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The 'Minority Question in Egypt' and the Bounds of Nationalism: Testing the Limits of the Nation

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Introduction

The events of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 are perhaps one of the few moments in contemporary Egyptian history where there was such an effort to break with the past and perform a rupture of time. Gone were the days of 'authoritarianism'; syndicates, newspapers and other spaces of the public were relatively opened up, access to streets and protests – though of course contested – became significantly easier.¹ Though these few measures were not linked to this rupture of time, they were often used as an embryonic idea, if bastions of 'authoritarianism' could be opened up – universities could now have department heads and deans elected, opposition members could appear on TV – then why couldn't this 'gain' be extended? Indeed, there was an unspoken understanding that these relative gains could be historicized by each member of society who approved of the revolution. These 'lists' of gains were wide topics of discussions; even inside Churches. If every member of society in his/her community could do this, then they could perform this 'rupture' and convince people to embrace the revolution and each do their part if so to speak.

Indeed after a very uneasy 18 days from January 25th- February the 11th, Copts at the Coptic Orthodox Church of *mari murqus* (St Marcos) in Heliopolis gathered on February 11th for an extended meeting for servants, these were young individuals of the *mari murqus* community who chose to 'serve' by a host of activities including being Sunday School teachers, helping the needy running support activities for the Church's wide range of Sunday School classes by being part of the illustrative media team or the newly founded and exciting 'Sports Team'.

¹ While indeed any observer and participant in the tumultuous 18 days - between the initial protests of January 25th, 2011 and the abdication of Mubarak on February 11th 2011 - and its follow up of events in 2011 may confirm this observation, and the observations here are my own as a participant observer, Hani Shukrallah has captured this sentiment well in the introduction to the book Hani Shukrallah *Egypt, the Arabs, and the World*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011.

These were all called families, *usar* (singular: *usra*). This extended meeting happened every week on a Friday in which all *usar* meet in the physical building of the 'Church' before its altar, the very juridical category of the 'Church' had extended from the conventional understanding of benches before an altar and under a dome where mass was held – typical of Coptic tradition and architecture to convey a feeling of entering heaven by an elevation of stairs and the altar facing East; the direction Christ ascended – into all buildings surrounding the Church. This included *mari murqus* vast network of classrooms, the courtyard where football was played, its summer club where video games and films were screened, as well as its hospital complex consisting of clinics, scanning equipment, endoscopes and other high-tech medical equipment. *Mari murqus* occupied a special, and often controversial place in the Coptic Church; it had no bishop to oversee it and was not part of a bishopric. Thus, its extended meeting, *ijtima' al-khidma al 'am*, shortened to *ijtima' al-khidma*, was a large gathering where all different families prayed together and discussed issues affecting all *usar* alongside with its clergy, no further hierarchy existed except the Pope who had a special place for *mari murqus* but left it alone.

As the meeting was set to begin, most had just received news of Mubarak's removal from power. Despite the curfew and the ongoing events, or perhaps because of it, attendance was normal. The *ijtima' 'am's* length was shortened to allow for a brief prayer and a word by *mari murqus'* oldest priest, the follow up *usar* meetings were cancelled. This was so that the army-imposed curfew not be broken. The Priest started out by saying a new era would start after Mubarak's overthrow, and it would be characterized by uncertainty. Egypt had been home to several revolutions, more recent was the 1952 revolution but even older was the 1919 revolution he claimed. It is now the job of each individual to pray for Copts. Beyond that there was no elaboration, with no police outside the big Church, not even the usual Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) outside, attendance was still high but an uneasy feeling spread. On the way to the Church, two major streets intersected with it, *salah salem*, one of Cairo's main traffic arteries named after the Free Officer of the 1952 revolution, and *shari' al-thawra*, literally translating as 'the revolution' street. Several cars were celebrating, and despite the priest's consoling words, couched in the usual call for prayer, I could not shake off his remark about uncertainty compared to the jubilation I witnessed in Tahrir Square that day along with my father after a huge fight over the ongoing events. Eventually the fight resolved when he came and saw for himself the square.

This anecdote forms the basis of this paper's argument, that the issue of time, and the performativity of a new temporality, is what was constitutive of Copts' subjectivity since the events of 2011, the very representations of what happened all seem to intersect and agree on this one issue: new time and a rupture with the past. This lens allows us to capture several polyvalent notions and representations, clearly for some revolutionaries this new 'era' – in fact the dominant representation for much of the beginning of 2011 – was to usher in greatness. Yet this same new era was cautiously approached by the Priest in *mari murqus* and

some of his flock who while one cannot know what all their views were – and should not group all of them in the camp of those against the events of February 11th, 2011– had chosen to come in for the *ijtima' am* rather than celebrate. Thus the issue of time – and a rupture with the past – would seem to come up and be deployed differently by different actors, some like those celebrating were looking forward and in fact believed a new era would be ushered in; implicitly implying it would be a better era. As for the Priest who adopted a more of 'wait and see' approach, this was more complicated in that the rupture implied was deployed alongside previous milestones in Egyptian history such as 1952 and 1919.

By exploring the issue of time and the rupture with the past, this paper aims to provide a diachronic analysis of the 2011-2015 period and how Coptic subjectivity was molded with respect to different national actors. Often the very claim of a new era and time was meant as a tactic to escape the dogma of nationalism on the one hand and exceptionalism – the claim that discrimination against Copts is hardwired into Egyptians by virtue of Islamic extremism, foreign plots or what have you – on the other hand. But that is all that it was, a claim that aimed to perform this rupture with the past, a rupture with nationalism and a rupture with exceptionalism, without recourse to material acts or new forms of solidarity to escape nation centric and state centric epistemology.

Thus, often the very activists hoping to break with the past and authoritarianism's deployment of nationalism would shoulder grievances against Copts in 2011 as a 'holdover of the past' when they showed hesitation similar to that of the priest on February 11th, 2011. Often this hesitation would be attributed to years of 'authoritarianism', making their case of 'breaking with the past' all the more appealing. Yet this fascination with authoritarianism and a rupture with the past became so obsessive that it ended up rehashing nationalism and exceptionalism, shutting out Copts further. Hesitation towards the constitutional declaration referendum of March 2011, parliamentary elections, the outrage over the appointment of a Christian governor in Qena and his eventual removal and other events in the year of 2011 would always earn the frustration of activists and politicians who would attribute it to years of authoritarianism and that heritage. It became common for people to have a knee-jerk reaction whenever anyone questioned what was happening after 2011 by saying "*ihna fi sana ula thawra*", "we are [only] first years in the revolution." Even distinguished intellectuals such as Galal Amin trafficked in this explanation with a very elaborate allegory in an opinion piece titled "the January 25th revolution: a short story."

Amin described Egypt as a beautiful old palace inherited by an individual who once had rich ancestors. As this individual faced difficulty he rented out some parts of the palace. These new tenants proceeded to split up the palace further and different people occupied it. "Islamists" in one room, "Copts in another", occupied each room as the palace run amuck. Eventually the King of the land decreed there must be an end to this and he seizes the palace,

its inhabitants coming out for the first time to see their fellow neighbors.² This allegory is the perfect example of the idea that after 2011 a rupture occurred whereby any and all problems, protests, attacks on Churches and clearing of protests was always blamed on a society plagued by the lack of democracy. Such a rupture is also performed nostalgically by looking back at those 18 days, romanticizing Tahrir Square as a utopia that can be replicated. This is where the 'Tahrir Square' thesis or 'Republic of Tahrir' idea comes in.³ Thus the past is evoked dually, by looking back at its ills of nationalism and exceptionalism and hoping to break away from it, and looking back at the 18 days of the Egyptian uprising in 2011 nostalgically hoping to replicate them.

The risk to diachronic analysis of the 2011-2015 period is that it can be ahistorical and reproduce a focus of the period under study by neglecting periods before it. This will be accounted for by attempting to narrate the 2011-2015 period not just diachronically – rather than break it up into these taken for granted ruptures such as the break between June 30th of 2013 and the preceding era marked by January 25th, 2011–⁴ but by doing a history of the present where the effects of national discourse have a historical continuity with the period before 2011. For this I turn to not just the facets of the period preceding 2011, and the binary of nationalism and exceptionalism, but what I argue is one of the most important moments that exemplified this: the minority conference organized by Egyptian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in May of 1994.

Theoretical Framework: The Minority Conference of 1994 as a Genealogy

A storm was brewing in the May of Cairo in 1994 as Saad al-Din Ibrahim, in his capacity as founder of the Ibn Khaldun center, attempted to host a conference on minorities in the Middle East. By focusing in on this one issue a 'history of the present'⁵ can be reconstructed

² Galal Amin, "thawrat 25 yanayir: qisa qasira," *al shorouk*, May 6, 2011.

³ Though this is not the idea of Larbi Sadiki, he is correct to pinpoint this theorization which has its origins in local Egyptian intellectuals and laymen. See Larbi Sadiki, "January 25 and the Republic of Tahrir," *Al Jazeera English*, January 25, 2012, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/20121259355661345.html>>, accessed October 13, 2015. This representation is also the same liberal and mistaken representation that continues to celebrate the events of January 25th via the cliché of 'Muslims prayed while Christians protected them'. Thus, Christians' agency is always brought up in this celebratory manner as an inter-faith display of coexistence, not when Christians were in danger in subsequent events. For a critique of this representation of Christians' role in the 2011 Egyptian uprising see Karim Malak, Sara Salem, "Reorientalizing the Middle East: The Power Agenda Setting the Post-Arab Uprisings," *Middle East Theory and Arguments*, Volume: 4, Issue: 1, 2015, 93-109.

⁴ Indeed, there is an argument to be made, one not addressed here, that January 25th, 2011 does not in and of itself mark the correct milestone for this change, but rather it lies in the events of Tunisia in December 17 2010.

⁵ The phrase 'history of the present' and its comparison to the task of an archaeology is taken from Michel Foucault. Foucault emphasized Nietzsche's contribution in not taking easily deployed theories that can explain continuities, synchronic explanations that categorize history into epochs and the writing of history with a focus on the past. To do a history of the present one must start from the present, work backwards and problematize taken for granted periodizations and explanations to see what their limits are and how they themselves were

in which we see a focal point that mobilized national unity discourse as well as exceptionalism. Thus, this conference shows the origins of the discourse of nationalism and exceptionalism, and through this contemporary event, a host of other histories that date back as far as Egypt's colonial experience can be discussed. This analysis allows for a historical approach that keeps the prime lens, the issue of time and rupture in the period of 2011-2015, in place while exploring the genealogy of this discourse without losing focus of the present contemporary period under discussion. It is for this reason that the conference is rendered as a key moment for Copts and the question of their 'minority' status.⁶ This conference is narrated using archival material from the 1990s from newspapers, journals and statements as well as academic literature. As for the 2011-2015 period, newspapers, journals and statements are also used as well as ethnographic field research that involved participant observation at the site of one Church with follow-up interviews conducted with lay and clerical individuals.

This conference created a firestorm of newspaper articles, statements and other expressions of deep emotions so much so that the conference was moved from Cairo to Cyprus. Through the conference a host of characters came that include Lebanese Christians, Christians in Sudan and Kurds. Reminiscent of late President Anwar el Sadat's accusation on the 5th of September 1981 that Copts were scheming with the Lebanese Christian Phalange militia to create a Christian state in Upper Egypt,⁷ the conference soon began to elicit the same type of nationalism, the presence of Christian Lebanese and Christian Sudanese participants calling for a separate state compounded this further.

The very decision by Sadat to question the Church's nationalist credentials in 1981 would seem to have deep resonance not only with those he courted – too much so that they resulted in assassinating him – but specifically because he knew the extent to which the Church was revered as part of the Egyptian nation. It would also not be the only time where the Church's nationalist credentials were questioned, but they do mark a formative moment as such.

By accusing it of being in bed with a Zionist militia Sadat knew this would be enough to haunt the Church for the conceivable future, it was also payback for when Pope Shenouda III sent 400 Copts to the site of a Church destroyed in al-Khanka after the President refused to investigate, causing Sadat much embarrassment. Some have mistakenly chosen to dismiss Sadat's address before parliament on the 5th of September 1981 in which he accused the Church of seeking a separate state in Upper Egypt, arguing that these accusations traffic in

formed. For more see Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Rainbow P. (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, 1984, 76-100.

⁶ For an insightful discussion of the value laden term 'minority' and its resonance with the imperial US agenda, albeit a discussion that is not rooted in Egypt's historical specificity and its history of the present see Saba Mahmood, Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 54, Number: 2, 2012 418-446.

⁷ Sanaa Hassan, *Christian versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century Long Struggle for Coptic Equality*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 116

“absurdity”.⁸ Be that as it may, this would not be the only time such an accusation was made and it would find resonance with individuals such as 2012 presidential candidate Selim el-Awa who accused the Coptic Church of harboring weapons. But this accusation, the invitation and relationship between imperial powers and minorities, would appear in a different and more contemporary way, for this I return to the Ibn Khaldun Center’s Minority Conference of May 1994.

As invitations for the minority conference of the Middle East were sent out by the head of the Ibn Khaldun center Saad al-Din Ibrahim, he soon found steep opposition to the conference. Before the security apparatus intervened, a brief window allowed for participants to voice their concerns before it seemed settled that no venue would accept to host the conference. In this moment, Ibrahim sent a letter to the pope to clarify the stance of the Ibn Khaldun Center and the conference with respect to the Copts, saying that he does not consider them a minority but a part of the fabric of the nation . . . and that the intention was to discuss the concerns of the Copts.⁹

Pope Shenouda III, in response to the statement issued his famous phrase in which he asserted that he “likes neither that the Copts think of themselves as minority nor that anyone would call them a minority.”¹⁰ It was at this moment that organizers of the conference decided to act. The Ibn Khaldun center moved ahead by issuing a statement cancelling the one-line item on the conference’s agenda of a discussion of Copts. This level of detail, and how the minority conference organized by an Egyptian CSO decided not to discuss the so-called ‘minority’ question in Egypt, but discuss almost every other ‘minority’ in the region, attests to the importance of doing a history of the present and how these events occurred rather than narrate that the conference did not discuss the question of Copts altogether.

A closed session was held to discuss Copts in an unofficial matter in the conference and a follow up workshop on Copts was held in the Ibn Khaldun conference back in Cairo. In the details of how Copts were on the agenda of the minority conference but removed after the Pope’s statement as the organizers attempted to alleviate Copts’ fears and the Church’s fears, one gets an understanding of this whole affair fanned out. In fact, as a result of this exchange the conference asserted its ‘national’ presence by making sure that only Egyptians and Arab chair all workshops after previously opening the floor to all participants to being able to chair sessions.

⁸ Sanaa Hassan, *Christian versus Muslims*, New York, 2013, 116.

⁹ Quoted in Peter Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim relations in Contemporary Egypt*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007, 164, quoted in Adel Hammouda, "Al-Aqbat fi Misr." *Rosa al-Yusif*, May 2, 1994, 16.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Seizing the opportunity, others likewise joined in and denounced the idea of the conference. Adel Hammouda wrote “there are no differences between Copts and Muslims.” He even quoted Lord Cromer’s famous description of Copts in volume II of *Modern Egypt* with the correct page number of 203 stating that “the Copt has become from the tip of his head to the bottom of his feet, in his customs and language and spirit entirely like a Muslim.”¹¹ Hammouda must have been referring to Cromer’s description of Copts that stated, “The modern Copt has become from head to toe, in manners, language, and spirit, a Moslem [sic].” Hammouda’s citation of Cromer however omitted the last 10 words that directly followed, drastically changing the meaning intended, for Cromer had added that indeed the Copt became indistinguishable from the Muslim “however unwilling he may be to recognize that fact.”¹² Taken as a whole Cromer was decrying the degeneracy of Copts becoming like Muslims, true to his Christian bias of believing they were of a higher order.

Hammouda went on and cited Makram Ebeid, a Coptic nationalist leader of the Wafd party. He asserted Ebeid’s famous quote “I am a Muslim when it comes to the nation and a Copt when it comes to my religion.”¹³ Hammouda in his article cites also Mostafa al-Fiqqi, someone who wrote his PhD dissertation on the history of Copts and an interesting regime affiliated figure who will figure in this study yet again in the period of June 30th, 2013. Hammouda cites al-Fiqqi’s dissertation in which he argued that Copts were among the first to resist the Crusades and that they fought alongside their Muslim leaders. Hammouda’s article can thus be categorized as a deeply nationalist, and to the naïve observer an anti-colonial nationalist article that buffed Copts’ anti-colonial nationalist credentials. This is deployed alongside the denunciation of the minority conference to assert the Coptic Church’s long fight against colonialism in its various forms. After citing Copts’ decision to serve in the army in 1866 and their fight against missionaries under Ottoman ruler Selim I, Hammouda concludes his article by saying that “there is no use hiding behind academic research [to further a foreign agenda] ...there is no use claiming good intentions, for sectarianism, separation and civil war start out with good intentions.”¹⁴

Some Copts shared this sense of anti-colonial nationalism as well. Former State Council Judge William Qallada likewise denounced the conference and its packaging as an academic inquiry. He stated, “This cannot be considered intellectual activity, but rather political activity in the detailed sense.” Giving his own history lesson like Hammouda he argued “the conference is planning for outside intervention, this time under the guise of minority protection... It is rather odd for the conference organizers to ignore the fact that Britain tried over 90 years ago to stay in Egypt under the guise of protecting minorities”. Referencing the terms of the 1922 unilateral declaration of Egyptian independence, and it being conditional on Britain’s

¹¹ Adel Hammouda, "Al-Aqbat fi Misr." *Rosa al-Yusif*, May 2, 1994, 15.

¹² The Early of Cromer, *Modern Egypt Volume II*, London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1908, 203.

¹³ Adel Hammouda, "Al-Aqbat fi Misr." *Rosa al-Yusif*, May 2, 1994, 15

¹⁴ Ibid.

protection of minorities in Egypt – among other provisions such as imperial communications such as the Suez Canal, the defense of Egypt by Great Britain against foreign aggressors and the Sudan question – Qallada further adds “[B]ut Egyptians, all of them with Copts taking the lead – rejected this leading to Britain forcibly withdrawing in a written document to the Egyptian Prime Minister in 1929.”¹⁵ Yet again it seemed that in addition to Hammouda and El Fiqqi, a distinguished Copt was also utilizing anti-colonial nationalism, quite accurately as well. But this particular use of it by a Copt would be drowned out as the debate entered a new stage when heavyweight journalist and former confidant to Gamal Abdel-Nasser – Mohamed Hasanein Heikal – weighed in on the debate.

Saad Al-Din Ibrahim had invited Heikal to the conference proceedings. Heikal immediately declined and made his opinion known to all in an opinion editorial that was to be written in Al-Wafd newspaper but pulled last minute – because of the Wafd party’s leadership that opposed publishing such a staunch supporter and member of the Nasserite regime (Heikal was quick to point out in his reply the contradiction in the self-proclaimed liberal party’s position),¹⁶ the opinion editorial appeared instead in *al ahram*. After an introduction in which Heikal pointed to the organizers’ good intentions he proceeded to cite, yet again, word for word Hammouda’s citation with the same omission of Lord Cromer. This was the same word for word citation on the indistinguishable features of the Copt and Muslim. Astonishingly yet again, Makraim Ebeid’s famous sentence that he was a Muslim national but a Copt when it comes to his religion also appeared. The more likely culprit of plagiarism is Hammouda considering that Heikal’s argument appeared on the 22nd of April 1994 when Hammouda’s appeared on the 2nd of May 1994. Heikal went further and cited how Ahmed Uraby’s aborted revolt was backed by Azhar Sheikhs and the Coptic clergy.

Thus, it would the influence of anti-colonial nationalism would seem to be a formative element among these individuals and perhaps beyond. Ibrahim would respond to the overall argument that Copts are not minority at great sociological detail, that it is not only about race or religion but other imagined traits perhaps a muted reference to Benedict Anderson. Ibrahim would also rebut that being a minority does not take away from one’s nationalism and claim to citizenship. Yet Ibrahim ultimately conceded to the dangers of the classification of the minority, if still framing it within the UN’s effort in 1993/4 to push for increased protection of ‘minorities’. The UN’s sub-commission on the prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities agreed in 1990 to invite its Norwegian expert member to explore the ways of strengthening the protection of minorities. This would culminate in meetings in 1993 in the UN Center for Human Rights in Geneva.¹⁷ The UN thus continued to push for more

¹⁵ Mohamed Allam, “mu’tamar al-aqliyyat fi al-qahira yuthir ‘asifa w hamla itihat w yaftah malaf al-tamwil al-ajnbay,” *al-hayat*, May 2, 1994; Mohamed Hasanyin Heikal, “aqbat misr laysu aqliyya w inma guz’ min al-kutla al-hadariyya lil-sha’b al-misry,” *al ahram*, April 22, 1994.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For more on these efforts by the UN see <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/none/minorities-and-un>

member states and CSOs to embrace this framework. Heikal would disapprove of this framing and the use of former Coptic Foreign Minister and former Secretary General of the UN Boutros Boutros Ghali. Heikal seemed to have done his homework and categorically dismissed all of the conference's claims, efforts to use international figures as well as Copts.

Yet this would not come without a twist, for exactly ten years later in 2004 when Adel Hammouda would republish Heikal's article on March 22nd in 2004. As a result, Ibrahim accused Hammouda of not only conveniently saying that those who propagate the 'Coptic Question' are traitors to the nation, but that Hammouda was the agent of state security. For the timing was close to after Ibrahim was released from jail and as he was due to resuming his activities with the Ibn Khaldun center. This was detailed in a preface to a yearly report that had stopped with the arrest of Ibrahim about the Arab World's minorities.¹⁸ Ibrahim further elaborated that this was an attempt to hide the regime's own mistakes and Copts' grievances as a result of the rise in violence against them by using nationalism.

This more recent mention of the Minority Conference in 2004, and the possibility that there was a truth to Ibrahim's claims that Copts had grievances, allows us to revisit those whose voices were drowned out in 1994. Among those was Ibrahim Eissa who had a small space in *Rusa al-Yusif* dedicated to challenging those who opposed the conference. Eissa agreed that moving it abroad was neither appropriate nor beneficial to Egypt's Copts or Egypt, but his recoil to that was that security services had themselves allowed this to happen in order to attack the conference when it was to be moved. He rebutted and said better for the conference to be held in Cairo and be open to the public so that any issues raised be dealt with swiftly and appropriately under the watchful eyes of Egyptians rather than foreigners. Eissa ended his small opinion piece questioning those who were bent on muffling freedom of expression and freedom in general in Egypt. This, while carefully nuanced, allowed for an articulation of a nationalist position that rejected foreign funding for such issues and its engagement with Western agendas, but still criticized those who prevent such dialogue.¹⁹ Eissa's overtones and issue with the lack of freedom, while accurate in the climate of 1994, seem to be unaware of the same un-freedoms in the West and the impossibility of expression of minority rights say to native Americans in the United States, thus with a slight shade of exceptionalism Eissa engaged in promoting the idea of the Egyptian state as suffering from a democracy deficit. Despite the tight space the editors of *Rusa al-Yusif* granted him, this double critique of the West's own lack of freedom towards its own community and marginalized groups as well as Egypt's would have been a searing critique that would hold against all.

For indeed the importance of this cannot be underscored, Coptic Egyptians who live outside Egypt attended the conference and called for the protection of Copts as a minority of the

¹⁸ Ibn Khaldun Center, *al-malal w al-nahl w al-a'raq: al-taqrir al-sanawy al-thamin*, Cairo: Ibn Khaldun, 2005.

¹⁹ Ibrahim Eissa, "utruquh fi al-qahira," *Rusa al-Yusif*, May 2, 1994, 17.

state of Egypt with respect to its obligations as enshrined in the UN Declaration of Minority Rights. Selim Naguib, head of the Canadian Coptic Organization did not attend but reiterated this claim in a paper sent to the conference. This bears in contrast to other Copts residing outside Egypt such as Nabil Abdel-Malek who refused this call. In fact, Abdel-Malek said that the West politicizes the 'Coptic Question', admitting that the violence against Copts is mistakenly portrayed in the West as the result of ideological day to day fighting between Christians and Muslims to make the West seem as if it is more 'civilized'. Thus, proponents of a 'minority' designation to Copts such as Selim Naguib hold on to the West as the standard of freedom through universal frameworks of protection as enshrined in the UN. Yet this phenomenon was not the opinion of the majority of Copts and was itself even more rare amongst Copts who attended or sent papers. This is to be contrasted with Abdel-Malek who admitted to the politicization and appropriation of violence against Copts as endemic to Muslim countries in the Middle East owing to 'Islamic fundamentalism'. These polyvalencies are important for they underscore the link of exceptionalism – Copts are the victims of 'Islamic ideological violence' - to the West and find resonance in the universalization of the category of 'minority'. It becomes beneficial to the West to pinpoint this 'radical fundamentalist ideology' through the strategic issue of the Coptic question. This is despite many objections from Copts and Muslims in Egypt as we have seen. It also underscores that even expatriate Copts are aware of this appropriation by the West and seek to consciously combat this representation as evidenced by Abdel-Malek.²⁰ Such an added dimension of analysis seems to be lacking in Talal Asad's analysis in which he claims:

Muslim suspicions of Coptic intentions are met by Coptic slogans of self-assertion ("We are the original owners of the land!"). Some Copts living in the United States have even publicly called for the West "to protect the Christians in Egypt" (see for example the US-based online newspaper Copts United <www.coptsunited.com>, especially the call by American Coptic leaders on October 30, 2010, to save the Christians of Egypt). This call has found a complicated reaction among Copts, most of whom have now come see themselves represented by the church, and it has facilitated Euro-American material and moral support for human rights organizations devoted to defending Copts as a "threatened minority."²¹

Thus, not all Copts traffic in these exceptionalist claims, Western universalizing frameworks of 'minority rights' and even these same expatriate Copts refused to attend the conference lest they be identified with Sudanese Christian separatists or Kurds for that matter. Discursively, articulation of grievances of Copts can and is made without a rejoinder to the West or the category of 'minority'. It would seem that even those who hold on to the mantle of the West as guarantor of "minority rights" such as Selim Naguib – and if anything, this conference is exemplary of the majority of Copts and Muslim Egyptians who have rejected

²⁰ Usama Salama, "sira'al-aqbat fi mu'tamar al-aqaliyyat," *Rusa al-Yusif*, May 23 1994.

²¹ Talal Asad, "Fear and the Ruptured State: Reflections on Egypt After Mubarak," *Social Research*, Volume: 79, Number: 2, 2012, 283.

this – they refused to attend like the vast majority of other Copts but sent in papers to outline their position. Thus, one can detect a nationalist facet even among expatriate Copts such as Abdel-Malik who are bent on showing the West’s own appropriation of Christians in the Arab world as ‘minorities’ that deserve their protection. After all, much to the chagrin of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Copts continually snubbed ‘fact finding missions’ by the commission hoping to find any resonance with the Coptic community that could be used.²² But how do others *inside* the Arab world appropriate this anti-imperial nationalism?

Aside from Hammouda’s appropriation of Heikal to drown out all concerns by Copts, there is still the unanalyzed facet of naïve anti-colonial nationalism. It is naïve for this is regularly deployed by self-proclaimed Islamists in all their shades such as Fahmi Huwaidi, Tariq al-Bishri and others who as Saad al-Din Ibrahim has shown “have a double standard because they advocate for the defense of Muslim minorities and Arab minorities in more than 50 states such as Kashmir in India, Burma and Europe where as they do not care about the rights of minorities in the Arab world.”²³ This is not to second Ibrahim’s analysis but to point that such characters openly use minority frameworks for Muslims outside the Middle East but denounce those same frameworks and designations in the Arab world for Christians.²⁴ Thus even anti-colonial nationalism can at times be appropriated by these characters who seem to make its truth statement conditional only on its geography, namely for Muslim subjects residing outside the Arab world in non-majoritarian Muslim societies.

To conclude it is perhaps important to return to the present, specifically 2010. It would take Saad el-Din Ibrahim 10 years to reply to Heikal fully. In an opinion piece in Egypt’s widely read *al-masry al-Youm* Ibrahim admitted that Heikal’s article perhaps stung the most. Ibrahim concluded that his CSO continued to monitor the Arab and Egyptian press, arriving to the conclusion that more than 200 articles were written on the topic of the conference. He quite honestly concluded that 80% of these articles attacked the conference and “reiterated what Heikal said, ie denying Copts having any problems.” This is what prompted the state to move against the conference, forcing it to be moved to Cyprus in May of 1994. Yet Ibrahim seems to feel vindicated after Heikal claimed more than 10 years later on his program on Aljazeera titled “With Heikal” that the minority question is the most important challenge faced by the

²² An example of this was the refusal of many clergy, bishops and Coptic intellectuals to attend a reception hosted by the USCIRF at the US Embassy on March 22, 2001. Interview with Coptic Church official conducted on September 10, 2015.

²³ Mohamed Allam, “mu’tamar al-aqliyyat fi al-qahira yuthir ‘asifa w hamla itihat w yaftah malaf al-tamwil al-ajaby,” *al hayat*, May 2, 1994.

²⁴ Fahmi Huweidi for example has openly called for the attention to the plight of Muslim minorities in Europe yet in that same call he openly asked said minorities to respect the rule of law in Europe. He thus observes the rights framework of ‘minorities’ par excellence and fails to admit the contradictions of the politicization of the category of ‘minorities’. See Fahmy Huweidi, “al-aqliyyat al-muslima byn al-itsal w al-infisal,” *al-sharq al-awsat*, March 12, 2008.

Arab world in the 21st century.²⁵ Thus it would seem, irrespective of Copts' grievances, the persistence of the minority question is in fact almost helpful to a host set of actors who deploy exceptionalism or nationalism to their own cause. Hammouda and those linked to state security bodies rely on the honest anti-colonial nationalism of Heikal to subdue the Coptic question internally. Self-proclaimed Islamists of all shades such as Huweidi and Bishri rely specifically on anti-colonial nationalism, and at the same time Western minority frameworks, to further their own cause of subduing the Coptic Question externally yet invoking the Muslim Minority Question in the West.²⁶ The majority of Copts seem to fall into the fold of anti-colonial nationalism, as well as the explicit refusal of appropriation by the United States, and reject the power politics of the term 'minority', even those outside such as Nabil Abdel-Malik. The exception that proves this rule is Selim Naguib who insisted on the use of the UN Declaration of Minority Rights and partakes in exceptionalism by refusing to call out the West's own contradictions and representation of violence against Copts in Egypt as the cause of a civilizational deficit. As for opposition figures such as Ibrahim Eissa who may be grouped with Selim, these Muslim Egyptians lean towards the tendency of Egyptian liberals who traffic in exceptionalism and nationalist self-flagellation.

It is therefore understandable that on the eve of Mubarak's abdication on February 11th, 2011 Egyptians would attempt a rupture with this past, for none were able to engage in double critique; critique of the West's own contradictions in being the mantle of human rights as well as critique of the nationalist movement in Egypt, these are "the pitfalls of national consciousness" as Fanon eloquently put it. There is something to be said about this double critique that can still be able to frame itself within anti-colonial nationalist discourse that denies the appropriation of nationalism against one's own people. One should not forget that the anti-national credentials of Heikal and his citation of Cromer, plagiarized by Hammouda, was in fact missing the last few words that drastically changed the meaning of the quote. Thus, there is an argument to be made about a more honest anti-colonial nationalism being deployed.²⁷ Fanon developed this further what he described as the reluctant use of the tools and methods of the nationalist bourgeoisie against the colonizer against one's own fellow subjects after independence. National consciousness "instead of being the all-embracing

²⁵ Saad al-Din Ibrahim, "al-mas'ala al-qibtiyya w khayalat ra'ys tahryr," *al-masry al-youm*, January 16, 2010.

²⁶ They would be forgiven for their use of minority rights frameworks had they been using them to point out the impossibility of so-called religious freedom in the West and liberalism's own double standard of protecting minorities it only sees fit worthy of the designation while it oppresses its own 'minorities' such as Native Americans in the US and Muslims in Europe. The phrase the impossibility of religious freedom is borrowed from Winnifred Sullivan's seminal study *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

²⁷ Though beyond the scope of this paper examples to this avail include the Patriarch of the Coptic Church's refusal to participate in a 'Coptic Congress' in Asyut from the 6th to the 8th of March in 1911 organized by the pro-British Protestant (Anglican missionized) Akhnukh Fanous. This is to be contrasted by the counter "Egyptian conference" held in Heliopolis by Muslim and Coptic nationalists in which a confessional parliamentary system – the demand raised by the Coptic Congress – was rejected.

crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people... will be in any case an empty shell."²⁸

January 25th, 2011: Revolutionary Time

Among the often-remembered moments right after the revolution was the 19th of March 2011 referendum in Egypt. This referendum was held for the people of Egypt to agree on a set of constitutional articles, amended by legal experts, to serve as a provisional constitutional declaration until a parliament was elected. Despite the controversy surrounding this referendum, and the mobilization for it by those supporting the constitutional declaration – of which a majority of revolutionary forces rejected for creating a timetable of elections that would follow suit immediately rather than take time to draft the constitution – another less pronounced incident took place despite all attempts to publicize it. This was the attack on the Two Saints Church in al-sul, Atfih on March 4th, 2011, in the South of Cairo in Helwan. The attack on the Two Saints Church burned it down. Several Copts gathered in front of the State TV Broadcasting building – called Maspero – to protest the lack of coverage. The decision for the venue of the protest was to underlie not only the injustice suffered, but the implicit decision to sweep it aside as business usual by the media. Yet was it only the state that was guilty of turning a blind eye to Copts?

On March 3rd, 2011 lawyer Ramsis Naggar presented a memorandum to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the ruler of Egypt, outlining Churches that were closed by state security. These were Churches that were properly licensed and were deemed 'security threats' after previous attacks on them in which state security chose to appease, and often side with, the perpetrators of those attacks. Needless to say, Naggar's demands were ignored. Instead focus gravitated towards the lead up to the referendum and its celebration as the first instance of free voting in Egyptian history. This was a time to celebrate, a time for the revolution to be properly coroneted, yet this revolutionary time also silenced others, most notably Copts. It was understandable therefore that as the Church voiced discomfort, and as even some Copts joined in with this sense of uneasiness, others quickly rebutted that this was an issue of the past, one that would eventually sort itself out, this belief and sentiment was expressed the decision to form committees to legalize the process of Church building (even if the law never saw the light of day), and to penalize discrimination. Yet once again what would the law do if Churches who were built 'legally' before were not opened? The answer to that question returns us to revolutionary time and the need for a parliament.

The answer to this lied in the Muslim Brotherhood's own statement denouncing the attack in which it blamed it on the remnants of the old regime, the '*feloul*'. The statement issued by the MB mentioned that the ancien regime was adopting a tactic of divide and conquer, this

²⁸ See Frantz Fanon, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," 148-206 in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Groove Press, 1963.

resonates greatly with Galal Amin's allegory diagnosing the malaise of Egyptian society after 2011 and the fact that Egyptians had not 'mingled' with one another as the cause behind all of this tension. One cannot help but shake off the extreme exceptionalism in this line of explanation that lacks any causal mechanism and renders Egyptian society as inherently susceptible to violence against each other. This line of thinking draws on representations of the *fellah* and peasant revolts as those were 'feudal blood' reigns supreme and violent outbreaks happen consistently.²⁹ The MB also cited the tactics by the ancien regime as those of colonizers' 'divide and conquer', evoking once again nationalist legacy to stop discussion of the issue. It ended its statement saying that now is the time for unity, the same unity that brought this revolution. This discourse of time and unity is used counter demands that break this unity, 'individual demands', 'sectoral demands' which were described in Arabic as *matalib fi'awiyya* (fi'a singular, meaning a sector or tranche of society). This would mark among the first, if not *the* first articulation of this chauvinistic way of rendering all 'non-revolutionary' demands as divisive of the revolution, thus they were outside revolutionary time, that is why the blame of the act on the ancien regime and the holdovers of the Mubarak regime – the rulers of the past – are so important to this discourse.

Thus, implicit in the MB's discourse of unity and revolutionary time was the opposite, raising such issues was to be considered divisive and a threat to this unity. One could see this explicitly in the end of the MB's statement when it stated

The MB calls on wise men [al 'uqqala'] from both sides to put their brains before their emotions [tahqym al 'aql] and to put the interests of the nation [first] and to postpone private demands and sectoral demands [al-matalaib al-khasa w al-matalib al-fi'awiyya] ...so that we not put obstacles in front of the SCAF to fulfill its promises [emphasis added].³⁰

In this case Christian victims were arrested and held, as they usually are in such incidents so that when reconciliation happens there is a quid-pro-quo of releasing Christians arrested (even if victims) in exchange for Muslim perpetrators. Thus, this mention of both sides seems malicious, but extremely strategic in the repression of and very designation of what is and is not a 'revolutionary' demand. By relegating such demands as private (*matalib khasa*), and threatening to the promises (as opposed to the obligations) of SCAF, they were discussed as out of time. What was important to the MB was the performativity of the binary opposition of these demands compared with "the nation's interests (*maslahat al-watan*)". Thus, the MB was now in support of national demands which happened to coincide with the regime in power, before the MB would criticize the regime on not doing what was in the nation's interests.

²⁹ See Timothy Mitchell, "The Invention and Reinvention of the Peasant," 123-153, in *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002

³⁰ Statement from the MB concerning the last series of sectarian events, March 8, 2011, statement in author's possession.

Thus, nationalism was repackaged into the revolution at the expense of Copts' wellbeing. Now after January 25th, 2011, or so the argument goes, the nation became the property of the citizenry, not the rulers as opposed to before the revolution. Yet Copts found that hard to believe as they were told to sit and wait. Implicit in this understanding was the questioning of peoples' nationalism, and idea of national interests, who spoke out against the events of Atfih. Copts were by extension outside this framework and outside the bounds of nationalism. For such an intent to move beyond the dogma of nationalism and exceptionalism, these seem to have been reproduced whole sale. The MB used nationalism to rally behind the SCAF and its intent on holding a referendum, and exceptionalism was deployed in the use of the *ancien regime* as a scapegoat for the 'conspiracy' of violence against Copts. This seemed to differ little from Sadat's own cries of a Phalangist Zionist conspiracy against Copts.

Two months afterwards on May 7, 2011 another attack occurred at the Church of Mari-Mina (St Mina) in Imbaba, Cairo. This attack was prompted by self-proclaimed Salafis (the phrase al-salaf al-salih literally means those of the righteous past, thus those considered Salafis are those who look to pre-modern Islam and seek to replicate its ways today) fears that a recently converted woman to Islam- 'abeer was being held in the Church against her will. 'abir had in fact left her husband in Asyut to go to Banha with her Muslim lover. Her mysterious appearance in a house near the Mari Mina Church in Imbaba prompted Salafis to proclaim that she was being held against her will. This prompted these Salafis to storm the Church in which violence later enthused as the rumor turned out to be false. Yet clashes continued as 16 were killed and hundreds injured. When 'abir was not found Salafis went to the nearby Church of al-Adhra (St. Mary). What is of interest in this incident is not so much the level of violence but rather the narration of this event. Staying true to revolutionary time, there were several omissions of these details.

Metropolitan Bishop of Asyut, Bishop Francis, stayed true to the discourse of exceptionalism, saying that perpetrators of this attack were "outsiders". For this attack and intensity of violence "does not match with Egyptians' spirit" (of nationalism?). Amongst those outsiders were remnants of the *ancien regime* in addition forces from outside Egypt. Thus, the foundational moment of post-revolutionary discourse of exceptionalism and nationalism in the attack on the Two Saints Church in Al-Sul, Atfih in March of 2011 seems to have held and cemented its presence.

More importantly however was the development of nationalist discourse - often articulated in the form of unity between Christians and Muslims – under revolutionary time. As previously argued in the case of the attack on the Two Saints Church in al-Sul, Atfih, there was an underlying assumption that was stated that the nation was regained after January 25th, 2011. This was represented in the need to support the SCAF in navigating the transitional period. Yet now after the attack on Imbaba this discourse was built on and cemented further.

Metropolitan Francis added that not only were the perpetrators of the attack foreigners, for the Bishop added that “most Islamic groups are moderate [mu’zam al-jama’at al-islamiyya...mu’tadila] ... the Muslim Brotherhood is one such case for example.”³¹ This statement happened to coincide with not only political events after the constitutional declaration, but rising demands against the SCAF such as minimum wage and workers’ demands. The Church, sensing that it was being often implicitly attacked for being against the revolution felt it needed to change its approach and embrace the revolution and those who seem to have control over nationalist discourse. This was too done in the hopes of performing a rupture with the past and hoping that a new beginning would be more prosperous for Copts. Yet the MB, having secured implicit backing from the SCAF in the form of having one of its ideologues being on the committee to draft the constitutional declaration (Tariq al-Bishri) had continued to provide the cover necessary for the SCAF by categorizing most demands as ‘matalib fi’awiyya’ (sectoral demands). Thus, as the MB continued to gain political clout, subdue workers’ protests and postpone all non-political demands, Copts too were relegated to waiting. Their time was not yet, it was time for the ‘revolution’ to be secured first. For the Coptic Church and Copts in general not to be ostracized meant that they should embrace this idea, thus the MB was branded as a ‘moderate’ and nationalist organization, with the Church being encouraged to embrace it and see if the MB could reciprocate by reigning in rising antagonism against Churches.

The point is not to see if indeed it is or is not ‘moderate’, for such a value judgment can be different to different people, but to see the push for the MB as a revolutionary organization and ‘moderate’ actor as the West itself began to promote ‘moderate Islam’ as a force that was at once pro free-market and moderating on issues it held dear to it such as the Camp David accords and Israel.³² As a ‘moderate’ actor yet at once also a participant of the revolution (perhaps the problem with politics after the uprising lies in the equating of moderation and revolutionary values) the MB held the reigns of nationalism after the uprising.

The Church adopted a ‘wait and see’ approach after the Imbaba Church attack. Yet what were others waiting for? The answer lies in how time was being kept by several actors who waited for the revolution to realize its goal: parliamentary elections.

³¹ See Ayman Lutfi, “wakyl mutraniyat bani-swyf: a’da’ al-thawra wara’ hadith imbaba,” *al youm 7*, May 8, 2011, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2011/5/8/%D9%88%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84_%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9_%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%89_%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%81__%D8%A3%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9_%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1_%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB_%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9/407457#.ViEeE6RQ91w>, accessed October 14, 2015.

³² Karim Malak, Sara Salem, “Reorientalizing the Middle East: The Power Agenda Setting the Post-Arab Uprisings,” *Middle East Theory and Arguments*, Volume: 4, Issue: 1, 2015, 93-109; Karim Malak, “False Ideas about ‘activism’ in Egypt and the Case of Egypt’s Copts: Outside the State and Within the Economy of Power, *Sites of Home*. Spec. issue of *The Postcolonialist*, Volume: 2, Issue: 1, (2014); Karim Malak, “tarqi’ am tatbi’ ? tarikh mawqif al-kanisa tijah isra’il,” *al-shorouk*, December 4 2015.

On October 9th, 2011, a march of mostly Coptic Christians headed from *midan shubra* towards the National TV Broadcaster named 'Maspero'. This was to protest the destruction of the Marinab Church in Aswan. An earlier sit-in in front of Maspero on October 4th was dispersed by Military Police. The October 9th March was meant as a counter-march but ended up being forcibly dispersed by the army, using live bullets and Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) to run over protesters, this was termed the 'Maspero massacre'. This was done under the guise of breaking up violence that began to spread, as thugs –widely believed to be a tool of the police - appeared to attack the march. Another piece of evidence that corroborates the state's hand in the instigation of violence is the incitement of National TV to citizens to protect the army against the marauding Christians. While several statements were issued deploring the army's use of coercive force, a statement by new political parties and youth coalitions who participated in the revolution condemned the army.³³

This bears in stark contrast to impressions by thinkers such as Fahmy Huweidy who used exceptionalism to disavow the army's role in the massacre. Huweidy was not alone in this certainly; non-Islamists such as Emad al-Din Hussein trafficked in this line of reasoning even before the massacre and attacked Copts who chose to protest the destruction of the Church in Atifh in March of 2011. Hussein argued that the plot's success hinged on arousing Copts' emotions and reactions to the destruction of the Church in order to instigate further violence.³⁴ Hussein attacked Copts and their "ghetto" mentality for protesting for their demands – a term not indigenous to Arabic which he Arabcized from English. Hussein further asked that Copts be cognizant of attempts to hijack and fail the revolution and that they stop protesting. His most audacious claim is that

*"[Coptic] wise men realize that the leaders of the Church used the Coptic Question [tagaru bi-al-qadiyya al-qibtiyya] ...and were a card in the hands of the regime...all what happened in Atfih was not targeted towards Christians but the nation."*³⁵

Hussein's homogenization of the Church's history and its relations with the regime is important. It is key in looking at the 'authoritarian' past in order to perform the rupture and claim that after January 25th, 2011 there would be no such wrongs and that this was a foreign

³³ See <https://www.facebook.com/notes/%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%88-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88/250091281709904>

³⁴ Emad al-Din Hussein, "jar al-aqbat ila al-fakh," *al-shorouk*, March 10, 2011.

³⁵ Ibid.

plot to derail the revolution, to prevent this transition away from this past filled with 'authoritarianism'.

Huweidy on the other hand held to this opinion after the massacre and even questioned the decision of some to march and protest the destruction of the Church in Aswan in October, saying that there are other motives to those Copts to march. This was expressed in an article that reeked of exceptionalism titled "have we fallen in the trap?" Huweidy ended his article saying "[this act of violence] this act made our perceptions of the present corrupted [tashawuhat] and obfuscated our perception into the future we forgot the banner of 'the poor first' and instead all media outlets began to cry "the law on the building of unified places of worship first."³⁶ Thus Huweidy seemed to show what distorts the present and blocks the future using a leftist touch; demands to end attack on Copts and the implementation of a law that allows the construction of Churches. It was time to go back to looking at the future and the present crisis of the poor. This was a revolutionary goal; Copts' demands were not.

Likewise, the General Guide of the MB's statement on the matter argued that this attack at Maspero was perpetrated by the ancien regime, Badie expressed fears that such demands to ending violence against Copts will

"be a threat to national stability...we all have demands...[but] we must be a little patient. Once an elected parliament is in place government officials will be closely monitored to avoid a repeat of the Mubarak era."

Thus, it would seem that this was relegated yet again to the sides lest focus be lost on attaining the revolution's goals, be they the end poverty or the holding of elections. "Time will tell," the General Guide said, "and prove to the Copts that their equality, freedom and rights will be fully observed." Time would indeed tell, for the question of Maspero and its designation, like all attacks on Christians since 2011, was that it was out of (revolutionary) time and out of place.

In the month of November during the week of 19-25th of November violent clashes between protestors and security forces enthused over what was being perceived at the time as the army's failure to hand over power to an elected executive branch. This incident would drive a wedge between reactionary forces who did not legitimate these protests such as the MB that came to be termed the 'Mohamed Mahmoud clashes' because of the street the Ministry of Interior Headquarters, where the clashes occurred, was located was named Mohamed Mahmoud. This was the extreme focus of several revolutionary actors and organizations on the contrary. This was such the case that, during clashes between the police and protestors in Tahrir a month before elections, the MB warned that these events were being perpetrated to derail the revolution and cancel parliamentary elections due to begin a week later on

³⁶ Fahmy Howeidy, "hal waq' na fi al-fakh?" *al shorouk newspaper*, October 17 2011.

November 28, 2011. This bears in stark contrast to parliamentary candidates from the youth who chose to halt campaigning for elections, other parties as well followed suit.

Subsequently after parliament convened its first test came when eight Coptic families were evicted from al-Amriyya in Alexandria during the month of February 2012. This was the ‘communal’ verdict after a state sponsored reconciliation session ruled that Copts be evicted to avoid further escalation, despite Copts being the victims of the attack on their homes, stores and Church. This was the moment that the revolution could prove it had succeeded and that its promises of prosperity be revealed to all. According to revolutionary time this was the first case that necessitated a parliamentary inquiry and fact-finding mission to travel to al-Amriyya and see for itself what had happened. As Copts held their breath matters took an un/expected turn.

A flurry of statements were issued by the state denying any forced evictions took place and insisted that the Copts left of their own accord. One should not focus too much on state officials; even Coptic Members of Parliament (MPs) stuck to this narrative and denied there were forced evictions. Ihab Ramzy, a Coptic MP of the Minya governorate was part of the fact-finding mission and agreed that no forced evictions happened despite testimonies and evidence from the matter. In fact a report by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) stated that it was shocked at how the fact finding committee seemed to reinforce communal forms of injustice, stating that “the parliamentary fact-finding mission turned into a reconciliation committee of its own whether intentionally or unintentionally.”³⁷ The statement by the fact-finding mission denied there were any “forced evictions, but that what happened is considered leaving due to circumstances relating to security, and that the citizen Isbakhairun Suliman has the right to return to his house any time after it is fixed.”³⁸ It would take the Coptic Church several months to respond when another incident of forced evictions – with parliament was dissolved – took place in Rafah during the 27th of September 2012. This prompted the interim Pope, Bishop Pakhomious, to say that

*“it is with great regret that incidents of forced of eviction keep repeating themselves, sometimes under live threatening conditions, these began with the evictions in Al-Amriyya.”*³⁹

Thus, we can discern from Pakhomious’ statement that the Church is well aware of the events happening against it, despite choosing not to publically voice its dissatisfaction at times. This can be no doubt due to the portrayal of it by some as having divisive demands as we’ve seen, or being against the nation by question these post-revolution institutions as well as the climate of euphoria that spread. Thus, where for some post-revolution MPs seem to deny the

³⁷ See <http://eipr.org/pressrelease/2012/02/21/1374>

³⁸ See *al-masry al-youm*, “wafd al-barlman yanfi al-tahjir al-qasry li-aqbat al- ‘amriyya,” February 17 2012, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/152395>>, accessed October 14 2015.

³⁹ See <http://eipr.org/pressrelease/2012/09/30/1505>

occurrence of such crimes and stick to revolutionary time by focusing on elections and the drafting of the constitution, the Church seems too often quietly and at times publicly, be aware of and voice its opinion on the futility of such milestones. For after all what good could a new constitution do if measures already in place are not enforced?

As time went on, and more disenchantment with the revolution was expressed there seem to be a moment of truth, or coming to terms with Copts' grievances. It would take almost two years since the revolution to happen as opposed to the immediate disenchantment and anxiety from the Coptic Church and some Copts due to attacks against them early on after February 11, 2011. This moment was the attack on the Coptic Cathedral in Abassiya. A funeral procession composed of Copts was on its way to the Cathedral mourning the deaths of four Copts killed in a targeted attack in Qalyubiyya on April 6, 2013. The next day during the funeral procession thugs attacked the procession and the police stood by allowing them to proceed only to intervene and fire tear gas canisters and rubber shots towards the Cathedral compound and mourners. This was recorded on video and caused significant embarrassment to the then MB President Muhammed Morsi.⁴⁰ This of all attacks on Copts was the most widely condemned for the culpability of the MB government because disenchantment with the revolution had reached its nadir.

This disenchantment grew after Morsi issued a constitutional declaration in November 2012 making his decisions immune to judicial review. Using this power, the constituent assembly drafting the constitution, widely believed to be exclusionary and under judicial review at the time by the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC), was also immunized and its work rushed to avoid being dissolved. In fact, MB supporters would besiege the SCC to prevent it from issuing its ruling before a referendum was called for. When the constituent assembly rushed and finished its work, Morsi called for a referendum on the 15th and 22nd of December 2012. Thus, when the SCC reconvened and issued a verdict annulling the constituent assembly the constitution of 2012 had already passed and so it gained the legitimacy of a referendum as the court stated, this was detailed in the court's judgment passed after the constitution came into effect. Despite the measures spearheaded by Morsi one cannot help but shake off that the legitimacy of the attack on the Coptic Cathedral in al-Abassiyya was several times that of the violence against Copts in March 2011 a month after the revolution. This legitimacy of Copts

⁴⁰ Despite Western media jumping at this opportunity to cover the attack on the cathedral the US government still chose to cast Morsi in a positive light, claiming he is an advocate of 'religious freedom'. For a sample of such Western coverage see Leon Watson, "Egyptian Police refuse to protect Coptic Christians during gun and machete attack on mourners at cathedral," *Dailymail*, April 27, 2013, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2315779/Egyptian-police-refuse-protect-Coptic-Christians-gun-machete-attack-mourners-cathedral.html>>, accessed October 19, 2015. For an argument that traces contemporary US engineering of the discourse of 'religious freedom' and 'religious rights' as a discourse that is apologetic to US power as the guarantor of such rights in order to support its policies see Karim Malak, "False Ideas about 'activism' in Egypt *Sites of Home*. Spec. issue of *The Postcolonialist*, (2014).

would not last long as only two months stood between April of 2013 and the regime change of power on June 30th, 2013. It is at the backdrop of these events that Copts would be regulated to a different form of time-keeping that once again did not take into account their grievances or attacks. Necessary for this rupture was not only the removal from power of the MB, despite their culpability in the attacks against Copts, but the wholesale scapegoat of all the attacks on Copts on the January 25th revolution and for allowing the 'Islamist' perpetrators of the attacks on Copts to rise to power. Using this veneer of 'Islamism' – despite yet again the incitement of attacks on Copts by those using the guise of religion⁴¹ - public discourse started to shift towards secularism after June 30th, 2013. This brought about the adoption of 'secular time'.

June 30th, 2013: Secular time

After the MB was removed from power and with Mohamed Morsi no longer president, Copts – like many other Egyptians who mobilized – were celebrating. These celebrations took the form of even public statements by lay and clerical Copts, with the latter to be taken with a grain of salt. Public statements by the clergy are to be taken with a grain of salt because more often than not these statements are not contextualized and there remains an immature press that does not understand the workings of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Egypt as result of the Coptic Church's tradition and pride in being an Apostolic Church.⁴² This means that each Bishopric is endowed with its own clerical representative who traces his role to the Apostles of Jesus, thus these bishops can and do at times voice their opinions independently of the pope. Thus, these clerics are not a homogenous bloc by any means. One need not forget that Father Yuhana Fouad spoke out in a record TV sermon that he asks God to forgive him for shaking hands with General Hamdi Badeen, head of the Military Police brigade and the General on sight during the Maspero massacre. Needless to say, analysis that fails to distinguish with the clergy and treat it homogeneously, as the press does, does not cover Priests such as Yuhana Fouad. It is such appreciation for the clergy's decision *how* to voice

⁴¹ Examples of such outright incitement against Copts can not only be traced to the moments preceding the attack on Copts such as in the attack on the Imbaba church in 2011, but also at the level of public rhetoric by Islamist channels that host MB figures. These channels, such as al-Hafiz and al-Nas to name but two, were shut down after June 30th, 2013. It is important to note that such incitement was not only against Copts but against Shi'ites. MB cadre Safwat Hegazy called a Shi'ite leader on skynews an 'infidel' (kafir). For a reaction from the Egyptian Shi'ite community see <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/191264>

⁴² This is not to discount outrageous statements by some of the clergy who openly say that "We thank God for sending President al-Sissi to make the state rise." See interview on Al-Arabiyya <<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/webtv/programs/point-of-order/2015/09/21/-Copts-in-Egypt-are-not-persecuted-says-bishop.html>>. It is however to note that others who persistently reject such statements from the clergy do in fact exist but rarely find a platform or are covered by the media such as Bishop Yohana Ramzy in Qina. Moreover, is the fact that behind the Church's walls the clergy do at times voice a very different and particular understanding. This difference entails often double critique of the present political situation or at the very least a historicization of events, thus the clergy remember that even Mubarak had an interest in allowing violence against Copts to go unchecked. Further the clergy and almost all members of the Church rarely forget the exile of Pope Shenouda III and understand that a full-frontal clash with the state in Egypt is impossible and would result in less gains.

discontent – within Church walls – that leads me to the discussion on the removal from power of former President Morsi.

Inside the *mari-marcos* Church of Heliopolis sat an illustrious and almost celebrity like Priest in his office. This priest is a distinguished person of the Coptic Church for his activities that span around the world, as a renowned figure he travels to give sermons almost non-stop. Further, it is a well-kept secret that he has the Pope's ear. After June 30th, 2013 his office, I sat in his office which was filled with video CDs of his sermons and bookshelves with his latest publications (these entail new monthly books about topics that include 'combating atheism' and 'Christianity's creed in a modern changing world'). Yet this time round something new stood out, this was a miniature version of the Egyptian flag on his desk. All other priests in their offices had not placed Egyptian flags in their offices. But this priest who did was different in that he ran a new type of unorthodox 'service' (with the classical example of serving and being a servant being the Sunday school teacher at a Church), this service was called '*muwatna*', translating roughly to citizenship.

When I raised this issue with another Priest, who did not have a flag at his office either before 2011 or after June 30th, 2013 he told me not to look into it too much. That someone could have given it to him and he was embarrassed not to keep it there visible – alluding perhaps to the role of State Security or a state dignitary – but more importantly his disagreement was discernable. This was despite it being couched in a defense of it and contextualization of at the backdrop of a state-affiliated individual giving him the flag so as to put it in his office. Such a level of detail and understanding would be entirely missed in press debates that merely seek to locate Christians as supporters of the fight against the MB. But it does capture precarious nature that Copts face when they voice their opinions. Indeed, with the upcoming Coptic Christmas on January 7th, 2014 (celebrated on the eve of the 6th), many Muslims had gotten in touch to wish Copts a merry Christmas. This was something that could be discerned by the Coptic community at large and elicited debate about how after June 30th, 2013 there was a conscious effort to incorporate Copts into the nationalist fold, make them feel like equals. Indeed, several opinions editorials appeared – and almost trafficked – in attacking Salafis who forbid Muslims from wishing Copts a merry Christmas (or celebrating or congratulating Copts for the arrival of any festivity). Yet such painstaking efforts had the counter effect of showing how people were going to lengths to incorporate Copts, as if they were outsiders.

Thus, it suddenly became in vogue to attack those who previously wronged or discriminated against Copts, if it often occurred by forgetting how the military too wronged Copts, this was done to promote a secular idea surrounding the June 30th, 2013 regime change. Its undertones however were clear, that the events of January 25th, 2011 had allowed religion to play a role more detrimental to Copts and that the new allegedly secular regime would not copy any of those mistakes. Despite the intention to perform this 'secular' rupture with time,

such attacks against ‘Islamists’ or those who are hostile to Copts would find in common with the same discourse since January 25th, 2011; it too would seek to ignore the grievances of Copts using nationalism (if now more secular) or exceptionalism (if not it attributed it the rise of ‘Islamism’).

As security forces prepared to disperse the sit-in by supporters of President Morsi at *midan rab’a ‘dawiyya* and *al-nahda*, Rab’a and al-Nahda square on August 14, 2013, few had thought about the repercussions against the Coptic community. Though out of these two spaces outright incitement against Copts was evident – making the case of those seeking to perform a rupture after June 30th, 2013 easier – few of the supporters of the ousting of Morsi anticipated the vindictive violence that would destroy close to 45 churches, burn 25 churches and partially damage 7 churches in addition to scores of homes and businesses belonging to Copts. Reprisal damage after the dispersal of Rab’a and al-Nahda however was not the start of violence against Copts. Prior to the dispersal and since June 30th violence against churches was widespread if not at the same large scale as after the dispersal.⁴³

These acts of violence made it easy to supporters of June 30th, 2013 and general public discourse to relegate it to the past and mistakes of the revolution of January 25th, 2011. This was an act of the ‘Islamists’ who were well on their way to being rounded up.⁴⁴ Indeed some argued that hatred against Copts was the product of the MB.⁴⁵ Thus the past was not performed nostalgically as in some cases (not all) after January 25th, 2011, rather it was held up as a reminder, its specter enough to remind people of the violence against Copts. Rather than talk about the status of Copts and their grievances, instead people were too busy lamenting Copts as nationalist heroes unlike supporters of President Morsi and at the same time relegating the heavy toll of violence against Copts after June 30th, 2013 to the past. Yet what was interesting was that few, in their purported solidarity with Copts asked why these attacks were allowed to happen. Instead they merely celebrated Copts as nationalist heroes who suffered at great cost for the nation. Nowhere did anyone bother to ask how such attacks were allowed to take place. This process shows how to such extent nationalist discourse, this time through inclusion, was complicit in the violence.

Yet this form of secular solidarity was hollow, in a rare opinion editorial that was allowed to go to print, a Coptic woman attempted to guilt Pope Tawadrus II for appearing in a television

⁴³ For coverage of violence since June 30th, 2013 see <http://www.eipr.org/content/2013/08/20/1785>. For coverage of violence in the wake of the dispersal of Rab’a and al-Nahda squares see <http://eipr.org/pressrelease/2013/08/20/1784>

⁴⁴ Ibrahim Eissa has for example linked Copts and the attacks on the violently secular Islam al-Beheiry who seeks to attack al-Azhar for allowing ‘extremist Islamists’ to flourish intellectually. Al-Beheiry is known for blaming al-Azhar for the rise of ‘Islamists’ who now pose a threat to the nation after June 30th, 2013 and the enthusing attacks. Eissa says that the victims of these ‘Islamists’ that al-Beheiry attacks are also Copts. See <http://www.light-dark.net/topic.php?id=340317>

⁴⁵ Mohamed Amin, “ma dakhil al-aqbat w al-azhar?” *al-masry al-youm*, March 4 2015.

advertisement that asked Egyptians to donate to places of worship destroyed after the dispersal of Rab'aa, in fact this interfaith move was a rouse to get people to donate, for mosques destroyed such as the Rab'aa adawiyya mosque, the mosque in Rafah that was detonated and the mosque in Asyut also detonated after the dispersal of Rab'aa were renovated quickly, some by the army. One could argue this was out of necessity seeing as a campaign seeking only to rebuild Churches would not raise any funds. Yet this did not seem to work and the donations fund seemed to have gathered only 1,900,000 EGP, not enough to rebuild one Church.⁴⁶ In the opinion editorial Muna Thabit lambasted the Pope for appearing in the television advertisement and not speaking up about the state's false promises in rebuilding Churches. Egyptians gathered and showed solidarity in rebuilding Churches and looking forward, yet few cared to follow through and see if that promise would be held.⁴⁷

But the token gesture of a donations campaign for a fund to rebuild places of worship – if what they really meant was churches – was not the only one after June 30th, 2013. President Sissi chose to be the first head of state in Egypt's history after independence to visit the Cathedral on its Christmas mass in January of 2014. Speaking about coexistence and harmony, Sissi seemed to have wooed the crowds at the Cathedral. This was seized by public discourse and amplified greatly as part of Egypt's harmonious nationalism. While Copts were indeed genuinely touched, others celebrated this event by taking it to new heights. Though by and large the reaction to this visit by nationalists was hysterical, a few stand out who exemplify this hysteria. Muslim actress Yusra (birth name Cevine Nassim) said that she cried when she saw Sissi at the Cathedral and that “no one could touch our national unity.”⁴⁸ Muslim singer Hani Shaker, head of the syndicate of musicians, said that he got goose bumps when he saw Sissi on the Cathedral by Pope Tawadrus II. These are but a few examples that demonstrate the state of hysteria that followed the visit and how it was used to amplify nationalist discourse.

Editor in chief of the newspaper *al-shorouk* Emad al-Din Hussein could not pass up this opportunity to add his opinion, he wrote an article titled “to Copts: do not be the vanguard of the [political] scene.” This article began with a reference to Sissi's visit and how it was historic, showing that it “deepens Copts' sense of citizenship by a real act not mere speech [*fi'lan la qawlan*].” He added a warning and stated that “Copts must not err in reading this message, they should not err in reading the political landscape after June 30th [2013].”⁴⁹ This was someone who boldly linked Sissi's visit to the political scene and was not shy about it. He warned that the rift between Copts and the MB must not be deepened. Going further he

⁴⁶ See <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/UI/Front/Inner.aspx?NewsContentID=455922>

⁴⁷ Mona Thabit, “al-baba tawadrus...li-man tulqi shabakatak?” *al-tahrir*, January 27, 2014.

⁴⁸ See <http://www.masrawy.com/arts/zoom/details/2015/1/7/424383/%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B8%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A9>

⁴⁹ Emad al-Din Hussein, “ila al-aqbat: la ttsadaru al-mashhad did al-ikhwan,” *al-shorouk*, January 8, 2015.

stated that the Church and Coptic politicians must not put themselves at the vanguard of the political scene lest this rift grows. In doing so Emad al-Din Hussein exemplifies secular time by advocating for the reconciliation of Copts' rift with the MB in light of June 30th, 2013. By extension, he wipes clean most events and grievances before then; forgetting that some also held grievances from revolutionaries, the MB for its stance on Maspero and later violence and the state's position since 2011. Thus, this immediate focus on the *current* political landscape shows how this serialization of time works. Its natural extension and focus is a return to fascination with such questions of politics, its conclusion being elections as I will now turn to.

Much like there was an attempt to define revolutionary time through the serialization of elections, so too did that occur in 2014. With parliamentary elections looming, all the trafficking and the hollow celebration of Copts' new freedom could be cashed in. Big parties began to seek Coptic candidates that could provide inroads inside the Coptic Cathedral. With many parties established after 2011 deciding not to field candidates they soon found their party cadres up for grabs. Offers in the amount of millions of Egyptian pounds were made for famous party members who had clout who could become parliamentary candidates. Women were sought after as well young members; Copts too were a rare commodity that everyone went after. Hany Naguib, the former executive secretary and vice-president of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP) was an individual that was exceedingly close to Pope Tawadros II, the Free Egyptians Party (FEP), hoping to garner the Coptic vote went after him. After a record amount of money was offered to Hany Naguib he flipped and soon became part of the FEP. Despite being a close confidant to the Pope, one who accompanied him on several official visits abroad such as the Pope's visit to the Emirates. Yet after it was made known to the church that Naguib was purchased, he was soon shunned out of the Cathedral and no longer in the good books of the Pope.⁵⁰

Looking Forward: The Limits of Secularism

Yet this idea of secularity is not without contradictions. Take the interesting case of Coptic activist Magdi Khalil. Khalil resides in the US and is the Executive Director of the Middle East Forum. Khalil took a harsh stance against President Sissi and did not endorse the mobilization campaign that followed with Sissi's second visit to the US to deliver a speech before the UN General Assembly. This created a fault line with other Copts who after June 30th, 2013 were encouraged, through nationalist discourse, to have a rupture with the past and support the regime. Khalil not only called out Sissi on his failure to act against attacks against Copts since 2014 such as the attack in Al-Amriyya 2015,⁵¹ amongst other attacks such as the forced evictions of Copts in Beni Suef in June of 2015. Khalil likewise suffered and had his books in

⁵⁰ Interview conducted by author with an affiliate of the Coptic Church, September 2015.

⁵¹ See <http://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/sectarian/copts-in-amriya-village-under-attack/14664/>

Cairo banned.⁵² Thus even under the rubric of secularism it has its own contradictions and as a discourse subjects to it like Khalil lacked its subjectivity. They seemed to be out of tune with those using secularism to tie Copts' interests with the present regime.

Conclusion:

This paper has sought to narrate the events in Egypt since 2011 to the lead up to 2015 using the several different lenses of time. By showing the diachronic element to these events and comparing them to revolutionary time - and its linearity in following through a Utopian dream - activists' perceptions and liberal underpinning of revolutionary demands (individual, rights based and not collective) was shown to be destructive to Copts. This paper thus takes the fundamental position of critiquing most social movement theories that anchor the agency of either the youth or other movements as agents of change. If anything, this paper has analyzed how non-change since 2011 has been the only continuity despite claims to otherwise by activists. At this point it may be important to survey the often-hidden voices that have also critiqued activists in Egypt since 2011.

Some such as Maha Abdel Rahman have attempted to show that activists had only the tools to bring down a regime and not build one.⁵³ While this is certainly a critical voice that problematizes social movements' ability to bring about change, it does not go as far as showing what activists do not work on. In fact, when it comes to the case of the Maspero massacre it remains frightful how it continues to be narrated as a moment in the continuous (Trotskite) understanding of the revolution. This was far from the truth, in fact as one observer has shown, "the usual group of activists were not there [on October 9th, 2011; the day the army responded to the protests outside the 'Maspero' building]."⁵⁴ This should not be surprising, for even during the 18 days violence few cared to remember the Church in Rafah destroyed by militants and the three-day plundering that continued unabated.

Thus, through revolutionary time there was such an intent to perform a rupture without looking at its epistemology, who and what created nationalism and exceptionalism, that it was only claimed there was a shift outside this binary and it was recreated in all but name. Thus, Copts in the wake of January 25th, 2011 were represented as breaking all their shackles and continued grievances were muffled as the loud calls for freedom, and a break with the past, deafened those that died in Maspero and the Churches that were destroyed as early as March of 2011 such as the Imbaba Church incident. Those who refused this new subjectivity and the prod to embrace the revolution as emancipatory were called 'authoritarian' as Emad

⁵² <http://www.rosa-magazine.com/news/15275/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%C2%AB%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%89%C2%BB-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A9-%C2%AB%D9%82%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9%C2%BB>

⁵³ Maha Abdelrahman, *Egypt's Long Revolution: Protest Movements and Uprisings*, New York: Routledge, 2015.

⁵⁴ Sherif Gaber, "Maspero and Memory," *mada masr*, October 9, 2013.

al-Din Hussein stated when he attacked those who were magnifying the attack on the church in Al-Sul, Atfih. The decision to march, he argued, was falling in a trap, and it is understandable after years of colluding with the Mubarak regime that the Coptic Church adopt this type of thinking and fall into this trap. This was a quite exemplary position that Hussein, the MB and several others held on in urging a break to the past. The more 'progressive' camp urged that the Church look forward by looking back at the harmonious interaction of Copts during the 18 days of the revolt, this was assumed to be enough to help the status of Copts after January 25th, 2011. This greatly homogenized the Church as being in bed with the regime neglecting the layers, decentralization of Bishops and different decision-making mechanisms within the Church. This paper has sought to dispel that myth by showing how at the micro-level smaller Churches work often differently and independently of the Cathedral. Indeed, those who continue to accuse the Coptic Church of being authoritarian, as if it is a monolithic bloc, of authoritarianism - implying it failed to embrace the revolution (in say stopping people from protesting the destruction of the Church in al-Sul as Emad al-Din Hussein stated) - ignore its efforts to address issues inside the Church.

Indeed, most analysis thus far falls into this trap neglects for example Pope Tawadros II's new Church bylaw that creates a governing board decentralized at the local level with a third of the board appointed by the Pope to represent him yet two thirds composed of elected lay representative from each Church (footnote). Analysis of the new initiative to give Christians (back) the power to divorce likewise is criticized for its lack of openness in the drafting process, neglecting the Church's historical role. There are echoes of accusations against the Church's authoritarianism also in its position on the Christian personal status draft law's failure to allow civil marriage. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who adopt this line of thinking neglect to mention the larger juridical framework that would block Christian men from marrying Muslim women as it would violate article two of the constitution and Egyptian (Muslim) personal status law. Thus, if the Christian personal status draft law has a civil marriage stipulation it is only to allow Christian women to marry Muslim men and not on an equal footing that would be granted to both males of each religion. This peculiar demand by CSOs also fails to historicize the Church's uneasiness about confrontations after it came under heavy attack and had its Pope removed and exiled in 1980 by President Anwar Sadat. Thus, where some self-proclaimed Islamists such as Selim El-Awa or Fahmi Huweidy or academics such as Talal Asad or observers such as Emad al-Din Hussein see authoritarianism and critique the Church for unifying itself to speak for Copts, these people ignore this facet of thinking. They ignore that

the unification of the whole community behind a single force was in fact necessary, even urgent, after the 1950s. The damage inflicted on the wealth and influence of the lay elite by Nasser's 'nationalization' measures, the centralization of the administration of mortmain goods (*waqf*) under a Muslim Ministry of Religious Affairs, the appearance of anti-Copt ideas among some figures surrounding Sadat... convinced all the Copts that the establishment of a

politically representative institution or group of actors was what was needed to halt the weakening of their status.⁵⁵

This is not to say that Asad's work and deliniation of secularism as an ideology and a discourse of power is not helpful, but to question the substrataum that often informs and is constitutive of it to the extent that it changes what may seem to be nothing more than the operation of a discourse that empowers the state's intervention in the religious 'affairs. The important missing dimension here is one of the simultaneous *weakening* of the Church, thus in locating secularism it is important to focus on intentionality and the victims of it who often are forced to grapple with it and operate through it in the face of many threats and class interests as the state's process of accumulation *by secularism* occurs.

With June 30th, 2013 a new rupture came, one that likewise claimed to end the problem of discrimination against Copts and the dogma of the Mubarak regime's nationalism. Indeed, even exceptionalism seemed to be settled since now the regime had the chance to exile the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) once and for all, with them out of power Copts could look forward to a new era. This heralded the beginning of secular time which also reproduced nationalism - by celebrating Sissi's visit to the Cathedral hysterically and using it to muffle any critique - and exceptionalism by talking about the danger Islamists' pose to Copts. Yet as I have shown even this notion of secular time is unique and does not subjectify all Cotps the same way, for even hardline militant secularists such as Magdi Khalil attempt to use secularism - perhaps to no avail - to critique the Sissi regime. Khalil's evangelizing American right wing discourse should be critiqued of course, but it should serve as a moment of reflection on the intentionality and direction of those who traffic in secularism.

Indeed, it seems that while most Copts reject secular ideology, or use it in a piecemeal fashion, this bears in stark contrast to diasporic Copts who reside in the US and become a treasure trove for congressional hearings. Khalil's example is that even his strategic importance often comes at a cost and potential disturbance to US imperial designs which seem to support Sissi's call for religious 'reform'. This idea of intentionality helps us understand the substratum of secularism that is often imperially driven rather than whose ideological premise weighs in entirely on 'reforming' religion and constituting it to the private sphere. More often than one would think imperial designs rest on the securing for the state a religious role, the example of Khalil shows where such interventions can go wrong, and should serve as a reminder for those who want to 'see' secular ideology that he is the exception rather than the rule and it may be easier to explain such ideology as imperially grounded rather than merely a quest for European renaissance laïcité.

⁵⁵ Dina El Khwaga, "The Political Dynamics of the Copts: Giving the Community an Active Role," in Andrea Pacini (ed), *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 185-6

Yet if anything this paper has shown that all these claims are performed for a certain agenda, not only did the June 30th alliance of 2013 and its regime fail to usher in any of its promises – perhaps something that is easy to discern for outside observers who continue to chastise the Church (much like the MB and its allies say, “Christians were the bulwark of the coup of June 30th, 2013”). But so too did the alliance of January 25th of 2011 fail to live up to its promises of ending grievances of Copts – an idea that is hard to digest for the majority of outside observers and revolutionary activists but easy to gauge from the Church; in fact, even in this polyvalence of time it is a source of discontent between the Church and revolutionary activists. This failure of the alliance of January 25th, 2011 is not for its failure to come to power, but because of revolutionary activists’ discourse of a rupture with the past and their desire to perform the claim that no more would Copts suffer. This is an even bitter pill to swallow.

ABOUT ARI

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