

BEFORE AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION: A ‘SPRING’ ALSO FOR THE COPTS OF EGYPT?

Alessia Melcangi, PhD in Political Thought and Institutions in Mediterranean Societies,
University of Catania (Italy), Faculty of Political Science – Center for Studies on the
Contemporary Islamic World and Africa (COSMICA), University of Catania, Italy.
Email: alessiamelcangi@tiscali.it

BRISMES Graduate Section Annual Conference 2012
London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)
London, United Kingdom - 11 June 2012

Change and Continuity in the Middle East
Rethinking West Asia, North Africa and the Gulf after 2011

Abstract

The Egyptian revolution featured an unprecedented solidarity within Egyptian society between the two main religious groups, the Muslims and the Christian Copts, in the struggle against the ruling regime. This image remains a symbol of those events, but repeated clashes between the Muslim community and the Christian one put the issue of interfaith dialogue, of the protection of human rights and individual freedoms as a priority on the political agenda of the state. This paper will try to analyse the 'Coptic question' in contemporary debate, underlining the political relations between the Christian community and the political institutions of the reference country, its varied composition, the intra-communal cleavages or factionalism. The aim of the paper is to understand what place is reserved for non-Muslim communities within the social structure and the political organization of contemporary Egypt and if the revolution can call in question the juridical and political position of non-Muslims.

1. Introduction¹

The popular uprising, which provoked the collapse of the autocratic Egyptian regime, broke out spontaneously on January 25th, 2011, in Tahrir Square, Liberation Square, in the heart of Cairo.

After days of protests, on February 11th, Hosni Mubarak, the President of the State, resigned from his post, handing over power to the armed forces: for the Egyptian people that date represented the end of the regime that had ruled and controlled the country for thirty years, without making room for any form of opposition, and the beginning of an institutional transition towards a hoped for democracy.

On February 4th, the Friday before the announcement of Mubarak's resignation, it was possible to see Christian youths in Tahrir Square hand in hand forming a protective cordon around their Muslim countrymen so they could pray in safety.

The following Sunday, in the same square, some Christian bishops, addressing the faithful, declaimed the reunion with the 'Coptic brothers' in the days of the uprising and called for social cohesion². This image remains a symbol of those events, especially in the light of a history often made up of dramatic events.

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Andrew Brayley for his precious help with the linguistic review of my contribution, for his suggestions and his courteous patience. I am very grateful.

² Firas Araqchi, 'Egyptian youth and new dawn hopes', *Al Jazeera* [on line], 29 January 2011. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011129081571546.html>.

On December 31th, 2010, during the New Year's Eve Mass, an explosion in front of the Church of All Saints in Alexandria not only killed 21 worshippers, but made many Muslims realize how unaware they were of the real and symbolic violence against their compatriots: some Muslims decided to attend the Christmas Mass as a sign of solidarity after the Alexandria tragedy. A year before, on January 6th, 2010, six Coptic deacons were murdered as they emerged from a Coptic Christmas Eve Mass in the city of Nag Hammadi in the Upper Egyptian Governorate of Qena.

Looking back and considering recent events, we can find many acts of violence against one or the other of the religious groups, born of a coexistence which was peaceful only for a short while.

The political, social and religious participation of the Coptic Christian community, as in the past, continues to be nowadays a cause of conflicts which has very often culminated in serious acts of violence that limit its involvement in politics (as in the presidential elections of September 2005 and in the parliamentary ones of November 2005 and 2010), freedom of worship, the opportunity to build churches and celebrate the holyday in public places³.

The issues of interreligious dialogue, protection of human rights and individual freedoms have become, therefore, key points on the political agenda of the state also thanks to the repeated requests which come from various actors, internal and external. Solicitations to start the debate and the dialogue come from Egyptian civil society (political parties, associations, non-governmental organizations), from the Coptic emigrant's associations in the United States and the United Kingdom (*US Coptic Association, British Coptic Association*) and from the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and several international organizations which operate within the policies of partnership and 'democracy building' promoted by the Euro-Mediterranean agreements (Barcelona Declaration, 1995).

As a consequence of the electoral success of the 'moderate Islam' of the Muslim Brotherhood and that of the 'radical Islam' of the Salafis in the legislative elections which ended in January 2012, the Coptic community is ever more worried that the return of the religious factor in the political arena could hinder the path towards a democratic political system and a civil state. The persistence of political and social problems and religious clashes induce us to consider that the Coptic question in Egypt is still open and needs to be dealt with.

The aim of the paper is to understand how the changes which have taken place in contemporary Egypt have influenced the definition of the core national identity and the political, social and economic relations between the Coptic community and the leadership, leading to a reassessment of the position of Christians in Egyptian society.

³ Gihan Shahine, 'Bad cards', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 29 December 2005 - 4 January 2006. Available on: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/775/eg40.htm>.

This paper tries to analyse the struggle of the Coptic community for the recognition of their rights in a contemporary Egypt marked by fundamental constitutional and political changes. In this context, necessarily, the political and social reflection on concepts such as citizenship, civil society and political participation dwells upon notions like minority rights and religious freedom. It involves the link between the idea of the state and the idea of religion in order to understand the place reserved for non-Muslim communities within the social structure and the political organization.

2. Methodology and research sources

The Coptic question has represented, for some years, the focus of my academic research. Besides several published conference papers⁴, the main result of my study is the PhD thesis completed in 2012 and entitled 'The Coptic community in Nasserist Egypt (1952-1970): between politics and religion'. The revolution of the Free Officers in 1952 marked an important passage, particularly concerning the ideology and the policies realized by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser during his leadership. The aim of the thesis is to analyse how, from 1952 to 1970, a new collaboration between the Coptic community and the state led the Christians of Egypt to find a place for political and social participation: for this reason that period represents an interval in the history of contemporary Egypt and a relevant starting point to comprehend the changes of the following years.

So, paying attention to contemporary dynamics represents the next stage of my research which enables me to study in depth and complete the picture on the international problems concerning minority rights within the specific case-study. The paper examines the role played by the Coptic community in the political and social arena within the historical framework of Egypt ruled by Hosni Mubarak and in the current transitional phase. This study focuses not only on the religious debate but also on broader issues, such as the democratic process in the Islamic world, the breaking down of barriers that discriminate minorities and the defence of religious freedoms and citizens' rights.

This research, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that combines state and society, a joint perspective from above and below, considers the positions of different segments of society: the

⁴ Alessia Melcangi, 'La risata che cambiò il mondo. Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser tra mito pubblico e identità privata', in Daniela Melfa, Alessia Melcangi, Federico Cresti (edited by), *Spazio privato, spazio pubblico e società civile in Medio Oriente e in Africa del Nord*, (Milano: Giuffrè, 2008), pp. 153-180; A. Melcangi, 'The Egyptian religious question as an international issue', EUDEM (*Jean Monnet Information and Research Activity on European Foreign Policy and Democratic Promotion*) Newsletter 2, May/June 2011, p. 9. Available at: <http://www.fscpo.unict.it/europa/EudemNewsletter2.pdf>; A. Melcangi, 'Religious issues in Egypt: from revolution to Nasser and back', in Stefania Panebianco, Rosa Rossi, ed., *Winds of Democratic Change in the Mediterranean? Actors, Processes and possible Outcomes*, (Catanzaro: Rubettino - forthcoming - November 2012).

governmental and legal policies that deal with the problem of minorities, the official position of the Egyptian government and how government officials have responded during different phases of the relationship between Christians and Muslims on the one hand; the standpoint of minority groups, their internal debate, political proposals, and strategies, on the other.

The research methodology mirrors the above approach. On the one hand, constitutional and legislative texts will be examined, as well as political leaders' speeches, party platforms, official documents and books and articles written by key individuals at the various levels. On the other hand, useful sources will include minority group publications, their opinions as reported by the media.

In fact, an essential tool for the study of the Coptic question is the analysis of some on-line periodicals and newspaper articles in English and French that, through the in-depth columns and opinion articles, stimulate the debate on the issues of religious freedom and the respect of minority rights, opening it to a readership that is not only Arabic-speaking. Through reading reports and articles, especially in the major Egyptian press such as *Al-Ahram Weekly*⁵ or *Al-Ahram on-line*⁶, considered the semi-official newspaper until the revolution, it is possible to determine the government's positions. The analysis also considers the *Egypt Independent*, the weekly English language newspaper supplement of *Al-Masry al-Youm*⁷, the *Egyptian Gazette*⁸, the Coptic newspaper *Watani International*⁹, *Reuters* (news agency), and the *Arab West Report*¹⁰ site.

In addition, the research focuses its attention on the websites of the most relevant Coptic international association such as the *US Copts Association*, *The Voice of the Copts*, *The Free Copts*, *Copts United* and on the Muslims' foreign organization *Ikhwanweb*; the *US International Religious Freedom Report* website represents an important source of information regarding the US politics towards the Middle East. The comparison between these different types of sources can enhance the issue with more details which provide a different level of comprehension and promote the debate.

This paper presents a work in progress, which does not pretend to be exhaustive or complete. By continuing this research project, it will be possible to analyse the prevailing dynamics of Christian-Muslim communal relations and how these are manifested at different political and social

⁵ *Al-Ahram Weekly* is an Egyptian English-language weekly broadsheet printed by the *Al-Ahram Publishing House* in Cairo, state owned until the revolution. It was established in 1991 by the *Al-Ahram* newspaper.

⁶ *Al-Ahram on-line* is the English-language news web site published by *Al-Ahram Establishment*, Egypt's largest news organisation, and the publisher of the daily *Al-Ahram*. *Al-Ahram on-line* was launched in November 2010.

⁷ *Al-Masry al-Youm* is Egypt's foremost Arabic-language independent daily first published in June 2004 and close to opposition.

⁸ The *Egyptian Gazette* is the Middle East's oldest English-language newspaper and which first appeared in January 1880.

⁹ The *Watani International* is the most important Coptic community weekly Sunday newspaper published in Cairo, founded in 1958.

¹⁰ The *Arab West Report* is an independent weekly digest of Egyptian newspaper translations and editorial analysis, focusing primarily on Arab-West and Muslim-Christian relations covering the period from 1997 until today.

levels, emphasizing the presence not only of conflict but also of cooperation, however difficult, between groups; to pay more attention to the Muslim community's point of view towards religious minorities, especially the Copts; to study in depth, in a middle-term perspective, the political developments of revolutionary Egypt. These are the aims that the research will try to achieve in the next phase.

3. *Before the revolution: the Coptic question from the Sadat years to Mubarak's reign*

In recent years many states of Maghreb have had to deal with the rise of ethnic and religious consciousness; religious differences have accentuated conflicts and raised barriers much more impermeable than those symbolized by ethnic, tribal and linguistic diversities¹¹. Stability and social cohesion have been guaranteed at the price of ideological and cultural pluralism. Nationalist leaderships have laid stress on unanimity and unity¹², imposing, more often than not, authoritarian governments¹³, based on a 'discriminating ideology' which aims to assimilate and marginalise the 'other'¹⁴.

Post-colonial regimes refused to recognise cultural differences, freedom of expression and participation and changes of regime. On the other hand, the political liberalisation launched in the 1970s and 1980s (Sadat, Benjedid, Ben Ali) turned into operations of 'institutional cosmetics'.

As a result, political pluralism lacked any effectiveness, while cultural plurality did not receive any acknowledgement in the constitutional charters that consider the Arab-Islamic identity the sole national reference. In the independent states the balance of force was basically overthrown, and community survival¹⁵ was perceived to be in danger. In the face of the 'steamroller of the modern state'¹⁶, the term 'minority' acquired a new meaning centred not only on numerical inferiority, but also on group vulnerability.

Further adding to the difficulty has been the more recent entry into the Arab political discourse of notions of democratization, pluralism and civil society, all of which have implications for state-minority relations and pose challenges to entrenched, authoritarian Arab regimes¹⁷.

During the last decades, religious clashes in Egypt (a country where the Muslim majority lives close to a considerable Christian minority - about 9% of the Egyptian population according to

¹¹ Richard Tapper (edited by), *Some minorities in the Middle East*, (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1992), p. 2.

¹² Alain Finkielkraut, *La défaite de la pensée*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 44.

¹³ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1960), p. 120.

¹⁴ Maya Shatzmiller (edited by), *Nationalism and minority identities in Islamic societies*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2005), p. 30.

¹⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1988), p. 100.

¹⁶ Christopher A. Bayly, *The birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 223.

¹⁷ Tapper, *Some minorities in the Middle East*, p. I.

estimates provided by *The World Factbook*¹⁸) have broken out with violence, passing their ‘safety level’¹⁹ and calling into question the juridical and political position of non-Muslims within society and the state.

In the XXth century there were different answers to the issue of the core identity of Egypt that influenced the political participation of Christians. The shift to Islamic themes as the main constituent of the Egyptian community and the rise of sectarian tensions led Copts to be relegated to a secondary status, as outsiders, who have indeed certain rights as a ‘protected’ and accepted ancient minority, but are not, and never can be, part of the Islamic core identity, and they must therefore be politically marginalized.

The political participation of the Coptic minority and the problem of its integration inside a national community went through several phases during the different Republican governments, but all Egyptian regimes have failed to deal with the problem of defining the Egyptian political community.

The collapse of the Nasserist ideology led to the dissolution of nationalistic and socialistic projects, giving space to radical tendencies, oriented in defining themselves only from a religious viewpoint; this marked a passage from a political and economic view to a religious one.

The Islamization process initiated by Anwar al-Sadat (1970-1981) marked a turning point in the 1970’s: the fundamentalist resurgence pushed Islam again to the fore as the common denominator of the majority, thus leaving the Copts out of the political arena²⁰. In this period the Coptic Church emerged as the community’s effective political representative and eclipsed the secular Coptic elite in consequence of the election of Bishop Shenouda as Patriarch in October 1971. The political leadership of Pope Shenouda coincided with a growing sense of Coptic nationalism or ethnic consciousness; Sadat’s appeal to the Islamic heritage alienated the traditionally quiescent Coptic community²¹ and provoked several conflicts between the President and the Pope and violent social clashes between the religious groups.

‘To engineer the shift, the ruling elites resorted to certain policies that triggered a process of significant changes in Muslim-Coptic relations’²². This fact was highlighted when the phrase ‘Islam

¹⁸ THE WORLD FACTBOOK 2009, *Egyptian People Section*, Central Intelligence Agency, Washington DC 2009. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>.

¹⁹ Samir Morcos, ‘The Coptic question’, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 31 December 2009 – 6 January 2011. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/979/sc101.htm>.

²⁰ Hamied Ansari, ‘Sectarian conflict in Egypt and the political expediency of religion’, *Middle East Journal* 38:3, Summer 1984, pp. 400-401.

²¹ David Zeidan, ‘The Copts. Equal, protected or persecuted? The impact of islamization on Muslim-Christian relations in Modern Egypt’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10:1, 1999, p. 57.

²² Nadia R. Farah, *Religious strife in Egypt: crisis and ideological conflict in the Seventies*, (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1986.), p. 122.

is the religion of the state, and Shari'a is a main source of legislation'²³ was added to the second article of the constitution in 1971, which was later amended to 'Shari'a is *the*²⁴ main source of legislation'²⁵ in 1980. These events also affected the political participation of Copts by excluding them from the electoral lists, due to the assumption that they were incapable of winning seats.

In October 1981 a group of Muslim extremists assassinated Sadat while he was attending a military parade; the end of the Sadat regime did not lead to a return of interfaith dialogue. On the contrary, as we have said before, religious strife continued during all the Mubarak regime (1981-2011): 'His regime was good at window dressing, and public meetings with the Coptic Patriarch Shenuda III cemented the president's image as protector of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Although it remained difficult for Copts to obtain permits to build or repair churches, he allowed several grand projects, and declared January 7th, Coptic Christmas, a national holiday'²⁶.

Politically and socially, Mubarak's administration was more willing to bring the Copts into the fold. In naming his government, Mubarak appointed Fikri Makram 'Ebeid deputy Prime Minister and a second Copt as Minister of State for Emigration. He also released the Pope from the monastic exile imposed by Sadat. Tolerance was also demonstrated by Mubarak's 'national unity' campaign of the early 1990s.

However Mubarak's regime remained under severe Islamist pressure and compromised with the Islamic 'moderates' in order to isolate and crush the violent extremists. This meant continuing the discriminatory trends of the status quo. Whenever Copts were being attacked the government remained passive and refrained from intervention or action.

'During the past three decades polarization between Muslims and Christians has grown. Both groups have become religiously more conservative. Mubarak allowed inter-religious tensions to escalate; by the year 2000, random acts of violence against the Copts had become normative'²⁷.

According to 'Ala al-Aswani, one of the most important critical voices against the overthrown Mubarak regime, 'the inconsistency of the state policy in the sectarian domain is due to the regime being afraid of any external pressure, its over-reliance on the repressive state apparatus, and the general prosecutor's office being under the influence of the justice minister who is appointed and directed by Mubarak'²⁸. All of these issues have led to the vacillation of the state policy regarding

²³ Hany Dowidar, 'Égypte', in Eric Canal-Forgues, ed., *Recueil des constitutions des pays arabes*, (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2000), p. 91.

²⁴ Italics mine.

²⁵ Dowidar, 'Égypte', [T1]

²⁶ Nelly van Doorn-Harder, 'Egypt: does the revolution include the Copts?', *Open Democracy* [on line], 16 March 2011. Available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/nelly-van-doorn-harder/egypt-does-revolution-include-copts>.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ 'Ala al-Aswani, *On the state of Egypt. The issues that caused the Revolution*, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011), pp. 131-132.

Copts; in some cases, the law is breached to assuage Copts, as in the Wafa' Qustantin²⁹ affair in 2004, in which the state neglected to protect her and handed her over to the Church; in other cases the regime fails to protect Copts, as in the bombing of the Alexandria Church. 'This inconsistency has led people to lose faith in the law and to take the law into their own hands, which has caused horrendous crimes'³⁰.

Today, the political, social and economic condition of Christians in Egypt represents the main reason for concerns rather than the problems of persecution. Whatever their percentages, though, Copts are to a certain extent politically underrepresented. Coptic political participation remained limited to a number of appointed MPs and ministers with second-rate portfolios. In the election of 2005, Copts were disappointed when the National Democratic Party (NDP) announced that only one Copt, Yusuf Boutros Ghali, would be on its list of candidates. Moreover, in 2007, the regime broke a promise reportedly made to the Church that it would allocate a specific number of seats to Copts in the Shura Council elections.

Coptic representation in the last cabinet before the recent Egyptian Revolution consisted of two ministers, Youssef Boutros Ghali in the Ministry of Finance and Maged George in the Ministry of the Environment; in the Shafiq interim cabinet (January 2011) only the Minister of Environment kept his post³¹.

The NDP often withdrew the candidacy of Copts from electoral districts, claiming their inability to win the vote as we saw in the last elections when candidates were removed after they were placed on party lists for the Shura Council elections. The official regime limits Coptic citizens to a symbolic participation in the political system, which is made most evident by the President's appointment of Coptic representatives in the People's Assembly. In the 2010 elections, prior to the Alexandria Church bombing, former President Mubarak chose to appoint only seven Coptic members of Parliament out of ten that he is constitutionally allowed to select³².

Furthermore they are underrepresented in a number of fields. There are hardly any high-ranking Copts in the military, police force, judiciary or diplomatic corps. Copts are also drastically underrepresented in higher university posts. They tend to be excluded from the intelligence service and the presidential staff and are underrepresented among Egypt's regional governors.

²⁹ She was the wife of a priest who converted to Islam and then returned to the Church. This made the Church urge Christians to demonstrate and claim that she was kidnapped. Security services brought her back to the Church. However, Qustantin disappeared and the Church confirmed that she willingly came back to Christianity. There were many reports accusing the Church of kidnapping Qustantin.

³⁰ Al-Aswani, *On the state of Egypt*, pp. 131-132.

³¹ Christine Chaillot, *Les Coptes d'Égypte. Discriminations et persécutions*, (Paris: L'oeuvre editions, 2011), p. 124.

³² Ishaq Ibrahim, 'Luring Copts into politics', *Watani International* [on-line], 20 January 2008. Available at: http://www.wataninet.com/watani_Article_Details.aspx?A=1555.

Important state offices are still closed to Egyptian citizens with a Coptic background, and their representation in the judiciary, the official media, diplomatic missions, the army and the police does not exceed 2% of the total. For instance, there are 17 public universities in Egypt, each having one director and three or four deputy directors with a total of 71 positions; not a single Copt occupies one of these seats. In addition, there are 274 deans in Egyptian faculties, none of which includes a single Copt³³.

However Copts do obtain leading posts in Egyptian society and have a large presence in civil society associations. The presence of Egyptian Copts is not limited to a specific profession or a cluster of professions; they practice all professions and are active in all economic fields as their Muslim counterparts. Just like Muslims, Copts are represented in all social strata.

A significant number of Copts are concentrated in private and skilled professions; even so a large gap exists between the economic dynamism of Egyptian Christians and their political and legal stature. Such a fact tends not to console the productive and economically successful Coptic man, but increases his frustration instead, for he would expect – with additional vigour – a legal and political treatment that makes him equal to other citizens.

4. The Coptic question: the main elements of a controversial theme

The Coptic question focuses on some relevant issues which, being often the subject of news stories, continue to highlight the urgency of a possible solution.

To give some examples: the political and social discrimination that limits the freedom of worship; the problems related to personal status, such as the theme of divorce, forbidden by the Coptic Church, which represents the cause of numerous episodes of conversion and the pretext for the consequent religious clashes within the communities, between opposing groups, and among the Coptic and Muslim groups, frequently because of specious grounds; serious acts of violence which caused the deaths of many Christians during holydays.

Confrontation on the question continues to generate conflicts within the Coptic community too. In fact, the contemporary debate over the nature of the inter-communal relations between Muslims and Christians and between the latter and the state is based on the positions of two different groups: on the one hand supporters of a political discourse that appeals to national unity, as a ‘glue’ of relations between Copts and power, and, on the other hand, those who put forward the hypothesis that religious and cultural differences among groups have generated, throughout history, hostility towards the Christians.

³³ Adel Gunidy, ‘Symbolic victim in a socially regressing Egypt: the declining situation of the Copts’, *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 14:1, March 2010, p. 85.

Such Coptic scholars as Vivian Fu'ad and Samir Morcos, who are Coptic researchers and writers, Hani Labib, Ghali Shukri, Milad Hanna, a Coptic writer, and William Soliman Kelada, one of the most important Coptic intellectuals, emphasize in their studies the importance of the national unity call: in the name of Egyptian nationalism, they reject any kind of dialogue that deals with the Coptic community presented as a minority and focus attention on the general problem of citizenship, which involved all the Egyptian without differences³⁴.

From a different position, Shawky Karas, the founder of the *US Coptic Association*, emphasizes the persecutory attitude of Muslims towards the minority community, focusing on the evident differences of religion, culture and history between Copts and Muslims.

'Most Coptic intellectuals and the Church leaders, as well as Muslim counterparts inside Egypt, view Muslim-Coptic relations in a unique fashion which does not resemble any other inter-ethnic or inter-religious dynamics'³⁵.

These conflicts are reflected in the different responses provided by groups to the Patriarch's policies: the statements and decisions of Shenouda III (1923-2012) appeared divergent if compared with the positions expressed by the secular group on political matters such as the imposition of the vote during the elections and support for government policy, but also on social issues such as divorce and conversion. This situation has led some Coptic intellectuals to define the positions taken by the Coptic Church as not representative of the community. The secular elite, regarding the path of the community for the recognition of civil rights, has often claimed the necessary division between the religious sphere and the political one. This group stresses Egyptian nationalism, the links between Muslims and Christians, and the distinctiveness of Egyptian national identity tied not to religion but to the land.

3.1 Masriyyin or Masihiyyin: the problem of citizenship

The concept of citizen and citizenship represents one of the most important topics concerning the Coptic question. It is closely connected with the definition of community in Egypt and if the religious affiliation represents an important element of national identity.

Historically the relationship between the Islamic state and non-Muslims was based on the concept of the *dhimma*, a protection contract, and was used to designate a sort of indefinitely renewed contract through which the Muslim community accorded hospitality and protection to Jews

³⁴ Mohammad Abu-Nimer, Amal Khoury, Emily Welty (edited by), *Unity in diversity: interfaith dialogue in the Middle East*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), pp. 100-101.

³⁵ Asef Bayat, 'Egypt's sectarian playing field', *Al Jazeera* [on-line], 5 June 2011. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/06/201163904835903.html>.

and Christians (known collectively as *Ahl al-Dhimma*³⁶, the People of the Book) on condition that they paid the *jizya*³⁷, a poll tax.

Living as second-class citizens in a situation which guaranteed Arab conquerors a political and economic supremacy, they could keep their religion and much of their social organization, but were subject to numerous personal and political restrictions.

Under the Ottoman Empire, the *dhimma* evolved into a collective pact between the sultan and the religious communities that became formalized in the *millet* system³⁸ which granted a relative autonomy in managing their internal affairs under their own chiefs.

Beginning in the second half of the XIXth century, the *millet* system and its ramifications were gradually discarded, but the maturing of an alternative, modern system based on the concept of citizenship was difficult to acquire.

The Egyptian Constitution establishes political, legal and social equality between Muslims and non-Muslims (art. 40, 46 and 8)³⁹. However article 2 states that ‘Islam is the religion of the state, Arabic is its official language and the principles of Islamic Shari’a are the main source of legislation’⁴⁰. This article has the potential to undermine the concept of citizenship by forcing the individual to be linked to a religious community. During the 2007 debate about constitutional amendments, most secular Copts and Muslims and the Coptic expatriates, opposed article 2 while many Copts, who were associated with the government and the Patriarch, issued statements of support for it⁴¹. Moreover the constitutional declaration issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in March 2011, following the referendum on constitutional amendments of March 19, has left article 2 intact⁴².

Despite these, a perpetual guarantee remained in the form of shared Egyptian identity and the social intermingling of Copts and Muslims in a single social context, whether in the cities or in the country. Official rhetoric of ‘national dialogue’ and ‘national unity’, trying apparently to break

³⁶ See Georges Vajda, s.v. ‘Ahl al-Kitab’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd ed. (EI2), I, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), p. 264-266; Claude Cahen, s.v. ‘Dhimma’, in EI2, II, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 227-231; Aziz S. Atiya, s.v. ‘Ahl al-Dhimmah’, in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (CE), I, (New York: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 72-73.

³⁷ Claude Cahen, s.v. ‘Djizya’, in EI2, II, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 559-562; Aziz S. Atiya, s.v. ‘Jizyah’, in CE, IV, p. 1336.

³⁸ Michael O.H. Ursinus, s.v. ‘Millet’, in EI2, VII, (Leiden-New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), pp. 61-64; Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 38-39.

³⁹ Dowidar, ‘Égypte’, [T2].

⁴⁰ Dowidar, ‘Égypte’, [T3].

⁴¹ Nushin Atmaca, ‘Arguments, alternatives and amendments: article two of the Egyptian Constitution’, *Arab-West Report*, Paper 2, August 2007, pp. 6-8. Available at: <http://www.arabwestreport.info/sites/default/files/pdfs/AWRpapers/paper2.pdf>.

⁴² Egyptian Constitutional Declaration 2011. Available at: <http://www.egypt.gov.eg/english/laws/constitution/default.aspx>

down barriers, did not consider the differences and the real problems of the Christian group⁴³. It became a mechanism for avoiding a nuanced discussion of the challenges inherent in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In fact, although the government of Mubarak issued several laws in favour of the Copts such as the 'relative' flexibility in the legal procedure for building churches, the establishment of Christmas as an official state holiday, the leadership's intervention to resolve some of the Copts' claims, and other practices, some groups within the community underlined that the government's attempts to fight the fundamentalist current led to its sidelining of Coptic issues and concerns.

The state was keen to preserve the status quo concerning its relationship with the Islamists and was eager not to provoke them by defending the Copts⁴⁴. Its decision to avoid confrontation with the Islamists was particularly acute when, during the early 1990's, *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* had become very powerful and had stepped up its violent activities, which included targeting the Copts.

Samir Morcos affirms that 'the Copts are not a separate group or closed entity. Nor are they sociologically or politically homogenous. They are spread across the social scale, include labourers, peasants and craftsmen, practitioners of the liberal professions and businessmen. [...] We need to look at current trends as the product of socio-economic causes and as a deviation from the concrete achievements of Egyptians, proceeding from the notion that existing tensions oblige us to consider the Coptic question in a context that includes the problems of the Egyptian people as a whole'⁴⁵.

In accordance with this position, Al-Aswani states that, 'apart from the existence of a Coptic question, there are several accompanying symptoms that must be explained. These include general problems in the country that are suffered by all, Muslims and Copts equally, such as the lack of education, the inequality in opportunities, injustice and corruption'. Therefore, al-Aswani believes the struggle of the Copts must be part and parcel of the struggle of all citizens in Egypt⁴⁶.

In line with this position, some Coptic associations active in Egypt and the Coptic secular group claim an equal treatment and status for the Christians of Egypt.

This point of view, which involved the reflection on citizenship, tries to oppose the claims of an isolationist Coptic position which, requesting a different status as a minority, undermines the equality of the civic infrastructure, the necessity of acknowledging the shared national framework that binds all Egyptians together. From this perspective Coptic lobbies in the United States did not seek an equal Egyptian citizenship under the aegis of a democratic system, nor did they struggle against despotism and all the forms of injustice that touched both Muslims and Christians.

⁴³ The Free Copts, 'Ending sectarianism in Egypt', *The Free Copts* [on-line], 15 January 2011. Available at: http://english.freecopty.net/english//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1199&Itemid=9.

⁴⁴ Karim Al-Ghawary, 'Copts in the 'Egyptian Fabric'', *Middle East Report* 200, Jul. - Sep. 1996, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Morcos, 'The Coptic question'.

⁴⁶ Al-Aswani, *On the state of Egypt*, p.132.

In fact, some clerical and Coptic figures had no objections to making deals favouring the government in exchange for what they believed to be increased rights for Coptic citizens. Such behaviour ignored the inherent contradiction between receiving civic rights as political ‘favours’, and the very notion of citizenship. Some authors who argue for the equality of Copts have noted that – in recent years – there has been a coupling between the interests of the Church and that of the regime which has led to the maintainance of the status quo through mutual benefits.

The Pope started to adopt a low profile, to cooperate with the regime, to avoid confrontation and embrace the rhetoric of national unity publicly supporting Mubarak during the presidential elections of 2005 and, later, his son Gamal. It was in the Church’s interest to make the Copts – once again – into a *millet*, a sectarian community that is largely autonomous, while at the same time, the Church itself was pressing the state to implement the rights of modern citizenship.

The presidential and parliamentary elections have highlighted how the government tries to exploit the Coptic votes by making all kinds of promises to the Church and the people, but not offering anything in return after victory.

Moreover the government, supported by the Pope, manipulated the community as a sectarian bloc, instead of participating in the political process as individuals. The regime’s failure to build fully-fledged equal citizenship and its incapacity to manage the country have created a number of negative reactions, including on social and religious levels, making sectarian polarization nothing but a symptom of this general state of incompetence.

This trend was evident, as we said before, in the behaviour of the Coptic Church in Egypt, as well as the Salafi current, or even the Muslim Brother organization, which never provided a clear explanation of its position on the matter of citizenship or regarding the proposition that all are equal in their homeland regardless of differences in doctrine and creed⁴⁷. The view of non-Muslims as an ‘other’ in the Muslim-majority state, as if it were an Islamic state, and the principles of Muslim-Christian relations in such a context are, in the best of cases, based on the notion of ‘tolerance’ (and on the charitable teachings of Islam) rather than equal rights.

3.2 The personal status law and the question of divorce

In December 2004 sectarian tension broke out between Muslims and Christians over the alleged conversion of Wafa’ Qustantin, a Coptic Christian, to Islam. Owing to social and economic pressure, the conversion to Islam by Christians is a relatively common occurrence in Egypt and, more often than not, it provokes religious strife. There are considerable incentives to convert to

⁴⁷ Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, ‘Can we speak of a Coptic Question in Egypt?’, May 2011[on-line], p. 22. Available at: <<http://english.dohainstitute.org/Home/Summary?entityID=83ee0edb-d77a-4183-ab94-575b65489a27&resourceId=dd38b406-f9cf-4eee-bae3-6bd22fab0fc0>>.

Islam such as the possibility of a mixed marriage. But the principle reason for the high rate of Coptic conversions is that the Coptic Church makes divorce very difficult and refuses permission.

The general principle of the Egyptian personal status law declares that each citizen is subjected to the laws of the religion declared on his or her government identification card.

According to law 462/1955, still in force today, the religious courts and the millet councils were abolished and their competences were transferred to national courts. However the law stated that the Islamic Shari'a would apply to non-Muslims in personal status litigations between parties belonging to different religious groups⁴⁸. For this reason, in case of divorce, the spouse who chooses to convert to Islam would benefit from the facilities that Islamic law grants relating to *talaq* (repudiation), prohibited by the Christian Church.

Thousands of Copts suffer because the Coptic Church refuses to grant them a divorce. The Coptic Church only allows divorce and remarriage of divorced people in very rare cases, leaving a big portion in a grey area⁴⁹. Recently, Egypt has witnessed several violent sectarian attacks in response to confirmed and unconfirmed reports of Copts converting to Islam in order to get divorced and remarry. In fact, after the Egyptian revolution, two major sectarian clashes took place that led to churches and Copts' homes being set afire and left hundreds injured⁵⁰. An ancient rural custom was re-asserted, changing a trans-sectarian love affair into a sectarian issue that leads to sectarian violence.

On 29 May 2010, the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) ruled in favour of Christians' right to remarry, directly contradicting the position of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The court ruling states that Egyptian Copts have a constitutional right to remarry⁵¹. Following Pope Shenouda III's objections the Ministry of Justice established a committee to prepare a unified personal status law for all Christian denominations. This project is still in discussion among many disputes⁵².

The demand to issue a religion-based special law for Coptic personal status is one of the major controversies between the state and the Church, given the Church's draconian rules in personal status matters, which are decried and opposed by many in the Coptic community itself.

⁴⁸ Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, *Non-Musulmans en pays d'Islam. Cas de l'Égypte*, (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires & Zurich, 1979), p. 206.

⁴⁹ Manal A. Aziz, 'Differentiating between State and Church Authorities', *The Egyptian Gazette* [on-line], June 14, 2010. Available at: <http://www.masress.com/en/egyptiangazette/9087>.

⁵⁰ Ekram Ibrahim, 'Civil personal status law: the fight for an equal right to a happy life for Copts', *Al-Ahram on line*, 5 July 2011. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentm/1/64/15625.aspx>.

⁵¹ Reem Leila, 'Church and State', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 3-9 June 2010. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1001/eg7.htm>.

⁵² Reem Leila, 'Towards a resolution', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 17-23 June 2010. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1003/eg4.htm>.

Many Coptic intellectuals argue that the maintenance of this religious personal status law represents an impediment to the development of the secular nation-state and they encourage the establishment of a unified civil personal status law.

The Coptic Church, defending the religious identity of marriage and its intransigent position on divorce cases⁵³, is trying to reinforce its own authority and to protect itself and the community by limiting conversions and the encroachment of the Islamic heritage which would further undermine the Christian group. As the Christian family is the core of the Coptic community, the best way to preserve the centrality of the Church is through the defence of the personal status law.

This reinforcement of the political role of the Church, according to secularists, constitutes a significant impediment to the development of an equal concept of citizenship⁵⁴. The integrity of the community, rather than the freedom of individuals, is prioritized. One can see this in the attitude the Church takes toward national identity cards. Secular Copts and Muslims support the removal of religious affiliation on identity cards, 'viewing it as the key to establishing a human rights-based culture, increasing Egyptian's sense of national affiliation, and putting an end to religious discrimination. The Church, contrary to this position, wishes to keep religious affiliation on identity cards since it fears that removing that designation could result in illegal marriages between Muslims and Christians'⁵⁵.

3.3 The building of Churches in Egypt

The issue of church building in Egypt is among one of crucial subjects affecting Muslim-Christian relations. A lot of reporting is focused on building problems, difficulties in obtaining building permits and tensions that sometimes follow construction activities. But some recent researches have introduced a new approach to the issue revealing that the Western public is not made aware by journalists of the complex background and of difficulties in building. Egyptian law and regulations are not the only factors that influence building but also the social climate between Muslims and Christians.

It is possible to show that the relevance of the existing regulations⁵⁶ and also the impact of new laws on church building should not be overestimated because the existence of a loophole for

⁵³ Youssef Sidhom, 'Not above the law', *Watani International* [on-line], 9 March 2008. Available at: http://www.wataninet.com/watani_Article_Details.aspx?A=2192.

⁵⁴ Karima Kamal, 'Coptic remarriage: how to solve the impasse', *Egypt Independent* [on-line], 8 June 2010. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/coptic-remarriage-how-solve-impasse>.

⁵⁵ Rachel M. Scott, *The challenge of political Islam. Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2010, pp. 175-176.

⁵⁶ The building of both churches and mosques requires that ten legal conditions, issued in February 1934 by Deputy Interior Minister Al-Ezabi Pasha, be fulfilled. Presidential decree 291/2005 signifies yet another simplification for church related construction. The President delegates his authority for permitting modifications and extensions as well as the demolition and subsequent rebuilding of churches to the governors, thus only retaining the authority to license new churches. For further details see Christian Fastenrath, Corin Kazanjian, 'Important Factors for church building in

the administration or security body seems to be a common feature of law for building houses of worship in general. The gap in the legislation is filled by different factors in the social environment.

It has emerged that relationships both with administration officials and with the local Muslim communities are exceptionally important for church building. This means that the impact of the social environment on church building is stronger than the impact of legislation. In fact ‘under the former regime of President Hosni Mubarak the building of a church was a security issue, where the [now] dissolved State Security apparatus was the body responsible for giving church building permission’⁵⁷.

This is also the position expressed by the Coptic scholar Hani Labib⁵⁸ who says that the really strict conditions are not a reflection of discrimination against the Copts as much as they are a routine procedure established to organize the building of religious temples also for Muslims.

In accordance with this perspective, in recent years, multiple voices have called for a unified law governing the building of places of worship in Egypt. According to the draft law proposed in 2005 by the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), the construction of all houses of worship, irrespective of religion, should follow a single procedure. Hence, the houses of prayer of all religions are to be placed on an equal legal footing.

The NCHR by adopting such a law ‘would put an end to one of the chief causes of sectarian strife in Egypt’⁵⁹. For others, the proposed legislation would confirm the importance given to the principle of national unity referred to in article 3 of the Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt⁶⁰. On June 2011 a new draft was issued by the cabinet, therefore, still waiting to be approved but *de facto* the draft law continues to give to National Security Agency a role in terms of authorizing it. The building of places of worship is not an administrative issue and could create further religious strife.

3.4 The Egyptian religious question as an international question.

The problem of interfaith dialogue and the protection of human rights and individual freedoms, with regard to the religious question in Egypt, is considered as an important issue of global politics and Euro-Mediterranean relations in order to promote policies of partnership and democracy building in Maghreb.

Egypt’, *Arab-West Report*, Paper 4, April 2008. Available at: <http://www.arabwestreport.info/sites/default/files/pdfs/AWRpapers/churchbuildingpaper.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Ahmed Z. Osman, ‘New places of worship law leaves much to be desired’, *Egypt independent* [on-line], 18 June 2011. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/new-places-worship-law-leaves-much-be-desired>.

⁵⁸ Hani Labib, ‘About building churches and Christians wealth’, *Arab-West Report* 17/23, April 2012. Available at: <http://www.arabwestreport.info/23-about-building-churches-and-christians-wealth>.

⁵⁹ ‘Problems on hold: confounding the Copting Issue’, *National American Coptic Assembly*, February 2010. Available at: <http://nacopts1.blogspot.it/search?q=problems+on+hold>.

⁶⁰ Dowidar, ‘Égypte’, [T4].

Looking at international politics, the numerous cases of religious discrimination that have occurred in Egypt have called in a loud voice for the intervention of international institutions committed to the promotion and protection of human rights in countries where they undergo repeated violations.

The role played and the policies enacted by international political actors, such as the European Union and the United States, and local organizations, such as the NCHR, have often tried to increase awareness of international public opinion on the religious problem in Egypt, inviting the government to consider the problem of interfaith dialogue and the defence of minority rights as an important and indispensable issue in order to enact real democratic policies.

Analysing different news articles and editorials published between 2005 and 2011, we can highlight the role played and the policies enacted by the above mentioned political actors. On this occasion we only get a few but relevant examples analysing the debate presented in the newspapers.

In consequence of the sectarian strife which took place in Alexandria in October 2005, *Al-Ahram Weekly* reported that the USCA, through its president Michael Munir, exploited the unrest to ask Congress to place additional pressure on the Egyptian government, and press its allegations of 'Coptic-targeted hate crimes' in the predominantly Muslim country⁶¹.

The following November a controversial US-based conference ended with calls for greater United States pressure on Egypt, and restrictions on Washington's aid to Cairo, in light of alleged persecution of Coptic Orthodox Christians⁶². According to this, the United States might want to reconsider both its aid package, as well as plans for a free trade agreement with Cairo, if the alleged persecution of Copts persisted. Egypt is the second largest recipient of United States foreign aid⁶³.

In December 2007 *Watani* and *Al-Ahram Weekly* focused their attention on the General Citizenship Conference held in Cairo under the auspices of the NCHR which resulted in the Egyptian Declaration of Citizenship (EDC), a comprehensive report on how human rights measures and principles could be respected in Egypt. Important options were offered to combat religious discrimination where formal papers are concerned. The EDC stressed the absolute necessity of respecting the dignity of individuals, even if suspects or defendants⁶⁴. The head of the NCHR,

⁶¹ Mustafa Al-Menshaway, 'Too Late for denials', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 2-9 November 2005. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/767/eg11.htm>.

⁶² William Inboden, 'US religious freedom policy in the new Egypt', *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs* [on-line], 3 June 2011. Available at: <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/william-inboden-on-us-religious-freedom-policy-in-the-new-egypt>.

⁶³ Emad Mekay, 'Copts mix cards', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 24-30 November 2005. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/770/eg13.htm>; Emad Mekay, 'Empowering the Copts', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 16-22 August 2007. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/858/fr2.htm>.

⁶⁴ Youssef Sidhom, 'Declaration of citizenship rights', *Watani International* [on-line], 2 December 2007. Available at: http://www.wataninet.com/watani_Article_Details.aspx?A=57.

Boutros Boutros Ghali⁶⁵, said that particular problems faced by religious minorities, such as Coptic Christians and Bahaais, had been carefully examined.

In the beginning of 2008 an article published in *Watani* underlined how an European Parliament resolution, adopted on the 17th of January which criticised Egypt's human rights record, especially with regard to the status of religious minorities, provoked a far-reaching negative effect on Egyptian-EU relations.⁶⁶

The dramatic situation was confirmed by a series of sectarian conflicts which happened during 2008; in July 2008 *Al-Ahram Weekly* highlighted an important question: while a chorus of Coptic foreign activists protested against the conditions of Copts in Egypt, those at home tended to play down the Coptic 'crisis' propagated by Copts who live abroad. There were growing reservations among Copts in Egypt that if foreign Coptic organizations continued to use such spats as this, the interests of Copts at home would be jeopardised. Many Coptic lay people believed that their interests would be compromised if the Copts abroad stepped up their angry demonstrations and protests. 'Copts, like their Muslim compatriots suffer from the sharp rise in the costs of food and fuel and many are unemployed. Copts face much the same challenges facing Muslim Egyptians' told Milad Hanna.⁶⁷

This controversy represents only the tip of the iceberg; in fact, in 1988 the US Congress passed the *Freedom from Religious Persecution Act*, largely as a result of Coptic lobbying. The law imposed automatic sanctions on those countries seen to engage in ongoing persecution of persons on account of their religious beliefs: 'The United States government is committed to the right to freedom of religion, and its policies and relations with foreign governments should be consistent with the commitment to this principle'⁶⁸.

In Egypt, a strong negative reaction came from many different people, for example Youssef Sidhom, the editor-in-chief of *Watani*, Samir Morcos but also from relevant Muslims such as the judge and intellectual Tariq al-Bishri and from the Brotherhood⁶⁹; the Coptic Church was among the first to reject such intervention viewed as an interference in internal matters⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Egyptian politician and diplomat, he was the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations from January 1992 to December 1996.

⁶⁶ Magdi Malak, 'Furore over human rights', in *Watani International* [on-line], 27 January 2008. Available at: http://www.wataninet.com/watani_Article_Details.aspx?A=1697.

⁶⁷ Gamal Nkrumah, 'Race against time', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 17-23 July 2008. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/906/eg4.htm>.

⁶⁸ *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998*, H.R. 2431-7. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/2297.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Ikhwanweb, 'Habib: engaging Copts is necessary to prevent sectarian conflicts', *Ikhwanweb* [on-line], 19 July 2008. Available at: <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=17401&ref=search.php>.

⁷⁰ Peter E. Makari, *Conflict & Cooperation. Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*, (Syracuse-New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), pp. 171-172.

4. *After the revolution: the Copts between old demands and new hopes*

After the January revolution the Coptic question seems to have been put on the agenda once again, especially as a result of the latest sectarian strife which took place after the Tahrir Square rebellion. Only to quote some examples, on the 4th of March 2011 two men were killed during clashes in the Helwan Governorate between Muslims and Christians, which also saw Muslims set fire to a church in the village of Sul, in the south of Cairo; thousands of Christians staged a sit-in in front of the Broadcasting and Television building (Maspero) on the Nile Corniche in Cairo protesting against the attack on the St. Mina and St. George Churches.

The protesters blocked the road and were confronted by a number of Muslims. The Church did not appear to be controlling the scene of the protest, with a negligible number of clerics among the protesters, and the demonstrators stressed that they did not march behind a priest, but in order to demand that Copts become first class citizens.

Once again, on the 7th of May, 2011 there was a series of attacks that took place against Coptic churches in the poor working-class neighbourhood of Imbaba in Cairo; many protesters staged, as before, a sit-in in front of Egyptian Radio and Television.

Regarding these events, important analyses can be found mainly thanks to the press⁷¹, because the topicality of facts precludes the possibility of historical research.

The Coptic community has continued to fear that the possible rise to power of the Brotherhood could undermine the basis for the emergence of a democratic government; Copts are becoming increasingly fearful as the political and social identities of Islamist groups begin to crystallize in the aftermath of Egypt's 25 January revolution. But many commentators have put much trust in the Brotherhood's youth wing whose members seem more moderate and congenial towards political compromises than the older generation. Young Brothers in Tahrir Square downplayed their agenda and refused to carry Islamist banners.

All these could be confirmed by the fact that on several occasions, many newspaper articles stated that the sectarian clashes in March and May seemed to be a plot by groups out to thwart the revolution and underlined 'the role of domestic and foreign forces in launching a counter-revolution by instigating a security vacuum, the mayhem of professional rights, institutional turmoil and intimidation by thugs'⁷².

According to a research paper published by the *Arab Center for Research and Policy*

⁷¹ For example *Al-Ahram Weekly* devoted several analyses to the clashes of Imbaba, questioning the role of the Copts in post-revolutionary Egypt, in the issue n. 1047 of 12-18 May 2011; moreover *Al-Masry al-Youm* focused its attention on this question in many editorials, i.e. Ahmed Z. Osman, 'Egypt's Copts: at a political crossroads', *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 10 March 2011. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypts-copts-political-crossroads>.

⁷² Taha A. Alim, 'National unity after the Egyptian revolution', *Al-Ahram on-line*, 23 March 2011. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/4/8367/Opinion/National-unity-after-the-Egyptian-revolution.aspx>.

Studies, ‘the Revolutionary Youth Coalition⁷³ issued a statement on March 9th accusing the State Security officers of being the inciters and fomenters of sedition [...]. This was the position of the Muslim Brotherhood⁷⁴ who claimed that the rabble of the former regime and its National Party and State Security are behind the flaring of sectarian strife between Muslims and Christians⁷⁵.

On that occasion the group called for a million-man march on Friday (March 11th) under the slogan ‘for the love of Egypt’ rejecting sectarian sedition and the incidents of violence that recently took place in the country.

This time, however, a new variable entered the fray: the Egyptian people and Egyptian public opinion, both of which were marginalized in the past. When the public began voicing its opinions, it became clear that mainstream Egyptian society staunchly rejected sectarian strife, and refused to be drawn into it; in doing this, it was refusing to be silenced or marginalized by sectarian polarization⁷⁶.

This was evident on the occasion of the sectarian clashes which broke out in October 2011⁷⁷. Whether the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is consciously manipulating these tensions, underestimating them, or simply mishandling them, the net effect is to increase the sense of instability and division in Egyptian society, to which many are responding by demanding stability and order. The April 6 Youth Movement, which played a leading role in sparking off the revolution, followed this event and issued a set of demands. The group called for an indefinite sit-in at Tahrir, and accused the military council of ‘wearing Mubarak's mask’⁷⁸.

The Maspero Youth Coalition, a Coptic activist group, issued a similar statement denouncing the use of what it called ‘unjustified violence’ against peaceful protesters and calling for a swift transfer of executive power to an elected civilian authority.

⁷³ The coalition is composed of representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood, the Youth Movement for Justice and Freedom, the April 6 Youth Movement, the campaign to support Mohamed al-Baradei, the National Association for Change, the youth wings of the Democratic Front, al-Karama, Tagammu’ and al-Ghad parties, as well as independent activists like Sally Moore, ‘Abd al-Rahman Faris, and Nasser ‘Abd al-Hamid. The coalition called for the end of the state of emergency, the dissolution of the parliament and the constitution, the depoliticization of the military, and the abolition of all the restrictions limiting freedoms of opinion and expression. Although the coalition supported dialogue with the SCAF during the early phase of the transition, it also recommended the creation of a civilian council to govern for the remainder of the interim period. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, ‘Revolutionary Youth Coalition’. Available at: <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/11/revolutionary-youth-coalition>.

⁷⁴ A statement by the General Guide of Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Badie in *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 10 March 2011.

⁷⁵ Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, ‘Can we speak of a Coptic Question in Egypt?’, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Samer Soliman, ‘The pragmatic spirit of Egypt's civil forces’, *Copts United* [on-line], 22 May 2012. Available at: <http://www.coptsunited.com/Details.php?I=598&A=5499>.

⁷⁷ Hundreds of Copts, and some Muslims, marched on the building that houses the state-run television and radio to protest against the authorities’ failure to investigate the burning of a church in Aswan. The demonstration turned bloody when soldiers guarding the building shot at protesters and ran over them with armoured vehicles. The protest, which had been approved by the ruling military council, became a battleground that left 28 people dead and 325 wounded.

⁷⁸ Hatem Maher, ‘April 6: SCAF is now ‘wearing Mubarak’s mask’, *Al-Ahram on-line*, 20 November 2011. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/27089/Egypt/Politics-/April--SCAF-is-now-wearing-Mubarak's-mask.aspx>; Gregg Carlstrom, ‘Egypt violence: mood turns against military’, *Al-Jazeera* [on-line], 21 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/11/2011112182234430919.html>.

However, the first post-Mubarak parliamentary elections, held between November 2011 and February 2012, did not give comfort to those Christians who had hoped Egypt's revolution would mean a chance for equal rights for all citizens.

In fact, the virtual disappearance of Mubarak's vehicle for clientelism, the NDP, brought different groups to parliament, from the Social-Democratic Party to the liberal Egypt Bloc to the Revolution Continues Alliance group, the effectiveness of which remains to be seen. But the real concerns of Copts, although different political analysts affirm that these worries are out of proportion and unfounded, is that Islamist political candidates have dominated parliamentary elections: the Muslim Brotherhood Freedom and Justice Party received about 47% of seats and the hardline Salafist Al-Nour Party received 29%.

Meanwhile the victory of the 'Yes' vote to constitutional amendments in March increase the discountenance of Christians. The proposed constitutional amendments put to the vote largely dealt with the articles of the 1971 constitution pertaining to presidential elections and the president's term in office and there was no mention of the notorious article 2. Despite this, the referendum campaign has become a fight between the two religious groups of the country. The Copts have said they will vote against the amendments which could enable the Islamists to gain more parliamentary seats.

Although religion was not the only theme marshalled by those defending the 'Yes' vote, the widespread notion that it was 'un-Islamic' to vote 'No' angered many and heightened existing fears that Islamists and Salafists were pushing their agendas through religious manipulation instead of political participation⁷⁹.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the Coptic question presented here we have tried to understand the dynamics that have shaped, and continue to shape, Egyptian policy and society. Nowadays, trying to know what place is reserved for religion in this context has become more necessary than ever before.

Failing to provide definitive or exhaustive answers, we can, however, suggest some final reflections. When we look at the relationship between state and society in Egypt, we find that the state itself is not yet fully formed; on the other hand, there is not enough of a democratic political culture within the society to allow for civic forces to become full, dynamic participants in the drafting of the social contract⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Salma Shukrallah, Yassin Gaber, 'What was religion doing in the debate on Egypt's Constitutional amendments?', *Al-Ahram on-line*, 22 march 2011. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org/Egypt/0/What-was-religion-doing-in-the-debate-on-Egypt-Co.aspx>.

⁸⁰ Robert Springborg, 'State-society relations in Egypt: the debate over owner-tenant relations', *Middle East Journal* 45:2, Spring 1991, p. 232.

In this way, we can understand the lack of a democratic public culture as the political reality on the ground is divorced from the idealized scenario presented in the texts⁸¹. This sense of injustice and lack of equal opportunities has fed feelings of discrimination along sectarian lines as well as others, such as sex, regional, agrarian or status. There is indeed a real set of forces which drove a wedge between Egyptian citizens and their government, with effects on social integration and participation.

In fact, different elements, which do not involve only the religious sphere, cover Coptic-Muslim relations. There is, for example, the economic aspect, which, in Egypt, is a struggle between the many have-nots and the few who control all the wealth; there is furthermore a political aspect, which might spill over into a struggle for power between the leadership of the Coptic minority and the rest of society; and finally, there is the social aspect, which foreign forces sometimes exploit as an excuse to intervene in Egypt's internal affairs, in a situation which brings to mind the phrase 'politicization of religion'. These aspects were present in the past as they are at the present time.

In line with this analysis, different commentators and observers criticize the prevailing civic and cultural conditions in Egypt; Boutros Boutros Ghali has argued that the sectarian strifes occurred because of a deficiency in the Egyptian educational system, and the lack of respect for human rights in the country⁸². Similarly, the Egyptian scholar and columnist Mamun Fandy criticises the approach of the media and cultural circles in dealing with the Coptic Question, describing it as emotional, superficial, and neglectful of the role of the state and civil society in resolving the crisis⁸³.

Moreover the notion of the Copts' need for 'protection' has become a central issue. The principal dilemma is that all sides - including the Copts themselves - have formulated concepts of 'protection' without reference to the notion of citizenship that would guarantee total equality of rights and duties among all citizens regardless of sex, creed, colour or race.

The Egyptian revolution tried to call into question these central issues which supposedly deal with all Egyptian citizens according to the concept of citizenship regardless of their religious beliefs, ideological affiliations, or numerical ratio even if it does not exceed 1%.

The Muslim Brothers, who have been included in the political and legal framework once again, also have to take into account the achievements of the January revolution, in term of pacific collaboration between religious groups. The 2012 parliamentary election victory could represent a

⁸¹ Jonathan Fox, 'The difficult transition from clientelism to citizenship: lessons from Mexico', *World Politics* 46:2, January 1994, p.151.

⁸² Gamal Nkrumah, 'Room for religion and rights', *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 6-12 January 2012. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1030/eg2.htm>.

⁸³ Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, 'Can we speak of a Coptic Question in Egypt?', p. 32.

historic opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood and others to revise and theorize and clarify their principles in these civic matters, with the absence of the former dictatorial authority that actively urged all sides into internal conflicts and civic strife.

The question is still open: the Copts continue to claim the creation of a democratic political system and a civic state which is neither military nor religious, starting with a new constitution which protects without exclusion the right of citizenship, including the rights and freedoms as well as political, economic, social and cultural rights. Two important events, the election of the new Coptic Patriarch in consequence of the death of Shenouda III (17th March 2012) and the presidential election (May/June 2012), opening a new political scenario, could give new answers to the question.

Now the hope is not so much placed on the new policies of the military junta, but on the ability of Tahrir youth to protect the egalitarian and democratic spirit of the Egyptian revolution.

REFERENCES

- ABU-NIMER, M., KHOURY, A. AND WELTY, E. (edited by), 2007. *Unity in diversity: interfaith dialogue in the Middle East*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- ALDEEB ABU-SAHLIEH, S. A., 1979. *Non-Muslims en pays d'Islam. Cas de l'Égypte*. Fribourg: Editions Universitaires & Zurich.
- ALIM, T.A., 2011. National unity after the Egyptian revolution. *Al-Ahram on-line*, 23 March. Available at: <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/4/8367/Opinion/National-unity-after-the-Egyptian-revolution.aspx>> [Accessed 16 June 2011].
- ANSARI, H., 1984. Sectarian conflict in Egypt and the political expediency of religion, *Middle East Journal*, 38 (3), pp. 397-418.
- ARAB CENTRE FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES, May 2011. Can we speak of a Coptic Question in Egypt?[on-line]. Available at: <<http://english.dohainstitute.org/Home/Summary?entityID=83ee0edb-d77a-4183-ab94575b65489a27&resourceId=dd38b406-f9cf-4eee-bae3-6bd22fab0fc0>> [Accessed 23 May 2011].
- AL-ASWANI, A., 2011. *On the state of Egypt. The issues that caused the Revolution*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- ATIYA, A. S., 1991. S.v. 'Ahl al-Dhimmah', *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (CE), I. New York: Macmillan, pp. 72-73.
- ATIYA, A. S., 1991. S.v. 'Jizyah', CE, IV. New York: Macmillan, p. 1336.
- AZIZ, M. A., 2010. Differentiating between State and Church Authorities, *The Egyptian Gazette* [on-line], June 14. Available at: <http://www.masress.com/en/egyptiangazette/9087> [Accessed 22 March 2011].
- ATMACA, N., 2007. Arguments, alternatives and amendments: article two of the Egyptian Constitution', *Arab-West Report*, Paper 2. Available at: <http://www.arabwestreport.info/sites/default/files/pdfs/AWRpapers/paper2.pdf> [Accessed 22 March 2011].
- ATRAQCHI, F., 2011. Egyptian youth and new dawn hopes. *Al Jazeera*, [on line] 29 January. Available at: <<http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/01/2011129081571546.html>> [Accessed 22 March 2011].
- BAYAT, A., 2011. 'Egypt's sectarian playing field', *Al Jazeera* [on-line], 5 June. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/06/201163904835903.html> [Accessed 26 September 2011].
- BAYLY, C. A., 2004. *The birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- CARLSTROM, G., 2011. Egypt violence: mood turns against military, *Al-Jazeera* [on-line], 21 November. Available at:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/11/2011112182234430919.html> [Accessed 02 February 2012].

CARNAGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, 2011. *Revolutionary Youth Coalition*. Available at: <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/11/revolutionary-youth-coalition> [Accessed 30 March 2012].

CAHEN, C., 1991. S.v. 'Dhimma', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd ed. (EI2), II. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 227-231.

CAHEN, C., 1991. S.v. 'Djizya', EI2, II. Leiden: E.J. Brill pp. 559-562.

CHAILLOT, C., 2011. *Les Coptes d'Égypte. Discriminations et persécutions*. Paris: L'oeuvre editions.

DOWIDAR, H., 2000. Égypte. In: E. Canal-Forgues, ed., *Recueil des constitutions des pays arabes*. Bruxelles: Bruylant.

Egyptian Constitutional Declaration 2011. Available at: <http://www.egypt.gov.eg/english/laws/constitution/default.aspx> [Accessed 30 March 2012].

FASTENRATH, C., KAZANJIAN, C., 2008. Important Factors for church building in Egypt, *Arab-West Report*, Paper 4. Available at: <http://www.arabwestreport.info/sites/default/files/pdfs/AWRpapers/churchbuildingpaper.pdf> [Accessed 22 March 2011].

FARAH, N. R., 1986. *Religious strife in Egypt. Crisis and ideological conflict in the Seventies*. London and New York: Gordon and Breach.

FINKIELKRAUT, A., 1989. *La défaite de la pensée*. Paris: Gallimard.

FOX, J., 1994. The difficult transition from clientelism to citizenship: lessons from Mexico, *World Politics* 46 (2), pp.151-184.

AL-GHAWARY, K., 1996. Copts in the 'Egyptian Fabric', *Middle East Report* 200, Jul. - Sep., p. 21-22.

GUNIDY, A., 2010. Symbolic victim in a socially regressing Egypt: the declining situation of the Copts, *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 14 (1), p. 80-85.

HABIB, N., 2011. Ablaze with tension. *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line] 10-16 March. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1038/eg401.htm> [Accessed 30 May 2011].

HABIB, N., 2011. Staying put in Maspero. *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line] 12-18 May. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1047/eg51.htm> [Accessed 30 May 2011].

HASSAN, A.A., 2011. Counter-revolution and sectarian strife. *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 12-18 May. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1047/eg70.htm> [Accessed 30 May 2011].

- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH MIDDLE EAST, 1994. *Egypt: violations of freedom of religious belief and expression of the Christian minority*, 1 November. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a7ec0.html> [Accessed 25 March 2005].
- IBRAHIM, E., 2011. Civil personal status law: the fight for an equal right to a happy life for Copts, *Al-Ahram on line*, 5 July. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentm/1/64/15625.aspx>. [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- IBRAHIM, I., 2008. Luring Copts into politics, *Watani International* [on-line], 20 January. Available at: http://www.wataninet.com/watani_Article_Details.aspx?A=1555 [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- IKHWANWEB, 2008. Habib: engaging Copts is necessary to prevent sectarian conflicts, *Ikhwanweb* [on-line], 19 July. Available at: <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=17401&ref=search.php> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- INBODEN, W., 2011. US religious freedom policy in the new Egypt, *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs* [on-line], 3 June. Available at: <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/william-inboden-on-us-religious-freedom-policy-in-the-new-egypt> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT OF 1998, H.R. 2431-7. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/2297.pdf> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- KAMAL, K., 2010. Coptic remarriage: how to solve the impasse, *Egypt Independent* [on-line], 8 June. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/coptic-remarriage-how-solve-impasse> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- KAMAL, K., 2010. The NDP's manipulation of Egyptian Copts, *Egypt Independent* [on-line], 19 November. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/ndps-manipulation-egyptian-copts> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- KEDOURIE, E., 1960. *Nationalism*. London: Hutchinson University Library.
- LABIB, H., 2012. About building churches and Christians wealth, *Arab-West Report* 17/23 [on-line], April. Available at: <http://www.arabwestreport.info/23-about-building-churches-and-christians-wealth> [Accessed 30 March 2012].
- LEILA, R., 2010. Church and State, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 3-9 June. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1001/eg7.htm> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- LEILA, R., 2010. Towards a resolution, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 17-23 June. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1003/eg4.htm> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- LEWIS, B., 1988. *The Political Language of Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MAHER, H., 2011. April 6: SCAF is now wearing Mubarak's mask, *Al-Ahram on-line*, 20 November. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/27089/Egypt/Politics-/April--SCAF-is-now-wearing-Mubarak's-mask.aspx> [Accessed 30 March 2012].
- MAKARI, P. E., 2007. *Conflict & Cooperation. Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*. Syracuse-New York: Syracuse University Press.

- MALAK, M., 2008. Furore over human rights. *Watani* [on-line] 27 January. Available at: <<http://www.wataninet.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?A=17427>> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- MEKAY, E., 2007. Empowering the Copts. *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line] 16-22 August. Available at: <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/858/fr2.htm>> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- MEKAY, E., 2005. Copts mix cards. *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on line] 24-30 November. Available at: <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/770/eg13.htm>> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- MELCANGI, A., 2008. La risata che cambiò il mondo. Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser tra mito pubblico e identità privata. In: Melfa, D., Melcangi, A. and Cresti F., eds, *Spazio privato, spazio pubblico e società civile in Medio Oriente e in Africa del Nord*, Milano: Giuffrè, pp. 153-180.
- MELCANGI, A., 2011. The Egyptian religious question as an international issue, EUDEM (*Jean Monnet Information and Research Activity on European Foreign Policy and Democratic Promotion*) Newsletter 2, May/June, p. 9. Available on: <http://www.fscpo.unict.it/europa/EudemNewsletter2.pdf> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- MELCANGI, A., 2012. Religious issues in Egypt: from revolution to Nasser and back. In: Stefania Panebianco, S. and Rossi, R., eds, *Winds of Democratic Change in the Mediterranean? Actors, Processes and possible Outcomes*, Catanzaro: Rubettino – forthcoming.
- AL-MENSHAWY, M., 2005. Too Late for denials, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 2-9 November. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/767/eg11.htm> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- MORCOS, S., 2009-2010. The Coptic question, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 31 December - 6 January. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/979/sc101.htm> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- NATIONAL AMERICAN COPTIC ASSEMBLY, 2010. Problems on hold: confounding the Copting Issue, February. Available at: <http://nacopts1.blogspot.it/search?q=problems+on+hold> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- NKRUMAH, G., 2008. Race against time, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 17-23 July. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/906/eg4.htm> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- NKRUMAH, G., 2012. Room for religion and rights, *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 6-12 January. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1030/eg2.htm> [Accessed 4 February 2012].
- OSMAN, A. Z., 2011. New places of worship law leaves much to be desired, *Egypt independent* [on-line], 18 June. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/new-places-worship-law-leaves-much-be-desired> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- OSMAN, A. Z., 2011. Egypt's Copts: at a political crossroads, *Al-Masry al-Youm, independent* [on-line] 10 March. Available at: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypts-copts-political-crossroads> [Accessed 30 September 2011].
- PHILIPP, T., 1995. Copts and other minorities in the development of the Egyptian national-state. In: Shamir, S., ed., *Egypt; from monarchy to republic, a reassessment of revolution and change*, Boulder: Westview Press.

- SCOTT, R. M., 2010. *The challenge of political Islam. Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- SEDRA, P., 1999. Class cleavages and ethnic conflict: Coptic Christian communities in Modern Egyptian politics', *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations* 10 (2), pp. 219-235.
- SHAHINE G., 2006. Bad cards. *Al-Ahram Weekly* [on-line], 29 December - 4 January. Available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/775/eg40.htm> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- SHATZMILLER M., ed. *Nationalism and minority identities in Islamic societies*, Montreal and Kingstone: McGill Queen's Press – MQUP. Ch. 2.
- SHUKRALLAH, S., GABER, Y., 2011. What was religion doing in the debate on Egypt's Constitutional amendments?, *Al-Ahram on-line*, 22 March. Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/8267/Egypt/0/What-was-religion-doing-in-the-debate-on-Egypt's-Co.aspx> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- SIDHOM, Y., 2008. Not above the law, *Watani International* [on-line], 9 March. Available at: http://www.wataninet.com/watani_Article_Details.aspx?A=2192 [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- SMITH, A. D., 1988. *The ethnic origins of nations*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- SOLIMAN, S., 2012. The pragmatic spirit of Egypt's civil forces, *Copts United* [on-line], 22 May. Available at: <http://www.coptsunited.com/Details.php?I=598&A=5499> [Accessed 30 May 2012].
- SPRINGBORG, R., 1991. State-society relations in Egypt: the debate over owner-tenant relations, *Middle East Journal* 45 (2), p. 232-249.
- TAPPER, R., ed., 1992. *Some minorities in the Middle East*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- THE FREE COPTS, 2011. Ending sectarianism in Egypt, *The Free Copts* [on-line], 15 January. Available at: http://english.freecopty.net/english//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1199&Itemid=9 [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- URSINUS, M. O. H., 1993. S.v. 'Millet', EI2, VII. Leiden-New York: E.J. Brill, pp. 61-64.
- VAJDA, G., 1986. S.v. 'Ahl al-Kitab', EI2, I. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 264-266;
- VAN DOORN-HARDER, N., 2011. Egypt: does the Revolution include the Copts?. *Open Democracy* [on line] 16 March. Available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/nelly-van-doorn-harder/egypt-does-revolution-include-copts> [Accessed 30 March 2011].
- ZEIDAN, D., 1999. The Copts. Equal, protected or persecuted? The impact of islamization on Muslim-Christian relations in Modern Egypt, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10 (1), pp. 53-67.