Intertwining Narratives:
The Copts and Their Muslim Relations

1919 Revolution*

Mother Egypt**

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“There is no longer any such thing as fiction and non-fiction; there is only narrative.”

E.L. Doctorow
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Introduction:

On December 31, 1999, an argument took place between a shopkeeper and his customer in al-Kush, a village in the Sohag Governorate of Upper Egypt. The dispute was over the price of the Coptic vendor’s merchandise, which the Muslim customer claimed was unusually high. Surely, the customer argued, the prices would be lower if he was the shopkeeper’s coreligionist, rather than his compatriot. The two men proceeded to exchange remarks, but their brief encounter drew to an uneventful close. Less than a week later, on January 6, 2000, the customer returned to the shop, only this time with a number of his fellow Muslims. An argument ensued, and as the sun set, twenty-one Copts and one Muslim had been murdered, thirty-nine others were injured, and 135 people were indicted for participating in the day’s violent atrocities. In addition to the loss of human life, 200 homes had been badly damaged and approximately one million dollars of merchandise and property had been lost. In exchange for the hardship experienced by the Christian minority, the Egyptian government gave $882 to the families of the fallen victims and $147 to those wounded, effectively reducing the Copts’ lives to pounds and piastres.

Pending further investigation into what actually transpired in al-Kush, Pope Shenouda III, the reigning Coptic Patriarch, publicly declared that “negligence on the part of the police and local leaders led to an increase in the number of victims and an escalation of violence.” To the frustration of the Pope and his followers, this negligence was destined to permeate other arenas. In February 2001, more than a year after the murders, ninety-two of the ninety-six defendants allegedly responsible for the systematic targeting of the Copts were acquitted in a criminal court. In June 2004, Egypt’s highest
appellate court, the Court of Cassation, upheld the acquittal and dismissed the charges leveled against two other Muslims.\(^4\) To the agony of the Egyptian minority and the ire of Copts abroad (\textit{Aqbat al-mahjar}), ninety-four of the ninety-six defendants walked away from the largest massacre of Copts in Egypt’s modern history, without so much as a slap on the wrist.

Exactly ten years to the day of the al-Kush massacre, sectarian violence once again erupted in Upper Egypt. The conflict unfolded in Nag Hammadi in the Qena Province. Three Muslims opened fire on a crowd of Copts exiting St. John’s Church after a Christmas mass. The gunmen killed six Copts and one Muslim police officer, and wounded ten others. In the aftermath of the attack, fourteen Muslims and twenty-eight Copts were arrested, while the compatriots proceeded to burn one another’s shops and houses to the ground. The \textit{Huffington Post} labeled the assault a “vendetta killing” carried out in response to the rape of a twelve-year-old Muslim girl by a Coptic man earlier in November.\(^5\) The \textit{BBC} cited U.S. officials as saying that the killings showed “an atmosphere of intolerance in Egypt,”\(^6\) and suggested that Copts were bracing themselves for the “next catastrophe.”\(^7\)

Cognizant of the foreign media’s portrayal of the Nag Hammadi massacre, which eerily resembled the killings at al-Kush, President Mubarak warned Egyptian media outlets not to depict the violence in religious terms. He ordered the media “to deter hateful sectarian motives that threaten[ed] [Egyptians’] social unity.”\(^8\) Masking the mayhem, the State sought to veil the widening religious fault lines that had led to the massacre in Nag Hammadi and claimed that the event was an isolated, criminal case.
Prior to his death, Mohamed Sayyed Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, condemned the violence in Nag Hammadi and offered his condolences to Bishop Kirollos in Qena (January 15, 2010).

Contrary to the claims of Mubarak’s regime, Bishop Kirillos, who narrowly escaped with his life, framed the Copts’ murders in strictly sectarian terms. Reflecting on the tragedy, Kirillos exclaimed, “It’s all religious now. This is a religious war about how [Egyptian Muslims] can finish off the Christians in Egypt.”

In an effort to restore peace in the region, Magdy Ayoub, the Provincial Governor of Qena, swiftly dismissed Kirillos’ assertion in front of the Defense and National Security and Religious Affairs Committees. The governor, a Mubarak appointee, argued that the three Muslims responsible for the deaths were not “religiously inspired.”

Ahmed Fathi Sorour, the Parliament Speaker and a potential successor to President Mubarak, supported Ayoub, positing that “the crime of Nag Hammadi [was] just an individual case with no religious motives, just like the crime of raping the girl.”

In an interview with BBC Arabic, Sorour, to the disbelief of his host, reiterated that both events were isolated incidents that were not representative of Coptic and Muslim behavior in Egypt.

As actors continually use Nag Hammadi as a political soapbox, promoting national unity or pointing out persecution, the fact remains that the trial for the three
Muslims allegedly responsible for the murders has been delayed until May 16, 2010. Marking the ten-year anniversary of the al-Kush massacre, which ended with the acquittal of ninety-four of the ninety-six defendants, the pending verdict for the bloodshed at Nag Hammadi looms large over the Coptic communities, at home and abroad.

More than 2,000 Copts gathered outside of the White House to protest the Nag Hammadi killings on January 21, 2010.14

It is through these two massacres that several dimensions of Coptic-Muslim relations are revealed. The prioritization of religion over other aspects of identity and the notable absence of broadcasting sectarian violence in the mainstream Egyptian media, loudly resonate. The heated debates surrounding the number of Copts vis-à-vis Muslims in the homeland, as well as the perceived threat that the minority poses to the majority, are apparent. Moreover, the Copts’ alleged dependence on coreligionists abroad and torn identity as Christians first and Egyptians second, echo in the aftermath of both events. Finally, the portrayal of Copts and Muslims as friends and foes is captured in the reactions of Egyptians to the conflicts. All of these themes portray the compatriots’
relations in different lights. Certain dimensions are emphasized and deemphasized depending on the actors involved. Moreover, every conflicting account has its own set of consequences.

The Copts and Muslims are two ancient communities whose coexistence has spanned two millennia, and while their relationship has been troubled, sectarian violence peaked in 1999. Although drawing on this lengthy history, I shall primarily focus on the 20th-21st centuries, and particularly events transpiring in Cairo. The binarized representations of the Coptic community and its relations with Muslims are briefly addressed in the coming sections, and it is these rigid identifications that provide context to the three following chapters.

**Religion as Identity: Crosses and Crescents**

According to a 2007-2008 poll conducted by *Gallup*, an organization dedicated to identifying global trends, Egypt was labeled the most religious country in the world.\(^{15}\) As one Coptic interlocutor put it, “Muslims are trying to become more Muslim [and] Copts are becoming more Coptic.”\(^{16}\) The Egyptian government has written off this religious reawakening, instead, promoting Copts and Muslims as equal *citizens*. However, the growing importance placed on religion is evident on Egyptians’ national identification (ID) cards. The card is a patriot’s primary form of identification. It must be carried at all times and presents its owner’s religious affiliation for all to see. If an individual is not Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, the space between gender and marital status is left blank.
In addition to serving as a necessary document for employment and a key to accessing innumerable venues, the cards have created a rift between the Copts and Muslims. They define the pious patriots\(^\text{19}\) not as citizens, but on the basis of their religious affiliation, which has transformed into *the* primary identity marker in Egypt. By reducing Copts and Muslims to crosses and crescents, the Egyptian government has divided its citizenry into two religious groups: “Us” and “Them.”\(^\text{20}\)

In addition to ID cards, public discourse as a whole, is adopting an increasingly religious flavor. Despite the government’s promotion of national unity, particularly in the aftermath of sectarian violence, the boundaries between the religious and secular arenas are fading. Expressions previously confined to churches and mosques, such as *Bism al-salib* (“in the name of the cross”) and *salli ala al-nabi* (“blessings on the Prophet), have emerged as common catchphrases.\(^\text{21}\) *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim* [“in the name of god the all merciful the all compassionate”] functions as a letterhead to government documents and an icebreaker for new acquaintances. These expressions and their religious underpinnings have been uploaded to the realm of the cybersphere, a
virtual arena where websites serve as platforms for Biblical and Qur’anic verses, as well as weapons to target members of other faiths.

As one young Copt explained to me, there has been at least one incident of Coptic students enrolled at the American University in Cairo (AUC) receiving mass invitations to join anti-Coptic groups on Facebook. Once accepting the invitations, the Coptic users were bombarded with Youtube videos featuring priests condemning Christianity. Despite Egypt’s status during the 1990s as one of the most underdeveloped countries in terms of Internet access, it is clear that the web has emerged as a powerful proselytizing tool in 21st century Cairo.

Streaming Religion: A Media Minority

In an effort to curb the Islamic slant in the public and digital arenas, a few individuals have created alternative outlets for Coptic expression. Tharwat Bassily, a
Coptic businessman, founded Coptic TV (CTV) in 2007. Based in Cairo, CTV streams its programs across the world via satellite. CTV complements Aghapy TV, which was founded by the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria in 2005. ‘Aghapy’ is the Coptic word for ‘love’ and according to the satellite channel’s website, the station is meant to “bring the richness of the Coptic Orthodox Church into the home of every church member.”

Despite the efforts of CTV and Aghapy TV to reach out to all Copts, the stations have faced a number of challenges. First, not every Copt owns a satellite dish (particularly those in rural Egypt) and secondly, national television channels broadcast an estimated 3,000 hours of Islamic teachings a year in contrast to five hours of Coptic programming. The fact that the five hours provided to the minority are restricted to covering Coptic Christmas mass further prioritizes the minority’s religion over their national identity; the Copts are not Egyptian Christians, but Christian Egyptians. Thus, the government’s relegation of Coptic channels to extra-state satellite stations has
reaffirmed that Muslim interests are superior to Coptic ones, at least on the national airwaves.

The fact that the Copts are a media minority is also evident in Egyptian newspapers. Pope Shenouda III is provided with a weekly column in al-Ahram, Egypt’s leading newspaper, but his words are closely monitored and are often lost in the pages of articles written by, and for, the Muslim majority. Moreover, the Pope’s articles, as one Coptic interlocutor explained, are simply “contemplations that both Muslims and Christians read.” These reflections are removed from the Copts’ struggles and appeal to all Egyptians, irrespective of their religious affiliations. For example, following the massacre at Nag Hammadi, which sparked Coptic protests across Egypt and ignited international outrage, the Pope’s columns discussed: “the visible and the invisible” (1/10/10), “love of the good and love of others” (1/24/10), “self-righteousness and justification” (2/28/10), and “envy and jealousy” (3/7/10). The day after the al-Kush massacre in 2000, the Pope’s article addressed the birth of Jesus Christ and asked for the lord to protect President Mubarak and all of those in his regime. Therefore, the Pope, like the Imam who leads prayer in a government-regulated mosque, is free to discuss any subject so long as it adheres to the regime’s discourse on national unity.

The clear sense of escapism in the Pope’s articles resonates in Coptic cinema. In a 2006 film produced by the Church of St. George, a just and loving Coptic King rules over a crumbling kingdom in a land far, far away. The film’s title, “There is Nothing I Desire Other Than You,” reveals the King’s mission to marry an ‘ordinary girl’ from his kingdom.
In search of his future queen, the King disguises himself in a blue cloak and ventures into the streets, which are brimming with sin. Drugs and alcohol have torn apart families; men and women steal produce from one another to prolong starvation; and fights are commonplace in the circus-like atmosphere. The religion of the sinful citizenry is not clear, whereas the film’s royal hero is overtly Coptic. The fact that the director, Maged Tawfiq, does not label the peasants as either Coptic or Muslim reflects an important dimension of Coptic-Muslim relations in the media. The Christian minority must be careful about how they talk about the Muslim majority. Although a Copt may be a King in a far away Kingdom and the Pope is provided a voice in *al-Ahram*, neither Tawfiq nor Shenouda are able to cast the Muslim majority in a negative light.

Attempting to reach out to the marginalized Christian minority via satellite, the printing press, and film, Coptic efforts have been met with strong Muslim resistance. *CTV* and *Aghapy TV’s* audiences have gradually expanded, but the number of Muslim channels has increased at an exponential rate. According to Alaa al-Aswani, a prominent
Egyptian author, “[there are] more than seventeen [Egyptian] TV channels, every day, promoting the Wahhabi ideas,” a Saudi-imported brand of Islam that Aswani and many Copts view as ‘exclusive.’ This rise in Wahhabi channels is not unique to Egypt and can be seen in response to the efforts of Copts to compete with their Muslim brethren for airtime and headlines in the public sphere. The push by religions to publicize their faiths has deepened religious fault lines in Egypt, resulting in an affirmation of the “Us” versus “Them” mentality. The Copts, as a media minority, are unworthy of the national airwaves and newspaper columns in Egypt.

Diplomatic Relations and Copts Abroad: A Marginalized Minority

Following President Mubarak’s efforts to mask the religious tensions that fueled the Nag Hammadi massacre, a New York Times article asserted that “sectarian conflict amounted to sedition” in Egypt. Yet, despite the Egyptian government’s attempts to downplay conflicts between Copts and Muslims, often limiting reporters’ access to material witnesses and promoting a message of national unity, Egypt has received high marks for governmental and social discrimination on the basis of religion. In a recent report issued by the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Egypt scored in the top 5% for governmental restrictions on religion and in the top 15% for social hostilities directed at members of different faiths.
Only Iraq and Saudi Arabia had a worse combined score than Egypt in the MENA region (Note: GRI = Government Restrictions Index; SHI = Social Hostilities Index).\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the report’s far-reaching research, the Copts may experience even higher levels of top-down and bottom-up hostility since many cases of discrimination go unreported.

Sectarian violence has steadily escalated in recent decades. Such conflicts, however, are routinely overshadowed in the American mainstream media by other events unfolding in the Arab world. Moreover, U.S. politicians are hesitant to acknowledge the incidents that the media chooses to ignore, opting to criticize President Mubarak’s leniency towards guaranteeing Copts’ religious freedoms in the dense pages of the State Department’s \textit{International Religious Freedom Reports}. The IRF reports were signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1998 and strive to impact U.S. foreign policy and financial flows abroad on the basis of religious freedoms, and whether or not foreign governments preserve and defend said freedoms. I shall argue that maintaining sound relations with President Mubarak’s regime, which has served as a U.S. ally since he assumed power in 1981, is pivotal to securing U.S. interests in the Middle East and takes precedence over protecting the Copts, a marginalized minority.
Evidence of these warm relations and the United States’ vested interest in Egypt was apparent in President Barack Obama’s decision to deliver his historic address to the Arab world in the Grand Hall of Cairo University on June 4, 2009. The President devoted the majority of his speech to discussing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, elusive Arab-Israeli peace efforts, and the potential proliferation of nuclear weapons across the region. He made certain to reassure his predominately Muslim audience that liberalism would not be used as a front to attack Islam and proclaimed that religion was a unifying force. Speaking on a world stage before a rapt audience, the President failed to address sectarian conflict, referring to Egypt’s Copts in a single sentence concerning the preservation of “religious diversity.”

President Obama’s address peaked the interest of the Nobel Prize committee and was framed by international media outlets as a watershed moment in East-West relations. Other actors, however, proved less willing to offer their praise. Copts abroad, and particularly iCopts, or members of the Christian minority who use the Internet to speak on behalf of their coreligionists, criticized President Obama. Free Copts, a cyber platform that functions as a news outlet, blog, and forum, urged Obama to revisit the issue of sectarian conflict when meeting with Mubarak in the White House on August 18, 2009 – a request that ultimately fell on deaf ears. For President Obama, Coptic-Muslim relations was an issue of secondary importance, whereas Free Copts contended that “without solving the Coptic issue there will be no real peace in the Middle East.” This brazen statement placed ‘the Coptic problem’ on center stage, if only in the minds of the robust cyber community. This U.S.-Egypt dynamic and the role of the Coptic cyber
community, wherein Copts are defined as a marginalized minority, is examined in greater depth in chapter three: *iCopts: Engaging and Empowering in the Digital Diaspora.*

**Polling and Provoking: A Threatening Fraction**

The Copts number upwards of 8 million members, or approximately 10% of Egypt’s population, and are routinely framed as Christians first and Egyptians second. The prevailing attitude that the Copts are eternal others to their Muslim compatriots has plagued the community for more than a century. Claire Mitchell, a lecturer in sociology at Queen’s University Belfast, illuminates the ways in which religion, one of many identity markers, may be awakened from its dormant state, in response to external, or internal, threats. In *The Religious Content of Ethnic Identities* (2006), Mitchell explains:

> Indeed, religious aspects of identity may be latent and can be triggered in response to circumstances…Where there is familiarity with religious ideas, contact with religious institutions or participation in religious activities, for whatever reason, religion remains in people’s consciousness…These religious elements of identity make most sense in times of struggle…

With respect to the Copts, the minority’s religious affiliation impacts their position as legitimate Egyptians in the eyes of the Muslim majority. Their dual identity, being both Egyptian and Christian, concerns many of their Muslim neighbors. In an effort to understand why Copts are considered Christian Egyptians, as opposed to Egyptian Christians, and how this mindset leads to outbreaks of sectarian violence, as witnessed in al-Kush and Nag Hamamdi, I shall refer to Arjun Appadurai. A leading theorist on globalization, Appadurai addresses the perceived dangers that minorities pose to majorities in *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger.* The panic created by minorities, no matter how miniscule or robust their numbers, results in an
anxiety of incompleteness, a gap the nation state seeks to fill by imposing its will and projecting its identity onto the majority population. The fact that the Coptic population continues to grow has exacerbated these tensions, which are further compounded by the governments’ refusal to conduct a census. A national poll might force President Mubarak to redistribute monetary resources allocated to the Coptic and Muslim communities. A census may also reaffirm Muslims’ fears that the Copts are gaining strength.

**Egyptian Christians and Christian Egyptians: A Torn Identity**

As a Christian minority living in Egypt, many Muslims fear that the Copts will side with their coreligionists overseas and forsake their compatriots at home. The idea that Copts will betray the nation-state is not a novel concept and can be traced back to the Crusades in the 13th century. According to Peter Makari, author of *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*, Muslims have always mistrusted Copts at various historical junctures, because the Copts embody two divergent identities, that of the fellow citizen and the internal foreigner. This conviction, which is not limited to religious differences and extends to issues of class, gender, geography, and age, is clearly articulated by Tadros Malaty, a Coptic historian, who wrote extensively on the Crusades. According to Malaty, “as the Muslims saw the invaders carrying crosses on their chests, they assumed that the Copts would side with the invaders.”

Distrusted by the Muslim majority, the Christian minority’s coreligionists have also found faults in their Coptic brethren. During colonial rule over Egypt from 1882-1922, for example, the British showed the Copts little sympathy as fellow Christians,
preferring to view the minority as “the colonized.” In *Egypt Under the Egyptians*, Murray Harris captures this prevailing sentiment of superiority practiced by the British officialdom. Horrified by the Muslim’s reliance on out-dated traditions and customs, which eliminated all hopes for their advancement in the civilizing mission, Harris writes:

> The Copt seems to have caught the infection, though perhaps in a slightly less virulent form. He does not progress, however, as fast as his European coreligionists, because of his rigid hyper-orthodoxy, because he adheres to an archaic and unprogressive theology which does not admit of new truths as they are discovered by science and psychology. 

Framed as unfaithful compatriots and inferior coreligionists, the Copts occupied a marginal space. They were hesitant to look for support abroad during the 1919 revolution, for fear of being labeled as traitors. They were also unable to negotiate their status as a minority from within, due to their lack of political representation. The struggle of Copts to navigate this seemingly torn identity, leading to Egypt’s conditional independence from Britain, is further examined in chapter two: *Define and Conquer: Identifying Copts, Muslims, and Egyptians (1906-1923).*

**Polemics in the Public Sphere: An Artistic Target**

On November 14, 2009, in a talk at Duke University, Marie Louis Bishara, president of “I The Egyptian Association,” spoke on transforming Egypt’s ‘street children’. Bishara was part of a three-person panel that discussed ‘civic engagement in context and in action’ at the *Civic Engagement in the Middle East Conference*. After her presentation concluded, she fielded questions from the audience. In response to a student’s inquiry on Coptic-Muslim relations, Bishara recalled an analogy from her Egyptian textbooks in primary and secondary school: “Black is to White as Copt is to
Dr. Hamdy Hassan, the conference’s keynote speaker and a professor of political science at Cairo University, swiftly dismissed the comparison and argued that the compatriots were on sound terms. And as if the recollection had been a momentary lapse in thought, Bishara digressed and agreed with Hassan. As a member of the Advisory Committee for Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, Bishara could not afford to let her experiences as a Copt growing up in Egypt discolor the nation-state in the eyes of a foreign audience.

These dangerous comparisons and government censorship of texts dealing with Coptic Christianity foster misconceptions of the Egyptian minority. The titles that address compatriot relations and somehow manage to evade censorship tend to promote two major discourses. The first, a dialogue grounded in fierce national unity, proclaiming that Copts and Muslims have always been united compatriots under the banner of Egypt. And the second, a narrative rooted in discrimination, asserting that Coptic civilization was destroyed during the Arab conquest.

In an effort to understand the first major discourse, I shall examine Milad Hanna’s *The Seven Pillars of the Egyptian Identity* (1994). The author, a regular contributor to *al-Ahram* and appointed member of the Parliament, states his intentions from the very beginning. “This book mainly seeks to enhance the feelings of national unity in Egypt binding Moslems and Copts together,” Hanna writes. According to Hanna, Egyptian Islam “has a Sunni face, Shi’ite blood, Coptic heart, and Pharaonic bones.” Elaborating on this notion of unity, the author posits that the Copts welcomed the Arabs as saviours, not conquerors, in 642 A.D. Thus, in the eyes of Hanna and other advocates of national
unity, Copts and Muslims have always cooperated, overcoming religious differences for the sake of the nation-state.

Regarding the second prominent discourse, I will address Shawky Karas’ *The Copts Since the Arab Invasion: Strangers in Their Land* (1986). The text argues that the Arab conquest of Egypt marked the decline of Coptic civilization. It was at this point that the powerful Christian majority was rendered a weak marginalized minority. Karas, unlike Hanna, supports his controversial claims with empirical data, asserting that there were 25-30 million Copts and 45,000 churches and monasteries prior to the Arab invasion, of which only 250 partially-destroyed churches and 150,000 Copts remained at the beginning of the 19th century.\(^{50,51}\) Thus, Karas exposes the whole-scale destruction of Coptic civilization at the hands of the Muslims. Whereas Hanna narrows the divide between Copts and Muslims, Karas reopens old wounds by projecting the Copts as a persecuted people.

These two discourses, the first exuding national unity and the second exposing a history of discrimination, are well documented. In chapter one: *Unveiling Polemics in Poplar Culture*, I will explore the ways in which Copts and their relations with Muslims are depicted in alternative arenas, namely novels and cinema. All of these works were produced by Muslims and are currently circulating in the Egyptian public sphere. These pieces range from Youssef Ziedan’s award winning novel, *Azazil* (2008), to Ramy Emam’s latest blockbuster, *Hassan and Morcos* (2008). They are placed in conversation with one another to understand how Coptic-Muslim relations are cast in a popular culture brimming with polemics.
Navigating Nomenclature:

Although the massacres at al-Kush and Nag Hammadi are only two of many sectarian conflicts in Egypt, they throw light on Copts and their relations with the Muslim majority. It is clear from both narratives that the Copts are viewed in radically different ways. Although religion permeates many of these portrayals and appears to define Egyptians’ identity on the surface, those who reduce Copts to cathedrals and Muslims to minarets fail to recognize an important fact. Every Egyptian has multiple identities that are mobilized at different moments. Inside a church a Copt may be considered a Christian, but on the outside he or she may be addressed as an Egyptian.

Divided into the static binaries of *this* or *that*, the consequences of this rhetoric and the moments in which it is employed, are examined in the three chapters that follow. Each chapter embraces a different discipline, including literature, history, and the new media. The actors that have compartmentalized the Copts, from abroad and within Egypt, are explored. Thus, this inter-disciplinary thesis peels back the layers of problematic discourse that have come to represent the Coptic minority and their relations with Muslims over time.
Notes:

Photographs on the cover page:


2 Ibid, 434.


9 http://www.egyptiangazette.net/up/P1%2016%201%202010%202222222222.pdf (accessed March 8, 2010).


Personal communication; Mary; interview #6.


I acquired this photograph from a Muslim interlocutor in Egypt (email correspondence; accessed April 12, 2010).

I invoke this term to address both Copts and Muslims from Bruce Lawrence’s paper: Islam in the Public Square: Minority Perspectives from Africa and Asia (Youngstown: Youngstown State University, 2009), 8.


Personal communication; Mike; interview #17.

‘MuslimReverts,’ a client who lists his occupation as “Muslim Dawah”, posted this video on youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SLj1--gh0c (accessed March 7, 2010).

Personal communication; Rakhel; interview #3.


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtPR3yfZNCA (accessed March 8, 2010).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_q2m4SSuSU (accessed March 8, 2010).


Personal communication; Rakhel; interview #3.

For a complete archive of Pope Shenouda’s columns in al-Ahram, see: http://www.ahram.org.eg/WriterTopics.aspx?WID=113 (accessed March 7, 2010).
This Arabic article can be found at: 
http://www.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2000/1/7/OPIN1.HTM (accessed March 8, 2010).


Ibid, 51.


I derived the term “iCopts” from Gary Bunt’s: iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), which maps the activities of Muslims in cyberspace.


It is important to note that several parties adamantly dispute this figure. The Egyptian government claims that there are 8 million Copts in the homeland, whereas the Coptic Orthodox Church asserts that there are 18 million Copts in Egypt. The figures presented in this chapter were taken from the CIA World Fact Book: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html (accessed January 17, 2010).

Claire Mitchell, “The Religious Content of Ethnic Identities” (Sociology, 40.6, 2006), 1147.

44 The government last conducted a census in 1976, which claimed that the Copts composed 6.2% of the population. The Coptic Orthodox Church countered, claiming it boasted 8 million members, or approximately 22% of Egypt’s population.

45 Malaty as quoted by Peter Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 46.


49 Ibid, 13.


51 Karas does not substantiate these “facts,” which appear suspect.
Chapter 1: Unveiling Polemics in Popular Culture

Egypt’s 71% (2005) literacy rate pales in comparison to its eastern and western neighbors, but bookshops line the streets of the country’s capital. The elaborate storefronts display the latest texts on American politics, terrorism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Novels addressing a wide range of topics are also showcased and very much in demand. Veiled under the guise of ‘fiction,’ novels stand a better chance at escaping the censor’s desk. By managing to stay under the government’s radar, these texts flood popular culture and may influence public discourse on controversial subjects. The Coptic minority and their relations with Muslims are two of these contentious areas and serve as the focus of this chapter.

Theater also functions as a public space for representing Copts. Movies, unlike novels, cater to the literate and illiterate, and thus, tend to attract larger audiences in Egypt. Also, tickets to a local cinema may cost as little as $2-3 U.S. dollars, whereas books may be purchased for upwards of $10-20 U.S. dollars. The differences between the two mediums extend beyond the target demographics. Filmmakers have to be more direct in the message that they want to convey, while authors are afforded hundreds of pages to express an idea. Differences aside, films, like novels, may serve as political interventions and function as more than mere entertainment.

By examining a number of novels written by Muslims over the past three decades, as well as an Egyptian satire that transformed into a blockbuster overnight, I will demonstrate that artists offer conflicting representations of Copts and their relations with Muslims. I will argue that artists’ messages are often problematic and polemical,
however, they are viewed as ‘artistic expressions,’ rather than outright assaults. The following analysis highlights these divergent representations that moderate difference, in addition to the ramifications of the artists’ rhetoric.

**Azazil: Words that Wound**

Targeting Copts on paper, rather than in the street, Youssef Ziedan’s *Azazil* epitomizes popular polemics in Egypt. The novel, which has been reprinted twelve times since its initial publication in 2008, is a bestseller, recipient of the *International Prize for Arabic Fiction* (2009), and on the fast track to English translation. A fanciful autobiography told through the eyes of Hayba, a Coptic monk trained as a doctor in pagan medicines, Ziedan’s text is “nothing more than an Arabic translation of an ancient Syriac autobiography written on parchment by an Egyptian monk,” or so the introduction proclaims. Prominently displayed at the end of the work, this mysterious manuscript is accompanied by several black-and-white photographs, including a picture of Hayba’s alleged dwelling.

![The remainders of Hayba’s House](image1.jpg) ![The western side of Hayba’s monastery](image2.jpg)
The images transform the story into an archive, and instill a sense of visual authority to the author’s provocative claims. In addition to the pictures, the writer’s background – a professor of Islamic philosophy at Alexandria University – persuades his Egyptian audience to accept his words as fact, rather than fiction. In his efforts to publicize an early history that has long been privatized by the Coptic Church, Ziedan’s polemical tale, contrary to its high praise, is nothing more than an attack on the Copts, veiled as a ‘novel.’

As the Director of the Manuscript Center at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Ziedan has devoted much of his personal and academic life to exploring ancient documents. He has catalogued more than 18,000 Arabic manuscripts. Unlike his fellow librarians, however, Ziedan has made it “his mission to turn desiccated parchment into live debate.” This notion of bringing a text ‘to life’ served as the author’s motivation for writing Azazil. The Coptic Orthodox Church and many of its followers have refused to accept the novel as an innocent tale, or a translation of a pre-existing parchment. Instead, the Church has condemned the novel as the newest Da Vinci Code, an accusation that Ziedan has vigorously discredited, claiming that the Copts were reading the text without “open minds.”

In addition to publicly denouncing the novel, some Copts, such as Hani Nazeer, have written vengeful counter-narratives critical of Islam. Nazeer, a social worker from Qena, published his literary retort under the title, “Azazil’s Goat in Mecca,” on his blog in 2008. Shortly thereafter, he was arrested and remains behind bars without ever being formally charged. The critiques leveled by the Church, Nazeer, and other Copts have contested Ziedan’s portrayal of the Church as a “scheming villain” in 5th century Egypt.
Those behind these accusations, however, have failed to recognize that the novel’s greatest attack is neither on the Church, nor the Copts, but Coptic Christianity.

Near the end of the novel, Azazil transforms from a disembodied voice into Hayba’s companion and confidant. He encourages Hayba to use any one of his six names, all of which refer to the devil: *iblis, al-shaitan, ahriman, azazil, beelzebub,* and *baalzebul.*Moreover, Azazil always appears when the disillusioned monk is experiencing a crisis of identity, the first of which occurs after Hayba reflects on the tensions between the Church of Antioch and the Church of Alexandria. The monk confesses his frustrations to the reader:

> God is far from us and we are far from one another, because we are subject to our illusions. People themselves are mysterious; we invent, believe, disagree, and some of us are always fighting for [God]. There will come a day that every person will have a different belief than everyone else. Religion’s foundations will fade and law will disappear. And that day…will it be…I will be in my cell!\(^12\)

It is clear that Hayba is distraught with his crumbling religion and disenchanted with the monastic lifestyle. Shortly thereafter, Hayba questions whether he is a “a doctor or a monk, devoted or lost, Christian or Pagan?”\(^13\) Drowning in the darkness of his coffin-sized cell, it is Azazil who brings light into Hayba’s otherwise dreary monastic life. Azazil guides the monk away from the dark sanctuary, “which was dark no longer,”\(^14\) and proceeds to play on Hayba’s frustrations, calling into question his doubts as to why God would let events unfold as they had. Tightening his grip on Hayba, Azazil asks his downtrodden friend, “Did God create people, or the opposite?”\(^15\) When Hayba begs for clarification, Azazil preys on the monk’s confusion, exclaiming, “Oh, Hayba! People in every era create a god on a whim, and their god is always their vision, impossible dreams, and desire.”\(^16\) Angered by his companion’s words, Hayba leaves momentarily, only to
return to the devil’s opened arms. Whereas there is no god but God in Islam, there is simply no God in Coptic Christianity.

Hayba’s second crisis is marked by the departure of one of his beloveds, Marta, to Aleppo. Despite having taken the vow of celibacy, Hayba is enamored by Marta’s beauty throughout the latter half of the novel and hopelessly wishes to marry her. Upon learning that Marta was compelled to leave the monastery’s grounds, he sees “nothing but death in front of him.”\textsuperscript{17} It is at this point that Azazil’s voice resounds, much to the astonishment of Hayba, who thought he was alone. Unable to live without Marta, Hayba asks Azazil – his friend and shepherd – if he should drink poison to put an end to his misery. Knowing full well that his life is tied to the monk, Azazil scorns Hayba, insisting that he has “no right to kill [him] before the designated time.”\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, Azazil urges Hayba to write, because “one who writes will never die.”\textsuperscript{19} Writing Azazil into eternity with every stroke of his pen, Hayba links the reader to the devil. Thus, Azazil uses Hayba as a key to immortality, and strives to convince the monk that “death does not have any meaning [and] all the meaning is in life.”\textsuperscript{20} This exchange between Azazil and Hayba is more than an innocent dialogue in a best-selling novel; it desecrates the Copts’ belief in life after death and relegates resurrection to the realm of the imaginary.

Ziedan’s \textit{Azazil} will be published in six European languages by the end of March 2010 and was guaranteed an English translation after receiving the \textit{International Prize for Arabic Fiction} in 2009. The text, which has gradually emerged beyond Egypt’s porous public sphere, is bound to draw the ire of Copts abroad, as it has angered members of the Egyptian minority in the homeland. Disguised as an innocent, award-winning novel, Ziedan’s work not only villianizes the Church, but openly attacks the existence of God
and the idea of resurrection in Coptic Christianity. Despite the highly problematic nature of the text, however, it is Ziedan, ironically, who has been encouraging those enraged by his novel “to turn the other cheek.”²¹,²²

The Man from Bashmour: Lusting Celibates and Undercover Pagans

Similar to Ziedan, Salwa Bakr attacks early Coptic history through the lens of a ‘novel’ in The Man from Bashmour. Published in 1998, two years before the massacre of 21 Copts at al-Kush, the fictional work embraces popular polemics to unveil the Copts in 5th and 6th century Egypt, prior to ʿAmr Ibn al-ʿAs’ conquest in 642 A.D. Bakr, a prolific Muslim writer, cites more than 30 verses from the Bible and seven Qur’anic suras throughout the novel. These extensive citations give the illusion that the text is grounded in scripture, when, in fact, it accuses the Copts of blindly following the Church, persecuting their coreligionists, and secretly practicing paganism. Feigning to be a well-researched history, drawing on dozens of scholarly Arabic works, the text is merely another piece of Islamic da’wah that misrepresents the Copts.

Bakr paints a detailed picture of the early Coptic Orthodox Church that revolves around the life of Budayr, a Coptic sexton at the Qasr al-Sham Church in Old Cairo. From the beginning of the story, it is clear that the Church is the only agent capable of cleansing the Copts’ sins. As an institution, “it is the church that sweeps away sins and iniquity and which purifies the heart.”²³ The Copts are shackled to the Church, incapable of self-purification and must routinely attend confession to wash away their transgressions. Whereas Muslims communicate directly with God, Father Michael, the head of the Qasr al-Sham Church, serves as the intermediary between God and those who
attend mass. He is the key to the vertical realm, which remains locked to the Coptic masses. It is through this rigid hierarchy that Bakr frames the Church as a dominant entity demanding the absolute obedience of its blind practitioners.

Moreover, the same priests responsible for leading prayer are also capable of abusing the Copts in Bakr’s text. For example, Father Michael, a high-ranking priest, attempts to seduce Budayr into massaging his private parts inside the grounds of the Qasyan Church. In horror, Budayr retreats to his room and refers to the priest as a “wicked, depraved Sodomite.” In light of the fact that no such reports of sexual abuse have been filed by Copts, this seemingly ‘innocent’ plot twist slanders the Church and casts Coptic priests as sexual deviants. Thus, the novel not only sharply critiques the Church, but attacks its hierarchy and the common Copt who places more faith in the human Father, than the divine Father.

Following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., the Coptic Orthodox Church came into existence as a separate entity, splitting from the other Christian Churches. The schism was due to a disagreement over the nature of Christ. The Copts insisted that Christ had a single nature, while the Roman Church and its Melkite supporters argued that Christ embodied two natures, one human and the other divine. Unfolding in the background of Bakr’s plot, the tension between Copts and Melkites is captured in the story of Fla’as, a monk at the Atrib Monastery. Fla’as is accused by his fellow monk, Narkisus, for reading forbidden books and misinterpreting sacred texts. Once the charges of blasphemy are verified by Father Serapion, Fla’as is violently beaten by the other monks and imprisoned in a vault beneath the monastery. In the underground dungeon, he is denied food and provided with only two cups of water to survive. The fear that Fla’as
is a Melkite clearly resonates in the accusations of Deacon Thawna, Budayr’s companion, who warns, “He may have been planted in the monastery for some reason. Maybe he came to spy out conditions in our monastic church.” Further emphasizing that the tyrannical Melkites are the primary threat to the Copts at the time of the Arab conquest, Bakr writes:

what concerns Father Joseph first and foremost is our Jacobite Church, its land and its wealth, and the war he is waging is, first and foremost, against the heretical Melkites….The spread of Islam in the villages and hamlets does not worry him. On the contrary, he is keen to foster friendly ties with all Muslims…so that they can strengthen his hand against the Melkite Church.”

This excerpt reaffirms that the Church is a corrupt establishment, concerned more with its wealth and wars than its religious obligations. Therefore, the ecclesiastical hierarchy is reduced to a war-mongering council, vying to establish itself as the only ‘cross’ in the region.

Throughout the novel Budayr, like Hayba, struggles to control his sexual longings. Despite being a Coptic sexton and an emissary of the Qasr al-Sham Church, his mind constantly wanders to his many lovers. It is Amuna and Suwayla, not Christ, who Budayr finds attractive, and his longing for physical intimacy often eclipses the disembodied companionship that God provides. Budayr’s struggles to maintain his vow of celibacy are clearly depicted in the Caliph’s private quarters, where the sexton observes a dancing slave girl. As he watches the girl sing, Budayr is overcome by “a violent upheaval” and can hardly resist from “grabbing her breasts and pulling her towards [him].” Shortly thereafter, the sexton realizes “just how weak the soul is in the face of the desires of the flesh.” Sexual longings are capable of plunging a man “from the heights of his humanity to the depths of his animality,” Bakr writers. Whereas
Ziedan’s text dismissed resurrection as a cruel delusion, Bakr’s novel frames Coptic celibacy as an impossible oath. The major tenet of monasticism is nothing more than a foolish façade.

In addition to longing for women, the Coptic characters in Bakr’s text are similar to the Pagan’s whom they oppress. On their way to the Nile Delta, Thawna and Budayr stop by a river to set up camp for the night. In the process of catching a fish, Thawna is bitten by a snake and begins to hallucinate. As his fever worsens, the Coptic Deacon begins to shout deliriously:

Jesus the Saviour, the Virgin Mary, our last supper, the snake, poison, the black elder...He is the Lord of all. Everyone knows Him in his own way. The Holy Trinity. The thrice-great Hermes, Tahouti...The land is in agony. The Gods have abandoned the earth and gone to heaven. Poverty and deprivation are everywhere. ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor...Imhotep, O Kyrios meta pandon imon, Imhotep...’

Seemingly possessed by the Devil, Thawna cites divine figures in Coptic Christianity, as well as Pagan gods. He invokes Jesus and Tahouti in the same breath and his intimate past with Paganism is revealed as his health deteriorates. Although Thawna preaches the love and mercy of one God to all those around him, he is no different than the Pagans that his fellow Copts persecute. By revealing the Deacon’s true identity, Bakr’s novel gives the impression that behind every Copt is a Pagan.

After criticizing the Church and its followers throughout the text, Bakr strives to convince the reader that Islam is the only path toward inner-healing. The failure of confession to cleanse the tainted soul, which has “been dead by virtue of Adam’s original sin since the beginning of time,” may only be saved by reading the Qur’an and welcoming Islam’s inner-light. In the eyes of Budayr, Islam becomes the truth and
Arabic removes the veil that has long obstructed his vision as a Copt. When Thawna asks Budayr if his faith has become more resolute since converting to Islam, he responds:

when I set out on the path of those who seek knowledge of God and those who are wayfarers on the spiritual path, I arrived at ‘There is no he but He.’ When that happened – that is, when I forgot ‘was’ and focused entirely on ‘is’—my inner torments disappeared and the distances between me and those things that had caused me pain grew vaster and vaster.\(^{35}\)

Thawna accepts his friend’s explanation on his deathbed and encourages Budayr to go, and spread the same message to others. “Tell them these things even if they beat you or persecute you,”\(^ {36}\) urges the Deacon. Upon leaving the monastery and entering a near-by village, Budayr is pelted with stones by a group of young boys. He responds to the abuse by singing a song that reaffirms his faith in God and encourages others to flock to Him for ever-lasting peace. On his way to spread the message of Islam, Bakr’s conclusion leaves readers with little to imagine – Islam is the solution.

*The Man From Bashmour* was translated into English in 2007 and has been praised by many as a ‘must-read’ text for understanding early Coptic history. The author’s attempts to veil her assault on the Copts under the guise of a ‘historical novel’ is evident on the book jacket, which reads:

Hailed as a groundbreaking treatment of otherwise neglected aspects of medieval history, *The Man from Bashmour* is an exploration of the Egyptian character past and present, and offers insights into Egyptian thought…\(^ {37}\)

Despite the novel’s claim that it simply reveals a shrouded, ‘medieval’ past, Bakr’s treatment of the Copts is neither innocent, nor objective. Rather, the Copts, like the Pagans before them, are constantly struggling to purge themselves of sin. They are in a never-ending battle wherein accepting Islam is the only solution.
Al-Mahdi: Theater and Resistance

If embracing Islam is the answer in Bakr’s novel, forcing one’s religion onto another is the greatest tragedy in `Abd al-Hakim Qasim’s short story, Al-Mahdi. In the text, the left-wing critic of the Nasser regime launches a sharp critique against the Islamists, who threaten the Copts and Muslims alike. Published in 1978 and translated into English eleven years later, the short story is told through the eyes of Master Awadallah, a Coptic umbrella maker who leaves Tanta for a better life and finds himself the ‘project’ of the Muslim Brotherhood in a nearby village. One of the prominent Muslim writers in the “generation of witnesses,” Qasim embraces the written word to make a political intervention. He exposes religious intolerance in Egypt, where a member of the Coptic minority is the victim and the Islamists are the villains.

Upon arrival at the village of Mahallat al-Gayad, Awadallah and his family are greeted by Ali Effendi. Initially turned off by the Copt’s tattooed crosses, which are immediately visible when Awadallah extends his hand, Ali Effendi abstains from replying with the traditional salaam alaikum (“may peace be upon you”). Nevertheless, he offers the Coptic passerby his home as a temporary shelter. Shortly thereafter, however, Ali Effendi is forced to hand over his new acquaintance to the Muslim Brotherhood, religious extremists who have ‘taken an interest’ in the impoverished Christian. It is clear from Qasim’s plot that the Muslim Brothers are the only game in town. The Islamists call the shots, the Muslims listen, and the Copt pays the price for the former’s fundamentalism and the latter’s silence.

Awadallah’s conversion to Islam becomes a grand performance, a “spectacle” and a “show.” Whereas Budayr is gently exposed to Islam’s inner light in The Man From
Bashmour, the umbrella maker is drowned in it. Stripped of his dignity, he becomes an empty signifier, a decaying entity that the Muslim Brothers consciously coerce as a sign of their devotion to Allah. The extremists defy the Qur’an’s clear prohibition of “compulsion in religion” (Q 2: 256). Unmoved by the Copt’s deteriorating health and feeding off of their subject’s fear, the Islamists epitomize evil. Framing the Copt as the victim and the Islamists as pious predators, Qasim is making a political intervention; religious extremism will erode Egypt’s history of religious pluralism and threatens the future of the nation-state.

Religion dominates Qasim’s short story, even though it lacks Biblical or Qur’anic citations. Instead, the author revisits Christ’s crucifixion, a deliberate allusion that transforms Awadallah into the Coptic Saviour. On the way to the mosque, Awadallah hears the story of Jesus’ crucifixion resonating deep within him. His turban and Christ’s crown of thorns become one and the same. He surrenders to the crowds of Muslims around him, as Jesus submitted to the chief priests and elders. Collapsing in front of the mosque, destined to rise again, the umbrella maker is at ease with his final sacrifice and preservation of his faith. From Qasim’s presentation of Awadallah’s demise, it is clear that religious fundamentalism yields nothing. Whereas Egyptians may convert on their own free-will, resulting in a believer added and a believer deducted, the Muslim Brothers who forcibly convert Awadallah trespass on the Copt’s rights and religion.

Qasim’s short story illuminates religious intolerance at the hands of the Islamists in Egypt. The author criticizes those who remain silent witnesses to religious persecution and argues that forcing one’s religious beliefs onto another results in the dehumanization of one, if not both parties involved. Published exactly two decades before Bakr’s The
Man From Bashmour, Qasim’s text portrays a Coptic umbrella maker as the victim and Muslim fundamentalists as the villains – a storyline that sharply diverges from Bakr’s attack on the Coptic Church and relegation of the Copts to the realm of pagans and sexual deviants. Similarly, al-Mahdi stands apart from Ziedan’s Azazil, which launches a full-out assault on Coptic Christianity. Thus, Qasim’s Coptic protagonist has undergone a role reversal in popular culture. Once cast as the victim, the Copt has become the villain.

Hassan and Morcos: Cinematic Common Ground

Although there are several films that could have been discussed in this chapter, one film of particular interest is Ramy Emam’s Hassan and Morcos. Unlike the fiction, this cinematic sensation transformed into a blockbuster overnight and focuses on common ground, rather than the clash. Emam highlights the similar beliefs of Copts and Muslims, as well as their mutual victimhood during outbreaks of sectarian violence. Released in 2008, the film strives to address Coptic-Muslim relations from a street level. Due to its controversial subject matter, and particularly for its portrayal of religious extremism in Egypt, the film has been placed on the censor’s desk, but remains available for mass consumption, in large part due to the prominence of its leading actors, Adel Imam (“Father Paulous”) and Omar Sherif (“Sheikh Mahmoud”). Both men are handcuffed to one another on the DVD’s cover, which can be found all over Egypt’s Cairene metropolis, and acutely captures the film’s message; Copts and Muslims are bound together as Egyptians and their fates are one – for better or for worse.
Emam’s film opens with Father Paulous praying in a church beside his son, Gerges, and transitions to Sheikh Mahmoud leading prayer in a local mosque. It is clear from this juxtaposition that religion unifies the two protagonists, more than it divides them. They ask for love, wisdom, and strength, and offer their blessings to the one and only God in return. The religious bonds between Copts and Muslims are again illustrated at a conference on national unity later in the film. During Father Paulous’ speech, members of the inter-faith audience hold hands and chant, “God bless the crescent and the cross.”

Emam’s film stands out because his camera enters the compatriots’ sacred spaces through the eyes of their respective ‘outsiders.’ In a comical scene, Father Paulous, Gerges, and Sheikh Mahmoud encounter one another in the street en route to pray. The father and son, who have assumed Muslim identities after a failed assassination attempt
on Father Paulous’ life, are forced to preserve their façade in front the neighbor and enter the mosque. Likewise, Sheikh Mahmoud, who has convinced those in his building that he is Coptic, enters the church in order to maintain his disguise. Once inside one another’s places of worship, they are struck by the scriptures being read. Father Paulous and Gerges listen in awe as the mullah recites:

You will find out that the Christians are the closest to the Muslims. That is because some of them are saints, some of them are monastic, and they condemn arrogance.”

In the church across the road, Sheikh Mahmoud observes the priest wishing everyone to “go in peace.” At ease, and having overcome their initial anxiety, Father Paulos prays behind the prostrating Muslims and Sheikh Mahmoud asks God to unite the hearts of all Egyptians, and to “heal any fractions that might be between [them].” It is through entering these intimate dwellings that Emam gives life to the religious affiliations that divide Egyptians on their national IDs. He forces his compatriots to observe their common spiritual ground, as President Obama reiterated in June of 2009. Therefore, lack of understanding of other religions, for Emam, is not a catalyst for clash, but a starting point for conversation.

Whereas the former works villainized either the Copts or the Muslims, Emam’s movie portrays the pious patriots as victims of religious extremists. Sheikh Mahmoud, for example, refuses to join the Muslim Brotherhood and his shop is burned to the ground. Likewise, Father Paulous denounces any Copt that practices violence, an act that is neither ‘Christian’ nor ‘Egyptian,’ and finds himself the target of a failed assassination attempt. The fact that their coreligionists execute these crimes attests to the existence of religious extremists in both faiths. This reality is once more reflected at the end of the
film when a priest and imam encourage their followers to discriminate against those practicing creeds other than their own.

The theme of mutual victimhood permeates every scene, from beginning to end. In the closing minutes, Father Paulous and Sheikh Mahmoud walk through a bloody conflict in the street. Holding hands, they are struck by stray blows from Copts and Muslims, but they continue to advance. The scene resonates with Thawna’s revelation in *The Man From Bashmour*, when the Deacon questions if Copts and Muslims are both victims of violence; however, the answer to the film’s sectarian conflict is not Islam. On the contrary, the solution to the blind hatred that begins in the sacred spaces and dissipates to the streets is mutual understanding and unconditional respect.

*Hassan and Morcos* has been dismissed by some critics as a dry comedy and praised by others as “razor-sharp satire about religious intolerance.” Opinions aside, the film’s ability to spark national debate over majority-minority relations in Egypt is undeniable. In addition to stirring controversy in the homeland, the film has also managed to grab the attention of international audiences by participating in a number of film festivals, including the London Film Festival in 2008. By casting prominent actors that are more eager, than hesitant, to take a stand on religious issues, Emam’s movie has directly challenged the censor’s office, which maintains the official line that artistic expressions concerning “national unity between Copts and Muslims” are equivalent to those that are “obscene or immoral.” In the end, *Hassan and Morcos* has set a new precedent for addressing Coptic-Muslim relations in Egyptian cinema – a breakthrough that is, perhaps, most clearly captured in the words of one Coptic interlocutor. “He
(Emam) opened a space for dialogue. Not a sentence in a movie, but a whole movie. This is a sign of hope.52

**Compartmentalizing Compatriots**

The works presented in this chapter constitute only a fraction of the novels and films currently circulating in Egyptian popular culture. It is clear, however, that their authors and producers, irrespective, but perhaps informed by their religious affiliations, offer different definitions of the Coptic community and the minority’s relations with Muslim compatriots. Moreover, the art that they produce challenges the government’s policy of ‘national unity or else’ and, if avoiding the censor’s office, directly impacts the ways in which Egyptians perceive their compatriots. Thus, it is individuals and their artistic expressions that not only shape popular discourse in Egypt, but also influence the images of Copts the world over.

Lastly, the novels and film leave little room for Copts and Muslims to express their views of one another. The opinions of everyday Egyptians are not exported to international film festivals and book signings; they are confined to footnotes in ethnographic articles and enticing bylines in foreign media reports on sectarian violence. Writers and producers represent only two groups that have defined the Coptic community and their Muslim relations, without the permission of their subjects and removed from the consequences of their rhetoric. Their works have elated some Egyptians and enraged others. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the consequences of these ‘artistic expressions’ exceed popular culture and fuel misconceptions of ‘the other.’ Embracing words to discover common ground and perpetuate clash, novels and films have defined the
compatriots on paper, inside the theater, and within the hearts and minds of their mass audiences.
Notes:

1. According to the CIA World Fact Book, the literacy rate in Libya is 82.6% (2003) and 97.1% in Israel (2004).


13. Ibid, 335.


15. Ibid, 348.


18. Ibid, 361.
Ibid, 361.

Ibid, 361.


Matthew 5:39 reads. “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”


Ibid, 194.

Ibid, 48.

Ibid, 85-86.

Ibid, 230.

Ibid, 230.

Ibid, 232.

Ibid, 232.

Tahouti is “an ancient Egyptian deity viewed as the lord of the moon and light” (Bakr, 312).

A Greek phrase meaning “the Lord is with you all” (Bakr, 310).

Ibid, 70.

Ibid, 61.

Ibid, 298.

Ibid, 298.


Ibid, 49, 55.

These other films include: Osama Fawzi’s *Baheb El Cima* (2005) and Hassan Emam’s *Chafika El Keptia* (1963).


Pretending to be a Muslim, Father Paulous is forced to adopt the name ‘Hassan,’ and Sheikh Mahmoud, who in actuality is a Copt, is really named ‘Morcos.’

Ibid, 1:12.


Personal communication; Emad; Interview #13.
Chapter II - Define and Conquer: Identifying Copts, Muslims, and Egyptians (1906–1923)

Copts and Muslims take to the streets waving banners with crosses and crescents during the 1919 revolution.¹
At the turn of the 20th century, British officials under the command of Evelyn Baring, known to the world as Lord Cromer, struggled to ebb the rising tide of Egyptian nationalism. As England attempted to maintain control by dividing Copts and Muslims, thereby inhibiting the formation of a collective Egyptian identity, she encountered political opposition from Mustafa Kamil’s National Party and Saad Zaghloul’s Wafd. The Copts were members of both parties and often stood by the side of their Muslim neighbors against the British. Father Sergius, the Copts’ leader in the 1919 revolution, infamously claimed, “If the achievement of Egyptian Independence required the sacrifice of a million Copts, this must be willingly accepted.”

Disturbed by the strong bonds of unity forming between Copts and Muslims, who preached from one another’s pulpits against colonialism, Britain continued to pit the Christian minority against the Muslim majority, and vice versa. The British sought to convince both communities that their coreligionists held their best interests at heart, not their compatriots. By moderating their differences, Britain maintained the upper hand. This chapter analyzes the extent to which Cromer and the British succeeded in severing Egyptians into Copts and Muslims. It also examines the historical tipping points wherein the compatriots converged as nationalists and clashed along religious fault lines. What follows will demonstrate that, contrary to popular belief, the sectarian divide between Copts and Muslims is neither a product of the 21st century, nor an insurmountable division.

The Dinshaway Incident: Unity in Tragedy
The drive to define Copts, Muslims, and Egyptians in the 20th century is clearly articulated in Lord Cromer’s lengthy volume, *Modern Egypt* (1908). Published in the midst of heightened tensions between the colonizer and the colonized, part IV of Cromer’s reflections, *The Egyptian Puzzle*, addresses the various stakeholders in the nation, including: “the Dwellers in Egypt,” “the Moslems,” “the Christians,” “the Europeanised Egyptians,” and “the Europeans.” The consul general classifies Copts and Muslims as fundamentally different and builds on the categories of Caliph Mu’awiya, the first Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty, who stated twelve centuries prior:

> I found that the people of Egypt were of three sorts, one-third men, one-third like men, and one-third not men, i.e. Arabs, converted foreigners, and those who pretend to be Muslims, the Copts.

While embracing these rigid classifications, Cromer, unlike Caliph Mu’awiya, advances the argument that Muslims were chained to the Qur’an and antagonistic towards progress, whereas Copts did not present any “religious shackles” and could “proceed along the path of political and social advancement.” Flipping Mu’awiya’s typology, Britain’s civilizing mission and policy of divide and conquer, a strategy that was by no means unique to Egypt at the time, is clearly illuminated in Cromer’s chapter on Christians.

Having addressed the content of Part IV of Cromer’s volume, one needs to analyze the time in which it was published. The fact that the text was printed shortly after the Dinshaway incident in June of 1906 is essential to understanding Cromer’s stance on Coptic, Muslim, and Egyptian identities. At Dinshaway, a small village near Tanta in the Minufiya Province, British soldiers aiming at pigeons mistakenly shot and wounded a prayer leader’s wife. A conflict ensued and resulted in the death of one British soldier and a village bystander. Butrus Ghali, the Coptic Prime Minister (1908-
1910), presided over the court case and sentenced four villagers to be hanged, imprisoned eight others, and ordered several Egyptians to be flogged in public.

A photograph capturing the four Egyptian villagers who were hanged in front of their families and compatriots following Prime Minister Ghali’s verdict.

The drastic ruling prompted Mustafa Kamil, the future founder of the National Party, to ask:

- Does not Dinshaway alone suffice to prove for all time that the English have mercilessly inflicted on the Egyptians a humiliation that will never be forgotten...a humiliation concerning which there can be no two opinions among impartial men?

The anger directed at Ghali’s verdict was not confined to the Muslim community. Recalling the drastic ruling, Salama Musa, a prominent Coptic scholar, recorded in his autobiography:
I was overcome by a convulsion, and felt as if I had to vomit, and for a number of days I could not eat a bit as savage and criminal thoughts kept turning round in my mind against those who had so brutally wronged our people.\textsuperscript{10}

The notion of being victimized by the British soldiers, as well as the British-appointed Prime Minister, led to a temporary, shared sense of unity between Copts and Muslims. This camaraderie is evident in Kamil’s invocation of “Egyptians” and Musa’s usage of “our people.” In \textit{Modern Egypt}, Cromer is also well-aware of this emerging Egyptian identity, strengthened in the aftermath of Dinshaway, stating:

\begin{quote}
…the only difference between the Copt and the Moslem is that the former is an Egyptian who worships in a Christian church, whilst the latter is an Egyptian who worships in a Mohammedan mosque.\textsuperscript{9,11}
\end{quote}

Although attesting on paper to the camaraderie between Copts and Muslims as victims in the aftermath of the Dinshaway tragedy, Cromer continued a deliberate process of dividing the minority and the majority, praying beside the former and governing Egypt through the latter.

\textbf{The Rise and Fall of Butrus Ghali}

In 1875, Butrus Ghali was invited by Sharif Pasha, an Egyptian statesman and future Prime Minister, to work as a clerk in the Mixed Courts. The Pasha was unaware at the time that the Copt who caught his eye for his fluency in European languages, would quickly ascend the governmental ladder. Ghali was appointed as the Minister of Finance in 1893, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1895, and eventually the Prime Minister in November of 1908. As a Copt, his appointment as Prime Minister defied England’s policy of promoting Muslims to the highest positions of authority. The tendency of
British officials to favor Muslims over Copts in the political arena was known to all Egyptians and clearly articulated in a letter from Cromer to Lord Salisbury in 1889. In the letter Cromer argues that it would “be better to govern through the medium of Mohammedan rather than…through Christian ministers,” a policy that neither Salisbury, nor Britain rejected. Several commentators, on the other hand, have argued that Ghali’s rise to Prime Minister was not so much a defiance of England’s policy as it was a continuation of colonial rule in Egypt. Samir Seikaly, a professor at the American University of Beirut (AUB), has claimed that Ghali was a “trusted British agent around whom would coalesce a Coptic community finally dissociated from any nationalist agitation and altogether sympathetic to the British.” In the eyes of Seikaly and other scholars, Ghali was not a Coptic revolutionary, he was the new British puppet.

Nevertheless, Ghali’s rise to the highest seat of power was viewed as an unprecedented victory among Copts. The British officials’ resentment of the Copts was common knowledge during the foreign power’s occupation (1882-1922) and is well-documented in written history. In Cromer’s *Modern Egypt*, the consul general reflects on the tenuous relationship between the Christian minority and the ruling Brits. Cromer claims that the Copts, as coreligionists of the British, expected the colonizer’s loyalty and after witnessing Britain side with the Muslims, became frustrated with the foreign power. The Copts’ lowly status in the eyes of Cromer and other officials is perhaps best articulated by C.A. Bayly, a Cambridge scholar, who opines:

Copts were a race of venal shopkeepers, cruel usurers, and low clerks who tried to gain jobs from the British by craven appeals ‘in the name of that Saviour who died for both of them.’ They were a weak and sickly race compared with the stolid Egyptian Muslim peasant.
Due to their monophysite beliefs, the Copts were considered inferior in the eyes of their British handlers, whom perpetually cast the Egyptian minority as Christian degenerates and followers of a “soul-destroying heresy” in the illogical Orient. It was therefore a shock to many Copts that a member of their minority community could transcend England’s policy of promoting Egyptian Muslims and acquire a position of political leverage.

Although the Coptic communities generally praised the appointment of Ghali to Prime Minister, members of the Muslim community, as whole, were less content and equally vocal. Rumors spread that Ghali intended to regain power that the Muslims had supposedly usurped. Leading Muslim figures, such as Saad Zaghloul, the leader of one of two revolutionary groups within the Wafd, feared that the Egyptian press would attack Ghali and Coptic-Muslim relations would take a turn for the worse. On February 20, 1910, Ibrahim Nasif al-Wardani fatally shot Ghali. The assassin claimed full responsibility for the murder and provided his interrogators with a list of reasons for committing the crime, including: Ghali’s reinstatement of the restrictive Press Law of 1881 and the Prime Minister’s willingness to further lease the Suez Canal to the British. According to the memoirs of Muhammad Farid, an influential nationalist, Ghali stood to profit from prolonging this concession. In al-Wardani’s eyes, however, these two reasons were of secondary importance to Ghali’s role as judge in the Dinshaway trial. Thus, al-Wardani’s motives were clearly political and not religious in nature.

The National Party, with which al-Wardani was affiliated, sought to safeguard its members from possible incrimination following Ghali’s assassination. Farid was secretly alerted by Ahmed Abd al-Rizaq, a friend and a judge, that his house would be searched
and he swiftly “destroyed all the paper [the British] could have used to harm some of
[his] brethren.”18 Farid’s actions were viewed by the Copts, who actively participated in
the National Party, as necessary steps to ensure the livelihood of the nationalist
movement, but Muslims’ celebration of Ghali’s assassination in the streets enraged the
Coptic communities. According to the exhaustive account of B.L. Carter, a former
student of the late P.J. Vatikiotis, crowds of Muslims took to the streets, praising
“Wardani who killed the Nazarene”19 and proclaiming the assassin to be a national hero.
The English Gazette further embellished the description of the assassin as the “most
popular man in Egypt,”20 while Al-Ahram immortalized al-Wardani in photographs,
addressing the murderer as the “champion of patriotism.”21 Realizing the gravity of their
brethren’s protests and attempting to counter Al-Ahram’s ill-advised proclamations, other
journalists argued that al-Wardani assassinated Ghali for political reasons. The Coptic
press immediately countered, claiming religious motives. Marking the end of a class of
Egyptian collaborators to some, and the fall of a Coptic icon and Muslim enemy to
others, Ghali’s death signaled the demise of the fragile unity formed in the aftermath of
the Dinshaway incident four years prior.

The 1911 Coptic Conference: Establishing the True Egyptians

Following Ghali’s assassination, the Copts sought to combat their status as a
marginalized minority living under British colonization in Egypt. They pressed the
British officials for additional rights equal to those enjoyed by their Muslim compatriots.
In February of 1911, a large group of Copts gathered in Asyut, a traditional Christian
stronghold, to commemorate the death of their late Prime Minister. Discussions centered
on “the Coptic Issue” (al-mas’ala al-qibtiyya) and a date was set for the First Coptic Conference.

At the March 1911 gathering, the Christian minority argued for equality with their Muslim compatriots. In the first of five demands, they asserted that Sunday should be deemed a legal day of rest, as was the case with Friday for Muslims. Secondly, the conference participants insisted on equality in upper leadership positions within the government and that religious affiliation not factor into ministerial appointments. Thirdly, the Copts claimed that they deserved financial aid from the government to be used in funding Coptic schools, similar to the governmental funds allotted to Muslim Kuttabs. The fourth demand applied to the local and national levels, where the Copts argued that they deserved greater representation on government councils. Lastly, they demanded that public expenditures should apply to the interests of all Egyptians and, as such, that domestic Coptic courts and councils should receive governmental aid. As these demands suggest, it was not that the Copts sought to secede, or take more than their share from the Muslim majority. Rather, the Christian minority convened as concerned citizens, striving for rights equal to those enjoyed by their Muslim neighbors.

In response to the demands, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, with the support of Sir Eldon Gorst, the Consul-General, swiftly rejected all five of the Copts’ requests. Grey’s decision was largely influenced by Gorst’s annual reports, which in 1911 claimed that the Copts were already over-represented in the political arena. In light of the increasing sectarian violence in the aftermath of Ghali’s assassination, Gorst convinced Grey that it would be best if the Copts did not further provoke the Muslims with calls for additional representation that transcended their status as a Christian
minority living besides a Muslim majority. Such provocation could potentially lead to an uprising detrimental to British interests in Egypt. Moreover, the fact that the Copts had sided with their Muslim compatriots over their British coreligionists in the past also served as a strike against the minority’s appeals.

Although the Copts’ definitive demands, as subjects of British rule, were rejected, the British could not extinguish the powerful pro-Coptic discourse that emerged from Asyut. The Christian minority cast themselves as the ‘sons of pharaoh’ and the ‘children of the Nile.’ Having resided in Egypt since St. Mark’s arrival in 42 A.D., exactly six centuries prior to ‘Amr Ibn al-‘As’ conquest, the Copts’ claim that they were the original Egyptians was embraced as a source of pride and validation.\(^{27}\) The idea that the Copts were superior to their Muslim compatriots, due to their lengthier history, was given credence by several foreign-born elite intellectuals. Gaston Maspero, a Parisian Egyptologist, argued that “the Copts, more than any other people, had retained their racial purity, and that the present Copts were themselves the descendants of the Pharaohs.”\(^{28}\) In light of the fact that the minority’s Muslim neighbors were racially less pure, British Egyptologist Flinders Petrie and Oxford Assyriologist A.H. Sayce asserted that Egypt’s future should be placed in Coptic hands. Sana Hassan, an Egyptian scholar, further elaborates on this robust discourse. According to Hassan:

> Muslims, in their view, [were] basically Copts who converted to Islam, either under pressure or for tax advantages, and intermarried with the Arab invaders, then with the mamluks…and still later with the Ottoman rulers.\(^{29}\)

This chain of mixed marriages with the ruling power, although propagating Islam and ensuring the Muslims’ numerical majority vis-à-vis the Coptic minority, served as fodder
to the Copts’ claims that only they carried the true, undiluted deed to the land. Seikaly eloquently summarizes the power behind this pharaonic nostalgia, stating:

A lost minority had now found its identity, an identification with a glorious past to which, through their father, they had vicariously contributed, and of which they were themselves the rightful inheritors.30

The predominately-Muslim press villainized the Copts in attendance. According to Tariq al-Bishri, an Islamic modernist, Egyptian newspapers, such as Misr and Al-Watan, falsely depicted the 1911 conference proceedings. In fact, a Muslim journalist by the name of Abd’ al-Qadir Hamza was the only Egyptian newspaper columnist at the gathering. A writer for Al-Ahli, Hamza covered all four conference sessions and published a number of popular articles. One of Hamza’s first reports was printed on March 14 and opened with the reporter reflecting, “I was amazed at the conference speakers who struck at Muslim-Coptic unity in their words.”22 Routinely pitting Copts against Muslims, Hamza’s politically-driven banter spread across Egypt and cast compatriots as subversive suspects. Perhaps Copts were not fully Egyptian after all.

In sharp contrast to Hamza, others in Asyut, such as Morqos Fahmi, a prominent judge, claimed that the Copts had no intentions of creating national unrest. During the fourth conference session, Fahmi declared:

The Copts gather as doctors gather and as lawyers convene, because between them exists a private communion and sectarian bonds…they do not seek anything but to stabilize national sentiments in all people.23

The Copts’ demands were meant to place the Christian minority on equal footing with the Muslim majority, and to ensure that the Copts would not live in Egypt “like the blacks in America.”24 Thus, the Copts did not brazenly lash out at national unity; on the contrary,
the Christian minority reaffirmed that Egyptians were from “one origin and a single race dating back thousands of years.”25,26 They did not strive to form a Coptic nation, but rather to solidify their status as equals in Egypt.

Nevertheless, Muslims boisterously discredited Hamza’s appeals and criticized the Copts’ requests; the Egyptian minority was challenging the Islamic identity of the nation and the majority’s right to the land. Following the conference and the pharaonic discourse that was mobilized, sectarian violence broke out across Egypt. “Coptic funerals and processions were attacked by mobs in major cities” and “in Cairo, people dressed up as Coptic priests were pelted and jeered at in staged public demonstrations.”31 It was clear that Copts and Muslims, who had once stood side-by-side as victims in the aftermath Dinshaway, were now in a fierce battle to determine which of the two were the true Egyptians.

**The 1911 Egyptian Congress: Muslim Hosts, Coptic Guests**

Angered by the appeals of their compatriots at the First Coptic Conference and encouraged to respond by the Egyptian press, 2,500 Muslim congress members and sympathizers gathered in Heliopolis to convene the First Egyptian Congress on April 29, 1911. The conference spanned five full days and addressed the Copts’ demands, in addition to relations between the Christian minority and Muslim majority. The Organizing Committee drew on reports prepared by Muslim delegates from across Egypt and clearly articulated from the beginning that dividing Egypt into two political parties, Muslim and Coptic, would be a “monstrous error” and an “absurdity that eludes definition.”32 On the other hand, the committee also found it to be “perfectly
“unthinkable” for the state to have more than one religion and boldly proclaimed that “the religion of the Egyptian people [was] Islam.” In the eyes of the majority of those in attendance, both Copts and Muslims were Egyptians, but they were by no means equals.

As was the case with the British colonizers, the Egyptian Muslims unanimously dismissed all five Coptic requests. First, by asking for a day of rest on Sunday, the Organizing Committee claimed that the Copts had lost sight of Egypt’s national traditions, which were inherently Islamic, not Christian. In response to the second demand for adjusting the conditions of admission to governmental posts, the Muslim participants distanced themselves from radical coreligionists and argued that they were entitled to greater representation “not because they [were] Muslims, but because fanaticism and partiality, [did] not generally speaking, characterise a religious majority.” Following the lengthy discussions over the first two requests made in Asyut, the final three appeals were quickly dismissed as excessive and illegitimate. The Copts held a larger share of the public education endowment than their size warranted; they would not be granted their own electoral constituency; and they could not demand grants from the public treasury for their denominational institutions.

Muslims’ resentment towards their compatriots for demanding additional rights, as a Christian minority, permeated the vast majority of the speeches given at the conference. Hamdi Hammad, a well-known Muslim writer, portrayed the Copts as a greedy minority, stating, “the Copts [possessed] more than their rights; but, said they to themselves, can we not have still more?” Ahmed Loutfi, a fellow presenter, took Hammad’s argument one step farther, declaring that it was the Copts, in fact, who were prejudiced against the Muslims. Loutfi concluded that if the Copts would only open up
their clubs and societies to other Egyptians and view Muslims as equal inhabitants of Egypt, sectarian violence would cease and the Copts would “increase their credit in the civilised world.”\textsuperscript{36,37} Based on the critical viewpoints of Hammad, Loutfi, and others in attendance in Heliopolis, it appeared that the Copts should accept their status as a minority, immediately desist in their demands for additional rights, and take it upon themselves to welcome the Muslim majority into their communities.

Although the conference commenced with the Organizing Committee accusing the Copts of attempting to form a separate nation, the afternoon session ended with Dr. Abbate Pacha, President of the Khedivial Geographical Society, calling for a renewed unity between Copts and Muslims. “No, Egyptians! I do not call you Christians, Copts, or Mussulmen,” Dr. Abbate declared.\textsuperscript{38} Standing out from his fellow presenters and ignoring the demands of the Copts entirely, the speaker proceeded to directly address his attentive audience, exclaiming:

You are one nation united by sentiments of harmony and brotherhood; vis unita fortior!\textsuperscript{39} This [is] no place for the triumphant claims of creeds; religion does not enter into nationality.\textsuperscript{40}

Defying the central assertions of his peers, Dr. Abbate’s speech prioritized nationalism over religious affiliation and strove to revive the unity maintained by Copts and Muslims from 1906-1910. The presenter pleaded with his audience to let ideas trump dogmas and sought to restore the notion that Copts and Muslims were equals. Striking a chord within the hearts and minds of the attendants, Dr. Abbate’s charismatic calls for unity would materialize several years later when Copts and Muslims came together under one banner to expel the British colonizer. For the time being, however, Muslims were the hosts and Copts were their guests in Egypt.
The Revolution of 1919: ‘Egypt is for Egyptians’

Approaching the end of 1917, nearly seven years after the Coptic and Egyptian conferences, prominent Egyptians began to informally discuss independence in tight-knit circles. By November of 1918, Saad Zaghloul had invited several Copts to join his ranks. The first three Copts to accept his invitations, included: Sinut Hanna, a member of the Legislative Assembly, George Khayyat, the American consul in Asyut, and Wasif Ghali, son of the late Butrus Ghali and devout nationalist. Although the loyalty of each was initially questioned by Zaghloul’s coreligionists and the First Coptic Conference lingered in everyone’s’ minds, Hanna, Khayyat, and Ghali slowly proved their dedication to the nationalist movement leading up to the 1919 revolution.

Unlike the past unity of Copts and Muslims in response to a single tragedy, the new, emerging unity spreading from the Wafd across Egypt was in reaction to decades of British colonization. Thus, the aim of Zaghloul’s group, which would later assume control of the Wafd, was to create an Egyptian nation, rather than an Arab, or Islamic one. Carter clearly articulates this point in his account of the Wafd’s formation, stating, “these post-war nationalists had no interest in pan-Islam and believed that the interests of their own country superseded all other considerations.” Zaghloul’s mission was endorsed by several diverse entities, ranging from Misr and other Egyptian newspapers that promoted Coptic-Muslim unity throughout 1919 to Taha Husayn, an Egyptian literary icon who was one of the leading writers for the Wafd. Framing the British as the enemy, Zaghloul’s party embodied the promise of an independent Egypt and functioned as an arena where Copts and Muslims could once again shed their respective religious affiliations and unite as Egyptians.
The two-month revolution, directed by the Wafd, erased many Muslims’ doubts that the Copts were disloyal to the nation and in a number of ways mirrored the ‘Urabi revolt of 1882, where Muslims and Copts lectured from one another’s pulpits. In the wake of Zaghloul’s exile at the hands of British officials early on in the revolution, Murqus Sergius, a Coptic priest, spoke from the pulpit of al-Azhar, and proclaimed in front of a massive crowd of demonstrators that Copts and Muslims must stand together as Egyptians.42

A drawing depicting the cooperation between Copts and Muslims in the 1919 revolution.43

The Copts backed the Muslim revolutionaries not only in words, but also in actions. Carter asserts:

The Coptic role in the revolution was highly visible and substantial, and Copts were involved in all its facets: demonstrations, strikes, propaganda, terrorism, organisation, and policy-making.44
In light of the Copts’ instrumental roles in the revolution, it came as no surprise when Sinut, Khayyat, and Ghali, who had stood by the side of Zaghloul from the beginning, accompanied the Wafd leader to the Paris Peace Conference in April of 1919.

The Wafd was denied entrance to the Paris Peace Conference, which the British feared they would use as a platform to make their case for independence. This photo was taken of Zaghloul (front, center) and fellow members of the Wafd in Paris. The delegation was composed of Copts and Muslims.45

Although the Wafd would split temporarily in the spring of 1921, over a disagreement about who would lead the negotiations with the British, the party played a vital part in forcing England to grant conditional independence to Egypt on February 22, 1922. The four conditions of the independence extended by Britain included: continued communications in Egypt, defense of the nation in the case that a foreign power were to invade, protection of minorities and foreign interests, and the major stake on the question of Sudan.46 Although the third condition immediately raised suspicion among Muslim nationalists of Coptic members in the Wafd, the Copts took steps to convince their
compatriots that they were not a minority requiring a guardian, but rather full-fledged Egyptian citizens. Standing beside one another on the front lines of the 1919 revolution, waving banners with both crosses and crescents, Copts and Muslims transcended their respective religious affiliations and untied – if only momentarily – as Egyptians.

![Copts and Muslims marching in the 1919 revolution with a flag bearing a crescent and a cross.](image)

**Conclusions:**

Interactions between Copts and Muslims in the early 20th century were defined by moments of uncompromising unity, sharp disagreement, and sectarian violence. Cromer and the British were able to divide and conquer Egypt for decades by defining Copts and Muslims as incompatible compatriots, only to witness their rule come to an end when the Christian minority and Muslim majority emerged as a united front. The colonizer’s
policies that were meant to drive the compatriots apart had unintentionally driven Copts and Muslims together. The compatriots’ convergence, on the other hand, was by no means a streamlined process. Although sharing a common enemy in the British, Copts and Muslims diverged along religious fault lines at the 1911 conferences. They chose to define themselves as crosses and crescents, rather than as Egyptians. That said, independence from the British gradually appealed to all parties, irrespective of religious affiliation, and banners dawning crosses and crescents soon flooded the streets. Copts and Muslims marched together, side-by-side. They shelved their differences and foresaw a future where Egyptians ruled Egypt.

Saad Zaghloul leading the Egyptian Parliament out of a session post-revolution.\textsuperscript{50}

In tracing Egyptian nationalism from the Dinshaway incident to conditional independence, it is clear that Copts and Muslims viewed themselves as crosses and
crescents at times, and as a united citizenry at other moments. When finally managing to overthrow the British, however, they not only seized control of Egypt, but also grasped the colonizer’s authority to define its subjects. No longer conscripts of British binaries, Copts and Muslims determined what being “Egyptian” meant. Taking into consideration these changing definitions, which were constantly in flux, the momentous events from 1906-1923 prove, that contrary to the traditional arguments of scholars and non-scholars alike, the Coptic-Muslim divide is not a modern phenomenon. Likewise, the compatriots’ division, which was directly maintained by Britain’s policy of ‘define and conquer,’ is neither set in stone nor an insurmountable divide. Rather, it is a line drawn in the sand, navigated and negotiated by Copts, Muslims, and all of those who struggle to define the Egyptian minority and their relations with Muslims.
Notes:

1. http://www.flickr.com/photos/96884693@N00/sets/72157616337201164/ (accessed March 6, 2010).


3. It is worth noting that Egypt’s population was approximately 13,000,000 at the time of Father Sergius’ remarks (Haas, 2000; 85). Of the 13,000,000 Egyptians, approximately 780,000 (6%) to 1,040,000 (8%) were Copts.

4. The tendency to view this divide as a product of modernity is illustrated in chapter 2 of Peter Makari’s *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslims Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (2007).


12. This quote is often referenced by scholars when calling on Lord Cromer’s *Modern Egypt* (Bayly 2002, Hassan, 2003, Makari 2007). Little attention is paid to the fact that Cromer distinguishes between Copts and Muslims throughout part IV of the volume.


15. C.A Bayly, “Representing Copts and Muhammadans: Empire, Nation, and Community in Egypt and India, 1880-1914,” *Modernity and Culture: From the*
16 Ibid, 169.


18 Ibid, 428.


20 The Egyptian Gazette, April 26, 1910 (as quoted by Malak Badrawi in Political Violence in Egypt, 1910-1924: Secret Societies, Plots and Assassinations (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 32.

21 Al-Ahram, April 25, 1910 (as quoted in Ibid, 32).

22 Tariq al-Bishri. Muslims and Copts: Within the Scope of the National Community (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, 2004), 96.

23 Ibid, 96.

24 Ibid, 104.

25 Ibid, 97.

26 This excerpt was taken from Mikhail Fanos’ opening address at the First Coptic Conference on March 6, 1911 in Asyut.

27 The pharaonic rhetoric that permeated the 1911 Coptic Conference still resonates in Coptic discourse today. In a recent article for The Independent Copt, Sally Bishai referred to the Copts as “the most undiluted descendants of the pharaonic people” (Who Are the Copts Anyway?, 2006; 6).


33 Ibid, 6.

34 Ibid, 11.


36 Ibid, 250-251.

37 Salama Musa notes in his autobiography that the Y.M.C.A., established by Christian missionaries in 1922, was in fact open to both Copts and Muslims. The Muslim Young Men Association (M.Y.M.A.) formed shortly thereafter, however, was for Muslims only (Musa, 1961; 143, 145).


39 Vis unita fortior is Latin for “united strength is stronger.”


42 Carter notes that Father Sergius was the first Coptic priest to ever speak from al-Azhar’s pulpit since the mosque’s establishment circa 972 A.D. (Carter, 1986; 62).


46 Sudan was jointly ruled by Britain and Egypt from 1899-1956. According to the conditional independence extended to Egypt in 1922, Britain would control the main share in governing Sudan.

In his article, Sedra references Pope Shenouda III, the current Coptic Patriarch, who infamously stated, “we are not a minority in Egypt. We do not like to consider ourselves a minority and do not like others to call us a minority” (Sedra, 1999; 219).

http://www.flickr.com/photos/96884693@N00/sets/72157616337201164/ (accessed March 6, 2010).

Chapter III - iCopts: Engaging and Empowering in the Digital Diaspora

The Internet has given rise to a new public sphere\(^1\) that challenges and complicates the traditional concepts of nation, citizenship, and diaspora. Cyberspace has redefined freedom of speech and reaffirmed the power of individuals and interest groups to challenge homeland institutions from afar. On the level of the collective, the Internet has transformed religious minorities into cyber majorities and allows individuals to reshape their own identities and their former nation-states as they see fit.\(^2\) In order to illuminate this phenomenon, this chapter examines the relationship between the Internet and diaspora, which converge to lay the foundations of “digital diasporas.” The Coptic virtual community, which bridges home and homeland, speaks for the marginalized minority from abroad.

The New Imagined Community

The ideas of cyberspace and diaspora are rooted in a decentralized space. Cyberspace is ubiquitous; diasporic space exists in any place beyond the homeland. Despite this continuity, the structures differ on a number of levels. The first of two major differences is the fact that the \textit{virtual self}\(^3\) is not confined to one particular place, whereas the actual immigrant faces restrictions on his or her movement. While the immigrant may be unable to return home due to persecution and denied entrance into a new nation-state because of visas, the digital client travels from site to site. Thus, the virtual self is unbounded whereas the immigrant is bounded by borders. Secondly, the Internet can be a critical instrument in diasporic networks. Those in diaspora are scattered and
historically, not in frequent contact with fellow expatriates. However, through cyberspace, individuals may remain in constant contact and connect instantly. In light of these differences and in conjunction with the launch of the World Wide Web in 1991, the access to the Internet allowed Copts in diaspora to re-establish relationships with other expatriates, in addition to their coreligionists remaining in the homeland.

As those in diaspora began to flock to the web en masse, cyber communities were born. In an effort to illuminate these virtual spaces, which were quickly inhabited by long-distance nationalists, I shall refer to Benedict Anderson’s discussion of *imagined communities*. According to Anderson, the nation is “an imagined political community” and “it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Individuals navigate the Internet’s cybersphere, while elected representatives and regimes lead the nation’s (traditional) public sphere. All actors, however, are unaware and incapable of knowing every party around them.

Due to the Internet’s sheer size and user anonymity, the digital structure has virtualized Anderson’s imagined community. This allows digital citizens to connect across geographic, socio-economic, linguistic, and other seemingly rigid barriers via chat rooms, interactive forums, and web pages. As an imagined community, the cybersphere rivals the traditional public sphere as a forum for expression and serves a different purpose for each individual. Therefore, Anderson’s assertion that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” is also applicable to the virtual world. Both the cyber community and the actual community assume the shape its members desire. Thus, cyberspace provides the
opportunity for the creation of a mega-community, woven together by millions of virtual citizens across the globe.

**Belonging on Broadband**

The Internet’s new public sphere has fundamentally altered the concept of citizenship. In *The Erosion of Citizenship*, Bryan Turner, a professor of sociology at Cambridge, critiques the Marshallian theory of citizenship and advances the argument that economic changes, technological innovation, and globalization have altered Marshall’s three categories of citizens: worker, warrior, and parent. Rather than focusing on citizenship as a product, Turner argues that citizenship is a process, inclusionary in the sense that resources are reallocated on the basis of censuses and exclusionary because identities are constructed on common or imagined solidarities. Regardless of the validity of Turner’s argument, the key is to realize that the Internet is a virtual space through which an emigrant may become a virtual citizen of a digital homeland.

Emigrants’ desire to remain intimately attached to their homelands is not a novel concept. The case of Egypt’s Copts clearly articulates the longing to stay in touch. One Copt in the United States explains, “No Copt is ‘outside’ Egypt no matter where he or she lives. Egypt is the entity that gives us, the Copts our identity.” Pope Shenouda III also acknowledges this extra-state allegiance amongst the Copts, declaring, “Egypt is not a homeland that we live in, but a homeland that lives in us.” Thus, the Internet facilitates long-distance nationalism from the emigrant’s location abroad – a place of residence, work, and service – and allows those in diaspora to remain immersed in their homelands.
via virtual citizenship. Reducing the Internet to a simple phone line, as Sonja de Leeuw and Ingegerd Rydin do in “Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-Imagining Diaspora” downplays the ability of the World Wide Web to engage those in the homeland and empower others in diaspora. By cautiously adopting Marshall and Turner’s analyses of citizenship, while remaining critical of their categories and arguments, it is clear that the Internet elasticizes, rather than erodes citizenship. After all, virtual citizenship is still a form of citizenship, albeit, perhaps, more complex. Certainly less tangible than a national identification card, virtual citizenship provides the individual Internet user with the sense of belonging to something greater than either him or herself, even if that community is only accessed through a modem and monitor. Cyberspace is an arena where one can construct a dual identity: citizen of the home and virtual citizen of the homeland.

**Virtualizing the Homeland**

The term ‘diaspora’ is traditionally associated with the notions of scattering, fleeing, and living outside of one’s homeland. The concept of return is rarely mentioned and diaspora is widely viewed as a one-way movement. This sense of finality is no longer the case. Digital diasporas have virtualized the homeland and facilitate the active participation of long-distance nationalists in the homeland’s politics by way of the cybersphere.

As cyber communities complicate Anderson’s notion of imagined communities and as virtual citizens challenge Turner’s discussion on citizenship, the rise of digital diasporas forces the observer to question scholarly arguments on the subject.
Intellectuals typically take two approaches when addressing diaspora. Their analyses tend to focus on either the community or the network, but rarely both. For example, Robin Cohen, a professor of development studies at the University of Oxford, analyzes diasporas on a macro-level and suggests that they can be compartmentalized into four primary categories: victims, labor, trade, and cultural. Others, such as Brian Axel, a professor of anthropology at Swarthmore, focus on the micro-level and have sought to critique diaspora theory. While Cohen attempts to identify the type of network, Axel focuses on particular communities, claiming that said groups do not simply fit into the normative molds of “settler” and “parasite.”

In fact, Axel claims that such templates reflect “several presumptions into analysis,” of which the most significant is that “a diasporic community is ‘Other’ and, as such, is separate, and isolable from a national people.” The assumption of diasporic communities’ isolation has been invalidated with the advent of digital diasporas. Although Cohen and Axel’s efforts to clarify diaspora are noteworthy, both scholars fail to address the two categories of interest to this chapter: digital diasporas and activists abroad. Long-distance nationalism is no longer confined to letter writing and “lobbying or demonstrating in the new land on behalf of the old.” The new long-distance nationalists are unlike their predecessors. They have embraced the freedom to voice their opinions and protest on a world stage – actions made possible by the new digital diaspora network.

The iCopts and Michael Meunier’s Call to Arms
At the First International Coptic Symposium in Zurich, Switzerland in 2004, Adly Youssef, the conference chairman and a graduate of Cairo University, was the first scheduled presenter. Youssef’s paper, “Unite the Coptic Diaspora Against Discrimination,” was direct in its message and identified the principal aim of the symposium:

It is to seek ways by which we can unite the one and half million Egyptian diaspora Copts and thus create a strong and respected voice to help relieve the suffering of the 12 million Copts in Egypt.\(^\text{14}\)

In addition to serving as the mission for the two-day conference, Youssef’s foregoing statement is important for a number of reasons. First, the chairman identifies *Aqbat al-mahjar* (Copts abroad), a minority of a minority, as the group responsible for saving the 12 million\(^\text{15}\) Copts suffering in Egypt. By addressing the Copts in diaspora as the main stakeholders in the minority’s future in the homeland, Youssef effectively reduces the Copts in Cairo, Alexandria, and elsewhere in Egypt to silent victims, unable to voice their opinions and incapable of instilling political change. Youssef’s view that the Copts remaining in Egypt are powerless is reaffirmed when he states, “the Egyptian Copts [have] been robbed of their rights, degraded, and marginalized to become third-class citizens.”\(^\text{16}\) The chairman proceeds to blame Wahhabism for poisoning the minds of Egyptian Muslims and claims that Islamic nations swore to cleanse the Middle East of its Christians at the 1956 Jeddah Summit, but it is Youssef’s opening note that struck a deep cord within his international audience and set the tone for the rest of the symposium.

The twenty speeches following Youssef’s opening address touched on topics ranging from the struggles of Coptic women to the Coptic press, but no discussion rivaled Michael Meunier’s “A Forward-Looking Vision for the Copts” in conviction and
charisma. Meunier, the founder and president of the U.S. Copts Association, directly responded to Youssef’s opening remarks, stating:

We must unite, educate, and mobilize the Copts outside of Egypt to further the interests of the Coptic community in its newly adopted lands, while also fighting for the cause in Egypt. We must study and benefit from the experience of various other communities around the world, such as the Jewish, the Irish-American, and the Muslim-American communities that have succeeded in mobilizing their base from the most powerful country in the world.17

It is clear from Meunier’s language that the Copts in diaspora, and particularly those in the United States, must carry the burden of their Coptic brethren in Egypt. In order to accomplish this difficult task, Meunier recommends that Copts abroad participate in civic engagement, register to vote, and strive to attain influential government positions. The most important key to mobilizing the Copts abroad, however, is to create a strong media presence in the form of a robust Coptic cyber community that would be capable of reaching out to a world audience. Meunier supports this cyber call to arms by referencing his highly-successful website, www.copts.com, which was founded in 1996 and regularly attracted over 26 million views a month at the time of the 2004 symposium.18 The site served as a potent example of what a Coptic virtual space could achieve. Meunier’s speech foreshadowed the birth of the iCopts19, or Copts prone to using the Internet to speak on behalf of their coreligionists20, as well as the development of Coptic websites.

Reclaiming the Coptic Podium

The Coptic Orthodox Church is more than a religious institution in Egypt. The Church builds communities, provides scholarships to promising students, and conducts trips for all ages to Alexandria and other popular vacation sites. Due to its wealth of social services, it is no surprise that the Coptic Orthodox Church was identified by 60%
of Copts in a 2009 survey as the most representative Coptic institution or group. In the same survey, 40% named Pope Shenouda III as their favorite Coptic figure. These numbers suggest that the Copts are content with the Church’s role in society, but this is not necessarily the case. While many Copts appreciate the Church’s support and protection, others have accused the institution of monopolizing the Coptic voice and blindly supporting the incumbent President, Hosni Mubarak. This suppressed anger among the Copts is reflected in the words of a Master’s candidate in comparative politics at the American University in Cairo (AUC), who explains:

The Coptic argument is that the followers of the Pope say that he is trying to protect his people, but you do not protect your people like that... You cannot shake hands with the devil to promote a higher view [and] by the devil, I mean compromising with the government and governmental politics. Why on earth would they promote NDP [National Democratic Party] candidates?

Bold statements, like the one above, are rarely voiced outside of the home in Egypt, but Coptic cyber communities have changed the game, actively seeking out those that speak in opposition to the Egyptian government and all of its supporters, including the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Before delving deeper into the tenuous relationship between the Church and the Coptic cybersphere, it is important to understand how the Church became the predominant spokesperson for all the Copts. According to Mariz Tadros, a professor of political science at AUC and the author of Vicissitudes in the Entente Between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State in Egypt (1952-2007), the Church pledged its allegiance to the Egyptian government in exchange for several concessions in 1952. As the relationship of mutual necessity deepened, the government weakened rival Coptic voices,
including the Majlis al-Milli, which was established in 1874 and deemed as a threat to the Church’s monopoly on the Coptic podium.

In 1957, a presidential decree further crippled the Majlis al-Milli and “reflected all of the demands made by the conservative ecclesiastical ranks within the church and dismissed all the concerns and propositions of the Majlis al-Milli.”

By strengthening the Church and repeatedly dealing severe blows to the Majlis al-Milli, the government expected the Church’s loyalty, which it continues to receive to this day. A recent indication of this allegiance is Pope Shenouda III’s pledge of support for Gamal Mubarak, the current president’s son and perceived favorite in the 2011 presidential elections. Many Copts are enraged with Pope Shenouda for once again supporting the restrictive National Democratic Party in the name of the Coptic community.

The Coptic cybersphere challenges the Coptic Orthodox Church’s monopoly on the Coptic voice and unlike the Majlis al-Milli, the Egyptian government cannot easily silence the cyber community. Rather than following in Pope Shenouda III’s footsteps, iCopts aggressively attack the government, knowing that President Mubarak’s regime may be able to silence Copts in Egypt but poses no threat to Copts overseas. This activist attitude is reflected in the mission statements of many Coptic websites. For example, under the “About Us” section on the Free Copts website, the association states, “We are a group of concerned individuals who refuse to sit idly by and watch the situation deteriorate in Egypt, our motherland.”

Another popular website, Voice of the Copts, published an open letter to President Obama in 2009 detailing their great efforts to alleviate Coptic persecution. The President of the organization, Ashraf Ramelah, wrote:
We will ceaselessly fight for [the Copts] until they can go out to pray without fear of being attacked, and until their girls can walk safely everywhere without fear of being abducted. Our work is against regimes that are only interested in themselves and on how to hold power; those regimes that are not interested in their minority citizens, their human rights or their suffering.26

Due to the provocative rhetoric of the iCopts, several high-ranking members of the Coptic Orthodox Church have been deeply incensed by the virtual citizens, but are unable to restrict, limit, or otherwise censor the cyber community. A Coptic doctor at Demerdash Hospital, clearly articulates the Pope’s frustrations with the new long-distance nationalists, stating:

The Pope is angry at what they do. The Pope represents the Christians here. He is responsible for keeping peace between the two religions. He said that they should not intervene because they are disturbing the peace and making coexistence difficult.27

Supporters of the Coptic Orthodox Church have also rallied behind the Pope and criticize the actions of the iCopts. A telephone storeowner in Cairo’s Garden City, explains:

They are not with us. They do not know our real problems. What they say is exaggerated…You cannot speak of a problem you have never seen or experienced. They create an even bigger problem between us and Muslims. We have the Pope and other figures to help [solve] our problems.28

On the other hand, many Copts in Egypt walk the line between supporting the Coptic Orthodox Church as a religious institution and siding with the iCopts in their political struggle. A business and marketing student at AUC, opines:

[Copts abroad] alleviate the Coptic crisis… People here cannot solve the problems. Here, people are in the problem and they are already fighting. It is better to have someone not in the problem to solve it.29

Whether disturbing the peace or threatening the Church’s historical monopoly on the Coptic soapbox, it is evident that neither the Pope nor the iCopts are willing to back down. The Coptic podium is no longer confined to the Church’s court.
Reasserting Citizenship Over Christianity

Copts are often labeled as Christians first and Egyptians second, even though the word Copt stems from the Greek word *Aigyptos*, which means Egyptian. The tendency to prioritize one identity marker over another may appear to be harmless, but in fact carries severe consequences. Prior to exploring the tension between Copts’ religion and their status as citizens, I shall briefly return to Tadros’ idea of an entente between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Egyptian government. Following the ascent of the Church to the sole voice of Coptic society in the 1950s, religious affiliation, not citizenship, became the main identity marker for all Copts. Christianity, previously one of the many dimensions of Coptic identity, transformed into the Coptic marker, differentiating between the Christian minority and Muslim majority.

In addition to Egyptian Muslims, Western scholars also fixate on the Copts’ religious affiliation. In *Copts: Fully Egyptian, but for a Tattoo?*, Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder asserts, “Copts consider themselves fully Egyptian, but their first and foremost allegiance is not to the state but to their faith.” The tension between the Copts’ religious affiliation and citizenship seems to force the religious minority’s members to choose between the Church and the nation-state – Copts can either be Christians or Egyptians, but they cannot be both.

Many Copts on the ground in Egypt have refuted the advances of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Egyptian Muslims, and Western scholars to prioritize their religion over their citizenship. An employee at Al Haram Hospital, warns, “you should not confuse religious identities with national identity. Nationalism comes first.” The majority of Copts abroad have embraced a strictly secular rhetoric on their websites in an
effort to combat the idea that they are loyal to the Church first and Egypt second. The
websites note specific incidences of discrimination targeting the Copts and demand that
the Egyptian government protect its Coptic minority, as the Egyptian Constitution
stipulates. For example, a number of Coptic sites, including Free Copts, Coptic
Assembly of America, and Copts United, recently notified their visitors that the Egyptian
Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) released a comprehensive report detailing Coptic
persecution. The 36-page Arabic report references several incidences of discrimination
against Copts, including government demolition of houses in Southern Egypt under the
suspicion that they were clandestine churches. The text, void of religious rhetoric, claims
that an average of four attacks are carried out against Copts every month across the
country. It depicts the Copts as victimized citizens, not as members of the Coptic
Orthodox Church. The report’s appearance on three major diasporic websites reaffirms
the goal of iCopts to prove that they are citizens deserving of equal rights. This emphasis
on citizenship over religious affiliation is further reflected in the Coptic Assembly of
America’s mission statement, which posits:

The Coptic Assembly of America (CAA) is dedicated to promoting equality,
unity, human rights and democracy in Egypt for all citizens and to protecting the
unique cultural identity of Egypt’s Coptic Christians.33

The Coptic religion is a qualifier, rather than a separate marker, of the minority’s “unique
cultural identity,” which compliments the culture of Egyptian Muslims.

Other websites, such as Free Copts, are even more direct in their affirmation of
citizenship. “Copts are Egyptians. We are Egyptians first and foremost and we are
Egyptians to the core. We will not be alienated or allow our identity to be the subject of
debate,”34 explains the “About Us” section. By focusing on universal principles that both
Copts and Muslims stand to benefit from, the long-distance nationalists within the Coptic cyber community have embraced their new homes’ freedom of speech to redefine Copts in the homeland as patriotic citizens first and pious members of the Coptic Orthodox Church a distant second.

Re-Routing Reality: Stepping out of the Cybersphere

The external opposition’s activities are not confined to the cybersphere. Shortly after the launch of copts.com in 1996, Meunier and other Copts online began to exert pressure on the U.S. Congress to pass an act concerning religious persecution. The founder of the U.S. Copts’ Association met with Congressmen and published letters in major newspapers calling for an end to Coptic persecution. As a result of the Coptic lobbying efforts, the International Religious Freedom Act was introduced by Congressman Frank Wolf (Va.) and Senator Arlen Specter (Pa.) in May 1997 and was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in October 1998.

The International Religious Freedom (IRF) reports cover the state of religious freedoms in 194 countries worldwide and are published annually by the Department of State. The preface of the first report, released in 1999, states, “The Report will be used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy, and making assistance, training, and other resource allocations.” These objectives clarify that the reports intend to shape U.S. policy in Egypt and other countries of interest, and, in doing so, impact the social and political relationships between the U.S. and said countries. The ability of the reports to actually instigate change, on the other hand, were (and continue to be) suspect. Concerns directed at the tangible power of the IRF reports date back to the hearings held
by the Committee on Foreign Relations in May of 1998. In the second session of the one hundred fifth congress, Senator Don Nickles (Ok.) voiced his apprehension regarding economic sanctions in response to religious persecution. Rather than addressing the theoretical fault lines behind basing aid on a country’s performance in securing the rights of its religious minorities, or introducing a hypothetical scenario, Senator Nickles directed his colleagues’ attention to Egypt. He forecasted the inability of President Clinton, and any future president, to punish Egypt for its poor treatment of the Copts, stating:

Under the one sanction fits all countries approach, if a country like Egypt were cited as a country that engages in religious persecution, the President would be required to take action. If the President is given only the choice of cutting off all foreign aid or waiving that action, I think we all know that the current President and probably any future President would most likely choose to waive sanctions.36

Elaborating on the inherent hypocrisy of the act, in which U.S. allies would receive a slap on the wrist while enemies would be cut off from aid entirely, Senator Nickles concluded:

A country like Egypt would know that if it has a sensitive relationship with the United States it can persecute people of faith with impunity because the U.S. will waive the sanctions.37

Therefore, the IRF reports promised religious freedoms and served as evidence for adjusting U.S. policies and reevaluating U.S. aid to countries across the globe, but questions as to whether the reports’ findings would actually influence diplomatic relations with Egypt and other allies were present from the start.

From the publication of the first IRF report in 1999 until 2005, when the format of the executive summaries changed, Egypt was consistently labeled a category three offender, or a state that neglects discrimination and persecution of its minorities.
The structure of Egypt’s reports follows a standard template. For example, the executive summaries from 1999-2001 all begin by stating that members of the non-Muslim majority are generally able to worship without obstruction, but there continues to be governmental and societal discrimination. Whereas the first three executive summaries on Egypt address both societal and government discrimination, the following three reports, from 2002-2004, open by citing the government’s prosecution of those holding “unorthodox religious beliefs,” a term replaced in the 2005 report with “non-Muslims.”

The remaining reports, dating from 2006-2008, begin by citing the Egyptian government’s restrictions on religious freedoms even though the country’s Constitution guarantees such rights, as proclaimed in Article 46, which reads: “The State shall guarantee the freedom of belief and the freedom of practice of religious rites.” These transitions in the opening sentences of the executive summaries, as documented above, reflect the reports’ move from identifying Egyptian society as a culprit and towards declaring the Egyptian government as the primary violator.

The IRF Reports and Copts in diaspora, particularly those abroad in the United States, are routinely targeted by Muslim journalists in Egypt. In February 1999, an article in the Cairo Times, written by Khaled Elgindy, denounced the Coptic lobby as a group of radicals threatening national cohesion in Egypt. Aptly titled, “Diaspora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Category</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category #3: State Neglect</strong></td>
<td>Bulgaria, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Egypt, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Nigeria</td>
<td>Egypt, India, Indonesia, Nigeria</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Nigeria</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Egypt, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Nigeria</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: International Religious Freedom Report Category Breakdown (1999-2005)
Troublemakers,” the article downplayed the strength of Copts abroad, referring to Michael Meunier and his lobby as “three or four guys with a fax machine.”40 ‘Amir Mahmud, a journalist at Al-Ahrar, has even accused Coptic activists abroad of “declaring war” on Egypt.41 In addition to the IRF reports inciting the ire of Muslims in Egypt, influential Copts in Mubarak’s administration have also criticized the Coptic lobby’s role in the publication. In a New York Times article published in April 1998, nearly five months before the International Religious Freedom Act was approved, Edward Ghali Eldahabi, a member of the People’s Assembly, was cited as saying, “Those who are trying to incite foreigners to interfere in Egypt’s internal affairs are, in fact stabbing Copts in the heart.”42 By reaching out to the extra-state iCopts for help, Copts in the homeland had irreparably damaged their loyalty to the homeland in the eyes of many Egyptians.

The IRF Reports: A Beacon or a Fist?

Despite the rhetorical storm surrounding the IRF reports and the efforts of the Coptic lobby to protect their coreligionists from afar, U.S. economic and military aid to Egypt has not been affected. Economic aid to Egypt decreased over the past decade due to reductions in economic aid to Israel, not the IRF reports’ findings. U.S. aid historically maintains a 3 to 2 ratio in aid to Israel and Egypt.43 From 1999-2008, Egypt has accepted, on average, $1.9 billion annually from the United States.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>775.0</td>
<td>1,300.0</td>
<td>2,075.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>727.3</td>
<td>1,300.0</td>
<td>2,027.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>695.0</td>
<td>1,300.0</td>
<td>1,995.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>655.0</td>
<td>1,300.0</td>
<td>1,955.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>911.0</td>
<td>1,300.0</td>
<td>2,211.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>571.6</td>
<td>1,292.3</td>
<td>1,863.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>530.7</td>
<td>1,289.6</td>
<td>1,820.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>490.0</td>
<td>1,287.0</td>
<td>1,777.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>450.0</td>
<td>1,300.0</td>
<td>1,750.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>411.6</td>
<td>1,289.4</td>
<td>1,701.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there has been a precedent for the U.S. decreasing aid to Egypt on the basis of sectarian issues, as was the case when President Bush turned down a proposal for $134 million in additional economic aid to Egypt in 2002,\(^45\) in response to Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s imprisonment,\(^46\) the IRF reports have had little to no bearing on determining aid to Egypt. The inability of the IRF reports to impact aid is, perhaps, most apparent in the $695 million in economic aid granted to Egypt in 2001 following the massacre of 21 Copts at al-Kush in January of 2000. The IRF report released after the massacre, which remains the most infamous act of sectarian violence involving Copts and Muslims in Egypt’s modern history, praised the Egyptian government’s response to the event. Mubarak’s arrest of 135 culprits was even noted under the 2001 report’s “Noteworthy Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom” section.\(^47\) It was not until years later, when 92 of the 96 alleged perpetrators were acquitted in criminal court, that the IRF reports directly accused Mubarak’s regime of failing “to bring to justice those responsible for the murder of the 21 Christians.”\(^48\) The massacre at al-Kush had transformed from a promising checkmark on the Egyptian government’s resume to a definitive minus; what
once was considered a sign of “noteworthy improvement” had become a “heinous crime.”

Despite the IRF reports harsh critique of the Egyptian regime, those responsible for the rendering the publication refrained from pursuing other avenues to hold the Egyptian government accountable for their negligence in the handling of the al-Kush massacre.

Posing for pictures with Meunier was one thing, but jeopardizing one’s political career by denouncing Mubarak was another. The willingness of politicians to raise questions regarding the treatment of Copts in Egypt’s ‘atmosphere of intolerance,’ but discomfort with actually following through on the IRF reports’ findings, is clearly captured in an exchange between Congressman Joseph Pitts (Pa.) and John Hanford, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, at a 2002 congress hearing. When Pitts questioned Hanford as to whether President Bush had responded to the killings of Copts at al-Kush, the ambassador replied:

**Michael Meunier with Congressman Joseph Pitts, Senator Arlen Spectar, and Senator Donald Nickles (Left to Right)**
I am searching the recesses of my memory right now in terms of what President Bush has done on this, and I seem to recall something, but I need to get back to you on this.\footnote{51}

Following Hanford’s ambiguous response, which remained unresolved, Pitts dropped his line of questioning and the hearing seamlessly shifted its focus to systematic torture in Burma.

As a key player in the Arab-Israeli peace process and a pillar of stability in the turbulent Middle East, Egypt shares a strong alliance with the United States. A relationship that, in the words of Middle East expert Elliot Abrams, leads to the U.S. “sharing solidarity with Mubarak…rather than those sitting in his prisons.”\footnote{52} And while the IRF reports may “embarrass governments, feed press stories…[and] help NGOs act on certain issues,” any changes on the ground are, as the former Chairman of the IRF Commission admits, “mostly at the margins.”\footnote{53} Therefore, it is clear that political relations take precedence over Egypt’s treatment of its Coptic minority. The ‘politics of aid’ have come to epitomize realpolitik, or the preservation of political power over what is considered to be ‘moral’ and ‘just.’ To the disappointment of the Coptic Lobby, and Meunier in particular, the IRF reports that had vowed to protect the Egyptian minority on paper, had failed to do so in practice.

Conclusions:

After exploring the ways in which the Internet has revolutionized the concepts of nation, citizenship, and diaspora, as well as the avenues taken by the Coptic virtual space to represent their homeland coreligionists from abroad, in the cybersphere and public arena, a number of key questions remain unanswered. Is the Coptic digital diaspora
capable of redefining the religious minority via the Internet, or will the Coptic Orthodox Church continue to determine what being a Copt means? Likewise, will the Coptic cyber community be able to effect political change in the homeland, or will the new long-distance nationalists fail to better the lives of their Christian brethren? And if change is possible, will Copts accept being represented as a powerless minority by coreligionists abroad, or will they assert their own agency in determining the perimeters of their identity? Also, what is the dynamic between Coptic and Muslim compatriots online?\textsuperscript{54}

Praised by many for presenting a powerful new forum to discuss solutions to persecution and to challenge preconceptions of the citizen and the state, the Coptic cyber community has been deemed by others as distant from the homeland and unable to mobilize the masses. Nevertheless, iCopts challenge Anderson’s definition of long-distance nationalists as intrusive heroes,\textsuperscript{55} or who Dereje Feyissa, an Ethiopian scholar, frames as the ‘good guys’.\textsuperscript{56} Blurring the binaries of activist and intruder, here and there, Egyptian and expatriate, the fact remains that the iCopts are here to stay, and will continue to engage and empower all those who dare to dial into the Internet.
Notes:

1. Despite the fact that the public sphere, as defined by Jurgen Habermas, is traditionally associated with the state, this new public sphere, created by the Internet, should be viewed as a forum removed from the state.

2. It should also be noted that digital diasporas have relegated some religious minorities to the status of cyber minorities in relation to their dominant online compatriots.


5. Ibid, 6.


8. It is interesting to note that this quotation appears at the top of the “About Us” section on *The Free Copts’* website: http://freecopts.net/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=73 (accessed November 16, 2009).


10. Ibid, 34.


12. Ibid, 236.


Youssef neither substantiates this figure nor provides a source.


Ibid, 156.


I derived the term “iCopts” from Gary Bunt’s *Muslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), which maps the activities of Muslims across the cybersphere.

The iCopts, as virtual citizens invested in speaking for their coreligionists in the homeland, stand apart from the causal Internet user, as described by Roger Cohen in “The Narcissus Society.” In his editorial, which appeared in the *New York Times* on February 22, 2010, Cohen argues that the Internet is a place of “frenzied individualism, solipsistic screen-gazing [and] the disembodied pleasures of social networking.”

These statistics are from the interviews I conducted from June-July in Cairo, Egypt in 2009. All references to these interviews will henceforth be marked as “Personal Communication.”

Personal communication; George; interview #5.


http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6916192.ece (accessed November 17, 2009).


Personal communication; Silvana; interview #21.
Personal communication; Karim; interview #22.

Personal communication; Abigail; interview #27.

Tadros, “Vicissitudes in the Entente between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State in Egypt (1952-2007),” 271.

Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, “Copts: Fully Egyptian, but for a Tattoo?”, 34.

Personal communication; Shady; interview #29.


Ibid.


For a complete discussion of this incident, see: Paul Rowe’s: “Four Guys and a Fax Machine? Diasporas, New Information Technologies, and the Internationalization of Religion in Egypt,” (Journal of Church and State 1, 2001), 81-92.

See the summary of this article on the Arab-West Report (AWR): http://www.arabwestreport.info/awr/article_details.php?article_id=24148&ayear=2009&aweek=49&article_title=Coptic%20expatriates%20declare%20war%20on%20Egypt&article_t_date=03-12-2009&article_p_date=2009-12-03&article_p_week=2009-12-09&t=s (accessed February 10, 2010).


44 Ibid, 36.


46 Ibrahim, the founder and chairman of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies (ICDS) and a professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo (AUC), was charged by the Egyptian authorities for damaging Egypt’s image abroad, accepting funding for a “fictitious” project, and failing to declare a foreign aid donation. Ibrahim had also written a very critical article on Coptic persecution, “The Copts of Egypt” (1996). Following his release on March 18, 2003, Ibrahim became an avid contributor to several websites maintained by the ICopts.


49 *Annual Report of The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 107th Cong., Sess. 1 (2001)(Statement of Tom Lantos).* Lantos was the ranking Democratic member of the Committee on International Relations at the time.


The tension and relations between Muslims and Christians within the Egyptian cybersphere is an area of study that has received little attention and deserves to be further explored. Whereas Copts and Muslims clash on the ground in Egypt, cyber minorities and majorities have transformed the Internet into a new, virtual battleground.


In *Setting a Social Reform Agenda in the Homeland* (unpublished work), Feyissa notes the positive influence of Ethiopian Muslims in diaspora: “A closer examination of their moderate long distance religious nationalism also challenges the indiscriminate labeling of the diaspora as ‘intransigent’ and conflict actors. The discursive activities as well as practical involvement of the Ethiopian Muslims in the homeland’s rights movement contribute to peace building in many ways” (10).
Conclusion:

Coptic-Muslim relations are often portrayed in black-and-white binaries. The Copts are the oppressed minority, whereas the Muslims are the aggressive majority; the Copts are practitioners of a subservient faith, while the Muslims are followers of a superior doctrine; the Copts are loyal to the cross rather than the nation-state, and only the Muslims are fit to rule in a country where Islam is the official religion. These highly problematic discourses have been traced and critiqued throughout three major narratives: polemics in popular culture, the British policy of “define and conquer,” and the efforts of iCopts to engage and empower their coreligionists from abroad. The struggles to define the Copts and their relations with Muslims as either this or that and the consequences of this rhetoric, however, are not confined to solely narratives – they also extend to numbers, which tell a similar story of divergence and difference. In an effort to contextualize the many dimensions of Coptic-Muslim relations addressed in this thesis, one needs to return to the censuses conducted by the British colonizers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Compatriots to Conscripts

During colonial rule in Egypt (1882-1922), one of the many ways the British projected their authority was census taking. The Census Executive in the Ministry of the Interior conducted the first census in May of 1882. According to the census, there were three types of people living in Egypt: settled Egyptians (Égyptiens fixes), Bedouin Egyptians (Égyptiens Bédouins), and foreigners (Étrangers). These groups were classified on the basis of six categories: sex, nationality, age, primary education,
profession and religion. By enforcing this rigid topology, the British transformed compatriots into conscripts of the census. Regarding religion, Copts and Muslims may have objected to being classified as crosses and crescents but could not escape the census’ conclusions.

Therefore, the British not only had the desire to divide Copts and Muslims, but also the instruments to make this division a reality. The censuses, which were subsequently conducted in 1897, 1907, and 1917, bolstered a majority-minority discourse that is still in effect today. In terms of these early censuses, Copts and Muslims were framed as being fundamentally different from one another. After conducting extensive and meticulous polls, the British asserted that there were two nations under their rule: the Copts and the Muslims. This delineation, based on quantitative data, is perhaps most evident in a table appearing in the 1917 census.

This table emerges in Chapter II of the census, “Nationalities,” and accounts for all subjects of British rule. The nationalities of the colonized line the top of the table, while their numbers are recorded in the columns below. Impressive for its statistical

![District Table of Nationality and Race](image)

The “District table of nationality and race,” as it appeared in the 1917 census administered by the British. 2
breakdown, the table is particularly noteworthy for its division of “Egyptians” into “Moslem” and “Non-Moslem.” Only the Egyptian nationality is split on the basis of religion – the other groupings remain indivisible wholes. Released two years prior to the 1919 revolution and in the aftermath of the Dinshaway incident (1906), and Coptic and Muslim conferences (1911), the census sought to sever Egyptian solidarity and serves as visual evidence of Britain’s attempts to break the bonds of unity forming between Copts and Muslims.

**Competing Actors and Predatory Identities**

In addition to framing the compatriots as fundamentally different subjects, the censuses portrayed Copts and Muslims as competing actors. At the time, Egyptians were more likely concerned with throwing off the yolk of British colonialism than a demographic war, but population politics were an integral part of extending colonial rule. The politics surrounding populations surface in several of the tables and figures found in the censuses. For example, in the 1907 census, the British drew tables calculating the growth of Muslims vis-à-vis the Copts (see appendix 1). In the same census under the chapter “Religion and Sect,” the British displayed a map “Showing Distribution of Copts” across Egypt (see appendix 2). According to the statistics, from 1897 to 1907, the Coptic population grew from 609,511 (6.25%) to 706,322 (6.31%), whereas the Muslim majority increased from 8,992,203 (92.2%) to 10,269,445 (91.8%). These statistics were not innocent observations, they played into Coptic and Muslim fears that the other was gaining in strength.
Although Muslims remained the considerable majority to the small Coptic minority in the early 20th century, the British sought to convince the former that the Copts posed a threat. In order to understand some Muslims’ fears that the Copts, Egyptians of the “non-Moslem” stock, could potentially challenge their majority status, one needs to revisit Appadurai. When addressing the majority’s concerns that the minority may take their place, Appadurai writes:

majorities can always be mobilized to think that they are in danger of becoming minor (culturally or numerically) and to fear that minorities, conversely, can easily become major.\textsuperscript{5}

The uncertainties raised by minorities, whether due doctrinal, generational, or class-based differences, may result in the majority’s predatory identity\textsuperscript{6} being activated. By representing the Copts and Muslims as numbers, the British reduced their subjects’ complex identities to a single dimension and mobilized the Coptic minority against the Muslim majority, and vice versa.

**Narratives to Numbers**

Britain’s imperial ideology serves as a prelude to the efforts of others to represent Copts and their relations with Muslims in 21st century. Although the political landscape in Egypt has changed, visible markers of the compatriots’ differences remain. Once divided into columns and rows on British censuses, Copts and Muslims are forced to carry national IDs that prominently display their religious affiliations for all to see in modern Egypt. Moreover, in the age of the Internet, where reports of sectarian violence in the Egyptian countryside are uploaded to the World Wide Web in a matter of minutes, there is an even greater likelihood that outside actors will continually portray the
compatriots’ relations in problematic lights. With so many actors striving to represent the compatriots as compatible or clashing neighbors, the degree to which Copts and Muslims on-the-ground are allowed to define their relations is limited. Only by intertwining these narratives and unveiling the polemical pitfalls that line Coptic-Muslim discourse will a greater understanding of the Copts and their relations with Muslims be possible.
Notes:


Appendix 1:

**TABLE XVI.**—Relative growth of Musulmans and Copts since 1897.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF MUDERRIS</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1907</th>
<th>Variation per 1000 + or -</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1907</th>
<th>Variation per 2000 + or -</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MUSULMANS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governorates*</td>
<td>830,430</td>
<td>839,271</td>
<td></td>
<td>33,092</td>
<td>49,835</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beheira</td>
<td>626,506</td>
<td>780,508</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,009</td>
<td>10,453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daqahlia</td>
<td>1,760,673</td>
<td>890,625</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>15,584</td>
<td>17,271</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gharkia</td>
<td>1,273,073</td>
<td>1,416,512</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>18,482</td>
<td>21,041</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menfis</td>
<td>836,548</td>
<td>940,500</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>26,589</td>
<td>28,878</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qaliubia</td>
<td>362,932</td>
<td>434,843</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>7,803</td>
<td>8,703</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharqia</td>
<td>733,134</td>
<td>860,568</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>14,042</td>
<td>15,869</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assiut</td>
<td>611,574</td>
<td>707,263</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>170,662</td>
<td>194,955</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuan*</td>
<td>235,287</td>
<td>227,018</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,069</td>
<td>5,291</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beni Suef.*</td>
<td>294,191</td>
<td>351,635</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>19,913</td>
<td>20,139</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COPTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girshe</td>
<td>575,306</td>
<td>664,877</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17,548</td>
<td>127,641</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giza</td>
<td>380,177</td>
<td>444,376</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>11,030</td>
<td>11,920</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minia</td>
<td>453,867</td>
<td>544,403</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>94,088</td>
<td>114,748</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qena</td>
<td>657,022</td>
<td>713,181</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>58,777</td>
<td>58,653</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>8,992,303</td>
<td>10,289,445</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>609,511</td>
<td>706,322</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2:

Map Key:

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Map
Showing Distribution of Copts.

Markazes in which the Number of Copts per thousand of The population.

Was 130 and over
.. From 50 to 129
   .. 20 .. 49
   .. 0 .. 19

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