead of relying on a Church ruling that usually declines divorce requests. Pope Shenouda rejected such amendments as they violate biblical rulings and it is a direct intervention in church affairs that is guaranteed by religious freedom in the Constitution (Aina, 2010; Mahmood, 2012). The Pope was not alone in this debate as many lay Coptic intellectuals supported Pope Shenouda against the state on the grounds that the Egyptian state does not have the right to interfere in Coptic affairs. A 43 year old, housewife told me "The Church's divorce decisions take time but we do not want the state to interfere" (M.W, personal communication, March 3, 2012). This indicates a discontent with the Church but protects it against the state, not only because the state is seen as intervener but also as a result of the right of Church to rule the community. Moreover, while this comment questions to which

areas the Egyptian state can interfere, this bold move of the regime shows its willingness to penetrate into the religious area that leads one to ask to what extent the Egyptian state is secular. Further, the amendment also eased conversion to Islam but did complicate returning from Islam to Christianity, “al-‘aidin”. Given the benefits of conversion to Islam and costs of reconversion to Christianity, Mubarak regime’s this move caused anger among the Copts as they perceived it an act against their existence.

Supported by the Coptic Church some Coptic lawyers brought a case of reconversion to the attention of the Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court. While this is a significant response of the Church to the state apparatus, the Coptic women’s conversion and marriage is a significant source of conflict not only in the broader Egyptian society but also within the Coptic community. As 24 year old activist argued the Church provides incentives to convert as it wants to be in the center of individuals’ life, in his words, “The Church wants to be the sole authority in our personal matters like divorce that makes many of us to follow other denominations or convert to Islam” (B.F.T., personal communication, March 15, 2012). This indicates discontent with the Church’s policies and helps explaining the emergence of Maspero Youth as an ethnopolitical movement, which will be explored below.

The amendment was procrastinated as the *Ikhwan* and many other Islamists rejected the idea because of its violation of religious traditions. In 2010, Mubarak replaced seven Copts in Parliament by appointment by giving a seat to an anti-Church person, Gamal Assad that was perceived as a betrayal by the Church authorities (Khalil & Ramadan, 2010). This was one of the worst moments of Mubarak-Pope Shenouda entente over the last 30 years. And yet, the following questions remain: to what extent is the Egyptian state is secular, and does religious freedom mean that a religious institution has the right not to divorce or allow the convert parishes to remarry?

Third, violence against the Copts has intensified significantly and changed character. According to EIPR (2010), one of the most common violence types is provocation that is caused by houses of worship. Between 2008-2010, 62 violent incidents took place the most notables being the targeting of the Coptic Churches during the Coptic Christmas Eve on January 7, 2010 and 2011. Despite EIPR’s explanations that religion is the fundamental reason

of such actions; provocation usually takes form of attacking the Copts' houses and looting their shops. Why? The stories told after incidents suggest that Muslims are led by local preachers after Friday prayer when rumors' regarding a new home church is being constructed. However, why do the Muslims attack to Coptic houses and shops threatening them to evacuate the village if the problem is with the home church?

The incident in Bimha village of south of Giza in 2007 in which Muslim men destroyed 36 houses and looted seven shops belonging to the Copts after the Friday prayer is a good case study. The below quotation explains how the process works:

Pamphlets distributed ahead of the violence called on Muslim villagers who wanted to "protect" their religion to gather after Friday prayers, in order to stop the construction of a church in their village. The pamphlet included the rumored location of the church and concluded by saying that the time to act had come: there must be no more laxity, no more laziness... it is necessary that every Muslim protects his religion otherwise all is lost (Loza, 2007, p. A3).

However, reading between the lines there are significant details of this attack not being a religious one. The witnesses told the reporters that local security officers (ghafar') were involved in the riot and those who entered houses and shops did not kill anybody but stole jewelry and other valuables. Further, Coptic intellectual Kamal Zakhir commented that simple villagers were involved in this case whereas it is usually extremist groups expected to be (Loza, 2007). While this suggests how the unease between the two communities prevails among the "poor", reading between the lines show us that the cause of the conflict may not be religious but economic as poverty dominated the Egyptian society. The case was reported to be solved after a reconciliation meeting between the locals (*al-majlis al-'urfi*) that actually meant parties were made to reach a resolution since local sheiks and other facilitators are "men of power"<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Reconciliation sessions are usually undertaken by the local notables to reach a resolution. However, in most cases the resolution is temporary as it does not satisfy the parties and only solve the problems on the surface. That's one of the causes

On the other hand, Pope Shenouda gave an interview to the Coptic newspaper *Al-Watani* criticizing the practices of the security apparatus as they arrived to the village late despite the intelligence they had and to the practice of forming local reconciliation committees instead of enforcing the rule of the law: “The problems need a radical cure not a cover up!” This was remarkable as it was his first time using a harsh language after an inter-communal tension. The number of houses destroyed, targeted shops, perpetrators (over 2,000 Muslims rioted that day) and involvement of local security forces seemed to alarm the Pope over insecurity as it was also a wider problem: the conflict between the Ministry of Interior and the Church.

What was the response of the Coptic community? In general, the Coptic community did not protest the regime openly as a minority between 2005 and 2010 except after violent incidents targeting Churches. Instead, the Copts usually articulated to daily protests of the Egyptians, which, actually reached from a level of 49 protests per year in 2001 to hundreds per day in 2008 (El-Ghobashy, 2011). The Copts’ participation in *Kefaya* protests was partly due to their sufferings not because of being Copts but of being Egyptian as part of the wider society. Prevailing unemployment, poverty, and horizontal inequality was accompanied with increasing level of baseless police violence. As one activist put it “Many Copts supported the *Kefaya* because it demanded justice, equality and employment that all Egyptians suffered. We felt it obligatory to join the *Kefaya* as it was the only option for change” (B.F.T, personal communication, March 15, 2012). Demanding justice and employment, the Egyptian protesters stick together under the umbrella of the *Kefaya (Enough!) Movement* that was established in 2004, electing George Ishaq, a leftist Copt as its coordinator. The *Kefaya* aimed at voicing legitimate demands of the Egyptian society asking for justice, food and democracy and the discourse of change found considerable support from different sectors of the society. To reach that end, toppling of Mubarak, *Kefaya* organized protests almost on a daily basis that bore no physical products but psychological ones. A particular influence of the *Kefaya* on the Copts were the discourse of change that contained demands related to justice and equality.

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why personal matters easily turn into inter-communal conflicts and become repetitive. Those interested in how customary law and mediation implemented in Egypt may read the following articles: (Nielsen, 2004) and (Zayed, 2004).

For many Copts, protesting was important and yet, by no means useful as it changed anything. Some Copts told me that they could not protest against the state institutions or the majority in the past because they were the same people who would take care of your protest. One Copt put it succinctly “to whom are you protesting against! The Police and others have the same understanding” (H.B., personal communication, February 19, 2012). The Kefaya’s impact was to help all Egyptians, not only Copts, to overcome their learned helplessness by showing them they have the power to change. Further, not participating in such movements meant living with their learned helplessness that causes desperation of not being able to change their destiny. However, not all Copts participated in protests. Why did not they go to streets?

Asked about how they have responded discrimination or violence at communal level, those who visit the church, told me that they fast and pray as the Church asks them to do. As 25 year old male AB who works for an NGO told me “I can go to protest as my fellows do but I think my job is to pray for them” (A.B., personal communication, March 10, 2012). Therefore, instead of “actively” being in the streets, they fasted and prayed for their fellows as the Church did want them to “protest peacefully” in the Church but not in public.

Despite this being a religio-political drawback for mobilization, from an anthropological point of view this can be interpreted as “passive mobilization”. Passive mobilization can be interpreted as a peaceful way of reacting to discrimination and violence without being in the streets or taking direct action against a government or a group but relying on alternative means of protest like praying or fasting as a way of protest or non-cooperation with state institutions. Yet, why do some people protest in the streets but others fast and pray? Neither Fox’s (2003) ethnoreligious model nor Harff and Gurr’s (2004) ethnopolitical framework provides an answer to this question. From a vantage point, recalling my finding on mass attendance it will not be wrong to argue that the Church leads parishes to protest by praying and fasting that can be named peaceful religious mobilization in anthropological terms. This shows us that some religious institutions prefer to lead their adherents in religious terms and negotiate for them rather than directly fighting. This phenomenon contradicts Fox’s framework since it shows while the Church mobilize its followers in anthropological terms it also negotiates for the Church’s and community’s interests.

The Church being loyal to the entente, suffering and witnessing the community's grievances used a rhetoric of "martyrs" that is highly important in Coptic history. For example, the Copts have a calendar which they date from the 3rd century which Copts refer to as the "era of martyrs" (Caeserea, 1984; Meinardus, 1999). St. Mark is also considered to be a martyr, and those were killed in Church attacks in Al-Kosheh in 2000 are seen as martyrs (El-Magd, 2000). Relating martyrdom to the everyday life, the Church promotes the idea that people can relieve their grievances and feel spiritually closer to religious figures. For instance, an interviewee said "I pray and fast because in this way I feel closer to our martyrs and feel the sufferings that are widespread in our history. As once Pope Shenouda said, we should pray and fast and God will have His word" (D.M., personal communication, March 11, 2012). Another interviewee's statements show how priests play a significant role in passive mobilization by orienting people to fast and pray after confession sessions. She, a 43 year old public officer, stated that "Once I could not stand discrimination when a Coptic family was evacuated after a love affair between two young people. I told my priest that I want to do something and he suggested me to think of our martyrs and to pray and fast if I want to help my fellow Copts" (M.A, personal communication, March 21, 2012). This shows how influential the Church is in orienting its parishes reaction and channeling them to use religious means as a way of protest.

However, for Fox (2002) the Copts' low level of mobilization is related to the status of "*dhimmi*" as the Copts have lived under the Islamic rule for centuries that provide "historical legitimacy of religious discrimination against them" (p.159). While this idea is related to pre-2002 context and flawed as there has been significant Coptic activism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the post-2005 context shows a rise in protest and mobilization<sup>20</sup>. So, why did some other Copts protest? How did they manage to go to streets and protest if the Church wanted them in the churches?

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<sup>20</sup> There is evidence showing mobilization of the *dhimmis* under the rule of Ottoman Empire that contradicts Fox's claim. Fox fails to see how the Coptic community was divided until Pope Shenouda rose to power and does not consider the Copts status as part of the Egyptian society. Further, one should bear in mind that the regime provided unofficial flexibilities to Copts and Copts are patriotic people who stood together with their nation in its struggle against Israel and other foreign threats.

The shift leading the Copts to protest account for several reasons;

1. From 2005 to 2010, Copts usually protested along with the Kefaya demanding justice, equality and religious freedom and did not organize separate protests unless a Coptic Church is attacked and some Copts have been killed. For example, in November 2005 when thousands Muslims protested in front of St. Georges Church in Alexandria after learning a film was shown in the Church that is believed to be vilifying Islam, no Coptic counter-protests were recorded. Instead, the Church and al-Azhar issued a joint statement asking Copts and Muslims not to intensify the tension giving an example from the regime's response to the problem. This suggests that religion can be used officially to prevent escalation of conflict and the Copts did not respond, as it was not a deadly attack. However, protesting after inter-communal or sectarian incidents provided legitimacy to Coptic grass root movements. In contrast to November 2005 Alexandria incident, in another case again in Alexandria in April 2006, a Coptic man was stabbed back as he was leaving the Church after praying. Hundreds rioted after the funeral as fervor reached to an unprecedented level and the Church was not able to control those leaving the funeral sermon (BBC, 2006). This case is of remarkable importance as it was the first protest of the Egyptian Copts marching outside of a church, raising Cross in the streets and chanting "We would die for you oh Cross!" Raising the Cross in the streets show us that the Copts do not only demand equality, religious freedom and enforcement of rule of law but also to want Christian symbols in public next to Islamic symbols.
2. The character and size of the attacks against the Copts has changed beginning as early as 2005. EIPR (2010) finds three most common types of violence to be collective attribution, violence prompted by Copts engaging in their religious rites and targeting churches. In collective retribution cases a group of Muslims usually attacks Copts because of personal or tribal vendettas that aim to punish the whole "Other" community.

After 2005, Copts' houses of worship were targeted frequently by unknown Muslim arsons and the security apparatus failed to provide security to the community, and even was involved sometimes in kindling inter-communal tension. Further, the term "houses of worship" does not necessarily mean "church" and refers to those buildings used by the Copts for religious purposes. However, despite its knowledge of "unofficial status" of such buildings the

state does not close them down, allowing them to operate until such buildings are targeted. When such buildings are targeted governors of provinces and the security apparatus speak in favor of Muslims emphasizing that such buildings are already illegal legitimizing the acts of the Muslims. Further, the security apparatus usually responded by setting up local reconciliation committees that usually covered up the problems instead of finding a durable resolution to the conflict.

Covering up inter-communal clashes aggravated the fury of the Copts as no long term solution was provided and the perpetrators were encouraged to continue their operations. Being the less frequent type of violence, targeting churches, caused intense anxiety among the Copts as these churches are normally “protected” by the Egyptian Police Department. As one of my interviewees told me, “After two of my close associates were killed and nobody was put on trial, I felt it necessary to go to streets and this was the first step to the establishment of Coptic Youth Movement, lately known as Maspero” (B.F.T., personal communication, March 15, 2012).

3. The development of information technology intensified the communication between the Coptic diaspora and the Copts of Egypt. Living in more democratic and welfare oriented countries like the United States, Canada and Australia, the Coptic diaspora have made the problems of their fellows a “cause” for them. Since its inception in 1970s, the Coptic diaspora have been more radical than Copts of Egypt, not hesitating to organize protests abroad, asking human rights organizations to intervene and by drawing attention on the grievances of Copts. The information technology increased interaction between the two groups and websites, blogs, forums like Facebook and videos posted on video sharing websites like YouTube became the fundamental tools of exchange of ideas (Brinkerhoff, 2005). The Free Copts and Copts United websites work as a forum where thousands of Copts discuss communal, social and political issues. Plus, Coptic satellite TVs called *Al-Hayat* and *C TV* were established and focused on inter-communal problems projecting how the Muslims treat the Copts.

#### **4.3.2 Copts in the Streets 2011-2012: Cooperation or Violence?**



Moore and Gurr (1998) found that instability and insecurity caused by regime change may give opportunities to ethnopolitical groups to mobilize. The recent past shows that such chaotic moments have provided mobilization opportunities to some ethnopolitical communities when the Soviet Union started to fall apart. As Charles Tilly observed once upon a time, regimes begin to fall when they cannot control the rapid change of a community's "organization, behavior and daily routine"(quoted in El-Ghobashy, 2011). Yet, it remains problematic how masses mobilize and revolt against "strong" regimes. The Mubarak regime was considered as a strong authoritarian regime to a degree that caused Secretary of State Department, Hillary Clinton to say the following on January 25, 2011: "I believe that the Egyptian government is *stable* and is *looking for ways to respond* to its people's aspirations" (my emphasis) (Mohammed, 2011). So, now the question is how to mobilize against a strong regime as an ethnopolitical group. Three important factors stand out: Copts' discovery of street politics, Mubarak's paralyzed response to violence, and the Church's unpreparedness.

First, street politics in Egypt means confronting the police not because Mubarak regime was a police state but because the police had become the chief tool of the regime, as it administered a wide range of matters including birth certificates, dealing with crime and inter-communal tension. Further, to make the things more complicated Mubarak regime employed "unknown" thugs as a tool of crashing opponents of the regime (Kandil, 2011). The Egyptians achieved to link three sectors of social movements, workplace movements, street movements and professional syndicate movements as early as 2008 after having experienced police violence when they methodically restored common weal (El-Ghobashy, 2011).

To reach that end, the Copts used two type of protests, the first being neighborhood protests and the second youth protests. First, neighborhood protests provided an advantage to the Copts as they started their protests in neighborhoods where they constituted the majority. In Cairo, this was usually district of *Shubra al Khayma*, home to 350,000 Copts, a poverty ridden neighborhood attracting Coptic migrants from Upper Egypt as there are many nearby factories and, Coptic Orthodox churches providing social service (Marshall, 2011). Starting the protest from this neighborhood gave the Copts the advantage of security and the opportunity of attracting more supporters as their numbers grew while they marched in the neighborhood.

Second, youth protests were usually led by university students or new graduates coming from Upper Egypt and unemployed Copts who actually started to challenge the Church about how to respond the regime since they were fed up with the ongoing relationship between the Church and the Mubarak regime (M.I., personal communication, March 12, 2012).

This youth was raised by the Youth Bishopric, one of the most influential departments of the Church that provided an advanced level curricula, social activities and community service. This suggests that the Coptic youth actually experienced less coexistence with their Muslim fellows as they formed societies for Copts and socialized with Copts. EIPR's (2010) findings prove this fact as this study observes:

...a no less serious problem is the isolation of a large segment of Christian (Copt) men, who are not integrated in society whether through schools, universities, clubs or civic associations (p.25).

While the above quote presents the results of the internal dynamics, one should also examine the broader context of the Egyptian youth that mobilized and was at the front of protests. Reading the youth as a social category in social movement debates, Asef Bayat (2009) argues that "youthfulness is likely to generate collective dissent". In his examination of the Egyptian youth, Bayat finds that young people representing different social classes have little in common, and could not become a movement until late 2000s when they started to find some venues to come together and act collectively. Furthermore, rigged elections and desperation of change pushed the youth to create youth subcultures in their own socio-economic capacities. Reinterpretation of the surrounding world and finding new definitions to Islam have become the catalyzer of the change, passive revolution in words of Bayat, leading the Egyptian youth to mobilize collectively and discover sophisticated ways of protesting the regime (Bayat, 2009).

The content of Coptic groups' protests emphasized the demand to abolish the restrictions on houses of worship, implementation of rule of law, religious freedom, equal political rights and an end to religious discrimination. For many Egyptians, the January 25 Revolution started after the Naga Hammadi incident on January 6, 2010 when a Muslim murdered six Copts and one Muslim because of a story circulated that these people raped a Muslim girl. The Copts flooded

to the streets to protest as they were aware if they do not do so, the state would cover the issue and nobody would be arrested. They continuously tried to keep this issue on the agenda of the society to put pressure on government and make it a “cause” for the Copts. A Coptic activist put it as follows: “Before Naga Hammadi we would pray, fast and ask Pope Shenouda to find a solution. But after this incident and the Revolution, now we have the streets!”(B.F.T, personal communication, March 15, 2012) Being in the street means, the Copts know they have to pay the cost of their freedom and they are eager to do so.

Second, the regime’s paralyzed response and non-enforcement of the rule of the law contributed to Coptic mobilization. On January 1, 2011, parishes leaving the New Year’s mass after the midnight from the Al-Qiddisin Church in Alexandria were shocked when a car bomb exploded in the middle of the night leaving 21 Copts dead and 79 others injured. Copts rioted against the police, attacked government buildings, protested against the regime and asked “revolution in Egypt, in all churches of Egypt” (BBC, 2011). This anger heightened as ministers paid a visit to Pope Shenouda and President Mubarak asked Egyptians to stand together be they Christian or Muslim as this case was an act of “foreign hands”. This was the usual practice and stance of the state apparatus: denial of inter-communal tension. Relying on police force without investigating who are the perpetrators of such attacks along with foreign hands discourse was not persuasive any more since these people wanted to change the status quo and such discourses were expired.

Third, the Coptic Church was both caught unprepared to these protests and remained ambivalent towards Coptic protests until Pope Shenouda announced his support for Mubarak. Despite Pope Shenouda’s condemnation of the Alexandria incident and demand for an investigation, his meeting with government officials caused clear fury among the Copts. When Bishop Youanis thanked Mubarak for his condolences after the incident, Copts attending to the funeral whose numbers were reported to be between 5,000 and 10,000 chanted adamantly “No, No, No!” (AFP, 2011). This shows that the Church did not expect such a powerful civil society response to such attacks and was caught unprepared to these protests. Nevertheless, the Church also did not ask the Copts not to protest that could easily undermine its legitimacy and took an ambivalent stance. On the other hand, most Muslims offered their condolences including the

Ikhwan and served as human shields on January 7, 2011, the Coptic New Year Eve in the Coptic churches (El-Rashidi, 2011). The case was attributed to one of the Gaza Jihad Group and to al-Qaeda in Iraq as this group threatened the Christians of the Middle East recently, despite these groups' rejection of the attack (VOA, 2010).

The regime's paralyzed response- blaming foreign powers-, and not taking action was enough reason for Copts to maintain and accelerate their protests against the regime. The Church had an ambivalent stance towards the protesters. On the one hand, it was reluctant to support the Coptic protesters who organized sit in protests and marched in neighborhoods not hesitating to clash with police. They managed to block the streets leaving the police ineffective and constituting an example for the future demonstrations. Yet, the Church did not discourage protesters to leave the streets until two days earlier than the January 25 Revolution when it became apparent the protests were absolutely getting out of control, and the Church feared not only from excessive use of force by the government but also from an Islamist dominated political and societal realm<sup>21</sup>. Nonetheless, cooperation between the Copts and Muslims prevailed as some Muslim groups protected Coptic churches, and Coptic schools and hospitals around Tahrir Square allowed Muslims to perform ablution and pray. However, cooperation did not necessarily mean the Copts' grievances were addressed or they abandoned them for the sake of the revolution. Instead, they were well aware if the Mubarak regime was not toppled democracy, religious freedom, equality, political representation and socio-economic welfare could not be achieved. The disobedient Copts did not listen to Pope Shenouda who ordered them to free the streets and revolution was realized on January 25, 2011 and Mubarak stepped down on February 14.

Pope Shenouda's this order, however, backfired as the Copts did not listen to him and participated massively in the Revolution. It will not be wrong to say that the Church could not

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<sup>21</sup> The friendship between Pope Shenouda and Mubarak could also be another reason of why the Church asked its parishes to go to their homes. Further, the Church was well aware who holds power in Egyptian politics and they knew removal of Mubarak did not necessarily mean the end of his regime. This point is important given the renewed entente between the SCAF and the Church.

adapt to the new means of politics led by youth and wanted to be party to the status quo. While it was rational for the Church given the power equilibrium in the Egyptian politics, for many Copts Pope Shenouda was a *feloul*, a remnant of Mubarak regime who did not understand the change in the Copts and could not fulfill their demands. According to Fox (2002) authoritarian leaders have more ability than democratic leaders to mobilize their followers. However, while Pope Shenouda was a strong leader and had to the ability to mobilize his followers to go to the streets, he did not so because of the abovementioned neo-millet system, his understanding of mobilization on theological grounds and his patriotism exemplified by his rejection of sending Copts to Jerusalem for pilgrimage in order to stand with his Muslim fellows in the Palestine case. Therefore, Pope Shenouda's role in mobilization process as a leader is more of preventive rather than being leading.

### **4.3.3 The Revolution's Influence on Coptic Mobilization**

When Mubarak stepped down, Egyptians were hopeful about their future as they were eager to elect new parliament members that would be responsible to undertake reform and address socio-economic and inter-communal issues. Copts were both hopeful and anxious as Muslim Brothers and Salafis that many believed to be threatening the Copts rose to political power. Yet, all Egyptians soon understood that revolution was a long marathon in which one had to confront the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, the 19 generals who have ruled Egypt since Mubarak's ouster. Below this study briefly discusses the influence of the revolution on Coptic mobilization in relation with the political rise of the Salafi trend, the Ikhwan and government responses. It simply argues that the revolution influenced the Copts negatively; the police as the main security apparatus were paralyzed to respond to prevailing insecurity, some policemen were involved in inter-communal conflicts and lack of authority caused increasing violence against the Copts. However, this proved Gurr and Moore's mobilization supposition as the Copts mobilized further as they were aware of the opportunities the Revolution provided and in response to the treatment they had.

Insecurity and lack of order triggered usual inter-communal conflicts serving both as an opportunity for Copts to mobilize and risking their coexistence with the Muslims as a community since their "communal" protests were perceived as provocative. Verbal support to

the Copts coming from western governments was perceived as interfering to Egyptian internal politics and in the broader Muslim vs. Christian context. In 2011, when a U.S. Congress commission wanted to investigate an inter-communal incident, even the famous intellectual Ala' al Aswany criticized this effort as it was a foreign hand interfering in internal affairs of a Muslim majority country and provoking people (Aswany, 2011).

Two significant cases occurred after the revolution that eased the establishment of ethnopolitical organizations challenging both the Church and the state; Camilia Shehata's conversion and the Maspero incident. The first case is almost the same case with that of Wafa' Constantine. Shehata, wife of Tadros Saman, a Coptic priest in Minya, is believed to have disappeared after a dispute with her husband over family matters to some accounts and against her will to convert to Islam according to some other accounts. Despite the lack of information regarding her whereabouts, she was returned to the custody of the Church or to her family. On May 7, 2011 Shehata appeared on a TV program in the Coptic *Al-Hayat TV* claiming she never converted to Islam that led to mass protests next to St. Mark Church, the Headquarters of the Coptic Patriarchate, of the Salafi trend claiming the Church forcibly returned Shehata to Christianity (Bentelmassih, 2011). In response, the Coptic youth called for one million protest and announced they will protect the Coptic churches themselves (Khalil, 2011). What do all these things tell us about the mobilization of the Copts?

Three important reflections on the above story give insight about the changing nature of the Coptic mobilization. First, in contrast to Constantine case of 2004, the Church and the security apparatus did not discuss this issue publicly that means institutions realigned themselves as insecurity prevailed and the prospects of Islamist movements taking power alarmed both the security apparatus and the Coptic Church. In the late 1990s, the regime believed that once the Islamist threat was co-opted or solved, there would be no Coptic problem (Ayalon, 1999). What had happened is that Mubarak was toppled leaving a strong state apparatus that have not wanted to share power with the political wings of the Salafi trend and the Ikhwan that won the 2011 parliamentary elections. Cooperation between the Coptic Church and the SCAF was restored as there was a common threat and the Church knew very well it was the security

apparatus that would provide security but no other political actor. However, to what extent did this cooperation block Coptic mobilization or does it block?

The second phenomenon is that conversion/reconversion issues have become great source of provocation and mass demonstration whereas in the past such issues were solved between the institutions. This phenomenon refers to the change in dealing with such issues and engagement of the Coptic activists though Shehata's conversion case was solved by the Church and the security apparatus. The Church's ambivalent stance to Coptic mobilization did not only stem from its timid will to support such movements but also because its legitimacy could be challenged and weakened if it precluded such movements. For instance, one of the founders of the Maspero Youth Union told me that the Pope told them in a meeting the in the St. Mark Cathedral that "Pope did not ask us to end the sit-ins and protests but he was fearful for us" (F.P., personal communication, February 28, 2012). Further, this phenomenon reflected itself in symbolic power struggles as the Coptic groups knew they could not gather one million Copts, but wanted to show their growing muscles with the support of the bottom level Copts. Their mention of protecting their churches provided another opportunity to attract more Copts, as their Coptic Orthodox faith and its representatives were projected as threatened, and the state security might not be willing to provide security.

Third, the economic liberalization helped the emergence of private Coptic media broadcasting programs on Christian way of life and publishing articles on inter-communal relations. Along with its assertion of Coptic identity and traditions, Coptic Al-Hayat TV's coverage of Shehata's story revealed how the Church covered this problem but also provoked the Salafi trend. Therefore, one can assume the coverage of inter-communal incidents contributed to Coptic groups' mobilization and questioning of the Church policies whereas Copts have criticized Egyptian media's coverage of communal relations that kindles the flames of conflict, or "fitna" as it is used by Egyptian media (Elsasser, 2010). It would not be an exaggeration if one claims that inter-communal conflict may intensify in the foreseeable future if the media continues to broadcast and publish along communal lines.

To say that the Egyptian state responded intensifying conflict and increasing violence on the Copts only through the security apparatus will be unfair. During Essam Sharaf's prime

ministry, from March to December 2011, an investigation commission called Early Warning and Conflict Prevention was established to prevent further conflicts, reconcile conflicting parties, and map the zones of conflict. However, despite its little power this commission revealed that security personnel played important roles in inter-communal conflicts that caused the institute to be blocked from further activity. However, the state apparatus was not alone in its stance as both Al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church rejected the “kanun al-‘ibada al-muahhad” draft law that aimed to manage sacred places construction with one rule applying to Muslim and Christian houses of worship (N. al-Ashwal, personal communication, March 27, 2012). This reveals that there was little change after the revolution, if not any, in the understanding of the institutions’ approach to inter-communal relations. These institutions have been part of the former regime and could not engender “new policies” to respond Coptic mobilization that show their reluctance to change. Nevertheless, in general, it would not be wrong to say that these institutions reconfigured their policies after the revolution.

On October 9, 2011 Coptic youth organized a 10,000 person protest after an attack on a church that was under construction in Marinab of Aswan governorate on September 30. The Muslims claimed the church construction was illegitimate as it did not have a license and were backed by the governor of Aswan whereas the Church sources submitted a copy of their original license to the SCAF that did not take action. Not convinced and provoked by a speech of the local imam, a group of young Muslims attacked the church leaving the church and some Copts’ houses destroyed, and some Copts injured. The Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Commission found that some security personnel were involved and the governor of Aswan made the parties reconcile without the enforcement of the rule of law (N. al-Ashwal, personal communication, March 27, 2012). The involvement of the Governor of Aswan as mediator, who was party to the conflict, shows that the deal could only survive for a short period since learned observers know well that such sessions could only address the surface.

The protesters gathered in front of the Egypt’s state radio and TV building called Maspero and demanded the following: “immediate restoration of the church in al-Marinab; the Aswan governor’s resignation; justice for those assaulted; compensation for Aswan Christians whose



property was damaged; and *a quota for Copts in the parliamentary elections coming up in late November*”(my emphasis) (Tadros, 2011a, p. 2)

**Picture 2 Copts protesting peacefully on October 9, 2011 just before they were harshly crushed (Source: From the private collection of K.S., available upon request from the author)**



Starting as a peaceful protest with more than a thousand of participants including some Muslims, the night ended with 23 dead Copts and more than 300 injured. The SCAF showed its strong muscles not only to Copts but also to the entire revolutionary groups as many eye witnesses said there was no shooting or fight until some tanks approached the protesters and began shooting indiscriminately. The state TV asked help from Muslim citizens since the Copts were attacking the armed forces and killing soldiers at Maspero. Obviously, the media has become more than a weapon of the armed forces, as this call for Muslims means demonization of the Copts. The SCAF denied any responsibility and told reporters that Maspero was the work of “foreign hands and unknown thugs” denying any inter-communal and political problem. Pope Shenouda rejected an international investigation since it would threaten “national unity” (Jadalliyya, 2011). Yet, why so many Copts were killed and injured if they were protesting peacefully? What was the rationale behind the Maspero massacre?

Harff and Gurr's (2004) ethno-political mobilization conflict model surmises that massacres are sources of high-level mobilization since they intend to systematically destroy the existence of an ethno-political group. To say that the Maspero incident was a massacre would not be an exaggeration since peacefully protesting, innocent people were killed in a state sponsored attack. Why did the SCAF lead such an attack on Copts? From a vantage point of view, though not justifying such massive killings, there are at least three significant reasons that eased SCAF's use of violence.

To begin with, prevailing insecurity and ongoing protests paralyzed the daily life of Egypt and left SCAF's rule ineffective. At the time, Egypt was reported to suffer from insecurity the number of tourists visiting Egypt being one of the main indicators of this fact. More than 10 million tourists visited Egypt in 2011 whereas the number of tourists visited Egypt was 30 percent higher in 2010 (Farouk, 2011). Further, respect for institutions such as the Police, the primary civilian security tool of the state, was at the minimum level because of this institution's corruptness and collaboration with Mubarak regime during the Revolution which led to anarchy, given the number of daily protests after the Revolution. To argue these protests, plagued Egypt and made people to complain about Revolution will not be wrong.

Second, the security apparatus's unfriendly stance towards the Copts is well-known and can be counted as one of the reasons SCAF's handling this issue with hard power, to show Coptic folks that it's the ruler of the country and they cannot revolt. Despite the fact that SCAF did not mention religion at all and the attack was not sectarian but turned into after the state TV asked help from Muslims against the Copts. This shows religion was operationalized to intimidate the Copts, as the Muslim majority could easily be mobilized against the Copts. Nonetheless, the attack was also a response to the Coptic Church since a respected Coptic priest had publicly stated: "Tantawi knows well what we can do. We will show them a march that the country has never seen, ending inside Maspero" (Tadros, 2011a, p. 2). That shows the SCAF wanted to show the Church and to different voices in it that the SCAF is the ultimate power holder at the time. The message was clear, if the Church wants to maintain its power over the community and its respected place in the society, it had to understand whom should it negotiate. However, it also signals that the Church does not have a monolithic structure and accommodates priests

who support mobilization and action against the state and the majority Muslim community. A leader of the Maspero, for instance, cited two priests' names Father Philopather and Father Mattias, though just as priests but not representatives of the Church that means they provide legitimacy to the movement with their titles (F.P., personal communication, February 28, 2012).

Third, the SCAF's message did not only intend to target the Copts but also to show its will to maintain power by using force to threaten other revolutionaries and political forces, especially those who did not leave the streets after the Revolution and demanded full power transfer to civilians. Not surprisingly, no serious investigation was undertaken that leads one to argue if this case is not investigated and security apparatus was not held accountable; other local cases will not even be considered worth mentioning.

Nevertheless, while the Salafi trend asked Tantawi to protect Islam and stated they will protect it in case of any failure, the Ikhwan argued that the Marinab case was exaggerated and criticized the Copts for their demands at Maspero since not only the Copts but all of the Egyptian society had similar grievances. Instead of denouncing violence used by the SCAF, threatening the Copts and blaming them for prioritizing their grievances can be interpreted as a result of their hostile stance towards the Copts. This is a significant catalyst that brought SCAF, the Salafi trend and the Ikhwan together under one umbrella: The Copts cannot revolt along communal lines and demand specific rights!

This study highlights that beginning with the Maspero incident the Coptic groups publicly demanded "proportional political representation" marking a transformation in ethnopolitical mobilization as they added a new dimension to their discourse. This issue has become a contentious issue, as the Church rejected this idea and the formation of a Coptic political party to unite Christians on the grounds it would intensify sectarianism (Mayton, 2012). The political differences among the Church and the Maspero Youth emerged after Pope Shenouda's invitation of SCAF, Ikhwan, Al-Azhar and Salafi trend leaders to the Coptic Christmas Eve on January 7, 2012 in which the Pope was protested against in front of his guests and accused of hosting murderers of Copts. Yet, who is the Maspero Youth and how did they emerge as a distinct ethnopolitical movement?

The Maspero Youth was not established just after the Maspero massacre but started to organize like a youth club after the Naga Hammadi incident in 2010. Angry about the Church's and Mubarak's stance, they wanted to exchange ideas and organize in order to put an end to the community's sufferings. To reach that end, they did not distance themselves from the Church and had a religious discourse in the beginning until they realized that it was Mubarak whom they suffered most. This implies the entente between the Church and the regime and the movement became transformed into a more secular one in order to be "a parallel channel" to the Church and be the political representative of the Copts while being cautious not to criticize the Church on the religious grounds which could easily undermine their legitimacy. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to challenge the Church on political grounds especially after spectacular incidents. According to one of Maspero's founders, violent attacks accelerated the organization of the movement, as these people lost their relatives and friends in such attacks (B.F.T., personal communication, March 15, 2012). Despite many problems that Maspero experienced since its inception, the group opened branches in Alexandria, Assiut, Ismailia, and Fayoum where they set investigation and early warning committees that interfere in cases of conflict on the grounds to protect the rights of the Copts and organize protests. Despite the number of their supporters which is claimed to be between 8,000 and 10,000, the movement is still very young and should attract more people to be the representative of the Copts.

Nevertheless, the death of Pope Shenouda in March 2012 caused Copts to feel more vulnerable, as he was the undisputed leader of the Copts and it would take five months to elect a new Pope that meant the Copts will not have a religious leader during the presidential elections in May and June that will determine the future of the country<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> At the time of writing, Mohamed Morsy of Freedom and Justice Party, the official political wing of the Ikhwan was elected as the new president of Egypt. However, the Copts supported Ahmad Shafik who was the last prime minister of Mubarak as they had to choose between these two candidates. Nevertheless, there is convincing evidence that the Church leadership tacitly supported Shafik and asked Coptic parishes to do so. This suggests that the entente is renewed against an Islamist threat (Gokpinar, 2012).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This study finds that during 2005-2010 period the Copts protested after the “sacred” places were targeted and when Copts were killed that refer to a problem of existence and insecurity. In general, the Coptic mobilization fits well into Harff and Gurr and Fox’s models. However, neither Harff and Gurr (2004) nor Fox (2003) differentiate between those mobilizing ethnopolitical groups in terms of age and socio-economic classes unless factions have conflicts with each other that weaken mobilization. A significant finding of this study is that Coptic mobilization is led by Coptic youth that experienced unemployment, poverty, migration, lost their relatives in attacks against the Copts and lost faith in Mubarak regime not only Copts but also as Egyptians. Therefore, the Coptic mobilization cannot be discussed apart from the broader Egyptian mobilization that has had significant diffusion influence on Copts. To Harff and Gurr (2004) ethnopolitical groups take examples from the outside world, whereas the Coptic case shows Coptic movements are not only influenced by internal movements like Kefaya and 6 October movements but also cooperated with them.

Despite Coptic mobilization’s general fit in Fox’s ethnoreligious model, Fox’s attempts to explain low level of mobilization with religious elites’ and institutions’ interests may not be sound, as religious peaceful mobilization does not necessarily mean protesting in the streets. This flaw is a result of the ethnoreligious model’s structure that depends on “likelihood” rather than clear “casual” relationships. Further, Fox takes religion as the primary unit of analysis but the Coptic mobilization shows that other variables like nationalism, cooperation against a common problem and thousands of years of coexistence play significant roles in (im) mobilization, in other words, low level of mobilization. Yet, why do some people protest in the streets and mobilize actively whereas some others pray and fast in churches?

Protesting after so called sectarian incidents provided legitimacy to Coptic groups as the Church was seen the sole authority on Coptic matters. Further, despite the Church’s deteriorating entente with the Mubarak regime and its influence on Coptic mobilization, the Church took a more ambivalent approach towards Coptic mobilization after 2007. This suggests, in contrast to Fox’s arguments, religious institutions do not necessarily either facilitate or block mobilization. Constructing their role as a dichotomy prevents one seeing

religious institutions' interactions with regimes and their parishes. Also, this study could not find any data if the Coptic Orthodox Church allowed Coptic ethnopolitical movements to use its services as a means to mobilize Copts. Last but not least, this study finds that the Coptic diaspora groups, economic liberalization and façade reforms, and growing semi-independent Egyptian and Egyptian-Coptic media have had significant influence on mobilization as independent variables during this period.

In the second period of the mobilization this study finds that Coptic mobilization has increased in parallel with the escalating violence and increasing level of violence that is not only a result of lack of order and insecurity but also because of surfacing hostility towards the Copts. Provocation played a significant role, confirming Fox's (2002) assumptions, during this period since players from both sides threatened each other and struggled for opportunities in the new political landscape. However, the security apparatus sponsored massacre was the peak point of the Coptic mobilization since many rejected the Church's approaches and joined the Maspero Youth. While this phenomenon confirms Harff and Gurr's (2004) proposition that times of upheaval may provide further opportunities for mobilization, this study supplements it with the risks the Copts confronted. Official emergence and rise of ethnopolitical groups that use nonviolent and peaceful mobilization strategies provided an alternative channel for Copts and has challenged the Coptic Church because of its renewed entente with the state institutions. Yet, this may cause dissension within the Copts in the long run if the newly elected Pope cannot fulfill the charisma and authority of late Pope Shenouda.

Further, Coptic mobilization cannot be discussed without the broader Egyptian society's mobilization. In this mobilization period, this study observes both cooperation and conflict between the Copts and the Muslims but argues that conflict increased as insecurity prevailed. Yet, one should also consider that Copts have been aware of the opportunities the revolution brought and wanted to fight for their future. In the same vein, it is striking that the Copts' discourse began to change as ethnopolitical movements stressed polity related issues. The Coptic ethnopolitical movements' debate on proportional political representation and formation of a Coptic political party marks the birth of a politically active and mobilized actor. In a

nutshell, the Revolution's impact on the Copts has been negative in the short run but has positively influenced Coptic mobilization.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

What is to be drawn from the above discussion? How does the Coptic mobilization fit into Harff and Gurr's (2004) and Fox's (2003) models? To what extent, does the Coptic mobilization contrast with these two models? The conclusions of this study can be collected under two headings; results supporting or contradicting Harff and Gurr's ethnopolitical and Fox's ethnoreligious conflict frameworks.

First, the Coptic mobilization between 2005-2012, generally, fits well into Harff and Gurr's (2004) and Fox's (2003) ethnopolitical and ethnoreligious models. While this study finds that the degree of group discrimination, strength of group identity, and degree of ethnic group cohesion to be high, external support for Copts does not go beyond verbal support or investigation of some violent incidents, and the severity of governmental violence is low with the exception of the Maspéro massacre in October 2011. This study employed a type of political environment termed "competitive authoritarian regime" and found the façade reforms and economic liberalization program actually resulted in significant developments such as the establishment of new Coptic and Muslim media networks. While there is no statistical data to measure the influence of these outlets on ordinary Egyptians, this study finds good qualitative evidence to believe that such media outlets facilitated Coptic mobilization. This study finds the role of the international status of the regime in the mobilization process is medium since Egypt does not enjoy extensive natural resources however it does receive annual military aid as part of the Camp David Peace Accords.

Fox's theory addresses most of the factors in the Coptic mobilization as it encompasses a wide range of subjects. From a vantage point, Fox's (2002) argument that religious grievances cause mobilization is sound with regards to the Coptic mobilization. However, this begs the question why the Copts did not mobilize in the 1990s but only after 2005. This study shows that while religion is a significant part of Coptic mobilization and provides legitimacy for Coptic protests, the context is a key variable that shows religious mobilization may not be as powerful as Fox predicted if other factors are not present. Further, in parallel with Fox's (2002) proposition, the Coptic mobilization was peaceful and used nonviolent strategies. This study finds that the Copts both reacted to religious discrimination and demanded religious rights between 2005 and



2012 at a medium level, but this level remarkably increased from 2011 to 2012. Also, Fox (2002) argues religious institutions facilitate mobilization unless the institutions' and elites' interests are at stake. However, in contrast to Fox's propositions this study finds the Coptic Orthodox Church took an ambivalent stance towards the Coptic mobilization but found it strategic to renew its relationship with the SCAF as an uncertain future with the Ikhwan's and the Salafi trend's success to enter the Egyptian Parliament and the death of Pope Shenouda.

Further, the Church's resources were not used to functionalize as a means of mobilizing the group that leads one to question if the Church is more reluctant to mobilize. While one might argue religious institutions do not necessarily facilitate mobilization and devote resource for this purpose, one should examine the religious leadership's role in the mobilization process. In contrast to Harff and Gurr's (2004) and Fox's (2002) suggestion that authoritarian leaders usually mobilize their groups more than democratic leaders is not valid in this case, as Pope Shenouda opted for the renewal of the entente, and preferred a peaceful mobilization as he considered being in the street meant accelerating inter-communal conflict.

In this regard, the emergence of the Coptic ethnopolitical movements should not be understood only as a result of discrimination and increasing violence but also because of their desperation for change within the Church and the State. Research findings show that the Maspero Youth showed discontent against the Church leadership and its policies especially after the Revolution and did not hesitate to protest against Pope Shenouda, who occupied the Church leadership for more than thirty years, publicly in some instances. This shows that the Church is not the sole ruler of the community anymore; the Copts have become independent actors pursuing street politics.

While Coptic ethnopolitical movements operationalized religion to protest against the Egyptian government as Fox (2002) predicted, this study's findings suggest that these movements demanded not only religious freedom and equal rights but also asked for political rights and proportional representation of the Copts in the Parliament. Whereas one expects Coptic mobilization to be based on religion and the demand for religious rights or ease of church construction, discourses related to political representation beg the question if religious grievances are enough of a reason to mobilize.

What other factors contributed to Coptic mobilization? Why did not the Copts mobilize in 1990s or 2000s but now? Is this mobilization only a context-based one? The neo-millet system provided flexibility to both communities and the entente between the state and the Church was one of the main drawbacks to Coptic mobilization. Changing dynamics in the entente between power centers converged with deteriorating socio-economic dynamics in a boiling society that facilitated mobilization. This study finds four additional reasons that help us to understand the reasons behind the mobilization; differentiation among the Copts, geographical differences and concentration of power, structural changes in Mubarak regime and their reflections, and diffusion effect of other social movements and diaspora groups and the changes.

First, some findings of this study cannot be discussed within the framework of Harff and Gurr's (2004) and Fox's (2002) models since these findings are not coded as variables in these models. One of the major findings of this study is that the "differentiation" between the rich people and middle and lower classes in terms of discrimination and mobilization. This study's empirical findings suggest that the Coptic social classes experienced discrimination at different levels, the middle and low classes feeling the most state repression as they engaged with the state apparatus and Muslim Egyptians in their daily lives more than upper classes. As stated above, poor Coptic neighborhoods that are home to Coptic migrants became key points for starting Coptic protests as ethno-political movements attracted more participants from these parts of the different cities.

Second, it is important to note, as EIPR (2010) indicated, most of the violent incidents occurred in Upper Egypt whereas the protests usually took place in the two big Egyptian cities, Cairo and Alexandria. The rationale behind this phenomenon is twofold. First, despite the fact that Copts live mostly in Upper Egypt, the Headquarters of the Coptic Orthodox Church is in Cairo and Coptic migrants in the capital city are active in seeking their rights as they can attract more media and political attention. Second, traditional reconciliation commissions are set up in Upper Egypt where the Egyptian state rules lightly and the rule of tribal leaders is valid. Therefore, regional differences, which are not mentioned in Harff and Gurr's (2004) model, matter not only because of different socio-economic settings and traditional establishments but also because of the central authority's power concentration and efficiency.

Third, Harff and Gurr's (2004) framework does not differentiate between state actors but analyzes the state as if the state is a monolithic structure pursuing a certain agenda as a whole. This study finds that monolithic dispersion of power is not at stake as different key veto actors, like the Ministry of Interior, wanted to be a player in Church-regime entente in the last few years. Further, after the January 25 Revolution, the Church renewed its entente with the transitional ruler of the country, SCAF, that shows us how the veto players operate on different levels and state repression may be intrinsic to different state institutions. The overthrow of Mubarak did not necessarily mean the regime was defeated. Therefore, this study emphasizes that Harff and Gurr's (2004) study remains weak in explaining the state apparatus's behaviors as it considers the state as a monolithic structure. Moreover, the economic liberalization policy of Mubarak regime resulted in opening of new media outlets that published and broadcasted along communal lines by antagonizing the other. This fact is significant in the transformation of the conflict and the role of media and other technological developments are not discussed neither in Harff and Gurr's nor Fox's model. To think that such economic liberalization attempts are façade is flawed as such reforms had authentic impacts on Egyptian society.

Last but not least, Harff and Gurr's (2004) framework emphasizes that ethnopolitical movements can learn from other movements abroad. In this case, Coptic ethnopolitical movements did not take any model as an example and Coptic mobilization cannot be discussed without considering the greater Egyptian mobilization. As this study stressed in earlier chapters, until lately, the Copts joined protests against Mubarak with the Kefaya and protested as Copts only after the Revolution and where they had strongholds like Shubra. The Kefaya's diffusion impact is significant as the Copts learned sophisticated ways of gathering and protesting from this movement. The Maspero, the biggest Coptic protest and the bloodiest one, was a watershed not only because it showed the ruler of the country, SCAF, would not allow the Copts to protest as a distinct group but also resulted in formation of well-structured Coptic ethnopolitical movement.

What is the future of Coptic ethnopolitical mobilization? Is there any sign showing further escalation or decrease in mobilization level? The painful transitional period in Egypt and the election of a new Pope will determine the future of the mobilization. If the Egyptians achieve to

write a new and democratic constitution that satisfies the demands of the Copts, there is no reason to believe mobilization will increase. However, the SCAF and the Church seem to be pursuing traditional diplomacy politics that may provide another opportunity for the Maspero Youth to challenge both of them. Nevertheless, the Ikhwan's rise to political power caused fear among the Copts that might block mobilization and help institutions to renew the entente on the basis of the necessities of the day.

## Appendix

### List of Coptic Interviewees

|    | Name<br>(Abbreviation) | Age | Sex    | Educational<br>Level | Occupation              | I. Date   |
|----|------------------------|-----|--------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| 1  | M.I.                   | 28  | Female | High School          | Unemployed              | 3/12/2012 |
| 2  | B.F.T                  | 29  | Male   | University           | Student                 | 3/15/2012 |
| 3  | A.B.                   | 25  | Male   | University           | NGO worker              | 3/10/2012 |
| 4  | D.M.                   | 29  | Female | University           | Senior Adm.             | 3/5/2012  |
| 5  | M.A.                   | 43  | Female | University           | Public Officer          | 3/11/2012 |
| 6  | F.P.                   | 35  | Male   | University           | Veterinary              | 2/28/2012 |
| 7  | I.Z.                   | 20  | Female | High School          | Student                 | 3/2/2012  |
| 8  | N.H.W                  | 33  | Female | University           | Grad. Student           | 3/17/2012 |
| 9  | A.B.G.S                | 45  | Male   | Primary School       | Unemployed              | 3/5/2012  |
| 10 | M.P.M                  | 51  | Male   | Primary School       | Unemployed              | 3/9/2012  |
| 11 | R.R.G                  | 65  | Female | Primary School       | Housewife               | 2/26/2012 |
| 12 | Bishop A.              | 61  | Male   | High School          | Bishop                  | 2/23/2012 |
| 13 | R.R.R                  | 39  | Male   | High School          | Shop Owner              | 3/18/2012 |
| 14 | B.R.                   | 28  | Male   | University           | Engineer                | 2/15/2012 |
| 15 | M.D.                   | 52  | Female | University           | Administr. Ass.         | 2/27/2012 |
| 16 | K.S.                   | 36  | Male   | University           | Digital Media<br>Expert | 3/25/2012 |
| 17 | R.W.                   | 45  | Female | High School          | Unemployed              | 3/14/2012 |
| 18 | B.G.                   | 28  | Male   | High School          | Accounter               | 3/12/2012 |
| 19 | M.W.                   | 43  | Female | Primary School       | Housewife               | 3/3/2012  |
| 20 | M.S.                   | 58  | Male   | Primary School       | Unemployed              | 2/19/2012 |
| 21 | B.G.B.                 | 36  | Female | High School          | Employee                | 2/21/2012 |
| 22 | M.R.                   | 27  | Female | University           | Unemployed              | 2/25/2012 |
| 23 | C.S.                   | 38  | Female | High School          | Employee                | 2/26/2012 |
| 24 | H.B.                   | 48  | Male   | Primary School       | Employee                | 2/19/2012 |

### List of Interviewed Experts

|   |                  |                            |           |
|---|------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | E. Iskander      | LSE (PhD)                  | 3/25/2012 |
| 2 | Ishak<br>Assaad  | EIPR                       | 3/26/2012 |
| 3 | N. al-<br>Ashwal | Cairo Uni.( PhD Candidate) | 3/27/2012 |
| 4 | Amal<br>Hamada   | Cairo Uni.(PhD)            | 3/19/2012 |

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