BLESSED IS EGYPT
MY PEOPLE

RECONTEXTUALIZING COPTIC IDENTITY OUTSIDE OF EGYPT

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Preface

Already a decade before I came to join the EURYI project *Identity and Migration: Christian Minorities in the Middle East and in Diaspora* in 2008, I became fascinated with the sharp dissonance between national-canonical and minority-invisible narratives specifically in the jingoistic Middle East. This interest was stoked by the miniature ethno-religious group called the Samaritans (Klempner, “Mabbaṭ”). This group, once numbering millions and today only approximately one thousand individuals, faces challenges that are writ large in the cases of other more populous groups in the region such as the Kurds or the Copts of this work. Samaritans are not only pestered by the taunting calls of the totalistic Palestinian and Zionist national narratives that allow no alternative voice for this practically evanescent group. They are also seduced by the pull of Western moral values, especially those who had moved to Holon, Israel, in the wake of the 1927 Nablus earthquake. Furthermore, like many other minorities, they have had to confront the issue of exogamy, both sanctioned (non-Samaritan women have raised the population from its nadir of 120 individuals after the First World War nearly wiped it out), and unsanctioned (by Samaritan women marrying mostly Jewish men).

I was therefore elated when the opportunity of joining a doctoral research project on Eastern Christian minorities presented itself in late 2007, especially in light of the appalling dearth of comparable programs worldwide. Though I did not know it at the time, arriving in the Netherlands *en famille* would provide hands-on experience with the hardships of migration, granting me insight into those challenges of language, mentality and separation from wider family and
friends that are difficult to apprehend vicariously. I would not have known of the project nor had a large cheap taxi or a furnished apartment waiting for me upon my arrival in the Netherlands were it not for the helpful hand of Hagit Amirav, for which I remain thankful.

During my years at Leiden University, I have discussed my topic in one way or another with many people, both formally and informally. Each has in their own way helped nudge me along the path towards a clearer understanding of my subject matter. I am truly thankful for the help all of you have given. First and foremost I would like to thank those students who actively participated in my class and my supervisor and department for granting me the opportunity to teach it. Preparing and presenting the material allowed me to mull over concepts in a way not otherwise available.

Already during my first weeks in Leiden, I received much needed help in plunging into my research topic. ‘Amr Ryad was invaluable in arranging my attendance at the 2008 Coptic Conference, only two weeks after my arrival. Samuel Moawwad answered many questions and helped me get my bearings and abandon several research cul-de-sacs before venturing into them. More importantly, his name and warm reference brought me my first research interview. Without this help, I would have had a much harder time accessing this wonderful and fascinating group. Naures Atto was there as a colleague and office mate to push me to write and organize my material from the start in a goal oriented manner as well as helping me trudge through the Dutch bureaucracy. Though her efforts were somewhat frustrated by my eclectic and often tangential mode of work, they are still very much appreciated.
To Joost Hagen I am indebted for putting me in touch with other scholars in the Coptic field of study and keeping me informed of relevant conferences. His devil-may-care attitude to Egypt’s heat and incessant beggars made our visit to Cairo much more pleasant than it would have otherwise been. Though at first I had misstepped into folklorism, the acerbic academic attitude of both Jan van Ginkel and Professor Wim Hofstee reframed my approach and fostered a more critical one in its stead. Hofstee’s ever-present question “why should I be interested in …?” guided much of my thinking in making the Coptic case relevant for others not dealing in an overly specific way with this group.

For their support and direction during my crisis of faith in this project, I must give thanks to Professor Natal Dessing who suggested practical solutions for problems I had encountered during data collection for this work and to Elizabeth den Boer, the departmental advisor who provided much needed solace by informing me that my tribulations neither as terrible nor as unusual as I had thought at first.

I am also thankful to my office mates from the latter part of my studies. To Markus Davidsen whose fresh approach to what religion constitutes and interest in theory for its own sake proved to be contagious; To Merel Kahmann whose work on Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands offered a counterpoint to mine and whose sympathetic ear was ever present; and finally to Tineke Rooijakkers whose field of study most resembled my own and who freely shared many contacts, reference books and other helpful tidbits, some of which contributed greatly to the quality of this work.

For all the things mentioned above and many more surrounding my softer landing in Leiden as well as his much appreciated patience, I must also thank my
supervisor Prof. Bas ter Haar Romeny, whose assistance can be seen in every nook and cranny of this essay, down to notes on punctuation.

For their cooperation and candor, I am thankful to all the priests and laymen and women who made the time and had the patience to answer the questions of a perfect stranger. In the interest of ethical conduct and in order to avoid the appearance that my analysis reflects their own, I have chosen to err on the side of caution and minimize references to specific priests and congregants except when absolutely necessary.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Michal and my children Shannie and Yanai for goading me on throughout this lengthy and often trying ordeal.

A common academic joke quips that copying from a single person is plagiarism whereas copying from many is research. Though it was my initial intention to contribute something wholly original to this field of research, I must humbly say that everything that could be said – has been. However, in light of the persistence of misconceptions and inaccuracies that continue to confound the general understanding of the Coptic condition and the general surprise at the events of the so-called Arab Spring, they do apparently stand repetition. Many people have greater or lesser parts in making this book happen. As for those of you whom I have not mentioned above, it is not through lack of appreciation for your assistance. For all the faults of this manuscript, I alone bear responsibility.

Zofim, Israel  August 8th, 2013
Chapter I – The Vessels

It is the purpose of this work to “address how conceptions of self-worth and group boundaries are shaped by institutionalized definitions of cultural membership” since boundaries are “embedded in the environment, as opposed to created by atomized individuals” (Lamont and Molnár 171). In other words, I wish here to consider the impact of allegedly non-laden context-independent terms in managing the illusion of a static state of a religious community within a dynamic and erratic social sphere.

Naturally as a member of the human race, it is impossible for me to disentangle myself from my embeddedness in the environment I share with my object of study, even before any preconceived notions or potential biases come into play in observing the community at hand. In light of this handicap, I must therefore resort to those terms that strive asymptotically towards societal objectivity. The meaning of each term discussed is unfortunately still highly mutable and subjective and its ramifications vary by political clime. Furthermore, the implications of possessing or claiming certain identities run the gamut from the potentially fatal to light dinner conversation.

The questions confronted by all the actors concerned in this work are both social and societal in nature. That is to say, they are relational and would not exist out of the context of the societies they inhabit. Contrary to Margaret Thatcher’s now famous adage that “there is no such thing as society” (Keay), society remains more than the sum of all its individuals since collective action influences and delimits individuals just as much if not more than individual action influences collectivities. This harks back to the philosophical discussion between Robert Carlyle and Herbert Spencer on whether the times make the man or heroes determine the course of history. Society, itself a social construct created in order to imbue everyday interactions between individuals with
meaning and significance is, like other social constructs with which I will be dealing throughout my work, not a tangible object.

In this fashion, the boundaries that are constantly drawn by the leadership and laity of the Coptic Orthodox Church serve almost paradoxically to limit members’ actions while giving them a direct stake in the decision on boundary placement. This is what Anthony Giddens refers to as a “dual structure”, that is to say "both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems" (27).

Though moot ontological discussions about the necessity and reality of the terms I will use may suggest themselves as fascinating intellectual exercises, others have held and will continue to hold those discussions far more eloquently than myself. Moreover they are in my regard outside the scope of this work and I will therefore circumvent them. The yardstick I will be using for the validity of my terms and definitions was coined by William and Dorothy Thomas in 1928 and is widely known as the “Thomas Theorem”, which reads as follows, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 572). This is true even if that perception of the reality of a situation is subject to change or could be shown to be untrue for some proportion of the members. Racism for example constitutes a case in point. Despite the lack of any scientific grounding for the differentiation between alleged “races” on the basis of phenotypic evidence and the strong countercurrent of contrary DNA evidence, denying the existence of racism as a social phenomenon today would be a preposterous denial of a blatant and even banal truth.

Whereas membership in a minority group may have no observable impact on measurable economic or political indices, the impact is perceptible to those who claim membership so long as they choose to do so. Choosing to ignore the subjective perception of membership gravely impacts our ability to understand the choices and
views of certain group members, most especially at the margins of the group. I refer here specifically to the nagging tension between the theory and practice of religion. More specifically I mean here the bridgeable gap of contradictions between how religious life is supposed to take place according to holy writ and the way actual religious practice presents itself in day-to-day reality.

The modern state, even more than modern church institutions, struggles with the identification of those individuals who self-identify as belonging to a particular religious denomination while simultaneously not adhering to the self-imposed practices and restrictions of the selfsame church. Initial observation may dismiss such behavior as simple laxity or the inheritance of an empty label from one’s progenitors. Nonetheless, such a view would fail to explain the significant contribution of precisely those individuals to the perseverance of religious identity as well as the resurgence of both ideas and ideals in forthcoming generations (Sheffer, “Reexamination” 380; Marler and Hadaway). This is strongly apparent in conflict situations, as can be seen with the success of fundraising for paramilitary purposes among almost fully assimilated Irish-Americans (for the IRA) (H. van Amersfoort 358), American Jews (for Haganah) or Chechens living in Turkey (for Ichkeria). The latter are the most remarkable as they retain no discernable distinction between them and other Turks¹ and had been considered until recently as defunct.

Alongside the question of who belongs and how permeable the group boundaries are is the question of who comprises the nucleus of the group. These are the people who define the group’s identity and the effect that affiliation entails (Higham 242–246; Etzioni, “The Ghetto: A Re-Evaluation” 258–259). These core members can greatly

¹ Turkic tribes settled in Anatolia in several waves over a period of several centuries. In addition, a large part of the pre-Turkic indigenous population, also of multiple provenances, converted to Islam and adopted Turkish culture. This alluvial settlement combined with forceful top-down nation building has resulted in the formal subduction of sub-national Turkic affiliations.
influence group size and practical meaning. With each generation, core membership as a percentage of total membership tends to fall (H. van Amersfoort 357). Furthermore, it is of note that whereas religiosity remains stable and in the United States even moderately high, commitment to any specific church is far more fungible (Myers 756), placing significant pressure on church leadership to pay attention to its members’ needs and demands, lest they reconsider their specific affiliation.

Since upholding an identity is a long-term and continuous process and it would be irrational to invest energy in the preservation of a wholly ineffectual image, it stands to reason that people will tend to choose to maintain identities that carry meaning and offer valuable resources for them rather than those that provide none (Sanders 349–350). Maintaining an identity that is not in line with one’s conception of oneself will inevitably result in an existential crisis ending in adjustment or collapse. Multiple studies have shown that identity flashing is not only something that emanates from an individual’s need, but even more so from the need of the environment to identify him or her. Thus levels of externally visible religiosity and outward identification of migrants tend to fall in line with the regionally established local levels (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 74; Stump 302–303; Newman and Halvorson 313; Wuthnow and Christiano; Nelsen and Whitt; Mol). Notwithstanding, members of minority denominations who feel outside the mainstream tend not to decline in levels of group adherence following migration (Cf. Rebhun; Mauss; Bibby, Unknown Gods; Welch; Finke and Stark).

It could be argued in the name of political correctness that identity labels and all the concepts that flow from identity are superfluous as we are all equally human. Such posturing while enticing to western democratic values, undercuts the Thomas theorem and contravenes the self-image of those subjects who claim identities. It is therefore either disingenuous or useless. In the former case, such denial of the right of others to
claim an identity of their own is oppositional in its very nature, thus automatically conferring an identity on the identity-denier. Such “embracing” attitudes can be seen in the historical records in the cases of Wends in Germany or Kurds, referred to by the Turkish regime for many years as “mountain Turks”. Within the Coptic community, there remains a yet unsettled debate over whether the Copts are Egyptian Arabs by culture and language, or a separate non-Arab group differentiating along ethno-religious lines (R. R. Jones 221). In the long term however, attempts to label others in a manner that they do not accept is neither credible nor viable. Despite this difficulty, identity remains relational (H. van Amersfoort 327). As such, the label of membership as well as the contents of the identity are the result of a constant discussion between multiple interlocutors of differing power, most notably the identity holders themselves (Dahrendorf), members of the identity group’s elites, as well as state actors that are able to legitimize or alternatively delegitimize identities through legislation.

Especially in the case of migrants from a minority group, a state actor in a migration receiving country may even be unaware of the problems raised by their unwillingness to adopt a position on matters involving internal conflict in the sending country. Thus for example Berbers and Jews migrating from North Africa, Kurds and Assyrians migrating from Turkey or Christians migrating from Syria, Iraq or Egypt, are not seen as members of these groups by their receiving states. While this may seem inconsequential at first glance, its impact extends beyond the emotional aspects of identity into the realm of practicality. When the sending country acts on behalf of its majority citizens by building mosques or providing language centers, minority members who do not subscribe to the sending country’s majority religious belief or language are given the choice between fending for themselves, accepting the sending country’s coercive assistance or assimilating as quickly as possible into the receiving country.
Financial constraints and mentality differences do not really enable a true choice. Whereas the Church may make requests on behalf of its members, the results are uneven at best and often rely on access to networks.

The terms into which I will be looking in this chapter are those that have the most impact on my work. These are namely identity, morality, ethnicity, minority, migration, diaspora, and transnationalism. The ever-changing meaning of these terms across time and space is not unusual as all words undergo such lexical shifts, language being an imperfect tool for the description of a fleeting reality. This liquidity is further exacerbated by the intellectual expedience of its manipulability (Sartori 1041), a problem that seems to afflict the social sciences more so than other fields (Cf. Raffestin and Barampama 63).

It is rather the pretense that change does not occur and not the transformation itself that complicates matters for scholars (Wallerstein 77). As Reicher aptly puts it, “fixity is a conceit that derives more from the nature of the analysts’ gaze than from what is gazed upon” (924). Mumford further highlights the difficulties of assessing mutability even with the aid of distance and the privilege of retrospect: “What historians are tempted to characterize as the traits of an age indicates quite as much about their own standpoint and frame of reference as it does about the objective facts... the survivals often occupy a larger part of the visible scene than either the dominants or the recessives” (74). These interactions between different currents of past and future overlapping in the present bring about change in sometimes unexpected or delayed ways. It may even be argued that continuity ought to puzzle researchers far more than change as the perpetuation of patterns involves significant human intervention while change occurs naturally and in an ad-hoc manner (Wolf 387).
It is both fortunate and unfortunate that the meaning of these definitions, both generally and specifically for the Coptic community, are slowly meandering in their essence. It is fortunate because the ability to accommodate change is the cornerstone of any good organization. On the other hand, it is unfortunate as we can extrapolate very little information about the future that awaits this community beyond its very near prospective development, not to mention the opacity of past motives.

**Identity**

**Strict Definition**

The concept of identity is as popular today as it is murky (Brubaker and Cooper; Gleason, “Identifying Identity”). It refers to “all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications” (Brubaker and Cooper 2). Furthermore this multifarious definition brings about a circumstance where “the use and abuse of “identity”... affects not only the language of social analysis but also – inseparably – its substance” (ibid.). It may be argued that the term is superfluous and may be “rephrased in terms of identifications, values, assumptions, and self-categorizations” (Todd 454). This would however elide the unity of self and group experienced by individuals. It would also paint a Picasso-like image of reality. Though a cadaver and a living human being are virtually identical, the difference between them is the most important aspect of their being.

It is therefore not the identity itself, alleged or real that is the focal point of this study, but rather its performance before other identity holders (Goffman 8). While we may use different terms to sharpen the alternate ways in which identity is manipulated, so long as people continue to experience and perceive it as one, the discussion becomes
moot and at some point inconsequential. Just as we must not use reified concepts of practice in our analysis, so we must not force terms of analysis on our understanding of practice, especially when as social animals, our individuality is intertwined with our group.

Though surely more cumbersome and verbose than utilizing a shorthand term like identity, without resorting to any further elucidation, I find it preferable to clearly delineate what it is I am referring to when I speak of Coptic identity. Perhaps what is even more important is what I am not suggesting when using the term. For a rudimentary understanding of the term, let us begin then by turning to the dictionary. The online version of the Oxford English Dictionary defines identity as “[t]he quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness.” (“Identity”) In this work, I am referring specifically to the psychosocial denotation of the term, which is far less clear-cut than its mathematical equivalent.

**Rise of the term and its development**

Whereas that to which we refer as identity is in and of itself hardly a newcomer onto the world stage as a social phenomenon, discourse about identity is distinctly a novel phenomenon (Calhoun 193; Jenkins 11), and its growing popularity is most likely indicative of a need to reify a waning certainty in its unwavering stability, in part due to the exponentially increasing process of globalization and deterritorialization (Eisenstadt; Kinvall, “Globalization and Religious Nationalism”; Harvey 4; Kinvall, “Search for Chosen Traumas”). After all, there is little need to assert what is culturally accepted as obvious. For example, no one deems it necessary today to explain why minors do not have voting rights, even though the logical justification of poor judgment
and high suggestibility is the same one that circumscribed women's suffrage but a century ago.

Long before it became interlinked in the literature with individual identity, collective identity had been the subject of wide discussion (Tönnies; Durkheim; Marx; Bagehot). With the rise of gender studies, race studies and post-colonial studies since the 1970s, the century-old debate had been reinvigorated, though this time devoid of the pseudo-biological interpretation that informed the new scholars’ predecessors. According to Gleason (“Identifying Identity”), two trends gave rise to the popularity of the term. These were a burgeoning sense of ontological insecurity especially following the Second World War and during the Cold War and the establishment of the social sciences as respectable fields of academic study and popular readership. The need for a term to describe what we now call “identity” preceded its advent. Georges Sorel describes the prevalence of religious and national “unity” as a taken-for-granted method of social control based on a constructed myth already in his 1910 essay “Unité et Multiplicité” (Sorel 367–368). These notions did not however gain traction in his day.

It may therefore be of use to consider the context in which the term came to be used more widely. Although he is by no means the originator of the term, Erik Erikson is most identified with the notion of personal and social identity as it is conceived today in the social sciences and seems to have been the one who popularized it most widely. His work dealt somewhat paradoxically with the way identity changes over an individual lifespan, much as group identity does over longer periods of time. While both anthropologists and sociologists have come to use the term, the former have stressed the individual whereas the latter have focused on the group dynamic. The ensuing argument cannot but raise a smile of instant familiarity on the face of any scholar cognizant of the Chalcedonian debate over the nature of Christ.
Erikson conceived of ‘national identities’ as equivalent to ‘national characters’ (Childhood and Society 244). It was during the Second World War that this Jewish refugee came to develop his notions of ‘ego identity’ and ‘group identity’ in regard to national character (Gleason, “Identifying Identity” 925). His work was published alongside a number of immensely popular books on the topic of national character (Cf. Mead; Benedict; Butler; A. J. P. Taylor inter alia). This conception contrasted with Mannheim’s earlier more universal notion of age-cohort identity, and seems to be better supported by empirical data (Tilley).

Naturally, before one may accept the notion of social identity, one must, barring the solipsistic option, rely on some notion of a distinct self. Following in Cooley’s footsteps, the notion of an “I” necessitates an external other and most relevantly a “me”. The latter being a notion one has of how one appears in the eyes of an outside beholder (Cooley 151–153), necessary for self-verification (Stets and Cast). Though they themselves did not yet adopt the terminology of identity, Cooley and George H. Mead did lay the groundwork for what has come to be known as identity studies.

Until the 1970s, most work on identity focused on the individual conceptions of the self (Cerulo 385–386). This no doubt was a result of the overlap between the work of sociologists, who adopted the collective perspective, and social anthropologists and psychologists who in turn espoused the individual viewpoint. This was added alongside the erstwhile unclear demarcation of the boundaries between these two fields. The desire to subordinate individual identity to group identity and vice versa brought about a lack of cooperation and a convolution of the term that detracted from both sides.

Erikson himself points out that in Sigmund Freud’s work, “the term “identity” points to an individual’s link with the unique values, fostered by a unique history, of his people. Yet, it also relates to the cornerstone of this individual’s unique
development” (Erikson, “Ego Identity” 109). Use of the word implies then that the individual core identity remains stable over time even while faced with change and that development does not entail loss of identity. As Habermas puts it, people form “new identities in conflicting situations and... bring these in harmony with older superseded identities... into a unique life history” (90–91). Avruch frames this consolidation as a choice from within a hierarchy of identities.

**Group Membership**

On the group level, members sharing a group identity also share a set of identity markers differentiating them from members of other groups. The latter are what Barth refers to as “diacritica” (131). They are not themselves inherently vital, but only have value inasmuch as they serve as markers of difference from another competing group. The core of their purpose lies in their ability to convey the less readily visible value set assumed to be held by a member who bothers to display those identity markers in place of others (Nash 11–12). Wearing a wedding ring signals sexual unavailability to others, but does not actually prevent adultery. It is a symbolic item worn in order to express in a visible way a belief that the wearer ought not to be sexually available to the unfamiliar onlooker. Although the value of monogamy has changed over time from being part of a Christian value set to being part of a secular Western value set, the symbolic use of the ring has remained the same.

Once group members and others no longer apprehend items to be signaling membership, such diacritica possess no further purpose and may be abandoned without endangering the integral identity of the group or retained as an unhinged peculiarity of no current consequence (Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* 52). Occasionally initially
empty diacritica and invented traditions are retained, expanded or even adopted outright due to their value in the eyes of outsiders, most notably tourists (Borsboom et al. 11–15).

As Erikson puts it, “the term “identity” expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others” (Erikson, “Ego Identity” 109). The symbolic boundaries that separate people into groups generate by virtue of those very boundaries feelings of similarity and membership (Epstein 232; Tajfel, “Social Identity”). It is only when social boundaries based on symbolic ones are widely accepted and identity within them seen as meaningful that “they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction” (Lamont and Molnár 168–169).

Following the aforementioned Thomas theorem, both symbolic and social boundaries limit actors’ deeds as well as thoughts. They are not however identical. Aesthetic values such as the appreciation of objets d’art, possession of a large home library or a piano, are all symbolic boundary markers that have lost their social significance. Though symbolic boundaries underlie social ones, they alone are an insufficient condition for the establishment of the latter (Lamont 174–192). This is comparable to the difference between a map and the actual terrain it describes. Although the map allows those familiar with the legend to traverse the territory it describes, it does not show everything. It is only accurate up to a certain level, it standardizes the non-standard, and most importantly, it is oblivious to changes. While it is true that boundaries between groups may act and are often seen as barriers, it is important to note that when they are based on mutual recognition, they may actually act as a social medium for cultural interaction (Sanders 327).
There is a double differentiation on the one hand in the inherent tension between individual and group identities and on the other hand between various groups that imbues identity with value beyond its simplistic categorical one. This is because identity gains meaning only through the eyes of another or alternatively by adopting an external gaze upon oneself. This occurs on the group level as well as for the individual (Jenkins 27–37; Cornell and Hartmann Ch. 4; Brubaker and Cooper 14–21). Furthermore as a group comes into contact with any other group, it reacts in two discrete experimentally validated attitudinal dimensions that have often been convoluted. These are its attitude towards the other culture and its attitude towards cultural maintenance (Berry, “Psychological Aspects”; Berry, “Acculturation as Varieties”; Ryder, Alden, and Paulhus). Adoption of one culture does not necessitate loss of one’s own, syncretism on some level or another being the most common occurrence.

For any liminal community, be it on a physical borderland or a temporal one, this is intensified, as is the case for newly arrived migrants. Insofar as external observers view immigrants and their progeny as a single problem faced with a decision to assimilate fully, partially or not at all, they are ignoring the temporal borderland that the migrants and their children inhabit. While the physical border may be thousands of miles away, the mental border between the old country and the new as well as between generations, is a constant presence. As Tajfel has it, “Social Identity... [is] an intervening causal mechanism in situations of ‘objective social change’” (Differentiation 86). Staying in this interstitial zone gives rise to a “process of mirror imaging” (Borneman 17) or “playing the vis-à-vis” (Boon 26). As Georg Simmel put it, “the practical significance of men for one another... is determined by both similarities and differences among them. Similarity as fact or tendency is no less important than difference.” (30)
“The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one’s selfsameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity.” (Erikson, “Ego Development” 22).

Erikson proceeds to delineate the precise mechanism whereby identity is achieved in the individual:

“Linguistically as well as psychologically, identity and identification have common roots. Is identity, then, the mere sum of earlier identifications, or is it merely an additional set of identifications? The limited usefulness of the mechanism of identification becomes at once obvious if we consider the fact that none of the identifications of childhood... could, if merely added up, result in a functioning personality... “[M]ore desirable” identifications tend to be quietly subordinated to a new, a unique Gestalt which is more than the sum of its parts... The final identity... includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and a reasonably coherent whole of them” (“Ego Identity” 120–121).

In other words, as the (usually younger) individual identifies with certain aspects of other group members’ values and behavior, he or she engages in the process of identifying as a group member. Thus a sense of collective consciousness goes hand in hand with a sense of mutuality and solidarity (Hunt and Benford 434). The actions that are thus performed create an ‘emergent norm’ that positively incentivizes future identification (Turner and Killian 341). It is the “projection of one’s being into a becoming” (Nathan 182). Jenkins even argues for “identity” as a misnomer or misleading non-term, but concedes that placing the more processual “identification” in its stead would hinder communication outside sociological circles (Jenkins 5). Ben-Rafael makes a qualitative distinction between the terms, utilizing ‘identity’ in order to define the terms of group membership and ‘identification’ to answer the more basic question “how far does this identity matter to them at all?” (642).

It should come as no surprise then that just as an individual does this in regard to his own coreligionists, so entire congregations and churches identify with their synonymous forebears, choosing the more desirable identifications, making a unique
and reasonably coherent whole and then identifying as bearers of that time-honored identity. This is done mutually, as the community itself also “maintains its continuity by taking the offspring of its members as raw material and molding that material into the shape of new members of the society” (Child 18; See also Whiting, Whiting, and Longabaugh). More than other groups, the Coptic Church has taken an active and aware position concerning the molding of the children of Copts into new Copts in Egypt and even more so in the ‘lands of migration’ (Stene Preston; Stene, “Becoming a Copt”).

As one Coptic priest puts it,

“By the way, I tell the kids at the beginning of the school year, the beginning of the year\(^2\). I think the majority of you student [sic]. If not student, I’m talking to parent. I tell them you are going to the school. **We send you to the school to witness for Christ, not for your education.** It happen that you, your family, came to this area to go specific school [sic] to witness for Christ, to study and your grade have to be A+. Less than that, you are wasting your time”\(^3\) (Farag).

It is important to keep in mind though, as Etzioni reminds us (“A Nation of Minorities?”), that at least in regard to the American case, categories are sometimes not only non-descriptive but may not even exist at all outside of statistical summaries and political agendas. Similar criticism has been leveled at the census ethnic group question in the United Kingdom (Ratcliffe 5).

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**The Meaning and Implications of an Identity and its Mutability**

The importance of group identity and particularly of ethnic identity is difficult to gauge, especially since research has tended to focus on developed countries. It has however been established that in the United States, ethnic identity is perceived as important to migrant groups of all backgrounds (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, et al. 77). In

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\(^2\) “alā fikra, by the way, anā baqūl lillıkids fī bidāyat al-‘ām al-dirāsī, the beginning of the year”.

\(^3\) Although attaining good grades is considered part of witnessing to Christ, so the issue is of framing and prioritizing, not an either one or the other. Being simple and faithful is however deemed preferable to being clever but a non-believer. Bold text is my own emphasis.
and of itself, a strong identity is not an existential requirement except when it is used in order to challenge or negate a competing identity. It may however act as a coping resource in that it fosters a strong sense of positive identification with like others and mitigates the detrimental impact of discrimination confronted in encounters with a strong ‘other’ (majority, native, elite, inter alia) (Mossakowski; L. P. Anderson; Phinney, “Ethnic Identity and Self-Esteem”; Phinney and Chavira). In extreme cases, group identity called into play under duress may even efface individual identity (Kinvall, “Search for Chosen Traumas” 122; Volkan 25).

For frequent churchgoers, religious identity provides a favorable feedback loop where larger social networks provide more contacts and resources and a strong sense of belonging, which all in turn lead to a deeper religious commitment (Finke; Cornwall; Stark and Bainbridge). Families with children stand to gain further benefits since the church provides group identity fostering and socialization along with more practical day-to-day aspects of living as childcare and counseling (Myers 765). On the other hand, group identity can also have a negative effect on the individual as it is also possible for a member of a weakened group to internalize the low valuation of his group (Ellemers et al.; Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory”). However, this prospect is more likely when group boundaries are permeable and the individual may effectively dissociate from the group (Ellemers 37; Cook, Crosby, and Hennigan; Crosby; J. Martin).

Although they are related to each other, actual objective discrimination is less important than the level of discrimination perceived by the individual (Berry et al. 13). Stressing identity tends to highlight difference while simultaneously underplaying collectivity, community and solidarity with fellow human beings, marking the differences as what “really” matters (Jenkins 6). Nevertheless, some people are able to switch subtly between identities based on cultural cues without experiencing emotional
hardship (Benet-Martínez et al.; Hong et al.). The subjectivity and context dependence of identity becomes more apparent when one raises the possibility of a facetious identity that is credible only at face value such as being left-handed or redheaded.

In truth, many claims made about more “real” identities may sound just as far-fetched as the etymologies of words such as “sinister”\(^4\), “villain”\(^5\) or “snob”\(^6\) can attest. Whereas these pseudo-identities contrast with being right-handed or having black, brown or blond hair, no rational person today claims any meaning based on any of these attributes. Yet in a similar vein, identities based on skin color, language spoken, food eaten or avoided, specific beliefs in supernatural powers and so forth carry very little currency when they are used within a community that shares them. They are rather only meaningful when there is a potential or real challenge to them from within or from without.

An external observer’s work is made far more difficult, precisely because these ephemeral diacritica are what stands out while the internal world of the community must by definition remain at least partly opaque even to the most discerning member. Due to their position in the community, the priests have a privileged vantage point that allows them more insight and impact than most, though this again is still starkly limited (A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* 43).

The strength of any given identity depends on the social and individual cost of shedding it in favor of an alternative one. Although we may pretend that identity is rigid and that the cost is always steep, this pretense is only skin-deep. For one, all the constituent parts of identity are capable of change, if not in themselves as for example with skin color, then in their meaning and interpretation. In fact, vibrant groups with a

\(^4\) From the Latin for “left” as in left-handed.
\(^5\) From the Latin “villanus” meaning farmhand.
\(^6\) Originating from a word for a non-university educated person. See [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/page/197](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/page/197)
strong sense of identity tend to produce and maintain culture, language and values, in both reactive and independently creative ways. “Identity itself is a dynamic construct that evolves and changes in response to developmental and contextual factors” (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, et al. 76; see also Phinney, “Ethnic Identity and Acculturation”; Phinney, “Ethnic Identity in Adolescents”; Liebkind, “Ethnic Identity” 147–148; Liebkind, “Acculturation”). Although shifts may seem sudden at the surface, they are a result of “[g]radual changes in the “cultural substratum” [that] then become threshold conditions for sudden radical category change and social transformation.” (Todd 430)

It is the cohesion of the group rather than the contents of its identity basket that reflexively defines its being. In fact, the shared ideas of identity may be bitterly contested, as in the case of the naming of the Assyrian community (Atto 323–392), yet this does not detract from the oneness of the group (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 7). One man’s volatility is another’s dynamism. Nonetheless, especially in a country like the United States, as Mary Waters (Ethnic Options) points out, but also elsewhere (Ali), choosing an identity is a viable and real option. One may even choose to stress one identity more than another rather than abandoning an alternative per se.

However, even when a group identity is established, it is members of the group who subjectively construct their perception of the group’s characteristics, values and norms (Ferdman and Horenczyk). Naturally, these perceptions are affected by external circumstances, both present and historical. It is argued that today the multiplication of trans-state networks and the dissociation of major domains of social activity lead to a weakening of social boundaries, a plethora of new identities and a resurgence of religious sensibilities and their privatization (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 8; Eisenstadt 31–32). Paradoxically, a growing privatization of religious orientations now exists parallel to a revitalization of the religious components of national and international
political activity despite having been delegated out of the public sphere. This dual penetration of the public and private further entrenches religiosity in the constitution of collective identities. This is not a reactionary retreat to the past position of religion in the public sphere but rather a complete rewriting of the role of religion in our culture and institutions (Eisenstadt 33).

“The Ottoman state developed a policy towards its ethnic-religious communities designed not to change their ethnic composition or to affect their identity, but, rather, to integrate them into the administrative system by recognizing them and giving them a large degree of cultural and religious autonomy and local self-rule. Yet, inadvertently, the internal economic and social forces, and later international political and economic influences, produced significant changes in the composition and identity of various ethnic groups... while there was a substantial degree of ethnic continuity among various groups in the Ottoman state, the composition, self-image, and future aspirations of these ethnic groups underwent changes so substantial as to make the ethnic continuity a matter of form rather than substance” (Karpat 95)

For example, when the Copts edged their way from using Coptic as their daily language to using Arabic, this by no means lessened their Coptic identity. In the same fashion, the manner in which Coptic came to be a language distinct from the earlier Demotic Egyptian did not render it any less Egyptian. This matter is further complicated by the role of Greek as an official language in Egypt both prior to and following the Arab invasion (Rubenson, “The Transition”; Torallas Tovar; Papaconstantinou, “They Shall Speak the Arabic Language”; Vliet). Nevertheless the thousands of daily acts of speaking Arabic in place of Coptic until the choice was no longer reasonably viable may have increased interaction with the Muslim population. Alternatively, it may have simply satisfied an already extant wide interaction as Copts who had converted to Islam also began speaking Arabic as a result of their adopted faith (See Torallas Tovar 71 on the same process as it took place between Greek and Egyptian, both in its Demotic and Coptic forms).
The precise process of language shift to Arabic is difficult to gauge due to the paucity of papyri from the period deriving from numerous reasons and potential causes (Björnesjö). Either way, the change of language as it was done in a cataractous and quickly collective fashion, did not take anything away from the group identity, especially since it took several centuries to occur. Nonetheless language proficiency in both the minority and majority languages has been shown to be a fairly accurate measurement for the acculturation of the group (Birman and Trickett; Vijver, Helms-Lorenz, and Feltzer). Furthermore, the Coptic language had been invested with value as a marker of a distinct Egyptian Christian identity even prior to the Arab invasion due to the schism of 451 (Orlandi). It had established itself as a Christian alternative against the pagan Demotic7 when it acted as a more facile vehicle for the evangelization of those Egyptians who were not conversant in Greek. Eventually this alphabetization would provide a simple tool to disconnect Egypt from its pre-Christian past until the 19th century.

Following the schism with Constantinople, Egyptian Christians no longer had a vested interest in studying Greek8 (Torallas Tovar 72), despite the fact that by that point Greeks and their language had become fully integrated into Egyptian life (ibid, 34) in spite of initial mutual resentment (ibid, 27–34). Later, even from a cultural point of view, the change was not overly dramatic as the erudite few could still and did continue to reference ancient manuscripts in Coptic and Greek9. So we can see that even language, allegedly one of the most vital facets of identity, may shift even as the permanent-looking Nile has changed its course. Yet a language need not be spoken at all in order to affect identity.

7 The latest Demotic text found so far is dated to 452 AD. The latest hieroglyphic text is from 394 AD. Torallas Tovar questions, based on errors in those texts whether their authors actually understood them or rather used them as magical symbols (46). Demotic itself was declining already beforehand with its culture (Bagnall).
8 In 715, Caliph Walid I prohibited the use of Greek for both public and private use, thus crystallizing its loss (Torallas Tovar 16).
9 Greek was retained over Coptic for the liturgy in such pivotal phrases as “Agios, agios, agios” and “Kyrie Eleison” (Boghdady).
Even without any knowledge of the ancient language, Coptic has maintained the status of what Eastman & Reese refer to as an ‘associated language’. This position gives it symbolic rather than daily currency, definitely vis-à-vis Arabic and possibly also in regard to Greek (Eastman and Reese). Giving up on this symbolic use would be like giving up on being a Copt.

“[reading a congregant’s question] “There are people in the Church that believe that the Coptic language should be minimized as much as possible for the sake of the English-speaking congregation. Can you explain the reason, if any, why we should preserve the language to the utmost of our ability as opposed to getting rid of it?”

Getting rid of the Coptic language is like getting rid of our identity and getting rid of our heritage. Even some hymns could not be said in any other language. Some of the hymns, because when you put music, you put them [sic] to the words, so you wouldn’t be able to say them, except in the Coptic language, and they will not sound nice in any other language. For example, if I were to tell you. Say with me. Say with me!10 Ἅγιος ο Θεός [chanting]. You all know it, right? Right? It’s an easy hymn, but if I say, holy, can you say: Holy, God, holy, mighty [chanting]. How many could follow with me? You’re not used to it, right? So we are used to it in Coptic, or actually, this hymn in particular is in Greek. So many hymns, because we repeat them a lot, we know them in the original language, but we try as much as possible to say hymns in English for the benefit of the non-speaking congregation, whether they be young people or converts, but we have to keep the flavor of the Coptic Church. We cannot change everything. As much as we can, we do change” (Bishop David, Coptic Calendar and Martyrdom)11.

Culture may be transmitted through a newly acquired language (Genesee; Glenn and De Jong). In other words loss of the ethnic language does not necessarily equate with loss of the ethnic identity (Liebkind, “Social Psychology”; Bentahila and Davies; Pandharipande; Edwards; Giles and Robinson).

Still language maintenance remains important as a factor in identity maintenance for the second and further generations (Cameron and Lalonde; Phinney, Romero, et al.). It is even possible, though as of yet unproven, that language loss is a harbinger of identity fading, though this change is too slow to measure accurately (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, et al. 113). It is with this in mind that we should look at the loss of Arabic among the children of Coptic migrants, especially in light of the Islamic hue of Arabic. Tadros

10 “law qultu lakum. Qūlū ma’ay. Qūlū ma’ay!”
11 Emphasis is my own.
Malaty's attitude of preferring the message to the vehicle was acceptable to all the communities I attended (Malaty 296).

It is not strictly necessary that identities claim ancient origins as a matter of definition. This can be seen most clearly in the United States, where a strong sense of American identity exists and has superseded the previous identities of most if not all Americans. Hyphenated identities only serve to highlight this point through the choice of adjective order. This has occurred despite a lack of common origin and an originally common language.

Of course new identities are not forged anew every day and people do not alter or replace them often as though they were clothes. They are rather a facet of life in which people invest considerable time and energy, which would largely be wasted in an environment where one would start from scratch on a regular basis. In point of fact, identity is sometimes so ingrained that many people are not truly aware of it until outsiders challenge them on this point. By this I refer not only to encounters with racism or other forms of bigotry, but also to disagreements over principals that derive in turn from divergent value systems associated with specific identities.

Not all people choose to function socially as stable members of specific groups. Some choose either consciously or subconsciously to maintain only cursory, minimal or shifting group memberships (Klandermans, "The Demand and Supply of Participation" 360; Hunt and Benford 440; Zurcher and Snow). The subject matter of my research is not however an alleged incumbent sense of identity derived solely since birth from a primordial fount. It is rather the special challenge presented by the crisis of constructing a foreign identity in a new land. This construct is in turn based at best on a vague notion of that selfsame identity from the land of origin due to the lack of state reification thereof in the new state. In the past decade this has been changing little by little, with
several countries taking an avid interest in their citizens residing abroad as bridges between their country of residence and that of their birth.

Summing up, “[s]ocial identities are bundles of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and roles that are used to draw a boundary between the “in group” and the “out group”... The interaction of self-regarding individuals leads to the formation of groups that come to have a collective or social identity” (Rousseau 12). The main reason for this restrictive behavior is because “identity plays a central and often determining role in the construction of threat” (ibid, 6).

Consensus building and the contract of group identity

Unlike individual identity, group identity is formed by a general consensus among the members of the group. “Any movement that seeks to sustain commitment over a period of time must make the construction of collective identity one of its most central tasks” (Gamson 27). This does not imply any form of a true democracy of ideas, but simply that ideas that are not accepted by the majority of the group do not prevail, regardless of the source of their advent. Alternatively the minority opinion holders forge a new identity separate from that of the majority of the original group. Furthermore, this consensus may be quite loose, though a group as a whole would only retain collective agency when huddling around a morally grounded sense of right (C. Taylor, Sources of the Self). If or when that is lost, the group is more prone to disintegrate and unfurl. All that having been said, chosen or dictated group membership does largely determine behavior in any given situation (Lewin 46). The Copts are “a people who were never permitted a secular self-government. Rather, as a people, [they] have survived on a spiritual consensus...” (Gruber, “Coping with God” 66). Their spiritual strength stands in lieu of a martial one (Anba Bishoy, Le Christianisme une Religion forte).
Even when boundaries between such groups are seemingly arbitrary, there are "pressures to evaluate one’s own group positively through in-group/out-group comparison [that] lead social groups to differentiate themselves from each other... [in order] to maintain and achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimension" (Tajfel and Turner, “The Social Identity” 16–17). It is important to note here that some group members have more power in effecting communal consensus than others. In Weber's terms, consensus may be bureaucratic, traditional, charismatic or any combination of these with either official benediction or animus (Weber 122–176). Such power is however far from absolute and the multi-directionality claimed by constructionists regarding group identity does retain significant traction in the case of the Copts (See Calhoun 199 for the postmodernist criticism of the constructionist approach).

Despite its manifold faults, the postmodernist position on group identity does contribute a necessary piece of the puzzle to the picture of Coptic and other identities. Both the essentialist-primordialist school and influential constructionists like Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss) miss the internal variety encompassed within external uniformity and replace it with monolithic sameness. Although the anti-binary bent of postmodernists has so far been focused on an extra-dualistic view of gender, gay and racial identities, its insight remains just as germane as it pertains to the variegated identity within a community like the Copts living in the “lands of migration”. As Lamont and Molnár put it,

"it would be useful to explore the extent to which this process follows a binary logic as opposed to a multiplex one. In other words, we need to explore whether identities are defined in opposition to a privileged ‘Other,’ or in juxtaposition to a number of possible ‘others.’" (174)

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12 For a more thorough discussion of the positions and various synergies, see (Agger; Cerulo; Haar Romeny et al.).
Identity is also not reexamined in full on a regular basis. This would entail constant scrutinizing of it, like a photographer obsessed with a lens to the detriment of the subjects of his photographs, lighting and composition. Readjustment of identity would only prepare the group for the challenges of the present, ignoring those of the future and relinquishing the lessons of the past. Furthermore, certain aspects of identity may seem unnecessary at best and counter-productive at worst. In either case, the narrowness of any given observer’s field of vision across time and space does not enable accurate judgment. Even harsh persecution acts counter-intuitively as one of the best adhesives for the persecuted group and is viewed in this positive light. Correcting this misapprehension, Anba Bishoy states, “…people think that because there is persecution and hardship, that means not being joyous… Consider it pure joy, the various hardships to which you may be exposed. Rejoice!”\(^{13}\) (Pentecote étranger sur terre).

In addition, older identities, which by their nature retain anachronistic elements provide immanent evidence of their durability and “meaningful group boundaries are predicated on the presence (and perception) of common patterns of durable ties” (Gould 19). Nonetheless, young adulthood serves today as a period of time relegated to introspection and a burgeoning “awareness” or “invention” of identity (Waters, Black Identities; Waters, Ethnic Options), even more so when co-ethnics egg such identities on (Min and Kim; Rangaswamy).

**Opting in or out of the Group Identity**

Researchers have adopted two essentially different approaches to the study of migration, namely acculturation and identity. Whereas acculturation, the older tradition,

\(^{13}\) “... le gens croient que parce qu’il-y-a des persecutions et des épreuves, ça va dire que ne être pas joyeux... Regardez comme un sujet de joie complète les diverses épreuves auquel vous pouvez être exposé. Réjouissez vous!”
focuses on the observable actions of individuals in the new country, the identity approach looks at the self-perception of the relocated or dislocated migrants as the vital aspect (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, et al. 71).

Abandoning one’s group identity as an individual and adopting another one is far more acceptable today than it had been in the past. A case in point is seen in migration to the United States. At its earliest form, the notion of multiple migrant ethnic identities forging into one American identity was stated as a matter of fact by de Crevecoeur in his 1782 essay “What is an American” (Crevecoeur). By the early 20th century, the “melting pot” paradigm had turned from a dry observation into an emphatic exhortation, epitomized in Israel Zangwill’s 1908 eponymous play (Zangwill). By lauding the creation of a new American identity encouraged by citizenship classes, the policy essentially problematized the retained identities of those who scoffed American ‘generosity', refusing to pay the price of ethnic conversion.

Discussion of migrant groups that maintained allegedly maladjusted identities and their progeny focused solely on those who did not “melt”, so to speak. This ignored those who adapted, as they were and largely remain statistically invisible. This outlook promoted a focus on community institutions over individual choices and polarized the assimilation debate (Morawska), which has shifted radically in the past two decades (Brubaker, “The Return of Assimilation?” 542–544). The former negativistic agenda regarding migration (Phinney, Berry, Sam, et al. 216–217) went hand in hand with the old focus in research on social and mental pathology, largely ignoring majority “healthy” social trends or “normal” behavior (Offer and Sabshin). In reality, most migrants adapt well (Berry et al. 6; Beiser; Fuligni, “Adjustment of Children”; Scott, Scott, and Stumpf).

Adolescents, so often marked as more problematic, adapt even better than native youth (Fuligni, “Authority”; Aronowitz), though this effect erodes over period of
residence (Phinney, Berry, Sam, et al. 217; Hayes-Bautista). Pioneering studies on migrant groups such as Irvin Child’s 1939 doctoral dissertation “Italian or American?” linked a problematized non-acculturation with young delinquency. This was not unusual in the general climate linking ethnics with criminal behavior (Merton; Mays; see Colburn and Pozzetta for a survey of earlier popular articles linking the two).

The criminal shadow cast upon all identity-retaining migrants was no doubt in part due to the link attested by respected criminologists. Edwin Sutherland, arguably the father of modern criminology, linked crime as a societal problem with a conflict of behaviors originating from different cultures in his “Principles of Criminology” published in 1934. Newer more updated editions of his work are still used today and so clearly continue to carry weight. Sutherland went as far as saying that “the conflict of cultures is therefore the fundamental principle in the explanation of crime” (52), due to the conflict of standards, especially for children of migrants (ibid, 116). The pernicious effects of confounded acculturation of youth across boundary lines are attested by the high correlation between physical mobility as a function of residence away from the region of birth, either nationally or internationally (ibid, 71–73, 113), and higher criminality among second generation migrants exposed to interaction with natives and even more so for children of mixed parentage (ibid, 73, 115). Furthermore, these negative symptoms were largely seen as necessary evils on the path to integration (Antin 271).

Rumbaut contests this claim that boundary straddling inherently leads to maladjustment linking in its stead negative identity associations such as stereotype-based pan-ethnic and self-effacing identifications with the native population to low parental involvement and prestige (779). In a later study pointing out the lower incidence of incarceration among first generation migrants, he does however concede a
higher proportion of criminals among their children, yet still not to the extent of natives of lower socio-economic status (Rumbaut et al.). Lucassen and Lucassen present a concurrent position pointing out similar and troubling statistics among rural lower-educated youth of low socioeconomic status (46–49). Still others however continue to reaffirm a link (Hannan; Bergesen and Herman).

On the other hand, once culture is lost and not replaced by an alternate one, the immigrant faces the challenge of confronting his new reality alone. He possesses neither the tools of his forefathers’ experience as a claimable authority nor those of his newly adopted culture, especially when the new culture does not boast a time-tested narrative establishing its own identity. Gans points out quite astutely that the difference in attitude toward post-migratory behavior may have more to do with the identity of the researchers themselves rather than with the empirical data (876). It is critical to keep in mind that the so-called “second generation” of migrants are not predetermined to adopt either the culture of their biological parents or the culture of their surroundings if different. Just as much as the children of migrants are “second generation migrants” despite having only migrated vicariously, they are also first generation natives. They perceive both local and migrant culture as partial outsiders allowing ample space for the creation of both positive and negative stereotypes of both (Child 20–21; Benet-Martínez et al.).

**Identity in the structure of the organizational system**

In the modern period, the ideas of the enlightenment have presented a significant challenge before ecclesiastical authorities in regard to identity. Different churches adopted divergent strategies in order to persevere. Each method of governance boasts significant strengths while suffering from its attendant weaknesses. Foley and Hoge
divide the organizational cultures of congregations into family-style, house of worship, community-style and civic leader (Foley and Hoge). These religious attitudes affect the level of engagement of the migrant with other cultures, including that of their new country of residence (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, et al. 102).

Egalitarian family-style churches empower all their congregants, while at the same time establishing a platform that amplifies all dissent. Individualist houses of worship permit a wide range of personal beliefs but on the other hand limit church management to largely custodial chores. Community-style churches provide a sense of well-established solidarity but adopt a fatalistic attitude to change. Finally, more hierarchic civic leader congregations are effective in their unified actions, though they mute or muffle the voices of subalterns.

High cross-class solidarity (Kasinitz et al.), indicating strong group cohesion will characterize the community as hierarchist. Therefore, it will exhibit deference toward Church authorities and significant delegation of decisions concerning identity in the receiving country to them. Such an approach will cultivate significant political power in the hands of community leadership. One would also expect to find extensive membership in parallel compatible frameworks that also employ the hierarchist paradigm, such as the armed forces, bureaucratic government and so forth (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky).

Low cross-class solidarity would lead to a characterization of a Coptic community as fatalist. In such a situation, one would expect to find more of a worship community than a hub of social networking. Such a community would give the other cheek if attacked or mishandled, as the fatalist perceives the acts of the receiving country, like those of any sovereign, to be capriciously benevolent or tyrannical. This characterization is reminiscent of descriptions of the Coptic community in the 19th century.
The ethos of nationalism has argued for a competing structure of belonging, independent of the church if not in direct opposition to it. The sidestepping of this confrontation of ideas between universal morals and values and a particular tribal ethnic identity is at the core of the explosive tensions that typify this era. It is important to distinguish between the prima facie elements of performed identity and the deeper moral convictions that underlie it. Collective identity calls for the “making of emotional investments, which enable individuals to recognize themselves” (Melucci 343).

Though ethnicity does not preclude a moral element, as I will show using the ‘chosen people’ paradigm in the following sub-chapter, moral identity can stand alone, in stark contrast to other non-moral aspects of ethnicity. Alternative terms such as ‘secular’ identity or ‘profane’ identity would present an even more inaccurate description of the situation. The former would imply opposition to religion, which is clearly not the case, as is attested by the role of phyletism in the Chalcedonian Orthodox Church in the establishment of modern Balkan national identities (Kitromilides). The latter would imply a further disregard if not animosity toward religious identity.

**Morality**

**The Relevance of Morality to Identity**

“In moral communities, social norms can create a degree of behavioral uniformity within groups and differences among groups... which is highly favorable for among-group selection” (Wilson 22). Superficial identity alone proves sufficient as a rallying cry in times of limited unrest, as is attested by the heightened popularity of performed patriotism in times of distant war and of smaller scale violent persecution. Both in times of severe distress and of peace in the longue durée, its relevance declines. Harsher climes demand more visceral identities and cultivate what Smith refers to as a “myth of
ethnic election” (A. D. Smith, “Chosen Peoples” 189). Calmer times, on the other hand, lay waste to weakly grounded identities by gradually appealing to more universal humanist conceptions of who we are, that better promote and incentivize our needs as non-grouped individuals. Pursuit of earthly riches competes with the Church’s offer of spiritual riches as a motivating force, especially in the diaspora. I encountered this theme repeatedly when observing mass in Paris, and it continues to retain its vitality (Abouna Bichoï, Les Richesses; Abouna Bichoï, l’Argent; Abouna Bichoï, Le Carême; Anba Marc, Messe du Samedi).

A shared past alone does not instill enough ardor in order to mobilize individual actors to maintain their identities while faced with current challenges. Overall, “[m]orality and ethics constitute a structure for the self which mitigates social determinism and provides a trans-cultural structure for the self” (Stigliano 49). Contrary to the dichotomous description separating self-interest on the one hand and moral demands on the other, it is impossible to practically split these as what is moral is also very often a matter of self-interest and vice versa (Teske). The potential conflict between the two is rather one between our conceptions of them, rather than between objective morals and self (Wren 92–93).

“The third good quality about this young man, actually, he had a good moral [sic]. The way he talked to God, the way he talked to Jesus shows that he’s very polite. He had a very good moral [sic]. He came and asking Him, the Bible said he kneeling down before Him, asking Him and kneeling down, and saying, look, “good teacher”. See how he talks? It looks very nice. “Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit the kingdom of God”, but even so, he did have good morals, but good morals alone cannot save you. And we see that in our, at school, at work, some people, they do not believe in God and they have good morals, but good morals alone cannot save you as they may not necessarily lead to correct practical action (Hanna, The Young Rich Man).

In a hypothetical world where individuals consider identity, as well as multiple other aspects of their lives, on a case-by-case basis, the normal flow of life would grind

14 Bold text is my own emphasis.
to a complete halt. Even if only relegating such contemplative behavior to identity, our choices when faced with even a relatively small number of possible stimuli would make decision making a lengthy and tiring process involved mostly with redundant matters having little to no impact on our sense of identity. This is especially so since what is trivial in one culture, may be significantly threatening to identity in another (e.g. a ham sandwich, taking a photograph or partial nudity in a magazine advertisement). Furthermore, the basis for legitimating the regulation of public morality has weakened in light of the growing lack of general consensus on what is in fact moral and by extension immoral (Thompson and Sharma).

The repeatability of observed phenomena together with knowledge of the individual cases, is all that is needed to establish laws, as this provides a configuration or ‘gestalt’ (Ben-Rafael 685; Sternberg; Scholl; Van Valen 416). This is relevant also for moral laws. In extreme cases such as the heavily researched behavior of rescuers under Nazi occupation during the Second World War, research has consistently shown that these people did not choose to act morally per se. They were rather constrained by laws emanating from their constructed self. Disobeying these internal laws would negate their altruistic identity and undermine their reflexive view (Cf. Oliner and Oliner; Tec; Fogelman; Monroe, “Identity and Perspective”; Monroe, The Heart of Altruism). At a more basic level, such practice would damage their psychological self, a basic human need (Staub 338).

In order to process stimuli, people must develop certain biases in order to shorten their reaction time. Although this plays a vital part in human reaction to danger, it also affects human perception of far more mundane events (Gladwell). Each way of life provides its own “greedy algorithm” in order to help an individual make decisions about their identity. This enables individuals to presuppose solutions to newly encountered
problems. These are of course far more prevalent in a migration milieu. “[T]he psychological mechanisms behind identity’s ability to constrain choice emanates from human needs for consistency and the extent to which moral values are integrated into one’s sense of self” (Monroe, “Identity and Perspective” 418). “When there is perceived unity between self and morality, judgment and conduct are directly and predictably linked and action choices are made with great certainty (Colby and Damon 150).

Whether in calm or very stressful times, what is required in order to maintain a separate robust identity is to ask more of people. This may be likened to the training of military units that disregards actual objective conditions of war or peace, cultivating a sense of identity based on a specific moral code. When persecuted or while praying in the Church, the Coptic believer may feel sanctified, but when he or she is removed from these challenging conditions, fidelity to higher standards of holiness must be reified and internalized (Azmy). This identity may be further reified by traditions extending back occasionally even centuries, particular clothing and so forth\textsuperscript{15}. It is true that a disheveled uniform does not directly affect ability. It is also true that the US Marines who fought at the Battle of Belleau Wood in 1918 for example, share little more than their unit name with current conscripts. Nonetheless, a higher level of demands, even if based on distant events, tends to exact more out of individuals, regardless of their own interests apart from prestige. Even the compensation of prestige does not necessarily equal what is lost either potentially or in actuality.

Moral identity is precisely such a demanding tool for a community. It justifies otherness not for its own sake, but rather on the basis of moral reasons and values. Morality is “an expression of the relationship between the self and others” (Staub 337). Moral identity provides not only a sturdier foundation for the long-term preservation of

\textsuperscript{15} The swords carried by officers in some militaries while in dress uniform are a case in point.
a discrete group identity; it also serves to diminish the internal pressures that strive to bring down any social institution:

“Because the ethnic myth is a dramatic tale that links the present with a communal past, and one that is widely believed, it helps to draw the members into a distinctive community, conferring on them a special aura, that of ‘the elect’. Through its symbolism, it strives to unify different classes and regions, spreading ethnic culture outwards from the urban centres and the specialist strata, who guard the traditions, thereby creating a more participant society” (A. D. Smith, “Chosen Peoples” 194)

Though it certainly provides a relatively stable vector for the propagation of identity across a large number of generations, moral identity does come at a price. Unlike the weaker attachment of non-moral ethnic identity, the cost of a moral identity means that the group will lose marginal members over time if it does not wish to give up its appealing selectness (ibid, 190).

The main benefit of moral identity comes in the form of social capital, which in turn has an ambivalent effect on integration (Furseth). As a rule of thumb, moral identity is invoked more often than not when the group is driven to defensive posturing (H. van Amersfoort 327; Siegel), raising a demand for change based on the newly significant identity (A. D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations 55; Klandermans, The Social Psychology of Protest). Out of the four non-exhaustive patterns of ethnic persistence based on ethnic election mentioned by Smith, three refer to groups faced with unusual adversity – the emigrant colonist, the diaspora restoration and the communal demotic. The latter pattern is the most appropriate description of the Coptic condition in the past decades (P. van Doorn-Harder 23).

“[This] pattern of ethnic survival, the communal-demotic, attaches the myth directly to the people in their sacred land. In these cases the community has usually been conquered and is struggling to preserve its former rights and way of life, claiming that its members are the original inhabitants and their culture is vernacular.” (A. D. Smith, “Chosen Peoples” 195).
The Meaning of Morality

Though I have established the advantages of tying identity down with moral moorings, I have yet to define what this morality actually means and why it is a basis for separation rather than universality. Naturally, morality is that which is considered to be moral. A quick look in the dictionary however, reveals an unsettling truth. Much as in the case of our earlier term, morality does not boast the absoluteness it purports to its possessors. According to the Merriam-Webster 10th edition Collegiate Dictionary, although “moral” and “ethical” are synonyms, their connotations are vastly different. Whereas “[m]oral’ implies conformity to established sanctioned codes or accepted notions of right and wrong... ‘Ethical’ may suggest the involvement of more difficult or subtle questions of rightness, fairness or equity.” As Bielo puts it, “ethics are the abstract principles, while morals are the practices carried out according to those principles” (282).

Thus it is not necessary for codes of conduct or accepted notions to be uniform across cultures. Morality is “a demand to behave in specific ways... [that] is, within a community, universal and reciprocal... [m]oral identity... is a qualitative identity... an identity that is essentially intersubjective... the primary intersubjective identity” (Tugendhat 8–9). The “moral and ethical constituents of the socially constructed self are historically necessary without being universal” (Stigliano 48). Michael Ignatieff lays out a poignant example in his lengthy discussion of the differing moral values brought into play in the formation of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights16 (53–98). This has led to an avoidance of moral justification in order to

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16 Considering the difficulty of passing the declaration through the UN apparatus already in 1948 and the fact that most criticism of it came from Islamic and East Asian quarters, which have since vastly increased their representation in the organization, it is doubtful the document is more than a dead letter and even basic universal morality remains out of reach.

A poignant example of the practical particularity of moral values can be seen in the evocation of immorality as a tool of censure. Current discourse concerning Muslim migrants to Western countries pits two immoralities against each other. In the Islamic framework, the unacceptable immorality is that of lightly clad native women. In contrast, in the feminist secular framework, it is immoral to force a woman to wear various sorts of covering. Such heated debate arises in a place where all the major religions agree on the principle that moral women ought to be properly clothed, though not on the extent of sufficient clothing. Contemporary liberal secularists challenge even this religious consensus, particularly in the public sphere (MacIntyre; Thompson and Sharma).

There are however cases where disagreement on that which is moral/immoral is a matter of principle – quality rather than simply quantity. Notable examples are the consumption of wine and monastic celibacy. Whereas Islam decries wine as immoral and sinful, the Judeo-Christian tradition considers it intertwined with the sanctity of the weekly sacrament. As another example, life-long monastic celibacy is seen as highly virtuous in Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity as a whole, with Catholicism even requiring it of its priests. Judaism, on the other hand, considers monastic celibacy immoral and even considered a single man unfit to hold the clerical position of Rabbi in the past.

It is clear therefore that morality, dealing in the specifics of conduct in social space, is far more culturally specific than even the vague and opaque world of ethics. Furthermore it can be said that morality is dialogical and reactive to our contemporaries and our predecessors. “We can and do take stands against dominant ideologies and
images of our time. We make these stands for a variety of reasons, all of which are grounded in the previous stands taken by others...Our actions are made intelligible also by the assessments made in the context of a community” (Stigliano 49). Since religion is divided into practice and belief, the latter implies an answer to questions of right and wrong, that is - morality. It is this morality that helps a migrant find his or her way in a new country, acting like a sextant, to use Baumann’s turn of phrase (69–80). It bridges centuries and physical distance basing itself on human consistency across generations, in that

“the meaning of being human cannot evolve. These moments are identical to those that were in the past... his [Man’s] aspiration to eternity and his divine conscience are the elements that remain unchanged from generation to generation, free for man to use or ignore” (Anba Bishoy, *La vie de pureté est-elle possible*?).

Moral identity is a powerful tool in the fight for identity maintenance. Moral directives do not depend on geographical location or a language learned. They are universal in their application, even if the code of conduct is limited to a select few.

“[L]ong term ethnic survival depends, in the first place, on the active cultivation by specialists and others of a heightened sense of collective distinctiveness and mission. The members of an ethnic community must be made to feel, not only that they form a single ‘super-family’, but that their historic community is unique, that they possess what Max Weber called ‘irreplaceable culture values’, that their heritage must be preserved against inner corruption and external control, and that the community has a sacred duty to extend its culture values to outsiders” (A. D. Smith, “Chosen Peoples” 189).

Although their position is diametrically opposed to the Thomas Theorem, it would be a failure on my part to omit the fact that many social psychologists, unable to empirically establish any presence of individual morality or personal character traits independent of situational cues, have posited that moral character is simply a fallacious

17 “Le sens d’être humain ne peut [pas] évoluer. Ces instants sont identiques à ceux qu’ils étaient par le passé... son aspiration à l’éternité et sa conscience divine sont des éléments qui demeurent inchangé de génération en génération, libre à l’homme de les utiliser ou de les ignorer.”
folk theory. Flanagan\textsuperscript{18} cites experiments by Hartshorne & May\textsuperscript{19} and Newcomb\textsuperscript{20} testifying to limited verifiable evidence of at least short-term dispositions, but the exception here proves the rule.

“people sometimes feel \textit{obliged,} even committed to act consistently. This may be because of their social roles... individuals may behave in consistent ways that distinguish them from their peers not because of their enduring predispositions to be friendly, dependent, aggressive, or the like, but rather because they are pursuing consistent goals using consistent strategies, in the light of consistent ways of interpreting their social world.” (Ross and Nisbett 19–20)

\textbf{Ethnicity}

We have covered the problem of the imprecise nature of identity and discussed the efficaciousness of moral identity in scaffolding ethnic identity. We must now turn our attention at this time to the matter of ethnicity and what this term claims to represent. Like identity, it too has a complex, confused and turbulent past. The precise term ‘ethnicity’ is somewhat of a neologism in its current sense (Eriksen 3; Glazer and Moynihan 1). In anthropology, within whose fold the term developed, ethnicity is accused of redundancy with its value questioned like that of the term ‘culture’ (Levine; Brightman). Academic discussions struggle to define it and seem to corroborate the significant overlap between culture, ethnicity and nationalism. Since they are all vessels for ‘imagined communities’ (B. Anderson), they are all the more difficult to pin down.

Of the three, nationalism has the advantage of resting upon political ground, either through practical sovereignty or through claimed rights. As Ernest Gellner defined it, a nationalist identifies the limits of the state with the limits of the nation (hence the modern nation-state). A nation is however in turn defined as consisting of people who

\textsuperscript{18} (Flanagan)
\textsuperscript{19} (Hartshorne and May)
\textsuperscript{20} (Newcomb)
share a culture and who recognize themselves and others as being members of that nation (Gellner, Nations and Nationalism 1–7). In light of the above discussion of identity, this definition elucidates in stark relief how much ‘ethnic cultural identity’ may become a pleonasm ad absurdum when definitions become muddled.

One reason provided for the plethora of terms meaning largely the same things in different contexts or slightly tweaked is the nefarious sound of the now shamed term ‘race’. This term was used prior to the Second World War in much the same way as identity is used today (Guglielmo and Lewis 170; Ibrahim 12; Chapman, McDonald, and Tonkin) to describe an English or German race for example. The two terms are still closely linked even today (Cf. Caliendo and McIlwain; Doob; Bayor; Law). Furthermore, abundant criticism is leveled at state monitoring of both ethnic and racial groups while grudgingly no alternative is suggested (Bonnett and Carrington). Political correctness has also led some to use the term ‘culture’ in order to refer to what people are rather than what they do to express themselves (Vermeulen 8).

The ethnic group also termed ‘ethnos’ from the Greek or ‘ethnie’ from the French, acts as a catchall category for all senses of belonging beyond a certain magnitude. In this way, religion, language, class, race (in its popular meaning), and plain filiality are all equalized as sources for belonging to an ethnic group. In this way, ethnic groups constitute kinship networks writ large. In light of the invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger) and imagined (B. Anderson) aspects of ethnic groups, it remains unclear what if anything other than common ancestry differentiates them from football club fandom for example. Yinger goes as far as to question the motives behind the use of this specific term in an eponymous review (173), while Basham & deGroot abjure its over-ascription already in the 1970s (423).
Hutchinson & Smith name six features that typify ethnic groups to differing extents. These are: A common proper name; a myth of common ancestry; shared historical memories; one or more elements of common culture; a link with a homeland; and a sense of solidarity. (Hutchinson and Smith 6–7). These are amplified when cultures face an ‘other’ wishing to incorporate them (A. D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations 56).

Ethnicity also varies in its purpose and intensity. Olzak notes that many scholars differentiate between ethnic solidarity, an inactivated yet present social resource of untapped loyalty, and ethnic mobilization, the activated form. She also notes four broad categories of ethnic movements based on their goals. Namely, proto-nationalist ethnicities claiming sovereignty, civil rights groups demanding an end to discrimination against a particular ethnicity, antagonist movements focusing their animus against a particular ethnicity, and state-sponsored movements that bolster identification between ethnicity and state (Olzak 668).

Minority
Definition and Meaning

The term minority is often used but seldom considered for its merits and biases. In its current sociological meaning, like many of our tools of analysis, it is somewhat of a novelty. As Gleason (“Minorities”) shows, the word ‘minority’ was initially used to refer to those not of age and later in the political sense to the party with fewer seats in the British parliament21. This second meaning most likely gave rise to the first appearance of the term in the sense I use here in the so called ‘minority treaties’ following the First World War (ibid, 393).

21 For more detailed examples though with less rigorous analysis, see (Huckaby).
It is not so surprising that this term is so new since earlier times would have rendered it an anachronism for most if not all groups. The existence of a minority as such presupposes certain attributes that are present in the modern nation-state but that were not forthcoming in the pre-modern era. In fact, the only minorities that could exist in the feudal agriculture-based state were outsiders like Jews and Gypsies who could provide non-agricultural goods and services without endangering the stability of the system. More specifically, it suggests a minority identity that is incongruent with a majority identity that is in turn in line with the identity of the state with which it is closely associated. Much like the ascribed status of identity, minority membership is a subjective category (B. T. White 142). The primary raison d'être of the term minority is its socio-political antonym majority. In fact it highlights the omnipresent reification of majority. It is only in recent years that the issue of the meaning of whiteness in America for example has come under consideration. Yet even this narrow aspect of majority in its simplistic racial guise does not sufficiently challenge the unspoken assumptions concerning majority status.

The Coptic Church is well aware of these issues. For this reason the labeling of Copts as a minority brought about a heated debate in 1994. The Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies in Cairo cosponsored a conference in May 1994 with the UK-based Minority Rights Group to discuss the 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Minorities and Peoples in the Arab World and the Middle East' with Egypt's Copts on the agenda. The debate surrounding the conference became so heated that the venue was removed to Cyprus (Phillips 5; Thorbjørnsrud 74–78). Pope Shenouda III considered the term ‘minority’ to be labeling Copts as less Egyptian, stating “minorities are not numerical: the Copts are Egyptian through and through. The Copts are woven into the woof and warp of Egyptian history” (Watson 248).
On a global scale, even the largest ethnic group, the Han Chinese, constitute a minority of about one fifth of the world's population. So how is it that we are able to meaningfully discuss minorities contrasted with assumed majorities? This is largely a result of the geographic delimitation of the state as it presents itself today. The conjuring of majorities, more politely referred to as ‘nation-building’, derived from a modern need for a semblance of the consent of the governed.

The need for such legitimation increased sharply following the excesses of both world wars and the moral delegitimization of colonialism and imperialism as valid social and economic systems. The core of this anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist movement rested not on the excesses and mismanagement by the colonial officials but rather on the foreignness of the occupying rulers. Thus in an ironic twist of fate, the post colonial independence movements acted as a mirror image to western nativism. Technology allowed the post-colonial rulers to rule by edict much as their European predecessors had done while preventing the growth of civil society or challenges to the absolutist sovereignty of the state. International organs as well as Western powers supported such practices with a policy that refused the redrawing of borders. The secondary result of the double bind was the weakening of federative and devolved structures of state in the interest of promoting an allegedly more efficient centralized state leading to the further marginalization of the new periphery.

Despite the novelty of their appellation, official recognition of minorities is a less modern phenomenon. Most often, groups that we would today opt to call minorities would be labeled as heretics or foreigners. Due to the lack of standardized schools or a statewide extensive bureaucracy, a uniform linguistic field was simply uncalled for. Marginal religious groups relied on an individual ruler’s whims and could often be
brought up on charges of heresy even if their beliefs were thoroughly orthodox within their religious group or in another state.

Religious and ethnic cleansing in an attempt to assert a majority identity had taken place historically in Europe as well as other places. European examples abound from the Spanish Reconquista and the banishment of Jews from England, France and the Papal States to the Wars of Religion in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Peace of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War in 1648 was arguably however the first step in codifying the state’s legitimate right to determine the identity of its residents not as actors of divine will but as secular rulers.

The rise of nationalist movements within the losing empires of the First World War came together with the wish of the victorious empires to weaken their former adversaries by decentralizing power excessively. This gave rise to the establishment of new states or the reestablishment of defunct ones. Though some groups were seen as meriting their own states, others were too widely dispersed or numerically insignificant. Realizing the potential difficulty of belonging to the nation of one state but living in another, the League of Nations advocated two solutions. The harsher one seen as better in the long run was the cruel measure of population exchanges. This occurred on a large scale and under international supervision as Muslims in Greece and Christians in Turkey were exiled from their homes. Within European Christian states, a more mitigated stopgap measure was put into place. These were the ‘Minority Treaties’. These ‘treaties’ were not so much treaties as much as a codification of the protection of the rights of those who did not belong to the mono-ethnic nation states. More often than not, the minorities so protected were members of nations that had their own state. They were however resident in another state and so were seen as potential irredentists and hence in need of protection (B. T. White 136).
The Benefits and Costs of a Recognized Minority

White argues that it is the newly established might of international law in the hands of the League of Nations and the pressures restricting the imperial powers since the Congress of Berlin in 1878, that made it advantageous for some to adopt minority status. The presence of minorities could enable the mandatory or quasi-mandatory power, as was the case in Egypt, to invoke legal grounds for military intervention (ibid, 131–161). It is hardly surprising then that as a political and legal incentive appeared, reality came to be defined in a way that was more seemly and in line with the term. A more contemporary example of this phenomenon may be seen in the move away from ‘forced migration’ or ‘population transfer’ to the more legalistic term ‘ethnic cleansing’. Another example is the quick adoption of the term ‘genocide’ since Raphael Lemkin coined it in 1944 to define the actions of Germany under the National Socialists (A. Jones 8–12). For many in the West, unlike the menacing connotation of the multiethnic Balkans, the status of minorities in the Levant would take on a different air. Much like the Romantic Orientalist image of the odalisque awaiting her savior from the clutches of the seraglio, the Christian minorities were and continue to be portrayed in this light.

Usage of the term ‘minority’ as a tool defining an ethnic, religious or linguistic group indicates the presumption that homogenous societies are desirable or even the ‘natural’ state of affairs. The term implies a certain level of disempowerment and an asymmetrical relationship with some vague authority apparatus, be it the state or some other societal structure such as Bourdieu’s field of power (263–339). In other words, ‘minority’ status assumes the existence of a majority in whose name the minority is marginalized or alternatively, from whom the minority requires protection. Yet the existence of such a majority, despite its proverbial silence, ought to be questioned.
In the global context in which we now live, all groups, no matter how large, have failed to attain global majority status. Even within single nation states, such groups labeled as hegemonic ‘majories’ fail to function monolithically and are teeming with internal minority activity. At most, it can be said that certain minority elites are able to use their hegemonic power to incorporate or marginalize other minority groups, enabling them to establish ephemeral majority-like entities.

Minority status has more to do with marginalization and disenfranchisement than it does with objective numbers. In fact, “it... appears that minorities, in societies where a different religion from theirs prevails, tend to depart from their coreligionist majorities at the same time as they remain somehow at a distance from the value orientations exhibited by members of their societies who share the prevalent creed” (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 11). A more helpful definition of a minority group would be ‘a group that shares certain attributes it deems important and that perceives itself to be disempowered to a certain degree in comparison to some other group within its frame of reference’. Van Amersfoort relates a similar though more restrictive definition in his dissertation linking minority with migration (Immigratie en Minderheidsvorming 17). I would argue alongside Lucassen and Penninx that his definition is too delimited to be of practical use as few groups actually correspond to it, especially in regard to the establishment of multiple generations (104).

The definition I present here has two major advantages. Firstly, it relates more closely to the limited though not powerless minority of a child as well as the lesser political power of the opposition parties on affairs of state, which brings it more in line with the original thrust of the term. Secondly, it is better suited to explain numerical majorities behaving as though they were disenfranchised minorities. This has been accepted in sociological circles in the example of women, who are numerically the
majority in most world countries, but either are, or feel themselves to be, distanced from the loci of control (Cf. Mayer-Hacker).

Having accepted the usage of the term minority, one still faces several problematic issues. Most importantly, why is minority status even necessary, let alone vital, to the analysis of society? People who are left-handed comprise a minority across multiple cultures, as do twins and redheads, yet these categories have no political salience. Two important factors justify a subjective analysis of these objective facts. The first is whether outside society, that is, members of the surrounding culture who do not share those traits, see them as worthy of recognition, be it in a positive or negative light. Secondly, the question arises if enough of those who share the trait see it as a definition that they wish to adopt, even if only to counter a bias against them, thus creating the glue that would bind them together.

Both internal and external recognition of group boundaries is necessary for the maintenance of the group. One of the greatest challenges to group identity that occurs during migration is the lack of external recognition by receiving countries. This is a burden carried most heavily by members of minorities, as they are generally the ones most often being miscategorized. In the Dutch case, formal recognition of an ethnic community means government funding and recognition of schools, thus conferring an important status on official recognition (Koopmans and Statham 661). Ireland has even shown that migrants mobilize politically based on the national policies regarding their participation in society rather than according to any a priori attributes such as social class or ethnic origin (Ireland). Poignant examples of the potential political impact of these categories are the migration of Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, and under Ottoman rule even Arabs being classified as the migration of Turks. This confused recognition
manifested itself both on an official and popular level, as may be seen in the records left by the press and census data.

“Such articles... reflected a confusion about who the Syrians were, referring to them variously as Arabians, Armenians, Assyrians, and Turks, often synonymously with the term Syrian. These immigrants no less puzzled the United States immigration officials in New York and in the several other immigration ports. In 1899, acknowledging that most of the increasing flow of Turks from ‘Asia’ were, in fact, Arabs from Syria, the Bureau of Immigration added the classification of ‘Syrian’ to its records. Not only did this development improve the reliability of recordkeeping, but it also provided the Arabic-speaking immigrants with an identity – a way of sorting themselves out in a society teeming with foreigners from many different lands. It had not been, however, an identity they were accustomed to in their homeland” (Naff 14; See also McKay 321)

In contrast to members of a majority group, “members of a minority group are more inclined to show a group-level response (i.e., by emphasizing intragroup homogeneity on the dimension on which they claim in-group superiority)” (Ellemers and Van Rijswijk 63).

If the receiving country wishes to integrate rather than segregate the migrant communities, it would do well to recognize the internal classification of the group rather than deny it and risk alienating the group. Denial of external recognition of one’s identity entails only two possible solutions – unstable abnegation and chauvinistic self-edification of that identity. Both solutions involve a great amount of energy being expended by the individual to explain either what he is or what he is not. The time and effort being spent on explaining, justifying or challenging a certain discrete identity is not going towards perhaps more constructive goals such as individual promotion or advancement of the larger society. This has been shown in the focus of members of conservative churches in the United States on volunteering for internal tasks for the church rather than volunteering elsewhere or even working for their own financial or social gain outside the church (Foley and Hoge 117; Wuthnow, “Mobilizing Civic Engagement”). Naturally, such efforts do breed niches for their more avid champions in
the fields of ethnic studies and ethnic politics, but for most minority members, lack of interest in the outside society comes at a cost.

Equilibrium between the group and its surrounding society, gauged by the acceptance of the new group or its members as insiders by pre-existing inside-groups in society, would be the most likely final result. This may occur by the disintegration of the group and its assimilation into pre-existing classifications, or through the incorporation of some or all of its culture and values into the greater culture. Examples are ubiquitous, as the paucity of truly indigenous cultural phenomena shows. The so-called “American” kitchen is based quite heavily on that of blue collar German-Americans. The commercial success of the Lebanese-born poet Gibran Kahlil Gibran, though far from actually representing his culture of origin, attests to the ability of the receiving culture to accept seemingly foreign ideas as its own. Maintaining disequilibrium by means of segregation can only sow resentment and potentially even violence.

Minority status entails constant defense and an apologist rethinking of one’s position. A member of a majority is not required to explain his position or agenda, as the reason for it is considered blatantly obvious (Gudykunst and Bond 135–136; Sagiv and Schwartz). Common sense dictates membership in large groups that brings both the protection of large numbers and the safety of a tried path. Nonetheless Coptic morality dictates that a young person must

“expect to go against the majority, against what is common. Expect to go against the tide. If, again, you think about the boat [that] is drifting. In order to rescue this boat, the boat has to go against the tide. So we are surrounded by peers that pressure us to conform to them. In order not to drift, you have to expect to go against the peer pressure, against the popularity, because when you are conformed to your friends, you will be more popular. So are you willing to go against the tide. Are you willing to compromise the praise of men in order to gain the praise of God? Sometimes we are conformed to our friends or peers just to be praised by them. So the question here [is] are you willing to go against this and to refuse the praise of men in order to gain the praise of God? There are many forces that pull us down. There are many strange philosophies, many strange ideologies that try to pull us down. Are you strong enough?
to go against the current? Are you strong [enough] to go against the majority? Do you have the spirit of Athanasius, who said “I am against the world” and he refused to be conformed to the world? Are you transformed or conformed as St. Paul said “do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of mind. If all you friends [are] going in the wrong direction, do you want to be strong enough to say “no, I am Christian. I cannot do this”, even if you are alone, even if you are like Joseph, you are the only one in the land of Egypt, or like the three young men, Daniel and his friends in the land of Babylon and they purposed in their hearts not to defile themselves. So are you willing to go against the majority? Against the current? Against the tide? Against the stream? Remember, the strong fish are the ones that swim against the current, but the weak one is the one that goes with the current. If you are strong, strong through Jesus Christ who strengthens you, then you will go against the current and against the tide and you will grow spiritually. And remember, if one drifts along with the majority, maybe he will be lost. Listen to Matthew, chapter 7, verse 13 and 14: “Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go by it”. Many. “because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it”. “and there are few who find it” (Bishop Youssef, Drifting Away from God).

Going inexplicably against the grain can be termed tantamount to madness, comparable to going the wrong way on the highway. There is nothing innately wrong with the direction of travel, but driving on the left side of the road in the United States is just as dangerous as doing so on the right side in Britain. Therefore it is not that the minority identity is seen as innately problematic in and of itself, but rather that since this view of identity failed to gain majority standing, it must accept the democratic decision of the majority and adjust accordingly. If and when the minority member refuses to accept this, he is pressed to explain this refusal. The fact that especially new migrant minorities feel that it is more legitimate to demand recognition of group rights challenges some of the main assumptions regarding the raison d’être of the modern state and seeks to rewrite the rulebook (Koopmans and Statham 658; Kymlicka 1).

A Question of Boundaries

The ascription of minority status is a very tricky business. Any given Christian group in the United States, for example, is able to claim that it is a minority in need of
some measure of protection from the onslaught of the government’s liberal agenda. In the same breath however it is crystal clear that Christianity and Christian culture constitute an indefatigable majoritarian aspect of the United States. This ability to shift between majority identity and minority identity allows for a high degree of plasticity and increased malleability of boundaries in times of need. A case in point is the candidacy of two members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (more commonly known as Mormons) for the Republican Party’s Presidential Elections in 2012. Whereas in 2008 Romney was directly challenged for his denomination, unlike members of larger churches, such criticism was more muted for both Romney and Huntsman four years later. At the same time, President Obama stands accused by some of his more radical opponents of being a Muslim, that is, in other words, not representative of the Christian majority and its values.

On a national level, Copts are in a different situation. A Christian and a Copt in Egypt are largely synonymous. Even certain Catholic and Protestant groups in Egypt refer to themselves as Coptic. They do so because their flock is made up of former members of the Coptic Orthodox Church or their descendants, but also because naming themselves Copts does not significantly challenge the overwhelming presence of the recognized Orthodox Church.

The Role of International Attention and the Impact of Violence

A state, no matter how powerful, does not exist in a vacuum. Though the Coptic Church has repeatedly and consistently rejected outside powerful assistance based on shared Orthodoxy (from Russia, see page 88), or on shared Christian values (from the United Kingdom and later the United States), such offers are and were nonetheless real. When pressed by the United States on his treatment of the Coptic minority, it is unlikely
that Mubarak’s regime did not see the Copts as complicit in its troubles. This is despite Coptic official demands to desist from this intervention in Egyptian internal affairs, which could potentially be seen as theatrical protestation. Thus in a quick turn of phrase, Copts are turned from a minority within the Egyptian population into a local chapter of a much larger group, namely global Christianity. Whereas this potentially grants them the intervention of strong Christian nations on their part, its merit remains dubious. For one, such intervention or even the potential thereof would label the Copts as agents of foreign governments, raising the ire of the Muslim population. For another, it lends credence to the claim that the Copts are not a protected minority within a mostly Muslim state, but rather local representatives of foreign superpowers that allegedly wish to undermine the stability and sovereignty of the state.

Taken in retrospect, violent attacks against Coptic churches and individuals acted as a useful and accurate barometer to gauge the level of tension between the “street” and Mubarak’s regime. As the regime’s hold on power slowly slipped away, attacks on churches increased in both frequency and intensity. Although there may be some truth in the oft-heard claim that Mubarak used attacks on Copts as a reminder why the Church ought to support him as the lesser of two evils, this is unlikely to be the whole truth. Spikes in violence as had occurred in 1981 under Sadat and throughout 1992, did probably pose a real danger to the regime. It is quite instructive that only three short weeks before the “official” recognized start of the ‘Arab Spring’ in Egypt, a Coptic Church was violently attacked in Alexandria, just shy of a year after the Nagga’ Hammadi massacre. The Maspero Protests of October 2011 served to show that the military preferred to accommodate the “street” rather than assert its dominance and risk losing power. The lack of significant international reaction to these events especially with the backdrop of events in other ‘Arab Spring’ countries shows that the potential for Western
intervention is small and highly unlikely in Egypt, and even less so on the basis of defending the Copts.

**Migration**

Migration illustrates a deeper substratum of social interaction because it contravenes the ecological development of organic norms and values. In so doing, it helps with the obviation of those social, legal, cultural and other processes that are subject to far less scrutiny where they occur “naturally” as a result of established conventions. This becomes apparent most visibly where migrant parents compete with the public school and peers over the divergent socialization of children and youth (Phinney and Vedder 167). Nonetheless the migrant intergenerational gap is often exaggerated in comparison to the local norm, which can also be discordant (Fuligni, “Authority”; Yau and Smetana). Returning to the traffic analogy, whereas driving on the right-hand side of the road has no advantage over sticking to the left-hand side, a mix of the two leads to violent clashes, with both schools of thought much offended.

**Migration and Employment**

Perhaps more so than other migration-related issues, occupational competition from foreign migrants is a popular topic for the news media worldwide. To a wider extent than we may deign to confess, it is those unsubstantiated misconceptions regarding migration that various news outlets and limelight-seeking politicians propagate that have urged states and academic institutions to promote the popularized study of migration in the first place. More serious scholars do not have the prerogative of ignoring the vicissitudes of past migration absorptions or the positive integration of
the “well-oiled wheels” that do not proverbially “squeak” (Lucassen and Lucassen 228; Citrin et al.). In fact, a very large portion of migrants to western Europe arrive from other western states and are very rarely victims of anti-immigrant actions and possibly sentiment (Witte 494).

Contrary to what may be expected from the rhetoric one hears, the migration policies of Western Liberal states, while mildly restrictive during hard economic times, would be normally characterized as *laissez-faire* (Hammar) and even “broadly expansionist and inclusive” (Freeman 881). This remains the state of affairs despite a generalized skepticism regarding the capacity of the state to impinge on migration, let alone regulate it, both in the United States and in Europe. (Glazer; Sides and Citrin; Freeman 890–891). This is not to say that migration is a golden goose, simply that it has a positive macroeconomic impact alongside some microeconomic glitches (Cf. Brimelow; Camorata; Borjas; Altonji and Card).

Although the historical attitudes of the United States in comparison to western European states are quite divergent, current attitudes are remarkably similar. On both sides of the Atlantic, locally born individuals tend to overestimate the volume of the foreign-born\(^{22}\) and do not wish to expand migration, seeing it as a necessary economic evil (Citrin and Sides). There have been short-lived attempts to repatriate migrants, both legal and illegal, and to reduce migration (Parsons and Smeeding). Nevertheless most European countries have begun to place more of an emphasis on the positive demographic impact of well paid migrants on the transfer payments systems of demographically below-replacement-value states\(^{23}\) (Citrin and Sides 34).

\(^{22}\) This is the case for estimates of all minority groups (Nadeau, Niemi, and Levine).

\(^{23}\) States where the fertility rate per couple is lower than a rate that would provide two fertile adults in the next generation, a rate dependent on infant and child mortality rates, age at first childbearing and other residual factors.
Much like many migrants, native youth are untrained, undereducated and willing to work for less. They are seen as requiring socialization and lacking without it (Wieviorka 138). Though youth employment has a much wider impact on the employment status of others and their wages, it is simply not seen as problematic or threatening, while in comparison, migrant labor is commonly portrayed as foreboding. Whereas migrants respond to market demand for working hands, native youth are a constant presence whose response to job market demands is far less elastic. Though not commonly handled as such, child labor laws and the fairly active enforcement of truancy laws have curtailed the extent of unskilled youth involvement in the job market\textsuperscript{24}, necessitating the provision of an alternative pool of conditional laborers. The tendency to underestimate the negative impact of native youth in comparison to that of migrant laborers is most likely due to two main causes. The first of these is the outsider status of migrants, since by definition once a migrant becomes an insider, he or she is no longer a migrant. The second is the weaker status of migrants as a group, since most democratic countries will strive to restrain the flow of incoming migrants in order for them to retain their minority status within society, thus reifying the status quo ante migration. Regardless, “attitudes toward immigrants depend more on ‘symbolic’ attitudes toward cultural unity than the material circumstances of respondents” (Citrin and Sides 46).

The process of adjustment does not occur just within the membership of the minority group, but also within the receiving society. Both migrants and so-called natives lead lives on individual and group levels and encounter each other on those levels. I will extrapolate the ruling attitudes of the receiving countries from their official policies regarding migrant identity markers, as these have been shown to mirror majority views in democratic states (ibid, 49; Bourhis et al.). It is true that official law

\textsuperscript{24} Increasing requirements for the education of workers are raising the age at which pre-adults and even many young adults are entering the workforce (Wuthnow, \textit{After the Baby Boomers} 12).
does not necessarily reflect facts on the ground (Vedder, Van de Vijver, and Liebkind 149). Matters on an individual level may be quite different as can be seen in non-discrimination cases. Nevertheless legislation provides structural constraints that are more difficult to resist in comparison to the more ephemeral and perhaps more sensationalist anecdotal evidence likely to merit printing on the pages of the popular press25.

Native elites also affect policy both directly and indirectly. They do so first through increased participation in voting (Citrin and Sides 46) and secondly by signaling the ‘correct’ positions to the general public (Zaller). When mass attitudes do not agree with elite policies that encourage a certain measure of migration reception, data indicates these attitudes are largely ignored in practice (Howard). Since the successful integration of migrants depends on many factors involving the context of reception, the context of emigration and the skills and socioeconomic standing of the migrants (Vermeulen 25), it is quite easy to misrepresent facts surrounding migration. Counter-intuitively, even publicly expressed attitudes do not necessarily reflect the actual situation accurately. As Koopmans shows, western European countries with strong right-wing parties holding to an anti-immigration platform actually have lower levels of violence toward migrants and vice versa (Koopmans).

It is however difficult to gauge the extent of actual mass attitudes as both media and literary sources tend to repeatedly discuss the same spectacular events while ignoring daily interactions and even over-emphasizing the practical effects of the more serious events (Koopmans and Statham 659). The fact that the same events are mulled over repeatedly may be indicative of the dearth of problematic events regarding migrants as opposed to other economically disadvantaged people. In addition, the

25 While the law deals with dogs biting people, the press is more inclined to report of a man biting a dog as the journalistic aphorism goes.
country of settlement often makes a statistically stronger impact on integration than membership in any specific minority group (Vedder et al. 208). For example, it is likely that a single person encountering racism at a job interview would not do much about it, especially as a new migrant. However, as a whole, if the law forbids such racist behavior, it will either drift to the margins of society in time like other illicit activities or it will replace the law as in the case of the Jim Crow laws26 and other exclusionary immigration laws of the past and present.

The classification of migrant competition as somehow more unfair than any other form of economic rivalry may explain why anti-migrant sentiment is often strongest in areas where few migrants reside (Lucassen and Lucassen 235; H. van Amersfoort 361). This may however also be a resurfacing of tensions between the urban environment and the rural hinterland. It merits attention that many migrants identify more strongly with their new city while they remain aloof of the country as a whole (Lucassen and Lucassen 54; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters; Favell 19). Considering the central location of employment in today’s social life, migration “augurs freedom of meaning-creation for some, but portends ascription to meaninglessness for others. Some can now move out of the locality – any locality – at will. Others watch helplessly the sole locality they inhabit moving away from under their feet” (Bauman, Globalization 18).

The Direction of Migration

Throughout this paper, I will prefer to use the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘migration’. I do this for several reasons. The temporal gap between emigration and immigration is now in contrast to eons of history and prehistory almost defunct. It is therefore more

26 A general term referring to state and local laws that subverted Black equality in the United States in the century between the abolition of slavery and the Supreme Court’s decision to nullify the principle of “separate but equal”.

56
difficult to differentiate the two in contrast to the times when such a sojourn lasted weeks if not months or longer. Return migration, onward migration, repeat migration and internal migration serve to further obfuscate the directionality implied by the use of the prefixes. Furthermore, the prefixes imply that one is exiting something and entering something else. That something being an allegedly bounded society of a nation-state (Favell 13–14). Quite to the contrary, previous migrations provide multiple examples of individuals crossing political borders yet remaining within the same community without losing step, as the phenomenon of urban ethnic ghettos illustrates so vividly. Most importantly, in practice the emigrant and the immigrant are the same person in an altered context. The term ‘migrant’ retains this unity of being. It also avoids the pitfall of viewing the migrant through the eyes of the original or receiving country rather than through those of the migrant and thus objectifying them unnecessarily.

Over the years, the time-lapse between the rise of demand for labor in one country and supply of that labor by another has steadily declined. Labor flows between developed countries had once been the domain of resourceful and hardy people seeking adventure and taking a gamble. Today they have become commonplace and even a necessary part of résumé building for those seeking advancement in white-collar jobs. In order to avoid the stigma of migration, it is common to refer to such sought-after “good” migrants using other terms such as ‘expats’ or ‘knowledge migrants’ and to dub their migration ‘relocation’. In stark opposition to the unskilled labor market, failure to integrate culturally, linguistically or even residentially receives no negative attention when it comes to cosmopolitan expats. Ironically, the children of migrants born in the new country of residence tend to assimilate linguistically so quickly that a generational disconnect takes place and ill-equipped parents lose authority over their children who
turn to their peers. Portes and Rumbaut refer to this as segmented assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut).

The newly prominent flexibility of migration has brought new problems to the fore beyond the familiar issue of integration and assimilation. For many especially younger migrants, a return to their parents’ or even their early childhood country of origin can have a massive and often detrimental effect on their wellbeing (Georgas and Papastylianou, “The Effect of Time”; Georgas and Papastylianou, “Acculturation and Ethnic Identity”). Difficulties in assimilation, language acquisition or reacquisition and context inappropriate behavior all act in unison to make a “return” into re-migration (Schmitz 33; Diem-Wille; J. N. Martin). For some the loss of the psychological crutch that is the mental conception of the idealized home country constitutes an additional and unexpected disadvantage. Others solve this predicament by idealizing the country to which their parents had migrated in which they were either raised or born. This phenomenon has received some scant scholarly attention most notably in the case of the almancılar, Turkish citizens who have either spent long periods of time in Germany or were born there and have now removed their residence to Turkey (Akbalık et al.; Lin; J. B. White 755; Doğan; Mandel 43 – footnote 14; Tezcan; Tufan). The context surrounding remigration, the social standing of the child’s parents and perceived discrimination all had a significant impact on the negative aspects of reabsorption in the home country (Neto, “Behavioral Problems”; Neto, “Re-acculturation Attitudes”; Neto, “Re-acculturation and Adaptation”; Tamura and Furnham). As a whole though, adolescents favor a more plastic attitude of idiosyncratic integration, combining the cultures of origin and residence, in contrast to the choice of adult migrants to retain a discrete original identity untainted by the current surroundings (Berry and Sam 305).

27 The term is considered derogatory in some circles potentially because it questions the Turkishness of these individuals.
The decision to migrate brings about a similar though not identical dilemma to that of claiming minority status. In fact, even in cases where a migrant has not been a member of a minority group in his home country, migration often places him or her in that status upon arrival at the destination country. This in many ways epitomizes the change in status that occurs in migration. In today's global environment, the proliferation of migrant minorities has overwhelmed native minorities by sheer volume and number (Eisenstadt 29).

Unlike many other acts, migration is an act that implicitly demands justification as it is rarely done by default, with the potential exception of ethnically cleansed refugees whose plight is common knowledge. Remarkably, even when the receiving country solicits migration, the role of that state in the migration process is often glossed over and the onus is placed almost wholly on the migrants. This is most especially the case when the same parties that brought cheap labor from abroad turn against those whom they had invited (Pettigrew 95) or at least turn a blind eye toward elements encouraging xenophobia (Thränhardt 337).

In certain cases it is an ill-planned worsening in the domestic economic situation or a stricter entry policy that causes the countervailing effect propagating a sudden peak in migration through family unification (Lucassen and Lucassen 68–69, 227; Platt 699). Despite the globalization of economic crises, weathering the storm in a migration-exporting country is often more of a hardship than facing economic adversity in a migration-receiving country. Though one may be unemployed in both, government programs mitigate the repercussions of such joblessness, especially when it comes to the welfare of minors. Furthermore, starvation or death as a result of medical neglect, poor
public hygiene, or lack of heating or cooling, is less common though not unheard of in migration-receiving countries.

Migration is not solely a geographical relocation as it commonly involves much greater and far-reaching changes (Vermeulen 40). These are sometimes forgotten or overlooked because of the manifold travails of language acquisition, financial hardship, and the pining for the familiarity of the place of origin. More often than not, migration involves a change in the entire way of doing things for the migrant. From handling bureaucracy (appropriate level of decorum, effective tone of voice, expected accuracy of written information, acceptability of bribes); through methods of education (rote, experiential, corporal punitive); to acceptable behavior (vis-à-vis and qua member of class, family, gender and age); and beyond, a slow and cumbersome process of trial and error leads eventually if not to integration, then at least to some semblance of a modus vivendi with the “odd” customs of the locals to be tolerated even if frowned upon. Toleration does not mean acceptance, as can be seen in the example of the rejection of Halloween (Wassef, *Halloween*; Wassef, *Test the Spirits*), or in the insistence on retaining the Egyptian celebration of Nayrûz.

“It is very important to celebrate the feast of the Coptic New Year, especially in the diaspora, outside Egypt, because our children who were born in France, if they will not become attached to this evening, which is the value of the Coptic New Year, when they will grow up, it is possible that they will be uprooted from the Church” (Anba Bishoy, *Chretien et Vie de Temoignage*).

That having been stated, some migrants may greatly improve their stakes in life by wiping the slate clean and starting from scratch (Bibby, “Going, Going, Gone” 290). Most will choose to shed only certain aspects of their culture that are no longer compatible with the new environment (Berry, “Acculturation in a New Society”). I will
discuss those aspects in regard to the Coptic community in further detail in the following chapter. The stress of social and physical dislocation combined with the growing ease of ideological propaganda proliferation have greatly increased both the appeal and visibility of religious fundamentalism (Eisenstadt 35). This does not seem to have affected the Coptic communities I have encountered. It is possible this may be to a large extent because Copts did not experience migration as a traumatic event, but rather as a largely positive if difficult one. Nonetheless Anba Bishoy reminds his community that their foreignness is not a matter of geography. Drawing a parallel between biblical models and the Coptic community in France, he states,

“you are a stranger on this earth, but you have the Holy Spirit... at the same time, you are unique, you are free and you are joyous... what I want to tell you is that we live in this world, but we do not take part in this world”²⁹ (Pentecote etranger sur terre).

Once the wheels of migration are set in motion, it can become self-perpetuating. Chain migration reduces the financial and emotional cost of migration. Furthermore institutions develop to facilitate matters ranging from legal aid to translation services to religious services and beyond (Moore and Shellman 728; Hagan and Ebaugh 1146; Faist; Hagan; Massey et al.). At a given point, readily available social resources become scarce if one chooses to remain, almost forcing migration in order to return to a semblance of the previous status quo (Moore and Shellman 740). This does not mean that chain migration acts like a slinky toy moving populations from one place to another. There are curbs to chain migration originating from both the external locals startled at the rapid increase of a given community of belonging and from within the community itself as resources become scarce (Snel, Faber, and Engbersen).

²⁹ “tu es étranger sur cette terre, mais tu as le Saint-Esprit... en même temps, tu es unique, tu es libre, et tu es joyeux... est-ce que je veux dire c’est que nous vivons dans ce monde, mais nous ne faisons pas partie de ce monde”
Migration in the Past

Migration is not a novel phenomenon in the least. Though various paleontologists differ on the specific point of origin, the spread of humanity to all corners of the globe through migration is today taken to be axiomatic (Marsella and Ring 3; Diamond 35–52). The written mythical and historical record contains descriptions of many relocations brought about through war, famine or the search for a better life, that is, one that conforms to one's expectations of what life ought to be. These past migrations have markedly changed and in some cases completely wiped out the local population, if not physically then definitely culturally. Remarkably, it was not until the First World War that actual effective bureaucratic measures were taken to stem migration or at least regulate it. In time, tools such as passports, visas and work permits became more powerful hindrances to migration than organic challenges such as labor demand and language and cultural barriers (H. van Amersfoort 337).

The advent of mass transit in the nineteenth century and the increase in the scale of employment brought about the creation of residentially segregated neighborhoods, allowing a stronger retention of migrant culture (Ward). This concentration of co-ethnic migrants provided tools for the strengthening of group identity in the past through church and neighborhood activities (Neils Conzen 612). Though co-residence is no longer vital today, it still plays a role in providing a center for group activities.

Today the profusion of transnational diasporas challenges the basic social order though it is unclear to what extent (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 1). While internet forums, websites and e-mail provide a fairly recent method of keeping in touch with members half-a-world away, the cost of access, though quite low by developed country standards, are prohibitive for many in a developing country like Egypt. Many in the Coptic community cannot afford the cost of a personal computer, even before one reaches the
running costs of electricity and Internet access. Other tools of transnationalism, though available for several decades now, have dropped in cost quite significantly to levels that make them relevant for many. Though an airline ticket from Egypt to a Western state is not cheap, as a one-time investment in improving one’s lot, it is achievable with family assistance even for the most poor. Compared with 1930, the cost per mile of air transportation dropped to less than 20% by 1990 and the cost of a transatlantic telephone conversation to less than 1% (Stalker).

As old as war itself, the steady stream of refugees migrating from one country to another is a standard feature of the human experience. A small number of those refugees now travel farther than simply to the neighboring states that are required by international law to accept them, at least provisionally. Bound by the principal of non-refoulement on the one hand and the nearly insurmountable difficulties of integrating traumatized refugees on the other, many refugee receiving countries have begun reconsidering legal interpretation of regulations governing the acceptance of refugees. These are geared at discouraging the arrival of economic migrants via the refugee route (Jastram and Achiron 6).

Much as is the case for many of the terms we now so offhandedly use in the social sciences, the legal and social category of “refugee” became relevant in its current context only after the Second World War and the crisis of millions of displaced persons strewn about the ruins of war-ravaged Europe. The ad hoc lessons learned in the process of addressing these imminent issues became the manual for handling the humanitarian aftermath of armed conflict globally, first by Western actors and later by international organs (Malkki 496–497).

One aspect of migration reception that has changed drastically among Western countries is the abolition of ethnic selection of migrants, equated nowadays with racism.
Leading this trend was the United States in 1965, followed within a decade by the other Anglophone migration-receiving settler countries and later also by other states (Freeman 884; Dijk).

Voluntary migration, most commonly though not only for economic reasons, is typified by the somewhat spasmodic nature of capitalist markets and their cyclical labor needs. Though only a negligible three percent of humanity is resident in a state other than the one in which they were born or its political successor, this paints a rather misleading picture (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division). A more apt approach would highlight percentages in migration-receiving countries rather than in those exporting their surplus population. Thus although the United States has the largest foreign born population, amounting to almost 12% of its total population (and a much larger share of its gateway cities), the current restrictions on immigration policy mean that of the top ten countries with the highest percentage of foreign born residents, only two are “western” per se (ibid)\(^30\). Furthermore, since the mid-1970s, the proportion of foreign-born individuals in the global population had doubled within one generation (United Nations Population Division). Measuring percentage of foreign-born population ignores the second generation that is often perceived by others and sometimes perceives itself to be foreign in its country of residence. Berry et al estimate their numbers to be at least equal to those of foreign-born individuals (1).

\(^{30}\) These are Switzerland and New Zealand, coming in 9\(^{th}\) and 10\(^{th}\) respectively at around 23%. Qatar comes in first at 86.5% followed by the UAE, Kuwait, Jordan, Singapore, Israel, Oman and Saudi Arabia.
Conclusion

Minority status, coupled with migration, brings about a highly volatile yet also dynamic paradigm. Although this fact increases the visibility of the conflict between ways of life, it also makes for increased instability in the individual migrant’s life. In other words, the permanent dynamic imbalance, to use Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky’s term (87), is more liable to shift in the short term when it comes to minority migrants. The liquidity of migrants’ association with one way of life or the other is especially high across the generational gap separating first from second generation. While in their native milieus mainstream parents, wherever they may live, can usually rely on outside society to reify the values and norms instilled in the home also outside of it, this is unlikely post-migration (Berry et al. 9). This problem can also be seen as an opportunity to choose possessed by the second generation and unavailable to foreign-born migrants (Berry and Sam 316). Whereas it may serve to highlight the way decisions concerning identity are made and their causes, it also means that there is a significant likelihood that in a matter of only a few short years, associations may shift due to external influences. Furthermore, the receiving society to which the migrants adjust is itself a fast moving target (Alba and Nee).

This does not undermine the premise of this work, but is of import for those pursuing study of the groups discussed here in the future or in alternate locations. Tensions between value sets are further exacerbated by the adherence of many migrant groups to the fostering of familial interdependence over the encouragement of individual autonomy (Kâğıtçibaşi). Although this interdependence mitigates many of the stresses of migration and often cultivates better results in the educational and financial spheres, it does come at a price for the adolescent or young adult in regard to religious observance, peer selection and eventually marital choices. Migrant parents tend to
emphasize interdependence even more strongly after migration (D. Georgas et al.; Aycan and Kanungo; Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam; J. Georgas et al.; Nguyen and Williams; Phalet and Schönpflug). Religious organizations also promote interdependence and values that are more congruent with migrant wishes than the prevailing nativist values, especially in regard to youth, thus forming a bulwark against local youth culture (D’Antonio and Aldous).

The ever-growing Coptic population outside of Egypt is often lumped together with that of other Christian groups of Middle Eastern provenance in discussion of the state of Middle Eastern Christians. This occurs despite significant differences, most notably its demographic weight\(^{31}\). Although persecution may have a part in encouraging prospective migrants to take the leap, pull factors can also be very influential. In the case of Finland’s ethnic Swedish minority whose language and culture were accommodated and suffered from no reported violence or persecution, migration to Sweden still became a torrent since the 1970s (Hedberg and Kepsu).

It is of note that the level of association that migrants feel towards the nation in which they reside is not involved in a zero-sum game with their connectedness to their original identity. In fact, whereas identification with the new state increases with length of residence, ethnic identity remains unaffected for years on end (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, et al. 92, 112–113). While Rudmin attributes the claiming of dual culture to social desirability rather than concrete actions, he does not provide any convincing evidence for this effect (Rudmin).

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\(^{31}\) Both Lebanon and Israel have significant Christian minority populations, though these are smaller and more importantly, divided between denominations and in Israel’s case also ethnicities. As in Egypt, collection of data concerning actual membership and true affiliation in both these countries is politically charged and therefore highly suspect.
Diaspora versus Communities in the “Lands of Migration”

Origin and Definition of the Term Diaspora

The term diaspora has not arrived at our doorstep free and clear. Quite to the contrary, it is heavily laden with meaning made less clear by its history. Perhaps even more so than other terms, diaspora has evolved to explain the “abnormal” Jewish condition in the European sphere. In fact, the word is a neologism coined by the translators of the Septuagint and was not used in a similar vein by native Greek speakers (Dufoix). As the Merriam-Webster dictionary notes, its capitalized form refers specifically to the dispersion of Jews from Judea to other parts of the Babylonian Empire after 586 BC and thereafter, to those so dispersed and to the geographic extent of said dispersion. The term is more commonly associated with the greater and more total dispersion alleged to have occurred following the destruction of the Second Temple and the renaming of the province of Judea as Palestine. Even those who do not define Diaspora as the Jewish case with other cases being analogous, illustrate the meaning of the term using this case (Sheffer, Diaspora Politics 9; Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” 2; Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies”; Clifford; Cohen, Global Diasporas).

The term is further used to define those of sub-Saharan African descent who were so traumatically dispersed by a global network of local, Arab and Western slave traders for agricultural labor until the mid 19th century in such numbers that did not permit absorption by the enslavers through intermarriage or repatriation. Safran (“Diasporas in Modern Societies”) cites several criteria to differentiate a diaspora from any other ethnic agglomeration, a distinction that goes often ignored by much of the general public (Sheffer, “Reexamination” 376; H. van Amersfoort 352). According to Safran’s definition,

32 A large Diaspora was present beforehand throughout the known world and the shift of Jewish culture from Judea to present-day Iraq seems to have been more gradual than abrupt as can be seen in the textual evidence of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds.
there needs to be in addition to a physical dispersion also a sentimental and/or material link to the old homeland, a collective memory or myth and a sense of sympathy and solidarity with the putative brethren. He further sharpens the concept by referring to a ‘diaspora consciousness’ as a “primordial reflection of ethnicity” dependent in its contents on conditions of reception (Safran, “The Diaspora and the Homeland” 75) and in its viability on the level of organization (Sheffer, “Reexamination” 391). Van Amersfoort adds in his discussion of Sheffer’s problematic ‘incipient diaspora’ that a diaspora must be permanently settled, although how this distinction is to be made objectively in regard to contemporary groups except in retrospect is a question that he intentionally leaves unanswered, speaking rather of ‘potential diasporas’ (H. van Amersfoort 331–333).

Brubaker synthesizes this down even further to three elements – Dispersion, homeland orientation and boundary maintenance (Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” 5). The latter is most important as it contravenes the overly capacious extension of the term and grants it significance as a tool of analysis (ibid, 6; Armstrong; Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies” 83; Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora” 14; Cohen, Global Diasporas 24). That is not to say that diasporas must possess impregnable boundaries, but rather that boundaries, even porous and changing, infuse heterogeneity with significance (Hall 235). In fact, the “complex and changing integrative combination of primordial, psychological and instrumental factors” infuses diasporas with added resilience. (Sheffer, “Reexamination” 384; Kellas).

**Issues with the Term Diaspora**

Like other terms that I am using, ‘diaspora’ serves as both a category of practice and one of analysis (Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” 12; Brubaker, “Ethnicity
Without Groups”). As a category of analysis, it has furrowed many feathers, especially for its alleged suspension of migrants betwixt an amorphous home and their land of residence and for the advocation of racism (Tölölyan, “Restoring the Logic” 138–139; Cohen, “Solid, Ductile and Liquid” 118–121; Anthias 577; Soysal, “Citizenship and Identity” 2–3). Regardless of its moral attributes, the term has and continues to proliferate quite rapidly. Whereas Brubaker notes in 2005 that it yielded no less than a million hits on an internet search (Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” 1), a short seven years later, this number has grown fifty-fold, reflecting its enduring popularity.

Although it is tempting to identify ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationalism’ with political activism toward a goal in the state of orientation, be it real or imagined, this is an oversimplified image that does not further our understanding of the migrant communities. While de Valera, Masaryk, Herzl, Arafat and others used their respective diasporas for political ends in Ireland, Czechoslovakia and the Holy Land, Khomeini, Lenin and Lord Byron brought a similar impact to bear with no recourse to a significant diaspora at all in Iran, Russia and Greece. Thus it is not valid to equate political impact with diaspora consciousness. Rather it is necessary to see that this is only one aspect, albeit an important one for stability or lack thereof (H. Smith 9). Ignoring this distinction can and has had a negative impact as with the internment of anti-Nazi and Jewish refugees who were German nationals in the UK and USSR, the internment of ethnic Japanese in the US, regardless of citizenship, or the ethnic cleansing of the Templars, who were German nationals residing in British-held Palestine.

Quite often it is difficult to gauge how strong the bond between a diaspora and its ‘home’ actually is, especially if that home is imagined. Cohen, noting the lack of shading, uses the adjectives solid, ductile and liquid in order to describe the gamut running from
an actual uncontested homeland to a virtual home independent of time and space ("Solid, Ductile and Liquid").

**A Transnational Community?**

Transnationalism is often presented alongside or in contrast to diaspora and globalism. While global and international phenomena occur in neutral and decentered surroundings and refer normally to the economic and technological spheres, transnationalism takes place in the decentralized cultural and social spheres and most importantly is anchored in existing nation-states (H. van Amersfoort 323; Kearney 548–549; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Azanton-Blanc 5–10; Hannerz). Overcoming the growing vagueness of diaspora, this term stresses the importance of nations and the cross-border hold of states on their citizens utilizing the “practices and discourses through which the narratives, symbols and institutions of national identity are created and how they become ‘sediments’ of everyday life, the ultimate basis on which collective forms of identity and territoriality are reproduced” (Paasi 93).

Unlike in the past, a growing number of states are taking an active interest in the welfare of their emigrants and acting on their behalf, thus gaining from their influence and return investment (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 3). As Cowen and Gilbert phrase it, “territories are socially produced...This destabilizes the naturalized relationship between territory and power, and points toward... the nuanced forms of belonging and inclusion that persist alongside increasing mobility and migration” (18). These changes place question marks over the continued relevance of the Westphalian world order.

33 The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) brought an end to the Thirty Years’ War. Its long enduring legacy was that internationally recognized states could administer their own internal affairs without external interference being considered legitimate. The most prominent aspect of the treaty was the legitimation for the imposition of an established state religion decided upon by the sovereign in lieu of a universally acceptable faith, disestablishment being a non-term at the time.
with its declaration of total internal sovereignty. This is especially so in light of the decentralization of world order as a result of the end of the Cold War as well as the increasing destabilization of state apparatuses in the global periphery as can be seen in the ‘Arab Spring’ (Eisenstadt 39). States did not actually exercise complete control over their sovereign territory in the past. The difference is rather that such claims of absolute authority are no longer considered as prima facie legitimate claims and internal state matters are not protected by an aura that in personal relationships would be described as privacy. Bauman even argues that there is a regression to the nomadism of the past, although I would claim that the phenomenon never disappeared in much of the world (Bauman, Liquid Modernities 13).

In a way, the success of the nation-state has been its downfall as the security it provides more visceral subnational agglomerations alongside access to international bodies has allowed them prominence that would have remained unavailable to them outside of a nation’s purview. This link between subnational and international groupings comes at the expense of national ones (Azarya 497). Even so without a national platform it is unclear how stable this link is or whether the two magnitudes are capable of coalescing without a median framework.

Those who advocate a focus on national attachments have the advantage of significant amounts of raw data collected by and for nation states. That having been said, a post-national global approach based on supra-national and global organizations is even more tenuous. In fact, "the nation-state continues to be by far the most important frame of reference for the identities, organizations, and claims of ethnic minorities, and national authorities remain the almost exclusive addressees of the demands of these minorities. To be sure, some of migrant claims making…take another nation-state – not the host society, but the migrants' homeland – as their frame of reference." (Koopmans
and Statham 688–689). Even Soysal, a prominent post-nationalist, concedes that “[i]dentities, in contrast, still express particularity and are conceived as territorially bounded. As an identity, national citizenship... still prevails” (“Toward a Postnational” 208). Though she denies the importance of identity in practice, her reasoning for this seems arbitrary. That having been said, a reconstitution of relations between territory, authority and rights has taken place in the past few decades, with collective identity grounded both on a more local level and on a global level (Sassen).

Although Copts remain attached to the Egyptian land, this is not an attachment to the state. This attenuated connection is magnified by the difficulty of transferring Egyptian citizenship to one’s children if they were not born in Egypt. Thus for some people, Egypt is an idea rather than the physical place (R. R. Jones 236). Still, it is not uncommon for the second and later generations to maintain strong ties to the land from which their parents or grandparents migrated (Glick Schiller and Fouron).

Unlike the perception of unattached refugee-like diasporas, that of transnational communities alleges hard and fast attachments to other nation states. As such, transnational communities present a challenge, fueling the basic mistrust that governs the naturalization of migrants especially in times when terrorism remains so high on the agenda. Unlike citizenship, which is clear-cut, belonging to a diaspora involves a group consciousness that is difficult to measure. Without this idea of a shared identity, the group will dissipate (Safran, “The Diaspora and the Homeland” 75; Vertovec, “Three Meanings of Diasporas”). With it, intragroup relations in certain spheres actually intensify (Vertovec, “Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism” 447). Münch takes this a step further and decries the proliferation of diasporas in the United States as the death-knell of pluralism’s attempt to integrate migrants (Münch).
The position of many migrants is more complicated than in past instances as their arrival since the mid-1960s coincided with the increased bureaucratization of the welfare state and the shift from citizen armies to professional ones (Cowen and Gilbert 3; Burk; Doorn). The removal of the legal demand from the citizen to potentially lay down his life for the state desacralized citizenship, making it far less emotionally resonant (Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood 10; Waltzer 77–119; Hobbes 79–100). It also removed migrants’ ability to show loyalty symbolically without volunteering above and beyond other residents. Lack of proven loyalty to one state does not however necessitate loyalty to another or to any state for that matter (Wieviorka 147).

Building on this extended version of diaspora, Patterson points to the practical advantage of diasporas over other types of migrant groups that do not retain dual attachments (Patterson). He sees them as vehicles of third world development through western-based diasporas using Mohan’s threefold division into development in, through and by the diaspora (Mohan). Several scholars, especially in France, refer to diaspora interaction with both the homeland and the new land using the far less hierarchical term ‘interculturation’ (Bouvy et al.; Clanet). This term highlights the ‘dual homeness’ experienced by many transnationals as well as the mutual borrowing and use of the other’s cultural vocabulary to facilitate external and then internal communication (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 4; Ben-Rafael 647–648). While this term is preferable in my opinion, it has not yet gained currency among Anglophone scholars.

Remittances play a major role in the flow of events today. They allow not only for financial investment and development of underdeveloped or disadvantaged communities, but also provide alternative transnational centers for the peripheral communities. They simultaneously reduce the ability of national governments to curb the freedoms of the remaining community. The combination of transnational activation
and internal civil society strengthens voices of dissent, sometimes even beyond their actual weight (Rowe 329–330). The amount of remittances may even constitute a large factor in the global balance of payments, larger than foreign investment in third world countries and much larger than foreign government aid (Mohapatra, Ratha, and Xu 3).

**Methodology**

**The Original Structure of the Research**

As I began planning the specifics of this project in late 2007 and early 2008, I had a comparative approach in mind that would have highlighted the choices of the two eastern Christian denominations I selected. The guiding principal behind this paradigm was to achieve a semblance of ceteris paribus so as to enable a serious discussion of the impact of migration on pre-constructed notions of religious and ethnic identity. The similar though far from identical paths followed historically by my two groups would serve to highlight the communal idiosyncrasies in light of the context of reception.

In retrospect this approach may not have been constructive even in the case of fewer obstacles to fieldwork, as the society into which these groups migrated and the one they left changed considerably in the interval. The two groups were namely the Rum-Orthodox and Copts. For example, around the turn of the 20th century, at the height of Rum-Orthodox migration to the West, the geographical space from which these Christians migrated had no relation to that of the space during the period of Coptic migration less than a century later. The Vilayets of Beirut, Aleppo and Damascus and the Mutassarifate of Jerusalem bear no resemblance to current states and often straddle at least one current border each. Fin de siècle Europe and pre-World War I America are difficult to compare to the present as well in their approach toward migrants as part of

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34 Pronounced like the English word ‘room’.
their outlook upon the proper contents of their society. After initial background research, my intent was to interview priests and other church leaders, survey lay members on aspects of their identity and provide insight derived from participant observation.

As the research project that I joined at Leiden University was concerned with Middle Eastern Christian denominations in Europe, the scope of the research was limited for practical reasons of time and financing from the start to five target countries. These were the Netherlands, France, the United States, Germany and Sweden. These countries were selected in order to enable a more robust comparison with the extensive preliminary work of Naures Atto on the Assyrian or Syriac diaspora, part of which is reflected in her doctoral dissertation (Atto). Preliminary investigation showed no signs of religiously organized Copts living in Sweden, thus removing it from the list of countries to be surveyed.

Germany raised a different concern as Copts there are spread widely. This can also be argued in regard to the United States, though there are some important differences. In the United States, in contrast to Germany, federal policy regarding immigration tends to trump state legislation with little variation among states, the controversial Arizona legislation granting police officers expansive rights to detain a person on suspicion that they may be an illegal migrant is to a great extent the exception proving the rule. In Germany, matters are to the contrary, with the federal government avoiding the hot potato of immigration and state legislatures running the gamut from liberal and accepting to conservative and xenophobic. Due to the already present complexity of comparing the two Christian denominations and the remarkable intricacies of Rum-Orthodox identity, alongside the challenges of comparing Dutch, French and American terms of reception, it was decided to limit research to those three
countries. Furthermore, in order to mitigate the impact of the American data, research was to be limited to the State of New Jersey, where a sizable and varied Coptic population was present, allowing comparison to the other two European states.

Initially the two groups afforded basis for a promising comparison on multiple levels. Even before migration, the paths they followed diverged sharply. While Copts lived in a single unified country with only a smattering in the diaspora, Rum Orthodox did not enjoy such a fate. In this regard, the naming of both groups is indicative of their situation. While the name of the Copts is derived from the same Greek source as the English word ‘Egypt’, the Rum Orthodox derive this appellation from the Arabic and Turkish term for the Byzantine Empire, known to its contemporaries as Rome. Much like the term ‘Byzantine’, which was invented by scholars in order to differentiate the Eastern Roman Empire from its Western sister Empire (Rosser 2), the term ‘Rum Orthodox’ is not used by those to whom it refers. This name is however the least of many evils. It is infinitely preferable to simply ‘Orthodox’, which would cast aspersions on the orthodoxy of the Coptic Orthodox Church, ignore it, or confuse my readers. Furthermore Rum-Orthodox is definitely better suited than the misleading ‘Greek Orthodox’ occasionally encountered in casual conversation, as there is nothing but the thinnest thread linking the community to the modern Greek state, a hot button issue at that.

While the Copts enjoy a single papal leadership within a single recognized sovereign state and even prestige extending to Nubians in Sudan as well as Ethiopians and Eritreans, Rum Orthodox are one small Church among over a dozen autocephalous phyletic churches, with its flock divided between three patriarchates35 and multiple states often at odds with each other. Several reasons led me to focus my research on those Rum Orthodox whose mother tongue is Arabic at the expense of those residing in

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35 Constantinople (Istanbul), Antioch (now removed to Damascus) and Jerusalem.
modern-day Turkey. The divergent history of Turkey in the twentieth century led it away from the rest of the Middle East. The bloody events during and following the First World War in regard to the Armenians, the Assyrians and the Greeks had a strong impact on the more northerly communities largely missing those to the south. Furthermore the lack of a shared language with the other Rum Orthodox meant Arabic speaking Rum Orthodox did not share as much in the events taking place across at least one international border. Finally the shared language with the Copts also played a part in this choice.

Remarkably even with the field narrowed down to the Levant, matters were not simplified in the least. While Copts enjoy majority status among Christians in Egypt with other denominations largely a curiosity, Rum Orthodox are threatened on two fronts. Both in the Antiochian Patriarchate covering Syria and Lebanon and in the Jerusalemite Patriarchate covering Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan, the Orthodox Church had lost significant ground. These losses were primarily to Eastern Rite and Roman Catholicism mostly during the 18th century and to Anglo-American missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries. During the 20th century, secularism, Socialism, Pan-Arabism and the Palestinian National Movement further weakened the affinity of many members of the Rum Orthodox Church to a secondary and even tertiary affiliation. In Israel matters are even further complicated by concessions granted either deliberately in reaction to the Orthodox Church’s pro-Palestinian stance or through lack of thought to the Russian and Romanian Orthodox Churches. While these churches have a significant following in Israel, the Russian Orthodox membership possibly even outnumbering the Arab Orthodox, and conceding the fact that the original concessions were granted by Ottoman Sultans to Russian Tsars, the challenge to patriarchal authority is not diminished thereby.
Complicating matters further is the fact that unlike in Syria where after a long and arduous struggle, local Arabic speakers wrested the patriarchate out of ethnic Greek hands, the Arab clergy in Jerusalem was not as successful. Up until today, the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem is an ethnic Greek who is not even expected to speak a single word of Arabic in order to fulfill his duties, despite the fact that hardly any of his lay followers speak Greek.

One might argue that such ‘Byzantine’ intricacies may be washed away by migration outside the historic sphere of the Orthodox world. Thus Rum Orthodox migration, which took place mostly during the late 19th and early 20th century and therefore predated the setting of the Levant's state borders could be compared with the later migration of Copts since the late 1960s on more even ground. This could even allow for comparisons to other pre-1924 and post-1965 immigrant cohorts. While current borders did not influence the church flock during the initial phase of settlement most notably in the United States, other political issues did impact its life.

Adding a twist to the plot was Russian involvement in the management of Arab Rum Orthodox in the United States. Russia’s sale of Alaska to the United States officially brought Orthodoxy to the country. It therefore came as no surprise when the Russian-educated Syrian Raphael Hawaweeny was consecrated Bishop to the Syrian community in Brooklyn under Russian auspices (Garrett). The Bolshevik Revolution and greater interference from Damascus following his death as well as internal political jostling that led to a split into New York and Toledo, Ohio based factions ended officially in 1975 (Gabriel).
Initial Results and Challenges

While performing my fieldwork in New Jersey my initial fears concerning the original methodology were confirmed in full. In all the countries I visited, Copts, both priests and laity, lay aside a measure of distrust of outsiders intimated to me indirectly on several occasions by numerous informants\textsuperscript{36}. Antiochian Orthodox\textsuperscript{37}, whether due to internecine struggles; a distrust of my provenance; the lack of an internal recommender; the advanced age and centralized control of the Metropolitan to whom I was repeatedly forwarded despite or because of his inability to entertain questions in light of his health; the effects of living on the good grace of the Ba’thist police state; or all of the above, simply frustrated any attempt to gain any information. The only Antiochian Orthodox priest who was willing to meet with me at all was an American of Anglo-Saxon heritage who administered a pan-Orthodox church with only a handful of Arab members. Although he was helpful and even forwarded and sent the surveys I gave him, the data was insufficient.

Despite the warm friendliness I encountered in all the Coptic communities, I was unable to collect survey data from them. Respondents seemed disinclined to fill in their answers, raising various excuses for not doing so. Jones reports similar difficulties (223). Having only my semi-structured interviews with priests, non-structured interviews with members of the laity, and participant observation notes and left now with only the Coptic Orthodox Church, I was forced to reconsider the goal of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{36} I was apparently considered a potential spy collecting information, though to what end I was never informed. I considered this one of the difficulties involved in dealing with people who were raised in a non-democratic state.

\textsuperscript{37} In the United States it remains unclear whether the Antiochian Orthodox Church represents only believers from Syria and Lebanon or also those from the Jerusalem Patriarchate. It was not possible to pursue this issue further.
The Altered Methodology

After reviewing my interviews and notes and consulting with several far more experienced researchers, I teased out a paradigm with which I could work. Whereas I as an outsider could gather little useful information directly, interviews with the priests and the contents of several sermons I had heard did in fact answer several of the questions I had asked.

“You know, I was thinking while I was preparing this, Christ actually could, He could have done everything through sermons. He could have just gathered into a very big public place and He could have just said the words and gone away, and that was it. All his dealings could have just been public speaking, but He didn’t do that. He paid attention to eyh? [what?] To the personal touch and in spite of the fact that He was so busy, He gave individuals His time” (Wassef, Spiritual Day 1).

Still, Pope Shenouda III himself underscored the importance of sermons in the Coptic Church stating, “teaching and preaching is the church’s first responsibility” (N. van Doorn-Harder, “Discovering” 91).

Technology came here to my rescue as Coptic churches in the United States have taken to recording their sermons for the religious edification of their followers both in their parishes and beyond. I have thus been able to “attend” dozens of sermons, a certain proportion of which have been used for this work. Although this method of scanning recorded sermons may potentially allow priests to censor their own sermons, this does not seem likely and at any rate, the advantage of access to a larger number of sermons than that which I could have personally attended overrides such considerations. Furthermore, the primary data I collected directly through participant observation, as well as multitudinous secondary sources would serve to highlight any glaring inconsistencies, were there to be any.

Many of the available sermons, as well as the sermons I personally attended were not relevant to the research topic, being exegetical in nature and not reflecting any
idiosyncratic Coptic attitude toward the material. The sermons I have collected in the Primary Sources section of my bibliography are those that contained discussions of issues more relevant to the research focus. These constitute about a quarter of the sermons surveyed.

Of the 55 relevant sermons used, 33 are from the State of New Jersey. A further 21 sermons were given in greater Paris and one in the Netherlands. The heavier reliance on American sermons stems from two major causes. The first and most prominent is that the American churches were the first to adopt the medium. The earliest sermon used that was uploaded to the “Christian Orthodox Audio Visual Library” dates back to 2002. As such, there is more raw material available from which to select relevant sermons. French churches adopted the virtual medium only later and since the time of my research, Dutch Coptic churches have not uploaded sermons to their websites at all. Because of this reluctance to adopt the medium, I could rely only on a much smaller sample of sermons that I attended in person. The second reason is that listening to sermons online or after downloading them is encouraged in the United States, while in the Netherlands the medium was still regarded with some trepidation at the time of my fieldwork (Fr. Arsenious).

By narrowing down the research parameters, I was able to comb over a manageable amount of recorded data in order to establish Church positions on the issues that appeared in the sermons.

The Role of the Researcher

No discussion of methodology would be complete today without some clarifications concerning the prism through which you are reading, namely, the researcher. I as the researcher am both limited and limiting: limited in whom I meet and
in what I hear or see and limiting in what I choose either consciously or subconsciously to dismiss, ignore, belittle or exaggerate. I have endeavored to the utmost not to do so beyond what is necessary in order to maintain the length and internal order of this dissertation in check.

Although I initially expected the people with whom I was to interact during my research to converse mostly in Arabic, and was therefore preoccupied with my level in the Egyptian dialect, my concerns quickly dissipated. In contrast to a large number of other migrants with whom I have spoken over the years, of the Copts with whom I spoke and whom I saw speaking, none but the very oldest relied heavily on Arabic.

Code switching between Arabic and the local language – English, French or Dutch, is the most common practice, even among members and is very much encouraged by the clergy. Younger members of the Church seem to feel more at home in the local language. Arabic is not defined as a vital aspect of identity (R. R. Jones 236). Several priests noted that they provide services in Arabic or part of the service in Arabic for two rather small audiences, namely new arrivals and the elderly. I encountered only one church in New Jersey that provided parallel services in Arabic, as this was a gateway urban community with many members who had an abnormally high number of both new migrants and older church-goers who wanted to preserve something of the church atmosphere of their youth (see also ibid, 233). In order to circumvent this unexpected challenge, I did my best to learn Dutch and to improve my French. While English has acquired a lingua franca status, it is a rather blunt instrument when one is dealing with the subtleties of identity. The improvement in my Dutch allowed me to follow those conversations in full instead of being limited solely to the Arabic parts.

As an Israeli citizen, born in Israel and raised in a secular Jewish family, I was somewhat concerned that rather than talking about identity following migration, my
respondents would rather talk about Arab-Israeli relations and politics. Since this form of Middle Eastern chatter is the equivalent of Dutch discussion of the weather and American discussion of football, I preferred to avoid it. Therefore, before beginning my fieldwork, I decided not to hide my background, but also not to push it forward, all the more so because when the topic did arise, usually due to my first name, I had to spend a significant amount of time dispelling certain preconceptions and misconceptions. My own preconceptions about Copts before the start of this project were positive, based most likely on the positive portrayal of Middle Eastern Christians in Arab countries in Israeli public opinion and media venues.

I did however come to the topic with both an awareness of and a familiarity with the intricacies of Christian faith and practice. While my mother converted to Judaism in the 1960s, she did not express anything but a benign attitude towards Christian ideas and values. Hearing stories of my Unitarian grandfather, my Presbyterian grandmother and my mother having stayed in close touch with her Catholic half-sister and brothers, already required me to have at least a basic understanding of Christian theology. Attending Brigham Young University in the late 1990s, a majority Mormon (LDS) establishment, showed me the sharp dissonance between the beliefs actually held by members and the more prominent and often inaccurate beliefs and practices thought by outsiders to be held by them. It also made me more aware of the internal diversity of the Christian faith and thereafter also the parallel diversity within the Muslim and Jewish faiths.

My familiarity allowed me to identify with the Copts with whom I spoke, which in turn, in my opinion, helped them be more forthcoming. It is my strongly held view through my own and vicarious experience, that discussion of religion, even in the context of research, is dialogical in nature. Many of the people I interviewed engaged in
reciprocal interviewing. As a result, I found myself engaged, far more intensely than I had ever expected, in reflexive consideration of questions I had posed about religion, migration and identity.

My own experience with the naturalization process of my spouse in the United States and to a greater extent, my stay as a non-Dutch foreigner in the Netherlands, significantly increased the resonance of both the practical and emotional difficulties of migration for the people I was studying. This was intensified by my exposure to repeated migration and remigration.
Chapter II – The Crucible

Introduction

The Coptic Church is one of the oldest Churches in the world. It has been based in Egypt with its center first in Alexandria and since the Fatimid period in Cairo (Patrick 75; 77). It is an Orthodox Church of the miaphysite tradition38. That is, like the Armenian and Syriac Churches, it holds that Christ consists of “two natures – divine and human – mystically united in one, without confusion, corruption or change (Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity 69).

In the following chapter it is my intent to provide the necessary context for the Coptic community’s presence outside Egypt as it has come to present itself today. At the outset of my research, the Coptic story seemed fairly clear and simple, much as it is portrayed in the general press. The narrative goes roughly as follows: A Christian minority group is persecuted in Muslim Egypt for its faith and eventually finds its way to diaspora communities among its Christian brethren.

This is a narrative with all the underpinnings of a successful Orientalist tale. It provides a mythical beginning in the dawn of apostolic Christianity, a martyr hero in the form of the Egyptian Coptic community, a villain in the form of radical Islam and a savior angel embodied by the West, its churches and missionaries. Despite the high resonance of the above narrative that is further reified by many news articles concerning inter-communal violence in Egypt, it is quite simply a gross misrepresentation of reality (Bosch and Netjes). By this I do not mean to suggest that Copts are not attacked or harassed over their religion in Egypt. Rather I would state that there is certainly a kernel of truth to the message heralded by the press and often by some Coptic communities

38 Called ‘monophysite’ by its detractors (Wahba).
(Nispen tot Sevenaer 31). In a global environment it is unfair to demand one’s casual readers to be familiar with the intricate and often countervailing details of the true facts. These make for a convoluted and unclear story with no obvious message or manifest destiny and as such would not engage a glancing readership.

As a researcher, I do not have the privilege of simply denying the veracity of the popular outlook. It is however crucial to further consider the agendas and undercurrents that underlie the presuppositions assumed therein. The most glaring oversight is the labeling of Copts simplistically as a ‘Christian group in Egypt’, glossing over sharp differences in the name of ecumenism. This view also bolsters the agenda of a cultural chasm between Islam and Christianity. Although such fraternalism in Christ is surely not to be frowned upon, its uneven application is the author of much woe for the Coptic community. If anything, many fellow Christian groups in the past but also in the present had expressed less than brotherly attitudes in their words and deeds. Although Western missionary activity in Egypt was intended originally toward the general population, it quickly focused on the Coptic segments that were as Christians more prone to accept conversion within Christianity (Doorn-Harder and Vogt 10).

The Coptic Church under Islam had developed largely on its own with little to no contact with the burgeoning Christendom of Europe (Patrick vii). Once Jesuit missionaries had reestablished physical contact with the Christians of Egypt several centuries later, the gaps became very difficult to ignore39. Since both the Coptic and Catholic churches claimed immutability, this zero-sum game meant that agreement would require a concession from at least one side on this issue. Thus neither side had an interest in reaching an understanding or the motivation to actually learn about the other (Hamilton 58–73).

39 Earlier contact with Catholicism had been inconsistent, superficial and based on very negative stereotypes, most notably during the Crusades.
Until the second half of the twentieth century, Western contemporary observers viewed the Coptic Church as backward and superstitious if not heretical. The missionary threat on the part of multiple Christian denominations was further exacerbated by the Egyptian government's legal provision against missionary activity across faiths. This fails to preclude interdenominational conversion and further challenges the authority of the Coptic Church.

Prejudice and Perceptions
The Coptic Outlook

For their part, Coptic reaction to these occasionally successful attempts has brought about significant volumes of literature penned even by Coptic popes in defense of their faith against the challenges of their Christian brethren. It is notable in this regard that such texts focus on justifying Coptic beliefs and practices where those differ from other predominantly Protestant denominations (Cf. Shenouda III, Comparative Theology; Shenouda III, Jehovah’s Witnesses; Shenouda III, The Priesthood). In other words, the audience of such apologist works would seem to be Copts seeking to respond to missionaries (Rubenson, “Tradition and Renewal” 38). This assumption is further supported by the pamphlets and sermons on the appropriate handling of missionaries. It should be noted that missionary measures today among Coptic communities especially in Egypt are pursued by the more evangelical smaller Protestant denominations originating for the most part in the United States. Since the ecumenical agreements of the 1970s, the largest former missionary threats to the Copts, the Catholic and Anglican-Episcopalian Church, have laid down their spiritual arms, retaining those members whom they had already recruited, but no longer pursuing additional ones. According to Reid, the Catholics had pursued missionary activity among the Copts with far less zeal
already in the mid nineteenth century, especially in comparison to British and American evangelical groups (Reid 263). These pressures brought about the first reformation of the Church in several centuries (N. van Doorn-Harder, “The Modern” 58).

It is somewhat ironic that in order to battle external influences from other Christian denominations, the Coptic Church has come to adopt some of the tools used by those same groups in order to spread its own distinct message. By utilizing previously extant templates and architectures, the Church has been better able to advance its goals. Examples abound, the most prominent being the Sunday School Movement and the General Congregation Council where previously the Holy Synod had sole rights (Rubenson, “Tradition and Renewal” 38).

On a more mundane level the use of existing translations of the Bible into Western languages to be used by the Coptic diaspora communities as well as the popularity of the Catholic School System in lieu of a parallel Coptic School are examples of adapting institutions established by other denominations for use by the Coptic community. On a more quotidian level, even acceptance of the Gregorian calendar as the primary temporal organization tool serves as a small albeit necessary concession to Western Christianity.

It is important to note in this respect that such borrowing does not in any way mar the originality of the Coptic Church as such. It does however shed some light on the priorities of the Coptic Church. The Church separates the chaff from the wheat through its actions and words selecting from among the aspects of the faith those that are significant and those that have come to be used or retained simply as a matter of convenience rather than as a matter of principle. I will be discussing precisely this in the third chapter.
Due to political constraints, it is impossible to ascertain whether the lack of official church manuscripts refuting Islam is a result of a fear of government\textsuperscript{40} and popular violent sanction or of the relatively small number of Coptic converts to Islam\textsuperscript{41}. Although some Coptic churches outside of Egypt do provide written material that is highly critical of Islam available among their books for sale, these are translations of texts written by other non-Coptic “warriors” against Islam. What is clear from an overview of Coptic pundits who are writing about Islam outside the sphere of the Coptic Church is their preference of a confident and offensive approach over the defensive one adopted in discussions of Christianity with fellow Christians. This may very well be due to the fact that whereas a welcoming and ancient church may intrigue non-Coptic Christians seeking the Lord, Muslims stand less of a chance of potential conversion. It may however also be a matter of the proper decorum expected of the speaker, a bar that was not set very high by popular Muslim critics of Christianity in general and of the Coptic Church in particular. Because of restrictions on freedom of speech in Egypt and a well-honed propensity of many Copts to consider their words and their audience, it is difficult to delve much deeper into the true motivations of the faithful. Considering the circumstances, expecting anything else would be highly unreasonable.

Prominent in its omission is the lack of texts confronting Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, the Church from which the Coptic faith parted ways over a millennium and a half ago. This is not indicative of an agreement concerning the nature of Christ, but rather of the lack of aggressive missionary activity on the part of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Russian Empire, attempting to gain a foothold in Egypt like the other

\textsuperscript{40} This is a concern relevant only until January 2011 with the collapse of public order. It may resurface as revolutionary conditions subside and a new state apparatus is consolidated.

\textsuperscript{41} The strong sentiments and the massive media attention to such cases in Egypt attest to their paucity and marginality in society.
powers had done did not send its missionaries there but rather offered its financial support to the Coptic Church. The increasing presence of the large expatriate Greek community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not fuel any large measure of Greek missionary activity either.

The State View

The Coptic Church’s time-tested way of staving off disintegration had been to seek refuge in the desert monasteries. Still caches of knowledge did not completely curtail the slow decline of Egyptian Christianity. Centuries of relative geographical and cultural isolation from the rest of Christendom wrought extensive damage on the state of the Coptic Church. Atiya compares the Church in this regard to the Pharaonic monuments abandoned in their decrepit yet impressive state over many centuries only to be ‘rediscovered’ in the nineteenth century (The Copts and Christian Civilization 1). Its decrepitude owed also to Egypt’s economic decline in the global market subsequent to Portugal’s discovery of an alternate sea route to the East. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt was the clarion call of the greater challenge of secularism, though change had begun earlier (Reid 31). This challenge was possibly even more severe for Coptic Christians than for their Muslim neighbors as community identity required reform and reawakening. British imperialism with its ardent Anglican missionaries would present a further challenge.

Rather than sprouting feelings of inadequacy, the Coptic Church proceeded undeterred on the path of reinvention. If anything, the meteoric rise of the European Christian titans who had so recently appeared on the international scene as though from thin air would surely bode well for the community. This would grant pride of place if not by some virtue implicit in Christian ethics then at least by association with the foreign
powers. In spite of this newfangled prestige and perhaps due to it, Copts would soon find themselves between a rock and a hard place. Especially as Western powers would attempt to curry favor with the Muslim elites.

On the one hand, Islamic revivalists spurned by the challenge the West set at Islam’s door from Algiers to India and from Crimea to Zanzibar saw no difference between the homegrown indigenous Copts and their foreign “coreligionists”. This view reinvented Copts as a thorn in Egypt’s side and a fifth column. Rather than a target for conversion to Islam, Copts were seen by Islam’s more radical spokespersons as worthy of expulsion from Egypt.

On the other side of the fray stood Christian missionary societies that saw Coptic Orthodox Christianity as a conglomeration of superstition and uncouthness (Baring 206–208; Carter 18; Lane 539). This latter view was most likely fueled by the pseudo-scientific prism of alleged racial superiority. Even relatively propitious accounts of the Copts such as Leeder’s 1918 manuscript “Modern Sons of the Pharaohs” border on at best impolitic and patronizing descriptions of the group (Leeder). This is all the more so as following Britain’s occupation of Egypt and the establishment of the Khedivate, Copts became the main target of Christian missionaries (Carter 18). Increasing Egyptian independence brought about a rise in the status of Islam. This culminated in Sadat’s 1971 constitution with its establishment as the official state religion. Independence also turned the conversion of Muslims to Christianity from difficult to impossible, the opposite not being the case.

In contrast to the view espoused by those missionaries seeking to reform the allegedly heretical Copts, the Muslim popular view consistently failed to differentiate between different types of Christians. Thus military actions of Christian or even

42 This shortcoming is far from exclusive and goes in the other direction as well.
nominally Christian powers are consistently associated with the Coptic population. This was the rule at least as far back as during the Crusades (Hitti 211). When Catholic crusaders sacked Alexandria, Copts were made to pay the damages though they themselves were targets of the Catholic violence (Patrick 100). Following Napoleon’s withdrawal, Copts suffered “retribution”, though France had shown them no preferential treatment (N. van Doorn-Harder, “The Modern” 62).

Yet the Coptic Church has consistently denied foreign backing and intervention. In the 18th century, the Vatican offered protection that had been accepted by a multitude of Ottoman formerly Orthodox Christians in the Levant, but the Coptic Pope denied it (Ibrahim et al. 10). As mentioned earlier, such offers of support were even made by the ascendant Russian Empire. This was during a period of increasing financial capitulations by Egypt and its nominal Ottoman suzerain to Christian powers. More importantly, this offer unlike the previously mentioned one had no religious strings attached. Nonetheless the Coptic Church denied any political overtures and offers of protection from the onus of the Egyptian government (Patrick 126; N. van Doorn-Harder, “The Modern” 67).

It is precisely this position of principle over pragmatism that pervades Coptic identity precluding a simple representation and placing its faithful in a rather precarious position between two camps. Nonetheless there are those Egyptian Muslims who view them as pseudo-Egyptians since total undivided loyalty to Egypt would allegedly entail becoming a Muslim.

Complete identification of official Egypt with Islam and being ethnically Arab colors all aspects of the Egyptian state apparatus. Most poignantly, Egypt’s main source of legislation is stated in its constitution as being Shari’a law. On a more symbolic level, the flag of Egypt displays pan-Arab and Islamic imagery in its color choices and through the depiction the Eagle of Saladin, also referred to as the Hawk of Quraysh, the emblem
of the Muslim prophet Muhammad’s tribe. Whereas many other Arab states have chosen
the Eagle of Saladin for their coat of arms and some have simply copied the Egyptian
design, the Egyptian revolutionary government chose to depict it on the flag as well and
remains the only one to have done so. The Islamic character of the previous flag, that of
the Egyptian monarchy with its Ottoman-inspired stars and crescents design was also
distinctly Islamic in its imagery.

Despite cursory use of Egyptian archaeological monuments in national imagery,
its Arab as opposed to any Pharaonic origin was officially reasserted by renaming Egypt
the “Arab Republic of Egypt” in 1971. This was in turn a concession to its even being
Egyptian43, since in the period from 1958 until that time, it was officially known only as
the “United Arab Republic”, though for the entire preceding decade it was not united
with any other country. Finally the immanent Arab nature of a true Egyptian and the
assumed Islam of Arabs precludes the equation of being a true Egyptian with being a
non-Muslim in the eyes of many Muslims (see in Vliet, “Modern Sons” 281–282).

Nevertheless in some quarters the Coptic papacy’s unprevaricating and deep-
seated loyalty to the Egyptian state is viewed negatively. It is considered a sign of
disingenuous and groveling weakness rather than a mark of unflinching patriotism. This
shows a cooptation of a paradigm that denies the possibility of non-Muslim and non-
Arab loyalty to a majority Arab Muslim state.

The so-called “Arab Spring” of 2011 has brought these visceral questions of
Egyptian identity and the mutually complementing roles of religion and state to a head.
Strict military rule did not mitigate the powerful currents of radicalism and populist
religious intolerance on the street. They simply became less visible after Anwar Sadat’s
assassination. Rather than venting at the state as the masses had done for example in the

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43 Nasser had begun to chip away at Egyptian nationalism in favor of an Arab nationalism (Nispen tot Sevenaer 27).
bread riots of 1977, the public was permitted, and one may even say encouraged, to focus its resentment and sentiments of ill will on Christianity and Judaism. It was Sadat in fact who loosened the grip on the Muslim Brotherhood and other more radical groups during the 1970s (Guirguis; Chaillot 202, 207). Such a policy of encouraging religious fervor in order to compensate for flagging nationalist ardor has long been par for the course in autocratic regimes. One of the more poignant examples of this pattern in the past is czarist Russia. The 1881 assassination of the liberalizing Czar Alexander II was followed by religious persecution of minorities that quelled public anger for several decades until economic hardships finally brought about a revolution. In Egypt, the 1967 War with Israel that resulted in the loss of the Sinai Peninsula and followed a period of national elation lead to a loss of direction and a reversion among both Muslims and Christians from nationalist to more religious sources of meaning (P. van Doorn-Harder 22–23). As changes occur far more rapidly today thanks to the swifter dissemination of information, sinking to the populism of siccing the public on disenfranchised minorities renders quickly flagging, though not nil, returns, while leaving the costs of internecine enmity the same.

**New Soil**

The Coptic community in the West has not had time to establish a notion of itself wholly independent from its Egyptian source. Its history extends back a mere half century. We must therefore consider the weighty mental, emotional and spiritual baggage brought by the Coptic community from Egypt and the historical period in which they left.

Until Sadat’s regime opened up to West during the 1970s, emigration from Egypt was often difficult. Due to the paucity of travel options, the trip was expensive, drawing
attention to one's economic capacity in a cash-strapped Socialist state. Leaving the country was also problematic politically due to the need for an exit visa resulting in an interview with the state security apparatus. Such an interview would raise questions and suspicions not only about one’s means to travel, but also about the reasons, the contacts abroad and the activities during the sojourn after returning to Egypt. In some cases, the onus of the post reentry interview would be so heavy with potential allegations leading to prison sentences that it rendered exit irreversible in practice (R. R. Jones 219–220). In the past, migration meant a disconnection from the non-migrating ethnic community, occasionally leading to cleavages between members of different waves of migration. Presently new means of affordable communication allow entire communities to leave their former country of residence while retaining a strong and sometimes even intensified ethnic bond (Appadurai). This connection is especially important for the first generation that retains a strong link to the home state due to early socialization.

It is still too early for the communities outside of Egypt to have established trajectories of development completely independent from those of the communities in the home country. In this regard, it is important to note that the Coptic communities in the “lands of migration”, as the Church refers to them, have been forming in an aggregating process of migration. This is not necessarily chain migration, as the newer members of the Coptic migrant community are quite often neither related to other members of their community nor acquainted with them from Egypt. The Coptic presence is not a result of a single traumatic event or other mass migration but rather a steady and increasing flow resting upon the success of the present community.
Research on the ethnic identity of so-called second generation and 1.5 generation migrants\textsuperscript{44} has shown a high level of variation in coping methods as regards identity choices. I will discuss this in further detail in the following chapter. It will suffice now to state that by the time the third generation reach adulthood, only those young adults who felt completely marginalized and dispossessed would most likely retain an overpowering sense of binding kinship to the country their grandparents had left.

This phenomenon of the third and further generations’ behavior patterns is readily visible among descendants of the Christian migrants to the West who had arrived a century ago from Greater Syria, Anatolia or Greece\textsuperscript{45}. It has also been researched in larger groups such as among Italian migrants and other faster integrating groups such as Germans and the Irish. Academic literature on migration discussed identity management among Italian immigrants with its significant religious factor as a coping mechanism as early as the 1940s (Cf. Child).

Since the Coptic third generation in the West are still in their early youth, it is not possible to make any specific statements about their integration prospects at this juncture. Such results would only be forthcoming in a few decades (Platt). Even if they are well integrated into their new country as children, which seems to be the case from my own anecdotal observation, it cannot be said with utter certainty that they will remain so until after they have reached adulthood. By then, they will have made critical decisions about who they are, especially when it comes to such decisions as the choice of spouse, education of children and church attendance (Wuthnow, \textit{After the Baby Boomers} 6). Moreover, life-changing events affecting their worldviews as individuals and as a group may not have even taken place yet.

\textsuperscript{44} i.e. those who migrated as very young children and so had the opportunity to be socialized in the new country.

\textsuperscript{45} Although much has been written of the identity and allegiances of Jewish migrants to the West, their case bears less of a resemblance to that of the Copts than those mentioned above for several reasons. For one, it is unclear to what extent the Jewish populace identified with the localities it had forsaken for greener pastures. Secondly, the religiously resonant homeland was patently different from the physical birthplace of the Jews.
Thus in order to better understand Coptic identity abroad at this specific point in time, it is vital to comprehend the circumstances under which it developed up to our time. Its formative years as well as the past century that has been characterized by extensive Church reforms and a rethinking if not recasting of Coptic identity are important in this regard. This development is all the more impressive in light of the nadir the Copts had reached as a dispossessed group in a land forlorn of its past glory. Patrick describes the depths from which this community arose:

“Egypt as a nation emerged from lethargy with Muhammad Ali; the “awakening” of the Coptic Church came somewhat later. Coptic notables were able to get hold of land when private property became available. Thus the Copts were able to preserve solid links with their rural and provincial origins. Nevertheless, they suffered severe handicaps in their broader relation to the nation still in 1850: they were cut off from the memory of their own past by the lack of Christian literature in Arabic; they were overwhelmingly rural and outside the orbit of Cairo and Alexandria; many villages had no church; only the clergy knew the liturgy; monasticism was almost extinct; their culture was scarcely more than popular piety. It was largely their sense of being different that saved the Copts as a group from the various pressures of majority. They had no links with the universal church nor with their country, and they had no access to sources of real power or of high culture.” (127)

It is against this backdrop that the situation of the Copts today ought to be measured rather than against a largely mythical meta-reality of an imagined pre-Islamic golden age. The plain visibility of the amelioration of the Coptic condition over the longue durée may explain some of the bursting optimism one often encounters while speaking to many Coptic priests, as it is a clear and edifying testament to their faith.

Although a few values and norms providing practical structure to everyday identity find their sources in original autonomous springs, no social group exists in a complete void. This is all the more so in the case where one is confronted with assessing a Church that constitutes a numerical minority both among Egyptians nationally and among Christians globally. Invoking communal identity can easily drag one into an essentialist definition of discrete or even heterousian natures. Nevertheless, to paraphrase upon John Donne’s famous poem, no Church is an island entire of itself.
Despite particularistic tendencies encouraged by geographic and cultural isolation, phyletism, as this was aptly named by the Chalcedonian Orthodox synod, is not an inevitable result of ecclesiastic entropy. As Abba Athanasios puts it, “so we have great expectations of this Church formed by St. Mark, this traditional Church, and this Church [that is] also open to the world, this Church [that is] open to all other churches” (Le Pain de Vie).

Copts share significant aspects of their particular identity with other non-Coptic groups. These may be seen in the more distant affinity to Arab Muslims with whom they share a language, a sense of piety and chastity, a faith in an almighty God, and within Egypt also some folk festivities. Egyptian Muslims share norms and values to a greater extent with the Copts due to the frame of reference they provide as everyday neighbors and through the sharing of cultural as well as physical space. This is seen not only in language, food and dress, but also in more particular practices common throughout the region such as male and female circumcision.

Shared aspects of identity may be more sharply apparent in the historical and geographic boundaries established by separation from other non-Chalcedonian Orthodox communities, a gap further effaced in the latter part of the 20th century by migration to new homes and a newly shared western language. Thus it is necessary to shed light on Coptic identity’s liminal spaces by looking at other contemporaneous identities coexisting in their shared milieus. It is perhaps possible in this fashion to distill by process of elimination that which is distinctly Coptic, especially outside the national borders of the Egyptian state. Alternatively one may question the very validity of such a strict definition. While helpful in historical analysis and in the interest of
maintaining intellectual order, such pseudo-scientific definition of group traits simply does not allow for the vibrancy and dynamism of a living community.

**Alone but Connected**

Leo Tolstoy once famously quipped in the opening of his novel ‘Anna Karenina’, “[a]ll happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way (1). It is my view that this principle is all the more true when it comes to minority ethnic communities. That is to say, each minority experiences its predicament in subtly different ways. As I have explained earlier in my discussion of terminology, the catchall term ‘minority’ is so non-descript and context-dependent as to render it largely unhelpful in any serious academic discussion. The challenge of selecting clear and concise terminology is all the more challenging in a world where the borders of community are becoming increasingly nebulous.

In the past, geographic proximity partnered with joint participation in communal activities as basic as eating or attending the reading of a recited text alongside the need for mutual protection from outsiders has delineated stark group boundaries. The cost of leaving the exclusive group was exorbitant while the benefits, mainly due to the exclusivity of other groups, were largely doubtful and few except for in the cases of a handful of unusually talented individuals. At present though most societal groups are not inclusive, they are far less exclusive than they had been in the past.

This relaxing of boundaries is best illustrated in migration-receiving countries. Those countries that have received Coptic as well as other migration and are the loci of the present work are typified by a more generalized presence of the rule of law in comparison to Egypt. Though hate crimes against minority communities are not unheard of in those parts, they are far less common and more importantly they are
viewed as problematic rather than mundane. The subsequent increase in personal security decreases the need for mutual defense within the community. Furthermore, ethnic division of labor was expected, common and even *de rigueur* in the past even in the West. It is still present to varying degrees in Egypt, as for example in the entrepreneurial garbage processing industry (Rashidy). In the current Western surroundings such ethnic division of labor is largely defunct with co-workers rubbing shoulders with people of vastly divergent backgrounds in most fields.\(^{47}\)

The automobile, among many other vehicles for transportation, has greatly decreased the impact one’s choice of abode has on one’s choice of community. It is today not uncommon for members of a church to live a significant distance from their place of worship, commuting for this purpose much as they commute comparable distances for employment. During my fieldwork, it was not uncommon to speak with parishioners who had traveled from as far as two hours’ drive away in order to attend a specific church despite the physical proximity of another church.

In all three theaters of research, the phenomenon of church picking and church alternation was commonplace and not seen in any way as problematic. Thorbjørnsrud reports it in Egypt as well (110). The reasons for such added travel vary from a bad rapport with the priest or other community members, the special talents of the farther priest, and a desire for variation or to circulate within a larger Coptic community among others. The Church does not discourage this practice, perhaps because the spirit of the Church resembles an extended family. I was surprised to hear both open criticism and praise for other non-present priests in both France and New Jersey. Remarkably the criticism of preaching style or duration of services was voiced in front of the local priest.

\(^{47}\) A number of localized ethnically uniform professions are a salient feature of business life due mostly to chain migration and friendly personal referrals. These phenomena though readily visible are unstable and quite different than the rigid guild-like structures of the past. Moreover they are restricted to very specific economic areas further proving the general rule.
after services and never away from his presence. This took on more of an air of venting displeasure rather than of an actual demand for censure.

The accessibility of air travel has turned transatlantic travel from a one-way vector of migration into a reversible process, providing a solid bridge connecting back to the land of origin. Finally, advances in the field of communication and the increasing amount of public debate occurring in a virtual rather than physical space are probably the most novel to reshape the boundaries of the concept of community. This greatly influences power relations between majority and minority and more precisely between minority and the regime claiming to represent the majority. As recently as the 1980s, Egypt’s regime could use physical exile as a tool for intimidation coupled with a near total control of all media outlets. Today this is no longer tenable due to both internal and external pressure on the government not to abuse its authority alongside a current incapacity to control cyberspace.

**Cyber-Sovereignty**

Cyberspace has allowed Copts living abroad to remain in daily and direct contact with their native communities and vice versa. The telephone and post had permitted this as well to a lesser extent in the past, but these modes of communication were different in several crucial respects. They were and continue to be subject to far more government scrutiny than the web. Communication costs before the advent of the Internet were either prohibitive or high enough not to warrant casual use internationally. Finally forums, Facebook, Twitter, Skype and even e-mail allow for easy group discussions not available in the past.

The existence of the Internet and the widespread access of this anonymous space have also leveled the playing field in debates that take place in the Egyptian public
square. Anti-Coptic incitement appearing in Egyptian national newspapers and television channels, largely ignored by the government in the name of freedom of speech has encountered more visceral responses on the web. Such unofficial reactions from members of the Coptic community had been muted in the past through active political intervention and risk managing self-censorship.

Not only are Copts living outside of Egypt very keenly aware of what is being said and written in Egypt in real time especially in these tumultuous times, but they are also able to respond to it, an option of which many more now take advantage. This is often to the chagrin of church leadership as those responding online rarely consider the consequences of their words for Copts physically present in Egypt. The anonymity of the web further allows Copts living in Egypt proper to voice opinions that would be subject to censure if delivered by any other means. It is important however to note that cyber-anonymity is a double-edged sword as it permits people to misrepresent themselves in order to disseminate misinformation and rumors. The latter are granted far more credence in Egypt than in the West where news venues are extended, be it warranted or not, more trust than the official media in Egypt. The absence of a direct threat of retributive violence seems to also have a share in the rather fiery tone of cyber-dialogs, let alone monologs. It is not uncommon to encounter remarks calling for genocide, let alone libelous claims in the blogosphere.

Though many of these keyboard melees take place anonymously via screen names, some people choose not to take advantage of these tools in order to hide their true identity. A poignant example is Father Zakaria Botros who has an eponymous website (Botros). He enjoys what appears to be widespread popularity among lay Copts outside Egypt and most likely also within it. The main thrust of his articles and talks is a response to various Egyptian Muslim preachers who speak out against Copts and
Christianity in general. Botros like many other priests has a university education to his name. He had served Coptic communities in Egypt, Australia and Brighton in England and so has acquired direct access to a more worldly awareness. In 2003, nearing seventy years of age, he broke away from Coptic custom and throwing caution to the wind began speaking blatantly and in fiery diatribes against Islam and its messenger. The vitriol of the elderly priest would not have merited much attention but for the fact that it aired regularly on an Arabic language Christian channel based physically in Egypt. Even this would not have been overly significant even a decade ago when broadcasting even by cable, let alone on the more heavily regulated airwaves, would have reached only small audiences.

What is unusual and even potentially revolutionary in the 21st century is the ability of such a channel to transmit over the Internet to diverse interested audiences worldwide who are just a Google-search away. This allows for “pirate” non-regulated television channels operating outside the sphere of the Egyptian or any other government’s direct control and at an absurdly low financial cost. However the impact goes much further, for it is not only that a Coptic priest can challenge the Egyptian majority to a loud spat on the global stage for all to see for posterity. Even fringe groups within the Coptic community are able to come out of the shadows and into the limelight.

This deconstruction of hierarchy on the web has its advantages, but it also means that these individuals on the fringe often have very little if any training in theology and are not differentiated from their better-educated peers in any discernable manner online. In addition, they are more likely to be represented online, as more mainstream followers of the faith do not have the need to make use of alternative media in order to feel that their voice is heard.
Pope Shenouda III had criticized Father Zakaria for his confrontational style. However in the labyrinth of wild accusations leveled by various online groups of unknown and questionable provenance, it is unclear to what extent this censure was intended or taken and more importantly whether the criticism was limited to style rather than to content. The Pope’s critique seems all the more ceremonial at face value in light of the fact that he had appealed to the technical impossibility of dismissing a priest who had already officially retired from shepherding a specific congregation. Open to as much conjecture and rumor is the July 2010 cancellation of Botros’ television show.

Despite the level of the flames online, especially following the distribution of viral videos depicting the aftermath of the violent events at Nagga’ Hammādi in January of 2010, the motivations of those who sympathize with such anti-Muslims commentators remain vague. It is not known whether they are of the same mind or rather that they support these calumnies due to their pride in having figureheads who dare to talk back, even when expressing views that are harsher than those that many Copts may hold themselves. The more radical ‘Black Bloc’ movement appearing on the 2011 revolution’s second anniversary in January 2013, represents a similar dilemma, though in this case the anti-Islamists are not necessarily Christians, but rather mostly secular Muslims (Gamāl). Pope Tawadros II’s assertive role in giving credence to al-Sīsī’s popularly backed July 3, 2013 military coup alongside the Sheikh of al-Azhar may be seen in this light.

E Pluribus Unum?

Citizenship and the Construction of Majority

The creation of the modern nation-state is a topic that has been deeply researched and critiqued, especially since the groundbreaking and much cited works of
Hobsbawm and Ranger, Gellner (Nations and Nationalism) and B. Anderson in the 1980s. With the growing centralization of the state apparatus since the nineteenth century and the standardization of written language and canon culture, a higher level of identity came to be demanded of the individual citizen. In the case of some, though by no means a majority of countries, a specific religion was relegated an official or semi-official association with the republican state.

Whereas majoritarian ethno-nationalism based on the modern nation-state is to a great extent uniform and splayed across a fairly wide gamut of cultures, religions and languages, this cannot be said of minority groups. All the more so for those that do not accept the labels superimposed on them either by the state or by allegedly disinterested journalists and scholars. Simply labeling Copts as a Christian Orthodox minority community residing in Muslim Egypt and in a secularized Protestant or Catholic Western milieu does not even begin to elucidate the complexities of Coptic identity. Furthermore, it serves to obfuscate the realities on the ground by overlooking the ways in which Copts choose to identify reflexively. Such ways do not always conform to Western and Egyptian methods of self-identification and the categorization of others.

The aforementioned division portrays the Copts of Egypt as a single, discrete, independent, monolithic and uniform community devoid of significant cleavages in class, religiosity or worldview. Such an essentialist position also glosses over the significant variance across Muslim Egypt by positioning Islam and Christianity in Egypt on opposing sides of the Egyptian equation. This view reifies Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ model, thus assuming that violent conflict is the inevitable result culminating in a chilling zero sum game with the sword of ethnic cleansing hovering above the Christian minority’s collective head.
The problematic nature of such categorizations becomes clear when these are taken out of their original contexts by migration, as there are no universally accepted categories for the classification of social aggregations. Whereas one country may utilize the yardstick of religion in order to consolidate its majoritarian identity, another may deem religion irrelevant to public identity, preferring rather race, language or any other categorization tool considered as reasonable in the public discussion of identity.\(^{48}\)

Minority itself is less about numbers than about power structures and relations. By this I do not mean that the minority members are necessarily subservient to the tyranny of the majority. After all, even in the case of the Copts in Egypt, there are numerous cases of Copts who were far more empowered than any individual member of the majority, even though their positions were and remain precarious at best. The oft-cited example of Egypt’s former Coptic prime minister appointed a century ago is quite instructive in this regard as his two year tenure in office ended with an assassination in 1910.

Still membership in a recognized minority group is a mixed bag. Although it is customary to focus on its negative implications, it may actually confer some privileges. Copts for example enjoyed a monopoly in certain mostly bureaucratic professions for many centuries. Until Muhammad Ali’s reforms, they were exempt from military service, though not of its financial cost. In some Western countries recognized minority status may lead to subsidies and other preferential treatment.

\(^{48}\) It is important to note here that the definitions and meanings of these categories are characterized by an elasticity determined by the zeitgeist. For example, in the United States the cultural and linguistic term “Hispanic” is viewed as a racial category though it overlaps three existing recognized racial categories (White, Amerindian and Black). In the US and the UK, the term ‘Asian’ refers to completely different populations. In a more extreme example, Sorbs, also known as Lusatians or Wends, were classified as Slavic-language-speaking Germans by the Third Reich rather than as Slavs. A similar fate befell German-speaking Poles although this was more de facto than de jure (Lucassen 71). The importance of such a classification is clear when compared to the categorization of Jews as a racial grouping.

\(^{49}\) Also known by his Turkish name Mehmet Ali.
It is in these terms that we must view the Coptic Church’s official refusal to be classified as a minority. This was epitomized in its refusal to entertain discussion of the Coptic issue at an international conference on minorities in the Middle East in 1994. Such political theater may seem odd and even counter-logical to the external observer, but does in fact play an important role in the positioning of the group within the boundaries of the state.

"[T]he state... is not simply an arena or an instrument of a particular class or ethnic group, though it may sometimes be one or the other. More broadly, however, the state is itself the greatest prize and resource, over which groups engage in a continuing struggle in societies that have not developed stable relationships among the main institutions and centrally organized social forces. It is also a threat to... religious leaders, particularly in developing countries... When elites in conflict lack the bureaucratic apparatus or the instruments of violence to compete effectively, the will use symbolic resources in the struggle. When elites in conflict come from different cultural, linguistic or religious groups, the symbolic resources used will emphasize those differences.” (Brass 29–30)

The Quadrangle of Power

Power does not reside in the hands of a single social element even within a religious minority. In the case of the Copts in Egypt, four major loci of authority appear to balance each other in shifting constellations over time. They are not necessarily in conflict with each other, though competition can and has in the past certainly lead to heightened emotions and even violence.

Outside of the Coptic Church, the authority of the Egyptian state plays the most significant role. This is an important source of authority as the Egyptian state is the only power able to exercise a high level of temporal force over the others. The state may exile a sitting pope as it had done with Pope Kyrillos V and Pope Shenouda III. It can also curb or ignore Muslim anti-Coptic incitement originating from the Muslim Brotherhood.

50 I will not address here the forces vying for power within the Egyptian state, especially due to the effects of foreign interests and involvement. The military along with the intelligence organizations comprise an important pillar of state power, not only because of their hold on information and weaponry, but also due to their economic capacity. The thick bureaucracy, known as the ‘deep state’ constitutes another powerful actor.
or more recently from Jihadist groups. Of course the power of the state is limited as can be inferred from both the aforementioned exiles. After some deliberations and the type of foot dragging that has come to characterize the wheels of (in)justice in Egypt, both popes came to be reinstalled as a result of pressure from the other authority bearers within the Coptic community.

Within the church, three forces operate in constant albeit usually friendly competition. First and foremost is the authority of the pope. Though occasionally challenged on certain specific issues, no Coptic group presently challenges the position of the successor to St. Mark. Like the patriarch of a traditional nuclear family, his authority is deemed structurally necessary. For without a father, there is no strong family unit and without a strong pope, there is no Coptic Church.

The pope however, as an elected priest, is elevated to his position through popular support. Since he is neither appointed by the state nor does he inherit the title from his father, his authority, though independent following his appointment, is still derived from the Coptic masses. Theoretically, were a Coptic pope to go against the grain of popular sentiment, he would lose the main source of his authority in this world. The ubiquitous and prominent manifestations of the current and former popes’ images in churches and homes as well as many religious tomes bears witness to the high level of support and love that they engender. All the more so since it requires an active endeavor to purchase and hang such portraits. The power of the Coptic public has received added attention in the aftermath of the mass protests.

Last but not least stands the authority of the Coptic elites. Under Mamluk and Ottoman rule, these often overshadowed the authority of the pope. At the time of the Khedivate, this elite arose not only from among the more affluent Coptic families, but also from the well-educated burgeoning middle class. These laymen, especially in light of
missionary activities that had begun in earnest in 1826 chose to redouble their efforts to maintain the standing of the Church. In 1874, they established the Coptic Community Council (al-majlis al-milli) as a practical result of the removal of their dhimmi status in 1856.

Dhimmitude was the status of a protected minority, to which all Christians and Jews residing within any Muslim state and as such also in Egypt were relegated. On the one hand, this status conveyed several protections for the freedom of worship during times that were not known for their religious tolerance elsewhere. On the other, this status also included certain limitations, especially regarding the more public aspects of worship and worshippers. Despite the supposed revocation of these laws, even now the limits set on the construction of new churches are still in place and have caused numerous riots, occasionally resulting in mainly Coptic fatalities.

Very shortly after the establishment of the Coptic Community Council it was at loggerheads with Pope Kyrillos V and only two decades after its creation, after a long and strenuous battle of wills, was it able to begin influencing the programs of the Coptic Church as a whole (N. van Doorn-Harder, “The Modern” 56; 88–93).

In 1918, the Sunday School Movement, which is today a major flagship of the official Coptic Church, was a result of independent initiatives that were then bolstered by the Church, though somewhat reluctantly at first. Though this cannot be established with any certainty, it seems most plausible that the main concern of its early detractors was not that the Coptic masses would be educated and threaten the priests. It is more likely the clergy were concerned about any mimicking of the Protestant missionaries and their schools. Such cooptation of the Sunday school system would potentially lead some lay Copts to understand erroneously that other aspects of Protestantism were also acceptable. Although the Church officially sought a different appellation for its religious
education system, the temporary name has survived to the present. Cooptation of the schools became a method for the Church to clericalize the laity, thus bringing secular social activities into the ecclesiastic sphere, inexorably linking religious and ethnic identity (Sidarouss).

In 1908 the Coptic elite won a symbolic victory with the appointment of the Coptic Boutros Ghali to the position of Prime Minister, showing that state, elite and masses were not such rigid groups with impermeable boundaries, his assassination in 1910 notwithstanding. The political careers of the Coptic Makram 'Ubayd as Finance Minister and as Wafd secretary-general (1936-1942); Youssef Wahba Pasha as Foreign (1912), Finance (1914-1920) and Prime Minister (1919-1920); and Yahya Ibrahim Pasha as Prime Minister (1923-1924) further attest to this (Reid 263). For many Copts this period constituted a belle époque. The paucity of prominent Copts in the top echelons of government since that time serves only to further underscore the sharp decline in minority representation on the political stage.

During the century preceding the 1952 revolution, laymen attempted to introduce programs of reform roughly every decade (N. van Doorn-Harder, “The Modern” 88). This is a clear indication of the tumultuous struggle for internal control of the Coptic community. The relative calm thereafter is by contrast all the more unusual.

Though supposedly not targeting Copts specifically, Nasser's extensive nationalization program of large private companies following the 1952 revolution with its socialist aspirations disproportionately affected the Coptic elites. This was due to their great involvement in commerce and success therein. The sharp decline in the

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51 Although his grandson Boutros Boutros Ghali, who is known for holding the position of UN Secretary-General (1992-1996), is occasionally and erroneously depicted as having held the position of Egyptian Foreign Minister, he was in fact never appointed to the full position, holding the position of acting Minister for over a decade. Additional Copts have held marginal ministries.
power and wealth of Coptic captains of industry was not the only event that was to rewrite the dynamics of the Coptic authority structure.

In an unusual move and perhaps egged on by the removal of the Egyptian royal family, Pope Yusab II\textsuperscript{52} was forced into retirement in 1954 for failing to prevent acts of simony perpetrated by his secretary followed by his refusal to dismiss the offender. The authority of the papacy was further brought into question when upon his passing two years later no replacement was chosen\textsuperscript{53}. Until 1959 the Church was to be ruled by a council of bishops, revolutionizing the entire structure of the Church from a papist to an episcopal form.

\textbf{The Fate of Other Minorities in Egypt}

As Egyptian nationalism consolidated during the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the formation of the Egyptian state, independent of any direct foreign intervention, necessitated a more formal definition of insiders and outsiders. This was done as in the West using the heavy-handed tool of citizenship and a gradually increasing level of its enforcement. It is important to keep in mind that at this time there were large numbers of migrants residing in Egypt. These arrived from widely diverse regions and from mostly Muslim, Christian and Jewish backgrounds. This meant that Copts were by far not the sole minority group within Egyptian society. The choices of several notable contemporaneous subgroups within Egypt during the past century serve not only as alternate models for identity creation. They also provide a counterpoint that underscores Coptic choices within the milieu in which they were made rather than

\textsuperscript{52} Also known as Joseph II.
\textsuperscript{53} His initial abdication was forced upon him by young Coptic kidnappers belonging to the ‘Coptic Nation’ and could have been revoked as it was made under duress. A presidential decree recognizing the dethronement was issued on September 21, 1955, thereby ratifying the uncommonly uniform decision of the Holy Synod and the Coptic Council (N. van Doorn-Harder, “The Modern” 125; N. van Doorn-Harder, “Kyrillos VI” 234).
through our more distant and different-context-bound view. The fact that Copts are today the only remaining significant minority in Egypt goes to show that they had correctly assessed their situation, assuming their goal had been to remain in Egypt while retaining their separate identity.

Enforcement of restrictions on foreign nationals began in earnest with the 1947 Company Law that set quotas for the number of non-citizens who may be employed with any company operating within Egypt's borders. It culminated in the 1956 Suez War that clearly asserted Egypt's transition from nominal independence three decades earlier to full and antagonistic independence from its British overlords.

Although described in the law simply as foreigners, many of these non-citizens had lived their entire lives in Egypt and some were not even the first generation to have done so. They had simply found it advantageous to retain or sometimes seek foreign citizenship or to possess none at all. This was especially the case under the imperial auspices of the British occupation forces. Aside from the risk of military service requirements and the advantages of having foreign patrons, gaining Egyptian citizenship was a lengthy, tedious and difficult process that was also largely unnecessary unless one traveled abroad. Furthermore, it required the requesting party to prove continuous residency in Egypt for one's self or one's ancestors dating back to 1848 in a land that even today, let alone at that time period, was not exactly known for its accurate and extensive census information. Such preconditions were also quite clearly intended in order to prevent any of the migrants attracted by the Khedival reforms from ever naturalizing.

It was only in 1922 that the category of Egyptian citizenship as such even came into existence with the nominal independence of Egypt. By the time it had crystallized in the 1929 Citizenship Law, it became difficult for non-Muslims to seek Egyptian
nationality and it was not until the 1937 Montreux Convention with its abolition of the capitulations extended to foreign nationals that foreign nationality lost its advantage. The hardship faced by such individuals is all the more poignant in light of a prohibition at the time on holding multiple citizenships (Beinin 250).

It is a matter of no small consequence that Copts were relegated to the status of citizens, whereas other non-Muslim groups found themselves out of the fold and designated as *mutamaṣṣirs*, that is those who pretend to be Egyptians, but in fact are not. In this regard it is important to differentiate here between several categories of non-Muslim long-term residents of Egypt on this sliding and arguably dynamic scale.

Mehmet Ali, founder of the Modern Egyptian monarchy and himself a native son of Ottoman Albania, encouraged the influx of foreign nationals into Egypt throughout his rule as they had a vital role in the expansion and growth of the Egyptian economy. Some were European expatriates representing banking and other interests in their home countries, mainly though not only from France and Britain. Others supplemented and soon overwhelmed pre-existing communities of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Syrians and others.

When discussing groups that had migrated to Egypt and retained a separate “non-Egyptian” identity, it appears at first glance as though all these groups shared in being non-Muslim. There are two major reasons for this *inter alia*. The first and foremost cause is that ethnicity as such was not officially recognized. Egypt, still nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire until the outbreak of hostilities during the First World War, had inherited its *millet* system. This system recognized and arguably helped reify self-contained autonomous groups based on officially sanctioned religious constellations (A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* 66). Members of such groups were not direct subjects of the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. Rather they were subject first and foremost to
a central leader who represented his community before the imperial court. This position as head of a *millet* did not augur well for many as they often raised the ire of the Porte, the community or both. Despite the community leader’s precarious hold on life and limb, it is important to recall that such leaders possessed great viceregal power over their subjects. Most notably, heresy became nigh impossible as access to privileges was circumscribed solely for recognized communities, precluding the formation of new, let alone iconoclastic ones. Counterintuitively these high walls did not incentivize the Church to shift its flock from folk religious practices to a more puritanical outlook as it does today (Mayeur-Jaouen 222).

*Turks and Circassians*

For Muslims residing in Egypt and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, the *millet* system meant that no distinction other than being Muslim could be granted official writ. This created an odd situation regarding identity. Jewish and Greek minorities converted largely religious identities into more secularized ethnic ones (Kitroeff 1). In contrast, ethnically and linguistically different Turks, Circassians and Kurds were able to melt into Egyptian society almost without a trace. They had no need to tear down any ethnic “scaffolding” or to enter any conflict with communal elites seeking to bolster the bulwark of their power. This is noteworthy considering a conscious decision to adopt the Arabic vernacular was required, even while retaining surnames indicating one’s non-Arab origins.

Yet after more than a millennium of discrete non-Arabic speaking elite governance by Mamluks and oft foreign-born pashas, this major part of society simply dissipated as a socially distinct presence. This serves as a reminder of the fickleness of identity politics, but also of the significant role Islam plays in the popular conception of
Egyptian identity among the Muslim majority. After all, it is only one side of the coin that this separate class preferred to assimilate and "become" Arab rather than "return" to their ethnic homelands and relocate as the Greeks and Jews were to do\textsuperscript{54}. The obverse of the proverbial coin was the incorporating acceptance Arabic speaking Muslims awarded the so-called bāshās. In other words, the general populace did not deem them to be foreign, unlike other comparable groups. That is not to say that there was not any criticism of their foreignness, simply that it did not gain any traction, especially after their prerogatives were abjured.

Societal choices about who belongs and who is foreign are often based on flimsy historical grounding and derive more from visceral public sentiment. This can and has led to the rejection of native and semi-native Egyptian subpopulations. One ought not to ignore the fact that certain marginal salafi elements have already called for the expulsion of some or all of the ‘foreign’ Copts (Sedra, “Activism in the Coptic Diaspora”). Others closer to the mainstream have argued that Copts who choose to leave Egypt have no say in Egypt’s affairs, to which Copts would reply that they are being pushed out rather than leaving of their own volition (Gamāl).

\textit{Jews}

Let us return to the groups that were seen eventually as incompatible with the newfangled Egyptian nation. The first community that has received scholarly attention in this context is the Jews of Egypt. Like the Copts, they could pride themselves as a community on a long presence in Egypt dating back to Pharaonic times. Nonetheless by the Second World War, many of Egypt’s Jews were more recent arrivals coming from

\textsuperscript{54} Many of the Armenian community also left during the same period due to nationalization of property, though they were not strongly identified with the Soviet Republic of Armenia and emigrated westward (Karakashian and Poghosyan 234).
Spain, Yemen and Eastern Europe. In 1956, almost all the Jews who had remained thus far in Egypt were expelled from the country and barred from returning as permanent residents. It is a matter of long-standing debate whether this was or was not a legitimate action on the part of the Egyptian government.

It was however framed by a series of tumultuous events. These began to gain speed starting with Egypt’s failure to defeat the newly established State of Israel despite gaining and holding on to coastal territory now known as the Gaza Strip. Matters continued in a downward spiral with Israel’s failed 1954 plot to destabilize the new Egyptian revolutionary regime that has come to be known alternatively as the Lavon Affair, Operation Susannah or ‘the Mishap’ with the pursuant public trial of the Jewish Egyptian offenders. It culminated in the tripartite invasion of the Sinai Peninsula and the Suez Canal in October 1956, in reaction to Nasser’s order to nationalize the canal. In regard to British hegemony and supremacy in the region, this bode the death knell for the declining former empire. All the more so following Sudan’s independence in practice from Britain and nominally from Egypt in January of the same year as well as the purging of Jordan’s military of British officers in March.

Echoing the controversial debate concerning Armenian loyalty to the Ottoman Empire under the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress four decades earlier during the First World War, it is still a matter of heated debate whether the Jews of Egypt were loyal to Egypt or to Israel. With the benefit of hindsight, it does appear that they were in fact as a whole loyal to the former, backing the official Egyptian government position up until their expulsion.
The second group to find itself out of bounds was the Greek community. At the time of its expulsion, it was also the largest foreign community (Kitroeff 1). Here too the community could trace its roots back to Pharaonic times although many of its members were more recent arrivals. In contrast to the Jews, Greeks had a far stronger historical stake in Egypt. Ever since Alexander the Great’s conquest and occupation of Egypt and the establishment of his eponymous city on the shores of the Mediterranean, the Greek language and Hellenistic culture pervaded every facet of Egyptian life for nearly a millennium. The Coptic alphabet remains based mainly on the Greek one.

Furthermore in this case as opposed to the potential conflict of interests with the Jewish minority, here there was no extant border dispute and definitely no military conflict was afoot. Greece did accede to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952 alongside the offensive Britain and France that were among its 1949 founding member states. This position was in stark contrast to revolutionary Egypt’s non-alignment with the West and slight tendency toward Soviet patronage. Other than this meager source of disagreement, there was no bone of contention between the states and Greece’s NATO membership was largely passive at any rate.

In light of the fact that most Egyptiot Greeks did not “return” to Greece from their native Egyptian soil, but rather proceeded to migrate to migration-receiving countries such as Australia and Canada, it is questionable at best whether their loyalties were indeed at any point in time to the Greek state (ibid, 9). This of course is subject to further debate since many of their co-ethnic Hellenic “compatriots” also left for the same greener pastures.

We must keep in mind that both modern Greek and Jewish nationalisms grew out of the anachronistic coalescence of the crumbling Ottoman Empire into newly drawn
meta-historical states\textsuperscript{55}. From the sixteenth century until the early nineteenth, Jews, Greeks and Egyptians were all subjects of a single Ottoman Empire answerable to the Sublime Porte. Though regional affinities may or may not have played a part in each community’s sense of belonging, it is unlikely to have raised the national fervor seen in the twentieth century or even the late nineteenth within the context that this historical period provided.

The British Empire had often exaggerated the level of grassroots support for ethnic identities that happened to promote its regional interests while downplaying organic uprisings that flowed against the current of Britain’s imperial agenda. While Britain pretended to act as an allegedly disinterested mediator between Glücksburgian Greece and its former Ottoman overlords, this was clearly not the case. Not only were the British awarding the Greek position preferential treatment, but also they often championed the Greek expansionist call for \textit{enosis}, the unification of all ethnic Greeks under Greek political sovereignty.

Aside from Britain’s long-standing philhellenism and an automatic apprehension in regard to the motives of the Turks, one must not neglect the nepotistic aspect of this British partiality. King Edward VII of Britain (r. 1901-1910) was married in 1863 to the sister of King George I of the Hellenes (r. 1863-1913). As though part of a political liaison from the High Middle Ages, the niece of the then selfsame Prince of Wales was married in 1889 to the Greek royal heir, Constantine I (r. 1913-1917; 1920-1922), further sealing the bond. The Anglo-Hellenic affinity even outlasted the political power of the Greco-German royal house. Britain’s current Prince-consort Phillip is also a grandson of the aforementioned King George. These rather questionable motives rather absurdly

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\textsuperscript{55} I refer here to the nationalist identity constructed upon an ahistorical narrative based on an invented and idealized classic past that disregards and often acts to erase organic changes that have occurred during the intervening centuries that so typifies both of these cases.
brought about the movement of people to accommodate lines on maps in contrast to lines being redrawn to accommodate the very real demographics.

**Forging New Nations**

It is not the purpose of this present work to assess or discern the morality or immorality of such expulsions and property appropriations. Appropriations took place in two ways, direct and indirect. The former involved nationalization of private property. The latter were achieved through the forcing of short sales, providing little to no time for the adequate price to be reached. Non-citizens were especially disadvantaged, as it was no longer permitted for them to own property in Egypt. Such mass deportations were not unheard of either beforehand or since. The Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Turkey, Greece, Uganda and Zimbabwe among numerous others have perpetrated such deportations either by decree or by failing to remedy the situation following the cessation of open aggression.

It is at present in vogue to decry this practice as out and out reprehensible, terming it ‘ethnic cleansing’. We point out today the extreme emotional distress brought about by forced migration, which leads to the loss of one’s real homeland even if it is replaced with an imagined yet foreign one. Such a-historic projections of newfangled conceptions of individual human rights vis-à-vis communal rights are understandable and emotionally resonating. It is however vital to recall that they are also completely anachronistic and unfair toward the actors. Treaties and declarations such as the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations (1923) and the Potsdam Declaration (1945)\(^\text{56}\) were seen at the time as being in line with international

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\(^{56}\) Allowed the expulsion of axis nation ethnics, mostly Germans and Hungarians from eastern and central European nations.
law. Not only were they not viewed as negative by the general public as well as international jurists, but rather they were seen as mostly positive even if far from painless. Such solutions were seen as bringing an end to civil war; placing the right to life and safety above the right to retain one's home; preventing the outbreak of further wars based on potential irredentist claims; providing for nation building and aiding in the process of decolonization.

Whereas the ethics or lack thereof of forced deportation exceed the extent of this work, the dry facts remain that in 1956, the largely secular Nasser regime viewed certain minority groups as foreign to Egypt and feigning loyalty (mutamaṣṣir) while viewing others as authentic Egyptian. It is here important to note that those groups that remained were still subject to grave suspicions of potential perfidy and several retained international contacts, always a source of worry for those who were questioning and casting doubts on their loyalty. The removal of other non-Muslim groups has greatly increased the pressure on Copts to become absorbed by the Muslim majority thus consolidating defensive structuring mechanisms (Siegel 14).

Later on in this chapter I will further discuss the impact this may have had on the Coptic Church's relations with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in light of Haile Selassie's pro-Western alignment during the Cold War. There are however also smaller and less visible communities such as the Melkites with their affinity to the Chalcedonian Bishop in Istanbul, Turkey; the Coptic Catholics, not affiliated with the Coptic Church, though based upon converts and their descendants, and their attendant links to the Vatican; the Episcopal Anglican Church connected to Canterbury, England; various evangelical and other Protestant denominations subject to their respective American churches; and even Karaites, a splinter group from Judaism of unclear belonging, identified at times as a
Jewish sect and at others as a heretical separate religious community, suspected for its links with its brethren residing in Israel.

It goes almost without saying that those few Jews and Greeks who were not expelled after 1956 were subject to constant monitoring and occasional internment as possible spies, although in all fairness, many Muslims, Communists and other Egyptians suspected of less than perfect loyalty to the regime were subject to similar and often worse treatment due to a lack of foreign well-wishers. In addition it would be less than honest to portray such governmental acts as paranoid, since foreign countries were in fact spying on Egypt and certain dissident groups of varied provenance did in fact have the full intention of taking over government much as the Nasser regime had done, that is to say, not through the provision of democratic, open and free elections.

Persecuted Minority, Proud Egyptian or a Little of Both?

Although the focal point of this research revolves around the Coptic identity in three Western countries, namely the United States, France and the Netherlands, one cannot discuss the features of this ever changing identity without first addressing its Egyptian origins, both in the past and in the present. This is the case all the more so due to the relative youth of the global Coptic presence outside of Egypt.

It is not uncommon to read of the Copts as passive extras cast in a play about Islamic extremism and the rigid military Egyptian regime (Sedra, “Class Cleavages” 220; Sedra, “Writing the History”). This partial representation, in both meanings of the word, is encouraged by some vociferous lobbies such as ‘Copts United’ and the ‘International Christian Union’ that have a vested interest in deriding Islam in general for political and religious reasons or in attacking the current and previous Egyptian regimes.
It is unclear how much ground roots support these groups receive outside of Egypt, let alone in Egypt where such backing would be as a matter of course more hidden. What is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt is that the official Coptic Orthodox Church views them with good reason at best with distrust and questions their motives, methods and goals. This is especially so since regardless of the benefits accrued by their politicized involvement to the Coptic population, these organizations do not pay any of the costs (Cf. Bosch and Netjes).

Despite the fact that demographic estimates of the number of Copts living both in Egypt and in the diaspora vary greatly (between five and twenty percent of the total Egyptian population), even the highest and less probable appraisals place Copts as a numerical minority in their native Egypt. The number of Copts in Egypt, like all demographic issues in the Middle East, is very political57. While the Church would have an interest in maximizing the size of its flock, the government is more inclined to minimize the number of non-Muslims in order to justify Islam’s exclusive position in the country. In 1976, the conflict of interests nearly led the Church to prepare its own census, revealing the state’s malfeasance (Pennington 159). The upcoming 2016 census promises to be a challenge as well in this regard (Gamāl). It is clear why the Egyptian government would wish to place a low estimate on the number of Copts living in Egypt. What remains unclear is why the growing Coptic diaspora remains largely under-researched with a paucity of reliable and accessible demographic data despite the lack of a threatening sovereign abroad. It is possible that old habits simply die hard, or alternatively that the Church does not wish to encourage further migration. It is furthermore possible that publication of such data would draw attention to those Egyptian Copts living abroad and potentially prevent their return to Egypt in the Future.

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57 Even the smattering of Egyptian Shi’a has led to violence and extremely heated debate.
It would come as a surprise then to some that the former Coptic pope would state both that Copts number “no less than 12 million” (Bayūmī and Ramaḍān) and that “we are not a minority and do not like others to call us a minority (Foreign Broadcast Information Service 23)\(^5\). He further explains the Coptic predicament with the following words,

“We do not like to consider ourselves a minority and do not like others to call us a minority. The terms minority and majority indicate segregation and discrimination. This does not befit the sons of a single homeland, especially if this homeland is beloved Egypt... If the Copts have some problems or demands, these matters can be solved in a spirit of amity in the same homeland without the use of the terms minority and majority. These matters can be solved without psychological sensitivities. The attempts, even if they are well meaning, by some to defend the Copts does [sic] not necessarily require them to call us a minority.” (ibid)

One may argue that this position largely reflects that of the Egyptian government, which continually refuses the application of the term minority (Human Rights Watch). Regardless of the motives behind this like-mindedness, Pope Shenouda III was far from being a lone preacher in promoting a clear Egyptian identity that is shared by both Copts and Egyptian Muslims. Sedra identifies two principal strands of thought on the position of Copts in Egyptian society, which he refers to as ‘national unity’ and ‘persecution’ narratives ("Class Cleavages" 221–223).

At first glance, these two strands seem diametrically opposed and perhaps among some of their more radical advocates they are. Whereas the former seems to depict an image of fraternal amity, the latter presents a picture of rabid Muslim invaders subjugating helpless Copt victims to their yoke. Upon further consideration however, these two positions both argue some albeit propagandized aspect of reality, though by no means a complete depiction thereof.

The Copts were persecuted for their religious beliefs during several periods of Egyptian history, both preceding and following the Islamic invasion in the seventh

\(^5\) Original article appeared in Al-Muṣawwar magazine in Arabic on April 29, 1994.
century AD. Yet there are no sources indicating any wide scale genocide ever took place in Egypt. Nor was there any ethnic cleansing reported on a massive scale. Admittedly this absence of data does not prove in and of itself that no such event occurred, perhaps not to be recorded or to suffer expurgation from the records. After all, it is the victors who write history.

Such a contingency though admittedly not impossible is still quite unlikely. It is far more plausible that most Egyptian Muslims are descendants of Copts who converted from Christianity either under duress or for more earthly reasons such as reduced taxes or kinder treatment by the courts (Vogt 46; Pennington 177; Coptic Layman). Van Nispen tot Sevenaer estimates that approximately 90% of Egypt's current residents descend from the ancient Copts (23). This assessment is echoed also by such a prominent Coptic figure as Marcus Simaika, founder of the Coptic Museum in Cairo (Reid 282). Since conversions to Islam still occur today in a multivariate environment and the histories are replete with examples of such conversions throughout the centuries, it is doubtful that even those who consider Islam innately foreign to Egypt's true identity remain unaware of these common origins.

Although most Copts in Egypt are peasants, the Coptic elite that comprises a resounding majority of migrant Copts is also overrepresented in the professions in Egypt. Thus for example 80% of Egyptian pharmacists are Copts, while 30 to 40% of medical doctors profess the faith (Pennington 159; Nispen tot Sevenaer 24). This success is readily visible and is no doubt a contributing factor in the resentment felt by some lower-class Muslim Egyptians.
Church and State

It is a matter of paramount importance to recall that Coptic Orthodox Christianity never enjoyed the status of an official state religion in Egypt. Theodosius’ declared Orthodox Christianity to be the official and sole state religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. Only seven short decades separate this declaration from the one of setting the newly divergent Coptic position as heretical in the eyes of Constantinople following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. The inevitable outcome of this religious monopoly may be seen in the repression and outlawing of pagan worship, most notably in Egypt itself from 392 AD onwards, with the destruction of pagan temples.

Having had so little access to the privileges of governance, it is not surprising that the Coptic Orthodox Church has consistently maximized its position as a temporal underdog. In fact, its deprived state is the very source of its ultimate strength as a counterpoint to the almost inherent depravity and corruption of government. This attitude is strictly in line with the standards set by Christ and the Apostles for non-worldliness in the New Testament.

For this reason, the Coptic Church was far better aligned to survive in the long term following the Muslim conquest of Egypt in the mid-seventh century. Unlike the mainline Orthodox Church that was strongly identified with the defeated and weakened Byzantine Empire, the Coptic faith had no real stake in the prestige of the emperor and his armies. Some may venture to say that the Copts had an interest in bringing about the overthrow of imperial forces in Egypt, although this claim has yet to find grounding in actual proven facts. Despite later anachronistic depictions, the existing evidence points rather in the opposite direction. The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu, written only a few short decades after Egypt’s conquest does not glorify the Muslim invaders and labels
those who sided with them as ‘false Christians’ despite a critical and scathing opinion of Chalcedonian beliefs (Vliet, "Modern Sons" 287–288).

It is also quite unlikely that the Muslim Arab invaders had the clear understanding of the internal Christological schisms needed in order to use the Copts as a strategically campaign-altering fifth column. Furthermore internal Byzantine instability and military weakness evidenced in the decade-long Sassanid occupation of Egypt from approximately 619 to 629 underscores the superfluity of the need for Coptic underhanded cooperation. This is all the more so since this aforementioned occupation was brought to a close not by Byzantine troops routing the Persian army, but rather through negotiation and internal turmoil within the Sassanid court.

The Linguistic Field

The Role of Language

It is unclear to what extent the Coptic Church was actually encumbered by the propagation of Islam and its Arabic vernacular. It took centuries for Muslim rulers to consider changing the language of the Egyptian bureaucracy from Coptic to Arabic and many non-Muslims could climb quite high in political rank before being pressured to convert. What is clear is that by the tenth century at the latest and probably much earlier, Coptic was relegated to the status of a liturgical language, supplanted in daily activities by Arabic much as Sunni Islam had replaced Coptic Christianity as the majority religion. Coptic was thus invested with further holiness, having lost its vernacular purpose, becoming a medium for religious memory (Naguib, "The Era of Martyrs" 129–130). This however was a gradual process as can be seen by the lingering impact of Coptic vocabulary and grammar that separates Egyptian Arabic from other dialects of the language.
We cannot know today if increasing inaccessibility of the Coptic religious texts led to disaffection within the community. However, almost by definition, an intellectual elite consists of a numerically small population that is therefore non-representative. Lack of access to the ancestral language did not necessarily encumber worship in any significant way. For one, the iconic visual vocabulary of the Coptic churches themselves had no need for words in order to impart its universal message. For another, devotional stories do not require written language and come about and develop in whatever medium is readily available, often being committed to writing only many years later if at all.

Finally much of the population of Egypt at that time, and for that matter of the entire world, was largely illiterate, regardless of its faith. Although this would greatly reduce the laity's direct access to holy tomes, it would also limit the need for Coptic comprehension to the clergy. That being said, since much of the clergy were appointed largely according to the expressed profundity of their faith rather than to their erudition, this may have affected their abilities to properly represent the faith. It is important also to note that in stark contrast to the present and recent past, possessing the ability to read the available religious texts would not have implicitly conferred any advantage, as manuscripts were rarely available outside monastery libraries to those without significant financial means.

Still it is at this point that in my view the Coptic Church entered a watershed period. Shifting towards Arabic required prioritization, thus crystallizing Coptic identity. Translation of the important religious works for the purpose of prayer, sermons and spiritual contemplation into Arabic required two vital decisions that would forever affect the course of things to come. Only a small part of the existing Coptic texts were in fact translated into Arabic. On the other hand, some texts that had not been translated
into Coptic in the past but were consistent with Coptic teachings became available in Arabic through the translation work of non-Coptic Arabic-speaking Christians (Rubenson, “Tradition and Renewal” 37).

Much like the canonization of the New Testament, setting apart certain holy texts as worthy of the effort of translation into Arabic also simultaneously excluded those texts that were deemed less vital, let alone borderline heretical. We thus receive a rare snapshot of the relative importance and vitality of different texts to the Coptic communities and their monks (Cf. Haar Romeny et al. 14 on this phenomenon within other Orthodox communities). Those prayers and works of exegesis that remained in the wilderness of Bohairic or Sahidic Coptic, though not always lost for posterity, would no longer have a strong impact on future generations of Copts. Certainly they were not deemed heretical or contrary to contemporaneous interpretation, but rather they were classified tacitly as less necessary.

Another slightly subtle way translation freezes interpretation is par for the course in the act of translation itself. The translator rarely has the privilege of retaining double entendres or textual opacity. He is therefore required to write an exegetical approximate text, even as he strives to remain perfectly loyal to the original. Some may argue this precludes any real translation, since as the Italian adage states, *traduttore traditore*, that is, translators are traitors.

However this would constitute a gross misrepresentation of reality. Since language is fluid and meaning changes subtly and almost imperceptibly over a lifetime, our reading of an ostensibly static text written in the past in a language that is quaint and archaic though at face value still understandable today should supposedly be the same as that of the text’s contemporaries. In truth, linguistic but also social change
render different readings over time for the very same text. Translation into Arabic thus provides the reader with a vignette into the social values and norms promoted by the church at the time of the translation, rather than as mirrors of the original text in question.

The Language of Religion

A second implicit decision has been made in the choice to translate into Arabic in regard to the forthcoming status of the Coptic language. In order to better understand this aspect, it would be beneficial to examine the choices of others at this juncture. Several other religions that coexisted in the Coptic community’s milieu had relegated a specific idiom associated with their religious texts to a holy and almost magical status.

Arguably the one to do so to the greatest extent was the majority religion in Egypt, namely Islam. Translations of the Quran into languages other than Arabic were deemed interpretations devoid of any holiness in and of themselves. More importantly, those translations could only be used in the study of the text and never during the prayer. Thus even grammars and dictionaries of the Arabic language gained an added symbolic value. This is all the more remarkable for the fact that Islam’s spread beyond the original Caliphate was more often than not at the hands of non-Arabic speakers. Even when the state apparatus identified itself as Muslim, as in the case of the Delhi Sultanate or the numerous Turco-Mongol empires in Central Asia and beyond, Arabic and its script were placed on a pedestal though Persian and its local variants, now in an Arabic script, were deemed more befitting as an administrative and poetic tool.

59 For more on this issue, see McWhorter’s discussion of Shakespeare’s reduced intelligibility to the average theatergoer in regard to the linguistic change (McWhorter 87–116). In regard to the social aspect, the United States Declaration of Independence offers a poignant example in the phrase “that all men are created equal”. Though the term ‘man’ has not changed its lexical meaning in the past three centuries, the categories included within its sphere have come to include non-Whites, non-Christians and also women.
In the Jewish faith, biblical Hebrew was relegated a holy status and would later also be assigned magical qualities by various cabbalists once it was no longer a spoken everyday language. Nonetheless translations to Aramaic and Greek at a fairly early period do not seem to have raised anyone's ire and were used as authoritative versions for the purpose of exegesis. In the case of the Aramaic Targum Onkelos, this early translation even appears to this day as a standard alongside the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch in many printings. In the Yemenite Jewish community it is even read as part of the prayer service antiphonally verse by verse. This is not so surprising considering that Aramaic is prevalent in Talmudic sources and in the biblical books of Ezra and Daniel, as well as prayer books and ritual documents such as religious marriage certificates.

When it comes to Arabic, the Jewish Rabbi Sa‘īd bin Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, known also as Se‘adia Gaon, prepared an Arabic translation of the Old Testament in the tenth century, though this was named as a tafsīr, indicating its exegetical rather than authoritative status. Despite this attributed status, it was this text that he used in his arguments with the schismatic Jewish Karaite sect, then burgeoning in popularity among Jews in Egypt enough to merit a serious confrontation.

Divergent forms of Christianity were not by any means numerically significant in Egypt at the time, even less than they are today. Nonetheless it stands to reason that the Coptic Church would have had some awareness of the attitudes of other fellow Christians to the scriptures and their language, even if only by contrast.

In the Catholic Church, translation of the Latin Vulgate into indigenous languages did not seem to pose a threat to religious identity prior to the period of the Crusades. This can be deduced from the existence of multiple early translations of the Bible that
have survived into the present. This may have been related to the efforts directed toward the proselytization of the pagan barbarian kings of Europe.

The tide had turned as a need for a separate Catholic identity arose, leading to an 1199 papal ban that was placed on the translation and use of non-Latin bibles. This choice can be traced back to several reinforcing factors. First and foremost would be the gradual split with Byzantium brought about by such theological questions as the use of the ‘filioque’ and the relative status of Rome within Christendom. This split was also influenced by political events such as the massacre of the Latins in 1182, the sack of Constantinople by crusaders in 1204 and the general mistrust aggregated as the two came into contact during the Crusades. The status of Latin as a lingua franca of the erudite from the Irish shores and the Spanish frontier to the hinterland of central Europe, the Balkans and farther afield in northern Europe was epitomized in the use of a single authoritative bible. It arguably even cemented the underlying sense of future generations of themselves as Europeans.

It is a matter of note here that the church-sanctioned Vulgate tended to prefer the original Hebrew to the Septuagint’s Greek wherever the two diverged, thus at least implicitly casting aspersions on the value of the earlier Greek translation. In the following centuries the exigency of the selection of an elevated language for ritual purposes in the Catholic world was highlighted by the execution at the stake of Jan Hus in 1415. That same year, Wycliffe was posthumously declared a heretic and in 1428 his remains were disinterred, burned and their ashes were thrown in a river. Both were made famous by their translation of the Bible into the language actually spoken in the lands in which they lived.

In the case of other Orthodox churches, both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian, choice of language largely presaged the geographic limits of the
respective church. For some the language of worship was retained while another language was adopted for daily secular activities. This was the case in regard to Geez in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and with Greek in the Byzantine Orthodox Church until the nineteenth century.

For others, scriptural language acted as bedrock for the establishment of modern everyday ethnic languages with the advent of general literacy as a tool of both successful and failed nation building. For these, no linguistic tension existed between secular and liturgical texts. This is the case with most members of the Syriac, Armenian, Russian, as well as the numerous Balkan Orthodox churches, where liturgical language is merely an antiquated form of the modern vernacular.

In light of these concurrent attitudes toward scriptural language, the move to Arabic, the holy language of a rival faith, is hardly trivial and was only made official by Pope Gabriel II in the 12th century (Ibrahim et al. 8). Still even as Copts adopted the Arabic idiom as a parallel and equal medium for the expression of their religious sentiments (Wassef, “Hi Dr. Levi”), they made it their own. Thus the vocabulary and style used in the ritual prayers and hymns leave no shadow of a doubt concerning the deep-seated Christianity of the texts.

Maṣri and Arabic

The main difficulty in analyzing the full magnitude of the two-way relationship between Arabic and Coptic that brought about modern Egyptian Arabic as spoken by today’s Copts is the convolution brought about by long term cross pollination. This occurred on multiple levels and during different periods. For one, Egypt did not become arabized overnight. Though it is difficult to ascertain how long the process lasted, it is clear that it lasted several generations in a process of shifting proficiency from Coptic to
Arabic. Such a bilingual “interregnum” tends to encourage the formation of a creole language from an Arabized form of Coptic or a Copticized Arabic. In addition, cultural use of certain religious idioms makes the differences even more opaque.

“There are many men who speak in the name of God or in the name of Allah, but the name of Jesus, it will mean you know very well that is the name of your Lord. Our God is Jesus. There isn’t any need like this for us to say “oh Lord” and that’s it. People must know who is this Lord of ours” (Anba Bishoy, Le Nom du Seigneur).

Unfortunately for diachronic linguistics, Egypt did not exist in a void. Due to this fact, Egyptian Arabic influenced and was influenced in turn by other geographically near dialects. Since the advent of mass communication and the sharp increase in Arabic literacy, this is even more so. Egypt today is responsible for the lion’s share of Arabic cultural production in the form of books, music, television serials and film appearing every year in its vernacular. In this way, it is familiarizing Arabic speakers from divergent backgrounds and geographical locations with its distinct version of the language. More specifically, modern lexicography and the tools that spread modern Arabic such as novels, modern poetry, plays and so forth exhibit a disproportionately high number of Christians from Egypt, Lebanon and Syria.

The renaissance of the Arabic written language referred to in Arabic as the Nahda began in Egypt and it overturned centuries of literary style and argot praised for its archaic inaccessibility. It was two Christian brothers who had migrated from Syria to Egypt who founded the first daily newspaper in the Arabic language. This newspaper, al-Ahrâm, continues to be published more than a century later, though today it reflects the views of the current Egyptian regime.

In this fashion, the privileged position of Christians, either Copts or members of other denominations, both as purveyors of linguistic goods such as lexicographers,

60 “Il y a beaucoup des hommes qui parlent au nom de Dieu ou au nom de Allah, mais le nom de Jésus, ça va dire que tu connais très bien que est le nom de ton seigneur. Ilahnâ yasî‘. Mish ayya ḥâga kidâ nqîl yâ rabb wabass. Lâzîm al-nâs tirâf mîn rabbînâ bûnâ dâ”
authors, playwrights and newspaper editors and as their audience among the literate newly formed middle class, allowed them to significantly affect the choice of vocabulary to be used, accepted and readily understood among modern Arabic speakers. Still despite all the cross-influences, Egyptian Arabic retains many grammatical and lexical features that distinguish it from other Arabic dialects while retaining parallels to Coptic. Though such circumstantial evidence does not constitute proof in academic circles, it is compelling enough to be heard in a somewhat overstressed form in multiple pro-Coptic conferences and publications (Bassili; Sharaf al-Dīn inter alia).

The resonance of Maṣrī in contrast to Arabic is wide but unclear. It is however a controversial matter going to the roots of what it means to be Egyptian. Recent examples of this controversy are the reactions in print and in the blogosphere and online discussions to those promoting a separate status. Two prominent examples from the recent past are Bayūmī Qindīl’s 2007 book “Difā’an ‘an Turāthinā al-Qibṭī” (In Defense of Our Coptic Heritage) and reactions to it, and the 2008 launching of a Maṣrī version of the popular reference tool, Wikipedia (Wikīpīdyā al-Mawsū’ah al-Ḥarrah).

The intermixing of two languages in order to create a handy medium for the passage of culture across a generational chain is by no means a novelty even within Coptic circles. Coptic itself owes its distinction from the earlier Demotic language to powerful influences from Greek, which contributed more than just its alphabet (Vliet). Yet it is this link from Maṣrī to Coptic to Demotic and all the way back to the pre-Islamic past of the glorious Pharaohs that acts as an important force in modern Coptic identity. Historical influences by external cultures, no longer politically or historically expedient, do not aid in the invention of tradition. This is in contrast to the far more short-lived though more authentic and dynamic yet perfunctory ‘custom’. In this manner, Greek and Arabic influences on Egyptian culture may be seen as taking away from the autonomy
and independence of Egyptian civilization. On the other hand, Coptic historical interests outside of Egypt also diminish the ‘Coptic qua solely Egyptian’ narrative.

The Geographical Field
Coptic as African Orthodox

The Coptic Orthodox Church had begun its life as an African church, although at the time what Africa as such encompassed was far more limited in scope. Still, it becomes evident quite quickly that the Coptic Church is not interested in such an African identity despite its historical cogency. Such a decision merits closer inspection and comparison.

There are two African Orthodox churches that have coexisted with the Coptic Church in the long term. The first is the relatively anonymous and now extinct Nubian Church61. Although we know far less about it than about its sister churches, we do know that it provided stalwart opposition to Muslim armies up until the late fifteenth century with the demise of the Kingdom of Alodia. The constituent kingdoms in what is now northern Sudan and southern Egypt also provided support and succor in addition to acting as a potential military threat (Bowers 8). This was most prominent from the failed siege of Dongola by the advancing Muslim armies in 652 to the fall of the Makurian Kingdom in 1276 at the hands of the Mamluks who subordinated it. In the interim, there had been seven periods of open hostility between the prominent Orthodox Christian kingdom and the Muslim rulers of Egypt, the longest lasting 34 years (Spaulding 585–586 footnote 26).

61 For more on this Church and its relations with the Coptic leadership in Alexandria and Cairo as well as the Muslim rulers of Egypt see also (Brett; Adams 245–249; Hagen).
The second African church to survive the inception of Islam on the continent was nominally an integral part of the Coptic Church although it developed on an independent path. Yet the Coptic Church chose to relinquish its admittedly nominal authority over the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in 1959 with relative ease and with little to no protestations. This was done three weeks into Kyrillos VI’s reign and may have been a step to establish loyalty to the Egyptian state (N. van Doorn-Harder, “Kyrillos VI” 235). Though the Church’s decision to frame itself as an Egyptian rather than an African or even just north-east African Church, though understandable and coherent under its circumstances is neither self-explanatory nor inevitable.

Although the Coptic Pope’s full title refers to him as Patriarch of all Africa, this appellation has not played a vital role in the structuring of the Church’s policies. In contrast to the Coptic Church’s lukewarm attitude toward the mission in Africa, the Chalcedonian Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria chose in 1959 to reinvent itself by accepting sub-Saharan African congregations. Notwithstanding that the original designation of Africa did not cover the then-unknown swathes of land it now describes, this historical issue did not pose any added hardship, since no other Greek Orthodox Patriarchate could legitimately claim these lands. As a result of this choice, the Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria now has many more followers outside of Egypt than within its borders. Granting that it is still much smaller than the total size of the flock of the Coptic Orthodox Church, this move clearly capitalized on the rise of African identity and the ‘African unity’ narrative leading up to and following decolonization by the Western powers that ironically had introduced Christianity to much of the continent.

By granting full autocephaly to the forty-five million strong Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church clearly elected an identity that stressed its Egyptian nature over a more pan-African one. Despite the fact that this drastically
affected the number of faithful officially under a Coptic Egyptian-born Archbishop, it also avoided the need to bridge over divergent practices between the churches allowing for a more uniform agenda. Regardless of its autocephaly, the Ethiopian Church still honors the Coptic Pope. In addition, Eritrea’s declaration of independence in 1993 made it clear that the Coptic Pope still held some real sway. In 1994, the Eritrean government made an official plea on behalf of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church to Pope Shenouda III to receive autocephaly, as it remained part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church until that point despite political disunion. Although relations between the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches have been tense, the former recognized the autocephalous status conferred by Pope Shenouda III in 1998, setting a possible precedent for the supremacy of the Egyptian pope.

**The National Question**

The teleological acceptance of Coptic jurisdiction being limited to the political borders of the modern Egyptian state and to its citizens abroad is all the more questionable when compared to the other papacy, namely the Catholic one in the Vatican. Prior to the Chalcedonian schism of 451, Alexandria played a major role in the formation of the Christian universal Church and its doctrines. In point of fact, Alexandria’s theologians provided the groundwork delineating what constitutes Christianity and who is a Christian for over two centuries preceding the schism. It is this common ground that allows ecumenical discussions today (Patrick xiii). It is not readily apparent today, but at the time, Alexandria’s contribution to early Christianity was rivaled only by Antioch, which would also fall into relative dereliction in the following centuries in the view of the wider Christian world.
From an organizational point of view however, the choice for national dominion over universal jurisdiction is also far from obvious when one weighs Rome in Comparison to Alexandria/Cairo. From 1523 with the death of the ephemeral Utrecht born Pope Adrian VI until 1978 with the appointment of the Polish Pope John Paul II, every single person to sit on the See of St. Peter had been born on the Italian peninsula. In fact, except for the aforementioned and short lived “Dutch” papacy, to use a harmless anachronism, and the reign of the two Spanish born Borgias, Italian birth seems to have been a papal prerequisite since the end of the Avignon papacy in 1377. The mayhem of the Western Schism clearly indicates this was no minor issue. Overall since the dawn of the Roman pontificate, 190 of the 265 Catholic popes, over 70% have come from the Italian peninsula. Almost half of the grand total of these men were born within the political borders of the Papal States.

In such an environment, it is not completely inconceivable for the Roman papacy to have chosen what may be referred to as an Italian solution, while still retaining close relations with its fellow Catholic brethren within other nation states. Even today, certain branches of the Catholic Church maintain an affinity to the Vicar of Christ while not accepting his every decree as binding.

In hindsight, it is easier to dismiss the challenges, pressures and threats of almost six decades of the Italian Republic’s hold over the Vatican from the 1870 conquest of Rome until the 1929 Lateran Treaty. It is also controvertible whether it would have been politic for a Coptic pope to seek a power base outside Egypt. Although Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser took this prerogative for himself, such action by a Coptic pope may have been seen as nothing less than perfidy.

At this time however, the focus of the Coptic Orthodox Church outside of Egypt is clearly on Egyptian expatriate Copts who have emigrated in growing numbers since the
1970s. This is reflected in the official use of the term ‘the Lands of Immigration’ to describe the sphere of the pope’s rule. This term allows for a globalization of the church, but only insofar as there are Egyptian expatriates living in that country. Thus it precludes a ‘rootless’ community of converts, although these are present in small measure, all be it usually through marriage (Stene, “Into the Lands of Immigration” 258). Retaining these migrants within the sphere of the Coptic Orthodox faith has been the central goal of the Coptic Church and of the papacy. The emigration is framed not as a result of hardship but rather as an opportunity and a bridge to the glorious days of global outreach in the early Church (ibid, 256–257).

In the four decades of Pope Shenouda III’s papacy until today, hundreds of Coptic churches cropped up around the world to accommodate the newly formed communities. These were granted official recognition by sending not only priests from Egypt, but also bishops in order to accommodate the larger communities. While Watson attributes this intensification of activity abroad to the lack of backing of the diaspora community during the pope’s internal exile and a need to assert papal authority (251), I would argue it shows political savvy and a wise recognition of the limits of his power.

Only after the diaspora showed its clear impact on the Coptic system through internal, ecumenical and foreign political levers, did it make sense to allot it significant power through Church venues. It is important to note in this regard that a decision to migrate does not mean that one is only loosely connected to the church community. In fact, the level of church attendance has no statistically measurable effect on the decision to relocate and even though social involvement does deter migration, this effect vanishes when there is at least one child residing in the home (Myers 775). It is also important not to equate religiosity with church attendance, even though the latter is the most accessible yardstick at our disposal. Among Catholics, for example, worship has
become decentralized with priests losing authority even as the number of Catholics has increased worldwide (Hervieu-Léger).

Yet the choice of opting for a smaller community within the national sphere of Egypt and its nationals abroad is not necessarily symptomatic of ecclesiastical weakness. Focusing the Church’s message on a smaller and more select group allows for less disenfranchisement of marginalized groups that may lead to further schisms. The appearance of worldly power would be counterproductive to the message of the Coptic Church. The strength of the Copt is not displayed in temporal wealth, strength or earthly glory. It is rather in his meekness and apparent vulnerability wherein the greatest strength of the Church truly lies.
Chapter III – The Usage

As can be seen from the previous two chapters, the current boundaries that delimit the Coptic community and any group for that matter are a result of both historic circumstance and the active posturing of Church leadership and laity. Egypt’s geography has made the country into a single economic and cultural unit for several millennia, with a loose bifurcation into Upper and Lower Egypt that remains valid even today. Deserts to the east and west and the Mediterranean Sea to the north have acted as natural obstacles to its expansion, militarily as well as culturally. Sheer distance has limited expansion to the south, reaching its apex, albeit nominally, under the joint British-Egyptian sovereignty over what is today Sudan and South Sudan.

When I sought out to research and write this work, my choice to examine Coptic identity in the “Lands of Migration” rested on the hypothesis that it is there that tradition and the walls erected by conservative Egyptian society would not act as stabilizing forces on the conception of identity. In a way, I wished to remove the river from the riverbed, to see what remained of being a Copt once that was confronted with a new and different environment. Events in Egypt overtook us all and brought the salient questions to a head, not only for Copts, but also for Egyptians at large, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

What is that identity which unifies Copts and marks them as qualitatively different from other groups? Is this identity derived mainly from parentage and therefore framed as an ethnic one, or in terms of norms and values and hence as a moral one? Is Coptic identity a product of defensive structuring on the part of a numerically lesser community in the face of the imposing Muslim culture of
Egypt? Is Coptic identity in the “Lands of Migration” a result of culture shock? These are the questions I had in the back of my mind as I went about my research. I believe the context provided by the previous two chapters will allow the reader a clearer insight into the choices made by both Church officials and members as they proceed onward.

The historical factors that have come to shape Coptic identity in Egypt remain relevant today, though their impact has been steadily decreasing in the past two centuries. Global connectedness has brought Copts, along with all other Egyptians, into both direct and vicarious interaction with the world, either as migrants to other countries or as Egyptians consuming Western media today or experiencing British rule in the past. The growing extent of this contact both in number of occurrences and in their duration, has forced the Coptic Orthodox Church to form an opinion in order to redress the impact that these changes have had on itself as well as its followers. Following a millennium of relative isolation from other Christian denominations, Copts have come into increasing unmitigated contact with other Christians contemporaneously with a heightened Islamic identity in Egypt that has grown largely as a result of the selfsame unnerving encounter with the West.

Unlike in the case of slowly forming boundaries based on centuries of give and take, the Coptic Church has been confronted with swift changes in its landscape forcing the question of how much one must change in order to keep the Church the same while all the world around it is changing? The Coptic Church, in contrast to Protestant churches for example, bears the double burden of facing 21st century Egypt with all its revolutionary turmoil while carrying the living and relevant memory of Diocletian’s martyrs in a difficult balancing act.
(Doorn-Harder and Vogt 9; Bishop Angelos). The Church is thus like a man standing in an overflowing river. Giving up on its ancient past would make it lose its historical and moral footing and therefore its distinct identity. On the other hand, ignoring the present may lead it to drown. This precarious condition mutes much of the Copts’ criticism of their own Church. By this I do not mean by any means that the Church silences the occasional complaints or displeasure of some of its followers, but rather that these are expressed discreetly and in a non-confrontational manner due to self-censorship (Cf. Thorbjørnsrud 362). Such nuances remain invisible to many outsiders, most notably and problematically, to Muslims in Egypt.

Scholarly analysis, individual decisions and institutional decisions by the Church all have to deal with the difficulty of the ever-changing and diverse contexts of reception. Whereas Portes has raised and pursued the issue of these different contexts of reception regarding different Caribbean migrants to the United States (Portes and Borocz), few advances have been made in mapping how exactly these contexts are formed and reformed. One thing has been made abundantly clear regarding contexts of reception. Though these contexts have a very significant impact on the way migrants perceive their new home, actual daily experience rests on shifting micro-contexts rather than national trends (Stepick and Dutton Stepick).

The “softer” aspects of reception are difficult to gauge. Many Copts with whom I have spoken have intimated a need to differentiate themselves from Muslim Egyptians especially after 9/11. This has brought about a need to flash their identity more prominently. It remains unclear whether Copts living in the “lands of migration” are more outwardly obvious about their Christian identity
because they feel freer and safer to do so or because they feel not doing this would lead to a negative bias against them as Middle Easterners. Perhaps it is a little of both with each reifying the other in turn. It is noteworthy that while some Copts with whom I spoke justified the bias expressed by some Western Christians against Islam and Muslim migrants, others expressed concern and found the bias unwarranted and based on ignorance. Nonetheless, the notion that ringing church bells may be offensive to Muslims in France is seen as shameful:

"And another priest here in France wrote in the newspapers after he built his church, from our brothers the Catholics, and he has a bell-tower and he has bells, and he said "I will not ring the bells out of consideration for the feelings of the Muslims in France." What is this? Another Catholic priest in France, he said in the magazines, in the newspapers, after he consecrated his church. He has a bell-tower. He has bells. He had said "I will not have the bells rung out of respect for the feelings of our brothers, the Muslims, but what is this? You can respect the feelings of your brothers, the Muslims, and you can ring your bells. We respect the feelings of our Muslim brothers, but what do these have to do with the ringing of the bells? What shame! This is a great shame in France, [that] a Catholic priest will say such a thing. It is a shame. A Christian country, she is ashamed of ringing the bells out of respect or as a tribute to our brothers, the Muslims? What is this? One ought not to confuse the matters"62 (Anba Bishoy, Le Nom du Seigneur).

In regard to the view concerning Muslims and Islam there was no distinct difference between the three countries. The most remarkable thing about attending services in New Jersey, Paris and around the Netherlands is the extent to which the churches felt endemic. This may have to do with the purchase of

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62*waqāṣs thāni hunā fi faransā katab fi al-garāid ba’d mā banā kanīsatuḥu min ikhwatnā al-kāthūlik wa’indahu manāra wa’indahu agrās waqāl "mish ḫadrab bil-agrās murā’ātān limaṣā’ir al-muslimīn fi faransā". Eyh dā? Un autre prêtre catholique en France, il disait dans les magazines, dans les journaux, après qu’il consacrait son église. Il a un clocher. Il a des cloches. Il a dit "je vais pas faire sonner les cloches pour respecter les sentiments des nos frères les musulmans", mais Qu’est-ce que c’est ça? Tu peux respecter les sentiments de tes frères les musulmans et tu peux sonner tes cloches. Ḫān naḥtarim maṣā’ir iḥkwatnā al-muslimīn, lakin mā hadhīhi lidarb al-agrās? Quel honte! Dā 'ayb awī fi faransā wāḥid qasīs kāthūlikī yaqūl kīdā. C’est une honte. Un pays chrétien, elle a honte de sonner les cloches par respect ou par les compliments à nos frères les musulmans? Qu’est-ce que c’est ça? Il faut pas mêlanger les choses.”
existing disused churches from other local denominations, but nonetheless a feeling of fitting into the local context arises.

In Paris, the Coptic Church was granted the rights to make use of an abandoned church within the city owned by the authorities. The priest with whom I spoke attributed the granting of this benevolent gift to the solid foundations laid down by former French President Jacques Chirac. Though it is unclear whether or not Chirac himself was involved in the allocation of church buildings, it is clear he fostered a kind spirit toward Middle Eastern Christians that either permeated the state apparatus, ameliorated the perception by the Coptic Church of its handling by the French state or both. As a counterpoint, a drawn-out attempt at establishing a Coptic school in the Netherlands fostered a sense of Kafkaesque acceptance. Though flustering and protracted battles with Dutch bureaucracy are meted out to the entire population on an even basis, a lack of perceived fairness can eventually breed resentment. Just because the Copts have quietly acquiesced to their current treatment does not necessarily mean that this behavior will continue without end.

When discussing issues troubling Coptic priests concerning their communities, very few differences arose between countries. In New Jersey and in France, the difficulties in gaining legal migrant status posed a challenge for a significant number of marginal new migrants. Dealing with migration laws comprises an important part of church activity in other churches in the United States and is a common research artifact. The fact that this issue did not arise in the case of Dutch Coptic churches rests more on the dormancy of the Dutch job market in comparison to the United States and even France alongside a more stringent enforcement of the law. Another concern is that the “land of migration”,
while nominally assumed to be Christian, is actually no longer so, a concern voiced by some parishioners with whom I spoke in the Netherlands and appeared also in France. “I am afraid that one day we will be embarrassed to put on this cross in France that was a Christian country” (ibid).

It stands to reason that differences between the three countries are difficult to pinpoint and may be traced back to other factors such as geographic distribution, age of the priest, or size of the specific community. So long as much of the membership is taken from the same source, namely Egypt, and given that today most of the priests are still those who came to their new country as adults from Egypt, it is not surprising that there are no sharp divergences. As larger portions of the Coptic communities residing in France, the Netherlands and the United States are born in those countries and more importantly, as an increasing number of priests arise from within these non-Egyptian contexts, it is more likely that we will see and hear growing variation. This however is not yet the case and at any rate, divergence is far from a certainty.

Given the declining prestige of the nation-state and the growing impact of virtual experience on our lives, it is no longer axiomatic that one must be subject to the geographically adjacent socializing agents. Local newspapers, radio stations, television stations, public forums and neighborly conversation possess little advantage today over non-local equivalents. At first glance, this seems to entail the easy fortification of a social ghetto raising barriers to assimilation. While this may be true for certain communities for short periods of time, it is unlikely to be the rule. Unlike urban ghettos, the technological social tools of the 21st century allow for the active flow of ideas between distant locales. In a virtual

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63 “J’ai peur qu’un jour on a honte de mettre cette croix en France qui était un pays chrétien”
Coptic society comprising of all ‘Coptdom’, ideas flow from the “lands of migration” to Egypt just as readily as they do in the other direction. While this weakens the ability of government to shape society by allowing external actors to provide services and challenge the local ‘cultural sovereignty’, we are still in a process of transition and the endgame remains unclear. Nevertheless the threat of isolation or assimilation is very much diluted by these changes.

Unlike many other groups that set up migration hubs and ethnic neighborhoods, Copts have established wider residence patterns. It is not uncommon for church members to attend services an hour away from their residence and on occasion even farther away, an artifact that I confirmed in both New Jersey and Paris. Jones states most Copts reside at least 15 minutes driving distance away from their church, though they will still attend regularly and remain for a long while after services end. He bases this difference on the professional status of many Copts in comparison to the untrained nature of other migrant groups (R. R. Jones 224–225). Although this seems a reasonable hypothesis, I have not been able to confirm or dispel it. In New Jersey, geographic dispersion correlated with the nature of the parish. The Holmdel, NJ community for example was composed of older wealthier families that had arrived in the US several decades ago and moved out of the cities to retire accompanied by their highly integrated adult children (Wassef, “Interview”). Jersey City, NJ, on the other hand was a typical gateway community, encountering the challenges of new migrants and lower incomes (Sleman, "Personal Interview"). In France and the Netherlands this was not the case, most likely due to the small number of Copts not allowing for social stratification (Lucas). In addition there appears to
be a lower level of residential segmentation in those countries in comparison to the physical distances seen in the United States.

Notwithstanding, long distance church attendance also occurs in Egypt and choice of priest seems to also play a certain role according to informants. Long distance travel to a church imbues it with more value due to the added investment and signals this importance to youth. The more dispersed pattern of residence does however mean increased contact with non-Copts and the social relations these pursue. An inevitable result of the successful integration of many Copts into suburban middle class neighborhoods is the fairly large number of mixed marriages, a matter that concerned many of the priests with whom I spoke who pointed out the mixed bag of results brought about by such unions. Group maintenance is facilitated by an agreement on common traditions and values.

The Internet has become increasingly available in a large number of homes in the United States and from there to the rest of the world especially since the 1990s. Like all novel modes of communication, many regarded it with distrust, especially from a religious perspective. One priest with whom I spoke remarked that the pernicious effects far outweighed the advantages, as some of his younger parishioners enter into futile arguments online in matters of religion (Fr. Arsenious). By the dawn of this century, as it became clear that the Internet was here to stay, it became commonplace to use this tool (Smith and Smith). The merits and shortcomings of the combination of Internet use and sermons have received some scholarly attention as have various aspects of the meta-discussion (See for example Laan; Michels; Haese).
Remarkably despite the increasing use of the Internet in order to make religious information more readily available, there has been a paucity of scholarly attention to the growing amount of sheer data being generated by the very communities scholars seek to understand. For the Coptic Church, I have personally seen the amount of online data explode over the past few years from a handful of sites dedicated to the provision of sermons previously and concomitantly distributed on compact discs. I was given such a CD of a Tadros Malaty sermon when visiting one of the churches. Half a decade later, all of the churches I attended have an individual website and the early adopters of this technology provide sermons of the own priests and other religious material through their websites or YouTube channels. This is a far cry from the situation described by Puck de Wit a decade ago, when religious internet usage revolved more around internet forums and other forms of more or less anonymous interactions with the priesthood (Wit).

This bounty of primary information sources provides easier and cheaper access for researchers and even more importantly allows other researchers to access the same ‘texts’, whether they are written or recorded on video or audio files. It adds a measure of verifiability that has been lacking in much of the social science work done up until now. A further advantage of religious internet activity is the archaeological layers left behind that may be reviewed by researchers on internet archives at a later date in order to observe subtle or radical changes over time. In this manner, the Internet provides a venue that is simultaneously dynamic and crystallized.

The incorporation of online sermons into regular Church activity is a noticeable difference between the three countries on which this work is
centered. In the United States, many sermons are available today through each particular church’s website as well as being cross-referenced on YouTube and other popular sites. The sheer volume of sermons is almost overwhelming. In France, online outreach to the Coptic youth and other technologically savvy individuals as well as spiritual seekers is present though not quite as developed as in the United States. It is nevertheless not far behind. Finally, in the Netherlands, local sermons are not yet available online.

The minor Coptic Dutch online footprint stems in my view from several reasons. For one, Church leadership in France and New Jersey exhibited during my interviews a progressive outlook eager to adopt new technology in order to maintain the attention of the energetic and young community. In contrast, leadership in Amsterdam was not actively pushing such a technological agenda. In time, this will most likely change as congregants come to expect the same amenities available to parallel communities.

Secondly the Dutch speaking Coptic community is much smaller than the Anglophone and Francophone ones. It is therefore likely that Coptic sermons in Dutch may have a much smaller audience, even when one includes Copts residing in Flanders, which is subject together with the rest of Belgium to the Bishop in Paris.

Thirdly settlement dynamics of Copts in the Netherlands have left them in an urban setting never living too far from any church. It is therefore unlikely that sermons recorded in Dutch would reach a much wider audience than that which attended the service in the first place. From my personal observation, church attendance in the Netherlands is very high, even in comparison to the high levels set by the French and American counterparts. Although a library of Coptic
sermons in Dutch would allow churchgoers to enjoy a greater variety in their sermons, it may also encourage the faithful to remain at home more often and listen online. At present, they must attend the physical service, lest they miss out on the entire experience. Naturally communion is not available online, though this is not necessarily taken on a weekly basis.

There is a certain disadvantage to the overwhelming presence of material in English and Arabic in comparison to French and Dutch sermons. While I certainly hope that Dutch and French communities will proceed to document and retain their religious activities online for posterity, it would not make sense to ignore the extant material simply due to this temporary imbalance. Since the process of virtualizing the Coptic communities has taken place in the United States and France in part during my research period, it is my opinion that future researchers will be able to redress the issue as more communities establish a growing online presence.

I had initially held reservations concerning the significance of sermons as attesting to truly held communal beliefs that have since been dispelled. In addition I was also concerned as to the extent to which the priests voiced the authentic thoughts and concerns of their communities. Despite these initial doubts about the pervasive role of the priests and how representative they may be of the communities as a whole, I found like other researchers, that their role is indeed central (Nispen tot Sevenaer 30; Thorbjørnsrud; Sidarouss). As mediators between traditional values and modern ones, priests are pivotal in oiling the familial wheels and bridging over the generation gap to circumvent major tragic conflicts already in Egypt (Thorbjørnsrud). As representatives of a larger institution, they are able to broker in the trust given them by the church
members (Oskarsson, Svensson, and Öberg). This is a role they readily fill in the “lands of emigration” (Bingham-Kolenkow 267).

The Church, personified in the leadership of the priest, mitigates the social costs of migration. According to Institutional Rational Choice Theory individual actors use the framework of the Church in order to gain the positive goods of approval and salvation and avoid the negative implications of being socially ostracized and the suffering of hell (Scott). The repeatability of Church interaction and the relatively infinite time period allow the Church to act as a sort of social bank account. Individual members can use the Church in order to accumulate a reputation based on reciprocity and trust (Ostrom 12-15). This overcomes the theoretical weakness of the more basic Rational Choice Theory that had overly relied on an exaggerated individualism that is not forthcoming in social action.

It is my argument that the clear and present dangers thrust in the face of the Coptic Orthodox Church have forced it to reframe its agenda and purpose in terms that are dictated by the world around it. In other words, the Church has been forced to “translate” itself culturally into a globally interconnected whole, much as it had translated its texts from Coptic to Arabic in order to salvage its heritage. While performing this task, the Church was required to define its core and as a result, its periphery. Thus for example when political Islam chose to imbue the veil with a more religious rather than class-indicative meaning, veiling became a symbol of Islam. The Church does not disagree with Islam concerning the importance of female chastity and the moral value stemming from covering the body:
“St. Butamina, who said to the people who would burn her “I am ready to put myself in boiling oil”. Do you understand? Boiling oil or boiling tar, do you know what it is like? She descended into it little by little, until she was separated from her life, all the time not revealing the body being destroyed. Of course, what is the meaning of her suffering and God forgave her sins, but she descended taking upon her this indescribable torture so that the body may not be exposed.

And St. Barbittu, who they tossed to the wild animals and a wild bull repeated struck her, and she was between life and death, when a part of her legs was exposed, so she moved her hand with her last remaining strength in order to cover those legs. So that the people who would save her would note see her legs exposed like this.

When we hear these matters and we look at today’s generation and today’s girls who without justification expose their hand and legs etc.”

Nonetheless veiling clearly became a problematic choice for Coptic women, even though in the past, their own female ancestors had donned such facial coverings (for a further discussion of this, see Thorbjørnsrud 334–336). In order to establish how the Church chooses to further its spiritual agenda, I noted the attitude expressed by the Church’s leadership toward various practices and trickled down to its believers, especially in the so-called "lands of migration".

I divide the practices of the Copts into “moral” and “ethnic” categories. These labels do not imply that the ethnic is immoral or amoral or that the moral effaces the ethnic. This division rather sets priorities, putting morally edifying practices ahead of merely culturally significant ones. I would also argue that this policy, whether intentional or not, is conducive to the spread of the Coptic faith outside of Egypt.


65 McKay frames this dilemma as being between keeping the faith and keeping the culture respectively (320).
The Church itself divides practices into *dīn* – theologically grounded practices and *taqālid* – lay practices having no theological grounding and occasionally running counter to the Church’s expressed views (Thorbjørnsrud 106). While this division appears to be prima facie clear, it breaks down under closer scrutiny. While theological grounding is the primary yardstick used to differentiate between the moral and the spiritually inert, it is not the only measuring tool utilized by the Church. For one, theological grounding is only relevant for what had been discussed up to that point. Lacunae resulting from a question not having been presented require discussion and the creation of theological grounding for the Church’s response. For another, customs arising independently may be reinterpreted in line with theological grounding and grafted retroactively upon them. Finally this division ignores those practices enjoined by the Church without resting on theological reasons known as *taqālid al-kanīsah* (ibid, 129).

Although the Church is conservative in its outlook even in novel matters such as cloning (Salib, *Cloning*), it is not frozen. Sturdy reforms that stand the test of time are built steadily over time. Otherwise they lead to strong counterreaction. The current configuration of the Coptic Church would not have been possible without the step-by-step reforms set in motion most notably during the periods of the last two popes, though also beforehand, most notably by Pope Kyrillos IV (1854-1861), known as *abū al-ʾiṣlāḥ* or the ‘father of reform’ (Nispen tot Sevenaer 25; Rubenson, “Tradition and Renewal” 38). Pope Kyrillos VI laid the groundwork for the spiritual renewal that has put the stress on moral identity (M. Martin 16). Some non-Coptic Orthodox have ascribed his reforms to undue influence by CMS missionaries and cite for example his ordering the
burning of icons (Watson 244; Reid 266; See also Butcher 397; Coptic Layman 736; Seikaly 248 doubts this).

Moral Elements of Coptic Identity

Martyrdom

Martyrdom plays a major role in the identity of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the use of communal memory (Naguib, “The Era of Martyrs”). One may even say that this is the primary element and arguably, in its expanded form, the sole core principle in what it means to be a Copt. The martyrs act not only as ideal types to be followed in resisting sin even unto death in emulation of Christ’s sacrifice. They also serve to sanctify the tradition with their blood, underscoring that the values they maintained were worth dying for (Bishop David, The Martyrs).

The Church prepares its children for martyrdom and considers it a gift to be given to a select few in its highest form:

“Tonight we are remembering one of the early Egyptian martyrs. He’s Egyptian. And our church understands the place of the martyrs in God’s economy of salvation. And we are proud that our Church, God allow many of the Copt [sic] to receive the crown of martyrdom, because martyrdom is not for everyone. Martyrdom, it’s a gift, because when we read in the early church, we discover some time in one city, in one village, there is a persecution. Few receive the crown, the martyrdom” (Farag).

Nonetheless martyrdom levels the hierarchy of the Church in that the crown of martyrdom may be given not only to lay folk but even to those who were distant from it or sinned and repented (Youssef).

While we have come to accept a narrow definition of what it means to be a martyr in the Anglophone world, the Coptic definition actually retains the multifaceted older meaning. While laying down one’s life in the name of Christ
remains the paragon of martyrial behavior worthy of the highest approbation, this is not expected of everyone, much as complete celibacy remains a living ideal for only a selected few.

The word ‘martyr’, from the Greek μαρτυς (martys), originally meant simply a witness. This multitudinous meaning is retained in the Arabic word shahid, from the verb shahida, the stem of the verb ‘to testify’ or ‘to see’.66 This is partially corrected by the use of the word istishhād to describe death in the name of preserving or furthering the faith. Although the word shahid has entered the English language as a loanword referring often pejoratively to a holy warrior who died for Islam, this word is used and has long been used within the Coptic Church to refer to its martyrs67.

“Each of us is considered like a grain of wheat that has fallen into the earth. Now, after one falls like a grain of wheat, if you want to remain alone, remain alone, but you will have no fruit, but if you want to have a lot of fruits, there is no [other] solution – we must die in the name of Christ. No less than that68" (Anba Bishoy, Le Chretien et la Vie de Temoignage (Ser_076)).

I will address the divergence between Coptic and Muslim shahādah or martyrdom later on. Attesting to the veracity of the Coptic Church and its message of rejection of the worldly in order to overcome the temptations of the devil and inherit eternal life can but need not result in the testifier’s death. Witnessing to God’s truth is however insufficient in and of itself, as the witnessing must rest upon faith in addition to knowledge.

“The devil believes with a rational faith. He still does, that is, he knows that this is our Lord, but we believe with a heartfelt faith. We believe in Him and we love Him. He believes in Him but he does not love Him. The difference

66 In Arabic, the stem form of the verb is the past third person and no exact parallel exists for the form ‘to see’.
67 Arabic has retained multiple meanings, connotations and denotations for this word deriving mostly from context.
68 “Chacun de nous est considéré comme un grain de blé tombé en terre. Voilà, après tomber d’un comme un grain de blé, si tu veux rester seul, reste seul, mais tu n’auras pas de fruits, mais si tu veux avoir beaucoup de fruits il n’y a aucun solution - il faut mourir au nom du Christ. Pas moins que ça.”
between our faith and the faith of the devil is that the faith of the devil stops just at the level of the brain while our faith, it reaches the level of the heart.69” (ibid)  

The Church of the Martyrs

The Coptic Church has long anchored itself to the rock of martyrdom. Its Coptic calendar constantly reminds the believers of the past examples set by martyrs. The first year of the Coptic calendar is pegged to the epoch of the enthronement of Emperor Diocletian in 284 AD70, who is known to have headed the last major wave of Roman anti-Christian persecution and who sent many martyrs to their deaths. The Era of Martyrs calendar preceded the formation of a separate Coptic Church by several decades. As it originated in Alexandria and is currently used exclusively by the Coptic Orthodox Church, the decision to retain it has suffused it with additional significance.
Admittedly this calendar had been used in the past, but not overall. By the time of the early Abbasid period, it had come to acquire its name, “Era of the Martyrs” (Papaconstantinou, “Historiography” 79). This term continues to be used in the Coptic Church’s chronology up to the present. Appropriately, the feast of Nayrûz, which is the Coptic New Year celebration, is known also as the Feast of the Martyrs (Anba Bishoy, La Fete du Nayrouz). In this way the Church is continuously reified as the ‘Church of the Martyrs’, a branding it has promoted since its inception (Vliet, “Modern Sons” 289), even though the term may have began as an external description. As Anba Bishoy states, “... it is one of the greatest churches in the whole world, the church called by all the historians ‘the Church of the Martyrs’” (Chretien et Vie de Temoignage).

“It is clear from the fact that the Copts used the Year of the Martyrs to start their calendar, it’s very clear what was in the mind and the heart of the Church when they made that decision. In the heart and the mind of the Church, to make that decision, there is a message here that Christianity without suffering is not Christianity. Christianity without a cross is not Christianity. Right? It’s a very clear message. If they have made the date of the reign of Diocletian their official date for their calendar, this is the message” (Bishop David, Coptic Calendar and Martyrdom).

“He’s [Christ] saying, “you’re going to follow me? Ok, you’re going to be in a lot of tribulations. Hard, it’s going to be hard. I don’t even have a place to lay my head”. Lying upon the earth. If you want to follow me, you’ve got to suffer. If you want to follow me, you’ve got to suffer. And another point, He said, if you want to follow me, pick up your cross, and back then, it wasn’t a nice little decoration we put on our chest or hang in our churches. It was a symbol of death and suffering. It was one of the harshest ways to die” (Wassef, Spiritual Day 1).

Martyrdoms are thus used extensively for the edification of the faithful. During prayer services, this is done by referring the flock to the hagiographical descriptions of the Coptic martyrs collected in the Synaxarion. Current events

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71 “... une de plus grandes églises dans le monde entier, l’église qui est appelé par tous les historiens ‘l’Église des Martyrs’”
72 Emphasis is my own.
unfortunately provide examples of martyrs that are celebrated in a bittersweet way (Kamel).

"How can I share? How can I have fellowship with Christ’s suffering and death? By bearing joyfully the persecutions and suffering for Christ. And **thanks be to God that He has richly blessed our Church and our people in suffering, especially in Egypt these days.** But don’t make any mistake. Don’t forget that every suffering, because we have the name of Christ upon us, is considering [sic] as suffering, as sharing the suffering and the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake” [Matthew 5:11] and look what St. Peter said to encourage us. He said “if you are bruised for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you”. This is Peter 1st [1 Peter] 4:14. In other translation, “if you are persecuted because you belong to Christ, so you are blessed because the spirit of glory descends upon you” or “rests upon you”. So, how much glory we have when we carry any kind of suffering or any kind of persecution for the name of Christ?” (Sleman, *Fellowship*)

The actions of the martyrs are extolled not only in the reading of the Synaxarion. They are also visible on ubiquitous icons and religious pictures and their actions are extolled in popular films and plays, both professionally and by Sunday schools. As Papaconstantinou so eloquently puts it,

"... the capacity of Egyptians to endure pain or persecution is one of many Greek clichés about Egypt, repeated throughout classical and late antiquity. It is not surprising that the Egyptians chose it for their own literary production as one of their defining characteristics, considering how well it fit the motif of persecution both as a legitimating device and as a founding myth for the community.” (“Historiography” 72–73)

Once the persecutions of Diocletian had ended and the physical threat to the existence of Christians had been removed, there came a need for a new type of martyrdom, a new method in order to witness to the Lord, the literal meaning of the word. The monastic movement soon filled this void and hagiographic tales

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73 Emphasis is my own.
74 “Someone is asking about icons, How come sometimes we have icons, which are not Coptic Orthodox. We don’t call them icons in this case. They are pictures. A lot of the time, we have pictures of some of the saints, but there are certain conditions to anoint an icon and consider it according to the Coptic rite and Coptic art. Most of these gestures are not icons. They are pictures, but of course, because you still are in the process of building your church, one day you will have a beautiful church, big church, with all icons, beautiful icons all around and then we can invite His Holiness to come and bless them with the holy Mayrūn [chrism] oil.” (Bishop David, *Spirituality and Depth of Our Rituals*)
of the lives of monks appeared alongside those who had died in the name of their faith. When becoming a monk, a Copt undergoes funerary ceremonies, signifying his symbolic death. This draws a parallel to the physical death of the martyr role models.

"The first thing I want to tell you is that Christianity in short in one word is life. In one word, Christianity is life. You can proclaim with your life more than what you proclaim with your words. Therefore, the messiah said the words that I am saying to you are what? Spirit and life. Good. A little bit of proclaiming Christ through one’s life is much more than proclaiming Him through words. Like Christ told us: The word that I am telling you is of the spirit and it is life”75 (Anba Bishoy, Chretien et Vie de Temoignage).

Monastic life had spread since the fourth century AD76 across every Christian religious denomination and was therefore not a facet of religious practice peculiar to the Copts. That having been said, the advent of Christian monasticism is almost universally attributed to St. Antony and his lengthy anchoretic stay in Egypt’s Wadi Natrun. The Egyptian origin of this eremitic lifestyle provides a source of pride and prestige for the Coptic Church derived from its continuing identification with Egypt.

Despite its many hardships monastic life provided the Church with a tool chest that would equip it to deal with centuries of being relegated to a subservient status vis-à-vis Chalcedonian Orthodox Christianity and the lengthier rule of Islam. In a manner similar to that of the individual ascetic gaining purity of soul by withdrawing from the world and its daily tedious battle with the temptations it offers, so is it with the monastic community.


76 An earlier date of 270 AD may be applicable in the case of Antony, though as a movement one would be hard put to speak of a monastic movement before Pachomius (Joest 159).
This effect is amplified when we consider that the perils that prey upon the individual’s complete dedication to the Lord emanate not only from the secular world with its mundane attractions, but rather also from the potential for religious doubt in light of Islam’s overarching secular power. The hegemony Islam exacted over the Coptic population both directly through gubernatorial authority and indirectly through the aggregate influence of Coptic converts to Islam and the appropriation of public space is not to be underestimated and lasted well into the modern period. Though there had been a gradual reversal of this effacement of the Coptic public presence during the time of the Khedivate, this has been subject to a creeping counterreformation. Nonetheless the former association in the Egyptian public eye of Christianity with past glory and Islam with current temporal power has in time been reversed. Admittedly this association remains at the popular level from my own personal observations and does not withstand close scrutiny, especially in light of Western and for that matter Russian secularism.

By withdrawing from the urban communities, monks were able to assert Coptic culture in a safe and closed environment. Statements of faith that could be misconstrued as deriving from missionary zeal by local Muslims would be taken at face value within a monastic community. Since the cost of participation in such a community was so high due to the harsh conditions, only the most stalwart could enter in order to rejoice in its spiritual benefits. Much as in the West, such dedicated anchorites took upon themselves the task of copying and translating texts they considered to be of value for the ages. In this way, the monasteries acted as centers of Coptic learning and as depositories of knowledge.
Since monks were also soon incorporated into the hierarchical structure of the Coptic Church, the monasteries became loci of alternate authority (Simonsohn 592–593, 604–605; Bergmann), a challenge not seen as problematic by the secular rulers due to its non-material nature. Incorporation of competitors into the hierarchy of the Coptic Church remains an important tool, as can be seen in the ordination of the Lay Council into the Diaconate once the institution was revivified by Sadat in 1973 (Khawaga 152).

Since Copts reside mostly in Egypt, where the Muslim majority controls the public sphere, their choices are not made in a vacuum. An increasing number of violent attacks on Copts have revived the notion of a complete martyrdom. Although Copts killed while attending their church did not choose to die in a manner identical to the ancient martyrs but were rather chosen, they are still perceived as martyrs for having professed their faith openly in such tense and dire circumstances.

Because of the overlapping semantic fields, Coptic and Muslim notions of *šahāda*, do interplay with each other, though the extent of this would require research going far beyond the scope of this work. It is notable that Islam has relinquished the Middle Ages concept of the *fātiḥ* or *ghāzi*, a victorious holy warrior whose life may or may not be lost in favor of the term *mustashhid*, he who strives to be a *šahīd*, actively seeking out death.

For Copts, both celibacy and bare nutrition provide examples of a more graded form of martyrdom. Since it is extremely difficult to deny this world completely, the general attitude of the Church remains that the extent of one’s testimony should be set by one’s personal capacity (Thorbjørnsrud 121, 207). Failure to measure up is not seen as a shortcoming in others (ibid, 42). Only an
unwillingness to attempt is problematized and censured. A credible performance in an attempt to reach an unreachable ideal is at the heart of the Coptic cosmology (Gruber, “The Monastery as the Nexus” 68). It must however come from the heart and not be only for show (Sorial). This has led to a large number of steps developed over time to accommodate attainable goals. “It is most important that the end of something will be better than its beginning” (Anba Bishoy, *De l'Echec a l'Espoir*). The individual Copt is given a path to gradually tame his or her worldliness by denying it earthly gratification through self-control (Thorbjørnsrud 5). In this context, Prov. 16:32 is quoted often by Copts (ibid, 431; cf. Anba Bishoy, *l’Insulte*). Gradual repentance is mirrored by gradual falling into sin (Messeh, *So You Want to Be Like Jesus*).

Success in this venture allows the believer to rise above earthly temptations, framed as Satan’s challenge. In this way, pain and suffering are seen not as an end or as a means of punishment for past deeds, but rather as an unfortunate side effect of striving toward the joy of eternal life for the spirit (Thorbjørnsrud 212). To use an analogy, suffering in this world is like the muscle aches of a marathon runner, a necessary evil to gain the happiness of having achieved one’s lofty goal. Therefore, suffering ought not to be avoided but rather sought out in order to achieve the joy of surmounting pain (Sleman, *Fellowship*; Thorbjørnsrud 436). A partial martyrdom is achieved through fasting, chastity and humility. These may also be seen as practice for martyrdom (Shenouda III, *Fasting* 23). Witnessing to God remains a core responsibility for Copts (Anba Bishoy, *Le Jeunes et la Vie de Purete* 5)

77 “Le plus important c’est que mieux va la fin d’une chose que son commencement.”
Fasting is extremely important for Copts:

"We have shown in this testament our link as I said before this, the fast and prayer and charity that I explained once before this. Prayer is my link to our Lord, the fast is my link to myself and charity is my link to others. The Church or the Holy Book and our Lord places us so that we, as I interact with our Lord and I interact with myself and I interact with others, and every time he says, nevertheless, be careful with all that and we will show that all these actions together are presented to God who sees what is hidden. It is presented to God who sees what is hidden"78 (Georgy, Take Heed When You Fast).

Prayer links the believer to God, fasting to himself and charity to others, though all three make you think of God, yourself and others (ibid; Sorial). In this way fasting marks the main distinction today between them and other groups (Thorbjørnsrud 213). It is not the fasting itself that separates Copts from non-Copts, but rather the qualities of the fast. Fasting as such is seen as a universal tool for salvation granted to all humanity since the time of Adam (Shenouda III, Fasting 14–15). Berit Thorbjørnsrud aptly phrases this by stating, “to be a Copt is to Fast” (238).

As in the case of martyrdom, fasting has many gradations. The ideal, extolled in tales of the ancient desert fathers, involves the nearly complete renunciation of any form of sustenance for what are generally perceived to be superhuman lengths of time. Actual fasting practices are somewhat less enterprising among the laity. The goal is set quite high, that is to try to be a saint. Real practice depends on one’s personal capacity to reject food and it is understood that different people have differing capabilities in this respect. Therefore training is required in order to achieve the saintly goal (Tanious).

Fasting more than one is capable at any given point in time is viewed negatively, as failure to adhere cancels the value of one’s actions while showing a lack of humility that belittles the achievements of the desert fathers (Shenouda III, *Fasting* 22). The main focus is to set achievable goals rather than setting yourself up for a fall (Bishop David, *How to Achieve Goals*).

In a similar vein, the prominent and public Islamic fast of Ramadan is not seen by Copts as a true fast tantamount to a Coptic fast (Thorbjørnsrud 213, 244–245). The fanfare of breaking the fast and the gluttony of some are seen as representing the entirety of Egyptian Muslims (ibid, 245). Ironically, those Muslims who break the fast quietly and with a light meal are just as invisible in the public space as their Coptic co-nationals. The paramount status of fasting is reflected in the framing of original sin as a breaking of a fast directed by God (ibid, 80).

“Fasting is the earliest commandment known to mankind, for God commanded our ancestor Adam to refrain from eating a certain fruit from a certain tree (Gen. 2:16,17) but allowed him to eat from the rest” (Shenouda III, *Fasting* 9).

Ideally Copts are expected to fast over two hundred days a year, though it is permitted to fast more for individual edification so long as this is done in coordination with one’s father confessor. Fasting is not allowed during feast days and on the fifty days following Easter. If a Copt wishes to receive the Eucharist or one of the other sacraments, a complete fast of both food and water is obligatory from midnight until after mass on the ninth hour of the day\(^79\) (ibid, 27). This is known as *ṣiyām inqiṭā‘ī*.

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\(^79\) Equivalent to 3 PM.
Many Copts practice “fasting with oil” (ṣiyām bizayt) that is based on a vegan diet with beans as the main staple (Thorbjørnsrud 218). This is done either for health reasons or because a total fast is too difficult for them and is not viewed negatively.

Believers are encouraged to extend the total fast during Lent and especially during Passion Week ending it according to their individual ability (Shenouda III, *Fasting* 26). The fast prior to St. Mary’s Assumption to heaven, celebrated in August is also very widely practiced (Gruber, “The Monastery as the Nexus” 79).

While fasting is ordained by the Church as an exercise in renouncing the body and the temporary temptations of this world in order to focus on the eternal hereafter, it also has some other consequences, especially for Copts who have migrated outside of Egypt. From a purely financial perspective, a vegan diet reduces food costs for families. Though this effect is only marginal, it can be significant, especially for new migrants trying to hold their footing.

From a health viewpoint, decreasing consumption of red meat and substituting it with legumes and other sources of protein reduces mortality significantly (Pan et al.), a health implication of which the Coptic Church is fully aware (cf. Anba Bishoy, *Preparation au Careme*). In Egypt the cost of meat would be prohibitive regardless of fasting rules. In the lands of migration, the increase in income would not be accompanied by an increased consumption of meat leading to related diseases for observant Copts.

Learning to suppress one’s desire for food cultivates an attitude of investing in the future at the expense of the present. This pattern of behavior

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80 This is not to be confused with her Dormition, celebrated in January.
comforts migrants through the pains of adjustment to a new land. It also provides them with the tools to flourish by investing, whether in commercial enterprises or in their children’s education. Fasting is thus conducive to worldly success.

**Chastity**

Fasting is not restricted to food. As in other religious traditions, alimentary fasting is accompanied by sexual fasting. Like abstinence from meat, abstinence from the flesh is meant to strengthen the ability to control oneself. Control of the corporeal self is considered important even when this comes to bodily fluids such as the flow of menstrual blood, which prohibits one from receiving the Eucharist (Thorbjøørnsrud 365). “We must call the Christian youth to holiness and chastity, Indeed, the life of purity is the best position in order to safeguard the youth before and during marriage” (Anba Bishoy, *Les Jeunes et la Vie de Pureté* 8). As in the case of food, complete abstinence remains the ideal. The monk and the nun, who remain absolutely celibate, embody this exhorted ideal on a daily basis. Coptic values in this regard stick stringently to the letter of the law stated by Saint Paul in 1 Cor. 7:1-15. This is achieved not only through use of the symbol of Christ as a role model, but also by way of the more accessible St. Mary, who while not innately divine, becomes a tabernacle for the divine presence as the *theotokos*, the bearer of God (Messeh, *Saint Mary*).

81 Breast milk does not have this effect (Thorbjøørnsrud 367)
82 “Nous devons appeler la jeunesse chrétien à la sainteté et la chasteté. En effet, la vie de pureté est la meilleur voix pour préserver la jeunesse avant et pendant la vie conjugale”.
83 Priests may marry in the Coptic Orthodox faith. “In the first ecumenical council in 325 A.D. in the city of Nicaea attended by 318 bishops from all churches in the whole world. The gathered and decided that priests should be married, while bishops should be unmarried. Later, the Catholic Church changed that I think a lot of problems are happening because of this decision, but we think that the priests could be married, because they get into a lot of family problems, and if they are married, they will understand the family life better than someone who did not experience it” (Bishop David, *Spirituality and Depth of Our Rituals*).
Whereas carnal relations are strictly disallowed before and outside matrimony, they are permitted within its boundaries, though mainly for procreative reasons. “Sex associates us with creation... we participate with God in the continuation of the human race”84 (Anba Bishoy, Les Jeunes et la Vie de Pureté 1). As divorce is not allowed in the Coptic Church and marriage may only be dissolved in the direst circumstances and even then while bestowing significant social stigma, rules requiring sexual fasting within marriage are not strictly enforced for the purpose of maintaining a happy home. It should be noted in this regard that menstruation inhibits intercourse in light of the biblical law.

While the Church is today more aware of the psychological aspects of sexuality and encourages especially young couples to enjoy themselves, excess is not encouraged. Still, it remains considerate of the stresses places upon the migrants, especially those who are younger.

"[there is] no doubt that God considers the circumstances in which His children live. The age of marriage increases constantly. Life’s conditions are increasingly difficult. The old traditions of the ring and the dowry must increase in depth. All this makes a life of purity more difficult for young people, notably with the influence of the media, trips abroad and constant excitation. Therefore, the servant [of God] is called upon to not let the young sink into despair, but on the contrary, to give them hope that comes from God because it is not in a spirit of timidity that God has given to us. On the contrary, His spirit fills us with the power of love and wisdom85” (ibid)

In regard to homosexuality, the official Church sees it negatively not only because it exists by its nature outside of marriage like adultery, but also because

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84 "Le sexe nous associe à la création... nous participons avec Dieu à la continuité de genre humain."
85 “Nul doute que Dieu tient compte des circonstances dans lequel vivent ses enfants. L’âge de mariage augmente sans cesse. Les conditions de vie sont de plus en plus difficiles. Les traditions anciens de la bague et du trosseau doivent évoluer en profondeur. Tous cela rend la vie de pureté plus difficile pour les jeunes. Notamment avec l’influence des media, les voyages a l’étranger et l’excitation permanente. Pour cela, il convient au servent de ne pas laisser les jeunes sombrer dans le desespoir, mais au contraire, de leur donner l’esperance qui vient de Dieu car c’est ne pas en esprit de timidite que Dieu nous a donner. Au contraire, son esprit nous remplit des forces d’amour et de sagesse.”
it shows lack of self-control (Shenouda III, *Homosexuality* 18; Salib, *Today’s Challenges*). The Church therefore resists secular same-sex marriage legislation even though such legislation does not affect the sacrament of marriage much as a secular divorce does not grant an ecclesiastical one (Salib, *Today’s Challenges*).

The desexualization of Coptic space is contrasted to the perception of Islamic space. Once more, as with fasting, the distinction is set in terms of moral features (Thorbjørnsrud 72). Whereas Copts may only take a single spouse during their lifetime, barring tragic circumstances, Muslims are seen as marrying and divorcing at will with no self-control. Muslims may take up to four wives at a time while Copts are restricted to monogamy. Even though practically speaking, most Muslims marry once and do not hurry to dissolve the marriage, what is important here is the perception of Muslim marital ties in the eyes of Copts meant for their own identity construction.

Depiction of the nature of heaven is also a distinct boundary marker. While the Coptic heaven leaves no space for sexual desire, as temptation is no longer necessary to try humanity, Muslim heaven is often denounced by Copts in casual conversation as depraved, highlighting popular tales of 72 brown-eyed virgins.

The boundary lines between Copts and Muslims are clear and well-trodden, yet as one exits Egyptian public space, actual practical differences shrink. Chaste subdued clothing covering most of the skin is common among Egyptians of all creeds. While it is common for the two groups to foster misconceptions concerning the actual sexual liberty taken by the others, both religions’ dress codes would be considered conservative in a Western milieu. While the Church stresses the importance of one’s own accountability and
removes some of the onus from other people’s clothing and dressing habits, those Coptic migrants whom I have met in my observations ostensibly accept a subdued dress style, even while taking in Western designs.

**Humility**

Despite their strong and confident position regarding appropriate levels of clothing and fasting, Copts’ voices are not heard as loudly as those of other conservatives living in the countries on which I focused outside of Egypt. At first, I had believed that the tendency to avoid attracting attention to their presence was a result of caution cultivated by centuries of life next to the challenging presence of a dominant Islam. This may well be what brought about this type of behavior in the first place.

“Chatter. Blablabla blablabla. Hmm? He has said: “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin” [Proverbs 10:19]. Gossip is full of offenses, not to mention which, by this chatter here. We always, we judge others. Satan places us in judgment. He places us sometimes in the words of his and sometimes in denigration. So, people ought to conduct themselves in silence. One should speak as little as possible for the people. Good. Have the time to speak with the Lord and to read the Holy Bible. When we read the Bible, we listen to the Lord in silence and in meditation, and we will never hunger. We shall do unto people as we ought to do, and therefore we should during this period of Lent, we have the habit of speaking less, of having the silence and the meditation in order to consume the Word of God. We do not have the time to talk. We partake of the Word of God, which is more important. For it is said: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” [Matthew 4:4]”86 (Abouna Bichoï, *Le Carême*).
Regardless of its point of origin, such behavior has taken on an aspect of general humility. Those who bare their cross are to be hailed for doing so, but those who do so in silence are to be commended further still. They may also expect to receive more by expecting and being satisfied with less (Anba Bishoy, *Fidele en Peu de Choses*). It is considered highly inappropriate to brag about fasting or other nominally positive behaviors as this is seen to be counterproductive. “They will know you by your works”, so “be serious in your spiritual life. People see you as serious. Seriousness and spiritual life is contagious” (Wassef, *Q and A After Ordination*).

“... remember that Pharisee who stood before God and said ‘I thank you God because I am not like other men, the adulterers, the killers’, and he started cursing everybody else. ‘I fast twice a week and I give to the tithe and I and I, I do all this and I pray. I’m not like everybody else’, while the tax collector stood before God humbly, did not lift up his head towards God and said: ‘God, forgive me, I am a sinner. Forgive me, a sinner’ and that went home *mubarraran* [justifiably]. God forgave him.” (Said)

Thorbjørnsrud defines this quality as public invisibility. While the Muslim fast ends with very public celebration of the *iftaar* meals, all Coptic feasts and fasts excluding Easter and Christmas remain publicly unacknowledged by non-Copts. The importance of carrying one's cross happily and calmly is that others may see you and want to be like you, especially your own children (Bishop Youssef, *Challenges of the Present Era Q&A*). “There are many who practice fasting without wisdom, they have suffered physically and spiritually. Many also have practiced silence without wisdom... silence for them was not a virtue87” (Anba Bishoy, *Trois Vertus*)

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87 “Nombreux sont ceux qui ont pratiqué les jeûnes sans sagesse, ceux ont souffert physiquement et spirituellement. Nombreux aussi sont également ceux qui ont pratiqué le silence sans sagesse... le silence pour eux n’était pas une vertu.”
In today’s climate of heated discussion concerning migrants and their impact on their new environment, wallflower migrants experience an easier transition. Barring events such as the papal visit to the Netherlands in 2011 or the protests in Dam Square following some of the more violent attacks in Egypt, Copts would not be noticed at all in that country. During my first interview with a Coptic priest in Amsterdam, I had asked why the Church did not request the city to remove offensive graffiti from the wall of the church’s cultural center. The response was that they had considered this, but were advised by Coptic locals that graffiti is part of Dutch culture and popular art so its removal may be deemed offensive. It should be noted that the graffiti was not very aesthetic and consisted mostly of tags. It was however not directed at the owners of the building, nor were the markings on the church itself.

At a time when other migrant groups are becoming increasingly visible in the public spaces of the countries in which they live and staking a claim on the right to be seen and heard, Copts are not embracing their newfound freedom to express themselves. The sole exception to this public invisibility is the noticeability of the priests. While doing fieldwork in New Jersey, two separate priests told amusing stories about being approached concerning their unusual clothing. Although the encounters had been experienced initially as potentially threatening, a quick explanation defused the tension. The stories were told in response to my query regarding confusion between them and Muslims from Egypt.

Only in the United States and in France did Copts with whom I spoke relate a concern about being mistaken for Muslims and displayed minor Christian symbols. Being identified as Middle Easterners necessitates
identification as a Christian because the majority from the region is Muslim, a problematized social category in the United States in the aftermath of the War on Terror.

"Number one, there is nothing to be ashamed of, especially in this country, to say, “I'm Christian.” I think it’s, it's usual, it's normal here to say “ I am Christian”, which is my identity, you know, and especially these days when everybody may know that we belong to the Middle East and majority are not Christian there, and you have to pronounce that, you have to announce your faith..." (Armanious).

In the Netherlands, this concern may be present, though it was not voiced. This may be due to better relations with the Muslim Egyptian migrant community or because of the small number of Copts in the Netherlands and their wide geographic distribution in the country (Armanious). Like other non-Western migrants, most Copts have chosen to reside in the Dutch urban centers where the non-Western migrant population has grown exponentially since the 1970s (Bontje and Latten 445). In the Netherlands’ four largest cities, the foreign-born population and their children comprise approximately half the population having supplanted the native youth that have chosen to relocate to suburban communities (ibid, 448–449). Copts are thus integrating into communities that are not necessarily Dutch, but rather more characterized by an international array of fellow migrants. A large proportion of these, though by no means a majority, arrive from Muslim majority countries.

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88 Emphasis is my own.
89 In France, the official Coptic communities are centered mostly around greater Paris and in the United States, their numbers are significantly greater while anti-Muslim sentiment is more noticeable. About half of the Netherlands’ Copts, estimated at 1200 families, attend the Amsterdam church (Fr. Arsenious).
Baptism

Much as with fasting and chastity, Copts use baptism as a boundary marker (Turner; Harrington 5). This is a dual boundary as baptism itself involves handling a liminal space, as well as differentiating between Copts and non-Copts. In fact non-Coptic Christians wishing to become Copts must be rebaptized as though they had never been through the rite (Nispen tot Sevener 34; Rubenson, “Tradition and Renewal” 46; Shenouda III, *Comparative Theology* 28–29). Baptism is framed as a death and rebirth, symbolizing martyrdom.

“What else? Intū ‘ārfin [you know] ‘This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased’ was repeated another time. Emtā? Fi yawm al-‘imād. Dī nafs al-kilma illi ālā al-ab fi yawm eyh? Fi yawm al-‘imād [when? On the day of baptism. This is the same word that the Father said on which day? On the day of baptism] In the day of baptism. In the day of baptism. And what’s baptism? Baptism is actually death, ‘ašān kidā lammā gāyū ya’udū yūhannā waālū lahu, yā rabb, ihnā ‘āyizīn wāhid yawlis ‘an yaminak wāhid yaglis ‘an yasārak. Āl lahum, ātasābighān? anna tašābighā biš-sābgh al-latī asābighu anā bihā. Wabilingilīzī, [Therefore when the came to visit John and they told him, oh master, we want to sit one on your right and one on your left. He told them, have you two been baptized? You two will be baptized with the baptism that I myself have been baptized. And in English,] Can you be baptized with the same baptism? So here [is] the word baptism. Ṭāyīb, idh al-sābgh kān biytkallam ‘anhā al-masih illi huwa eyh? Huwa al-mawt ‘alā al-ṣalīb. Huwa al-mawt ‘alā al-ṣalīb. [Good, then the baptism of which the messiah spoke, what is it? It is the death upon the cross. It is the death upon the cross.] That is the baptism. That is the baptism. (Bishop Youssef, *Transfiguration*).

“Number one, I would like that each one know that you are, as a Christian, you are already buried with Christ in baptism. You are already buried with Him. So what we are celebrating this week? Not only his death, but our death with Him. In Colossians, chapter 2, verse 11, verse 12: “Buried with Him in baptism in which you also were raised with Him through faith and the working of God who raised Him from the dead.” We are buried with Him, so I wish you would have this feeling and this sense and this conviction that you are buried with Christ. You died with Him. You are buried with Him in the baptism” (Sleman, *Fellowship*).

"We died with Christ on the day of our baptism, because everybody and all the catechists... we want one thing. It is to be, to die with Christ, to be buried with Christ, to rise again with Christ... and not only on the day of our baptism...

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90This may be seen in the baptismal choices of other migrant groups such as Antiochian Orthodox, Maronites and Melkites (McKay).
but we die with Him every day. Each day and all the days\textsuperscript{91} (Anba Bishoy, \textit{Le Chretien et la Vie de Temoignage (Ser_076)}).

A person may not participate in the sacraments of the Church if he or she has not been baptized, just as for example the uncircumcised among the Jews were not permitted to consume the sacrificial Passover lamb (Bishop Ruweis, \textit{The Grace of Baptism}). Baptism is the first sacrament a Copt will go through in life and as such sets a precedent for things to come accordingly. It is performed on the 40\textsuperscript{th} day for boys and on the 80\textsuperscript{th} for girls (Salib, \textit{Baptism}). While it has replaced circumcision as an infant’s rite of entry into the community of believers already in early Christianity, Copts have conservatively chosen to do both, even though circumcision is given different non-moral health grounds (ibid).

Other Christian denominations see baptism as largely symbolic, sprinkling holy water on the child or only partially placing them in the font, the increasingly popular evangelical Protestant churches being the exception with their focus on adult immersion (Klaver). For Copts, baptism is a crucial ceremony and great emphasis is placed on its correct execution. The body of the child is sealed using the holy chrism by making 36 crosses on his or her skin. The baptism itself involves a complete inundation of the thoroughly disrobed baby. It is repeated thrice, representing the three days of Christ’s death until the resurrection thus signifying the rebirth of the child as a Coptic Christian (Salib, \textit{Baptism}).

"Why do we baptize children and even adults in a deep baptistery [sic]? Why? Because it is a day of burial with Christ and resurrection with Christ. You

\textsuperscript{91} "Nous sommes morts avec le Christ le jour de notre baptême, parce que tout le monde et tout les catechistes... on souhaite une seule chose. Ce d'être, de mourir avec le Christ, d'être enterré avec le Christ, ressusciter avec le Christ... et non seulement le jour de notre baptême... mais nous mourons avec Lui tous les jours. Chaque jour et tous les jours"
are already buried, completely dead for Christ and with Him on the day of your baptism\textsuperscript{92} (Anba Bishoy, \textit{Chretien et Vie de Temoignage}).

As with all the sacraments, a fast is requisite in preparation for the ceremony, though the child’s godmother, who in most cases is also his birthmother, does this in his stead. The sacrament of baptism (\textit{sirr al-
ma’ümūdiyyah}) is immediately followed by the sacrament of confirmation (\textit{sirr al-
mayrûn}). Once again, the child’s mother speaks in his or her name.

By making sure the baby is soundly embedded within the community and spiritually protected in such an intricate and complete ceremony, the Church declares the importance of boundary maintenance. This is done to the extent that it differentiates between Copts and other Christians. In other words, the actions of Copts are not strict for the purpose of strictness, but rather strict because the Coptic Church cannot be less orthodox in its practice than the other churches, as it will lose its unique nature (Shenouda III, \textit{Comparative Theology} 13).

\textbf{Implications of a Coptic Moral Ethic}

The Coptic moral ethic is well suited for the Church’s transformation into a global church. It provides entry conditions for salvation (Georgy, \textit{Follow God}). As a moral community, Copts have a stronger reason to retain their distinct identity even when they do not perceive themselves to be in physical danger. Thus in France, members are exhorted to “tell me not, “I am a Christian by birth”. Do you have the fruits or do you perform the acts that prove that you are a true Christian?” (Anba Bishoy, \textit{Le Chretien et la Vie de Temoignage (Ser_079)}).

\textsuperscript{92}“Pourquoi on baptise les enfants et même les adultes dans un baptistère profond? Pourquoi? Parce que c’est un jour d’enterrement avec le Christ et resurrection avec le Christ. Tu es deja enterré, complètement mort pour le Christ et avec Lui le jour de ton baptême.”
Moral boundaries serve not only as a tool to limit the amount of migrant Copts assimilating into their new countries’ identities and away from the Church. They also avoid challenging the new national identity while simultaneously attracting new followers, more often than not from among the new spouses of Coptic migrants. One of the most blatant results of a shift towards a more morally based identity is the shift away from what is labeled ‘superstition’. While the Church prescribes what is considered ‘moral’ based on textual authoritative resources, folk practitioners pass most ‘ethnic’ practices verbally, based on unwritten cultural memory, assumed either correctly or not, to hark back to time immemorial. This attempt at disempowering folk practitioners to the advantage of more official religious representatives began in Egypt in the nineteenth century in both the Muslim and Coptic communities at the hands of Muhammad Abduh and Pope Kyrillos IV respectively (Sedra, From Mission to Modernity 10).

**Ethnic Elements of Coptic Identity**

**Raising the Pharaohs**

The very same orientalists who had looked so unfavorably on the aboriginal Christians would later provide the grounding for the local separatist agenda of the persecution narrative. At first Pharaonism was to appear as part and parcel of the newly forming Egyptian nationalism. Harking back to a glorious and mythical past that was both pre-Islamic and pre-Christian, Pharaonism united all Egyptians regardless of their religious denomination. It capitalized on the allure of the newly established field of study of Egyptology. This allure was embodied as part of the Egyptian landscape in the undeniably impressive
colossal landmarks of the Sphinx and the Pyramids. Many orators inveighed against British intervention in the name of Egyptian uniqueness going back to ancient times. This can be seen most notably in Taha Hussein's invective against Arab influences on Egyptian culture as well as by Naguib Mahfuz's early Pharaonic historical novels (Reid 294).

Although many of its proponents were Muslims, its influence among them waned, to be replaced by Nasserist Pan-Arabism and Islamism. These social and religious movements afforded no space for Egyptian particularism or historical paganism. Both are outward looking, focusing on the Muslim Umma, that is, the sum of fellow Muslims constituted mostly of non-Egyptians; and on Mecca and/or Jerusalem. The policies these ideologies enjoined have been heavily focused on foreign affairs in the name of Arab or Muslim brotherhood and at the expense of Egyptian brotherhood. It is no coincidence that rioters associated with the Muslim Brotherhood raided museums, destroying Pharaonic archaeological artifacts, as they associate these facilities with the State and not with their historical heritage (Aref). While lucre plays a significant part in some of these museum raids, it fails to explain rampant vandalism.

For Copts, Pharaonism was not to be replaced by an alternate ideology and although not universally accepted, it retains its hold on Coptic identity up to the present (Vliet, "Modern Sons" 283–284). During pre-modern times, Copts identified with the ancient Israelites of the biblical narrative of the book of Exodus rather than with the Pharaonic residents of Egypt. Coptic bishops rallied against the pagan shrines of old, even going as far as destroying idols and establishing churches in derelict temples.
In stark contrast, Pharaonism reinterpreted the past, highlighting the positive aspects of pre-Christian Egypt. Some even go as far as identifying parallels between the ancient Egyptian religion and Christianity as reflecting a predisposition toward acceptance of Christianity (Sadek; Kamil xix; Reid 281–282). Others simply label such remnants as ‘survivals’ (Naguib, “Survivals”). The unofficial appellation ‘Copt’ or its earlier French variant ‘copte’, derives from an Arabic mispronunciation (qibti) of the Greek term for Egypt, Αιγύπτιος. The Copts now embraced this as a self-description, linking them directly to the land. In 1908 Marcus Simaika, with the blessing of Pope Kyrillos V, curated the initial collection for the Coptic Museum. This “reflected a dramatic shift in the way the Copts viewed their past and defined their modern identity” (Reid 258).

“Copts in search of a golden age to anchor their modern identity could look either to their spiritual leaders of Roman-Byzantine times – an era of persecution, however – or to ancient Egypt. In nineteenth-century Greece, the clergy and common people identified more readily with Orthodox and Byzantine memories than with the distant classical past, while lay intellectuals and merchants often joined western and northern Europeans in revering ancient Greece. Among Copts too, a church-centered vision was more congenial to the clergy and common folk, while laymen influenced by Western ideas often felt the allure of the pharaohs.

One contrast with modern Greece was that Byzantine enthusiasts can evoke the power and glory of Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Justinian, and Basil the Bulgar-Slayer, but the anti-Byzantine Copts never ruled Egypt and had only martyrs or ascetics like Saint Antony and Saint Pachomius to celebrate... Pharaonic history, in contrast, offers all the ancestral power and glory one could wish for.” (ibid, 280–281)

Further embracing the supposedly exclusive relationship Copts shared with the ancient Egyptians in contrast to the allegedly alien “Arabs” was the decisive role of Coptic in the translation of the Rosetta Stone. Although it is a matter of long standing academic debate when and where Coptic ceased to be a living language, it is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that by the time of
Napoleon's invasion of Egypt this was an uncontestable truism (Reid 259; Kamil 250). Thus the linguistic link to antiquity had largely atrophied to a thin thread.

Modern attempts to revive the Coptic language from its fossilized state have met with little success so far, but even if it were to become an organic mode of communication once more, it would be the same only by name. Unlike the case with gradual and organic shift that can be seen in long-standing living languages, linguistic necromancers are tasked with artificially bridging the gap of centuries of communal trial and error. Any such attempt creates an unnatural chasm filled by conjecture and often containing more cement than original fragments. A case in point being the “revival” of Modern Hebrew or the earlier “revival” of Modern Greek.

Copts have lived in Egypt for many centuries isolated to a great extent from other Christian denominations. They have also been the sole major Christian group living in Egypt. As such, the concept of being a Christian Egyptian has become fused with that of being Coptic Orthodox. While Copts attach a high value to loyalty to the land of Egypt, this is very much in the romantic Blut und Boden style. This is in line with the fact that a slight majority of Copts resides in the more rural Upper Egypt (Vogt 45). Though not exclusively endogamous in principle, as illustrated above, marriage within the Coptic community is encouraged and is the general rule. One may be led to assume that the Copts may also be described as an ethnic group, in line with other ethnic churches such as the Bulgarian Orthodox or Armenian Orthodox. While it is true that this path had been potentially reasonable for Copts in the past, it is clear that at this juncture, the Church has successfully stunted any such development. Nonetheless, Coptic
awareness of themselves as separate from Arab Egyptians could be interpreted as ethnic identity (Thorbjørnsrud 74).

A separate Coptic nationalism had not always been simply a tool in the hands of anti-Coptic propaganda. In reaction to the threatening rhetoric and violent actions of the Muslim Brotherhood, a small group of Coptic activists founded the underground ‘Coptic Nation’ movement in the late 1940s, meant to establish a separate state. This gained no traction among most Copts, though the idea has been revived by marginal and controversial elements over the years, especially outside of Egypt, as in the case of Maurice Sadiq.

The typical Copt does however espouse a notion of himself as somehow different from Muslim Egyptians, especially in his link to the Pharaonic past (Vogt 48), a metonymy for authentic Egyptianness (Naguib, “The Era of Martyrs” 126). The deciphering of the Rosetta Stone using Coptic and statements by the celebrated Egyptologist Gaston Maspero in 1908 cultivated this claim to the cultural authenticity of the descendants of the Pharaohs.

Those who are proud of the unique and special status of Egypt as a major source of world heritage have more to rely on than just pyramids and mummies. They also stress the importance of Egypt in and for global Christianity, most notably for the sojourn of the Holy Family through Egypt. Pope Tawadros II has stressed the notion of Egypt as a Holy Land due to this long visit. Jesus is described as preaching in Egyptian, that is, the contemporary form of Coptic (ibid, 127). The Prophet Isaiah provides a biblical leg for the notion of a chosen people of Egypt stating, “Blessed is Egypt my people” (Isaiah 19:25).

The Ottoman administrative tool of the ‘millet’ aided in the crystallization of ethnic boundaries between the Christian and Muslim communities in Egypt,
but khedival reforms granting Copts equal status as citizens effectively pushed such distinctions below the surface. Once the walls erected by decree between Copts and Muslims came down, internal reforms were needed in order to establish what it meant to belong to the Coptic community.

“Actually, Islam in Egypt is one of the, one of the things that maybe ya’ni [that is], maybe I’m wrong, but that has helped preserve our Church, that we have so tightly held on to what we know and what we believe- our rights, our rituals. All these things, because of the pressure. If I’m trying to take away his ring from him, he’s going to pull his hand away, but if I’m not, he, maybe, you know, maybe like this, and I could just slowly take it off without him noticing, but if I’m pulling, he’s going to hold onto it more, ok? So, but I want to tell you. We face the same thing here, but we don’t see it, and it comes in many forms. It comes in the form of music. It comes in the form of all the things that our society tells us to do that is ok. This is what’s happening, you know. The devil’s saying: “No problem”’. Slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, because he’s getting smart. He knows that if he grabs quickly, we’re going to pull away and we’re going to run to God, so what does he do? He comes nice, in different forms, you know, and looks nice and everything, and he says, you know what? Come here and I’ll be your friend. Huwa biyājabāb ‘alaynā kidā [He pats us on the back like this]. “Oh no, this is good. What’s wrong with this? What’s wrong with that?” and then slowly, you find yourself, just like you’re in the middle of an ocean, and you see the shoreline, ok, and you turn around, and all of a sudden, you’re out 3,4,5 miles and you can’t even see the shore anymore, ok? (Wassef, Q and A After Ordination)

Such reforms brought about the need to establish a consensus about what counts as irrelevant superstition lacking Church backing (Thorbjørnsrud 371). The flock does not always accept such reforms and negotiates them at length with the clergy, often denying any disagreement (ibid, 440). In certain matters, different priests hold varying views, making it difficult to enforce a single doctrine in more controversial areas as authority has been shifting from the priests to the believers to a certain extent (ibid, 441). Belief in the evil eye, sorcery (ibid, 369–404), and the centrality of quotidian miracles (Njerrefinnestad) are examples of such controversial fields.

[Reading out a parishioner’s question] ““Miracles make us all more spiritual and are amazing to hear. Have you heard or seen any new miracles that you can share with us tonight?”
I will tell you something about miracles. It was said about St. John the Baptist that he is the greatest man born of women [sic], right? And it was also said about him that St. John never performed one single miracle, ok? So Miracles is [sic] not a measure of spirituality or holiness.

We hear all the time about miracles and apparitions of saints [stops]. To many people [stops]. But I want us ... not to base out faith upon such things because we want to be spiritually oriented. These things should not shake our faith. Their existence or their absence. Because, as we know, when the antichrist will come in the end and he will do so [sic] great miracles with the power of the devil. If the devil sees that we like miracles and we follow them, he can do a lot of things to deceive us. So let us be strong in the love of our Lord Jesus, not to follow such things, but miracles, of course, do happen. They show the power of God and the love of the saints to us” (Bishop David, *Spirituality and Depth of Our Rituals*).

While the Church does not necessarily deny them, they are being marginalized as uneducated beliefs detracting from the central endeavor. In contrast, the Church accepts possession as real and acceptable. The middle class is more prone to accept the Church’s doctrine as is, shedding folk practices inconsistent with doctrine as uneducated behavior (Thorbjørnsrud 136). Among migrants, most Copts tend to come from the middle class (Stene, “Into the Lands of Immigration” 255), making religious practice outside of Egypt more in line with what the Coptic Church would have for all Copts.

Despite the many challenges, matters progressed well for members of the Coptic elite. Although accounts tend to be biased, it is clear that Copts played a major economic role in monarchical Egypt, owning extensive property and being highly overrepresented in many fields. While they had played an important and perhaps even crucial part in the historical events of the 1919 popular revolution, they had played no such part in the 1952 officers revolt. In fact, the military organization that brought about the revolution included only a single token Copt (Ibrahim et al. 15).

Nasser rose to power on the bayonets of the army rather than the votes of the people or the financial backing of an urban middle class. His ideology was a
populist form of Socialism. He nationalized property owned by foreign investors (1956) and wealthy Egyptians (1961); overtaxed the middle and upper classes; engaged in lengthy and grandiose military campaigns with Israel (1954-1956; 1967-1970), North Yemen, Saudi Arabia (1962-1967), France and Britain (1956); Expanded Egypt’s borders to include non-contiguous Syria (1958-1961); and created a policy that assured a public sector workplace for any Egyptian holding a university degree regardless of its relevance, public sector needs or a method by which to limit registration and graduation. With the arguable exception of the Aswan High Dam and its mixed legacy especially in regard to soil salinity and the dam’s impact on Egypt’s drinking water, Nasser left Egypt upon his death with almost double the population and an economy in shambles from his attempt at building a new Egyptian empire.

As much as other Egyptians had suffered the consequences of his actions, Copts bore more than their fair share of it, leading to the start of Coptic migration away from Egypt (Doorn-Harder and Vogt 11; Phillips 5). As the primary winners from the economic freedom that preceded the military regime, Copts were hit hardest by the socialist reforms that also targeted the skilled jobs in which they excelled (Ibrahim et al. 16).

While the new regime pretended to be secular, it failed to remove any of the religiously based limitations on Copts maintained by the nominally Islamic monarchy while simultaneously appeasing Islamists in order to weaken popular support for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood with steps such as the embracing of al-Azhar. As members of a hegemonic majority coming from among the rural

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93 His complicity before or after the fact in the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 and the failed coups in Jordan and Lebanon that same year remains plausible though unproven.
poor, Egypt’s junta had little insight into the actual use of secularism as a bulwark against social oppression.

When Egypt’s new political system failed to accommodate its Copts despite rhetoric to the contrary, Nasser resorted to tokenism (Phillips 5). He increased the representation of Copts by altering the constitution to permit presidential appointments to parliamentary seats. He then used this new power to appoint mostly Copts (Ibrahim et al. 16). The direct relationship between the Copts and the President was even given legal standing in regard to church construction and repair, both of which required particular presidential assent. The relationship so cultivated is reminiscent of the type exemplified in feudal Europe by the patronage given at the hands of the feudal lord to Jews or Gypsies. Though temporary due to its reliance on the individual lord’s lifespan, it sufficed in order to anger those not ‘enjoying’ such a relationship. An occasional pogrom allowed the ruler to vent some public anger while interceding on behalf of the group for its protection.

This typified the Coptic condition as well until Mubarak’s fall in 2011. Under Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood, attacks continued, but presidential protection was no longer forthcoming. Whether this will worsen the state of Copts in Egypt or leave it largely unmodified remains to be seen, but violence does tend to foster a stronger ethnic attachment.

In 1956, the religious courts were abrogated and their cases were transferred to the civil courts. In practice, Muslim religious judges were reappointed to the civil courts while the posts of Coptic judges were rendered defunct (Vogt 56). This brought about the absurd situation where allegedly secular judges were deciding in cases involving no Muslims while influenced by
their training in Islamic law and lack of formal secular law. Sadat formally established Islam as a state religion by acknowledging Sharia as the main source of legislation in his new constitution of 1971. That same year he returned confiscated waqf land to the Islamic charitable organizations that held them. Waqf land that had been confiscated from the Coptic Church at the same time and redistributed to mostly Muslim farmers was never returned (ibid, 57). Unlike his predecessor, Sadat attempted to appease Muslim extremists, or at least to minimize their grassroots support on religious grounds (Lebeau). Few could argue that his charisma equaled that of Nasser or even came close. This increased the pressure on Copts to protect themselves or leave (Hatina).

Naming

While Copts had been apt to disguise themselves in order to avoid drawing attention to their Christianity in public, this is subtly changing. Copts, like other Christians, are given a double name. Traditionally it has been common for Coptic parents to choose neutral Arabic first names with the saint’s name restricted to the safer spheres of the home and church. In some rare cases a clearly Muslim name was given, though this is felt to be completely inappropriate:

“I know we used in Egypt to keep it away from saying that we are Christians, because we were worried about being persecuted or being mistreated or oppressed and people in Egypt unfortunately used at one point not to give their children Christian names. Like making their name, the name of the child would sound like Muslim rather than a Christian. You know, I have a friend, a Christian friend, who was ordained a deacon with me the same day more than forty years ago and his first name is Ḥusayn. Yeah, and just, I remember, I mean, the name, I mean, the bishop during the time of ordination, he put his hand on, laid his hand upon his head, and the priest was standing by, we were all wondering how the bishop would react when he hears that the name of this
deacon is Ḥusayn. We said after, I mean, Ḥusayn is a pure Muslim name, of course, so we expected the bishop would reject the whole thing, but thank God, I mean, the priest that time quickly gave this man another name, Ḥunayn, which is a Christian name. Instead of Ḥusayn, it became Ḥunayn, and he was ordained under the name of Ḥunayn. So in Egypt we used to do that, but here it’s a free country. Actually, it’s a good chance for me and for you to say “we are Christians and we belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church” (Armanious).

While the practice of double names continues, there has been a rise since the 1990s in the number of Copts selecting distinctly Coptic saints’ names for their children (Thorbjørnsrud 98). By doing this, the parents are making every introduction into an assertion of faith. Naming practices are an important ethnic marker used to highlight difference. Outside of Egypt, the effect is lessened. Many Coptic names that would stand out in Muslim Egypt are common and popular among Westerners such as Sophie, Christine or Marcus. This in turn reduces the visibility of migrant Copts as foreigners, especially among the youth. In one Paris mass I had attended followed by refreshments and a play evoking the life of Saint Antony, I noted that hardly any of the children called throughout the day by their mothers had non-French names.

Tattoos

A more visible aspect of Coptic identity marking is one performed by often-Muslim tattoo artists. Although the Church frowns upon the more artistic tattoos popular in the West (Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States; “Seventh Grade: Christ, Our Light” 7), identity tattoos are not aesthetic but rather pragmatic in their purpose. They are usually done on children and often at religious festivals. The tattoos can vary in design but the simplest are the most common. These are one cross or more on the skin of the anterior forearm.
The marker itself and its location serve multiple purposes. It is not overly prominent and may be discretely hidden if this becomes necessary. Nonetheless if one is physically confronted, the tattoo is a clear indication of one’s faith that cannot be easily removed. As such it encourages its possessor to stand strong, perhaps even edifying in the case of a potential martyrdom as it is useless to deny what is marked on one’s skin (Thorbjørnsrud 303–305). Its location also allows any Copt to see it and think of Christ\textsuperscript{94}. In the past, some Coptic women also had facial cross tattoos that remain popular in Ethiopia, but these have largely disappeared from Egypt.

Although tattooing remains popular among all Copts in Egypt, it does not seem to be practiced extensively in the diaspora, at least as far as I have been able to observe anecdotally. While the Church views cross tattoos in a positive light, they are not required (ibid, 301). Even in Egypt, tattooing has not been incorporated into the Church. When asked anecdotally about the practice for young children, respondents stated that they may do it while visiting Egypt, but would not go especially out of their way. As the cross tattoo is also seen as a form of protection against the Evil Eye, the urgency of applying it may decline among middle and upper class Copts. For them the Evil Eye is less of a concern as the current Church teachings attempt to marginalize belief in the Evil Eye, a central aspect of folk religion.

**Circumcision**

Like tattoos, circumcision has been a part of Egyptian life for longer than Christianity. In the past it was practiced among all Egyptians, regardless of

\textsuperscript{94}This is reminiscent of the purpose of the phylacteries mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:8.
religion or gender. In the past few decades and most likely due to questions from other Christian denominations from the West, the Coptic Church has come to consider the significance of both male and female circumcision.

Although Jesus himself was circumcised, it is important to note that circumcision is not and never was a Christian sacrament. Even among Christians who circumcise their children, the sacrament of baptism has replaced the Jewish sacrament of circumcision.

“Again, what does this mean to us? OK? What does this mean to us? Why is this such a big feast day? One of the seven minor feasts? Well, if you read in the New Testament, Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:19, ok? He speaks a little bit about circumcision and he says something peculiar. He says “circumcision is nothing! And uncircumcision is nothing”. Didn’t we just say and didn’t we just say in the church, didn’t we say that it was something that the Lord came to do? How could God command Abraham and all the children of Israel to keep this law and St. Paul comes and says circumcision is nothing. St. Paul meant, according to St. Cyril of Alexandria, that after the new covenant and after the incarnation of the Lord, the physical circumcision, the physical circumcision was superseded by the spiritual circumcision. What was done physically must now be done spiritually, and he explained this to us in Colossians, chapter 2 [verse 11-12]. I know this is a little complicated, but just follow along the thought process here. St. Paul says, “in whom you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands. By putting off”, and this is now the real circumcision, this is the circumcision that we should be living now, “by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”. Then he continues, “then buried with Him in baptism.” “then buried with Him in baptism.” So now, in the New Testament, after the Lord came, in Lord incarnated, circumcision is now a spiritual act and which we receive in baptism, in baptism” (Wassef, The Idea of the Circumcision Feast).

Unlike the other practices I recounted so far, circumcision in both its male and female form does not distinguish Copts from their non-Coptic neighbors in Egypt. Folk opinion concerning female circumcision, which is a nearly ubiquitous practice in Egypt, considers it as a method of curbing female sexual desire (Thorbjørnsrud 282, 315). As such it would belong under the moral practices of Copts. This interpretation is however diametrically opposed to the official Church stance that has been trickling down to the Coptic populace in Egypt and
appears to be accepted universally in the diaspora. It is only in the recent past that female circumcision has become controversial as a global practice. During the 1970s and ‘80s the issue was raised by prominent voices such as the Muslim-born Egyptian doctor and feminist author Nawāl al-Sa’dāwī. By 1991 the World Health Organization recommended that the United Nations adopt the term Female Genital Mutilation with the intention of eradicating the practice by differentiating it from male circumcision (OHCHR et al. 22).

The ensuing debate brought about not only accusations of post-colonialist cultural imperialism but also of curbing Islamic religious freedom. The linking of female circumcision so emphatically with Islam problematized it in the same way as veiling, another practice abandoned by Copts. A serious discussion among Copts seems to be leading to a complete abandonment of the procedure, at least in urban areas (Thorbjørnsrud 309–321).

Male circumcision does not receive the negative attitude professed by the Church toward female cutting. Although Coptic doctrine stresses that boys, if circumcised, ought to have the procedure done prior to baptism (ibid, 308), this is not enforced. In fact boys are circumcised when it is deemed convenient by the parents. The Church does not express an opinion in practice as the act is seen as a medical one targeted at the maintenance of genital hygiene (ibid, 309). It is therefore not worthy of Church attention more than for example the piercing of female earlobes (ibid, 321). In the Netherlands, where circumcision is not the practiced norm, Coptic couples whom I had asked had no interest in actively pursuing the procedure.
Conclusion

“The Church advocates certain symbols and the annihilation of others” (ibid, 342). While Thorbjørnsrud focuses on “individual responsibility and the internalization of control” (ibid) as the cause for these choices, I would stress the moral aspects of the practices. Those practices that further the moral standing of the individual Copt and his or her community are given precedent over the customs that have come to typify Copts though not to define them. This moral identity takes an active stand in the land of migration, hence the revival of the call for evangelism, especially from among the youth (Salama). Inaction will lead to a “drifting away from God” and parents have a greater potential impact on the detachment of Coptic migrant children from the Church under the pressures to succeed in the new country.

“Parents may become excited over their, the success of their son in [an] exam and they are not worried about his spiritual life at all, so maybe they become very excited that he passed the exam, but they are not concerned at all about his spiritual life. So, these parents should examine themselves, whether they are drifting away or not” (Bishop Youssef, Drifting Away from God).

Moral identity that is based on religious demands identifies the religious heritage with the group identity to the extent that the one cannot viably exist without the other. There is tension between moral and ethnic identity and Coptic adoption of a purely ethnic identity would lead the community down a path that is violent and potentially ruinous. It therefore becomes clear why Church leadership has chosen to stress those practices that cultivate a stronger moral identity, prioritizing them over more ethnic folk practices. While it is true that this policy also challenges the power of the folk sources of authority and the popular traditions that cultivate a more ethnically based identity at the expense
of the moral identity, Church leadership does also have vital and good causes for its preferences. A Coptic identity based mainly on ethnicity would pose a direct challenge to Egyptian Muslims and would strike at the heart of Egypt’s geographical and political unity. A further negative consequence would be the weakening of moral ties that hinder assimilation of group members in the lands of migration.

“As long as it is a question of quietist accommodation to an often hostile environment the symbols and organization of an ancient faith act as a protective shell, and one that is portable. But the moment the question arises of transforming the community into a nation it is far more difficult to break out of the habitual conceptual ethnic framework and its lifestyle... The trouble is that so many of the members of a demotic community simply assumed that they already constituted a nation, and had always done so, possessing as they did the ethnic components of a nation – a common name, ancestry myths, historical memories, attachments to a homeland, and the like” (A. D. Smith, National Identity 62).

As I have shown in this chapter, priests consistently ignore aspects of Coptic identity in their sermons that fail to further a moral sense of self. It is insufficient to be a Copt simply because that is the inheritance one receives from one’s parents. Attaching such significance to moral underpinnings of identity, priests effectively push away those members who would very likely have attended the Church were it to be more of a social club. Those who do not attend, using various excuses or who attend rarely or arrive late, are the subject of many chastisements raised in nearly all the services I have attended across the board. The remaining core of the faithful is however strengthened in their notion of being Copts. Not only can they pride themselves in the long tradition stretching back over the millennia, but they are also given a constant reminder of the sacrifices they choose to make by dutifully attending. This is especially so when facing the attractions of the West’s consumer culture, thus increasing their
prestige and personal self-value. This in turn strengthens the ties of church members to the Coptic Church as a result of this positive effect on members’ self evaluation.

"Now we go to one of the major problems – the identity, the identity problems. This creates some problems with communication at home, with relationships. As I said before, sometimes I ask myself: Am I Egyptian, Arabic, Coptic, Orthodox or else? What do you think? What kind of identity would you choose from these? Any idea? Or else? [chuckling] ok, good. Anybody has anything but or else? What is the else? Well, Egyptian, Arabic, Coptic, Orthodox, American. What are you? Select one. Which one? Or else. What is the else? Christian. Yes. That’s exactly. That is our identity. We are neither Egyptians, neither Arabics, neither Coptics, neither Orthodox, but we are Christians. This is number one. Yes, we are Orthodox Christians. Yes, we are Coptic Christians, but the first thing is we are Christians. We believe in Jesus Christ. You know, some people say, and that, that hurts me a little, a little bit, you know, when somebody asks about our identity and we say, “we are Orthodox”, you know, Americans here understand the word Orthodox means Jewish Orthodox. Right? ok? So you are not a Jewish Orthodox. And second thing, second thing, some people say “we are Coptic” and nobody understands what’s Coptic. Coptic means Egyptian. Coptic means, Ægyptus and Coptus, they are all the same word. Are you Egyptian? Well, we belong to Egypt in one way or another, ethnic, ethnicity-wise, but we are Christians, and we are Christian-Orthodox, meaning that we keep the same beliefs like the early days of Christianity and we have our national Church, which is the Coptic Church that we are proud of. This is our mother that raised us in faith, but the first thing is we are Christians.

Number two, this is the generational gap. Yes, I understand that. We have this problem all the time that sometimes my parents want me to behave like Egyptian and/or behave like some parents want, want me to behave like American, and I’m not sure, which one is right. So the best thing is just to think of yourself as Christian, period. Christian, and this book and this Church is what you follow, but the Bible and the Church would take you to who? Take you to Jesus Christ, the Lord.

This is very important. Very important point, because when we come to number three, we get confused about our set of norms, and this creates a problem at home all the time, like sometimes you go home and say to your dad and mom, “listen, you got me here in this country. Don’t ask me to behave like an Egyptian anymore. I am here. Everybody here smokes. Everybody here does this and does that and do this and do that. Why did you come here, then? Since you came to this country, you have to expect me to behave like any other American.” Then, your set of norms has changed. Has changed. The norms here are not the Christian norms. You are following other norms. Could be American, although not all Americans having these liberal norms that we hear these days about. Not all Americans are bad, of course. Many of them are very good, but these are your own norms that you developed to fulfill or to gratify your pleasures and your needs. This is not Christian. This is the devil’s work,
because the devil wants you to justify and find some good reasons to do the
wrong thing in your life. The devil may come today and tell me: "Yoursry, just do
this and do that. Don't worry, because you are living in America now. Everyone
in America here may get a divorce. Fine. 60% probably of people. Everybody
here believes in extramarital affairs or premarital sex or smoking or it's nice to
experiment with some drugs, some marijuana and things like that, and drink
alcohol, especially during the weekends, and get high and all of that. Yeah, these
are your norms. These are your norms. You are living in America." This is the
social influence and you are trying to take all this social influence and the media
influence and try to make it sound good in your mind, so you don't have a sense
of guilt in this case. You don't have a sense of guilt. Why would you feel guilty if
everybody is doing this? Everybody is doing that. Well let me do it again. Me too,
ok? So, these are the things that you have to be careful about"\textsuperscript{95} (Armanious).

\textsuperscript{95}Emphases are my own.
Chapter IV – The Legacy

The Future of Coptic Identity

While studying at Leiden University, I spoke with a certain professor who asked me what I was writing about. After explaining the general outline of my proposed work, I was taken aback by his reaction. Rather than raising issues that I may or may not have considered or reading suggestions, he asked me a troubling and initially annoying question, namely, “Yes, but why should I care about Coptic identity?” After noting my offended reaction, he explained that I ought to constantly keep in mind the contribution my text has for those people who are not in the small circle of researchers of modern Coptic identity. It is therefore my purpose in this text to sketch a clearer image of the Coptic community as a particular example of a religious minority group formulating its identity outside of its original homeland.

In the first chapter, I outlined the historical context in which Coptic identity was formed and reformed as a result of internal pressures and interaction with multiple other groups within Egypt. The second chapter was dedicated to the tools I use in order describe the changes that are taking place. Due to their versatility, it has become necessary to sharply define them or at the bare minimum, to clarify the context in which they are used in this work. This is so as to facilitate a better understanding thereof without presupposing a given meaning that may or may not be forthcoming to any particular reader. In the previous and third chapter, I turned to the practical steps the Coptic community has undertaken in an attempt to outline a sorting mechanism that explains its
choices as a model for other comparable groups. In this final chapter, I wish to outline the current and potential trajectories of the community.

While I was researching this work, it became clear that many things were about to change for the Coptic community in Egypt and these changes would potentially impact the Coptic diaspora. Though I had outlined the important actors beforehand, events overtook my writing and many of the potentialities fulfilled themselves.

The Egyptian Situation

The Role of the Egyptian Regime

The importance of Egypt in the global power play has always ebbed and flowed. With the rise and fall of support from major global powers, the country moved swiftly from peripheral status to that of a major regional player and back again. While Egypt played a fundamental role in Britain's complex balance of power with the various empires of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the exorbitantly high social and financial costs of the Second World War reduced its value quickly and drastically.

Clement Attlee's\(^{96}\) Asian decolonization sharply reduced Egypt's strategic value to Britain as a link in the chain to India. Coupled with Egypt's poor showing in its ill-prepared 1948 Palestine campaign and the failure to realign according to the new Cold War paradigm, it was only a matter of time before the Egyptian monarchy fell with no foreign backing and a waning domestic one.

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\(^{96}\) UK Prime Minister, 1945-1951.
Coming on the heels of the 1952 republican revolution, Nasser's alignment with the Soviet Union brought Egypt back to the fore, bankrolling a series of melees with Israel and massive development in the Communist mold. Following Nasser's death, Sadat successfully leveraged a tactical pyrrhic victory against Israel into a strategic success by mitigating the shortfalls in Soviet assistance through realignment with the United States, culminating in a peace treaty with Israel, sharply reducing defense expenditures. Concomitant to the abrupt conclusion of the Cold War, Mubarak recast Egypt as a pillar of regional stability and a useful diplomatic channel for American purposes.

Two decades later, domestic events had boiled up to a seething cauldron. The elderly Egyptian President, who had been suffering from declining health, was attempting to prepare the ground for the succession of his deeply unpopular son Gamal Mubarak. The 'militocratic' regime could hardly tolerate the appointment of an unpopular civilian resting on the bayonets of the army, yet no particular general could generate enough enthusiasm to rally sufficient support to force a decision in his favor.

The global recession coupled with lower expected dependence on foreign oil brought about a steady decline in American regional involvement reflected most poignantly in the major troop drawdown from Iraq. This meant Egypt's importance as a mediator declined proportionally. At the same time, the country's economy suffered, especially due to its reliance on the highly sensitive tourism industry, raising the Egyptian public's ire. A growing population with few natural resources and fewer economic prospects in the short term became a powder keg ready to explode.
Though it was clear that Mubarak would soon be shedding his mortal coil, signaling the start of a tumultuous free-for-all, reality overtook with a series of events ranging from the mundane to the bizarre. Obama’s ambiguous June 2009 Cairo Address about despots clinging to power eerily echoed Carter’s November 1977 words about human rights during the Iranian Shah’s last state visit to Washington. General Omar Suleiman’s fortnightly stint as Egyptian Vice-President was followed by a failed bid for the presidential elections on technical grounds. The July 2012 report of his sudden death in a Cleveland hospital showed that reality is stranger than even pulp fiction. Remarkably his serendipitous and precipitous disappearance did not merit any significant attention, even in rumor-prone circles.

In a final *coup de grace*, President-elect Mursi extremely deftly defanged the de facto power-sharing Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) headed by Field-Marshal Ṭanṭāwī, by retiring the latter only three months after the council usurped critical powers away from the ill-defined presidency. He appointed General al-Sīsī as his replacement due to his apparent support for the Muslim Brotherhood, though the latter would overthrow Mursi in July 2013. Al-Sīsī secured the Presidential Palace with the blessing of the military and the endorsement of many of those resenting Muslim Brotherhood rule through the approval of the January 2014 constitution identified to a large extent with himself.

Though pushing the military out of the center of government had cleared the main obstacle to the Muslim Brotherhood regime’s stability in its first and only year and cleared it of complicity in the army’s more questionable acts, it had far from solved all its troubles. The lack of established checks and balances
between the presidency, the parliament and the judiciary came out in full force in the crisis surrounding the December 2012 constitution.

Regardless of whether a balance is actually achieved or one branch of government, most likely the presidency, monopolizes all the real power for itself, certain issues are far from being resolved any time in the upcoming years. The Egyptian public, riding on the wings of revolutionary euphoria will have to confront the crushing economic challenges that preceded the revolution and crash onto the hard ground of reality. Since no economic bonanzas seem readily available and few actual changes that bode well for the future of the country have been made, a popular acceptance of belt tightening policies does not appear to be forthcoming. A far likelier outcome will be that the populist mobs will seek out a scapegoat, either autonomously or by government directive. This target may be the government itself, Israel, foreign assets in Egypt or the Coptic minority. Though the first three would inevitably lead to sizeable financial damages to the welfare of the Egyptian state due to disinvestment, collateral damage and the cost of belligerency, the latter concerns the object of this manuscript. If such an eventuality does occur, it is one the Church is scarcely able to deflect, thus clarifying the actions of the current Coptic pope.

*The Role of the Coptic Pope*

The last two Coptic popes were immensely successful at revamping a papacy that had been losing ground to communal dignitaries as I have already described in the first chapter. Throughout four decades of incessant work the late Pope Shenouda III had undertaken multiple calculated steps to strengthen
the Coptic Church and its identity across the board, only slightly easing his busy schedule as his health waned (cf. Klempner, “Remembering the Coptic Pope”). Such a successful person is however like a tall tree, making it more difficult for other trees to grow tall close to it.

Although it is too early to tell, the new Pope Tawadros II showed in his inaugural interviews cited below that he is aware that as a result of the 2011 revolution, his authority over Coptic youth and young adults in Egypt and in the lands of migration is not automatic. Two issues that have already become bones of contention within the Coptic community are the ‘1938 Regulations’ and the ‘1957 Regulations’, both of which ought to be reviewed in detail as per the new Pope (“Liqā’ Khāṣṣ ma’a al-Anbā Tawādrūs”; “’Awwal Liqā’ Ḥaṣrī”; “Liqā’ ma’a al-Bābā Tawādrūs”).

The former are regulations that were suggested by the Coptic Orthodox Lay Council in 1938, but never ratified by the Church, let alone made into law. They concern the Family Status Law, touching on the highly sensitive point of divorce where both spouses are Copts. According to the current version of the Family Status Law from 1955, a mix of secular and religious rules governs family status. Though a couple does not require religious sanction in order to divorce, a divorcé/e who wishes to remarry in the church cannot do so without the church’s recognition of the earlier divorce. Such recognition is currently forthcoming in only a handful of cases. Since only the Coptic Church is legally authorized by the Egyptian State to join two Copts in marriage, the choices put

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97 I have chosen this spelling rather than the Hellenized ‘Theodoros’ due to the new Pope’s own comments in the interview cited below with Lamis El-Hadidy.

98 Known respectively in Arabic as lā’īḥah 38 and lā’īḥah 57.
before a divorced Copt are either to remain celibate, live in sin, remarry one’s former spouse or convert to some other denomination (Guindy).

The 1957 Regulations, though high on the agenda at this juncture, do not pose any risk to the authority of the papacy, as they concern the complex election process of a new pope. More specifically, they are concerned with the question of who can and cannot become pope based on a minimum age requirement, minimum time spent as a monk, and maximum position in the church apparatus, that is if a Bishop or Archbishop may be elected. Even should the regulations be altered during his reign to bar bishops from ascending the papal throne, this will only affect the election of the next pope. As the current pope just turned sixty on the day of his election, this matter is very unlikely to become pressing any time in the near future.

Pope Tawadros II is a very different pope in several important ways from his predecessor. This is not a difference in contents, for that remains the same, but rather one in tone, as can be seen in Pope Shenouda’s last interview (“al-Ḥiwar al-ʿĀkhir”). Unlike the late Pope Shenouda III who built a global church, the current pope has received it as a given. He estimates the number of Copts residing outside of Egypt as between one and two million (“Liqāʿ Khāṣṣ maʿa al-Anbā Tawādrūs”).

When asked concerning the migration of Copts from Egypt, he concedes that many do so out of fear. He does however subtly reframe the issue, pointing out three important elements. For one, the Coptic Church is global, with communities as far as Fiji, or in other words, even a large migration of Copts out of Egypt does not affect the condition of the Church as a whole. For another, migration is an individual decision and at the behest of the individual who must
make his or her own decision based on educational, financial, family and safety needs. Finally, he points to the case of Ghana, where physicians are leaving and there is a shortage of doctors. As the pope is himself a pharmacist in his training, he is surely aware that most pharmacists and a very large proportion of all medical doctors in Egypt are Copts. In other words, Egypt needs the Copts and if they were to leave, some basic services would be severely damaged ("Awwal Liqā’ Ḥaṣrí").

Though he has the authority to do so, Tawadros II chooses not to govern by edict, but rather to convince in a firm yet soft-spoken manner. Thus he admonishes Copts abroad not to internationalize the Coptic problem as respectable families discuss their problems within the family and public discussion of Egyptian internal issues is inappropriate (ibid).

Confronting the issue of Copts who took advantage of the interregnum, but also since then, to perform the pilgrimage to the holy sites especially in Jerusalem that the former pope had forbidden them from visiting, he applies the same method. When asked if the position of the Church has changed or whether he will reiterate the prohibition, he states that the peace between Egypt and Israel was a peace between governments and not between the two peoples. Therefore, if a small segment of Egyptian society travels to Jerusalem and the larger part does not, then it is like a betrayal of those co-nationals. Furthermore, he points out that Egypt is also a holy land as Jesus lived there for several years and there are multiple sites there equal in their holiness, rendering a Palestine pilgrimage unnecessary. Although he repeats several times that the Church does not encourage its members to go to Jerusalem, he does not actually forbid it per se, rather suggesting that it is simply bad decorum ("Liqā’ ma’a al-Bābā
Tawāḍrūs”). Nonetheless, the Pope did choose to attend Archbishop Anba Abraham’s funeral in November 2015 in Jerusalem. While not strictly a pilgrimage, it still sets a precedent, being the first Coptic papal visit of any kind to the city since Ibrahim Pasha’s triumphal occupation of the city in 1832.

The Pope has also studied abroad, gaining a health certificate in England and completing Christian leadership coursework in Singapore. His vocabulary is peppered with English words and he is clearly adjusted to the global scope of his flock as he continually refers to events around the world, comparing events there to those in Egypt. Nonetheless he points out that he is an Egyptian citizen and loves the soil of Egypt before he is a Christian (ibid). It is however clear that this does not entail toeing the majoritarian line of political Islam, a term that the pope considers an oxymoron as politics and religion are like the earth and sky (ibid).

In both the interview with Ḍuḥā al-Zuhayrī and with Wā’il al-‘Ībrāshī, Pope Tawadros denounced the definition of the Copts as a ‘sect’ (Ṭā‘ifah), pointing out emphatically that the word derives from the verb ‘to travel’ (Ṭāfa), while the Copts have always been native to Egypt (“Liqā’ Khāṣṣ ma’a al-Anbā Tawāḍrūs”; “Liqā’ ma’a al-Bābā Tawāḍrūs”). Considering that Islam did ‘travel’ to Egypt and that his interviewer is a Muslim, the Pope’s position is very confident. This confidence should not be confused with defiance, from which the Pope has distanced himself, as in the case of the infamous ‘Innocence of Muslims’ film (“‘Awwal Liqā’ Ḥaṣrī”).

In the political sphere, Pope Tawadros II has been far more vocal and unequivocal. His staunch and publicly visible support for the July 3, 2013 military takeover in Egypt was not an ad-hoc opportunistic act in any way, shape
or form. It was presaged by earlier comments openly detracting from the legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood’s regime (Saleh and Taylor). For better and/or worse, Pope Tawadros II’s papacy has strengthened the link between the Coptic Church and the Egyptian military. While this is likely to aid the status of the Coptic Church within the Egyptian state due to this wholehearted support, it has already made Coptic Church buildings into a lightning rod for violent bombings, with dozens ensuing after President Mursi’s deposing.

**The Role of Islamism**

In the case of Islamism, also known as political Islam, the change in regard to the Copts has also been one of tone rather than contents. The progressive Islamization of public life in Egypt is hardly novel to Copts. Since the 1940s when urban Egypt was very cosmopolitan and possessed many attributes of Western cities, it has undergone significant internal migration from rural more conservative regions. Following the 1952 revolution, anti-Western and anti-Capitalist trends have grown stronger.

As part of his reforms following Nasser’s death, Sadat presented the 1971 Constitution that has been in force until 2012. On June 26, 1980, this constitution was amended (Tilmīdh ‘Ibn ‘Uthaymayn). Among others, Article 2 was added, reading, “Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language. Principles of Islamic law (Shari’a) are the principal source of legislation.” (“Text of 1971 Constitution”). Since the establishment of an Egyptian constitution in 1923, this was the first to give Shari’a (Islamic law) a legal standing that made it an established religion. Although the wording was vague enough to suggest that this was simply lip service to the Muslim Brotherhood to
whose cadres Sadat himself had once belonged, it was also vague enough to allow more conservative judges to adjudicate according to Islamic law in matters where lacunae appeared in legislation (Cf. Adib).

Though Mubarak did not repeal his predecessor’s Islamic legislation, he did not share his zeal in that respect and did not expand the process. Taking advantage of Sadat’s assassination by a radical Islamist fringe group called *al-Takfir wal-Higrah,* Mubarak arrested many individuals associated with all brands of both political and radical Islam that posed a risk to his regime. After more than a decade had passed, pressure mounted on Mubarak to liberalize, release political prisoners and allow freer elections. It was an open secret that many individuals who ran as independents in the parliamentary elections were associated with the disallowed Muslim Brotherhood.

The first post-revolutionary elections brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power both in the parliament and the presidential palace. Yet even such a sharp change does not really represent a paradigm shift. Just as Mubarak was able to threaten the Copts with the radicalization of a mildly Islamic state if they did not assent to his rule, the Muslim Brotherhood had the tools to do the same. Since the radical Islamic al-Nūr Party had received a quarter of the votes, the stick of non-cooperation with the conservative Muslim Brotherhood was very real and threatening. This was even more so in light of occasional fiery statements from the more radical edge of the larger ruling party such as Muḥammad al-Biltāḡī (Chick).

Before being toppled, the Muslim Brotherhood had initially chosen the path of gradual routinization, taking advantage of opportune moments to progress toward its goals in a way reminiscent of their more successful Turkish
counterparts. It had not been pragmatic at that early juncture for the Brotherhood to worsen the status of Copts in Egypt in light of Western opinion and the potential halt of investment. So long as the Muslim Brotherhood remained in power, the lives of Copts remained relatively the same as they had been in the past few years, harassed and threatened, though not at risk for full-scale massacre. The lack of stability acted to Mursi’s advantage, as he was able to experiment with the amount of steam the radical Salafists and other thugs were permitted to release, while avoiding clear charges of collusion. The reintroduction of the state of emergency greatly influenced both official and popular behavior toward the Copts and aggravated violent attacks. Pope Tawadros II placed his bet on the removal of Mursi since the Copts would suffer the brunt of a radical backlash at any rate and backing al-Sisi’s move would at least affirm a stronger alliance between the Church and the Egyptian Army, a patriotic and largely unchallenged actor in the Egyptian sphere. This would bode well for the future of Regime-Church relations.

The Role of the West

The West affects the status of the Copts in Egypt both directly and indirectly. Due to the large number of Copts and in light of the negative attitudes towards refugees from conflict areas, it is unlikely that the United States and various European nations will encourage Copts to seek a better life as migrants to their lands, as has occurred with Christian minorities from Iraq or Lebanon for example.
The indirect method seems all the more likely for all its shortcomings. By pressuring the Egyptian regime to treat the Copts as equal citizens if it wants to receive assistance, Western countries are able to use the only leverage they have over the Egyptian government. Unfortunately, there are many faults with this, especially under the new Egyptian regimes. For one, the threat of non-investment or divestment is not credible, since a strategic desire for Egyptian alignment with the United States and its allies will always trump minority rights advocates’ demands. Turkey (Kurdish, Syrian Orthodox and Armenian minorities), Bulgaria (Turkish minority) and Israel (Arab minority) are prime examples in the region. For another, Western assistance to Egypt is limited in size and scope and is unlikely to expand. Most of that aid comes from the United States, contingent upon the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, further weakening the leverage that may be applied. Much of that aid, in turn, is military and not civilian, despite the fact that Egypt’s needs are mostly civilian, especially now.

Since both the United States and the European Union are undergoing severe financial difficulties, they are both unlikely to spend vast amounts of money propping up either a Muslim Brotherhood regime or a non-temporary military one. The continuing instability in the aftermath of the January 25 Revolution has and will continue to severely affect investment in Egypt’s gas and tourism industries. Meanwhile expansion of the Suez Canal to increase transport volume demands money that Egypt does not have and other states are unlikely to provide string-free at this time, given present conditions, though it is proceeding at a slow yet steady pace.

In conclusion, from the Egyptian side of the equation, matters are unlikely to change drastically regardless of who is managing the crisis in a battle to
maintain the status quo and address the abhorrent financial state of Egypt and its exigent issues of unemployment and cost of food. These issues run deeper than whether the elected president of Egypt will be a general, a liberal or a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Lands of Migration

Once migration has taken place, things do not turn less complicated. The same economic forces that place pressure on the Copts in Egypt and curtail Western assistance and involvement also tend to affect the welcome towards new migrants. In a stagnant economy, migrants are not seen in a positive light, even if they are escaping persecution. Luckily for those who choose to migrate to the West or remain there to wait things out, the Coptic Church has spent the past four decades establishing a network of communities that is able to provide a strong home away from home, making the move less traumatic and therefore more inviting.

Although no exact or accurate information exists on this matter, a large portion of Copts in the United States, France and the Netherlands are educated and reasonably well off financially. Since the cost of relocation to a Western country is prohibitive for much of the lower class undereducated rural and urban slum Copts, this selection bias is likely to continue even as the diaspora population grows. This will continue to allow these communities to perpetuate themselves and offer services to the parish even in countries where no communal financial aid is forthcoming to religious institutions. It should be noted that even in the Netherlands, where existing religious schools have access
to public funds, the Coptic Church has been unable to tap into the system and attain official recognition for its presently extra-curricular educational institutions. The success of Coptic communities abroad is also likely to funnel more aid to Copts remaining in Egypt. This is due to multiple causes, most notably guilt over not suffering the same fate, a wish to help one's brethren and more significant pressure as a lobby on Western legislatures and charities.

In conclusion, the Copts in Egypt are facing some very dire straits. Nonetheless, because these circumstances have not appeared abruptly, Copts have had several decades to prepare for these eventualities. Even in the extremely unlikely event of a Salafist takeover of Egypt, the Coptic Church has assured the perseverance of a lively and vibrant Coptic global community. After all, the current upheaval is hardly the biggest challenge the Church has faced in the past two millennia of its existence.
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Summary

This research is part of the EURYI project led by Prof. Bas ter Haar Romeny at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. My colleagues and I have been involved with several independent projects concerning various aspects of identity formation among Copts and Byzantine Orthodox Christians from the middle Ages up to the present. This Project follows up on the findings of the earlier PIONIER project that dealt with Syrian Orthodox identity formation, of which I had not been a part.

The purpose of my research is to shed light on the inner workings of Coptic identity formation outside of Egypt, namely in the Netherlands, France and the United States. I emphasize the official position of the Church as it is expressed in sermons reflecting the contents of what it means to be a Copt. I have chosen to divide my thesis into four segments in order to highlight the processual nature of identity formation in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In chapter one I describe and analyze the tools with which deeper meaning is cast into the Coptic sense of self. These tools are subject to the inherently variable meaning of such terms as identity, morality, ethnicity, minority, migration, diaspora and transnationalism. Each term allows for a certain creative mutability that may affect change and growth or decline by permitting the various external and internal actors to impact the contents and direction of Coptic identity, while all the time appearing to leave it untouched. The idiom thus created enables Copts to achieve a reified sense of self as a community unbounded by previous historical limitations. I utilize the framework
of Institutional Rational Choice Theory in order to explain the authority of the Church as it is put into force through its priests as a tenable vehicle for collective social action. In addition, this chapter surveys the travails involved in restructuring the methodology of the research.

In the following chapter, I describe the raw historical conditions that formed the available building blocks for Coptic identity as well as the various forces that limited choice. In order to clarify how Coptic identity came to exist as it does today, I highlight various pertinent aspects of Egyptian history and geography, political and social restrictions, changing languages as carriers of identity, as well as the illustrative lessons of other Egyptian groups that chose alternative paths.

In the third chapter, I turn to the sorting logic reflected in the choice of practices for reinforcement in the face of countervailing currents in the diaspora. I show that the practices that have been actively chosen by the Church for reification are those that promote an internalization of moral identity. This type of identity is more demanding but offers greater benefits in the long run.

To conclude, I examine the most significant actors who will in my view affect the future recasting of Coptic identity. This is done in order to stress that defining what it means to be a Copt is a fluid process that only appears solid and stable over short time periods.

My research shows how small group leadership is able to subtly manipulate aspects of identity in order to influence the integration and survival of their group even while maintaining the appearance of strict conservatism. This is achieved through multiple and repetitive aggregate dialogs where sermons represent a mediated and more quotidian version of official Church
dogma. This analysis may serve others wishing to explain change in other conservative groups that experience sharp changes while remaining strongly grounded in identity discourse.
Curriculum Vitae

Levi Klempner was born in Israel in 1981. His interest in Middle Eastern Studies began in 1992 when he started learning Arabic. By 1995 his focus shifted to minorities and marginalized fringe groups in the region. In 1997 he moved to the United States to attend Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. In 1999 he transferred to the University of California at Berkeley where he graduated with distinction in May 2001 after submitting an Honors thesis concerning the al-Aqsa Intifada. After pursuing multiple language courses, translating Arabic and Hebrew, and teaching, he began coursework in Economics in 2006 at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2008 he moved to the Netherlands to join the EURYI doctoral project at Leiden University. From 2008 to 2011 he taught a course on religion and migration at Leiden University. He is married to Michal and has two children. He is currently employed as a consultant on Middle Eastern socio-political affairs.